DEVELOPMENT
ENGAGEMENT
LAB

THE POWER OF ACTIVATION: THE EFFECT OF IMAGES IN GLOBAL POVERTY CAMPAIGN APPEALS

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// DEL German Partner Meeting
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@DevEngageLab

Thank you!

This research exemplifies the DEL-Partner collaborative design model we have co-developed over the past 5 years

Thank you for helping to refine the research question(s) and model, for giving us access to your image banks, and to content/ communication managers and photographers who helped us select the 116 images we used

This research wouldn't have been possible without the help of DEL Partners

AGENDA

1. Development tropes: views from the German public
2. Activation in campaign appeals images: motivation & design
3. Results: images, reaction, action
4. Pathways to donations and information seeking

DEVELOPMENT TROPES: VIEWS FROM THE GERMAN PUBLIC

How do images contribute to the public's sense of connection, progress and hope?

HOW DO DEVELOPMENT IMAGES PLAY OUT IN THE PUBLIC'S MIND OVER THE PAST 40 YEARS...

Which image ....

- most tired of seeing
- feel most connected to people in image
- most hopeful about progress

DEVELOPMENT TROPES: VIEWS FROM THE GERMAN PUBLIC

After 40+ years of development campaigns, how are images used in appeals viewed by the German public?

How does the use of images impact representation and engagement?

- Localisation
- Shifting the Power

Trope - a significant or recurrent theme; a motif

1. Passive victim
2. Solving problems
3. Partnership
4. White saviour

MEASURING THE IMPACT OF IMAGES: HOW DO GERMANS THINK/FEEL ABOUT THE IMAGES THEY SEE?

CONNECTION	HOPE	FATIGUE	MOTIVATION	SUSTAINABILITY
Please indicate the extent to which you personally feel a **connection** with the people you see in the image.	Please indicate the extent to which you personally feel **hopeful** that the world is making progress in ending extreme poverty.	Please indicate comes closest to your view.	Please indicate the extent to which you feel **motivated** to support a German development organisation working with people like those in the image.	Imagine the people in the image five years from today. Please indicate what you think would best describe their lives in 5 years' time.

CONNECTION
- 0 - 'No connection at all'
- 10 - 'A very strong connection'

HOPE
- 0 - 'Not at all hopeful'
- 10 - 'Very hopeful'

FATIGUE
- 0 - 'Not at all tired of seeing images like this one' to 10
- 10 - 'Very **tired** of seeing images like this one'

MOTIVATION
- 0 - 'Not at all motivated'
- 10 - 'Very motivated'

SUSTAINABILITY
- 0 - 'They are still **dependent** on help and support'
- 10 - 'They are fully **independent** in their lives'

VICTIM: PITIFUL, PASSIVE & WITHOUT AGENCY

VICTIM

War, famine, and lack of clean water mean that children like Avi living in the world's poorest countries are suffering through no fault of their own. With your support, Avi can lead a life free of hunger, disease, and suffering. You have the power to save his life - please help today.

SOLVE: INITIATIVE, SKILLED, TAKING CONTROL

VICTIM

SOLVE

Jerome's children love school, but he often doesn't have the money needed for school supplies. But that is not stopping Jerome. He is learning new skills in his farming job that will allow him to earn extra money to support his children's education. Get involved with the development organisation supporting Jerome today!

PARTNERSHIP: LOCALIZATION, CAPACITY BUILDING

VICTIM

SOLVE

PARTNERSHIP

This village needs access to a clean water source. Elias and his community have been working in partnership with a German organisation to install a new water pump in the village where they live. Once ready, the pump will provide clean water for people to drink and wash with. Please support this partnership today!

