

# Donors' self- and other-oriented motives for selecting charitable causes

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## Abstract

Millions of charities compete for charitable donations, yet the underlying factors influencing individuals' preferences for specific causes remain relatively poorly understood. Building upon the ongoing scholarly debate about whether charitable behaviors are more altruistically or egoistically motivated, this study employs a self and other orientation framework to explore the preferences captured in a community survey ( $N = 987$ ) to identify the various motivations relevant to donors' decision-making processes. Our study contributes significantly to our understanding of charitable cause selection. First, it uncovers diverse motives directly endorsed by donors, offering insight into the multifaceted factors influencing preferences. Second, it unveils distinctive constellations of motives related to self and other orientations, shedding light on the underlying drivers of charitable actions. Third, it delineates the impact of various identity motives on charitable preferences. Specifically, we find that self-oriented motives are associated with preferences for environmental and research causes, while other-oriented motives exhibit a strong link with preferences for housing and development causes. Additionally, a combination of self and other motives shapes preferences for health, social services, emergency, and international causes. This complex interplay highlights that prosocial behavior is susceptible to a plurality of motives and cannot be solely understood through a binary distinction of altruism versus egoism. The study also contributes to the broader understanding of the psychology of charitable giving and has implications for fundraising design in a competitive market.

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Millions of charities compete for public donations worldwide (NCCS, 2019). There are almost 60,000 registered charities and nonprofits in Australia (ACNC, 2022), over 180,000 in England and Wales (Charity Commission, 2022), and more than 1.5 million in the United States vying for donors' attention. Different people support different causes (Bennett, 2012), but we know little about why they support particular causes. Our study aims to address the research question: What motives influence individuals to support particular

charitable causes over others, and how do these motivations vary across different cause types?

Previous studies have shed light on the influence of various individual characteristics on donor preferences (Neumayr & Handy, 2019; Wiepking, 2010). However, our understanding of the specific factors that motivate individuals to support particular causes remains limited. Qualitative studies have provided preliminary insights, indicating that individuals' rationales for donating to their preferred charities encompass a range of self-oriented and other-oriented motivations (Chapman et al., 2020). Building upon this qualitative

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exploration, the present study adopts a quantitative approach to examine the relationship between different motives and the range of causes individuals are willing to support. Through our analysis, we provide evidence that the selection of charitable causes is underpinned by intricate motivational orientations that vary across different types of causes.

## 1.1 | Self and other orientations in charitable giving

Two broad orientations underlie people's motivation to give to charity: self-orientation and other-orientation. These orientations relate to concepts of egotism and altruism, respectively. Other-orientation refers to the altruistic concern donors have for the welfare of the recipients and includes motivations like awareness of need, altruism, efficacy, and empathy (Bekkers & Wiepking, 2011; Konrath & Handy, 2018; Sargeant & Woodliffe, 2007).

Self-orientation refers to more egoistic motivations based on self-interests; for example, seeking status, material benefits like tax rebates, hedonic satisfaction, or self-affirmation of 'goodness' (Arieli et al., 2009; Small & Cryder, 2016). Some self-orientations are social in nature. Donors sometimes give in order to restore a threatened group identity, improve their group image, or demonstrate their group's power over beneficiaries (Van Leeuwen, 2017; Van Leeuwen, 2007).

While some individuals are motivated by self-interest, others are motivated to contribute to social causes and help others. However, the importance of self-oriented versus other-oriented motivations may vary depending on individual traits such as personality or social norms (Ye et al., 2015).

The current understanding of the relative importance of self- and other-oriented motives for prosocial behavior is limited in two ways. First, these orientations have typically been used to understand whether people will give at all. We instead apply self/other orientations to the question of how people choose which causes to give to. Second, studies have typically examined self or other orientations or considered them in relation to the preference for a single charity. In this study, we instead acknowledge the complex and often conflicting motives that individuals may have for engaging in charitable behaviors (Dovidio et al., 2006) and consider multiple competing causes and multiple motives within and between causes.

## 1.2 | Choosing a cause: individual factors

A charitable cause is defined as the broad and overarching purpose that serves as the focus of a charitable organization's activities (ACNC, 2023). Sociodemographic characteristics of donors vary across causes. For example, women, highly educated individuals, and religious individuals tend to donate more to environmental causes (Casale & Baumann, 2015; Neumayr & Handy, 2019; Srnka et al., 2003). In contrast, animal welfare charities receive more funding from women with higher education and income (Neumayr & Handy, 2019; Srnka et al., 2003). International aid charities tend to attract donations from

young, politically conservative, and highly educated women with strong religious affiliations (Casale & Baumann, 2015; Chapman et al., 2018; Micklewright & Schnepf, 2009; Wiepking, 2010). Donating to health-related charities is associated with being female and elderly, and being religious (Casale & Baumann, 2015; Chapman et al., 2018; Srnka et al., 2003). On the other hand, donating to art and cultural charities has been linked to higher education, employment, socioeconomic status, being female, and having religious beliefs (Casale & Baumann, 2015; Neumayr & Handy, 2019; Wiepking, 2010).

