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The Art of Persuasion in Donation Crowdfunding: Exploring the Influence of Linguistic Styles in Fundraisers' Narratives on Multidimensional Altruistic Motivation

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The Art of Persuasion in Donation Crowdfunding: Exploring the Influence of Linguistic Styles in Fundraisers' Narratives on Multidimensional Altruistic Motivation

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Abstract:

Despite several advantages over traditional donation fundraising models, donation crowdfunding is one of the smallest crowdfunding models by volume worldwide. Two typical challenges that donation crowdfunding faces are attaining legitimacy from potential donors and motivating potential donors to contribute. A fundraiser's narrative and its linguistic style play an instrumental role in overcoming these challenges. However, academic research on the link between linguistic styles in fundraisers' narratives and potential donors' altruistic motivation remains in its infancy and is scarce in the donation crowdfunding literature. To bridge this gap, we use the multidimensional view of altruism to understand how fundraisers' narrative affects potential donors' intention to donate by provoking altruistic motivation in general and its seven dimensions in particular. Our findings from our experiment provide insights for fundraisers, crowdfunding platform designers, and scholars. In the donation crowdfunding context, our findings explain how linguistic narrative styles (social, emotional, and religious) may bring a change in potential donors' mixed altruistic motives (pure and pseudo-altruistic motives), which influence potential donors' intention to donate.

Keywords: Donation Crowdfunding, Altruistic Motivation, Linguistic Styles, Fundraiser's Narration, Donation Intention

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1 Introduction

Prosocial charitable projects have consistently faced challenges in identifying potential donors and obtaining their support (Chao et al., 2020). Crowdfunding as an innovative fundraising channel has simplified the process of donation funding for prosocial projects through information technology (IT)-enabled platforms that offer information exchange, interactive communication, and donation transactions integrated into one standardized process (Belleflamme et al., 2013). Researchers have often considered donation crowdfunding a better model for charitable fundraising than traditional (offline) approaches as it leverages IT to overcome physical distance barriers between potential donors and fundraisers (Zhao & Sun, 2020). Donation crowdfunding platforms perform more efficiently by facilitating rich interactions and frequent information exchange between fundraisers and potential donors (Choy & Schlagwein, 2016). Despite several advantages over the traditional donation fundraising models, donation crowdfunding is one of the smallest crowdfunding models by volume worldwide. For example, in Switzerland, donation crowdfunding accounts for around three percent of the CHF (Swiss franc) 1.81 billion that traditional funding/charity models collected for the 2018–2019 year (Dietrich & Amrein, 2021). Except for Africa and the Middle East, donation crowdfunding accounts for less than one percent of the total crowdfunding volumes in most regions (Ziegler et al., 2018). According to recent research, less than seven percent of medical crowdfunding projects succeed on average (Guo et al., 2019).

Two typical challenges of donation crowdfunding may explain these modest figures: 1) attaining legitimacy from potential donors and 2) motivating potential donors. Like any new venture, donation crowdfunding ventures struggle to obtain legitimacy from the audience that provides critical resources to support their prosocial agenda (Zimmerman & Zeitz, 2002). Donation crowdfunding ventures usually lack common legitimacy indicators such as a track record that contains successfully completed prosocial projects (Kshetri, 2015). While all types of entrepreneurial crowdfunding require legitimacy to survive and succeed (Chen, 2023), the second challenge pertains specifically to donation crowdfunding (Ordanini et al., 2011; Zhao & Sun, 2020). Hence, the driving force behind the donation intention and behavior emanates from a unique set of factors (i.e., multidimensional altruistic motivations) (Fang, 2022). Research on donors' intention to donate in the traditional charitable context has frequently reported that charitable giving is closely linked with humans' altruistic tendency to voluntarily share resources and help the needy (e.g., Fehr & Fischbacher, 2003; Choy & Schlagwein, 2016). While intrinsic motivation can drive charity, empirical research claims that motives behind donation can also be selfish and/or extrinsic (e.g., Nakagawa & Kosaka, 2022; Zhang et al., 2022). Indeed, altruistic motivation comes in various impure forms, such as warm glow (desire to get emotional gains), personal reputation, or even hedonism (desire for personal gain without any concern for the welfare of the needy) (Piatak & Holt, 2020; Tenner & Hörisch, 2021).

Due to altruism's multidimensional nature, donation crowdfunding ventures need to understand the motivational mechanism behind charitable giving more so than entrepreneurial crowdfunding ventures, for which extrinsic motives (such as personal gains) predominantly drive investment behavior (Bretschneider et al., 2014). The comparison between crowdfunding and traditional funding models indicates that, while intrinsic motivation represents the dominant altruistic motivation (pure altruism) for helping the needy in traditional funding (e.g., Skatova & Goulding, 2019), empirical investigations on donation crowdfunding have reported impure/pseudo altruistic motives such as hedonism, warm glow, or egoistic altruism behind online donations (e.g., Fang, 2022). Hence, the working mechanisms behind why crowdfunders donate remain unclear. Further, empirical literature suggests that a fundraiser's narrative (linguistics of donation appeal/fundraising pitch) plays an instrumental role in overcoming the above-mentioned challenges both in crowdfunding and traditional charity models. Without a track record, a fundraiser's narrative serves as a legitimacy signal by providing key information about the venture (Sukalla et al., 2017). Fundraisers frequently use narrative to stimulate donors/investors' altruistic motivation to help (Werther, 2022).

While previous studies have found that messages with emotional, social, or religious charitable appeals prove particularly effective in crowdfunding and traditional charitable giving contexts (van Rijn et al., 2019), one cannot assume their effects in donation crowdfunding as this context clearly differs from both traditional charitable giving and other forms of entrepreneurial crowdfunding with respect to setting, challenges, and factors affecting potential audience's motivation. For instance, unlike traditional giving, donation crowdfunding lacks institutional trust. In a traditional charitable context, donors often interact with established and recognized institutions that have high credibility (Lee & Kim, 2023). Therefore, in traditional donations, established trust and accountability structures may significantly influence the impact of narration styles on donors' altruistic motives. However, it remains unclear how linguistic styles in crowdfunding narrations may shape donors' altruistic motivations. Similarly, traditional donations often happen in private or institutionally mediated settings with less social and peer pressure. In contrast, donation crowdfunding

occurs in the public domain: people can clearly see donors and their contributions in real time (Savary & Goldsmith, 2020). These peculiar contextual settings may amplify the weight of narrative styles in donation crowdfunding.

Given the unique challenges with and our limited knowledge of multidimensional altruistic motivation, the literature on traditional charitable giving and other forms of entrepreneurial crowdfunding cannot fully explain the role of linguistic style in fundraisers' narratives or the mechanisms that drive donors' altruistic motives, which largely determine donation intention.

In this experimental study, we integrated the knowledge created by research on traditional charity-giving, multidimensional altruistic motivation, and crowdfunding to address the following research questions (RQ):

RQ1: How does a fundraiser's narrative (emotional, social, or religious donation appeal) impact potential donors' altruistic motivation to donate?

RQ2: How do linguistic styles in a fundraiser's narration work in the multidimensional space of donors' altruistic motivation?

RQ3: How does potential donors' altruistic motivation relate to their donation intention?

To examine the impact of fundraisers' narratives on potential donors' altruistic motivation and its dimensions, we employed a laboratory experiment. We created four old-age home crowdfunding webpages with emotional, social, religious, or no narratives, respectively. We carried out an experimental study to assess whether a specific treatment affected the outcome (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). In our experiment, we provided a specific type of narrative to a group, withheld it from another group, and determined how both groups scored on the outcome. We conducted the experiment on students in an executive management program in India. All students had a minimum of two years' work experience. We randomly provided the participants with a webpage and, based on it, asked them to fill out a survey. We undertook this experimental study in India, as it has approximately 658 million Internet users (approximately 60 percent of the population) (DataReportal, 2022).

2 Research Background

2.1 Multidimensional Altruistic Motivation: Conceptual Understanding

In a research context, altruism refers to an individual's purposive action to extend some benefit to someone else that involves a net cost to the individual (Smith, 2009). This definition broadly covers two types of altruistic behaviors: sharing resources or donations to someone in need and helping a person in distress (Fehr & Fischbacher, 2003). Unlike egoism, research on altruism primarily examines the motivations underlying prosocial behaviors. Expected personal gains motivate egoistic behavior, whereas altruism does not involve any such expectations. Recent studies highlight that altruism and egoism can coexist in that altruistic acts can reflect concern for the well-being of an individual (Feigin et al., 2014; Ma et al., 2018).