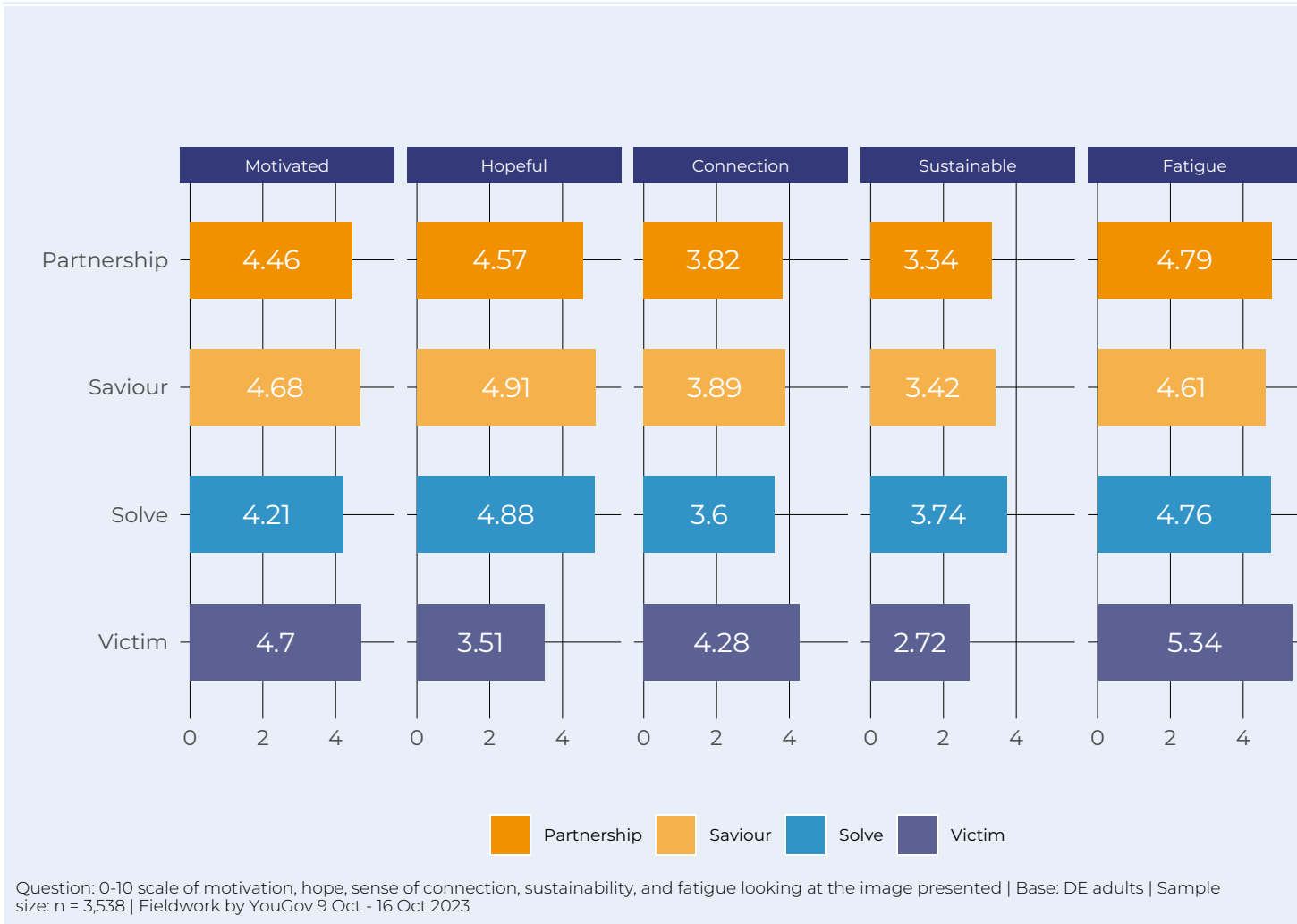# WHITE SAVIOUR: RESCUE, LIBERATE, EXPERT

VICTIM

SOLVE

PARTNERSHIP

WHITE SAVIOUR

The school in this village is supposed to offer a place to learn for kids, but it is often closed as there are not enough teachers. Hannah, a German university student, is stepping up to help. Thanks to her, the school can stay open, and children can go back to learning. Please support Hannah's efforts today.

TROPES PLAY OUT IN MORE AND LESS SURPRISING WAYS

	Motivated	Hopeful	Connection	Sustainable	Fatigue
Partnership	4.46	4.57	3.82	3.34	4.79
Saviour	4.68	4.91	3.89	3.42	4.61
Solve	4.21	4.88	3.6	3.74	4.76
Victim	4.7	3.51	4.28	2.72	5.34

Legend: Partnership, Saviour, Solve, Victim

- **Motivation** – No statistical difference across the four tropes around sense of motivation to support DE development organisation.

- **Hopeful** – 'Saviour' trope has highest level of hope. Partnership, saviour, and solve tropes significantly different from 'victim'. (remaining three tropes are not significantly different from each other)

- **Connection** – The German public generally have low levels of connection with all four tropes, but 'victim' receives the highest score on a sense of connection. Difference between 'victim' and 'solve' stat. sig.

- **Sustainable** – The public are sceptical of sustainability across all four tropes; victim receives the lowest score, and 'solve' receives the highest score of the four. 'Victim' significantly different from the three, but the three are not different from each other.

- **Fatigue** – 'Victim' trope ranks highest in the sense of fatigue – the public is tired of seeing pictures like this. The rest stat. sig. diff from 'victim'.

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TROPES' UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES

- Organisations have reduced reliance on 'victim' imagery, but use has cross cutting impacts:
  - More fatigue, less hopeful & sustainable
  - But more connected and doesn't dampen motivation to support orgs
- All images are weak on connection
- Partnership and solving own problems don't perform materially better, despite being the images we think are intrinsically better

ACTIVATION IN CAMPAIGN APPEAL IMAGES

How do active portrayals of subjects in appeals affect public engagement with global poverty?

WHY INVESTIGATE CAMPAIGN APPEAL IMAGES?