While these studies shed light on the characteristics of donors who contribute to specific causes, the motivation behind their selection remains unclear. The decision-making process involved in supporting charities is intricately tied to the initial perception of need. Fundamentally, the way a charity is portrayed, the cause underlying the need, and the depiction of the beneficiary collectively contribute to whether potential donors even recognize the existence of a need. This initial perception is a pivotal factor in determining the level of motivation aroused among individuals to provide help. The nature of this motivation, whether it leads to personal distress driven by egoistic motives or is channeled into altruistic actions, is significantly influenced by how individuals perceive the urgency and legitimacy of the identified need, as demonstrated in studies such as Bendapudi et al. (1996). Furthermore, Griffin et al. (1993) shed light on a crucial aspect of this decision process, highlighting that the inclination to help is more pronounced when the beneficiary's need stems from external and uncontrollable factors rather than actions within their control. This insight underscores the importance of understanding the cause of the need in shaping people's willingness to contribute. Moreover, the impact of the cause of need is subject to the influence of the belief in a just world (Lerner, 1980). Individuals with a strong belief in a just world are more inclined to support causes perceived as beyond the victim's control, as demonstrated by Bendapudi et al. (1996) in their study compares donations to breast cancer research (considered outside the victim's control) versus lung cancer research (linked, rightly or wrongly, to the victim's choice to smoke).

Donors who choose to support a particular genre of charity may also differ psychographically from other donors; religion and social norms can significantly influence people's giving behavior (Wiepking et al., 2014). Donating to ecological or environmental protection organizations could enhance one's self-worth (Sargeant, 1999). Furthermore, personal experience or knowledge of a charity's aims, especially in relation to health and medical research organizations, increases the likelihood and generosity of giving (Bennett, 2003). Finally, self and other orientations may underpin charity preferences (Chapman et al., 2020), which we explore in depth below.

## 1.3 | Theoretical framework: self and other orientations

Chapman et al. (2020) conducted a qualitative exploration of people's identity-relevant motivations for preferring specific charities. Their study, based on a global survey, revealed that self-oriented and other-oriented motives underlie charitable preferences. Donors tended to talk about their giving with reference to either themselves

or the beneficiaries. Those who preferred social service agencies, animal charities, or international charities explained their preferences in terms of the importance, powerlessness, or need of the beneficiaries. Conversely, donors who favored religious, medical research, and health nonprofits highlighted personal values, personal or group experiences, and the needs of their social groups. The authors proposed an inventory of self-oriented and other-oriented motives. Motives that explain giving to some charities in relation to the donor's sense of self are referred to as self-oriented motives. Informed by the social identity approach (Tajfel, 1981; Turner et al., 1987), self-oriented motives are conceptualized to include both personal ("I") and social selves ("we"). On the other hand, motives explaining charity preference in relation to beneficiaries ("they") are referred to as other-oriented motives.

### 1.3.1 | Self-oriented motives

The subthemes that Chapman et al. (2020) identified under self-oriented motives were social identities, values and beliefs, benefits, suffering and shared identity. These themes align with prior literature on the motivations (Spitzmuller & Van Dyne, 2013; White et al., 2012), indicating consistency in the understanding of self-oriented motives.

Donors who invoke one of their own identities to explain why a charity is important, constructed their motivations for giving based on the social identity they invoked. In situations where a charity's mission aligned with donors' or their group's values and beliefs, donors contributed to those causes as a form of self-expression. Transactional donors valued charities they have benefited from or expect to benefit from in the future. Consequently, they determined their reasons for giving based on the benefits they or their group members will receive (or have received). Those who donated to charities that addressed issues they or members of their important social groups had experienced constructed their motivation for giving as a response to their suffering. The final subtheme (shared identity) lay at the intersection of self and other: the donor believed that the beneficiary belonged to the same social group that they do, and that motivated their preference.

### 1.3.2 | Other-oriented motives

Subthemes identified as other-oriented motives were beneficiary identities, power, importance, and neediness (Chapman et al., 2020). The identified themes are in line with previous research on motivations (Awaliah Kasri, 2013; Breeze, 2013; Cryder et al., 2017), highlighting the consistency in the comprehension of other-oriented motives.

Donors who invoked beneficiary identities to explain why a charity was important constructed their motivations for giving based on the identity of groups that benefited from donations. Many donors donated to charitable causes because they believe the beneficiaries were disadvantaged or incapable of caring for themselves. In such cases, donors' motivation for giving was

influenced by the beneficiaries' lack of power. People who supported beneficiaries that they believe are inherently valuable and worthwhile constructed their motives for giving based on their perceptions of the beneficiaries' importance. For some donors, the existence of a need was sufficient reason to help: they gave based on perceived neediness.

