



# Bryant University

HONORS THESIS

## Advertising in the Volunteer Tourism Industry: Analyzing the Relationship Between Social Exclusion and Self-Versus-Other Benefit Appeals.

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**ABSTRACT**

This study aims to analyze how consumers perceive advertisements in the volunteer tourism industry when influenced by social exclusion and benefit appeals. The authors examined feelings, attitudes, and behavioral intentions of consumers in reference to an international volunteer trip advertisement. Based on data from a sample (n=259), findings demonstrated that consumers who felt more socially excluded responded more favorably to other-benefit appeals, opposed to self-benefit appeals. An interaction effect was discovered when looking at the degree of sympathy that participants felt regarding the advertisements. Participants who were socially excluded felt more sympathetic after viewing the other-benefit appeal advertisements, whereas those who were socially included felt more sympathetic when viewing self-benefit focused advertisements. A main effect was also discovered when looking at levels of self-confidence of the participants. It was found that regardless of social exclusion, participants were more likely to feel self-confident when they were exposed to other-benefit messaging. Finally, it was also discovered that regardless of social exclusion or benefit appeal, there were significant generational differences within the responses with Millennials and Generation Y being on the extreme ends of the spectrum.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

For many years, the popularity of volunteer tourism has been growing and it has become a major component of modern tourism. This has become a \$173 billion industry that has seen great growth over recent years (Pariyar, 2017). This industry was initially a niche sector with a low number of tourists, and then became one of the fastest growing tourism markets in the world. As of 2008, “up to 1.6 million people worldwide participate in volunteer tourism, spending between £832 million and £1.3 billion annually” (Sin et al., 2015). While this growth is key, it is also important to note that some sources are pointing to a decline of interest in this industry. For example, when looking at Google search trends it is found that from 2016 to 2021, searches for the term “volunteer abroad” have been going down, whereas searches for “volunteer opportunities near me” have been increasing, indicating a shift in consumer preferences in terms of type of volunteering (Appendix A).

The term “voluntourism” was coined to describe this section of the tourism industry that is focused on volunteering. Volunteer trips have become a popular choice over the traditional vacation because it makes people feel like they are travelling for a purpose greater than themselves, such as building a school or working in an orphanage. This has become a desirable experience, particularly for Western consumers who feel as though they are giving back to others. This industry is portrayed in a favorable light on the surface, but when looked at closely, there is a dark side to it.

This has become a complex and controversial industry in recent years, as many people claim that these trips can be detrimental to both host communities and to volunteers in the long run. One study claims that in the case of Nepal, “they [volunteers] volunteer their time and money to support needy children and develop a poor country, yet, in doing so, they are inadvertently keeping children away from their families, tearing apart rural communities, and fueling a criminal and corrupt industry that ultimately prevents Nepal from developing” (Broom, 2016). Other issues such as lack of skill, destruction of local economies and many others are being brought to the forefront. This research study seeks to understand what truly motivates consumers to pursue these trips and if the claims that this is a self-serving industry are accurate.

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### Volunteer Tourism Motives and Expectations

A wide range of people pursue volunteer trips for various reasons, although there are demographics that stand out. One of the largest ones is teenagers and young adults, and a main motivator is that they want to feel like they are doing something for the greater good and to feel better about themselves. This age group is experiencing a transformative time in their lives where they are trying to find themselves, which is one of the reasons why in this study we look at generational differences in response to these advertisements.

Emotions play a massive role in the motivations behind why people want to volunteer abroad, so this is an area that has a respectable amount of research done on it. The focus on the emotional side of these trips was looked at in depth in one article that claims that “tourists crave direct contact with children in global South countries” and pursue that contact through what the author calls “hug-an-orphan” vacations (Guiney, 2018). This is one of the main reasons why tourists pursue volunteering, as explained in the quote that “through volunteer tourism, children are now a tourist commodity, utilizing their love and emotions and creating space for exploitation” (Guiney, 2018). In another study, it was found that “few people volunteer for purely altruistic motives, and personal gains are a necessary component of encouraging volunteerism and often natural products of service” (Rotabi et al., 2017). This is important to note as many people believe that they are volunteering to help others, when in reality they are helping themselves. This raises the question of the true motivations of volunteers in this industry.

Through the revision of literature, it became clear that this industry is facing heavy criticism and that there have been numerous studies conducted on the specific issues deriving from these volunteer trips. There is however a lack of recent scholarly studies done on the marketing side of the industry, and consumer perceptions, which our research question aims to uncover.