Based on the above discussion, we conceptualize altruism as a multidimensional concept that encompasses a range of motives from purely selfless to those containing egoistic elements (Evans & Ferguson, 2014; Ma et al., 2018; Zhang et al., 2022). Extant literature and altruism theories suggest seven distinct motives along the egoism–altruism continuum:

- 1) Pure altruism, which refers to helping the needy at a personal cost without any desire for personal gain (Piatak & Holt, 2020).
- 2) Warm glow, which reflects the desire for emotional gains by helping the needy (Mimoun Chaabane & Parguel, 2016).
- 3) Reluctant altruism, which comes from the belief that one must help the needy because others will not. In the context of donation crowdfunding, it refers to the donors' motivation to donate due to a lack of trust in others for helping the needy (Jiao et al., 2021).
- 4) Social responsibility, which reflects a sense of responsibility to society.
- 5) Hedonism, which involves the desire for personal gains without any concern for the welfare of the beneficiaries (Tenner & Hörisch, 2021).

- 6) Reputation building, which involves maintaining social image and indirect reciprocity (Tey et al., 2020).
- 7) Kinship, which highlights an individual's preference towards helping family, friends, and relatives (Evans & Ferguson, 2013).

Although recent research highlights that different stimuli trigger distinct altruistic motives (Jiao et al., 2022; Pfattheicher et al., 2022), the literature does not clearly explain what triggers each motive in a donation context (Warneken & Tomasello, 2009; Batson, 2010). What factors inspire a specific altruistic motive? Understanding these factors would play a crucial role in helping crowdfunding projects succeed since online transactions typically feature more distant interpersonal connections.

2.2 Theoretical Perspectives on Altruistic Motivation in Donation Crowdfunding

Much literature explains human altruism and altruistic motivations. Existing research highlights the ongoing argument around pure altruism. Indeed, many psychological theories state that altruistic behavior is often intertwined with egoistic motives and one's own welfare (Batson, 2017; Giovanis & Ozdamar, 2022). However, social learning theory suggests that people develop altruistic behavior via internalizing values that they gain through observational learning (Dovidio & Penner, 2004). In the donation crowdfunding context, neither of these viewpoints can fully explain altruistic motivations because there are no observable rewards for donors (van Teunenbroek et al., 2023). Stage-development theories argue that pure altruism emerges only at the advanced level of ethical maturity (Krebs & Hesteren, 1994). However, this view does not pertain to the donation crowdfunding context since altruistic behavior often occurs in a reflexive, spontaneous, and situational manner and, thus, does not solely depend on development stages.

To understand and explain motives for donation crowdfunding behavior, we refer to models that explain reflex and automatic altruistic behavior. For instance, arousal reduction and negative state relief models—two widely accepted theoretical models—explain individuals' spontaneous altruism when they observe another person in pain, distress, or emergency (Gunessee et al., 2018). In such situations, people may experience a state of arousal expressed in negative emotions such as shame, guilt, anxiety, and stress. Individuals seek to control these emotions by empathizing and helping the needy—an altruistic motivation mechanism that focuses on reducing the aversive arousal or negative feelings (Giovanis & Ozdamar, 2022; Zhao et al., 2022). In comparison to models that position altruism as an ego-driven orientation of personal distress, autonomous altruism reflects one's empathetic conditioning as a sense of responsibility for human beings (Feigin et al., 2014) without any desire for observable (e.g., reward, reputation, popularity) or unobservable (e.g., emotional gains) personal gains (Nakagawa & Kosaka, 2022).

Together, these perspectives suggest that cues on a fundraiser's sufferings/pain can trigger potential donors' altruistic motivations to donate through crowdfunding platforms. In this study, we investigate how linguistic styles in narrations (i.e., social, emotional, and religious) directly affect potential donors' altruistic motives and indirectly predict crowdfunding donation behavior.

2.3 Previous Research on Narration Style, Altruistic Motivation, and Crowdfunding Donation Intention Links

Empirical studies have reported that donation crowdfunding has not scaled at a high growth rate (Van Teunenbroek, 2016). Therefore, we find it pertinent to investigate how to motivate online donors to contribute money to prosocial projects. One needs to understand the crowd to obtain insights into crowdfunding contexts, much like how one needs to understand investors to understand traditional investment contexts. Further, one needs to understand the key differences between the motivation behind investment and donation crowdfunding to understand donation crowdfunding behavior (Di Pietro & Buttice, 2020).

In donation crowdfunding, unlike investment crowdfunding, altruistic motives rather than financial returns drive donors (Ordanini et al., 2011; Allison et al., 2015; Gleasure & Feller, 2016). Empirical studies indicate that factors such as informativeness, fundraisers' experience, and business plans do not significantly motivate donors' funding intentions (Cumming & Johan, 2019). Instead, such studies have found that altruistic goal-related cues such as the fundraiser's social passion, degree of the fundraiser's suffering, perceived value indicators, and so on motivate donors to support donation crowdfunding projects (Davis et al., 2017; Seyb et al., 2022). Since philanthropic crowdfunders face information asymmetries due to inadequate information and a lack of direct access to fundraisers, they mainly rely on fundraisers' narratives available on the crowdfunding platforms (Mollick, 2014). Narratives in investment crowdfunding mainly focus

on highlighting the technical and financial details, whereas in donation crowdfunding, they focus on stimulating altruistic motivation by aligning with donors' prosocial goals (Mollick, 2014; Prashar & Gupta, 2023). Gleasure and Feller (2016) found that campaign imagery played an instrument role in a donation crowdfunding project's success. Furthermore, crowdfunding research suggests that, besides written narratives, linguistic narration styles also convey goal alignment and other useful information about crowdfunding projects. Excessive promotional and marketing language can harm donation crowdfunding projects (Johan & Zhang, 2020). Fundraisers need to take care in selecting the pitch and wording to ensure that the narrated story aligns closely with potential donors' altruistic motives. For instance, cues on universal moral foundations, social and religious values, emotional sensitivity, and empathy in the fundraiser's narrations play a particularly useful role in instigating target donors' altruistic motives and, thus, fostering their donation intentions (Jancenelle & Javalgi, 2018).

Recent empirical research underscores the magnitude and statistical significance of the impact of linguistic style on potential donors' altruistic-egoistic motivation continuum in donation crowdfunding contexts. For instance, Jancenelle and Javalgi (2018) demonstrated that linguistic cues emphasizing prosocial and religious values increased perceived goal alignment between donors and fundraisers. They found effect sizes (Cohen's *d*) that exceeded 0.6, which indicates a moderate to large effect. Similarly, Gleasure and Feller (2016) found that narrative vividness, achieved through coherent and rich linguistic style, can statistically explain over 30 percent of the variance in donor engagement levels, which emphasizes its significance in stimulating altruistic motivation to donate. Furthermore, in their experimental study, Moss et al. (2018) revealed that an emotional linguistic style with empathetic appeal increased donation intentions by up to 25 percent compared to neutral or mixed-style appeals. Taken together, previous studies affirm that linguistic styles may have a substantial and quantifiable influence on donors' altruistic-egoistic continuum, which reinforces the need for fundraisers to carefully use linguistics in crowdfunding narrations. Note that a single linguistic style (emotional, social, or religious) works better in favor of altruistic motivation than a mixed style, which may render the potential donor in a confused emotional state (Moss et al., 2018).

2.4 What's Next: This Study's Contribution

Previous empirical research has contributed enough evidence to support the assertion that narratives' language, content, and style play an important role in mobilizing resources in the online context (e.g., Parhankangas & Renko, 2017; Anglin et al., 2018; Johan & Zhang, 2020). For instance, studies in other contexts have found that psychologically driven linguistic style, such as emotional, social, and religious language, significantly relates to altruistic motivation and subsequent donation behavior (Chircop et al., 2017). Furthermore, donation and crowdfunding behavior studies drawing from moral development theories have found that linguistic styles, particularly emotional, prosocial, and religious language in a fundraiser's narrative, directly impact donors' altruistic motivation (e.g., Teah et al., 2014; Jamal et al., 2019). However, few studies have investigated how linguistic styles with proven influence on persuasion affect donors' altruistic motivation to donate in crowdfunding (Jancenelle & Javalgi, 2018; Lee et al., 2019). Moreover, existing research provides limited information on how linguistic style in narration works in a multidimensional space, such as altruistic motivation to donate. Specifically, we do not know much about how linguistic style in narration (emotional, social, and religious) influences seven altruistic motives and whether narrations generate altruistic motivations. In this study, we focus on filling the above-mentioned gaps. In doing so, we make four main contributions.

