The International Journal of Indian Psychology
ISSN 2348-5396 (Online) | ISSN: 2349-3429 (Print)
Volume 12, Issue 4, October - December, 2024
DIP: 18.01.036.20241204, DOI: 10.25215/1204.036
https://www.ijip.in

Research Paper

Giving or Gaining? Investigating Self-Interest Motivations in Altruistic Acts

Ann Maria Joseph[1]*

ABSTRACT

This study examines the influence of self-interest motivations on altruistic behaviour, a subject of great psychological debate. Altruism, traditionally viewed as a selfless act, is reassessed by considering the influence of self-interest motivation in altruistic behaviour. This research was conducted to address gaps in current knowledge of the factors influencing prosocial behaviour, specifically within the framework of conflicting theoretical viewpoints. The primary aim of this research was to investigate whether self-interest motivations negatively impact altruistic behaviour. The two hypotheses being (i) Self-prioritization negatively impacts altruistic actions and (ii) Self-maximization is a negative predictor of altruistic behaviour. Utilizing a quantitative, non-experimental design, the research analysed responses from 158 participants using validated psychological scales to assess altruistic behaviour and self-interest motivations. The findings revealed that while self-prioritizing motivations negatively predict altruistic behaviour, self-maximizing motivations do not significantly influence altruism. These findings suggest a complex interplay between personal gain and the welfare of others, where altruistic actions may not be inherently driven by self-interest. The study contributes to existing literature by challenging the traditional view that all human actions are driven by self-interest, highlighting the role of cultural and situational factors in shaping altruistic behaviour. This research bridges a significant gap in understanding the motives behind altruism but also discusses the practical implications of these findings for educational programs, organizational behaviour, and community engagement initiatives. By integrating insights from both evolutionary and psychological perspectives, this dissertation enriches the discourse on human social dynamics and opens new avenues for future research in prosocial behaviour.

Keywords: *Self-Interest, Altruism, Motivation, Prosocial Behaviour*

Altruism, stands as a universally embraced principle across human societies, sustaining many of the world's major religious, social reformist, and revolutionary movements (Rushton, 1982). Among the vast array of concepts studied in the field of human behaviour, altruism emerges as one of the most fascinating and complex concepts. Batson in "The Altruism Question," defines altruism as a state of motivation aimed at enhancing another's welfare, highlighting it is role as a critical aspect of human morality (Healy, 2004). This intriguing concept has captivated psychologists, sociologists, and

[1]Research Scholar
*Corresponding Author

Received: June 12, 2024; Revision Received: October 13, 2024; Accepted: October 17, 2024

philosophers alike, prompting in-depth examinations into the nature of altruistic behaviour (Filkowski et al., 2016).

Altruism has a significant impact on people's lives by fostering a sense of community and enhancing overall well-being, while providing individuals with a profound sense of purpose and meaning in their lives (Wang et al., 2023). It is becoming significantly important to comprehend the reasoning behind altruistic actions, as the motivations behind these acts are less understood and topic a of mass debate. By delving into what motivates people to act on behalf of others can help enable more effective strategies to promote these selfless acts.

Understanding the motivations behind altruistic acts becomes increasingly apparent in light of recent global challenges. As the world faces conflicts and crises, dissecting the distinct spectrum of intentions behind altruism could prove crucial in promoting peace and cooperative efforts (Mattis et al., 2009). Only in recent years has the topic of altruism gained legitimacy in professional discourse (Batson & Powell, 2003) making this exploration timely and critical.

Historically, the study of altruism confronted challenges, particularly its alignment with Charles Darwin's hypothesis of human evolution through natural selection which was largely overlooked as it appeared to be an anomaly within the hypothesis of human evolution (Feigin et al., 2014). Researchers did not find a solution to the paradox of natural selection and altruism until the mid to late 20th century. It was not until they introduced the concepts of group and kin selection into the framework, that these theories postulated that groups were more likely than individuals to successfully pass on genes, hence natural selection favoured them (Feigin et al., 2014). Reciprocal altruism further complicates this by suggesting that natural selection rewards compassion even in non-kin because of it is long-term advantages. These ideas contend that while generosity enhances one's genetic fitness, it is essentially selfish (Feigin et al., 2014)

In exploring altruism, biologists and evolutionary scientists often diverge from those of psychologists. Essentially, biologists and evolutionary scientists tend to emphasize the advantages of an action, whereas psychologists are more apprehensive with the underlying drive for the behavior (Filkowski et al., 2016). From a biological or evolutionary standpoint, altruism is a behavior that increases the fitness of one person while decreasing the genetic contribution or fitness of another (Filkowski et al., 2016). In contrast, psychologists argue that despite the apparent selflessness of altruism, all human desires are inherently egocentric or selfish (Filkowski et al., 2016). Psychologists further define altruism as actions primarily aimed at enhancing the well-being of others, classifying these actions as conscious efforts to assist others (Filkowski et al., 2016). This definition summarises the complex nature of altruism, setting it as a behaviour that, while beneficial to others may also serve the self-interest of the actor in less direct ways.