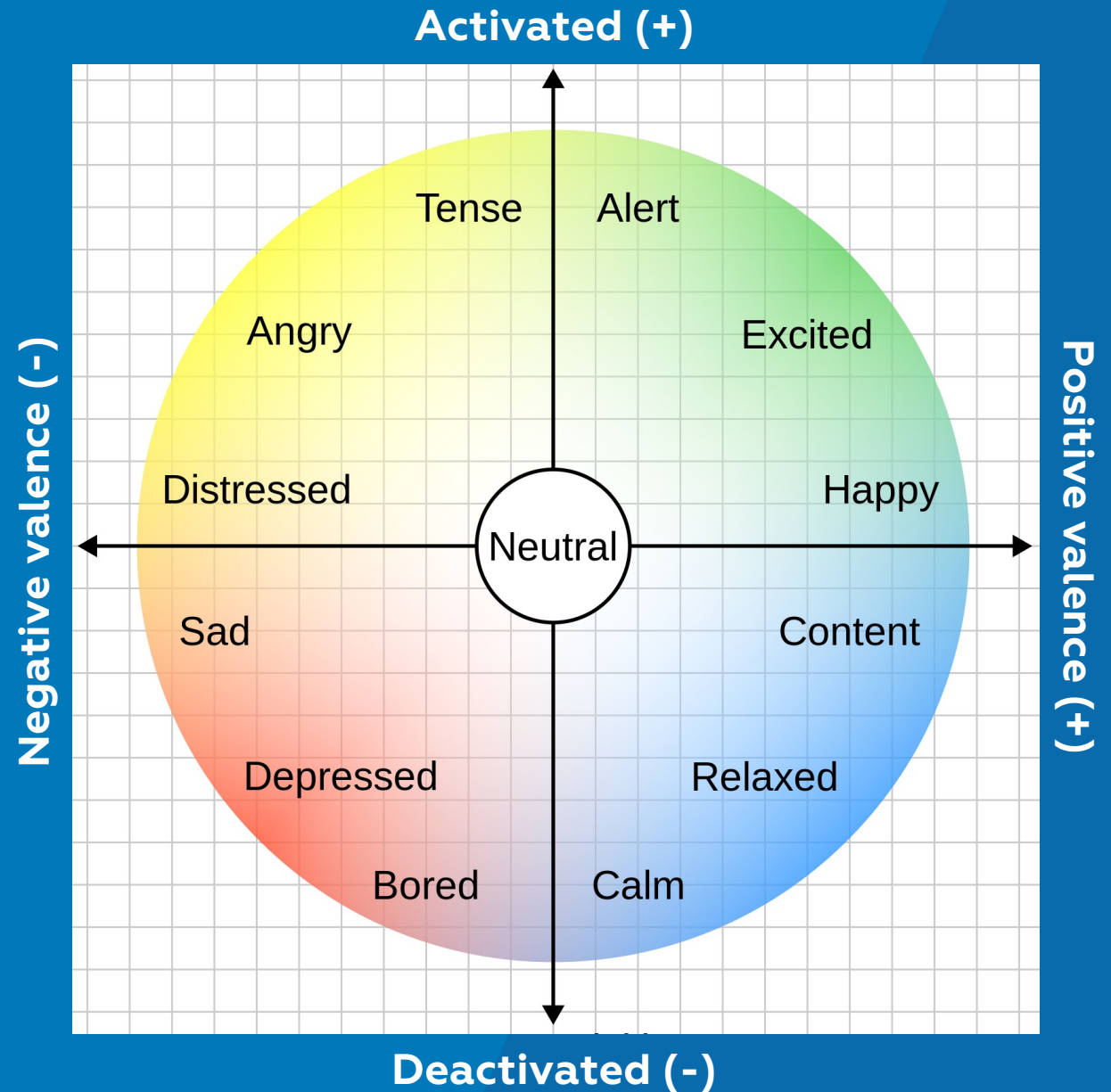Images play a substantial role in public engagement with global poverty and development

A body of research shows that the **characteristics of images** – e.g., gender, emotions, action – shape the way people connect with what they see

We wanted to know more about how these factors come together to create **active/passive representation** and how that affects public engagement

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY ACTIVE PORTRAYAL?

