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*A Research Note:
Faith, Reciprocity and
Guilt-A Prosocial Behaviour
of Microentrepreneurs*

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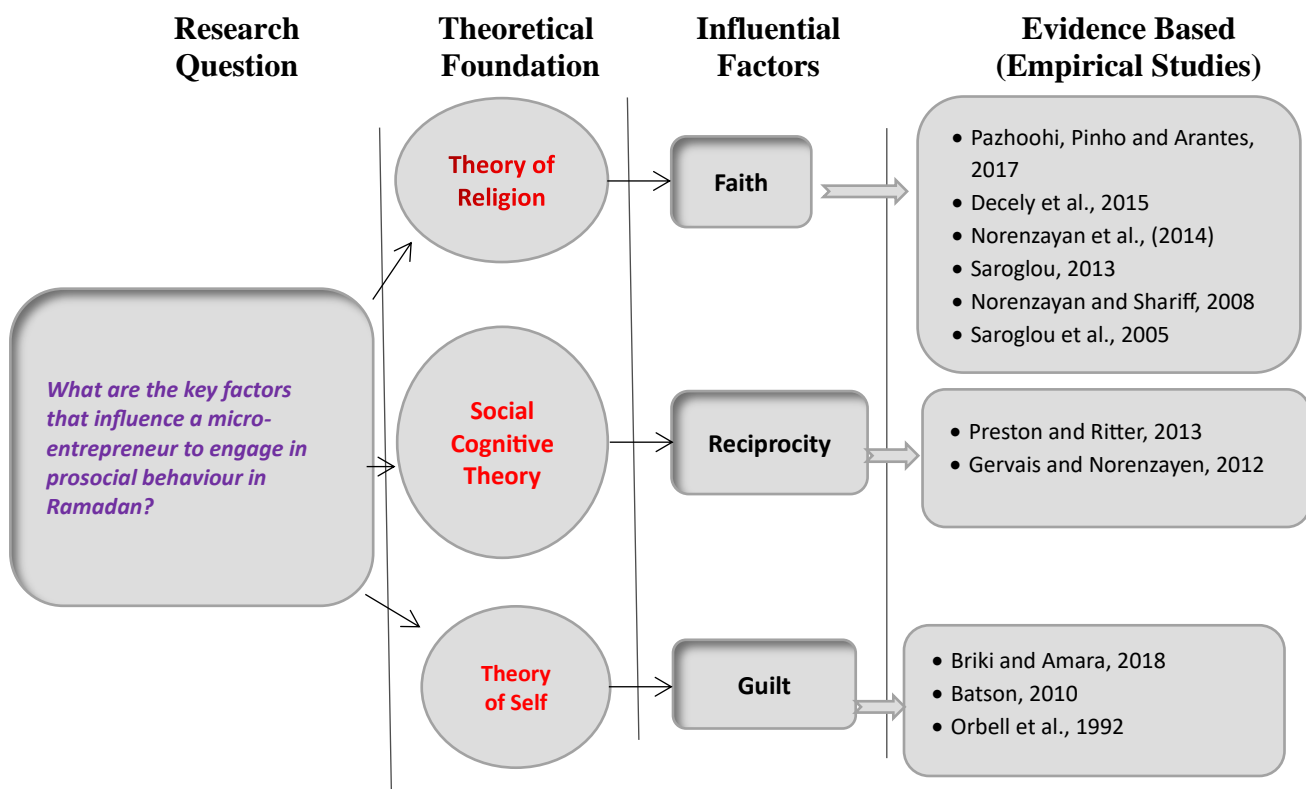
Executive Summary