It has become increasingly intriguing to understand why people act in prosocial ways like altruism even when doing so frequently goes against one's own self-interest and occasionally compromises one's well-being, both socially and behaviorally (Carlson & Zaki, 2018). This topic has sparked extensive debate among psychologists and philosophers, leading to the conclusion that all the primary motivations for human behaviour regardless of how selfless they appear are inherently self-interested (Carlson & Zaki, 2018). Feigin et al. (2014) proposed two distinct approaches to human altruism, theorising it as an intentional and voluntary act aimed primarily at assisting others. This can take two distinct forms:

pseudo-altruistic approach which may be done with the mindful awareness or unintentional awareness of receiving a benefit or the altruistic approach which may be done with no expectation of benefit or reward. The pseudo altruistic approach suggests that the primary purpose behind so-called altruistic behaviour is self-interest, with one's well-being as the ultimate objective. According to this concept, achieving internal rewards—even when they are not immediately apparent—is what drives altruism (Feigin et al., 2014).

Building on these perspectives, Maslow (1996) theorises that any action that benefits oneself as selfishness, urging caution against hastily judging such actions as purely selfless or selfish (Kaufman & Jauk, 2020). Maslow's critical perspective on subjective nature of selfless acts and self-interest, highlights the importance of determining the motivations behind these altruistic acts. Maslow goes on to emphasize the importance of context, suggesting that acts that appear selfish in one situation might be altruistic in another (Kaufman & Jauk, 2020). He also points out that actions deemed altruistic could stem from underlying self-serving motives. This raises important questions about how selfishness shapes human morality and other facets of human nature (Kaufman & Jauk, 2020).

The motivations driving people towards altruistic behaviour are diverse and reflect the multifaceted nature of human empathy and societal engagement (Mattis et al., 2009). On one hand, individuals are often propelled to act altruistically in response to the immediate needs of others or broader societal issues (Mattis et al., 2009). This can range from addressing the emotional, material, financial, or physical needs of individuals and communities to stepping in where social institutions fall short, with the aim of alleviating suffering (Mattis et al., 2009). Factors such as class status, gender, sexual identity, and personal experiences of privilege or discrimination further influence these altruistic actions, highlighting a collective desire to address and rectify social inequalities and injustices (Mattis et al., 2009). Such motivations highlight the role of empathy as fundamental reason behind selfless acts, painting a picture of altruism as an inherently noble pursuit.

However, emerging research challenges this straightforward narrative by revealing that motivations for altruism often have roots in self-interest. Research by Maner and Gailliot (2006) and Burns et al. (2006) illustrates the complex motivations behind seemingly altruistic behaviours such as volunteering. Maner and Gailliot (2006) found that empathic concern significantly influences helping behaviours within kin relationships, but not towards strangers, the results suggests that altruistic actions are context-dependent and vary greatly between personal and impersonal interactions. Meanwhile, Burns et al. (2006) observed that altruistic motivations are prevalent among college students volunteering, although these motivations often coexist with personal benefits like career advancement and self-esteem enhancement. These findings highlight that altruistic behaviours, while noble in appearance, are frequently driven by a complex blend of self-interest and genuine concern for others. This suggests that there is a more complex interplay between self-interest and altruistic behaviour.

Another imperative study is Olsen et al. (2020) who conducted empirical research on volunteering for clinical trials, interviewed twenty-seven patients about their inclination to participate in a supposed test. The study found that both altruism and self-interest are primary motivations for registration. Further exploration by Hu et al. (2017) into the motivations behind helping decisions supports this belief, indicating that people's altruistic behaviours are significantly influenced by their assessment of self-risk and the perceived needs of others, pointing towards a complicated balance between self-interested motives and

the desire to assist others. This body of research reveals a complex understanding of altruism, where the lines between self-interest and selflessness become blurred, challenging traditional views of altruistic behaviour as solely others oriented.

In exploring the nuanced landscape of human behaviour, this dissertation delves into the multifaceted nature of altruism, and it is intersections with self-interest. Central to this investigation are two key constructs: self-maximization and self-prioritizing relation, that offer perspectives for analysing the motivations that lie beneath behind altruistic behaviours. Traditionally, the Self-Prioritization Effect highlights the human tendency to prioritize information related to oneself over unrelated information (Singh & Karnick, 2022). However, in the context of this study, self-prioritization is extended to describe the behavioural tendency of prioritizing one's own well-being and health before engaging in prosocial behaviour. This concept is similar yet distinct from self-interest, which involves actions taken solely to gain personal benefit (Cropanzano et al., 2005). Similarly, the concept of self-maximization which describes an individual's pursuit of maximum personal gain or satisfaction, marking a clear focus on self-benefit (Vargová et al., 2020).

