

How Certain Are People About Their Giving Intentions in 2020?



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Introduction

The coronavirus pandemic has seismically changed the way we all engage with the world around us. For many people the future is uncertain. There is little in the way of clarity about what things will be like in the months and years to come.

This uncertainty has destabilised our lives and is having a profound impact on how we view giving to charity. There have been several recent studies providing a variety of different perspectives on what will happen to charitable donations in the UK. For example, a YouGov poll recently reported that the number of people considering making financial contributions to charities doubled in April. But the challenge in asking people how they intend to support charities in the future is that what they say and what they do are two very different things.

As humans, we lack accurate insight into our own thought processes, biases and decisions. Surveys often focus on recall and conscious opinion which might be disconnected from actual behaviour. To address this, we can use Reaction Time tests – an implicit¹ technique – to analyse attitudes on an emotional level and reveal deeper insights with more accurate predictions.

¹ Implicit technique refers to the various methods that measure the body's involuntary reaction to stimulus. They are performance-based instruments that limit participants' ability to control responses, and do not rely on introspection for the measurement of attitudes, opinions or emotional states. It can include techniques like Biometrics and Reaction Time. The power of these techniques is that they are gathering participants' responses that are unintentional, resource-independent, unconscious, or uncontrollable (see: Bargh, 1994). Therefore, they gauge unconscious physiological reality, unedited by the conscious mind.

Walnut's Reaction Time technique is based on the attitude, strength & accessibility paradigm² that shows the stronger an attitude is, the more accessible it is from memory, and the greater the likelihood that this will guide behaviour.

² Fazio, Russell & Williams, Carol. (1986). Attitude accessibility as a moderator of the attitude-perception and attitude-behavior relations: An investigation of the 1984 presidential election. *Journal of personality and social psychology*. 51. 505-14. 10.1037//0022-3514.51.3.505.

Fazio, Russell & Powell, Martha & Williams, Carol. (1989). The Role of Attitude Accessibility in the Attitude-to-Behavior Process. *Journal of Consumer Research*. 16. 280-89. 10.1086/209214.

Fazio, Russell. (2001). On the Automatic Activation of Associated Evaluations: An Overview. *Cognition and Emotion*. 15. 10.1080/02699930125908.

Survey Methodology

A Reaction Time survey tests the emotional confidence of a person's attitudes. It reflects automatic, intuitive reactions and thus enables better prediction of future behaviour.

From the respondents' point of view the Reaction Time Test is a short, user-friendly questionnaire that can be completed online on any device (mobile, desktop, etc.). The Reaction Time Test measures conscious opinion (level of agreement or disagreement) and the confidence of this opinion via the time it takes to respond.

Reaction Time is measured in milliseconds, individually for each participant and matched with their individual baseline which determines whether the answer is considered fast (high certainty) or slow (low certainty).

To be able to reliably measure the speed of response the questions are presented through a dedicated layout that facilitates implicit responses. Before the main test, every participant has their responses calibrated. During the calibration process, respondents familiarise themselves with how the survey works, whilst researchers measure the respondent's baseline speed which can be informed by factors such as an individual's reading speed, familiarity with computers, age etc.