Active portrayal can come in different ways: active **emotions**, active **behaviours**, or even **direct gaze**
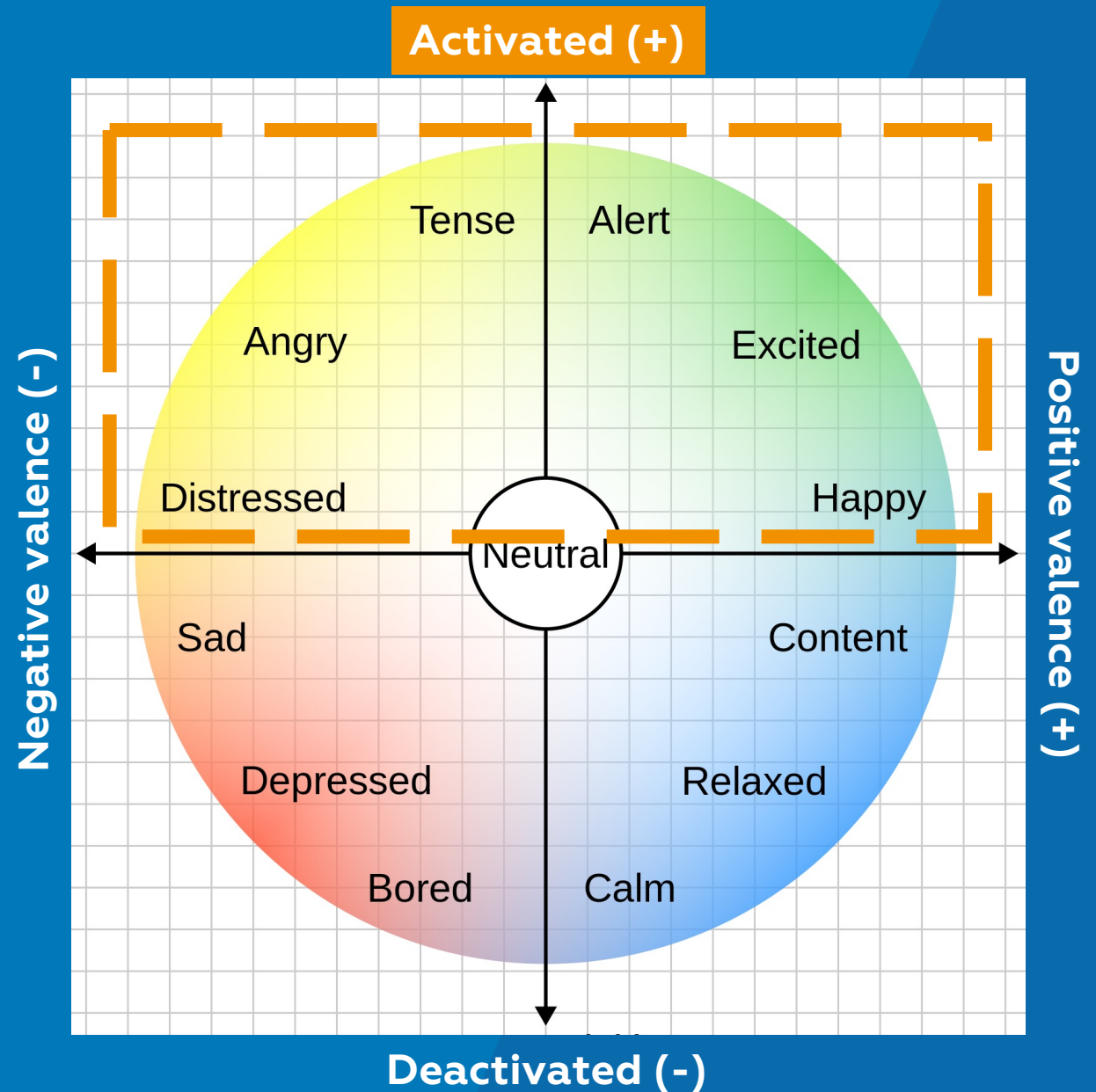
- **Active positive** or **negative emotions** include image subjects who look happy or angry instead of calm or bored

- Subjects can also be portrayed as **engaged in activity**: playing, working, or going about their daily lives instead of standing still in the image

- **Gaze** also contributes to activation: the subject in the image looks directly at the person looking at the picture

