



Volunteers-to-be in Oman: An Analytical Study of Sociocultural Motivations among University Students within their Social Networks

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ABSTRACT

Volunteerism research has been predominantly informed by Western perspectives emphasizing individual agency, providing limited understanding of volunteer motivations in societies where religious and sociocultural values remain central. This study examines the sociocultural motivations underlying volunteering intentions among Omani university students and identifies the demographic characteristics associated with these motivations. A cross-sectional survey was conducted among 492 university students, with analyses focusing on 399 respondents who expressed willingness to volunteer but had no prior volunteering experience. Exploratory factor analysis, hierarchical cluster analysis, and chi-square tests were employed to identify latent motivational dimensions and examine differences across sociodemographic groups. Five motivational dimensions emerged: faith and humanism, generosity and family, compassion and career relationships, homeland duty and individual will, and personal protection and career development. The faith and humanism factor emerged as the strongest motivational dimension, whereas the personal protection and career development factor was the weakest. Cluster analysis identified three distinct motivational profiles, with only 25.3% of respondents exhibiting consistently high motivation. Age and educational attainment significantly differentiated motivational profiles, whereas other sociodemographic characteristics showed no significant differences. The findings demonstrate that volunteering intentions in Oman are primarily shaped by culturally embedded religious and communal values rather than instrumental considerations, extending understanding of volunteer motivation in non-Western contexts and informing culturally responsive strategies for volunteer recruitment and engagement.

KEYWORDS

Cluster analysis; community service; Oman; sociocultural aspects; socio-demographic factors; volunteers-to-be.

INTRODUCTION

Volunteering is the selfless act of dedicating one's time, money, and/or energy to help others, encompassing various kinds of actions (Turner, 2005, p. 435). Throughout history, volunteering has played a crucial role in strengthening social connections, from small communities (Kaye, 2021) to the development of nation-states (Clemens, 2020).

Existing research has shown that volunteering can improve the well-being of both individuals and the community (Dennis & James, 2016; Utemissova et al., 2025). Particularly during crises and disasters, volunteering becomes essential in saving lives and lessening the impact of adverse events. In such situations, official resources may be strained due to the increased number of people requiring immediate or long-term assistance (Whittaker et al., 2015). The outbreak of COVID-19 is a poignant recent example as demonstrated by the emerging literature on the topic (Yuki et al., 2020).

Nonetheless, it has been shown in current studies that the adoption of volunteering remains limited in its reach and impact across different settings and demographics. Recent studies on college students indicate that engagement in volunteer and social activities differs based on social media usage patterns (Kilinc et al., 2023). Indeed, during the COVID-19 pandemic, traditional ways of volunteering that rely on in-person interactions became difficult due to new safety protocols (Lachance, 2021). As a result, communities less accustomed to modern volunteering methods, particularly those with less established civil societies, encountered obstacles in ensuring some services (Al-Ani et al., 2017; Al-Fahdi et al., 2020). Moreover, existing research revealed that even in newly urbanized areas, it is a challenge to involve residents accustomed to traditional volunteering in tight-knit local groups or small neighborhoods (Volunteers in the Arab World Report, 2003).

Studies on volunteering in the Middle East have often used standardized categories and methods to explore the motivations of volunteers (Al Gharaibeh, 2010; Al Rashidya, 2016). However, not all Middle Eastern societies have modern-style volunteering organizations supported by forms of solidarity like civil society. In some cases, these organizations may be lacking or weak, despite local traditions and beliefs that highly encourage altruistic acts (Abdel Samad, 2007). In such contexts, volunteering may be linked to cultural practices that are not easily understood within discourses that prioritize values associated with modernity, which have historically emphasized autonomous, self-motivated individuals and proactive community initiatives (Meyer & Jepperson, 2000).

Social behavior reflects both local traditions and modernization processes (Marquis & Battilana, 2009). In volunteering, value-based obligations may complement transactional and relational expectations, supporting the examination of motivation within the cultural and moral frameworks through which individuals understand service (Vantilborgh et al., 2012).

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the incentives that cause people to volunteer in Oman. The importance of this current study comes from examining how culture-based values and behaviors, which are often described in cultural-specific terms, can be studied using

sociocultural lenses versus solely quantitatively. This information will likely be valuable for all countries experiencing significant changes due to their rapid development and emergence of a new civil society such as Oman. Additionally, these studies support the idea that it is important to understand what motivates potential volunteers, based on both the local language and belief systems they live in; therefore, this is an essential component of developing effective recruitment/retention strategies (Aguirre & Bolton, 2013).

