

Nostalgia: The gift that keeps on giving

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With the festive holiday just around the corner many people will be thinking back to Christmases gone by with a nostalgic longing.

Now a new study, involving researchers at the University of Southampton, has shown that [charities](#) and not for profit organisations can benefit from people's nostalgic feelings, because it encourages them to donate more.

The study investigated whether [nostalgia](#), a sentimental longing for the past, can increase donor intentions and donations to charity as well as evaluating whether charities should incorporate nostalgia into appeals.

Researchers instructed participants, who were from two universities in China, to bring to mind a nostalgic autobiographical event before presenting them with a variety of charity appeals.

The participants' reactions and intentions were measured towards young earthquake victims or children in relatively deprived rural area of China.

Within the study there were five separate measurements. The first was participants' concrete intentions to volunteer and donate. The second, third and fourth measurements assessed nostalgia mediated by empathy, whether the findings could be generalised to all charities and whether people of different ages and from different backgrounds reacted in the same way. The fifth measurement evaluated nostalgia in charitable appeals and subsequent tangible charitable behavior.

Results showed that nostalgia boosted participants' intentions to donate and increased how much they were willing to donate.

Dr. Tim Wildschut, senior lecturer at the University of Southampton, comments: "For several hundred years, nostalgia has been regarded as negative emotion and has even been labelled as a medical disease. But actually, nostalgia is predominantly, albeit not exclusively, a positive emotion that serves vital psychological functions. One of these functions is to facilitate socially beneficial reactions.

"Nostalgia increases empathy- based charitable intentions and behaviours. It is encouraging to learn that people can mine their nostalgic memories and derive from this a feeling of empathy for the suffering of others."

The study was carried out in collaboration with researchers from Sun Yat-Sen University and Chinese Academy of Sciences. It was funded by grants from the Key Program and General Program of the National Natural Science Foundation of China, the Science and Technology Planning Project of Guangdong Province, China, and the Research Program of Sun Yat-Sen University.

The study has been published online by the *Journal of Consumer Research* and will be published in hard copy in the June 2012 edition.

Provided by University of Southampton

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