A Psychologist Explains Why TikTok’s ‘Blessing Strangers’ Trend Is So Popular

September 13, 2023

Social media influencers are often criticized for their content, which can be perceived as shallow, self-centered or, in some cases, even harmful. But there is an well-established trend among certain influencers to create content that showcases their generosity and kindness, while also giving random people unexpected moments of joy and virality.

One example of this is the “Blessing Strangers” trend on TikTok, where content creators surprise unsuspecting strangers with gifts. Even high-profile, mainstream celebrities like Drake have embraced this format, as seen in his 2018 music video for “God’s Plan,” where he gave away nearly a million dollars to people in need in Miami.

While there are certainly ethical considerations with using people’s reactions to kindness for online clout, these documented acts of kindness validate one thing that science has repeatedly pointed out: it may not always be obvious to us, but people are highly receptive to random acts of kindness.

For example, a recent study published in *Current Directions in Psychological Science* explored how people perceive the impact of their acts of kindness on others. The study involved 101 children aged 4 to 17 and 99 adults visiting a museum in Chicago. Each participant was given two pencils and encouraged to give one away to another visitor. Afterward, they were asked to predict how the recipient would perceive their act of kindness and how it made them, the giver, feel. The results showed that both children and adults tended to underestimate the positive impact of their small act of kindness, which can hold them back from engaging in prosocial behavior.

...