This exploration delves into the intricate aspects of human motivations for prosocial behaviour with Locock & Smith's (2010) qualitative study that examined the participants motivations for partaking in clinical trials. After analysing interviews from forty-two participants, the study revealed that personal benefits overshadowed altruistic motives, with most participants emphasizing direct advantages such as access to specialist care, intensive health monitoring, and specialized medical treatment. This highlights the dominance of self-interest in decisions that are seemingly altruistic. Complementarily, Luo et al. (2021) employed computational methods to observe altruistic behaviour during the COVID-19 pandemic, noting that periods of heightened crisis spurred both increased self-prioritization and stronger altruistic responses, motivated by a strong inclination for betterment of social welfare. This finding highlights the complex coexistence and interaction between self-prioritization and altruism. Similarly, Chernyak and Kushnir (2013) explored prosocial decision-making among children, distinguishing between self-prioritizing and other-prioritizing choices. Their results highlight a complex interplay between self-interest and altruism, suggesting a recurring pattern within human behaviour that incorporates these challenging motives.

This study aims to investigate the influence of self-interest motivation on altruistic behaviour, through the exploration of this dynamic, the research seeks to bridge a significant gap in comprehending the underlying motivations driving prosocial actions. This study is essential, given that the relationship between self-interest and altruistic behaviour has primarily only been explored through theoretical models with minimal empirical research. Therefore, this investigation aims to contribute significant empirical data to an area largely developed by theory, enhancing the understanding of the dynamics at play.

The anticipated findings not only have the potential to provide valuable insights with practical implications for fostering altruistic behaviour but also aim to contribute substantially to the broader discourse on human social dynamics (Salem et al., 2022). To provide a comprehensive understanding of the study's findings, special attention will be devoted to the contextual factors influencing participants, particularly their cultural motivations. Research indicates that altruistic behaviours tend to be more prevalent in interdependent collectivistic cultures, which value communal relationships and mutual support, compared to individualistic cultures that prioritize independent autonomy (Zhang et

al., 2023). This focus on cultural context will enrich the interpretation of the data, offering insights into how societal values shape altruistic tendencies.

Drawing from Hu et al. (2017), which showed how a focus on self-interest can diminish concern for the welfare of others, this study proposes two hypotheses:

- Self-prioritizing relation is a negative predictor of altruistic behavior, suggesting that individuals with higher self-prioritizing motives are less likely to exhibit altruistic actions.
- Self-maximization is a negative predictor of altruistic behavior, indicating that individuals with a greater inclination toward self-maximizing motives are less likely to engage in altruistic actions.

METHODS

Design

This study is a quantitative, non-experimental within group design this seemed appropriate for the study as this helps in observation of how individual behaviour changes in response to various conditions, allowing for a thorough examination of the effects of different circumstances on behaviour (Charness et al., 2012), with the predictor as self-interest motivation and the outcome variable as altruistic behaviour.

Participants

A total of 197 participants initially participated in the study, of these 39 participants were excluded from the analysis due to incomplete responses (n=39), resulting in a final sample size of 158. The sample consists of 62.66% female (n=99) and 37.34% male participants (n=59), ranging in age from 18 to 61 years (*M*=24.70 *SD*=9.44). Among them, 67.7% identified as of Indian ethnicity (n=107), 8.9% as Iranian (n=14), 6.3% as Pakistani (n=10), and the remaining 14.3% various other ethnic backgrounds, all participants were selected through convenience sampling.

Materials

The data will be collected with the help of an online questionnaire consisting of two parts.
The first part of online questionnaire will assess and measure altruistic behaviour in the participants with the help of the Self-Report Altruism Scale (Manzur & Olavarrieta, 2021).

This instrument consists of 9 questions scored on a five -point Likert scale where “1=Never” and “5=Always” and represents altruism as a single unit, allowing a better conceptual representation and measurement of the concept by adding all the items’ scores. Higher scores represent a higher tendency to contribute to altruistic acts, whereas lower scores indicate a lower inclination towards engaging in such acts of altruism. An item example is “I have offered my seat to a stranger who was standing”. A reliability analysis was performed to evaluate the reliability of the scale, yielding a Cronbach's Alpha of α=.82 showing good reliability.

The second questionnaire aims to evaluate participants' self-interest motivation using the Self- and Other-Interest Inventory (Gerbasi & Prentice, 2013). This instrument comprises twelve questions, each rated on a seven-point Likert scale, where "1=Strongly disagree" and "7=Strongly agree." Among these questions, only six will be included in the questionnaire to assess two specific subscales: self-maximizing relation and self-prioritizing relation, each subscale consists of three questions. These subscales represent key components of self-interest motivation. For example, participants will be asked to rate statements like "I look

out for my own outcomes and don't concern myself with what happens to other people". The questionnaire uses a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 7 (Strongly agree). A reliability analysis was performed to evaluate the reliability for each subscale, the self-maximizing subscale yielded a Cronbach's Alpha of α=.58 showing poor reliability. Whereas the reliability for the self-prioritizing subscale yielded a Cronbach's Alpha of α=.72 showing acceptable reliability. It's important to note that higher scores indicate a greater degree of alignment with the measured construct. In this context, for the Self-report Altruism Scale, higher scores suggest a higher level of altruistic behaviour. For the Self- and Other-Interest Inventory, elevated scores indicate stronger self-interest motivation, specifically in terms of self-maximizing and self-prioritizing relations.

