

## Online Altruism and Prosocial Behavior in Youth

Shruti Soudi<sup>1\*</sup>, Arnisha Aman<sup>2</sup>

### ABSTRACT

As much as cyber perpetration, victimisation, and cyber hate are of significance in exploring the factors influencing happiness and well-being, online prosocial behaviour can be considered significant since it aids in differentiating individuals on core goodwill with which they want to operate at a virtual level. Such benefiting behaviours can be fostered for the social well-being of the population, and the insights gained through this study will act as a source of niche to realise the true purpose of online community and social media. The study aims to find out the students' online altruism and prosocial behaviour. The objective of the study would be to identify the influence of personality types and psychosocial capital on their online prosocial behaviour. A purposive sample of 292 university students will be used for this study. The Brief Self Control Scale will be employed to evaluate an individual's self-capacity to regulate their inner responses and interpret their behavioural tendencies on acting or refraining from performing certain activities. In order to analyse the prosocial behaviour of the students, we will be using the Altruistic Personality Scale. A correlational analysis will be done between self-control and prosocial behaviour with personality types and psychological capital by using the 24-item Brief HEXACO Inventory and Psychological Capital Questionnaire. The results are interpreted, analysed and discussed in the paper.

**Keywords:** *Online Altruism, Prosocial Behavior, Psychological Capital, Personality Types*

Altruism and prosocial behaviour postulate a diverse range of actions which encircle the idea of initiating welfare for the benefit of more than one person without upholding a motive of selfish regard. The usage of social media as a global mechanism to express values, experiences, and morality is of great importance to understanding the overall personality of the youth. Social media provides an opportunity of being anonymous, which has been utilised by multiple researchers to understand the specific personality traits and their influence on the similarities between cyber identity in digital platforms and non-digital platforms with the help of co-constructionist theory (Kraut et al., 2006). Self-control is an individual's capacity to govern inner thoughts and overt behaviour; when paired with online prosocial behaviour, it is important to understand how its influence allows conformation to social norms in regulating emotions.

The objective of the present study is to compare if online prosocial and altruistic behaviour correlates the same in non-digital platforms by understanding its association through

<sup>1</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, Christ (Deemed to be) University, Bangalore, India

<sup>2</sup>UG student, Department of Psychology, Christ Deemed to be University, Bangalore, India

\*Corresponding Author

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individuals' specific personality types, psychological capital, altruism in general and self-control attitudes.

There is also a need to understand these ideas with the help of theoretical background.

The normative theory of altruism, as suggested by Schwartz SH postulates that there are three fundamental influences on altruism- moral obligation, norms and values comprising a cognitive structure and the appropriateness or the admissible feelings of moral responsibility. The understanding of these three components points towards one total deduction that individuals who are willing to help with a selfless motive do so because they view the attitude of providing help as pertinent social responses either by observing others enacting the same behaviour or through one's own personal experience. Stanley Cavell, through the moral theory of perfectionism, implies that human behaviour is directed towards protecting and promoting good human lives. In the most recent study, this theory has been corroborated to understand if moral values and judgements act as precursors towards prosocial behaviour, and the study has confirmed that moral identity moderated an association between moral perfectionism and online prosocial behaviour (Pan Zeng et al., 2020).

The theory of psychological capital, originally modelled by Fred Luthans for organisational context, is a primary construct for well-being and thriving. The theory interprets the individual meaning in life, and a study conducted on this has confirmed the same in which university students who possess a high level of meaning in life have a greater tendency to engage in prosocial behaviour. This was also confirmed in a longitudinal study in which psychological capital functioned as a mediatory factor in the relationship between meaning in life and prosocial behaviour (Shuyue Zhang et al., 2022)