First, we contribute to scholarly conversation about fundraisers' narratives and funders' altruistic motivations from the perspective of emotional, social, and religious causes in the donation crowdfunding context. This contribution has much importance, given that one cannot generalize cues in narratives and their impacts across contexts. People tell narratives in a specific context to a specific audience for a specific purpose (Gartner, 2007). In our study, we test a conceptual model to examine the impact of emotional, social, and religious cues in a fundraiser's narration on potential donors' altruistic motivations to support philanthropic crowdfunding endeavors.

Second, we enrich the altruistic motivation literature by viewing altruistic motivations' seven dimensions through the lens of linguistic styles in terms of emotional, social, and religious cues. Third, we contribute empirical evidence to the rapidly growing literature on donation crowdfunding by gaining insights from arousal-reduction and negative state relief models of altruistic motivation. Distinct from the literature that has treated motivation as a single dimension construct and ignored the role of linguistic styles in motivating the donors/investors (e.g., Bestari & Rahadian, 2020; Chen et al., 2021), we tested how linguistic styles in narration generate empathetic distress about fundraisers and the needy. Finally, we explain how linguistic

styles in narrations relate in different ways to the seven dimensions of altruistic motivation to participate in donation crowdfunding—an important inquiry because prior studies have largely ignored the fact that people may help the needy through crowdfunding platforms not necessarily for purely altruistic reasons.

3 Hypothesis Development

3.1 Social Linguistic Narratives and Altruistic Motivation

Research in different business management disciplines consistently maintains that individuals' concerns for social issues and willingness to contribute to society have shown remarkable growth in recent years. Notions such as “the greater good for society” very much play a role in the decisions (whether about business, investment, workplace, or even purchases) they make (Joshi & Rahman, 2019; Carroll & Brown, 2022). In fact, cause-related marketing (i.e., where a purchase transaction donation for a social cause takes place) has emerged as a successful marketing practice in recent years (Moosmayer & Fuljahn, 2010). Previous studies have found that social pitches in prosocial campaigns significantly improve how well people evaluate their products and firms. The underlying force behind the impact of a social pitch lies in its association with human altruistic motivation (Allison et al., 2015).

Humans usually have an unconscious desire to help others, and prosocial campaigns offer them a way to fulfill this desire (Bargh, 2014). In the crowdfunding context, empirical studies have found that intrinsic motives (willingness to help the needy; altruistic motivation) generally more strongly influence investment behavior than extrinsic motives (expectation of potential financial gains) (Allison et al., 2015; Cecere et al., 2017). In donation crowdfunding, where psychological motives primarily guide donation, the link between social linguistic narration and altruistic motivation is logically consistent. Social linguistics exhibits hardships, pains, and concerns associated with a specific social issue, which invokes potential donors' inner desire to help sufferers (Jancenelle et al., 2018). Social narratives serve as a key source of information about the criticality of the social issue(s) that crowdfunding projects target. Previous crowdfunding studies have argued that social cues in narrative serve two important purposes. First, social cues can address information asymmetry by providing background information about a social project and explaining how the project can improve people's lives. Second, they can induce empathy with the needy (Van Teunenbroek, 2016; Heon et al., 2019). These empathetic feelings generate a sense of responsibility toward human beings, which translates into altruistic motivation (Klimecki et al., 2016). Thus, theoretically and empirically, social linguistic narratives are strongly linked with potential donors' altruistic motivation (Berns et al., 2020; Rama et al., 2022). Based on the above discussion, we hypothesize:

H1a: A crowdfunding campaign with a social linguistic narrative has a stronger positive influence on donors' altruistic motivation than a crowdfunding campaign without a social linguistic narrative.

While prior studies acknowledge the influence of social linguistic narration on donors' behavior in a donation-based crowdfunding context, its effect across altruistic motivation's seven dimensions (i.e., pure altruism, warm glow, reluctant altruism, social responsibility, hedonism, reputation, and kinship) (Bekkers & Wiepking, 2011) likely lacks a uniform distribution. For example, social linguistic cues prove particularly effective at addressing donors' need to overcome negative emotions (distress or anxiety), a reaction aligned with the hedonistic motive (Ferguson & Lawrence, 2016). However, does not exclude other dimensions such as reputation building, which donors seek to enhance their public image and receive social recognition (Harbaugh, 1998).

Likewise, social linguistic cues in the entrepreneurial narratives likely induce both pure altruism and warm glow (Allison et al., 2013; Cappa et al., 2021). These narratives may also stimulate social responsibility and reluctant altruism where donors feel the moral obligation or pressure to act due to a perceived state of others' inaction (Bekkers & Wiepking, 2011).

Thereby, empathetic responses that social linguistic cues trigger can influence a multidimensional range of donor motivations that range from moral obligation to social gain and emotional fulfillment. Therefore, we hypothesize:

H1b: A social linguistic narrative has a positive influence on pure altruism.

H1c: A social linguistic narrative has a positive influence on warm glow.

H1d: A social linguistic narrative has a positive influence on reluctant altruism.

H1e: A social linguistic narrative has a positive influence on social responsibility.

H1f: A social linguistic narrative has a positive influence on hedonism.

H1g: A social linguistic narrative has a positive influence on reputation.

H1h: A social linguistic narrative has a positive influence on kinship.

3.2 Emotional Linguistic Narrative and Altruistic Motivation

Researchers believe that emotions are learned and controlled via social conventions. Based on an innate but limited tolerance for pain and pleasure, individuals' emotions are socially constituted. Thus, morality pertains to emotions as conventional morality predominantly determines an individual's emotional repertoire (De Sousa, 2001). When individuals encounter a socially disapproved act, they experience negative emotions such as guilt, sadness, and pain (Chang, 2014; Chen et al., 2021). To overcome distress, individuals engage in prosocial behavior. Supporting these claims, the literature on donation behavior suggests that others' suffering and trouble generate sadness and empathic emotions in people (Bennett, 2015; Albouy, 2017). Research in the business management domain has established a strong link between emotional persuasive appeal and the target audience's prosocial behavior, such as donation (Kemp et al., 2013; Majumdar & Bose, 2018). Literature on charity suggests that compelling stories that discuss a social problem and suffering emotionally engage potential donors, make them relate to the protagonist, and trigger negative emotions and empathy. Negative emotions such as sadness, anger, distress, and so on appear universally across charitable appeals (Vitaglione & Barnett, 2003; Hibbert et al., 2007). They are one of the most effective instruments to invoke altruistic motivation to donate because people can earn an emotional reward and fulfill their need to reduce negative emotions by helping others (Merchant, 2010; Chen et al., 2021). Thus, emotional reward serves as the main force behind the altruistic motivation to help the needy (Chang, 2014). Recent studies on donation crowdfunding have also supported the view that emotional linguistic narration that describes distress constitutes an instrumental force behind donors' motivation to help fund seekers (Majumdar & Bose, 2018; Chen et al., 2021). Hence, past research findings suggest that compelling emotional narrations, which reflect others' suffering and pain, can take potential donors through an emotional journey that leads to altruistic motivation. Though correlated, social and emotional linguistic narratives differ theoretically in terms of their construction and orientation. Social linguistic narratives have an external orientation and focus on collective issues, social responsibility, and moral obligation. These narratives rely on presenting community-level concerns in a way that highlights shared values and obligations (Jancenelle et al., 2018). In contrast, emotional linguistic narratives have an internal orientation and focus on affective expressions (sadness, anger, or empathy), and thereby, focus on influencing potential donors' emotional state (Hibbert et al., 2007; Chen et al., 2021).

Based on the above arguments, we hypothesize:

H2a: A crowdfunding campaign with an emotional linguistic narrative has a stronger positive influence on donors' altruistic motivation than a crowdfunding campaign without an emotional linguistic narrative.

As we discussed earlier, individual character and one's inherent capacity for pain and pleasure influence emotions despite their socially constituted nature. Thereby, both individual nature and social norms drive emotional responses (Lopes et al., 2005). In the context of charitable giving, individual expression and perception also determine the link between emotions and altruistic motivation. Hence, it becomes difficult to decide whether emotionally driven motivation is purely altruistic or whether it combines multiple altruistic motives.

Research has attributed the key factor behind altruistic motivation to pursuing an emotional reward—either the internal satisfaction from doing good or a sense of relief from distress from witnessing others' suffering (De Sousa, 2001). Even if a donor expresses a genuine willingness to help, the underlying emotional drive may include self-benefits such as reduced empathetic distress or self-gratification (Andreoni, 1990).

Considering the complexity of donor motivations, empathetic responses that emotional linguistic cues trigger likely also influence altruistic motivation's different dimensions (i.e., from pure altruism to kinship-based motives) in a different manner.

