

# Giving to charity: Feeling love means doing more for distant strangers

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Marketers often use positive emotions such as hope, pride, love, and compassion interchangeably to encourage people to donate to charitable causes. But these distinct emotions can lead to different results, and love alone has the power to inspire giving to those with whom the giver has no connection, according to a new study in the *Journal of Marketing Research*.

"Love is unique among positive emotions in fostering a feeling of connectedness," write authors Lisa A. Cavanaugh (University of Southern California), James R. Bettman (Duke University), and Mary Frances Luce (Duke University). "Love inspires giving in a way that even closely related emotions such as compassion do not."

To arouse specific emotions, study participants engaged in self-reflective writing and viewed emotion-laden advertisements. They imagined giving to a range of causes, some they felt connected to such as a food drive for local families, and others that felt more distant, such as rainforest conservation in a faraway country.

The findings revealed that while [positive emotions](#) in general encouraged people to give to those they felt connected to, only love enhanced giving to people who would otherwise seem distant and unconnected. Love generated a feeling of connection regardless of geography. The study also examined the closely related emotion of compassion, defined as the feeling of caring that arises from witnessing another's suffering. Like love, [compassion](#) was found to enhance feelings of connection, but it

also invoked negative feelings (pain at another's suffering), whereas love involved largely positive feelings. In the end, only emotional love increased the desire to give to distant charities.

"This study has serious implications for marketers, universities, charities, and nonprofits that seek contributions to projects with which donors have no personal relationship. The current findings underscore the importance of focusing in such cases on the one positive emotion which best widens the giver's circle of caring: love," conclude the authors.

**More information:** Lisa A. Cavanaugh, James R. Bettman, and Mary Frances Luce. "Feeling Love and Doing More for Distant Others: Specific Positive Emotions Differentially Affect Prosocial Consumption." Forthcoming in the *Journal of Marketing Research*.

Provided by American Marketing Association

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