Personality theorists over the years have arrived at a common conclusion that personality contributes significantly to social behaviour (Specht et al., 2011; Hampson, 2012). An extensive body of research has been conducted to understand the relationship between the big five personality traits and prosocial behaviour in which the literature suggests that agreeableness and conscientiousness are quasi-moral traits which can influence and predict decision-making in moral dilemmas and the succeeding moral emotions (Krettenauer et al., 2014). It has been further understood that the Big Five personality traits are connected with empathy which extraversion, conscientiousness and agreeableness are significantly correlated with perspective-taking and empathetic concern, while neuroticism was inversely associated with perspective-taking and personal distress (Barrio et al., 2004; Melchers et al., 2016; Song and Shi, 2017). While drawing from the co-construction theory, a specification has emerged that both the online and offline worlds are connected and based on that, it has been proposed that the social skills adopted in real scenarios can significantly affect social interactions in the online world (Kraut et al., 2002; Wright and Li, 2011; Reich, 2017).

### ***Hypotheses***

- H<sub>a1</sub>: There exists a significant relationship between online prosocial behaviour and altruism in individuals' altruistic behaviour.
- H<sub>a2</sub>: There exists a significant relationship between altruism and online prosocial behaviour with individuals' personality types.
- H<sub>a3</sub>: There exists a significant relationship between altruism and online prosocial behaviour with individuals' psychological capital.

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- H<sub>4</sub>: There exists a significant relationship between altruism and online prosocial behaviour with individual self-control levels.

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### *Participants*

Data was collected from students (N = 292) across Bangalore. The target sample was university, irrespective of their specific courses were selected with the target age being 17-30 years. The mean age of the participants was 19.26. Students were selected solely based on their voluntary participation and did not receive any financial remuneration for participating in the study. The medium of data collection was an online survey in which one section of the study was devoted to collecting information about the participants, such as their email addresses, ages, educational qualification, and preferred social media platform. The survey also comprised general questions to understand their distinct usage patterns of social media. Informed consent was obtained from all the participants before they volunteered to participate in the study.

#### *Measures and Procedure*

The study used a total of five standardised questionnaires in the survey.

1. The Brief HEXACO Personality Inventory is a 24-item questionnaire in which responses on the items were given on a five-point scale ranging from 1= strongly disagree and 5= strongly agree (Lee & Ashton, 2004).
2. The Psychological Capital Questionnaire (PCQ) is a 24-item questionnaire in which responses to the items were given on a six-point scale ranging from 1= strongly disagree and 6= strongly agree (Luthans et al., 2007).
3. The Altruistic Personality Scale is a 20-item scale which measures the altruistic tendency of individuals in which participants answer on a 5-point scale ranging from Never to Very Often (Rushton et al., 1981)
4. The Brief Self-Control Scale is a 13-item scale which measures the self-control tendency of individuals in which participants answer on a 5-point scale ranging from Not at all to Very Much (Tangney et al., 2004).
5. The Online Prosocial Behaviour Scale assesses individuals' participation in online prosocial behaviour with the response options ranging from 1= Never to 5= Every Day (Erreygers et al., 2018).

The participants in the study, after fulfilling the inclusion criteria, which is that they have to fall under the age group of 17-30 years, have basic English Proficiency and should be residing in Bangalore, were debriefed about the study procedure in the description section of the online survey form, in which a section exclusive to taking consent from the participants was also included. The survey was conducted remotely, wherein the participants were required to rate the specific items pertaining to five scales. After this, a statistical analysis was conducted to analyse the data by using SPSS.

### **RESULTS**

A correlational study was conducted using Pearson Moment Correlation in order to identify correlation among various dimensions pertaining to all five scales. The reliability test of all the items using Cronbach Alpha.

