

**Darwin,
the Galápagos Islands,
and how to donate
(or better, how not to
donate) with a double
dose of cognitive
dissonance and the
illusion of control bias.**



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Hello!



As I shared in the first part of this post, this summer I had the privilege of visiting the Galápagos Islands and the Charles Darwin Foundation, whose mission is to protect this unique place through science and conservation efforts.

At the end of the tour, there's a gift shop where you can purchase merchandise through a minimum donation system. Each item comes with a tag, like the one shown in the photo, displaying a specific donation amount.



\$18
Minimum Donation

Why I Didn't Donate



Surrounded by iguanas, tortoises, and sea lions in this natural paradise, the logical thing would have been to take something home. But I didn't—and here's why. Three psychological effects came into play:

- **Two cognitive dissonances**

The specific amounts displayed on the tags (\$13, \$18, \$54, \$75, etc.) made me perceive them more as prices than donations.

The combination of “donation” (which suggests freedom) with “minimum” (which implies restriction) created a strong internal contradiction.

- **Illusion of control**

Our brains crave options, but “minimum donation” limits the perception of choice and freedom.

Proposal 1



Tags with a positive impact

Let's move away from the "minimum donation" concept and replace it with messaging that connects emotionally, emphasizing the positive impact of each contribution.



Galápagos coffee: Perfect for starting your next adventure

\$20

Most common donation

With this contribution, you're helping clean 5 m² of beach, creating a safe environment for turtles and seabirds.

Scan to see how you're already protecting the living history of the Galápagos



\$18
Minimum Donation

Original tag




Tag with positive impact

Note

On the next page, I detail how I applied behavioral design principles to reduce psychological barriers and motivate action.




Tag with positive impact



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Larger logo

This reinforces the Foundation's authority and credibility

Aspirational text

Tying the donation to a positive, enjoyable experience creates an emotional framework that reinforces the idea that your contribution is both altruistic and personally meaningful

Simpler donation amount

Rounded from \$18 to \$20, with a softer font and clarified dollar symbol, making the amount feel more familiar and approachable



Tag with positive impact



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Social Influence

Replace “minimum donation” with “Most common donation” to reduce friction, presenting it as something others like you are doing

Tangible impact.

Use phrases like “you’re helping” (even if the action hasn’t occurred yet) to connect the donation with a clear outcome, fulfilling the donor’s need for purpose

Gamification and curiosity

The QR code allows users to explore the donation’s impact, fostering engagement and a sense of control

Proposal 2



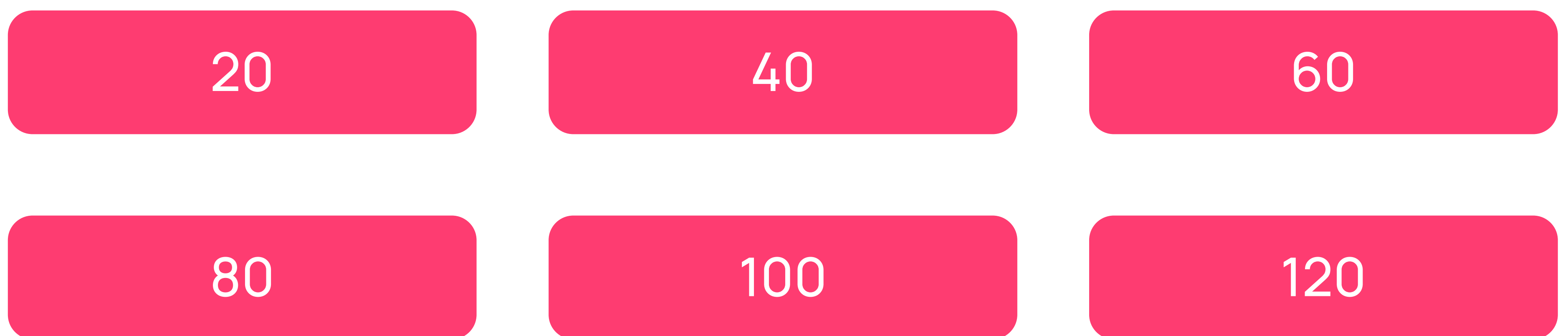
Relative value tag

This model combines tags with informational posters to create a more familiar donation scheme. This approach provides context and shows users that items are grouped into donation categories, reducing the perception of specific price points.

We start from a more familiar model



This model groups donations into clear, rounded categories, making choices easier and eliminating the perception of overly specific amounts.