Therefore, we hypothesize:

H2b: An emotional linguistic narrative has a positive influence on pure altruism.

H2c: An emotional linguistic narrative has a positive influence on warm glow.

- H2d:** An emotional linguistic narrative has a positive influence on reluctant altruism.
- H2e:** An emotional linguistic narrative has a positive influence on social responsibility.
- H2f:** An emotional linguistic narrative has a positive influence on hedonism.
- H2g:** An emotional linguistic narrative has a positive influence on reputation.
- H2h:** An emotional linguistic narrative has a positive influence on kinship.

3.3 Religious Linguistic Narrative and Altruistic Motivation

The social science literature suggests that each global religion has institutionalized instruments to promote donation and propagate collective efforts to support and help the needy in society (Jackson et al., 1995; Teah et al., 2014). Although the tradition of helping others and charity practices may vary across religions, all global religions nurture altruistic ties through donation. Religious messages strongly emphasize trust-based selfless giving, sacrifice, and prosocial behavior (Emmons & Paloutzian, 2003). For instance, in the Islamic context, the donation practices may vary from directly helping the needy (e.g., Infaq, Sadaqa) to charitable giving in general for overall social welfare (e.g., waqf) (Ismail et al., 2013). Likewise, in Hinduism, people subscribe to donation as a practice of virtue. Broadly speaking, donation in Hinduism comes in two forms: “Dana”, which refers to charity that one person provides to a fixed number of beneficiaries, and “Utsarga”, which refers to donations to the general public (Agarwal, 2010). Although religiosity may represent a factor in why people make donations, people develop their religious expressions through a common language of social institutions (Einolf, 2011). Each religion encourages its proponents to be cooperative, generous, and sensitive to the underprivileged in society and, thus, promotes altruistic motives (Brodman, 2009).

Therefore, we hypothesize:

- H3a:** A crowdfunding campaign with a religious linguistic narrative has a stronger positive influence on donors' altruistic motivation than a crowdfunding campaign without a religious linguistic narrative.

Donation-based crowdfunding perfectly aligns with the religious ethos of selfless cooperation, generosity, and solidarity in supporting people in need. Religious cues in crowdfunding narratives emphasize moral responsibility and communal duty, which sensitizes individuals to their spiritual and selfless social obligations to society (Zheng & Jiang, 2022). Religious linguistic cues, when incorporated in crowdfunding appeals, promote a sense of selfless religious duty towards the needy.

Empirical studies show that religious persuasiveness can effectively invoke altruistic motivations, especially among individuals who respond to religious appeals (Lim & MacGregor, 2012). Religious texts and appeals advocate the value of charitable giving both as a social virtue and as a spiritually rewarding act connected with reward in the afterlife. For example, Emmons and Paloutzian (2003) highlight how most global religions rely on altruistic motives linked with the afterlife, which accounts for the good and bad deeds that people perform in their lifetime. In Hinduism, for instance, “Dana” (donation) is linked with “Punya Karma” (meritorious deeds), where giving is seen as a way for a better rebirth (Majumdar, 2015). These religious propositions suggest that religious cues likely lead to both pure altruism and pseudo-altruism in combination, such that the act of giving serves both spiritual and emotional goals.

Hence, while prior studies affirm the positive impact of religious narrative on altruistic behaviors, existing studies have not fully explored its effect on altruistic motivation's dimensions. Considering the spiritual, emotional, and social aspects of religious appeals, we can expect that religious linguistic narratives will impact the various dimensions of altruistic motivation. Therefore, we hypothesize:

- H3b:** A religious linguistic narrative has a positive influence on pure altruism.
- H3c:** A religious linguistic narrative has a positive influence on warm glow.
- H3d:** A religious linguistic narrative has a positive influence on reluctant altruism.
- H3e:** A religious linguistic narrative has a positive influence on social responsibility.
- H3f:** A religious linguistic narrative has a positive influence on hedonism.
- H3g:** A religious linguistic narrative has a positive influence on reputation.
- H3h:** A religious linguistic narrative has a positive influence on kinship.

3.4 Altruistic Motivation and Donation Intention

According to the theory of planned behavior, behavioral intention represents an individual's cognitive state of readiness to perform a specific behavior (Ajzen, 1991; Ali et al., 2018). Researchers consider behavioral intention to strongly predict actual behavior. In the donation crowdfunding context, we can understand behavioral intention to donate as a potential donor's cognitive expression of willingness to donate through crowdfunding platforms (Prashar & Gupta, 2023). Much donation behavior research has focused on altruistic motivation, and crowdfunding research constitutes no exception (Wildman & Hollingsworth, 2009; Thomas et al., 2021). While crowdfunding studies in other contexts, such as equity-based or reward-based investments, suggest that the expectation that people primarily donate for personal gain (Lukkarinen et al., 2016; Bretschneider & Leimeister, 2017), donation crowdfunding studies argue for altruistic motivation as the key motivation behind donation intentions since charity to help the needy lies at the heart of altruism (Choy & Schlagwein, 2016; Gleasure & Feller, 2016). For instance, Moorlock et al. (2018) found that solidarity, empathy, and compassion (key indicators of altruistic motivation) stimulated potential donors' intention to donate organs. Therefore, it would be useful to examine the altruistic motivation–behavioral intention link. The relevance of this inquiry emanates from the literature on altruistic motivation and donation behavior (Warneken & Tomasello, 2009). Research suggests that donors' motivation to help the needy varies according to the ease with which they can escape from an emotion-eliciting situation (Batson, 1987; Batson et al., 2015). Donors with egoistic motivations help the needy only when they face a difficult escape from an emotion-elicited situation. Simply put, they help others only when they fail to overcome the distress and negative emotions that others' suffering generates (Chang & Lee, 2011). Grounded in the theoretical and empirical arguments, it is plausible to believe that altruistic motivation will have a positive impact on donors' behavioral intention to donate because they may not find a way to escape from the negative emotions that crowdfunding narratives generate. To verify these claims, we hypothesize:

H4: Altruistic motivation positively impacts donors' intention to donate.

Figure 1 shows the study's conceptual model.

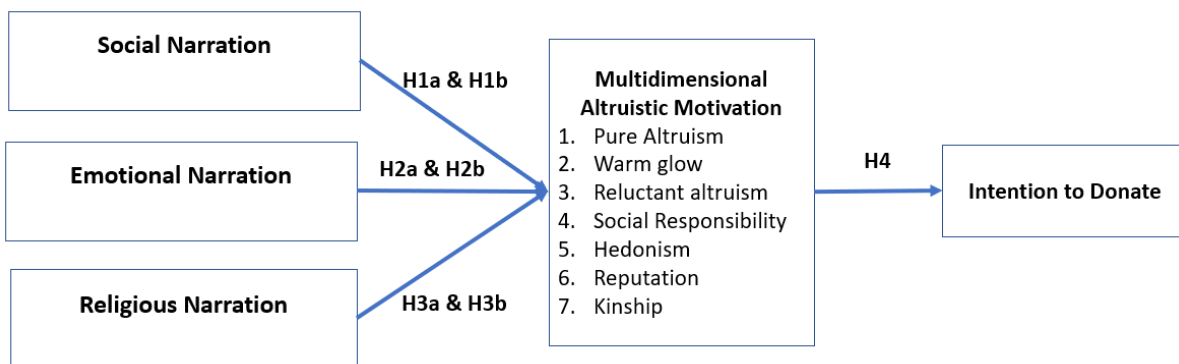


Figure 1. Conceptual Model

4 Methods

4.1 Experimental Design

We conducted a laboratory experiment to test how a fundraiser's narrative (emotional, social, or religious donation appeal) impacts potential donors' altruistic motivation to donate. We designed four old-age home crowdfunding webpages for the experiment (emotional, social, religious, and no-narrative webpages) (see Figures C1-C4 in Appendix C). Based on popular existing crowdfunding websites such as Impactguru¹ and Simplygiving², we designed the webpages for a fictional non-government organization (NGO) named "A Good Cause". We depicted this NGO as involved in helping social organizations and non-profit fundraisers in launching crowdfunding campaigns that cater to the housing, socializing, psychological, and healthcare needs of elderly people whose families abandoned them. We showed the NGO as running a crowdfunding

¹ See <https://www.impactguru.com>

² See <https://www.simplygiving.com/nonprofit/cambodiancharityorg>

campaign to finance the construction of an old-age home in India because the existing old-age home, “Kutumb”, lacked space for more than 15 elders. We noted that the NGO needed INR 8.5 million in total and had accumulated only INR 3.5 million till now. So, the crowdfunding campaign hoped to raise the remaining amount (i.e., INR 5 million).