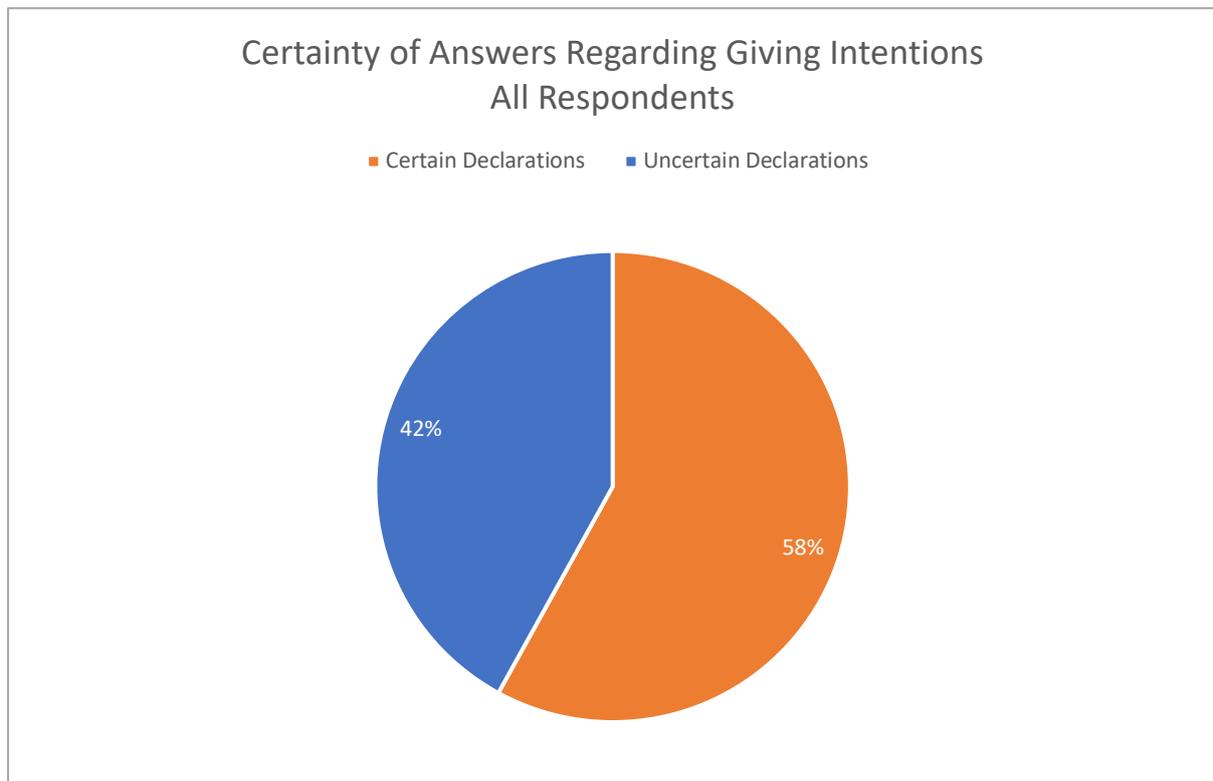
The survey on which this report is based was conducted 25-27 April 2020 by Walnut Unlimited. Over 2000 people participated representing the UK population in terms of demographics (gender, age, region etc), Proprietary algorithms were used to clean the data and provide the outcome.

Key Take Away Messages

- 42% of attitudes about giving intentions are uncertain. People who say they will keep their donations at the same level are less certain than people who say they will increase their donations. Regardless of what people say they intend doing, many are uncertain about how they will really behave. Charities should not take existing donor relationships for granted. Donors need to be continually nurtured in these uncertain times.
- To reduce feelings of uncertainty, people will want to feel in control of their lives. Now, more than ever, it is critical that charities focus on providing inspiring supporter experiences that address donor needs and demonstrate the impact donors have on the causes they support. Charities need to make donors feel powerful and needed.
- The data suggests people who have donated in the past are more certain they will do so in the future. People who have not donated in the past are less certain they will give in the future. Put simply, the data shows (as most fundraisers know), that it is easier to keep an existing donor than it is to attract a new one. If charities wish to focus on recruiting new donors, they will need to create compelling fundraising propositions appealing to people with differing values sets – not simply focusing on demographics to segment audiences.
- People who give more tend to be more certain about their future giving intentions than people who give at lower values. The scale of previous donations impacts on emotional beliefs and facilitates internalised decision-making processes.

