

# Corporations can benefit from altruism during a crisis, study says

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New research finds that altruism - and social media - can help corporations cultivate trust with consumers on mobile devices during and after natural disasters, such as hurricanes.

"Companies that engage in [corporate social responsibility](#) efforts during and after a disaster can build strong relationships with consumers," says

Yang Cheng, an assistant professor of communication at North Carolina State University and first author of a paper on the work. "This is particularly true if companies are communicating their efforts through [social media](#) aimed at mobile device users - but only if their efforts appear altruistic."

For the study, researchers conducted an online, nationally representative survey of 1,433 U.S. adults. Questions focused on why people use social media during and after a natural disaster; how frequently they've used social media to seek or share information during a crisis; the extent to which they've shared information on crisis-related corporate social responsibility efforts; how they perceive the motives of relevant companies; and how they feel about the companies themselves.

The researchers found a strong link between how social media users viewed corporate social responsibility motives and how they viewed the companies engaged in those efforts. If users felt the efforts were focused on the [public good](#), they were more likely to trust the [company](#). But if users felt the efforts were profit-driven, they were more skeptical of the company.

The researchers also found that users who frequently used social media to find and share information were more likely to trust companies engaged in corporate social responsibility efforts.

"These findings provide good advice for corporations," Cheng says. "If companies use their social media presence to provide useful information and resources during crises - with a clear focus on the public good - they can nurture meaningful, authentic relationships with consumers."

"What organizations can do is understand and value public perspectives; utilize the organization's various social/mobile media platforms; show care and empathy; be honest; be open and transparent in providing useful

and timely information; and engage in actual dialogue with stakeholders both during and post crisis."

**More information:** "Engaging Social Media Users on Mobile Devices in Crises: An Examination of Gratifications, CSR Motives, and Relationship Outcomes" Presented: May 24-28, 2018, 68th Annual International Communication Association Conference, Prague, Czech Republic

Provided by North Carolina State University

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