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## **PURPOSE**

The purpose of this study is to discover how self-benefit and other-benefit appeal messaging in advertisements in the volunteer tourism industry have varying persuasive effects, dependent on message recipients' feelings of social exclusion. Further, we aim to discover and understand how consumers respond to different types of advertising in this industry and acknowledge any generational differences. This study looks at the ways in which volunteer trip organizations market their services, with a focus on the advertising message – self vs other. The aim is to understand on a deeper level how consumers respond to different types of advertisements in this industry and to confirm or deny the intrinsic motivations of consumers. We expect that those who are socially excluded will respond more favorably overall, and even more so to other benefit focused advertisements.

## **THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

Through an extensive literature review, there were numerous studies that highlighted important aspects of volunteering. There are minimal studies conducted with a focus on volunteer tourism specifically, but rather there are many that focused on prosocial/helping behaviors, such as donation intention. One study titled, *Elevation Leads to Altruistic Behavior*, focused on the impacts of elevation on helping behaviors and it was discovered that in two different experiments participants were more likely to help when they were experiencing feelings of elevation. They state that “these results provide evidence that witnessing another person’s altruistic behavior elicits elevation, a discrete emotion that, in turn, leads to tangible increases in altruism” (Schnall, Simone, et al., 2010). In this study two of the feelings that they looked at were “want to help others” and “want to become a better person” (Schnall, Simone, et al., 2010). While these are only two of the eight feelings looked at in this study, they are important to look at together as they are very different sentiments – one is an external desire, and the other is internal. These two can be associated with the terms altruism and egoism, which are often looked at in studies of prosocial behaviors. One way in which these are studied is through the utilization of benefit appeals.

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### Benefit Appeals

Benefit appeals are commonly used by social marketers with intentions of targeting the internal motivations of consumers. Self-benefit appeals are a form of messaging that focuses on the giver as the main beneficiary of support in a giving behavior, whereas other-benefit appeals highlight other individuals or organizations as the main beneficiaries of support (Ryoo, Yuhosua, et al., 2020). In one study it was found that “to promote charitable behaviors, social marketers often use self-benefit appeals to target donors driven by egoistic motives” (White, Katherine & Peloza, John, 2009). Further, another study hypothesized that other-benefit appeals are more effective than self-benefit appeals for donations to public goods organizations (Fisher, Robert J., et al., 2008). They found that participants responded positively to other-benefit ads. The researchers raised the question “if people help for selfish reasons, why do they respond positively to unselfish (i.e., other-benefit) appeals and negatively to explicitly selfish appeals?” (Fisher, Robert J., et al., 2008). They concluded that a major reason for this is the social desirability of helping, and that “making a donation for explicitly selfish reasons is likely to be associated with unfavorable personal traits and motivations that have negative consequences for donor” (Fisher, Robert J., et al., 2008). Overall, there is no concrete consensus about which type of benefit appeal is most effective when looking at donations, which raises the question of whether or not this would be the case with other prosocial behaviors. Another study looked at self-vs-other benefit appeals, with an added layer of social exclusion in relation to charitable advertising and found that “consumers who feel socially excluded react more positively to other-benefit appeals rather than self-benefit appeals.” (Baek, Tae Hyun, et al, 2019). The addition of considering the impacts of social exclusion is interesting as in general, our society’s feelings of isolation are increasing, so this is an important trend to take into consideration. Further, these appeals are used in other contexts as well such as ethical consumption and materialism. It was found that when consumers were materialistic, they were more persuaded by self-benefit advertisements, as they increased ethical behaviors by tapping into their enhancement and protective motivations (Ryoo, Yuhosua, et al., 2020).