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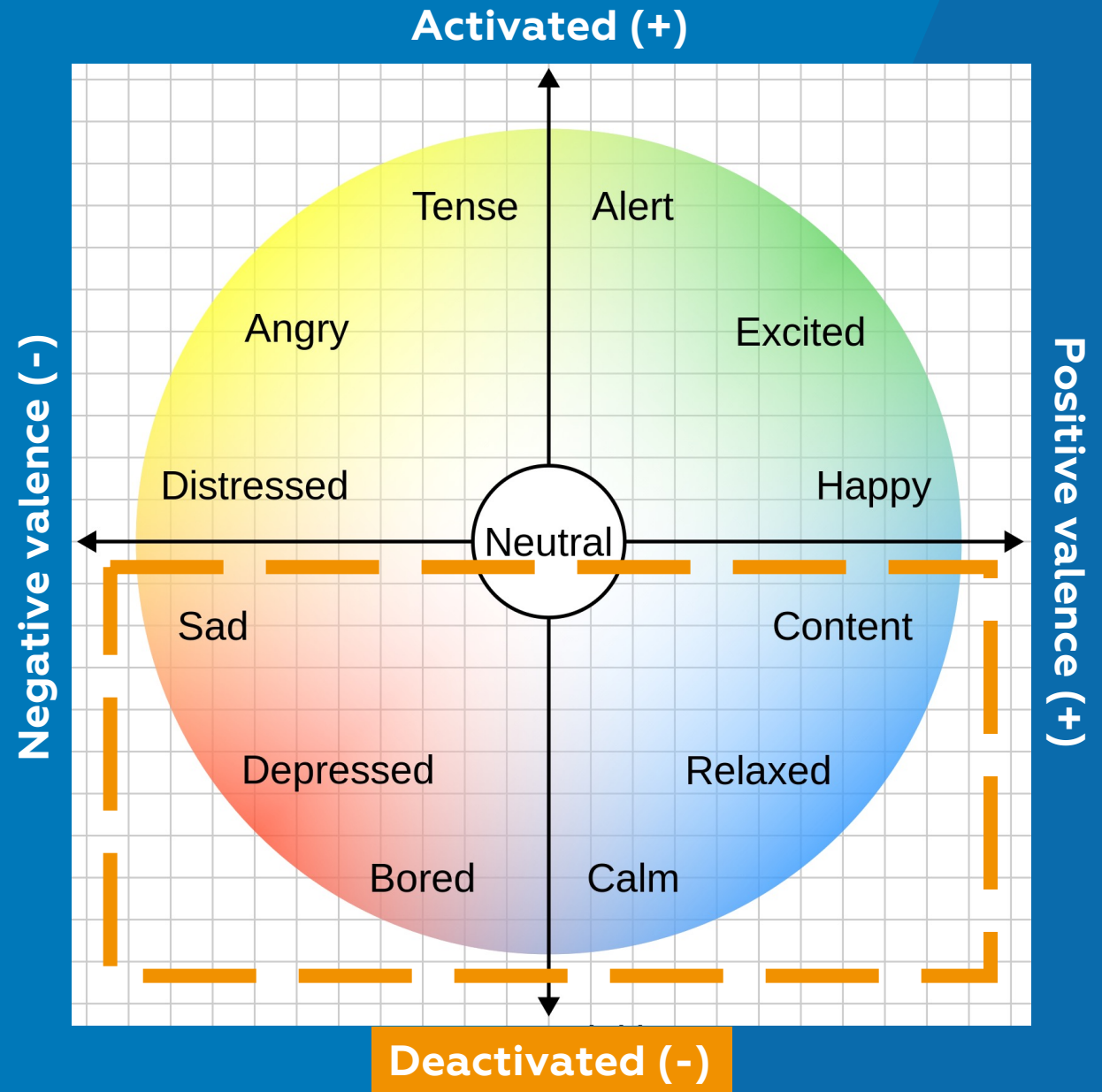
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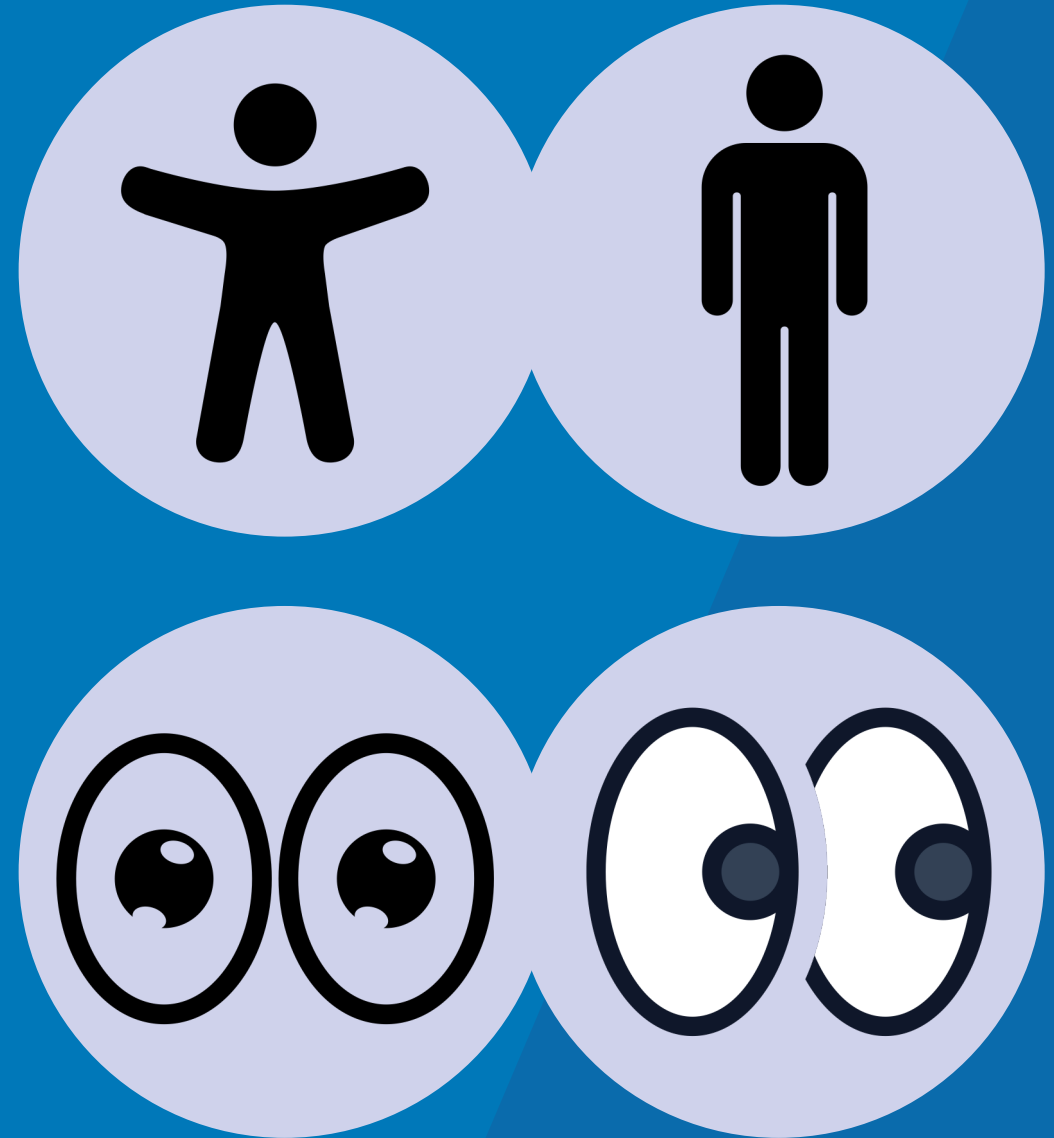
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BEYOND ACTIVE PORTRAYALS: IMAGE CONTEXT & SUBJECT CHARACTERISTICS

Images show more than emotions, activity & gaze

We examine two additional factors

- **Context**: the subject's surrounds and environment that could influence how we feel and engage with the image

- **Subject characteristics**: the age, gender and ethnicity of a subject shape the way they are seen in campaign appeal imagery

HOW DO PEOPLE REACT TO WHAT THEY SEE?