The webpages included various elements to strengthen the experiment’s validity and reliability (Prashar & Gupta, 2023). To ensure internal validity, we established experimental controls via choosing specific factors (i.e., webpage features and associated factor levels). We also created highly contextualized webpages. We established the experiment’s reliability by evaluating the webpages’ practicability with five academicians and five practitioners and by using a sufficiently large, stratified sample of respondents.

4.2 Variable Manipulations

We used a laboratory experimental approach since we could assess the impact of webpage features on donation intention. We manipulated three types of narratives on the webpage: social, emotional, and religious narratives. We created four webpages with social, emotional, religious, and no narratives. In this way, we had three comparisons: 1) social narrative and no narrative, 2) emotional narrative and no narrative, and 3) religious narrative and no narrative. The no-narrative webpage contained information about the fundraiser, the NGO, the old age home, the total amount to be raised, the amount raised till now, and the number of supporters. The other webpages contained additional information.

4.2.1 Manipulation for Social Narrative

The webpage with a social narrative portrayed additional information on the abandoned older people as a serious problem in society. We asked the participants to respond to the following manipulation check item, which we adapted from Khan et al. (2022), on a five-point scale (1: strongly disagree and 5: strongly agree): “I feel that the fundraiser believed that helping the abandoned elderly people was a social duty”.

4.2.2 Manipulation for Emotional Narrative

The webpage with an emotional narrative included additional information about the story of a 75-year-old woman whose only son abandoned her. The woman was found sobbing by the side of the road, and a few local residents helped her to an old-age home. We asked the participants to respond to the following manipulation check item, which we adapted from Majumdar and Bose (2018), on a five-point scale (1: strongly disagree and 5: strongly agree): “I feel that the fundraiser was emotional about helping the abandoned elderly people”.

4.2.3 Manipulation for Religious Narrative

Apart from information about the fundraiser, the NGO, the old age home, the total amount to be raised, the amount raised till now, and the number of supporters, the webpage with the religious narrative also presented “Seva” as one of the biggest religious duties in all religions. It described Seva as a selfless act that aims to protect, help, and provide for needy people. We asked the participants to respond to the following manipulation check item, which we adapted from Anglin et al. (2023), on a five-point scale (1: strongly disagree and 5: strongly agree): “I feel that the fundraiser believed that helping the abandoned elderly people was a religious duty”.

4.3 Measurement Scales and Data Collection

Our research model (see Figure 1) comprised latent constructs for altruistic motivation and intention to donate. Altruistic motivation comprised seven dimensions: pure altruism, warm glow, reluctant altruism, social responsibility, hedonism, reputation, and kinship. We adapted the measurement items for these constructs from existing studies (e.g., Steele et al., 2008; Ferguson et al., 2012) and modified them to suit the study’s context. The measurement items used a five-point Likert scale that ranged from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). We asked five academics to review these items and made suitable modifications based on their suggestions. In this way, we ensured content validity.

Further, we conducted a pilot study using the data that we collected from 80 participants. We performed the factor analysis and reliability test on this data. We did not delete any items after factor analysis as the loading of every item on its corresponding construct exceeded 0.5 (Hair et al., 2010). Additionally, Cronbach’s alpha value for both constructs exceeded 0.7, which is acceptable (Nunnally, 1978). Thus, we finalized our survey instrument (see Table A1 in Appendix A).

We tested the model with the data collected from 173 students (males = 92; females = 81) in an executive management program in India. These candidates had to have a minimum of two years' work experience, which indicated that they had personal income in the past. They also had to have prior donation experience with the crowdfunding platform. We show the participants' demographic profile in Table B1 in Appendix B. While collecting the data, we ensured participants that their identities would remain anonymous. We randomly assigned participants to one of the four scenarios (social, emotional, religious, and no narratives) and exposed them to the respective webpage. After going through the webpage, we provided them with a link to the online survey. We collected the data during April 2023. We collected 55, 40, 39, and 39 responses for social, emotional, religious, and no narration webpages, respectively. After collecting the data, we gave the participants an e-gift card worth INR 500 (US\$6.06 dollars) as compensation (Chan & Saqib, 2018).

5 Results

5.1 Manipulation Checks

To assess the manipulation checks' significance level, we used the independent sample t-test results (Hair et al., 2010). The test outcomes specified that a significant difference existed between the groups for manipulation checks for social narrative ($M_{high} = 4.31$, $SD = 0.471$ vs. $M_{low} = 2.24$, $SD = 0.872$; $t_{53} = 10.75^{***}$), emotional narrative ($M_{high} = 4.47$, $SD = 0.514$ vs. $M_{low} = 2.13$, $SD = 0.869$; $t_{38} = 9.879^{***}$), and religious narrative ($M_{high} = 4.63$, $SD = 0.496$ vs. $M_{low} = 2.00$, $SD = 0.858$; $t_{37} = 11.642^{***}$).

5.2 Validation of Measurement Model

We used SmartPLS 4 to validate the measurement model. We tested construct reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. As Table 1 shows, Cronbach's alpha exceeded 0.7, which indicates acceptable construct reliability (Nunnally, 1978). We established convergent validity as the average variance extracted (AVE) values exceeded 0.5 (Hair et al., 2010). Furthermore, we established discriminant validity (see Table 2) as the square root value of the AVE of both constructs exceeded the inter-construct correlation value (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). We further established discriminant validity as the heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratio did not surpass 0.9 (Henseler et al., 2015).

Table 1. Reliability and Convergent Validity OF Constructs

	Cronbach's alpha	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Intention to donate	0.838	0.757
Altruistic motivation	0.907	0.650

Table 2. Discriminant Validity of Constructs

	Intention to donate	Altruistic motivation
Intention to donate	<i>0.870</i>	0.597
Altruistic motivation	0.546	<i>0.806</i>

Note that the diagonal values in the table represent the square root of the average variance extracted (AVE) for each construct. The value above the diagonal indicates heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT), while the value below the diagonal shows the inter-construct correlation.

5.3 Hypotheses Testing

We used the structural equation modeling (SEM) approach to test the research model's path relationship. We used SmartPLS 4 to perform the SEM. We also assessed the model fit based on the collected data. We found the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) value to be 0.07, which indicates model fit as its acceptable value ranges between 0 and 0.08 (Henseler et al., 2016). We calculated the path coefficient and the coefficient of determination (R²) to evaluate the path model (Chin & Newsted, 1999). The R² value indicates the research model's capacity to explicate the variation in the dependent variable. We found the R² value to be 0.304. The significance level of the path coefficient indicates support for a hypothesis or not.

Altruistic motivation's significant and positive impact on the intention to donate ($\beta = 0.546$, $p < 0.001$) supports H4.

Furthermore, as the data did not follow a normal distribution, we performed non-parametric tests. A Kruskal-Wallis H test indicated a statistically significant difference in motivation scores across the four narrative types ($\chi^2(3, N = 173) = 22.415$, $p < 0.001$). Thereafter, we conducted the Mann-Whitney U test for pairwise comparisons. This test showed that the social narrative group was significantly more altruistically motivated than the no-narrative group ($p = 0.004$), which supports H1a. The emotional narrative group did not significantly differ from the no-narrative group ($p = 0.287$), which does not support H2a. The religious narrative group was statistically significantly more altruistically motivated than the no-narrative group ($p < 0.001$), which supports H3a.

Table 3. Results for H1a, H2a, and H3a

Hypotheses	Result
Social narration (H1a)	Supported (mean rank of social = 54.32; mean rank of no narration = 37.88; $p = 0.004$; Mann-Whitney U = 697.500; $Z = -2.879$)
Emotional narration (H2a)	Not supported (mean rank of emotional = 42.71; mean rank of no narration = 37.22; $p = 0.287$; Mann-Whitney U = 671.500; $Z = -1.065$)
Religious narration (H3a)	Supported (mean rank of religious = 48.73; mean rank of no narration = 30.27; $p < 0.001$; Mann-Whitney U = 400.500; $Z = -3.601$)

We further conducted the Kruskal-Wallis H test to assess H1b–H1h, H2b–H2h, and H3b–H3h that addressed the effects of narrations (social, emotional, and religious) on altruistic motivation's seven dimensions as compared to no narration. We found a statistically significant difference between groups for all the dimensions (see Table 4).