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### Social Exclusion

There have been limited studies done that look at social exclusion in relation to prosocial behaviors such as volunteering or charitable donations, however it has been suggested that individuals who are excluded react more to other-benefit appeals rather than self-benefit appeals. It is clear that group membership and feelings of inclusion plays a role in the interest of consumers, especially in our increasingly isolated and technological world. One study found that “socially excluded individuals were shown to exhibit increased helping behaviors when their relational needs were threatened” (Lee and Shrum, 2012). Further, when looking at social exclusion and benefit appeals together it is found that “other-benefit rather than self-benefit appeals more strongly impact message persuasiveness and charitable giving for individuals feeling socially excluded, but not for individuals feeling socially included” (Baek, Tae Hyun, et al, 2019). On its own however, it is inconclusive whether social exclusion increases or decreases prosocial behaviors as there are many contrasting views, which raises the question of are potential volunteers who feel socially isolated more or less likely to participate in an international volunteer trip advertised in self-benefit and other-benefit appeals? In one study it was found that consumers react more positively to egoistic appeals rather than altruistic appeals in reference to the attitudes that they have towards the ad and stronger behavioral intentions. This study also discusses the differences between loneliness and social exclusion, and the related actions to those feelings (Baek, Tae Hyun, et al, 2019). In another study, it was found that social exclusion can impact consumer behaviors in other contexts, not just in relation to prosocial behaviors. This study hypothesized that “after an experience of being excluded, consumers may strategically choose products to differentiate themselves from the majority of others as a result of their appraisal of the exclusion situation” (Wan, Echo Wen, et al., 2014). It was found that participants who were excluded were more likely to choose distinctive products – meaning that they were different from the norm. This finding is critical to note and raises the question of if these findings will be replicated in a service-based industry, such as volunteering.



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## **STUDY**

In this study we investigated the responses to two different advertising messages for a hypothetical volunteer trip program, 321 Volunteers. Each advertisement aimed to promote this organization's programs, while one version utilized self-benefit appeals, and the other utilized other-benefit appeals. To test our hypothesis, we used a 3 (social exclusion prime: exclusion vs. inclusion vs. control) x 2 (message appeal: self-benefit vs. other-benefit) factorial design. This study was conducted through a Qualtrics survey.

### Hypotheses

**H1:** Individuals who are socially excluded will feel more self-confident after attending one of these trips when exposed to other-benefit messaging.

**H2a:** Individuals who are socially excluded will feel more sympathetic when viewing other-benefit messaging.

**H2b:** Individuals who are socially included will feel more sympathetic when viewing self-benefit messaging.

### Method

Participants over the age of 18 were encouraged to take part in this survey. We received 259 participants (59.8% Female; average age, 37.8). The average age of participants addressed the age limitation mentioned in the study of charitable advertising, stated that future studies should look at samples that are not solely college aged students (Baek, Tae Hyun, et al, 2019). It was important to address this limitation in our study as in the volunteer tourism industry specifically, one of the largest demographics for volunteers is young adults, so it was even more reason for us to get participants from other age groups. We were successful in this as in our study, 24.3% of respondents were Millennials, 30.1% were Generation Y, 40.5% were generation X and 5% were Baby Boomers. This age breakdown provided us with a wide range of results to consider, as well as some comparative insights.

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Given the nature of the COVID-19 Pandemic, participants took the survey virtually at their convenience. They were informed that they were partaking in a study of advertising and consumer behavior titled “Positioning of Volunteer Tourism” and that the purpose of it was to investigate the effects that the positioning of volunteer trip organizations have on consumer perception. At the beginning of the survey, participants were exposed to one of three possible priming factors: exclusion, inclusion, or the control variable. Those who received the exclusion factor completed an essay-writing task and were asked to recall a past experience in which they were socially excluded and to write about the incident. Those who received the inclusion factor completed an essay-writing task and were asked to recall a past experience in which they were socially included and to write about the incident. Finally, participants who were exposed to the control prime were asked to write about what they did the previous day. Additionally, after the essay prompt participants indicated how much they felt “rejected” and “left out” when reflecting on the experience that they write about. This was rated on a 7-point scale (1 = not at all, 7= very much).

Following this, each participant was then exposed to what volunteer tourism is, and were introduced to a hypothetical volunteer tourism company, 321Volunteers (Appendix B). Next, participants viewed an advertisement for this company. They were randomly assigned to view either the self-benefit ad appeal or the other-benefit ad appeal (Appendix C). After participants viewed the ad, they were asked a series of questions developed based on prior studies mentioned in the Marketing Scales Handbook (Bruner II, 2017). Questions were asked using a 7-point Likert scale.