Procedure

Participants were recruited through the research team's private and university networks as well through various social media sites such as WhatsApp and Instagram and other online platforms. Potential participants had received a link to the online questionnaire where they were presented with an information sheet (Appendix A) explaining the study's overall purpose. The inclusion criteria were that participants had to be the age of 18 or older and fluent in English. Once participants had decided to take part in the study, they were given a virtual consent form (Appendix B) where they had to declare their agreement to take part in the study and their understanding of their rights as subjects in this study. Participants were assured of informed consent and anonymity and were presented with their right to withdraw from the study at any point. Then demographic data (such as age, gender, ethnicity) indications were collected. Then participants completed the nine-item Self-report altruism scale and the Self-and Other-Interest Inventory Scale. Finally, participants were thanked for their participation and presented with a short debrief (Appendix C) explaining aims of the research study. Confidentiality was strictly maintained, and the data were stored on a private device accessible only to the researcher.

Data analyses

SPSS software version 25 was used to perform statistical analysis on the data (IBM Corp., 2020). Two simple linear regression analysis was used to compute the significant impact of self-interest motivation on altruistic behaviour.

Ethical Considerations

Following the BPS criteria, participants' permission and non-mandatory participation were guaranteed. Data from participants was kept private, and a debriefing was provided after the research was complete. Middlesex University London research ethics committee granted research ethics approval.

RESULTS

The primary objective of this study was to explore the influence of self-interest motivation on altruistic behaviour. To measure self-interest motivation, two subscales of a self-and-other-interest scale were utilized which was the self-maximizing relation and self-prioritizing relation.

The data was exported to SPSS version 25 (IBM Corp., 2020), where before conducting the analysis, data was screened for missing data and errors, resulting in the final sample of 158 participants (N=158). Then, total scores were obtained for self-prioritizing and self-maximizing variables as well as altruistic variables. Furthermore, the reliability analysis was performed for each measurement tool, revealing good Cronbach's alpha values for both

scales, thus continuing with the next analysis steps. Then descriptive statistics were carried out for all continuous variables (shown in Table 1).

Table 1 Means and Standard Deviations of the participant's age, total self-prioritizing relation and total self-maximization scores, and total altruism score.

Variables	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Age		24.70	9.44
Total Altruism		26.01	6.38
Total Self-prioritizing	158	9.60	2.62
Total Self-maximization		8.02	2.16

As indicated in table 1, the present sample had relatively younger adults (M = 24.70, SD = 9.44). The mean score for altruism suggests a higher level of altruistic behaviour in the sample (M = 26.01, SD = 6.38). However, the mean scores of self-prioritizing relation (M = 9.60, SD = 2.62) was higher compared to the mean scores of the self-maximization (M=8.02, SD=2.16) indicating that there were higher self-prioritizing tendencies as compared to self-maximizing tendencies present in the sample.

Hypothesis 1. *Self-prioritizing relation is a negative predictor of altruistic behavior, suggesting that individuals with higher self-prioritizing motives are less likely to exhibit altruistic actions.*

Table 2 Simple Regression analysis of self-prioritizing on altruism

Block	Predictor	Total Altruism		
		Model fit	β	*t*
1.	Total Self-prioritizing	*Adj* R^2 = .062 F (1,156) = 11.42*	-.261	-3.38

*Note. All R^2 are adjusted for number of predictors; β = standardized regression coefficient; *p =.001*

A simple linear regression was conducted to test if self-prioritizing relation significantly predicted altruistic behaviour in individuals. As seen in Table 2, self-prioritizing relation accounts for 6.8% of the variance in altruistic behaviour (Adjusted R^2 = .062). The results indicated that self-prioritizing relation can significantly predict altruistic behaviour, F (1, 156) = 11.42, p > .001, (β = -.261, t (156) = -3.38, p =.001).

Hypothesis 2. *Self-maximization is a negative predictor of altruistic behavior, indicating that individuals with a greater inclination toward self-maximizing motives are less likely to engage in altruistic actions.*

Table 3 Simple Regression analysis of self-maximization on altruism

Block	Predictor	Total Altruism		
		Model fit	β	*t*
1.	Total Self-maximizing	*Adj* R^2 = .009 F (1,156) = 2.45*	-.124	-1.56

*Note. All R^2 are adjusted for number of predictors; β = standardized regression coefficient; *p >.001*

A simple linear regression was conducted to test if self-maximization significantly predicted altruistic behaviour in individuals. As seen in Table 3, self-maximization accounts for 1.5% of the variance in altruistic behaviour (Adjusted R^2 = .009). The results indicated that self-

maximizing cannot significantly predict altruistic behaviour, F (1, 156) = 2.45, p > .001, (β = -.124, t (156) = -1.56, p >.001).

DISCUSSION

The purpose of the current study was to investigate the impact of self- interest motivation on altruistic behaviour, by investigating this interaction, the study aimed to build on the significant gap in understanding the fundamental processes behind the motivation of human prosocial behaviour. The study proposed that two hypothesis (i) Self-prioritizing relation is a negative predictor of altruistic behaviour, suggesting that individuals with higher self-prioritizing motives are less likely to exhibit altruistic action. (ii)Self-maximization is a negative predictor of altruistic behaviour, indicating that individuals with a greater inclination toward self-maximizing motives are less likely to engage in altruistic actions.