Chapman and colleagues' thematic analyses established an inventory of different motives that underly donors' charity preferences. They examined motivations qualitatively and focused on motives for giving to the donor's most important (or preferred) charity. Building on this foundation, we examine quantitatively the self- and other-oriented motives that underly decisions about the constellation of causes that people are willing to support.

## 1.4 | The current study

The current research investigates which of the donors' self- and other-oriented motives underlie their preferences for different charitable causes. We examine quantitatively the relations between different self and other motives and preferences for supporting different charitable causes. To our knowledge, this study is the first to quantitatively analyze the association between self-reported motives and preferences for charitable causes. We also control for sociodemographic factors that have previously been found to influence charity selection (Bennett, 2003; Chapman et al., 2018). In our study, we consider self and other motivations simultaneously and consider all charitable causes in the donors' decision sets, as opposed to previous studies that looked at individual motivations or in relation to only the most important cause. When examining charitable causes, one must acknowledge that many donors support multiple causes. By recognizing this, we identify a range of motivations that influence consumer choices.

## 2 | METHOD

In 2022, a UK-based technology company called twio conducted an online survey to understand what drives personal preference for charitable causes. The second author was involved in the study design and was able to offer guidance on how to measure motives and charitable causes. The data were collected to help twio design a charity recommendation algorithm for their e-commerce platform. Secondary data were subsequently shared with us for scholarly purposes.

### 2.1 | Participant and procedure

The study was conducted in the UK. Data were collected using Prolific. In exchange for 12 min of their time, respondents were paid £1.50. Participation was anonymous and voluntary. In total, 1006 UK residents completed the survey, but 19 (1.9%) were excluded from

Variables	Categories	Response %	Coding
Age <sup>a</sup>	16–19	2.0	17.5
	20–24	10.9	22.0
	25–29	15.9	27.0
	30–39	33.0	34.5
	40–49	17.1	44.5
	50–59	13.1	54.5
Gender	60+	7.9	70.8
	Male	49.6	0
Religiosity	Female	50.4	1
	Not at all important	60.3	1
	Not too important	19.4	2
	Somewhat important	13.5	3
Political orientation	Very important	6.9	4
	On the conservative side	31.7	0
	On the liberal side	68.3	1
Qualification	pre-GCSEs	1.0	1
	GCSEs or equivalent	14.5	2
	A levels or equivalent	26.5	3
	Bachelor's degree	40.9	4
	Master's degree or higher	17.0	5
Income	less than £25,000	29.0	1
	£25,000–50,000	39.6	2
	£50,001–100,000	28.3	3
	£100,001–£200,000	2.8	4
	More than £200,000	0.3	5

Note:  $N = 987$ . Coding refers to how the variable levels were coded for analysis.

<sup>a</sup>Participants were allocated to the mid-point of the age for analyses. In the UK education system, Pre-GCSE covers education before the age of 14, GCSEs are subject-based exams taken between 14 and 16, and A-levels are specialized qualifications taken from ages 16 to 18, often required for university admission.

the analysis for failing one attention check.<sup>1</sup> The final sample comprised 987 people—490 men and 497 women—with an average age of 39 years ( $SD = 13.70$ ). Sample characteristics are summarized in Table 1.

## 2.2 | Measures

Key measures of interest for the study are outlined below. A copy of the full questionnaire is available on request.

### 2.2.1 | Motives for charity selection

To assess individuals' motives, we asked participants which motives reflected their reasons for charity selection (i.e., “Which of the

following motives reflect your reasons for choosing to donate to particular charities?”). Table 2 outlines the nine motives that were assessed and the frequency with which each was selected: social identities, values and beliefs, benefits, suffering, shared identity, beneficiary identities, power, importance, and neediness. Participants could choose all that applied. Each motive was dummy coded selected = 1 and not selected = 0 for analysis purposes. Certain researchers have recommended employing dichotomous rating scales, asserting that they offer the advantage of being simpler to respond to (Bhupalam, 2019). This simplicity, however, comes with minimal reduction in information, reliability, or validity when compared to scales with five or seven items (Preston & Colman, 2000; Zhu et al., 1997).

### 2.2.2 | Preferred charitable causes

Participants were also asked to consider which types of charitable causes they cared most about (i.e., “Which charitable causes do you care most about?”). Response options were the 15 sub-type

<sup>1</sup>An attention check is a question included in a survey to ensure respondents are paying attention and responding thoughtfully. In this case, the attention check message was “This is just an attention check. Sorry for being like that. Can you please make sure you select “strongly disagree” for just this one question. Thank you for your attention”. Only participants who responded “strongly disagree” to this item were retained in analyses.