Observations

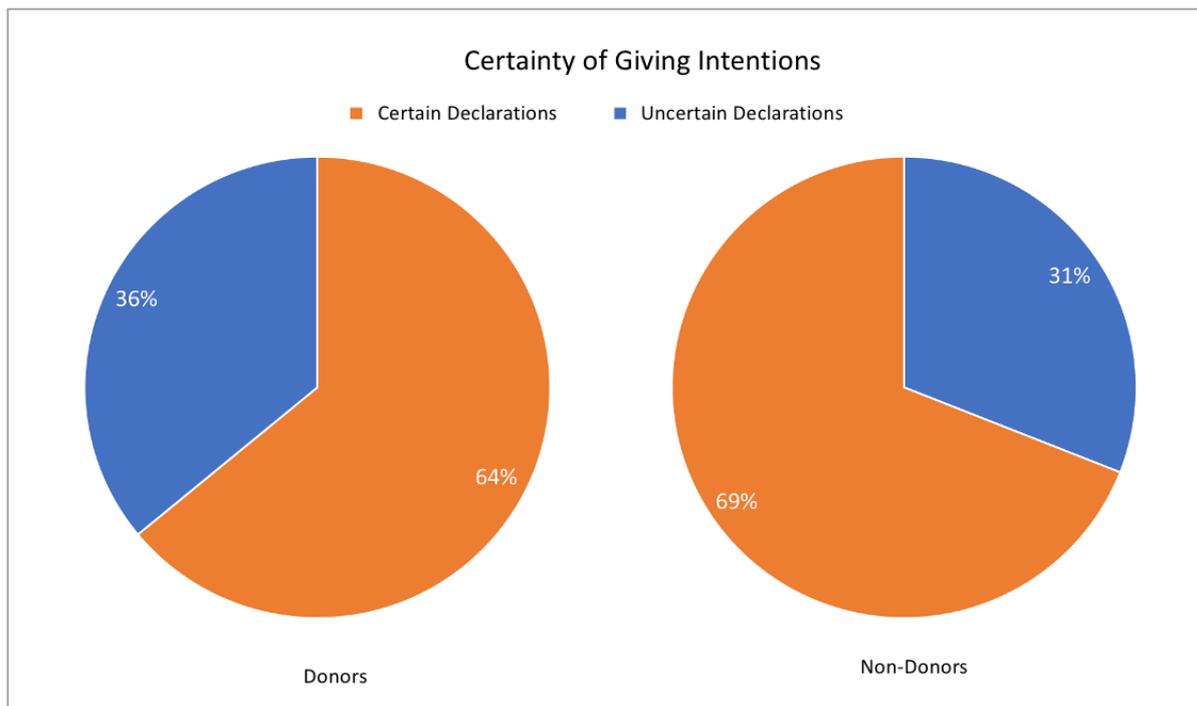
42% of Attitudes About Giving Intentions are Uncertain



Over half (58%) of all the answers we gathered about giving intentions were provided with high certainty. This means that these people were certain about their own attitudes regarding either giving more, giving less or giving the same as they did last year.

However, this also means that about 42% of people, who have declared some kind of attitude, are still uncertain about what their giving behaviour may be this year. This attitude is prone to change, despite the stated response and shows how big the gap is between what people overtly declare and how they will behave in the future.