We are interested in three ways in which those who look at images react to what they see

- Their **emotional response**

- Their perceived sense of **urgency to take action** and help someone

- Their perceived sense they can **make a difference** to the life of someone

HOW DO PEOPLE'S REACTIONS AFFECT THEIR ACTIONS?

We consider two actions people might want to take to help those in the pictures

- **Finding out more information**
    - For example, by clicking on a link to find out more or subscribing to a newsletter

- **Donating**
    - We ask about willingness to donate and the donation amount

HOW DO ATTRIBUTES OF IMAGES DRIVE WILLINGNESS TO DONATE AND GET INFORMATION?

IMAGES

Emotions

Activity

Gaze

Age, gender, ethnicity

Context

ACTION

Making a donation

Seeking more information

AN EXAMPLE OF IMAGE CHARACTERISTICS CODING

We code a total of 116 images for the partner imagery experiment; each respondent saw 5 images

Characteristic	Value
Emotions	Positive activated: Happy, excited, alert, elated
Activity	Inactive: standing still
Gaze	Direct: staring at the camera
Age	Young
Gender	Man
Ethnicity	Middle Eastern/Arab
Context	Daily life in a poor country

WHICH OF THESE IMAGES MADE RESPONDENTS SAY THEY WERE MORE WILLING TO DONATE?

IMAGE A

IMAGE B

IMAGE C

BEST AND WORST IMAGES – WILLINGNESS TO DONATE

BEST IMAGES

40%   33%   31%

Between 31% and 40% of respondents say they'd donate to these images. There is a clear preference for **younger** subjects. Top 10 images show consistent patterns – young female subjects.

WORST IMAGES

5%   5%   6%

Between 5% and 6% of respondents say they'd donate to these images. All images include men as subjects.

BEST AND WORST IMAGES – EXPECTED DONATION AMOUNT

BEST IMAGES

44€   11€   9€

The best performing images would get a hypothetical average donation between 44€ and 9€. There is **no clear pattern** on the characteristics of image subjects. The images which receive the largest amounts are not the ones that are most likely to see a donation.

WORST IMAGES

<1€   1€   1€

Overall, 1€ or less is donated to the worst performing images. Two of the images which are **less likely to get a donation** are also the ones which are likely to receive the smallest amounts.

WHICH OF THESE IMAGES MADE RESPONDENTS SAY THEY WERE MORE WILLING TO FIND OUT MORE?

IMAGE A

IMAGE B

IMAGE C

BEST AND WORST IMAGES – WILLINGNESS TO FIND OUT MORE

BEST IMAGES

41%   **36%**   **36%**

Between 41% and 36% of respondents would like to find out more about the appeals behind these top performing images. All subjects in the top 3 are **young children**.

WORST IMAGES

8%   **9%**   **9%**

Between 8% and 9% of respondents would like to find out more about the appeals behind the worst performing images. Some of these images featured in other "worst performing categories", and all subjects are **men**.

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DRIVERS OF WILLINGNESS TO DONATE

	Positive drivers	Negative drivers
Emotions	**Negative** emotional portrayal of subjects leads to a greater willingness to donate.	**Positive** emotional portrayal of subjects suppresses respondents' willingness to donate.
Character	Portrayal of a **young** subject (vs. adult subject)	Portrayal of **adults** dramatically suppress willingness to donate.
Context	The portrayal of **urgent** contexts significantly drives the willingness to donate. Urgency considerably weighs heavily on people's preference for donations.	Portrayal of subjects on **a long-term context** yields a much lower willingness to donate.

DRIVERS OF INTENTION TO FIND OUT MORE

	Positive drivers	Negative drivers
Emotions	Emotional portrayal of the subjects did not drive respondents' willingness to find out more	
Character	Portrayal of **young** subjects (vs. adults) increased willingness to find out more. **Female** subjects (vs. male) increased willingness to find out more	Portrayals of an **adult** subject decreased willingness to find out more.
Context	Consistent with willingness to donate, the portrayal of **urgent contexts** significantly influenced people's willingness to find out more about the appeal.	Portrayal of **long-term/non-urgent contexts** decreased the willingness to find out more about the appeal.