Table 4. Results: Between Groups on Motivation Dimensions

Motivation dimension	χ^2	Significance
Pure altruism	20.632	0.000
Warm glow	21.201	0.000
Reluctant altruism	10.866	0.012
Social responsibility	19.082	0.000
Hedonism	25.126	0.000
Reputation	29.422	0.000
Kinship	12.842	0.005

We performed the Mann-Whitney U test for pairwise comparisons. Table 5 shows that the social narrative group had a stronger positive influence than the no-narrative group on all dimensions except reputation and kinship. The emotional narrative group had a stronger positive influence than the no-narrative group on pure altruism, reluctant altruism, and kinship. Lastly, the religious narrative group had a stronger positive influence than the no-narrative group on six dimensions: pure altruism, warm glow, reluctant altruism, social responsibility, hedonism, and kinship.

Table 6 summarizes the stronger influence of religious, social, and emotional narratives on motivation's various dimensions in the crowdfunding context. We found that the religious narrative consistently established a stronger influence on altruistic dimensions (both pure and pseudo-altruistic) in comparison to the emotional narrative, such as pure altruism, warm glow, social responsibility, hedonism, and reputation. In the same way, the religious narrative also exerted an overall stronger impact than the social narrative on pure altruism, warm glow, social responsibility, hedonism, and kinship. In addition, social narrative established a stronger influence than emotional narrative for hedonism and reputation. Interestingly, we found that narrative type did not impact reluctant altruism across these comparisons.

Table 5. Results for H1b–H1h, H2b–H2h, and H3b–H3h

Motivation dimension	Social narration (H1b-H1h)	Emotional narration (H2b-H2h)	Religious narration (H3b-H3h)
Pure altruism	H1b supported (mean rank of social = 54.3; mean rank of no narration = 37.91; $p = 0.004$; Mann-Whitney $U = 698.5$)	H2b supported (mean rank of emotional = 45.24; mean rank of no narration = 34.63; $p = 0.038$; Mann-Whitney $U = 570.5$)	H3b supported (mean rank of religious = 49.55; mean rank of no narration = 29.45; $p = 0.000$; Mann-Whitney $U = 368.5$)
Warm glow	H1c supported (mean rank of social = 53.2; mean rank of no narration = 39.46; $p = 0.015$; Mann-Whitney $U = 759$)	H2c not supported (mean rank of emotional = 42.14; mean rank of no narration = 37.81; $p = 0.398$; Mann-Whitney $U = 694.5$)	H3c supported (mean rank of religious = 48.42; mean rank of no narration = 30.58; $p = 0.000$; Mann-Whitney $U = 412.5$)
Reluctant altruism	H1d supported (mean rank of social = 53.54; mean rank of no narration = 38.99; $p = 0.01$; Mann-Whitney $U = 740.5$)	H2d supported (mean rank of emotional = 46.44; mean rank of no narration = 33.4; $p = 0.011$; Mann-Whitney $U = 522.5$)	H3d supported (mean rank of religious = 46.38; mean rank of no narration = 32.62; $p = 0.007$; Mann-Whitney $U = 492$)
Social responsibility	H1e supported (mean rank of social = 53.38; mean rank of no narration = 39.21; $p = 0.012$; Mann-Whitney $U = 749$)	H2e not supported (mean rank of emotional = 42.18; mean rank of no narration = 37.77; $p = 0.39$; Mann-Whitney $U = 693$)	H3e supported (mean rank of religious = 48.37; mean rank of no narration = 30.63; $p = 0.000$; Mann-Whitney $U = 414.5$)
Hedonism	H1f supported (mean rank of social = 55.27; mean rank of no narration = 36.54; $p = 0.001$; Mann-Whitney $U = 645$)	H2f not supported (mean rank of emotional = 42.93; mean rank of no narration = 37; $p = 0.247$; Mann-Whitney $U = 663$)	H3f supported (mean rank of religious = 49.56; mean rank of no narration = 29.44; $p = 0.000$; Mann-Whitney $U = 368$)
Reputation	H1g not supported (mean rank of social = 50.85; mean rank of no narration = 42.77; $p = 0.154$; Mann-Whitney $U = 888$)	H2g not supported (mean rank of emotional = 31.09; mean rank of no narration = 49.14; $p = 0.000$; Mann-Whitney $U = 423.5$)	H3g not supported (mean rank of religious = 42.97; mean rank of no narration = 36.03; $p = 0.173$; Mann-Whitney $U = 625$)
Kinship	H1h not supported (mean rank of social = 51.65; mean rank of no narration = 41.65; $p = 0.076$; Mann-Whitney $U = 844.5$)	H2h supported (mean rank of emotional = 45.83; mean rank of no narration = 34.03; $p = 0.021$; Mann-Whitney $U = 547$)	H3h supported (mean rank of religious = 47.06; mean rank of no narration = 31.94; $p = 0.003$; Mann-Whitney $U = 465.5$)

6 Discussion and Implications

Academic research on the link between linguistic styles in fundraisers' narratives and potential donors' altruistic motivation remains in its nascence and is almost entirely non-existent in the donation crowdfunding context (Khurana, 2021). To help fill this gap, we conducted an experimental study in which we assumed the multidimensional view of altruism to understand how a fundraiser's narrative affects a potential donors' intention to donate by provoking altruistic motivation in general and its seven dimensions in particular. Our findings should prove informative and insightful for fundraisers, crowdfunding platform designers, and scholars. In the co-donation crowdfunding context, this study explains how linguistic narrative styles (social, emotional, and religious) may bring a change in potential donors' mixed altruistic motives (pure and pseudo-altruistic motives) on the altruistic–egoistic continuum, which may ultimately affect potential donors' intention to donate.

First, our results confirm a significant difference between potential donors' altruistic motivation depending on their experimental group. Notably, we found that experimental groups with religious and social narratives significantly differed from the control group (H1a, H3a accepted) while the experimental group with the emotional narrative did not (H2a rejected). While our results support claims in previous work on charity giving that social and religious appeals that emphasize social problems and helping and selfless giving rest at the core of target audience's religious propositions (Alison et al., 2015; Renko et al., 2019; Rama et al., 2022), we did not find support for scholarly contentions that emotional messages that convey people's suffering influence donor's altruistic motivation (Sukalla et al., 2017). This phenomenon depicts psychic numbing, a psychological state that describes how people "turn off" their feelings when exposed to people's suffering. An individual may initially feel empathy with sufferers, but, as they process emotional content,

their sensitivity may diminish and lead to apathy and inaction (Lifton, 1993). This state may arrive especially when individuals repeatedly encounter overwhelming emotional content. Consistent with some previous studies, these findings suggest that, if potential donors repeatedly see others' suffering, they may experience psychic numbing, which can result in less motivation to act (Slovic & Västfjäll, 2014; Breuner, 2019).

Table 6. Comparison of Influence among Narratives

Motivation dimension	Stronger influence		
	Religious vs. emotional	Social vs. emotional	Religious vs. social
Pure altruism	Religious (mean rank of religious = 46.96; mean rank of emotional = 33.21; $p = 0.007$; Mann-Whitney $U = 508.5$)	-	Religious (mean rank of religious = 56.28; mean rank of social = 41.27; $p = 0.008$; Mann-Whitney $U = 730$)
Warm glow	Religious (mean rank of religious = 49.23; mean rank of emotional = 31; $p = 0.000$; Mann-Whitney $U = 420$)	-	Religious (mean rank of religious = 57.53; mean rank of social = 40.39; $p = 0.002$; Mann-Whitney $U = 681.5$)
Reluctant altruism	-	-	-
Social responsibility	Religious (mean rank of religious = 48.63; mean rank of emotional = 31.59; $p = 0.001$; Mann-Whitney $U = 443.5$)	-	Religious (mean rank of religious = 56.69; mean rank of social = 40.98; $p = 0.005$; Mann-Whitney $U = 714$)
Hedonism	Religious (mean rank of religious = 49.29; mean rank of emotional = 30.94; $p = 0.000$; Mann-Whitney $U = 417.5$)	Social (mean rank of social = 53.38; mean rank of emotional = 40.60; $p = 0.024$; Mann-Whitney $U = 804$)	Religious (mean rank of religious = 55.54; mean rank of social = 41.80; $p = 0.015$; Mann-Whitney $U = 759$)
Reputation	Religious (mean rank of religious = 51.36; mean rank of emotional = 28.93; $p = 0.000$; Mann-Whitney $U = 337$)	Social (mean rank of social = 59.67; mean rank of emotional = 31.95; $p = 0.000$; Mann-Whitney $U = 458$)	-
Kinship	-	-	Religious (mean rank of religious = 55.83; mean rank of social = 41.59; $p = 0.012$; Mann-Whitney $U = 747.5$)

Additionally, we may explain the insignificant impact of emotional narratives through a phenomenon that neuroscience research has identified called “empathic distress fatigue”. This state refers to an individual's strong aversive response to others' suffering, which leads them to withdraw from a [what] situation and disconnect from sufferers. People adopt this behavior to protect themselves from irresistible negative feelings (Singer & Klimecki, 2014). In this sense, highly emotional narratives in fundraising campaigns may inadvertently induce affective distress in potential donors, which, rather than motivating prosocial action, becomes overwhelming and may lead to empathic distress fatigue (Klimecki, 2015). Donation crowd-fundraisers should note that, rather than consistently enhancing potential donors' altruistic motivation, emotional appeal may trigger psychic numbing if the appeal lacks focus and people cannot identify it. In the absence of meaningful personal resonance, emotional narratives may initially elicit empathy, but the effects may quickly diminish (Slovic & Västfjäll, 2014).