**TABLE 2** Motives which respondents identified as reflecting their reasons for donating to particular charities.

Motivation	Description/item wording	Participants %
Self-oriented motivation	<i>Charity preference explained in relation to personal ("I") or social ("we") identities</i>	
Social identities	To express my identity or group membership	5.3
Values and beliefs	Because their mission aligns with my values or beliefs	57.2
Benefits	I or people close to me have personally benefitted from the charity's services	28.5
Suffering	I or people close to me have suffered from something that the charity addresses	43.8
Other-oriented motivation	<i>Charity preference explained in relation to beneficiary ("they") identities</i>	
Beneficiary identities	Because of the types of beneficiaries the charity serves	34.2
Power	Because the charity's beneficiaries are powerless	16.2
Importance	Because the charity's beneficiaries are valuable and important	36.4
Neediness	Because the charity has great need for help	44.0
<i>Both self &amp; other</i>		
Shared identity	I identify with or see myself as similar to the beneficiaries of the charity	14.0

Note:  $N = 987$ . Participants could choose all the motives that applied.

categories identified in the UN nonprofit reporting guidelines (UN Statistics Division, 2003). A summary of these sub-types and the frequency with which each was selected is provided in Table 3. Participants could select all that applied. Each named charitable cause was dummy coded selected = 1 and not selected = 0 for analysis purposes.

### 2.2.3 | Control variables

Sociodemographic control variables include gender ("How do you identify?"), age ("How old are you?"), highest qualification ("What is your highest education qualification?"), income ("What is your annual household income?"), religiosity ("How important is religion in your life?"), and political orientation ("In terms of political views, are you:"). We converted the categorical age variable into continuous data by using the mid-point of each age category. The age of people in the 60+ category was computed using the UK's average life span as the upper category limit (UK Population Data, 2022). Response options are provided in Table 1.

## 3 | RESULTS

Participants, on average, cared most about 3.80 causes ( $SD = 2.19$ ). We found that people most preferred charitable causes related to health (66.7% of respondents), social services (44.8%), animal protection (43.3%), and the environment (40.3%). Means, standard deviations, and zero-order correlations between all variables are presented in Table 4. At the bivariate level, the self-oriented motive of social identity positively correlated with caring about education and development-related causes. Other-oriented motives, such as beneficiary identities and beneficiary importance, were positively associated with caring about animal protection. Both self- and other-oriented motives, such as shared identity, positively correlated with caring about research, and health related causes.

**TABLE 3** Response options for charitable causes that participants care most about and prevalence %.

Charities and sub types	Participants %
<i>Culture and arts</i> (e.g. performing arts, museums, zoos)	10.0
<i>Sports, recreation, and social clubs</i>	5.1
<i>Education</i> (including primary, secondary, higher)	29.2
<i>Research</i> (e.g. medical, science, policy)	30.6
<i>Health</i> (e.g. hospitals, nursing homes, mental health)	66.7
<i>Social services</i> (e.g. child welfare, disability support, elder care)	44.8
<i>Emergency and relief</i> (e.g. disaster prevention, temporary shelters, fire service)	37.9
<i>Environment</i>	40.4
<i>Animal protection</i>	43.3
<i>Development and housing</i> (e.g. community development, housing assistance)	16.0
<i>Civic and advocacy services</i> (e.g. civil rights, advocacy, ethnic associations)	8.5
<i>Law and legal services</i> (e.g. crime prevention, rehabilitation of offenders, victim support)	5.7
<i>Political organizations</i>	1.9
<i>International</i> (including poverty reduction, disaster relief, human rights)	37.0
<i>Religious congregations and associations</i>	3.0

Note: The 15 sub-type categories identified were based on the UN nonprofit reporting guidelines; participants could choose all the motives that applied.

Nine hierarchical binary logistic regression analyses were conducted to examine how motives related to the self and other were associated with caring about different charitable causes (summarized in Table 5). Sociodemographic factors were entered in Step 1. Self- and other-oriented motives were entered in Step 2 to test if they

TABLE 4 Descriptives and zero-order correlations between motives and charities.

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
1. Sol	0.05	0.22	-																	
2. Val	0.37	0.48	.09**	-																
3. Ben	0.28	0.45	.03	.14***	-															
4. Suf	0.44	0.50	.02	.11***	.25***	-														
5. Sha	0.14	0.35	.13***	.10**	.12***	.10**	-													
6. Bel	0.34	0.48	.07*	.15***	.01	-.02	.01	-												
7. Pow	0.16	0.37	.04	.16***	-.02	-.08**	-.01	.16***	-											
8. Imp	0.36	0.48	.05	.24***	.02	.01	.03	.23***	.14***	-										
9. Need	0.44	0.50	.06	.16***	.02	-.04	-.01	.11***	.10**	.11***	-									
10. Hea	0.67	0.47	-.02	-.00	.13***	.26***	.11***	-.01	-.10**	.03	.04	-								
11. Soc	0.45	0.50	.06	.12***	.08*	.12***	.06	.05	-.00	.08*	.13***	.19***	-							
12. Ani	0.43	0.50	-.04	.05	.00	.00	-.03	.07*	.01	.09***	.04	-.10**	-.01	-						
13. Env	0.40	0.49	-.03	.05	.01	-.09**	.02	.01	.04	.05	-.01	-.14***	-.11***	.33***	-					
14. Eme	0.38	0.49	.00	.11***	.06	.03	.05	.12***	.06	.14***	.13***	.09**	.16***	.08*	.09**	-				
15. Int	0.37	0.48	.01	.17***	.02	-.03	.02	.13***	.08**	.16***	.12***	-.01	.15***	.03	.12***	.40***	-			
16. Res	0.31	0.46	.00	.04	.16***	.18***	.07*	.06	-.04	.05	.01	.25***	.15***	.01	.05	.12***	.03	-		
17. Edu	0.29	0.46	.08*	.04	.02	.03	.04	.03	.03	.07*	.03	.17***	.21***	-.02	-.02	.12***	.11***	.15***	-	
18. Dev	0.16	0.37	.07*	.07*	.06	-.03	.05	.06*	.06*	.07*	.13***	.10**	.20***	-.01	.02	.18***	.17***	.09**	.23***	-