This working paper explores the relationship between faith, reciprocity, and guilt in shaping the prosocial behaviours of micro-entrepreneurs, particularly within the context of Islamic teachings. It examines how religious beliefs influence altruistic actions, highlighting the positive association between religion and prosocial behaviour as supported by various studies. The concepts of faith and reciprocity and guilt are analysed, especially during Ramadan (Month of Muslim fasting), where acts of kindness are motivated by the hope of divine reward or social recognition. This paper also looks into the role of guilt, suggesting that some micro-entrepreneurs may engage in charitable activities to mitigate feelings of guilt associated with lack of doing to please Allah. Through a critical review of literature and anecdotal evidence, this paper argues that while micro-entrepreneurs may appear altruistic, their motivations can be complex and multifaceted, often intertwined with personal and commercial interests. The findings underscore the need for further empirical research to accurately assess the true nature of altruistic behaviour among micro-entrepreneurs.

Faith, Reciprocity and Guilt: A Prosocial Behaviour of Micro-entrepreneurs

This essay critically discusses three motivational factors (faith, reciprocal altruism, and misguided guilt) that influence a micro-entrepreneur to engage in an altruistic behaviour during Ramadan (Muslim holy fasting month). As for its methodological and theoretical perspective (figure.1), this work draws these influential factors from the theory of religion, social cognitive theory, and the theory of self. Overall, the level of analysis and discussion, takes place at an individual/person in the context of a social situation and what makes him/her susceptible to religious and social influences. A micro-entrepreneur is a person who operates a small-scale business. In a Muslim country, a micro-entrepreneur tends to help during Ramadan (altruistic behaviour). S/he donates food, money, and open places to feed people in the evening (poor, homeless and travellers, etc.) during the month of fasting. Thus, *Altruism* is defined as "The desire to help another person even if it involves a cost to the helper" (Aronson, Wilson and Akert, 2014, p. 389). This manifests itself amongst these businesspeople and their families.

Figure.1: Theoretical and Methodological Perspective



FAITH – The idea of engaging in altruism behaviour is influenced by one's belief, I.e., prosocial behaviours are closely linked to his/her religion (Saroglou, 2013; Norenzayan and Shariff, 2008, Saroglou et al., 2005). Several studies have claimed the existing of positive association between religion and altruism (Galen, 2012; Norenzayan and Shariff, 2008) and their empirical evidence showed a religious prosociality. It is believed that –

“People who are religious, report on surveys, that they help more than do people who are not religious, and they actually do help more in situations in which helping makes them look good to themselves or others.” (Aronson, Wilson and Akert, 2014, p.387).

In contrast, other studies cast doubt on the relationship between religion and prosocial behaviour (Pazhoohi., Pinho and Arantes, 2017). Some studies went further to investigate religiousness and children's altruism. In their study, (Decety et al., 2015) examined the negative association between religiousness and children's altruism across the world, using a sample of 6 countries. However, their study's analysis was adversely criticised and showed some methodological concerns and inaccuracies. Their results, children from religious family are less altruistic (Muslim children), were questioned by scholars (Shariff et al., 2016). Consequently, their paper was retracted and the authors (Decety et al., 2019) issued an apology:

“... we feel if necessary to explicitly correct the scientific record, and we are therefore retracting the article. We apologize to the scientific community for any inconvenience caused.”

From an Islamic faith, a man/woman has been created for a single purpose is to worship and follows the commands of Allah (Quran 51:56). This is called “*Ibada*”, i.e., any act carried out to be closer to Allah, including helping others to your own cost.

RECIPROCITY – In our Ramadan case, reciprocity as motivational factor in altruism behaviour is understood as providing help to a stranger hoping to receive a reward to go to paradise by God Almighty or to be helped in case one is on a difficult situation. The Islamic religious teaching goes further in treating people better as stated in Quran (41:34):

“Nor can goodness and evil be equal Repel (evil) what is better.”

This reciprocal altruism is also found in non-religious studies (Batson, 2010; Alexrod, 1984; Triver, 1971). But it is beyond the scope of this essay to tackle this aspect.

