

# 'Compassion fatigue' to be studied by Queensland researcher

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"Compassion fatigue" and why people become numb to the marketing efforts of charities and nonprofit organisations will be explored in a new study at The University of Queensland Business School.

UQ Business School PhD researcher Christilene Du Plessis is attempting to redefine and measure compassion fatigue in cause-related marketing initiatives between nonprofits and commercial organizations, in order to identify the point at which people stop giving and why.

Ms. Du Plessis is seeking managers from nonprofit organizations and commercial organisations who partner with them to take part in the study, which is in its initial stages.

She said compassion fatigue was a well-documented phenomenon in professions such as emergency nursing or journalism where people become cynical, bored, anxious and discouraged due to an over-exposure to others' suffering.

"The understanding in marketing, however, is fairly limited," Ms. Du Plessis said.

"We know there is a correlation between the rise in the number of charities between 1994 and 2000, and a subsequent drop in the level of donations from 80 per cent to 66 per cent during that same period.

"As a result, many charities need to partner with commercial

organizations."

The researcher said in the past 20 years there had been prolific use of marketing and advertising efforts like "green marketing", corporate philanthropy and cause-related marketing. An example was companies producing pink products to raise money for [breast cancer](#) support.

"[Corporate social responsibility](#) is the fastest-growing sector in sponsorship and I want to see if the increasing number of cause-related marketing campaigns has also resulted in weary customers," she said.

"We are seeking to find out at what point consumers become annoyed by charitable appeals and cause-related marketing.

"For example, research has shown that people are more likely to donate to an appeal that uses no images, rather than an appeal that uses either images of malnourished children or smiling chubby children who have benefited from donations.

"That could be a sign that people are tired of this type of marketing."

Ms. Du Plessis said that once she had conducted interviews with organizations involved in cause-related marketing as well as consumers, she would use the findings to conduct experiments in attempting to avoid or overcome compassion fatigue.

"Once we know what number of partnerships and combination of exposures leads to burnout, then we can look at other strategies that can be used by an organisation to prevent this from occurring," she said.

Provided by University of Queensland

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