

Donors who feel upbeat are more likely to give to charity—new research

July 15 2023, by Nathan W. Chan and Casey Wichman



Credit: Unsplash/CC0 Public Domain

When people feel happier, they're more likely to donate to charity. That's what we, [two economists who study what motivates environmentally conscientious consumption and support for free](#)

services, found in a [new study](#) published in The Economic Journal.

To conduct this research, we analyzed tweets from over 20,000 Twitter users who used the hashtag "#iloveWikipedia." That slogan is part of a template that Wikipedia suggests to anyone who has just completed a donation on its [online platform](#), so it helped us identify people who have given money to the free online encyclopedia edited by volunteers. Those donations funded the [Wikimedia Foundation](#), the nonprofit that hosts Wikipedia.

We evaluated the donors' moods by using [natural language processing](#) tools. These tools assigned a score to each [tweet](#) to indicate how positive or negative the [mood](#) was for each tweet.

For example, a tweet that says "Woohoo! Awesome Pete!" would get a positive sentiment score, while one that says "THIS MADE ME CRY OUT OF ANGER AND SADNESS AND FRUSTRATION." would get a negative one. We used four different scoring systems, all of which allowed us to gauge how strongly positive or negative a Twitter user's mood was. We could adjust these sentiment scores by comparing them to a user's other tweets.

We found that donors' sentiments became more upbeat up to an hour before they made a gift to support Wikipedia and then declined, becoming more neutral pretty quickly after that. Donors tended to be in especially good moods before making their gifts, but they regressed quickly to their more typical mood afterward.

We can't be sure why people were feeling happier before they donated than they did afterward, but our findings suggest that feeling good could make you more likely to give to charity. We call this the "preheating effect." Our observation about donor behavior contrasts with an [economic theory](#) that people may give to charity because it makes them

feel good about doing the right thing. This feeling is known as a "[warm glow](#)."

Why it matters

Scholars of philanthropy have long known that [giving to charity is tied to happiness](#). What's less clear is whether being charitable makes people happier, or whether happier people are more charitable. Our study offers new evidence that feeling happy before they're asked to make a donation makes people more likely to give.

[Previous studies](#) have sought to make research participants feel happy or sad and then analyzed how those moods may affect their inclination to behave in helpful ways. However, we were able to capture the donors' real-world moods, which is more relevant to fundraising in terms of determining what might make someone more likely to make a charitable donation.

What still isn't known

Based on the evidence we scraped from tweets, it's not possible to tell whether being in a good mood makes people more likely to give to [charity](#), or if feeling happy simply makes donors more likely to tweet about their gifts.

Also, our study looked at the apparent emotional state of Twitter users, and not everyone actively uses that social media platform. Because of that limitation, we can't know whether everyone experiences this same preheating effect.

We also didn't figure out whether preheating varies across age, gender, race or class lines.

More information: Casey J Wichman et al, Preheating Prosocial Behaviour, *The Economic Journal* (2023). [DOI: 10.1093/ej/uead041](https://doi.org/10.1093/ej/uead041)

This article is republished from [The Conversation](#) under a Creative Commons license. Read the [original article](#).

Provided by The Conversation

Citation: Donors who feel upbeat are more likely to give to charity—new research (2023, July 15) retrieved 24 June 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2023-07-donors-upbeat-charitynew.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.