Indirect reciprocity – There are several verses (Quran 5:54: Quran 48: 9; Quran 59:9: Quran 107) reminding Muslims to be kind and help the needy without expecting a material reward. Allah, in return, promises them a reward in the Hereafter. However, based on anecdotal evidence, there has been a tendency that through their act of feeding hungry ones during Ramadan, micro-entrepreneurs promote or publicise themselves as kind and generous people that give them recognition within the Muslim community so to spread through word-of-mouth

as real Islamic altruism. This will give them a better recognition in society and then become known as honest and trustee believers. Reflecting on social cognitive theory, they appear to benefit from others outside this social situation such as increasing their commercial activities, tax reduction and benefits from different government schemes.

This essay argues that micro-entrepreneurs use indirect reciprocity through the acts of altruism to become known as generous contributors to the community so they become attractive to the faithful through word of mouth and business institutions/agencies for other purposes such as tax reduction, government schemes etc. To them, this mechanism of exchange leads to get benefits from a third-party as stipulated in the literature (Miller, 2007; Zahavi, 1977).

GUILT - It is widely recognised that religious people engage in prosocial behaviour (Orbell et al., 1992). Substantial evidence based in the psychology of religion (Anderson, 2015; Saraglou, 2013; Tan, 2005) confirm that religious people tend to appear helpful and prosocial when they are preoccupied with their positive self as a self-motivation factor. Referring to cultural differences and prosocial behaviour, it has been argued that *“People are more likely to feel empathy towards members of their in-groups who are in need, and the more empathy they feel, the more likely they are help”* (Aronson, Wilson, and Akert, 2014, p.387). Other scholars, Preston and Ritter 2013, examined the different effects of religion and God on prosociality with the ingroup and outgroup. They argue that religion and God are different concepts and concluded that religion primes enhanced prosocial behaviour towards the religious ingroup.

A misguided guilt manifests itself amongst micro-entrepreneurs when they are motivated by their own self-interest (Briki and Amara, 2018). This essay points out that they appear as feeding and helping the needy ones, but they are doing it for the wrong reason because, based on the writer personal’s observation, they also contribute to market speculation and price raise of food products during the month of Ramadan, i.e., price speculation. This can be reflected on the feeling guilty of their action and hoping to use their charity work to promote and rebuild their image in the society/community. However, Allah remind these people in (Quran: 90:7-10) –

“Does he (a person) none observes him? Have We not given him two eyes, and shown him the two paths?”

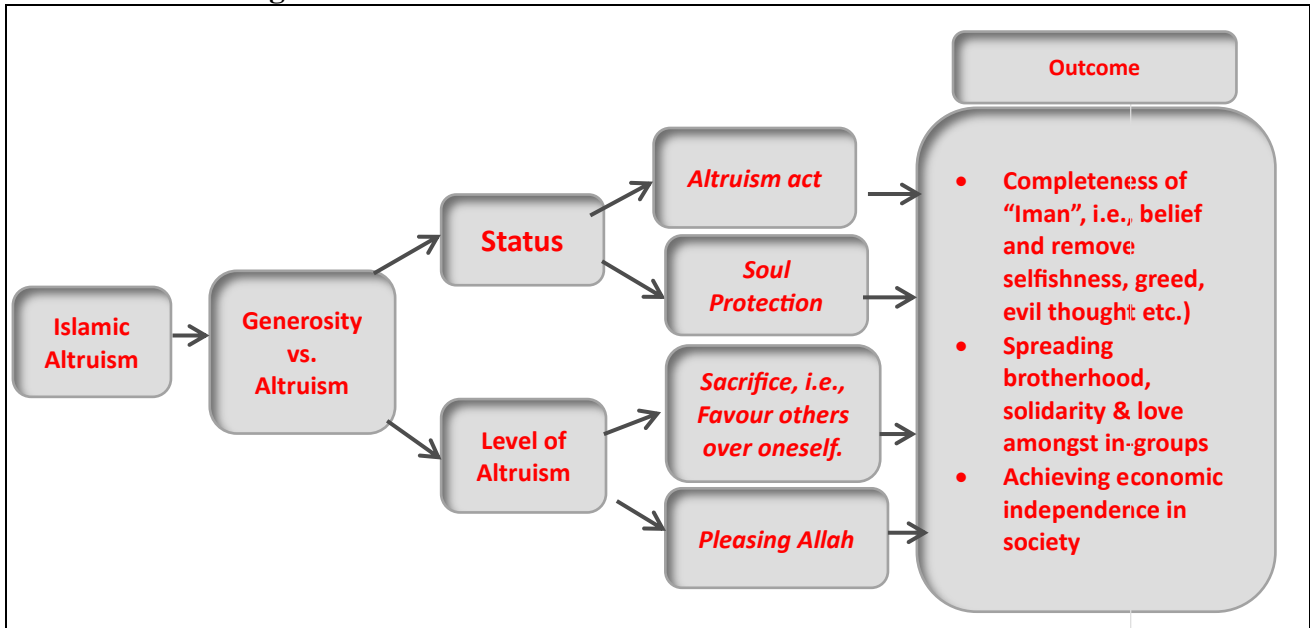
This is also reported in other religions (Gervais and Norenzayen 2012).