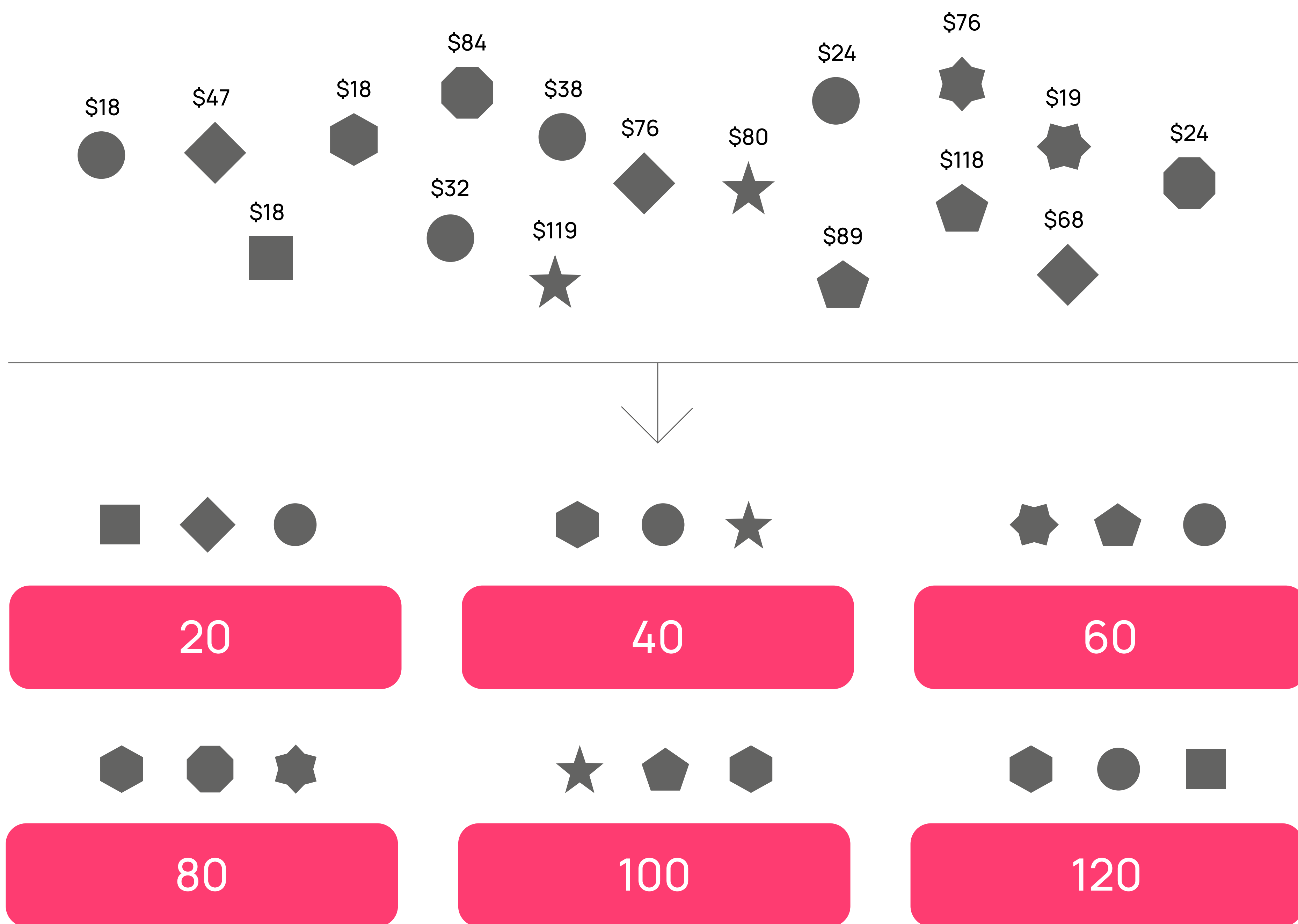


You can also donate any amount you'd like

We group products into categories



By doing so, we reduce the perception of specific prices that caused our initial dissonance, and we move toward a more familiar model, like the one presented on the previous page.



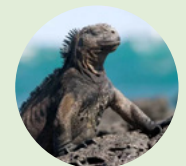
We create Posters



We decorate the room with posters that present a family-friendly donation model, explaining the donation framework and different categories in a clear and attractive way.

Donate Now and Protect the Galápagos for you and your loved ones

With your help and commitment, we are protecting the Galápagos so that you and your loved ones can continue to enjoy it forever.



20

Green Iguana Protector

With this donation, you're helping clean 5 m² of beach for a month, removing waste and creating safe habitats for iguanas and seabirds.



40

Turtle Guardian

With this donation, you're feeding rescued turtles in recovery centers for two weeks, helping them regain their health.



60

Sea Lion Defender

With this donation, you're preserving and monitoring essential marine habitats for a month, ensuring the protection of sea lions.



80

Penguin Savior

With this donation, you're supporting the restoration of critical coastal ecosystems for penguins and other vulnerable species.