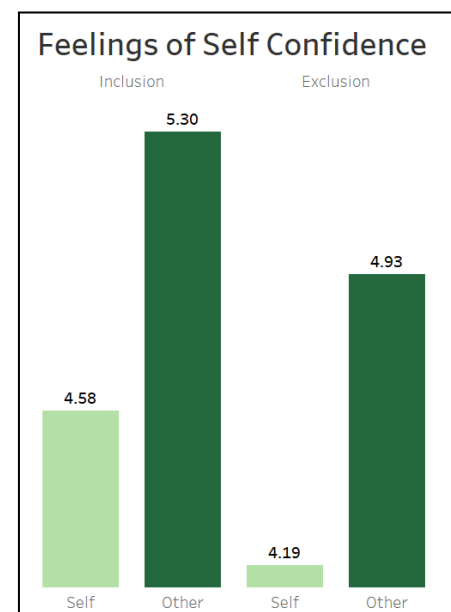
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## **RESULTS**

The two main findings in this study were related to feelings of self-confidence and sympathy. When looking at H1 (individuals who are socially excluded will feel more self-confident after attending one of these trips when exposed to other-benefit messaging), it was found that there was a main effect (Appendix D). An ANOVA test proved a main effect of message appeal ( $p = 0.003$ ) when participants were asked the likelihood of them feeling more self-confident if they participated in one of these trips, however there was no main effect of social exclusion. Regardless of social exclusion, participants were more likely to feel self-confident when they were exposed to other benefit messaging. This proves a main effect with a statistical significance of 0.003 when it comes to the benefit-appeal variable. Another observation is that on average, participants who felt included had higher levels of self-confidence than those who were excluded, which aligns with previous literature. Participants who were included and saw the other benefit ad had an average response of  $M=5.30$  and  $M=4.58$  for the self-benefit ad, whereas participants who were excluded and saw the self-benefit ad had an average response of  $M=4.19$  and  $M= 4.93$  for the other-benefit ad (Figure 1).



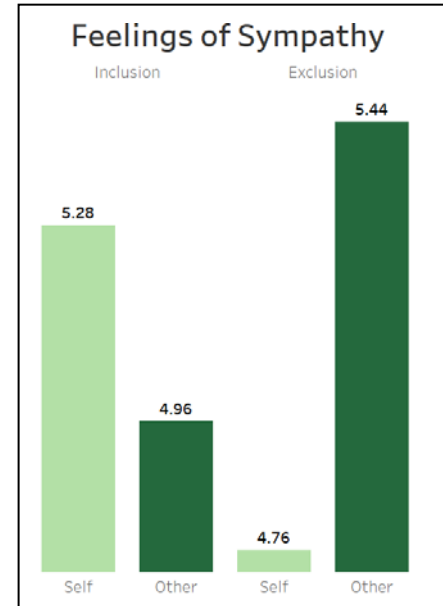
*Figure 1 – Feelings of Self Confidence*

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For H2a (individuals who are socially excluded will feel more sympathetic when viewing other-benefit messaging) and H2b (individuals who are socially included will feel more sympathetic when viewing self-benefit messaging), an ANOVA test proved an interaction effect ( $p = 0.022$ ). When looking at the degree of sympathy that participants felt after viewing the ad, it was discovered that participants who were excluded felt more sympathetic regarding the other-benefit ad, whereas participants who were included felt more sympathetic to the self-benefit ad (Appendix E). This finding is statistically significant and is an important finding in the area of prosocial behaviors (Figure 2). In summary, participants who felt socially excluded responded more favorably to other-benefit appeal advertisements, with greater feelings of



**Figure 2- Feelings of Sympathy**

sympathy and self-confidence, and when it comes to self-benefit messaging, the level of social inclusion is not as important.

When looking at the findings in relation to age it is important to note the differences between generations. It was discovered that on average, Millennials (ages 18-24) have the strongest feelings, as well as there was consistently a large gap between Generation X (ages 41-56) and Millennials (Appendices F, G). Participants were asked about how excited they would be to go on one of the volunteer trips that they learned about, and it was found that Millennials were the most excited ( $M=5.40$ ) and Generation Y were the least excited ( $M=3.77$ ). This gap between the generations remained consistent when participants were asked about their feelings of superiority after learning about these trips (Millennials  $M=3.40$ , Generation Y  $M=2.51$ ).

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**DISCUSSION**

By conducting this study, we were able to show that both social exclusion and benefit appeals influence individuals' perception of advertisements in this industry. It was found that those who feel socially excluded are influenced more significantly by other-benefit appeals, which could be a result of their desire to fit in social situations. More specifically, those who were socially excluded had greater feelings of sympathy, while those who were socially included had higher levels of self-confidence. These findings make sense when the type of emotional feeling is considered. For example, sympathy is more of an external emotion -- you feel sympathetic towards something, so when participants felt socially excluded the desire to be included comes into play and one way to do that is by getting involved and helping others. On the other side, self-confidence is a more internal feeling, so when participants felt socially included, they were more responsive to the self-benefit advertisements. This study provides evidence that the social group plays a role in what volunteers are responsive to, and what sort of benefits are persuasive to them.