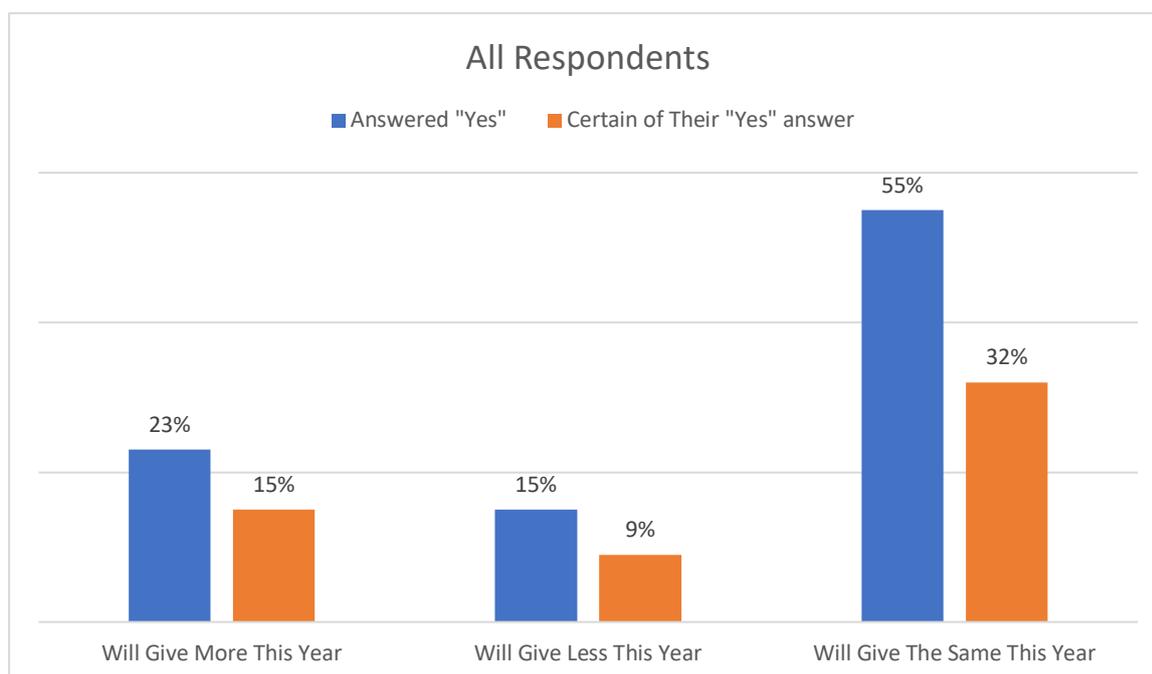
This gap is even stronger among people who have not donated in the past.



36% of people who have donated and 69% of people who have not donated within the last year are uncertain of the responses they provided.

This level of uncertainty means that charities will need to work hard to demonstrate why their causes are relevant to the lives of their donors or potential donors in the current situation.

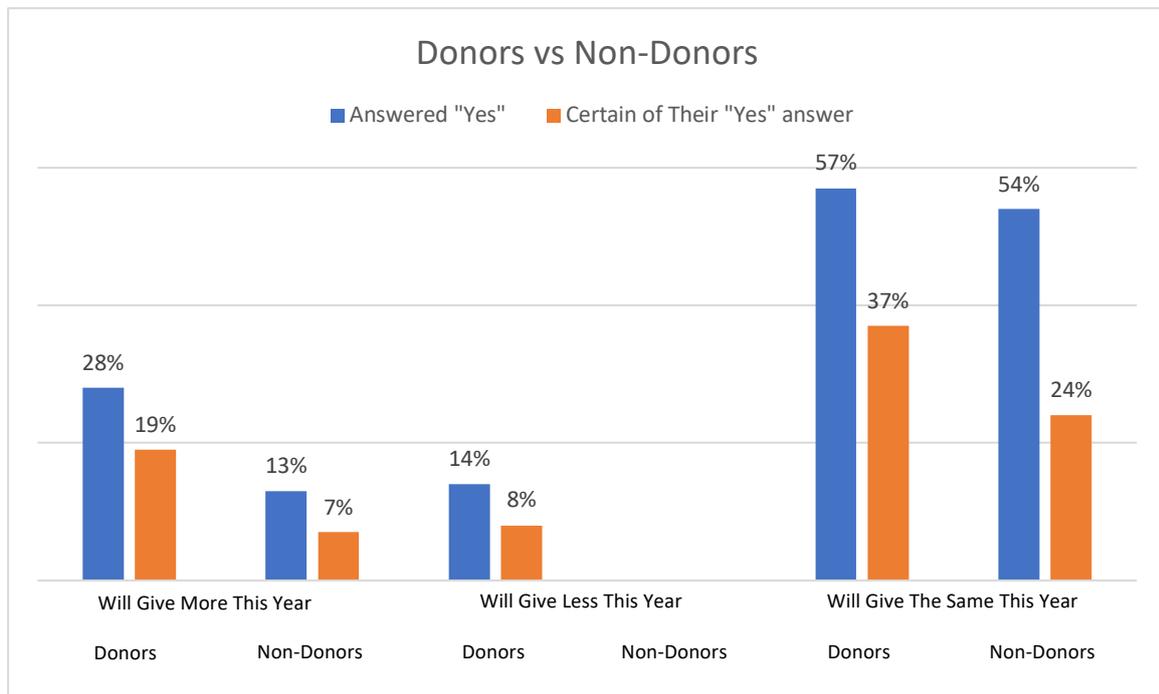
Charities Need to Reduce Uncertainty and Make Donors Feel Powerful, In Control and Needed