100

Hero of the Boobies

With this donation, you're funding research into terrestrial ecosystems and the training of local scientists for two weeks.



120

Hero of the Boobies

With this donation, you're driving educational programs for local communities, promoting conservation in the Galápagos for a month.

If you wish, you can also make a donation of your choice

Join a community of 19,891 conservation heroes like you

Scan to see how you're already protecting the living history of the Galápagos



In the design, I've applied gamification, availability heuristics, reciprocity, social influence, the call of the chosen, and much more. But I'll tell you about that another day—I don't want to go on too long.

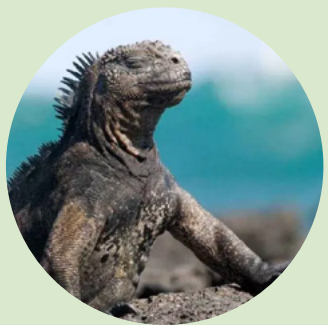
And tags



The tags display the donation amount, framing each product within the general donation scheme.



Galápagos coffee: Perfect for starting your next adventure.



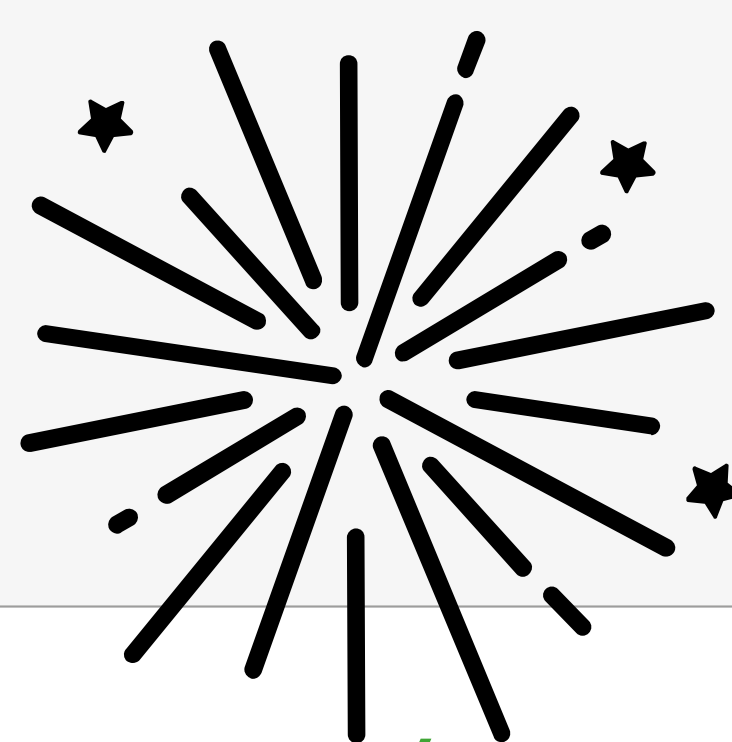
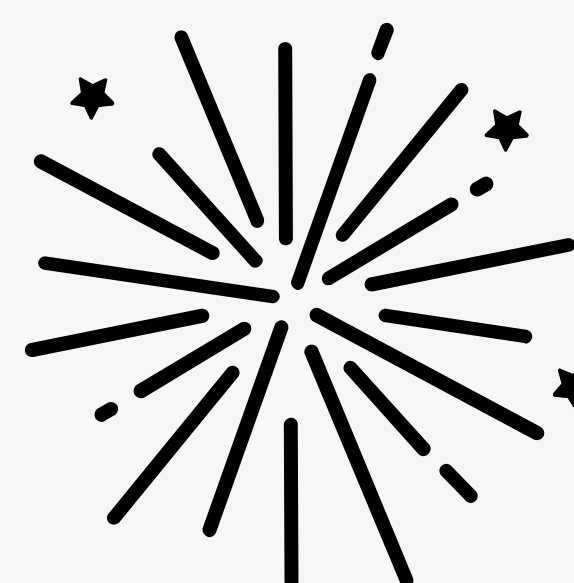
\$20 donation
Green Iguana
Protector

With this contribution, you're helping clean 5 square meters of beach, creating a safe environment for turtles and seabirds

Scan to see how you're already protecting the living history of the Galápagos Islands



In this way, we bring the donation framework closer to a more familiar model, while simultaneously reducing the perception of specific prices that created that annoying cognitive dissonance.



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In summary, by understanding how the human mind works and adding a touch of creativity, we can eliminate barriers and boost donations to protect the Galápagos Islands.

It's that simple.

Thank you very much for your time!



Follow me and turn on notifications to make sure you don't miss any posts, and give me a "like" if you enjoyed it so it can reach more people.



If you'd like support in applying these strategies to influence behavior, I'd be happy to help!



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