This study adds to existing research on benefit-appeals in advertising as it offers important findings on how feelings of social exclusion impact one's willingness to volunteer, which can be used as a background in other studies surrounding prosocial behavior. The findings demonstrate that social exclusion and benefit appeals play a role in prosocial behaviors like volunteering, which furthered existing research in the field of charitable advertising. These discoveries have practical implications that can be used in marketing, and when looking at the ethics of this industry. Some of these marketing implications can be that when potential volunteers are socially excluded, organizations should try and focus on other benefit appeals in their advertising, whereas when they are included, organizations should prioritize more internal feelings in their advertisements.

The main contribution that this study will make, is that it will add to existing knowledge of the issues within volunteer tourism and add to existing research while analyzing the impacts of marketing practices in the industry. Further, we aim to increase the literature available that is based on prosocial behaviors (ie: donating, volunteering).

## **LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

In any future studies, we suggest that a few changes be made to the experiment. When conducting our research, we faced limitations due to COVID-19, so in the future it would be recommended that the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic be considered when developing the questions. This will be especially important to acknowledge in the exclusion section as many people are feeling more socially isolated during the pandemic than they normally do. These feelings of loneliness are not only increasing due to the pandemic, but also with our increasing technological world. This is also important when looking at if participants are willing to go on one of these trips as many people's comfort levels with travelling have varied greatly due to COVID-19.

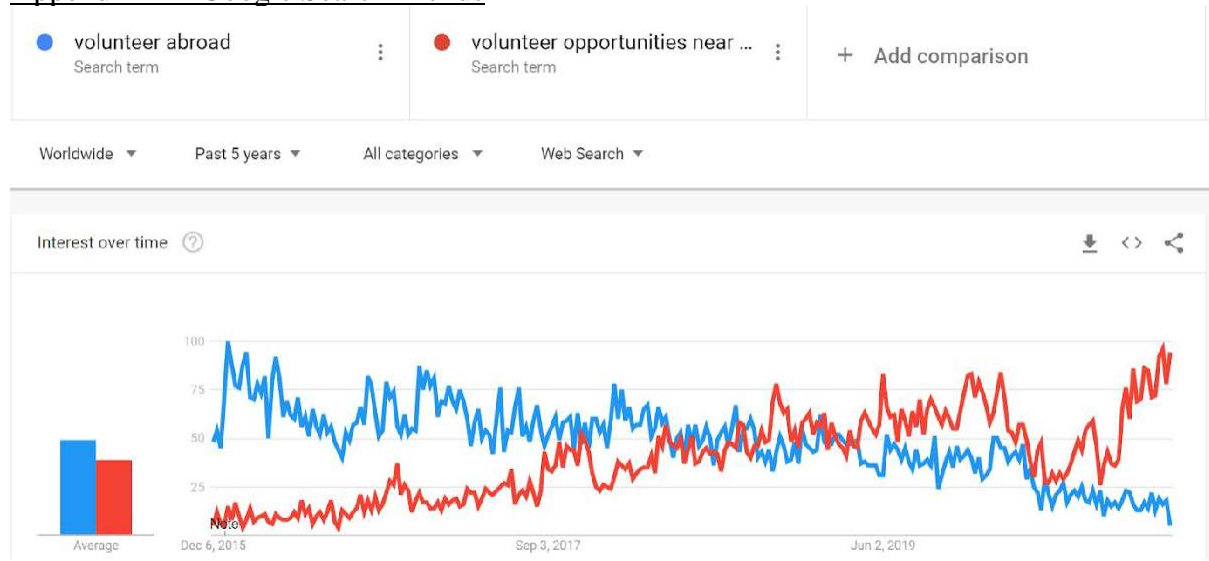
Demographic information is an important limitation and factor to consider in this industry as volunteer travel is not quite as simple as donating, it requires a significantly larger commitment. Due to this, it is important to consider that age and even gender can play a role in participants' interest, not simply what they saw in the survey. For example, many people commented in the written response area of the survey that they are too busy with a family to go on one of these trips, which may skew the results of people's true interest.