To test the first hypothesis, since Online Prosocial Behaviour has two dimensions-Performing and Receiving, the relationship of these two dimensions with Altruistic Personality analysed through Pearson Correlation found a statistically significantly low

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positive correlation with Performance ( $r = .299$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). In addition, for the Receiving dimension, a statistically significant low positive correlation was found ( $r = .199$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). (See Table A1)

For the second hypothesis, using the HEXACO Inventory, a separate correlational analysis was conducted between six distinct dimensions of the inventory and with the Online Prosocial Behaviour dimension. With regard to the Honesty-Humility dimension, a markedly statistically significant low positive correlation was found with the Performance dimension ( $r = 0.93$ ) and with the dimension of Receiving, a negligible negative correlation was found ( $r = -.005$ ). In the second dimension of HEXACO, Emotionality was found to have a low positive correlation with Performing ( $r = .016$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), and with Receiving, a negligible positive correlation was found ( $r = .007$ ). The third dimension of Extraversion had a statistically significant low positive correlation with Performing ( $r = .130$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), and with Receiving, a markedly low positive correlation was found ( $r = .052$ ). With regard to Agreeableness as another dimension, a low statistically significant positive correlation was found with Performing ( $r = .106$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) and with Receiving a negligible positive correlation was found ( $r = .064$ ). The fifth dimension of Conscientiousness had a statistically significant low positive correlation with Performing ( $r = .994$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), and with Receiving, a negligible positive correlation was found ( $r = .034$ ). The last dimension of the Inventory, Openness to Experience, had a statistically significant low positive correlation ( $r = .187$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) with Performing and with Receiving, the dimension had a statistically significant low positive correlation of ( $r = .159$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). (See Table A2)

The third hypothesis involved testing the dimensions of Psychological Capital with Online Prosocial Behaviour. The first dimension of Psychological Capital involves Hope, and we found a statistically significant low positive correlation with Performing ( $r = .206$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and with Receiving as well we have found a statistically significant low positive correlation ( $r = .158$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). The second dimension is Self-Efficacy and a statistically significant low positive correlation was found with Performing ( $r = .255$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and with Receiving, a statistically significant low positive correlation ( $r = .179$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) was identified. With regard to Resiliency as a dimension, we found a statistically significant relationship with Performing ( $r = .198$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), and with Receiving; there is a negligible low positive correlation ( $r = .089$ ). The fifth dimension of Psychological Capital involves Optimism, and there is a statistically significant positive correlation with Performing ( $r = .118$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) and Receiving also had a statistically significant positive correlation ( $r = .121$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). (See Table A3)

The fourth hypothesis of this study was interested in understanding the relationship between self-control and online prosocial behaviour. It was found that a markedly negligible positive correlation with Performing ( $r = .070$ ) and with Receiving ( $r = .060$ ). (See Table A4)

## CONCLUSION

Altruism is usually predicted as an individual selfless pursuit of helping others without expecting reciprocity in return (Sareena Dargan et al., 2022). This study had four hypotheses to be tested and one of them being predicting if individuals project a general altruistic personality to carry out the same in the online platform. However, it was found that a very negligible correlation between the two. A predicted reason for this could be, people having an altruistic personality are willing to perform acts of goodness rather than receiving the same from others. This connects to their distinct personality traits which they willingly choose for an overt presentation online because it allows them to be anonymous. In this

regard, the concept of Psychological Capital becomes quite essential to consider because ever since the inception of this concept, it has been deemed to be a “resources caravan” in which psychological resources form a cohesive group wherein interaction amongst them at many levels produces a synergy of agentic goal pursuit where individuals are known to share a sense of control and intentionality (Hobfoll, 2002). This understanding of intentionality is crucial to understand altruistic personality, which often relies on individuals voluntarily pursuing, choosing and defining the kind of psychological benefits that they would try to achieve for the attainment of higher life attainment and positive evaluations rather than the material rewards that they would want to procure, which becomes another explanatory reason as to why altruistic individuals actively choose the environment in which they would like to be more prosocial. This also tries to prove our third hypothesis of having a significant relationship between online prosocial behaviour and psychological capital.