On the other hand, we found religious and social appeal in the fundraiser's narrative to evoke both pure and pseudo-altruistic motives by making the potential donors experience empathy with the needy and negative emotions such as shame, guilt, anxiety, and stress. People assuage such emotions through behavioral intention to donate for the identified cause (Rodrigue et al., 2014). These results support previous studies

that have suggested that fundraisers' narratives play an instrumental role in crowdfunding projects' success (e.g., Sukalla et al., 2017; Rama et al., 2022). Donation crowd-fundraisers should note that narratives may prove even more useful because popular tools (e.g., compelling business plans, informativeness, interactivity, etc.) ineffectively evoke potential donors' altruistic motivation, which lies at the heart of charity-giving behavior (Cumming & Johan, 2019). However, note that narratives induce both pure and pseudo-altruistic motives, and, therefore, potential donors strive to enhance positive emotions and reduce negative emotions by donating to the cause presented in the narratives. Consequently, narration should explain how individual donors' contributions, regardless of their size, would help the fundraiser or the needy address the problem that the narration presents. Explaining the impact of an individual's donation and information about the final outcome completes the story, and the potential donor attains the pure and pseudo-altruistic goals behind donation intention. However, crafting a compelling, credible, and emotionally balanced story can prove quite challenging. A poorly constructed narrative may backfire by appearing manipulative. As we discussed above, emotional narratives may also lead to psychic numbing or empathic distress fatigue if overused. Cultural diversities present another potential challenge. Emotional narratives that resonate in one cultural or social context may not evoke the same altruistic responses in another.

Next, our analysis explains how linguistic styles in a fundraiser's narration work in the multidimensional space of donors' altruistic motivation in the donation crowdfunding context. We found distinct motivational patterns in the experimental groups and the control group. Thus, we propose that linguistic styles in a crowd fundraiser's narrative significantly impact the mixed altruistic motives, reflecting their expectations of the good deed. While those individuals who are motivated to donate for altruistic motives expect a change in the life of the needy through their contribution/donation, their counterparts expect that their good deeds will benefit them in the long or short run (Nowak, 2006). While the experiment groups exposed to social, emotional, and religious narratives showed significant differences in the impact of narratives on pure altruistic motives, linguistic styles in the narratives had distinct impacts on five pseudo-altruistic motives. The religious narrative provided a pseudo-altruism model, which suggests that religious messages have a substantial impact on potential donors' impure altruistic motives except for one motive (i.e., reputation). These findings indicate that potential donors motivated by religious narratives intend to donate with two broad motives: 1) to help the needy without selfish (altruistic motivation) and 2) to donate with selfish motives for personal benefits (egoistic motivation) (Konrath & Handy, 2018) (e.g., for emotional gain (warm glow), for internal satisfaction (social responsibility), to reduce negative emotions such as distrust (hedonism), or for concern for family and friends' wellbeing (kinship)). Our findings support previous studies that have found that concern for one's own well-being in one's current life and afterlife predominantly motivates the prosocial actions that individuals take based on religious commitment rather than empathy for the sufferers or social cause (Furrow et al., 2004; Jamal et al., 2019). Donation fundraisers should note religious linguistics in narratives to evoke egoistic motives along with pure altruistic motives. Potential donors may be strongly motivated to donate by self-focused concerns for personal well-being (egoistic motivation) rather than purely selfless motives for the public good (pure altruistic motivation). However, notable barriers can prevent fundraisers from using religious narration in donation crowdfunding. For instance, some jurisdictions and platforms do not allow fundraising narratives with heavily loaded religious content, which limits how they can apply such narratives. Moreover, striking an appropriate balance between religious and secular language adds complexity to message design as fundraisers must ensure inclusivity without diluting the intended persuasive impact.

From analyzing the three experiment groups, we found that, although the three linguistic styles examined in this study impacted both pure and pseudo-altruistic motives, emotional linguistics in narrative influenced the least number of pseudo-altruistic motives (only reluctant altruism and kinship) to help the needy, while social linguistics supported four pseudo-altruistic motives. Thus, emotional linguistic style shows a better pure-altruism pattern in the donation crowdfunding context. Findings suggest that potential donors motivated by emotional appeals will likely help the needy at a personal cost, which may be higher than personal gains. Corroborating what the empathy–altruism relationship proposes (Batson & Powell, 2003), our analysis suggests that emotional linguistics that describe distress generate empathy and offer an emotional reward, which works as the main force behind pure altruistic motivation (altruism) with very few self-interest motives to help (egoistic/pseudo-altruistic motives) the needy (Chang, 2014). On the other hand, social and religious linguistics as a stimulus operate more for pseudo-altruistic motives than pure-altruistic motives on the altruistic–egoistic continuum. Thus, results confirm that individuals motivated by social, emotional, and religious appeals show different levels of empathy for the needy, which strongly relates to altruistic motivation (Griffin et al., 1993). So far as pseudo-altruistic motives are concerned, social and religious narratives are likely to generate stronger self-interest motives for donation than emotional

narratives. Specifically, religious narrations positively influenced almost all pseudo-altruistic motives and, thus, produced altruism dominated by egoistic motives. The key motive to donate could be individuals' aspiration to accrue karmic rewards or alleviate personal distress. Additionally, the between-group analysis indicated that religious narration had the overall strongest impact on all altruistic-motivation dimensions (pure and pseudo-altruistic motives) followed by social narration. These distinct motivational patterns indicate that donation fundraisers should be careful about the linguistics they use in their narratives because excessive religious linguistics, though it can produce the strongest influence, may produce mixed altruistic motivation where egoistic motives outweigh pure altruistic motives. Given the varying impacts of emotional, social, and religious narratives on altruistic versus egoistic motives, one faces inherently challenges in designing a message that resonates broadly with diverse potential donors. Effectively segmenting and personalizing crowdfunding campaigns demand resources and technical capacity that smaller fundraisers may lack. Furthermore, developing narratives that inspire altruism without unintentionally triggering predominantly egoistic motives requires considerable expertise, which poses an additional resource constraint for fundraisers.

Furthermore, we found a strong association between altruistic motivation level and potential donors' donation intentions (H4 accepted), which indicates that altruistic motivation strongly predicts donors' willingness to participate in charitable drives through crowdfunding platforms. These results corroborate findings from many previous studies that altruism predicts an individual's donation behavior. For instance, Khalaila (2013), Milaniak et al. (2018), and Dopelt et al. (2022) reported similar results in their studies on behavioral intention to donate in offline settings. They found that respondents' altruism levels had a strong correlation with their willingness to help the needy. Fundraisers can use these findings to help their prosocial projects succeed. Efforts should be made to invoke potential donors' altruistic motives, which, in turn, will likely lead to desirable donation behavior through strengthening the willingness to donate. However, fundraisers should take care when choosing a linguistic style, as we found that linguistic styles play a critical role in altruistic motivation. While altruistic motivation strongly predicts donation intention, crowdfunding platforms may not allow sufficient flexibility in narrative styles. Thus, it limits fundraisers' ability to optimize altruism-based appeals.

We summarize our study's limitations and implications in Table 7.