Note: N = 987 (listwise). Charitable cause categories are coded 0/1.

Abbreviations: Ani, animal protection; Bel, beneficiary identities; Ben, benefits; Dev, development and housing; Edu, education; Eme, emergency and relief; Env, environment; Hea, health; Imp, importance; Int, international; Need, neediness; Pow, power; Res, research; Sha, shared identity; Soc, social services; Sol, social identities; Suf, suffering; Val, values and beliefs.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$  (two-tailed).

**TABLE 5** Binary logistic regression with identity motives predicting charity choice.

Variables	Hea	Soc	Ani	Env	Eme	Int	Res	Edu	Dev
	Exp(B)	Exp(B)	Exp(B)	Exp(B)	Exp(B)	Exp(B)	Exp(B)	Exp(B)	Exp(B)
<b>Block 1</b>									
Female (1)	1.43*	1.90***	1.62***	0.75	1.07	1.19	1.11	1.50**	1.29
Age	0.98**	0.99*	1.01	1.01	0.98**	1.00	1.01	0.97***	0.98**
Religiosity	1.26**	0.99	0.84*	0.82**	1.16	1.18*	1.00	1.12	0.91
Political orientation	0.94	1.47**	1.00	1.06	1.29	2.43***	0.81	1.37	1.86**
Qualification	0.81**	0.96	0.90	1.19*	0.95	1.25**	1.06	1.38***	1.18
Income	0.91	1.06	0.95	0.86	1.06	0.87	1.01	1.04	0.91
<b>Model fit</b>									
Model chi square	34.83***	45.13***	25.41***	21.28**	18.18**	53.63***	6.46	74.77***	34.13***
Cox and Snell R <sup>2</sup>	.03	.04	.02	.02	.02	.05	.01	.07	.03
Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup>	.05	.06	.03	.03	.02	.07	.01	.10	.06
<b>Correct classification</b>									
Overall (%)	67.80	60.30	60.00	59.80	63.20	63.70	69.40	71.20	84.00
<b>Block 2</b>									
Female (1)	1.14	1.76***	1.61***	0.78	1.00	1.16	0.90	1.45	1.33
Age	0.98**	0.99	1.00	1.01	0.98***	1.00	1.01	0.97***	0.97**
Religiosity	1.34***	0.98	0.81**	0.80**	1.14	1.13	1.04	1.11	0.86
Political orientation	1.07	1.45	0.94	0.96	1.20	2.20***	0.85	1.31	1.66
Qualification	0.84	0.95	0.86	1.15	0.90	1.16	1.06	1.33***	1.12
Income	0.85	1.05	0.95	0.87	1.05	0.86	0.96	1.04	0.92
<b>Self Motive</b>									
Social identities	0.67	1.42	0.70	0.71	0.70	0.74	0.85	1.50	1.44
Values and beliefs	0.85	1.16	1.30	1.56**	1.42*	2.00***	1.10	1.22	1.47
Benefits	1.50	1.23	0.95	1.11	1.25	1.10	1.66**	1.09	1.51
Suffering	3.14***	1.45**	0.91	0.70	1.11	0.93	2.01***	1.10	0.71
<b>Other Motive</b>									
Beneficiary identities	1.14	1.20	1.27	0.92	1.63**	1.50*	1.24	1.17	1.33
Power	0.63*	0.94	0.96	1.08	1.15	1.20	0.74	1.11	1.28
Importance	1.15	1.18	1.38	1.27	1.44*	1.46*	1.20	1.15	1.07
Neediness	1.17	1.61***	1.13	0.96	1.52**	1.43*	1.04	1.03	1.83**
<b>Self and Other Motive</b>									
Shared Identity	1.80*	1.29	.93	1.18	1.20	1.10	1.31	1.14	1.30
<b>Model Fit</b>									
Model Chi Square	129.80***	81.36***	44.19***	45.05***	70.90***	113.56***	59.51***	84.36***	68.77***
Block Chi Square	94.97***	36.24***	18.78	23.77**	52.70***	59.93***	53.05***	9.58	34.64***
Cox and Snell R <sup>2</sup>	.12	.08	.04	.04	.07	.11	.06	.08	.07
Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup>	.17	.11	.06	.06	.09	.15	.08	.12	.11
<b>Correct classification</b>									
Overall (%)	70.70	62.90	60.90	60.90	65.60	67.70	69.40	72.00	83.80

Note: N = 987. Only charity causes nominated by more than 10% of sample are represented in the table. Values in the table are considered significant only when they meet the critical threshold determined by the false discovery rate (FDR) assumptions.