Over half (55%) of all respondents declared that 'My charity donations will remain the same this year'. However, only 32% of people were certain of this. This would suggest that around two thirds of people who say their donations will remain the same maybe uncertain about their giving intentions this year, and their attitude might be just a wishful thinking. Nearly a quarter of respondents (23%) said that "I will donate more money to charities this year". Only 15% of people are certain about these intentions at this point in the year. In contrast 15% of people say "I will donate less money this year" but only 9% of people are certain about this.

Reducing feelings of uncertainty will help make people in control of their lives. Now, more than ever, it is critical that charities focus on providing inspiring supporter experiences that address donor needs and demonstrate the impact donors have on the causes they support. Charities need to focus on reducing uncertainty by making donors feel powerful, in control and needed.

Donors are More Certain of Their Giving Intentions Than Non-Donors



57% of people who have donated in the previous year said their charity donations will remain the same this year – 37% of people are certain of this. It is a big gap but it becomes even bigger for non-donors as 54% of people who did not give last year said this would be the same this year but only 24% of them are certain this will be the case.

28% of people who donated last year intend to give more this year – 19% of donors are certain they will increase their giving. In contrast, 13% of people who did not donate last year said they intend to give this year but only 7% of people are certain of this.

The data suggests a possible link to the Cognitive Consistency Principle which says that people prefer to have consistent thoughts, opinions, attitudes and behaviours that do not contradict each other.

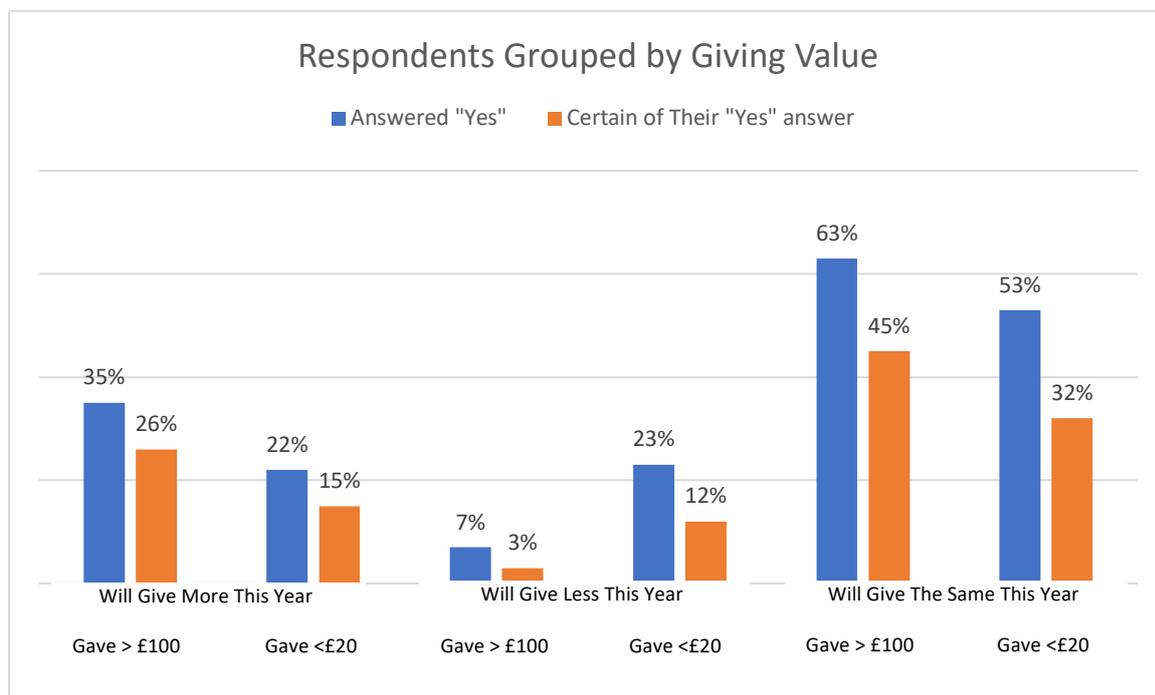
Robert Cialdini, one of the leading social scientists in the field of influence and social psychology said: *“Consistency is an adaptive behaviour that has been very beneficial. Doing certain things always in the same way, and making decisions according to the same values, helps us survive in a complex world.”*