The study examined the influence of self-interest motivation on altruistic behaviour, as previously discussed, the primary motivation behind so-called altruistic behaviour is self-interest, with one's well-being as the ultimate objective (Feigin et al., 2014). In the context of this study, self-prioritization is described as the behavioural tendency of prioritizing one's own well-being and health before engaging in prosocial behaviour, this concept is similar yet distinct from self-interest, which involves actions taken solely to gain personal benefit (Cropanzano et al., 2005).

This study was able to confirm the hypothesis that self-prioritizing relation is a negative predictor of altruistic behaviour, suggesting that individuals with higher self-prioritizing motives are less likely to exhibit altruistic behaviour. This is supported by previous findings from this study such as a qualitative study by Locock and Smith (2010) that examined motivations for participating in clinical trials. After analysing interviews from forty-two participants, the study revealed that personal benefits overshadowed altruistic motives, with most participants emphasizing direct advantages such as access to specialist care, intensive health monitoring, and specialized medical treatment. This emphasizes the prevalence of self-interest in decisions that appear to be altruistic. Additionally, previously mentioned research such as studies conducted by Maner and Gailliot (2006) and Burns et al. (2006) illustrates the complex motivations behind seemingly altruistic behaviours such as volunteering. Maner and Gailliot (2006) found that empathic concern significantly influences helping behaviours within kin relationships, but not towards strangers, the results suggests that altruistic actions are context-dependent and vary greatly between personal and impersonal interactions. Meanwhile, Burns et al. (2006) observed that altruistic motivations are prevalent among college students volunteering, although these motivations often coexist with personal benefits like career advancement and self-esteem enhancement. These insights complement this study's findings, highlighting that altruistic behaviours, although noble in appearance, are often driven by a blend of self-interest and genuine concern for others.

Conversely, the study also explored self-maximization which Vargová et al., (2020) described as an individual's pursuit of maximum personal gain or satisfaction, marking a clear focus on self-benefit. This study hypothesized that self-maximization a negative predictor of altruistic behaviour. However, regression analysis did not support this hypothesis, finding self-maximization to be non-significant. This outcome suggests that altruism may not be inherently motivated by self-interest, a conclusion supported by various other research studies.

For instance, a study examining reasons for COVID-19 vaccination provides compelling evidence against the belief that altruism is motivated by self-interest (Jones et al., 2022). The research established that kin altruism and non-kin altruism were significant factors influencing individuals' decisions to vaccinate, rated more highly than self-interest reasons. Specifically, participants expressed a stronger inclination towards altruistic motivations when considering their own reasons for vaccination (Jones et al., 2022). This suggests that altruistic motives can indeed replace self-interest in decision-making contexts, challenging the view that all altruistic actions are self-serving (Jones et al., 2022).

Similarly, another study investigating motivations to volunteer found that the motivations behind individuals expressing interest to volunteer for COVID-19 human challenges trial was found to be significantly correlated with increased altruistic motivation and behaviour. Majority of the volunteers testified altruistic motivations for volunteering and displayed high levels of previous engagement in various other practices of altruism, such as blood donation, donating to charity, and live registered bone marrow donors (Marsh et al., 2022) Furthermore, recent advancements in behavioural economics have contradicted the traditional view that altruism is solely driven by self-interest. Cohen et al., (2023) emphasized the importance of moral drive, rather than self-centred motives, in personal-decision making processes, indicating that moral and social motivations suggest conformity with social distancing rules. This body of evidence highlights a more complex interplay of motivations behind altruistic behaviour, highlighting the importance of moral motivations in shaping prosocial actions.

Unexpectedly, the non-significant predictive value of self-maximization suggests a more complex relationship between self-interested motivations and altruistic behaviour than initially hypothesized. This finding may be partly influenced by the cultural background of the sample, the majority of whom were from South Asian backgrounds, known for their collectivist cultures. Collectivist cultures, which emphasize community well-being over individual benefits, have been shown to exhibit more empathy and prosocial behaviours (Shukla et al., 2022). This cultural influence could be a critical factor in understanding why self-maximization did not emerge as a significant predictor of altruism in this study.

Moreover, the motivation for altruistic acts has been a subject of extensive research and debate, with some studies such as those by Rhoads et al. (2023), suggesting that self-interested motivations alone do not fully explain acts of real-world self-sacrifice. Supporting this, Miller and Strachan (2020) propose that in this contemporary society, prioritizing one’s needs may not necessarily stem from self-interest but rather from self-compassion, which is increasingly seen as a positive self-regard. This view redefines self-prioritization not as a selfish but as one of compassion. Hence, these perspectives add to a more comprehensive understanding that altruistic actions may not only be based on self-interests but can also be impacted by cultural beliefs and a revised understanding of self-compassion.

The findings of this study contribute to the ongoing debate regarding the relationship between self-interest motives and altruism. By confirming that self-prioritizing relation negatively impacts altruistic behaviour, this research supports the theories previously mentioned.