Abbreviations: Ani, animal protection; Dev, development and housing; Edu, education; Eme, emergency and relief; Env, environment; Hea, health; Int, international; Res, research; Soc, social services.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

explained variance over-and-above sociodemographic attributes known to be associated with charity preferences. Only variables with response rates greater than 10% were considered in our statistical model to ensure reliable estimates and to reduce the risk of bias and spurious associations (Groves et al., 2011).

We also employed the false discovery rate (FDR) statistical technique to minimize the risk of Type I error. FDR is a multiple testing correction method that compares the  $p$ -values of different hypotheses against a predetermined threshold level set according to the desired FDR level (Benjamini & Hochberg, 1995). The FDR approach is more precise in controlling false positives compared with the overly conservative Bonferroni correction (Perneger, 1998). In our study, the FDR threshold was set at 5% to limit the false positives. To determine the threshold level, we ranked the  $p$ -values in ascending order and calculated the number of false positives expected at each level. The threshold level was then set where the number of expected false positives met or fell below the desired FDR level. The FDR threshold varied for different causes due to inherent differences in the data and statistical characteristics associated with each specific cause. For environment, research, development and housing, animal, and educational causes, the threshold was .007. For health, emergency and relief, and international causes, it was .017, and for social services, it was .010. Any  $p$  values below these thresholds were deemed significant.

Self- and other-oriented motives explained significant variance over-and-above sociodemographics when understanding the likelihood of caring about health,  $\chi^2(9) = 94.97, p < .001$ , social services,  $\chi^2(9) = 36.24, p < .001$ , environmental,  $\chi^2(9) = 23.77, p = .005$ , emergency and relief,  $\chi^2(9) = 52.70, p < .001$ , international,  $\chi^2(9) = 59.93, p < .001$ , research,  $\chi^2(9) = 53.05, p < .001$ , and development and housing,  $\chi^2(9) = 34.64, p < .001$ . However, self- and other-oriented motives did not explain additional variance in caring about animal protection,  $\chi^2(9) = 18.77, p = .027$ , or education causes  $\chi^2(9) = 9.58, p = .385$ .

### 3.1 | Self-motivated cause selections

Participants who were more likely to care about environmental and research causes tended to self-report being motivated by self-oriented motives. People who said their charitable choices were motivated by their personal values and beliefs were more likely to care about environmental causes,  $\text{Exp}(B) = 1.56, p = .002$ . Those who said personal or group experiences of suffering,  $\text{Exp}(B) = 2.01, p < .001$ , or benefits received from the charity,  $\text{Exp}(B) = 1.66, p = .001$ , affected their charity preferences and were more likely to care about research causes.

### 3.2 | Other-motivated cause selections

Participants who were more likely to care about housing and development causes tended to self-report being motivated by other-oriented motives. Specifically, people who said their charitable choices were

motivated by the neediness of beneficiaries,  $\text{Exp}(B) = 1.83, p = .001$ , were more likely to care about development causes.

### 3.3 | Self- and other-oriented cause selections

Participants who were more likely to care about health, social services, emergency, and international causes tended to be motivated by both self- and other-oriented motives. People who cared about health causes said their charitable preferences were motivated by personal or group experiences of suffering (self)  $\text{Exp}(B) = 3.14, p < .001$ , as well as a shared sense of identity with beneficiaries (self and other),  $\text{Exp}(B) = 1.80, p = .013$ . People who cared about social causes were motivated by both the neediness of the beneficiaries (other),  $\text{Exp}(B) = 1.61, p < .001$ , and their personal or group experiences of suffering (self),  $\text{Exp}(B) = 1.49, p = .010$  respectively.

People who cared about emergency causes were especially other-oriented: more likely to select beneficiary identities,  $\text{Exp}(B) = 1.63, p = .001$ , perceived neediness,  $\text{Exp}(B) = 1.52, p = .003$ , and beneficiary importance,  $\text{Exp}(B) = 1.44, p = .012$ . However, they were also motivated by their own personal and social values (self),  $\text{Exp}(B) = 1.42, p = .016$ . Finally, people who cared about international causes were also largely motivated by other-orientations—beneficiary identities,  $\text{Exp}(B) = 1.50, p = .012$ , beneficiary neediness,  $\text{Exp}(B) = 1.43, p = .011$ , and the perceived importance of beneficiaries,  $\text{Exp}(B) = 1.46, p = .012$ —but also their own values and beliefs (self),  $\text{Exp}(B) = 2.00, p < .001$ .