The Cognitive Consistency Principle helps explain why someone who has made charitable donations in the past will have a greater propensity to do so again. Conversely, if someone does not make charitable donations, they will have a greater propensity to continue not giving.

On this basis, it may be challenging for charities to persuade people who do not donate to do so in the future. If charities wish to focus on recruiting new donors, they will need to create compelling fundraising propositions appealing to people with differing values sets. Propositions will be needed for:

- Those people whose values prioritise safety, security and family
- Those people whose values prioritise new ideas, achievement and visible signs of success
- Those people who value fairness, justice and equality

Donors Who Give More Are More Certain of Their Giving Intentions Than Donors Who Give Less



Of the people who gave £100 or more in the last year, 35% said they would give more to charity this year and around a quarter (26%) were certain they would do so. In contrast, of the people who gave less than £20 in the last year, 22% said they would give more this year but only 15% were certain this would happen.

Of the people who gave more than £100 or more in the last year, nearly two thirds (63%) said their donations would remain the same this year and close to half (45%) were certain. Nearly half (53%) of people who gave less than £20 last year said their donations would remain the same this year – but around a third (32%) were certain this would happen.

Interestingly this trend reverses for people who say they will give less this year. Of people who gave £100 or more last year, 7% said they would give less this year but only 3% of people are certain of this. However, 23% of donors giving less than £20 last year said they would give less this year and 12% of people are certain of this.

The data would indicate that a significant proportion of people are certain that they will keep their donations at the same level. However, it should also be noted that there is a sizable group of people willing to increase their donations. Targeting higher donors in this case might be also beneficial.

The Reaction Time method can provide important information for charities about donors' unconscious, internal attitudes and indicate the strength of donor's giving intentions.

Charities are encouraged to use Reaction Time testing as way to better understand their donor relationships and improve supporter engagement communications. Simply Reaction Time based tools can help you to minimize the gap between stated and actual behaviour.

Moreover, charities could benefit from using techniques such as RFV analysis (Recency, Frequency, Value) to identify donors that may have a propensity to give more or would prefer to give but not at an increased level.

About Walnut

The Human Understanding Agency

Walnut Unlimited is more than a market research agency, they are the human understanding agency. They uncover human insights that help bring global brands closer to understanding people for better business decisions. Through innovative thinking, they use no-nonsense science drawing on specialisms in neuroscience and behavioural psychology and economics. They work across retail and customer experience, technology, financial, FMCG, brand and communications. Information about Walnut Unlimited can be found here:
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About Pentatonic

A Fresh Perspective for Charities

With fundraising, communications and marketing it's easy to get a bit lost. We help charities create workable and realistic strategies and plans to keep them going in the right direction. We work with charities to better understand their audiences using values-based segmentation approaches. We use these insights to develop compelling fundraising propositions that appeal to new and existing supporters. If you'd like to get a fresh perspective on a business challenge, why not drop us a line.

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