Such as the pseudo altruistic approach proposed by Feigin et al., (2014) that suggests the primary motivation behind so-called altruistic behaviour is self-interest, with one's well-being as the ultimate objective. According to this concept, achieving internal rewards—even

when they are not immediately apparent—is what drives altruism. Supporting this Carlson and Zaki (2018) stated that psychologists have surmised that all behaviours, no matter how selfless they seem on the surface, are really motivated by self-interest.

Conversely, the non-significant results that self-maximization negatively impacts altruistic behaviour, is challenged by some of the existing theories present in this study. These theories argue that all human desires are inherently egocentric or selfish (Filkowski et al., 2016). Additionally, Maslow who points out that actions deemed altruistic could stem from underlying self-serving motives (Kaufman & Jauk, 2020). However, this has been contradicted by this findings of this study and other theories such a Batson (2011) who stated that altruism is a state of motivation where the ultimate aim is enhancing another person's well-being (Piatak & Holt, 2019).

These results invite a reassessment of the simplistic division of self-interest as a motivation for altruistic behaviour and highlight the complexity of motivations fundamental to prosocial behaviours. This suggests that the framework within which self-interest and altruism are often discussed might be overly simplistic and necessitate a more detailed exploration in future theoretical work.

The understanding of how different types of self-interest motivations impact altruistic behaviour can have practical implications for creating more effective interventions to promote altruistic behaviour. Exploring the motivations for altruistic behaviour has important real-world implications in many areas. For instance, research indicates integrating altruism-focused programs and service learning into school syllabuses not only enhances student development in empathy and social responsibility but also strengthens community ties (Wang & Rodgers, 2006, Gregorová et al., 2016). This approach not only enriches student education but also cultivates a generation committed to community engagement and societal contribution. Beyond education, the implications of altruistic motivations extend to consumer behaviour as well. Understanding the motives behind altruistic consumption behaviours targeting vulnerable groups can guide marketing strategies and campaigns aimed at promoting social responsibility and charitable initiatives (Xin et al., 2022). Additionally, in healthcare settings, balancing altruistic and self-interested motivations among general practitioners can have implications for patient care and satisfaction (O'Riordan, 2019).

This research encounters several limitations that must be considered. Primarily, the generalizability of the study's findings may be limited by the demographic and cultural homogeneity of the sample as majority of the sample is South Asian. If the study primarily involved participants from a specific geographic region or cultural background, the results might not adequately reflect the variability in altruistic behaviour across different societies or cultural contexts.

Secondly, the reliance on a small sample size and self-report measures might have further distorted the study's outcomes. Small sample sizes may inadequately power studies, limiting the generalizability of results and possibly leading to false conclusions (Faber & Fonseca, 2014). Lastly, self-report measures can be influenced by biases like social desirability and errors in self-perception, which may result in answers that mirror socially accepted opinions or match participants' self-image rather than their actual motivations (Mazzoni et al., 2021, Kaufmann et al., 2019). All these factors emphasize the importance of creating stronger measurement tools and methodologies to improve the reliability and relevance of future research in this area.

Integrating qualitative methods in future research is important for gaining a deeper insight of how personal, cultural, and situational factors impact the influence of self-interest motivations on altruistic behaviour. Qualitative research is essential for greatly understanding participants' internal experiences and the cultural contexts that influence their actions (Rahman, 2020). By providing detailed descriptions of people's feelings, opinions, and experiences, this approach reveals the meanings they construct within their cultural environments. Utilizing methods like participant-observation, unstructured interviews, and direct observation, qualitative research captures the details of human behaviour and societal impacts, which quantitative methods may miss (Rahman, 2020). This depth makes it invaluable for studies exploring complex interpersonal and cultural dynamics (Rahman, 2020).

Additionally, this research can be further enhanced by exploring the mediating effects of variables like empathy, moral reasoning, and social norms which could further explain the complex dynamics at play. This could involve experimental designs where these factors are manipulated to directly observe their impact on the relationship between self-interest motivations and altruistic behaviour (Wang et al., 2023, Mestre et al., 2019).

Moreover, expanding the demographic and cultural possibility of research participants would improve the generalizability of the findings and provide deeper insights into the variability of altruistic behaviour across different societies and cultural settings. This could help in understanding if the patterns observed are universally relevant or if they vary significantly across different cultures (Ferguson, 2004)

Lastly, extending research to include mixed-methods designs could provide a more holistic view of the factors at play. By combining quantitative data with qualitative insights, researchers can validate and enrich their findings, providing a more robust analysis of the motivations behind altruistic behaviours (Zhang, Li, et al., 2023)

In conclusion, this study expands on the understanding of how self-interest motivations impact altruistic behaviour and opens several avenues for future research and practical applications. By continuing to explore this complex relationship, a better understand the foundations of prosocial behaviour can help develop more effective strategies to cultivate altruism in society.

