



Workshop resource - Do you feel like a fraud?

It's not always easy to tell whether a charity communication is engaging people as consumers or as citizens. Here's a test that may help. Imagine yourself as a supporter who haggles over the price of a charity's membership package or other material and receives this at a discount. Ask yourself: "Do you feel like a fraud?"

Consider:

- a. Joining Amnesty International
- b. Joining the National Trust
- c. Buying an 'Oxfam Unwrapped' goat

a. Joining Amnesty International

Having joined Amnesty International, you will receive certain things: a welcome pack and a quarterly magazine. But the main reason for joining is that you'll become part of "a movement of ordinary people from around the world standing up for human rights". It's unlikely that you'd want to try to haggle with the telesales staff at Amnesty, to try to reduce the annual cost. **You're not buying something here – you're being invited to support a movement; it would seem strange to try to join more cheaply and you'd probably feel like a bit of a fraud if you managed this.**

The National Trust membership and the goat are more difficult.

b. Joining the National Trust

How would you feel about successfully haggling over the cost of family membership of the National Trust? That's likely to depend on whether you see such membership as primarily about enjoying free entry to National Trust properties, or about supporting the work of the Trust. Obviously, feelings will differ on this. But we suggest that because the National Trust promotes membership on the grounds of free entry and free car-parking (and, indeed, free binoculars – see Figure 1), you are more likely to feel that membership is something you'd like to get cheaper. That is, at least relative to the Amnesty International example, you are more likely to 'buy' your membership as a consumer, than to 'support' the charity as a citizen. **Far from feeling like a fraud, you might even boast to your friends that you managed to secure your membership at a reduced rate!**



Do you feel like a fraud?

The screenshot shows the National Trust website with a navigation menu (Visit, What we do, Holidays, Get involved, Shop, Membership) and a search bar. The main headline reads: "Enjoy unlimited access to over 500 special places, and receive a FREE pair of binoculars." Below this, there is a section titled "Be FREE to explore" with a sub-headline "Join today for great days out" and a paragraph describing membership benefits. To the right, there is a "Join to become a member" button and a "Need more info?" section with a chat option. A photograph of a coastal landscape is also visible.

Figure 1
National Trust website

What about the goat? That's not straightforward either.

c. Buying an 'Oxfam Unwrapped' goat

You're probably not buying the goat for yourself, but as a gift. Thinking like consumers, we like to get our Christmas shopping done more cheaply, and perhaps we even like to try to pass off a cheap gift as something more expensive! If the goat was just another present, perhaps we would feel good about managing to get it at a reduced price. But it's not just another present, and in the back of our minds, we know that our £25 supports Oxfam's work and that the goat is simply a symbol of our support for this. **Part of us would like to get the gift more cheaply; part of us would feel like a fraud.** That's going to be a personal thing, but it's also going to be influenced by how Oxfam choose to promote the goat – and, indeed, how they communicate about their wider work!

The point of this exercise is not to arrive at a definitive answer to the question about whether or not you would feel like a fraud if you got it more cheaply. **It is to help you explore the idea that the way in which a charity communicates will have an important effect on whether you engage as a consumer or as a citizen.**

Discussion question

- Think about the way in which your charity communicates with potential supporters or members. Imagine that you haggled and got the same package at a knock-down price. Would you feel like a fraud?