TRADITIONAL NARRATIVES ARE STILL WHAT 'WORK' FOR THE GERMAN PUBLIC

• Portrayal of **urgent** contexts with **young** subjects portraying **negative** emotions are the types of images that drive willingness to engage with the appeals through *donations*

• Engagement with the appeals through *information* is less contingent on the emotions portrayed by the subjects but similar set of factors are at work— **urgent**, **young**, and **female**.
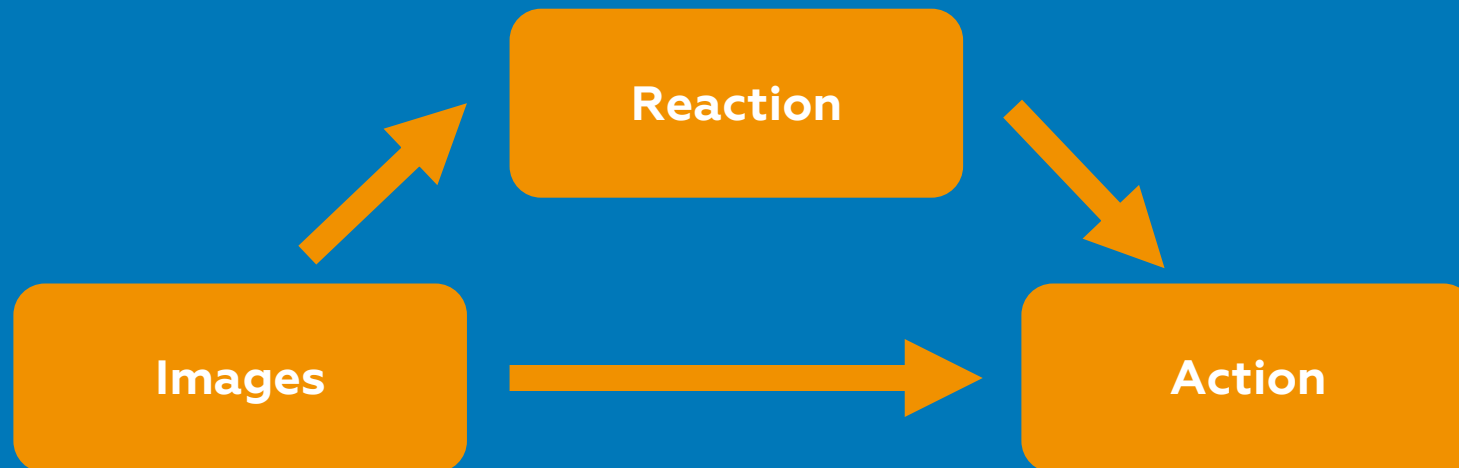
MEDIATION ANALYSIS

- When researchers want to understand not only that there is a causal relationship between X and Y (images and actions), but also *how* or *why* X causes Y then they investigate the role of mechanisms

Images → Action

MEDIATION ANALYSIS

- When researchers want to understand not only that there is a causal relationship between X and Y (images and actions), but also *how* or *why* X causes Y then they investigate the role of mechanisms

- This is what is called mediation analysis, the statistical analysis of processes in between X and Y – the pathways that explain how and why X causes Y

MEDIATION ANALYSIS

- The 'Reactions' that we test in this experiment are:
- Emotional response
    - Happy (Positive activated)
    - Calm (Positive deactivated)
    - Angry (Negative activated)
    - Sad (Negative deactivated)
- Sense of efficacy (being able to make a difference)
- Sense of urgency
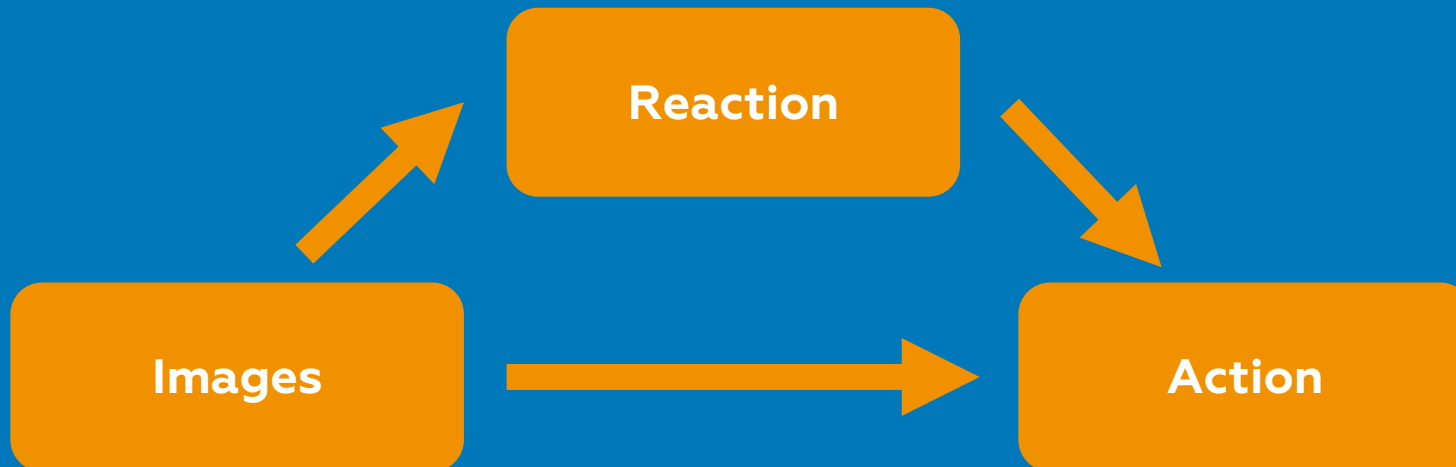
DECISION TO DONATE

- **17.5%** of the time respondents said that they would donate if they saw the image in an appeal from an international development charity/NGO

- The mediation analysis confirms that **urgent appeals** are most likely to get people to dig into their pockets, but how does this work?