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**APPENDICES**

Appendix A – Google Search Trends



Appendix B – 321 Volunteer Survey Introduction



**Volunteer Abroad**

**321Volunteer** is a global volunteer trip organization that offers a variety of 2 week programs for volunteering abroad. These programs include volunteers paying a fee to travel to a foreign country to participate in volunteer work. These trips can be a in wide range of areas. Some examples include community and infrastructure development in Ghana (ie: constructing schools and community centers) or volunteering as a teacher in Bali (ie: teaching local students).

*A volunteer trip is a cross-border trip where the travelers primary purpose is to participate in unpaid volunteer work. Also known as volunteering abroad or volunteer tourism.*

<http://321volunteer.com/>

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Appendix C – Self and Other Advertisements in the Survey

<u>Self Benefit Appeal</u>	<u>Other Benefit Appeal</u>
<p><b>Volunteer Abroad</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2 week programs</li> <li>Programs in different continents</li> <li>Wide variety of volunteer tasks offered</li> </ul> <p>Create a Positive Future for <b>OTHERS</b></p> <p><a href="http://321volunteer.com/">http://321volunteer.com/</a></p>	<p><b>Volunteer Abroad</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2 week programs</li> <li>Programs in different continents</li> <li>Wide variety of volunteer tasks offered</li> </ul> <p>Create a Positive Future for <b>YOURSELF</b></p> <p><a href="http://321volunteer.com/">http://321volunteer.com/</a></p>

Appendix D – Table: Feelings of Self Confidence

**Tests of Between-Subjects Effects**

Dependent Variable: Q9\_5

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	22.110 <sup>a</sup>	3	7.370	3.598	.015
Intercept	3165.605	1	3165.605	1545.238	.000
Benefit	18.614	1	18.614	9.086	.003
Social	5.025	1	5.025	2.453	.120
Benefit * Social	.009	1	.009	.004	.949
Error	288.855	141	2.049		
Total	3547.000	145			
Corrected Total	310.966	144			

a. R Squared = .071 (Adjusted R Squared = .051)



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Appendix E – Table: Feelings of Sympathy

**Tests of Between-Subjects Effects**

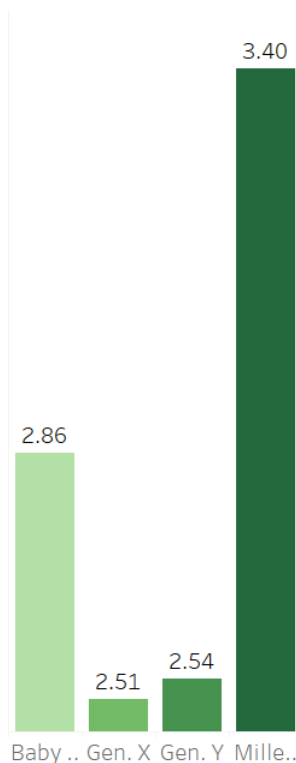
Dependent Variable: Q3\_1

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	11.134 <sup>a</sup>	3	3.711	2.255	.085
Intercept	3663.494	1	3663.494	2225.492	.000
Social	.014	1	.014	.008	.927
Benefit	1.219	1	1.219	.740	.391
Social * Benefit	8.811	1	8.811	5.352	.022
Error	232.107	141	1.646		
Total	4071.000	145			
Corrected Total	243.241	144			

a. R Squared = .046 (Adjusted R Squared = .025)

Appendix F – Chart: Feelings of Superiority

**Feelings of Superiority**

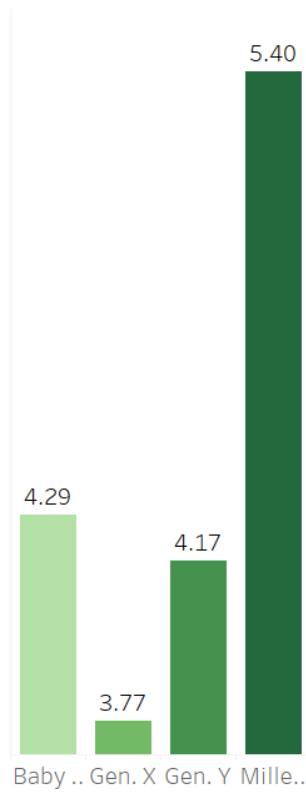


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Appendix G – Chart: Level of Excitement to Attend a Trip

**Level Of Excitement**



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