REFERENCES

Batson, C. D., & Powell, A. A. (2003). Altruism and Prosocial Behavior. *Handbook of Psychology*, *5*(19). https://doi.org/10.1002/0471264385.wei0519

Burns, D. J., Reid, J. S., Toncar, M., Fawcett, J., & Anderson, C. (2006). Motivations to volunteer: The role of altruism. *International Review on Public and Nonprofit Marketing*, *3*(2), 79–91. https://doi.org/10.1007/bf02893621

Carlson, R. W., & Zaki, J. (2018). Good deeds gone bad: Lay theories of altruism and selfishness. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, *75*, 36–40. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2017.11.005

Charness, G., Gneezy, U., & Kuhn, M. A. (2012). Experimental methods: Between-subject and within-subject design. *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization*, *81*(1), 1–8. Https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jebo.2011.08.009

Chernyak, N., & Kushnir, T. (2013). Giving Preschoolers Choice Increases Sharing Behavior. *Psychological Science*, *24*(10), 1971–1979. https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797613482335

Cohen, D. B., Saling, L. L., Lee, E., & Zagura, A. (2023). Moral, self-interested, and social motivation each predict compliance with social distancing rules: utilitarianism is an indirect positive predictor. *BMC Psychology*, *11*(1). https://doi.org/10.1186/s40359-023-01093-7

Cropanzano, R., Goldman, B., & Folger, R. (2005). Self-interest: defining and understanding a human motive. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, *26*(8), 985–991. https://doi.org/10.1002/job.353

Faber, J., & Fonseca, L. M. (2014). How sample size influences research outcomes. *Dental Press Journal of Orthodontics*, *19*(4), 27–29. NCBI. https://doi.org/10.1590/2176-9451.19.4.027-029.ebo

Feigin, S., Owens, G., & Goodyear-Smith, F. (2014). Theories of human altruism: a systematic review. *Journal of Psychiatry and Brain Functions*, *1*(1), 5. https://doi.org/10.7243/2055-3447-1-5

Ferguson, L. (2004). External Validity, Generalizability, and Knowledge Utilization. *Journal of Nursing Scholarship*, *36*(1), 16–22. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1547-5069.2004.04006.x

Filkowski, M., Cochran, R. N., & Haas, B. (2016). Altruistic behavior: mapping responses in the brain. *Neuroscience and Neuroeconomics*, *Volume 5*(5), 65–75. https://doi.org/10.2147/nan.s87718

Gerbasi, M. E., & Prentice, D. A. (2013). The Self- and Other-Interest Inventory. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *105*(3), 495–514. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0033483

Gregorová, A. B., Heinzová, Z., & Chovancová, K. (2016). The Impact of Service-Learning on Students' Key Competences. *International Journal of Research on Service-Learning and Community Engagement*, *4*(1). https://doi.org/10.37333/001c.29686

Healy, K. (2004). Altruism as an Organizational Problem: The Case of Organ Procurement. *American Sociological Review*, *69*(3), 387–404. https://doi.org/10.1177/000312240406900304

Hu, J., Li, Y., Yin, Y., Blue, P. R., Yu, H., & Zhou, X. (2017). How do self-interest and other-need interact in the brain to determine altruistic behavior? *NeuroImage*, *157*, 598–611. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.neuroimage.2017.06.040

IBM Corp. Released 2020. IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows, Version 27.0. Armonk, NY: IBM Corp

Jones, C., Bhogal, M. S., & Byrne, A. (2022). The role of altruism versus self-interest in Covid-19 vaccination uptake in the UK. *Public Health*, *213*, 91–93. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.puhe.2022.10.006

Kaufman, S. B., & Jauk, E. (2020). Healthy Selfishness and Pathological Altruism: Measuring Two Paradoxical Forms of Selfishness. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *11*. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.01006

Kaufmann, C. N., Nakhla, M. Z., Lee, E. E., Yoon, H.-K., Wing, D., Depp, C. A., & Eyler, L. T. (2019). Inaccuracy between subjective reports and objective measures of sleep duration and clinical correlates in bipolar disorder. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, *250*, 226–230. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2019.03.014

Locock, L., & Smith, L. (2010). Personal benefit, or benefiting others? Deciding whether to take part in clinical trials. *Clinical Trials: Journal of the Society for Clinical Trials*, *8*(1), 85–93. https://doi.org/10.1177/1740774510392257

Luo Y, Shuster A, D, C., O'Brien M, Heflin M, Perl O, Kulkarni K, S, N., Fiore Vg, Montague Pr, & Gu X. (2021). Altruism in a Time of Crisis: Dissociable Social Valuation and Perception during COVID-19 in the United States. *Research Square (Research Square)*, *1*. https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-820359/v1

Maner, J. K., & Gailliot, M. T. (2006). Altruism and egoism: prosocial motivations for helping depend on relationship context. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, *37*(2), 347–358. https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.364

Manzur, E., & Olavarrieta, S. (2021). The 9-SRA Scale: A Simplified 9-Items Version of the SRA Scale to Assess Altruism. *Sustainability*, *13*(13), 6999. https://doi.org/10.3390/su13136999

Marsh, A. A., Magalhaes, M., Peeler, M., Rose, S. M., Darton, T. C., Nir Eyal, Morrison, J., Shah, S. K., & Schmit, V. (2022). Characterizing altruistic motivation in potential volunteers for SARS-CoV-2 challenge trials. *PloS One*, *17*(11), e0275823–e0275823. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0275823