## 4 | DISCUSSION

We have identified diverse motives directly endorsed by people when explaining their preferences for charitable causes. Although past research has presented various inventories of motives for giving to charities in general, limited research exists exploring the factors that influence the selection of which charitable causes to support. Our findings reveal distinct constellations of motives at play, suggesting associations between self-oriented motives and preferences for environmental causes and research, other-oriented motives and preferences for housing and development, and a combination of self and other motives with preferences for health, social services, emergency relief, and international causes. Preferences for some causes (i.e., animal protection and education) were not explained by the self- and other-oriented motives examined here.

The decision-making process behind the choice of a charity type is a complex interplay of egoistic and altruistic motivations. Individuals guided by egoistic motives, which are self-centered, often lean towards causes that resonate with their personal interests, values, or experiences. These choices are shaped by the individual's learning history and are influenced by direct and vicarious experiences tied to their personal or social identities, providing insights into their charitable inclinations. On the other hand, individuals driven by other orientations, characterized by altruism, display a tendency to prioritize



charitable causes that emphasize the well-being of others, namely the beneficiaries, rather than the self. In these instances, the personal and social selves may not be as prominent, as the focus shifts to causes involving experiences not directly encountered by the donor. The primary emphasis lies on the factors benefiting the recipients rather than the donor's personal or social identity.

#### 4.1 | Theoretical implications

Preferences for certain causes can be explained exclusively or in large part by other-oriented motives: emergency, international, development and housing causes. These causes provide care for people experiencing rare and extreme forms of hardship (e.g., homelessness, natural disasters, and extreme poverty). These are issues that it is unlikely most donors have had firsthand experience with. Therefore, it may be difficult for individuals to relate to these causes from the perspective of their personal or social identities. For these reasons, we posit that such causes are often other-oriented.

Preferences for other causes are more self-oriented: health and research, which mostly refers to medical research causes. These causes are linked to challenges experienced by a larger segment of the population: a third of all people experience cancer in their lifetimes, for example, nearly every person has had an experience of themselves or a loved one suffering from cancer. It may be that these first-hand experiences are so intense that they override other motivations. For instance, although it is possible for individuals who have never seen their family members suffer from cancer to support a cancer charity out of a sense of concern for those in need and the importance of helping others, when a personal experience of suffering from cancer arises it potentially overwhelms other motivations to become the driving force guiding decisions. Future studies could take a longitudinal approach to understanding how motivations change over time as a result of significant life events and experiences.

Though both self and other motives were associated with support of international and emergency causes, other-oriented motives dominated in these contexts. Further, the observed patterns of prediction were similar for both causes. This suggests that individuals may be thinking of international disasters when considering giving to international causes. Indeed, UK giving data suggest that the largest share of total donations is tied to the combined category of overseas aid and disaster relief (CAF, 2023). The combination of other-orientation (concern about beneficiary identities, neediness, and importance) coupled with the more self-oriented reflection of personal or group values suggests that donors to these causes may hold humanitarian values that drive them to recognize and respond to the needs of distant others (Batson et al., 2007; Schwartz, 2010).

Previous research has shown need to be a key factor in driving the giving response, especially to humanitarian disasters (Bekkers & Wiepking, 2011; Chapman et al., 2020; Konrath & Handy, 2018; Zagefka & James, 2015). Indeed, disasters often receive more support when the event garners extensive media coverage, highlighting the need (Bennett & Kottasz, 2000; Chapman et al., 2023; Martin, 2013;

Waters & Tindall, 2011). However, we find here that the need-based motivation is combined with a constellation of motives highlighting the importance and identity of the beneficiary and also the values of the donors' group. This may help to explain why certain disasters received significantly more donations than others (Flavelle, 2021; Spiegel, 2005): such donors may feel that certain beneficiaries are worthy of care while others are less worthy (Loseke & Fawcett, 1995; Zagefka et al., 2011; Zagefka et al., 2012).

Previous scholarly investigations have suggested that social identities, including gender, ethnicity, and nationality, have a substantial impact on individuals' charitable giving and consumer brand preferences (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003; Charnysh et al., 2015). However, only 1 in 20 of our participants self-reported their social identities as a motivating factor for their charitable decisions. This observation may be a result of social desirability bias, whereby donors somehow feel that it would not reflect well on them if they reported giving in ways that reflect their own identities directly. Alternatively, respondents may lack self-awareness regarding how their identities shape their behaviors, indicating a potential limitation of self-reporting. Future studies may wish to consider how to test the role of identity experimentally to remove the role of self-presentation.