Table 7. Implications for Fundraisers and Potential Donors

Narration style	Limitations/challenges	Implications for fundraisers	Implications for potential donors
Social Narration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May evoke mixed altruistic motives where pseudo-altruistic motives dominate pure altruistic motives • May appeal to individuals with a strong social identity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exhibit hardships, pains, and concerns associated with a specific social issue • Effectiveness may vary based on an individual's social identification 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Align personal values with societal contribution and realistic impact • Be cautious that it may evoke both pure and pseudo-altruistic motives, leading to self-interested giving masked as pure altruism
Religious Narration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May provoke mixed altruistic motives where pseudo-altruistic (egoistic) motives outweigh pure altruistic motives • May work better with only secular donors who hold spiritual or moral belief systems that integrate giving as a moral duty or a path to personal salvation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasize karmic outcomes, duty, moral obligation, and spiritual wellbeing • Highlight emotional rewards and moral responsibility in the narration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflect on pseudo (egoistic) and pure altruistic motivations • Be cautious of personal bias toward selfish motives (egoistic motivation) over selfless motives to help the needy
Emotional Narrations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Abstract appeal and repeated exposure may lead to psychic numbing, resulting in apathy and inaction • Least impact on pseudo-altruistic motives in comparison to social and religious narration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on distress, empathy, and the immediate suffering of identifiable individuals • Avoid abstract or overly intense emotional overload 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluate whether emotional appeal is empathetic or manipulative • Attend to narratives that express authentic need and distress

7 Conclusion and Limitations

We conducted a study to examine how fundraisers' narrative (emotional, social, or religious donation appeal) impacts potential donors' altruistic motivation to donate. We also assessed the impact of these narratives on seven different dimensions of potential donors' altruistic motivation. We found that all three narrative groups differed significantly from no narrative group on altruistic motivation's seven dimensions. We also found that altruistic motivation leads to donation intention. Thus, the present study contributes to the crowdfunding literature by providing a holistic view of different types of narratives and their impact on altruistic motivation and its seven dimensions.

Like any other study, ours has some limitations. First, we measured the intention to donate, not participants' actual behavior. Hence, we suggest that researchers should conduct longitudinal studies in the future and measure participants' actual behavior. Second, our participants had prior donation experience on crowdfunding platforms. Therefore, one cannot generalize our results to individuals without prior donation experience on crowdfunding platforms. Hence, we suggest that future experimental studies perform a statistical comparison between models for subjects with donation experience and without donation experience and assess the significant variation in the results. Third, we manipulated the fundraisers' narratives to observe their impact on donors' altruistic motivation to donate. Future research can also manipulate platform-specific features (e.g., rules, quality, security, etc.) and investigate the interaction effect of narratives and platform features on altruistic motivation. Fourth, we focused only on a crowdfunding campaign that sought assistance to construct an old-age home in India. However, multiple crowdfunding projects exist that seek donations for other social issues (e.g., orphanages, healthcare, etc.). Hence, future experimental research could focus on such social issues. Fifth, we focused on emotional, social, and religious linguistic styles due to their importance in real-world donation appeals. However, other linguistic attributes such as text length, tone, and readability can also affect donors' motivation. Hence, future researchers could investigate the impact of these linguistic attributes to gain comprehensive insights. Sixth, our study sample comprised executive management students predominantly between 23 and 30 years old in a single cultural context (India). This sample limits our ability to generalize our findings. Thus, future researchers should replicate similar experimental studies across differing age groups, socioeconomic status, and geographical settings to explore whether our findings apply in other contexts and uncover how cultural norms can affect the relationship between narrative styles and altruistic motivations. Seventh, the cultural context of India, with its shared religious and social values, may have influenced the perceived impact of religious or social appeals in the narratives. Hence, researchers could also conduct similar studies in different countries to provide variations in altruistic motivation based on the donors' culture. Finally, our results indicate differential effects of religious, social, and emotional linguistic styles on altruistic motivation. However, the relative strength of their influence may depend on the additional factors that we do not capture in this study. The impact of one linguistic style over another may vary across audiences, causes, or platforms. Hence, one should not generalize these outcomes beyond the present study without further investigation.

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Appendix A: Constructs and Measurement Items

Table A1. Constructs and Measurement Items

Construct	Items	Source*
Behaviorial Intention	There is a high probability that I would donate money for this old age construction project through this crowdfunding platform	Baber (2022)
	I strongly intend to support this social service crowdfunding project by donating money	
	I have planned to donate money through crowdfunding platforms to support social project in the near future	
Pure Altruism	I try to work toward the well-being of society	Ferguson et al. (2012)
	It is important for me to help others	
	I think it is important to help the needy elderly people	
	I am very interested in helping others	
Warm Glow	I feel respected while helping abandoned elderly people because it shows my respect for elderly people	Boobalan et al. (2021)
	I have a sense of contributing to the well-being of humanity and the society	
	I feel like a responsible human being while helping the elderly people	
	I sense that I can live a peaceful life by helping the needy people in the society	
Reluctant Altruism	If the children or relatives of the abandoned elderly people don't take care of them, I feel I have to	Leygue et al. (2017)
	I can't trust other people to help the abandoned elderly people	
	Someone has to help the abandoned elderly people	
Social Responsibility	I believe that helping needy elderly people is a duty	Steele et al. (2008)
	I believe that I have a responsibility to help others	
	I wanted to help the needy people in the society	
	If I donate to the old age home, I would be fulfilling my duty toward the society	
Hedonism	Helping elderly people is truly a joy	Wu and Lau (2022)
	I help needy elderly people not because I have to but because I want to	
	I enjoy the pleasure of giving	
	Helping abandoned elderly people is truly like an escape	
Reputation	My colleagues would be more friendly towards me when they come to know about my donation to the old age home	Leygue et al. (2017)
	I think that demonstrating a commitment to the well-being of abandoned elderly people will be recognized	
	It would let me show my friends and family that I am a good person	
	I don't want to appear irresponsible to my family and friends	
Kinship	If I donate to the old age home, there is more of a chance that my close relatives will receive the help if they need it	Evans and Ferguson (2014)
	If I donate to the old age home, there is a high chance that elderly people in my family receive the benefit if they need it	
	I believe that kind produces kind for my family and friends	

Appendix B: Demographic Profile of Participants

Table B1. Demographic Profile of Participants

Category	Sample (N = 174)
Age (in years)	
23–26	61.49%
27–30	27.59%
>30	10.92%
Gender	
Male	53.45%
Female	46.55%
Work experience (in years)	
02	71.84%
05	20.69%
>8	7.47%

Appendix C: Webpages

The image shows a screenshot of a crowdfunding webpage. At the top, there is a navigation bar with the text 'A GOOD CAUSE' and a logo. Below this is a large photograph of a group of elderly people, some in traditional Indian attire, smiling and holding hands. Overlaid on the bottom of this photo is the text 'LET US SERVE THE ELDERLY PEOPLE'. Below the photo, there is a paragraph of text in Hindi, followed by a section titled 'About the Fundraiser and Project' which includes a smaller photo of people in a community setting. On the right side of the page, there is a 'Donate Now' button and a progress bar indicating that 50% of the goal has been reached. At the bottom of the page, there is a summary of the campaign: 'Let's us show the elderly people that we care', 'Total Amount of Money to be Raised: INR 55 Lakhs', 'Money Raised till now: INR 30 Lakhs', and 'Number of Supporters: 650'.

Figure C1. Social Narrative Webpage

A GOOD CAUSE

LET US SERVE THE ELDERLY PEOPLE

About the Fundraiser and Project

Having spent the last four years working in the social care field, I have always, a little bit, felt sorry that my biggest day in serving the elderly and helping them make most of their golden years is December 27th, and the support and help of my family and friends is what we need. "A Good Cause" is a charitable, social, financial, and health care organization that provides housing, medical, pharmaceutical, and healthcare needs of elderly people who are abandoned by their families.

The campaign of "A Good Cause" aims to support the construction of an old age home in Mysore, Karnataka. (If you ever in your life struggled to accommodate elderly, you have golden rule or been through half of their troubles. In many cases, this is by their own choice due to the ground for property, money, family, social, and so on. Their care in their old age home is always better and more comfortable than in their own homes. The elderly people who are abandoned by their families are often neglected and their needs are not met. They regularly use "A Good Cause" to help them with their needs, providing for them, and helping them with their health in the best of their ability. However, "A Good Cause" cannot accommodate more elderly people needing help. We need more space and a bigger facility. I have started the construction already. With your grace and assistance my family, volunteers and I have managed to get to INR 20 lacs. The total project cost would reach INR 50 lacs and hence the aim of this campaign is to raise the balance amount of INR 30 lacs.

Whenever you are in Karnataka you must visit Mysore and experience with them. It's a fulfilling experience. Help us build a larger and more comfortable home for our golden years.




Donate Now

INR 2,000.00 INR 10,000.00

Amount: **INR 2,000.00 INR**

Donate Now

Please support this campaign and let's together help transform the way the abandoned elderly residents of Karnataka enjoy their golden years. Please write an email to us at info@agoodcauseindia.com. We will contact you.

Let's us show the elderly people that we care

Total Amount of Money to be Raised: INR 55 Lakhs
 Money Raised till now: INR 30 Lakhs
 Number of Supporters: 650

Figure C4. No Narrative Webpage

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