- Through making people **angry** (+4% likelihood of donating), making people feel a sense of **urgency** (+8%) and being able to make a **difference** (+5%)

- **Young subjects** matter regardless of our tested mediators, so we assume that there is a different pathway that explains why appeals with young subjects solicit more donations

- **Angry** looking subjects are also effective at producing donation through increasing (righteous?) **anger** in respondents (+4%) and a sense of **urgency** (+4%)

DECISION TO DONATE OR NOT

- Appeals that show **sad subjects** depress donations

- This is because they increase respondents' **negative emotions** (both sad, and angry) (-2%) and that reduces donations, and the effects on respondents' sense of **urgency** (-3%) and **efficacy** (-2%) also explain why donations go down

- **Black / African subjects** also reduced donation decisions by shifting respondents' sense of **urgency**, possibly explained by a sense of fatigue around such images

DECISION TO SEEK FURTHER INFORMATION

- **Urgent** appeals also make people more likely to seek further information, by making respondents **angry** (+5%), feel a sense of **urgency** (+9%), and a sense of thinking they can make a **difference** (+4%)

- Appeals featuring **young subjects** increase information seeking behaviour mainly regardless of our mediators, the chief exception being by generating a sense of urgency (+2%)

- Appeals featuring **calm subjects** trigger information seeking via respondents' **negative emotions** (both sad, and angry) (+3%) and the effects on respondents' sense of **urgency** (+6%) and **efficacy** (+2%)

- Appeals featuring **angry subjects** also activate people by making them feel **angry** (+4%) or a sense of **urgency** (+4%). NB This is a good place to underline the fact that it is not the appeal that makes people seek information, it is only via making people feel angry or urgency that they *then* seek out information. It's not just a tautology, it's a conditional mechanism

DECISION TO SEEK FURTHER INFORMATION OR NOT

- Both **happy subjects** and **sad subjects** reduce people's information seeking behaviour. You can't win!?

- But crucially, what's going on is that by affecting respondents' negative emotions such as **anger** and their sense of **urgency**, both happy and sad subjects reduce respondents' information seeking behaviour (all in the range of minus 3-4% likelihood of wanting more information)

WHAT AFFECTS HOW MUCH PEOPLE GIVE?

- **Angry subjects** increased donations when they made the respondent feel **angry** (+€3.31), but zero difference if not

- **Happy subjects** increased donations when they made the respondent feel **happy** (+€9.68), but zero difference if not

- (In addition when **happy subjects** triggered respondents to feel **negative emotions** it reduced the donation amount (-€7.03), compared to zero difference if not. So clearly happy subjects are divisive)

WHAT AFFECTS HOW MUCH PEOPLE DON'T GIVE?

- **Urgent appeals** – despite eliciting more donations and information seeking – actually had a negative effect on the average amounts given. This wasn't especially through mediators, but a direct effect on respondents' calculations

- **White subjects** tend to reduce donation amounts, in general

INSIGHTS

- **Urgency** is the main game in town when it comes to eliciting donations and getting people engaged (through seeking further information)

- However, in tension with this, urgent appeals also result in **smaller donations** (when people do donate)

- **Happy**, **sad**, **angry** appeals 'work' when (and only when) they successfully evoke a matching emotional reaction in respondents

- **Younger subjects**, on average, work better than older subjects

- Finally, people' **feelings of urgency** and **being able to make a difference** are key mechanisms explaining why people give or engage

DATA AND USE

DATA

The data for this deck come from DEL 2023 German Sandbox (n= 3,583. Fieldwork by YouGov, 9-18 October 2023. Data are weighted to be nationally representative.

USE

DEL data and analysis are a public good and can be used and shared with the appropriate citation.

CITATION

Oh, S., Morini, P., Torres, F., Hudson, D. & Hudson, J. 2023. *The Power of Activation: The Effect of Images in Global Poverty Campaign Appeals.* London: Development Engagement Lab.

The Development Engagement Lab (DEL) is a five-year study of public attitudes and engagement with global development in France, Germany, Great Britain, and the United States (2018-2023).

DEL is a partner focussed research programme, convening and co-producing research and insights with over 30 international development NGOs and government agencies to understand the drivers of engagement and inform development communications.

Fieldwork is carried out by YouGov and surveys are weighted to be a nationally representative of the adult population. DEL is a grantee of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and led by Professor Jennifer Hudson (University College London) and Professor David Hudson (University of Birmingham).

The **Development Engagement Lab**
(Aid Attitudes Tracker Phase 2) has three goals:
1. Co-production of an evidence base for development campaigning
2. Enabling collaboration across the sector
3. Increasing advocacy capacity through the sharing of research and strategic insights

You can find out more information about DEL research at www.developmentcompass.org, follow us on Twitter @DevEngageLab or by contacting del@ucl.ac.uk.

Cover photo: Eva Blue on Unsplash