Through their acts, they hope to demonstrate their altruistic behaviour. One can argue that you do not have to be businessman/businesswomen to be altruistic. The fact of the matter, there are many people/volunteers who do not have the money but contribute by working and

volunteering and giving their own time to make the act successful (*Level of Altruism*). Those volunteers demonstrate prosocial altruistic behaviour and work on protecting their soul, but they do not receive as much recognition as the business owners (*Status*).

To sum up, it is widely recognised that most of religions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, etc.) preach altruistic behaviour. This essay focused on a single religion (Islam) and how its faithful (ingroup) demonstrates an altruistic behaviour (figure 2).

Figure.2: Islamic Altruism & Prosocial Behaviour Outcome



It is very difficult to pinpoint the exact characteristic of altruistic behaviour among micro-entrepreneurs. As it is still to be proven through lab experiments or survey reports, they might, themselves, believe and perceive the need to feed people during Ramadan. It is questionable whether they are motivated by empathy as their religious teaching preaches (*Soul Protection* and *Pleasing Allah*). Without carrying an experiment or ethnography study, this essay has the difficulty to claim with certainty that those micro-entrepreneurs have acted without expecting a (commercial not religious) reward or recognition in return amongst their fellow Muslims (*Level of Altruism*). If these micro-entrepreneurs are perceived as pure prosocial and altruism people, this can only be a case of an *attribute error*.

There is a tendency to believe that the volunteers (cooks, waiters, waitresses and other helpers) are after a gratifying/religious award. This essay believes that the helpers in this social setting practice Ramadan express *true altruism* behaviour. As far as micro-entrepreneurs are concerned, *implicit attribute* comes into play and their good behaviour is a cover-up or a

response to their guilt. Looking at religion and prosocial behaviour, there is views that, in private situations, people are less likely to help. The reason being is no one will be aware of the help given (Aronson, Wilson and Akert, 2014). It is good to see Muslims feeding people during Ramadan. But it has been witnessed that in some Muslim countries, politicians do feed voters. Whether as a Muslim politician or micro-businessperson, it does not explain his/her personal traits or answer the question: why do they help people? Do they really have personal qualities that social psychologists understand and predict their pro-social behaviour? Is the religion the key playing factor in this social setting during Ramadan? Without scientific experiments or survey reports, i.e., with lack of empirical evidence, this essay has left the writer with more questions than answers to the research question (*What are the key factors that influence a person (micro-entrepreneur) to engage in prosocial behaviour in Ramadan?*). Finally, this paper still argues that there is an act of prosocial behaviour by micro-entrepreneurs, but their key influential factors are to be tested to predict their altruistic behaviours.

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