Considering the cultural differences of this study, India is a collectivistic country which places great emphasis on forming social relationships or networks as part of the greater whole and in order to attain this, there is a greater need for individuals to differ in terms of how they maintain their interpersonal relationships as a distinct orientation towards gaining a unique insight of conflict resolution and prosocial behaviour (Graziano et al., 2007). This has been significantly true for the Agreeableness trait, in which our study also found a positive correlation with online prosocial behaviour. Along the same lines of cultural distinctiveness, although not all characteristics of HEXACO are shown to have a positive relationship with prosocial behaviour, Openness to Experience and Conscientiousness has given us the opportunity to interpret that when part of a more significant community and forming extensive online networking, there is a general finding in these platforms of carrying out acts of charity or raising awareness amongst others as part of altruistic behaviour. It can be seen that while doing so, they hold a sense of moral obligation, a reason of dutifulness of being committed to the contents that they create and uphold a characteristic feature of shared responsibility of being assured to the acts of helping and ethical understanding which is very much synonymous to the traits of Conscientiousness (Rhonda et al., 2014) and in the process of creating and interacting with people over a networking platform which in turn is diverse in nature makes a bridge between trusting others over a virtual medium and also willingness to negate stereotypical upholdings, is very much true for the traits of Openness to Experience (Hilbig et al., 2014).

### ***Future Implications***

Although we did find positive correlations among various dimensions of personality and online prosocial behaviour, there have been a few gaps encountered while trying to interpret specific dimensions of Honesty-Humility, Extraversion and Emotionality. In our discussions, we made an affirmation that there is no necessity to uphold a general altruistic personality tendency in order to be prosocial in an online environment, but that raises the possibility of another exploration as to what other advantages the social media platform provides for someone to be extroverted which is not the same in a familiar interactive environment. An additional exploring factor to this could be the concept of self-control, with regard to its distinct utilisation pattern by altruistic individuals in deciding their intentions of whom to help and with what specific acts the helping nature would be facilitated.

The concept of Psychological Capital is gaining importance in the present scenario, and finding a positive correlation across all its dimensions with online altruistic behaviour leaves us with another intriguing possibility of the roles that motivation- intrinsic or extrinsic is likely to play in helping behaviour with regard to Psychological Capitals specific

dimensions. A few studies have been conducted along this line, especially in understanding organisational behaviour, but modulation of analysing patterns or studying strategy can help us gain a deeper insight into one's ambition towards prosocial acts.

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### **Conflict of Interest**

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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**APPENDIX A**

**Table A1. Showing the correlation between the dimensions of Online Prosocial Behaviour and Altruistic Personality**

Serial No.	Variables	Mean	Altruistic Personality
1	Performing	37.35	0.299**
2	Receiving	35.50	0.199**

\*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; Highly Significant

\*  $p < 0.05$ ; Significant

**Table A2. Showing the correlation between the dimensions of Online Prosocial Behaviour and the dimensions of HEXACO Personality Inventory**

S N	Variables	Mean	Honesty-Humility	Emotionality	Extraversion	Agreeableness	Conscientiousness	Openness to Experience
1	Performing	37.35	0.93	0.016**	0.130*	0.106*	0.994*	0.187**
2	Receiving	35.50	-0.005	0.007	0.052	0.064	0.034	0.159**

\*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; Highly Significant

\*  $p < 0.05$ ; Significant

**Table A3. Showing the correlation between the dimensions of Online Prosocial Behaviour and the dimensions of Psychological Capital**

Serial No.	Variables	Mean	Hope	Self-Efficacy	Resiliency	Optimism
1	Performing	37.35	0.206**	0.255**	0.198**	0.118*
2	Receiving	35.50	0.158**	0.179**	0.089	0.121*

\*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; Highly Significant

\*  $p < 0.05$ ; Significant

**Table A4. Showing the correlation between the dimensions of Online Prosocial Behaviour and Self Control**

Serial No.	Variables	Mean	Self Control
1	Performing	37.35	0.070
2	Receiving	35.50	0.060

\*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; Highly Significant

\*  $p < 0.05$ ; Significant