Mattis, J. S., Hammond, W. P., Grayman, N., Bonacci, M., Brennan, W., Cowie, S.-A., Ladyzhenskaya, L., & So, S. (2009). The Social Production of Altruism: Motivations for Caring Action in a Low-Income Urban Community. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, *43*(1-2), 71–84. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10464-008-9217-5

Mazzoni, D., Marinucci, M., Monzani, D., & Pravettoni, G. (2021). The Social Exclusion Bench Tool (SEBT): A visual way of assessing interpersonal social exclusion. *MethodsX*, *8*, 101495. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.mex.2021.101495

Mestre, M. V., Carlo, G., Samper, P., Malonda, E., & Mestre, A. L. (2019). Bidirectional relations among empathy-related traits, prosocial moral reasoning, and prosocial behaviors. *Social Development*, *28*(3). https://doi.org/10.1111/sode.12366

Miller, C. L., & Strachan, S. M. (2020). Understanding the role of mother guilt and self-compassion in health behaviors in mothers with young children. *Women & Health*, *60*(7), 1–13. https://doi.org/10.1080/03630242.2020.1713966

O'Riordan, C. (2019). Balancing altruism and self-interest: GP and patient implications. *The Irish Journal of Management*, *37*(1), 1–15. https://doi.org/10.2478/ijm-2018-0001

Olsen, L., DePalma, L., & Evans, J. H. (2020). Self-Interested and Altruistic Motivations in Volunteering for Clinical Trials: A More Complex Relationship. *Journal of Empirical Research on Human Research Ethics*, *15*(5), 443–451. https://doi.org/10.1177/1556264620914463

Piatak, J. S., & Holt, S. B. (2019). Prosocial Behaviors: A Matter of Altruism or Public Service Motivation? *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, *30*(3). https://doi.org/10.1093/jopart/muz041

Rahman, S. (2020). The Advantages and Disadvantages of Using Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches and Methods in Language "Testing and Assessment" Research: a Literature Review. *Journal of Education and Learning*, *6*(1), 102–112. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1120221.pdf

Rhoads, S. A., Vekaria, K. M., O'Connell, K., Elizabeth, H. S., Rand, D. G., Kozak Williams, M. N., & Marsh, A. A. (2023). Unselfish traits and social decision-making patterns characterize six populations of real-world extraordinary altruists. *Nature Communications*, *14*(1), 1807. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-023-37283-5

Rushton, J. P. (1982). Altruism and Society: A Social Learning Perspective. *Ethics*, *92*(3), 425–446. https://doi.org/10.1086/292353

Salem, A. A. M. S., Abdelsattar, M., Abu Al-Diyar, M., Al-Hwailah, A. H., Derar, E., Al-Hamdan, N. A. H., & Tilwani, S. A. (2022). Altruistic behaviors and cooperation among gifted adolescents. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *13*. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.945766

Shukla, S., Mishra, S. K., & Agustino, R. D. (2022). Reflection of Types of Prosocial Behavior During COVID-19 in Collectivistic Asian Countries—India and Indonesia. *Qualitative Health Research*, *32*(13), 1993–2005. https://doi.org/10.1177/10497323221129260

Singh, D., & Karnick, H. (2022). Self-Prioritization Effect in Children and Adults. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *13*. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.726230

Vargová, L., Zibrínová, Ľ., & Baník, G. (2020). The way of making choices: Maximizing and satisficing and its relationship to well-being, personality, and self-rumination. *Judgment and Decision Making*, *15*(5), 798–806. https://doi.org/10.1017/s193029750 0007932

Wang, C., Fu, W., Wu, X., & Wang, Y. (2023). Just world beliefs and altruistic behaviors of college students during the COVID-19 pandemic: The mediating role of empathy. *Current Psychology*, *42*(36). https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-023-04233-9

Wang, Y., & Rodgers, R. (2006). Impact of Service-Learning and Social Justice Education on College Students' Cognitive Development. *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice*, *43*(2). https://doi.org/10.2202/1949-6605.1642

Xin, H., Li, C., Li, W., Wang, H., Liu, P., & Li, S. (2022). Consumption replaces charity: Altruistic consumption behaviors and motivations targeting vulnerable groups—Research based on poverty alleviation consumption in China. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *13*. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.933701

Zhang, J., Sara Valencia Botto, & Rochat, P. (2023). Altruism and hyperaltruism in children of three cultures. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*, *234*, 105708–105708. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jecp.2023.105708

Zhang, Y., Li, X., Zhang, X., Li, X., Lin, X., & Han, Y. (2023). Physician altruism under the change from pure payment system to mixed payment schemes: experimental evidence. *BMC Health Services Research (Online)*, *23*(1). https://doi.org/10.1186/s 12913-023-09112-4

Acknowledgment

The author(s) appreciates all those who participated in the study and helped to facilitate the research process.

Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

How to cite this article: Joseph, A.M. (2024). Giving or Gaining? Investigating Self-Interest Motivations in Altruistic Acts. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, *12*(4), 372-385. DIP:18.01.036.20241204, DOI:10.25215/1204.036