

Walking in their shoes: How fundraisers can boost donations

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When natural disaster strikes, calls for help are broadcast on television and across the Internet. Despite being exposed to the needs of widespread relief organizations, only a small percentage of us actually follow through by making a financial contribution. According to a new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research*, the more connected we feel with the people needing our help, the more likely we are to donate.

"Our thought is that people who act more independently might not necessarily be more benevolent than people who are more connected to others within their own society. We argue that a person's financial generosity depends more on how they associate themselves with the group in need rather than their expected cultural behavior," write authors Rod Duclos (Hong Kong University of Science and Technology) and Alixandra Barasch (Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania).

In a series of experiments conducted in both the United States and in China, the authors manipulated how participants felt about their sense of independence before asking them to donate to a charity that benefited victims of a real-life natural disaster.

Results of one study showed that, when asked to aid earthquake victims, Chinese university students made to think/feel independently were neither more nor less willing to help survivors from the nearby Sichuan province or from Haiti. In contrast, students made to think/feel connected to the Sichuan victims exhibited a stronger willingness to donate to relief efforts in China than in Haiti.

"Our research can help nonprofits better target their fundraising efforts towards a particular demographic or group of people. For example, when selecting photographs for ads, aid organizations should try and match recipient and donor profiles so as to highlight the fact that they are from the same in-group," the authors conclude. "Conversely, reminders of how donors are different from the people in need should be avoided, particularly in highly-interdependent societies."

More information: Rod Duclos and Alixandra Barasch. "Prosocial Behavior in Intergroup Relations: How Donor Self-Construal and Recipient Group-Membership Shape Generosity." *Journal of Consumer Research*: June 2014.

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