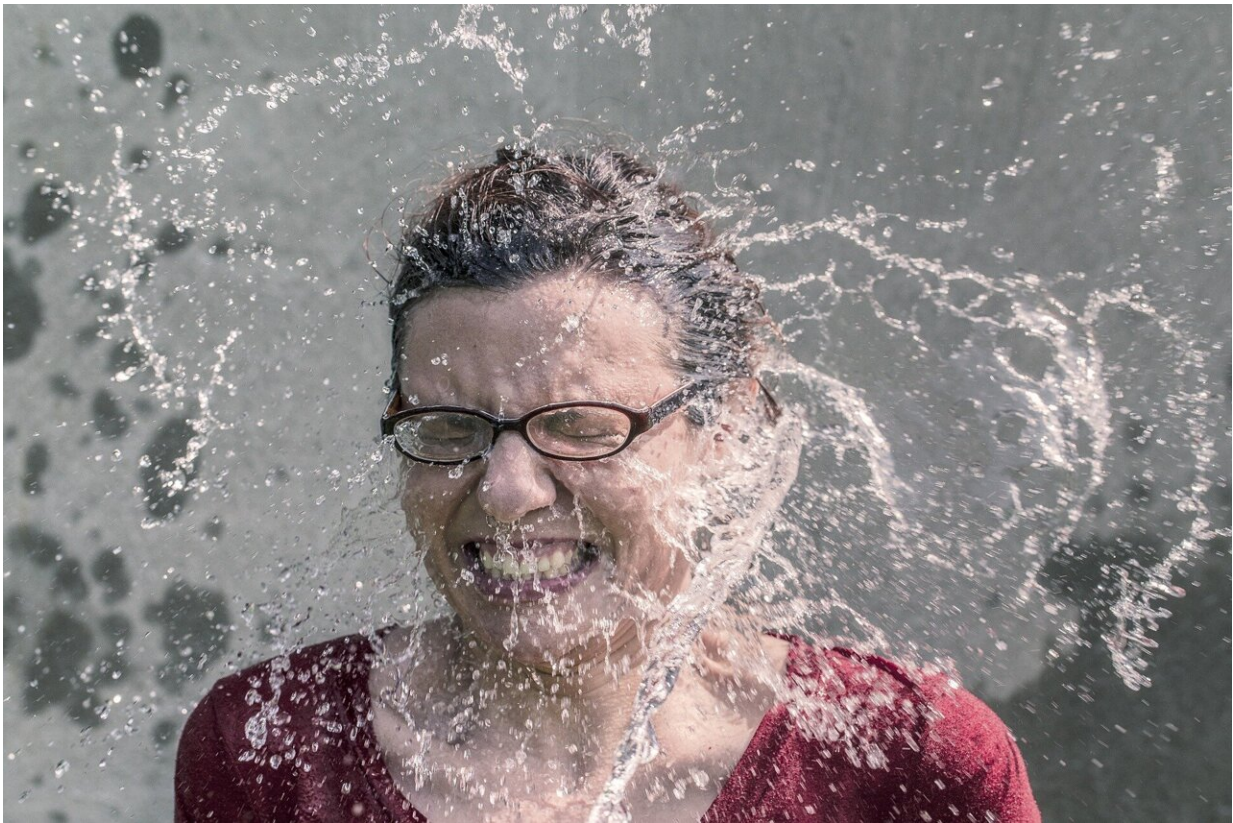


# Ice Bucket Challenge increased charitable giving and volunteering: Study

June 22 2023

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Credit: Pixabay/CC0 Public Domain

Around 1 million people donated money with hundreds of thousands volunteering for charitable causes as a result of the Ice Bucket Challenge, research has found.

Academics from Cardiff University used data from Understanding Society, a large household survey representative of the United Kingdom (UK) population, to assess the impact the [social media](#) craze had on viewers.

Individuals who belonged to a social media website were compared with those who did not when the trend erupted in 2014. The results show that exposure to the videos, where people tipped a bucket of icy water on themselves before nominating someone else for the challenge, increased the probability of donating by 4.2% and is equivalent to around one million people.

It also increased the probability of joining volunteering by 13% and led to approximately 900,000 people giving up their time for a charitable cause.

Authors found that this exposure increased the amount given by light donors to charity, or those who normally donate a maximum of £100 at any one time.

The findings also reveal that interpersonal trust—how you regard people around you—increased by 1%.

Co-author Dr. Tommaso Reggiani, based at Cardiff Business School, said, "This is the first time the behaviors of people exposed to the Ice Bucket Challenge in the UK have been investigated. The figures are incredible and it's likely social media boosted [peer pressure](#), which is a key driver of charitable giving."

"This might also explain why light donors decided to increase the amount they gave. Previous studies have shown that charitable giving and volunteering go hand-in-hand, so this could explain why the increase in donations led to more people giving up their time for charity."

"The increase in interpersonal trust might be driven by a change in the prevalent mood within social media. Usually, people expect to find hate speeches and aggressive behaviors online, but during the Ice Bucket Challenge, most content was potentially funny or with a more positive theme."

The Ice Bucket Challenge was a charity campaign that went viral on social media networks in the UK in August 2014, aiming to collect money for research on [amyotrophic lateral sclerosis](#) (ALS). It began in the US in July 2014 and soon spread around the globe, being particularly prevalent in the UK, Ireland, and Canada. It is widely considered the most successful campaign of its kind.

Dr. Reggiani added, "Although the beneficial effects of this trend are evident in our analysis, overall the duration is quite limited; The probability of donating money, the probability of joining volunteering activities, and interpersonal trust went back to previous levels as soon as the challenge ended."

"There is however an interesting exception: small donors who started to donate because of the Ice Bucket Challenge continued to give regularly afterwards. Even if they bring short-term benefits, it's clear social media challenges can certainly be a force for good."

The findings are published in the *Journal of Economic Psychology*.

**More information:** Andrea Fazio et al, Social media charity campaigns and pro-social behaviour. Evidence from the Ice Bucket Challenge, *Journal of Economic Psychology* (2023). [DOI: 10.1016/j.joep.2023.102624](#)

Provided by Cardiff University

Citation: Ice Bucket Challenge increased charitable giving and volunteering: Study (2023, June 22) retrieved 28 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2023-06-ice-bucket-charitable-volunteering.html>

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