One curious finding was that donors preferring to support health causes are motivated by a shared identity with the beneficiaries; however, they seem to be demotivated by the perceived powerlessness of those beneficiaries. In other words, supporters of health causes report selecting their causes based on their shared identity with beneficiaries whom they perceive as not powerless. This may be associated with an efficacy belief, wherein individuals are more motivated to offer assistance when they believe the beneficiaries can actively overcome their challenges (Arumi et al., 2005; Duncan, 2004). Future research could explore whether perceived efficacy is especially important in health-care contexts compared to other giving contexts.

Finally, we note that self- and other-orientations did not meaningfully explain preferences for animal welfare and education causes. Instead, sociodemographics had a greater role to play. Specifically, for animal causes, gender and religiosity emerge as significant determinants: women were more likely to give, and more religious people were less likely to give to animal welfare causes (see also Neumayr & Handy, 2019; Srnka et al., 2003). For education causes, age, gender, and education were all influential: women, younger people, and more educated people were all more likely to support education causes. This is consistent with previous studies showing that higher education levels strongly predict donations to educational organizations (James, 2008; Wu & Brown, 2010).

It may be that other individual differences or different motivational explanations may be at play in animal and educational giving. For example, misanthropy may help explain care for animal causes. Research has shown that individuals with misanthropic sentiments tend to advocate for animal rights as it allows them to express their aversion or distrust towards humankind (Wuensch et al., 2002). Another example: Alumni identity has been shown to promote giving to higher education (Schervish, 2000a, 2000b), and perhaps donors to such causes were not considering their alumni status as an important

identity when reflecting on their giving in general, even if it was a factor in their giving to some educational causes. Future research may wish to explore additional motivational forces and individual differences in charitable support preferences in addition to the self and other orientations explored here.

It has long been debated whether charitable giving is motivated purely by altruism (Batson, 1990) or a more egoistic motive (Andreoni, 1989). However, rather than a binary distinction, our results suggest that most people explain their preference for different causes using a combination of self and other motives. This implies that the motives underlying charitable giving are not mutually exclusive. Altruism may purely inspire some individuals, while egoistic motives solely drive others, however most operate under the combined altruistic and egoistic impetus. Further, the constellation of motives will vary across charitable giving contexts.

## 5 | STRENGTHS, LIMITATIONS, AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

One of the key strengths of our study is the identification of diverse motives directly endorsed by donors, shedding light on the complex factors that influence individuals' preferences for charitable causes. Through an examination of various causes, we reveal distinct constellations of motives associated with supporting different types of causes. This enriches our understanding of the underlying drivers of charitable actions and provides insight into the decision-making process behind charitable giving.

Nevertheless, our study is not without limitations. First, the reliance on self-reporting introduces the possibility of social desirability bias, as individuals may be hesitant to reveal their true motivations or may lack awareness regarding the influence of their identities on their behaviors. We encourage further research exploring the intricacies of donor motivation, especially using experimental methods or indirect question approaches. Second, the study was conducted in just one national context and did not consider other cultural contexts. It is feasible that different motives will dominate in different cultural context. For example, individualistic cultures emphasize individual differences and separateness, while collectivist cultures value social status highly (Becker et al., 2012). Future studies should therefore consider motivational constellations in giving across different countries. Third, we acknowledge that there are some inherent challenges in using secondary data. One limitation when using secondary data is that the researchers do not create the measures, meaning measures may not be uniquely designed to test the question at hand. In this study, the second author was consulted by twio when they designed the study and embedded the focal questions about motives and charitable causes. Nevertheless, the wording of the sociodemographic control variables were not always ideal. For example, age was captured as a categorical variable, although measuring it as a continuous variable would have been preferred. Fourth and finally, it is possible that the political orientations were not well described to participants, and some individuals might not have fully understood the distinctions

between the classifications of conservative and liberal. This lack of clarity could explain the largely nonsignificant results for the political orientation for most causes. Alternatively, it is plausible that political orientation may not be an important driving factor explaining preferences for causes other than international, which our data show that conservatives are less likely to support.

## 6 | CONCLUSION

Our study offers a novel perspective on the motives underlying charitable giving, showing that they are more complex than previously thought. We suggest that prosocial action is susceptible to a plurality of motives. Different self and other motives can simultaneously play a role in shaping donor choices, thereby emphasizing that there are both altruistic and egoistic grounds for helping beneficiaries. Our results have significant managerial implications for charities and non-profits. To begin with, organizations should appeal to both self and other motives when targeting potential donors for causes such as health, social services, emergency, and international. Successful organizations are likely to have greater success in soliciting donations by appealing to both motives. However, it is important to recognize that the same appeal will not work for all causes. Therefore, it is important to tailor messaging and appeals based on the cause they are being promoted. Promoting international and emergency relief causes could be more effective by emphasizing a combination of motives together, including perceived need and the identities of the beneficiaries. While promoting medical research, charities should emphasize the benefits of their research and foster emotional connections with potential donors by recognizing past experiences of suffering. They should craft messaging that aligns with the values and interests of potential donors and consider whether they are neglecting certain motives that could appeal to donors.

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## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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