Houle et al. (2005) stated that volunteering has numerous benefits based upon the following arguments. It protects the volunteer's emotional well-being from experiencing those negative emotions associated with volunteering (Schwartz, 1970). It assists the development of a person's career and leads to future job opportunities and/or promotions in a profession. It supports social beliefs that include solidarity and cooperation among people. It provides an opportunity for a person to carry out his/her religious beliefs that helping others will be rewarded in both the current life and in the afterlife. It allows individuals to make choices regarding how they would like to assist their family, country, and mankind without bias. Volunteering allows individuals to exercise free will. The results of this research show that the primary motivation behind an individual's decision to volunteer is their faith. Their free will is heavily influenced by their belief system as well as their connection with the sustainer. Although there may be differences in the types of motivations that exist in various cultures, the results of this study demonstrate the effectiveness of applying such motivations throughout all cultures. Nevertheless, this study demonstrates significant importance because it examines the functions that exist in this type of context of societal changes occurring in response to modernization within a traditional Omani cultural-social context.

Second, it delves into the methodology used to gather data. Third, it introduces the analysis, investigating whether the assumed benefits of volunteering act as a driving force for individuals and to what extent; exploring the variations in responses based on demographic characteristics; and scrutinizing the outcomes through cluster analysis. Fourth, it examines the results in the framework of the prevailing culture of modern Omani society. Finally, it affirms that the discoveries align with recent socio-cultural aspects of contemporary Omani society, which prioritizes a moderate form of Islam, advocates for modern education for personal empowerment, and endorses independent initiatives.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Volunteerism in Europe has helped create the concept of volunteering, and it has been spreading throughout the world for the last couple of hundred years (Paley, 2020). Volunteering is defined by volunteers acting voluntarily, or of their own free will (Cambridge Dictionary, 2013). Some key words used in association with volunteering include "will" and "desire"; these too were originally defined using the Latin word *voluntas* (Cambridge Dictionary, 2013).

Volunteering in Western societies is generally described as voluntary action undertaken through individual free will or altruism to benefit others without expectation of return (Mann,

2001). This emphasis on autonomous choice provides a useful contrast with culturally embedded understandings of volunteering in Arab and Islamic contexts.

The literature demonstrates that volunteering in Arab and Islamic societies has distinct features, first and foremost the terminology. The term for "Volunteering" in Arabic is *tattawwu'*. The distinction between volunteering and "*tattawwu'*" can be seen in the motivation behind them and their respective objectives. The term "voluntarism" from foreign origins emphasizes choices and free will, whereas volunteering in Omani society is associated with a collective will oriented toward shared beliefs and community aspirations. In Arabic the term *tattawwu'* is believed to be driven by a collective will ultimately be derived from the power of Almighty God. The etymology of the word "volunteer" in Arabic traces back to the term "*Mutawa'*", denoting individuals serving the community as a divine calling. In the countries comprising the Arabian Peninsula *Mutawaa'* refers to,

"[...] a volunteer for religious work for which a reward is calculated, and no money is agreed upon with him, except to the extent that the people donate to feed him, house him, and meet his needs.... God has made him obedient; God has made him a worshiper of Him, obedient to Him, with a rank superior to the common people, above the common people and below the world." (Al Qahtani, 2023).

The actions taken by volunteers are viewed as an act of Allah, or a manifestation of the inherent will of each person prior to being born. This differs from much of the individualistic motivation described within Western views regarding volunteering. As Mann (2001) stated, "theologically speaking, nothing happens without the will of God"; therefore, God represents goodness. This perspective raises questions about whether such an activity aligns with the common definition of a volunteer within both Omani and Western cultures. Additionally, it lends itself to the theological belief that nothing good or evil comes to fruition absent the intent of God. Therefore, since God is viewed as a benevolent force, it brings into question whether the essence of volunteering, as defined within Omani and Western societies, is represented through the activity of volunteering.

As noted in Mittermaier (2014), there exists a unique form of "Islamic volunteering" among Muslim populations. Her research examines the activities of the nonprofit organization Resala, as well as the relationship between Western compassionate values and local cultural values. She emphasizes the importance of intention in Islam, specifically executing God's intentions for society and promoting social unity. As Mittermaier states, her findings also illustrate how this form of "Islamic volunteerism" deviates from the traditional definitions of autonomous and sympathetic volunteers, as well as from those of traditional charity models.

Volunteers were motivated by a variety of factors, as identified through Mittermaier's research. These include social justice, assisting other humans, and economic exchange related to spirituality. The research demonstrates how the "other in need," "the self," and "God" exist on a continuum and how they often overlap in creating a more equitable world or paradise. Both emotional caregivers seeking paradise and those performing religious duties seek to serve

as mediators of divine justice based upon an understanding of ethical principles related to Islam. The practice of recognizing the interdependence and equality of all beings is counterintuitive to the belief in autonomous charity and compassion. Instead, it supports the development of pious intentions and the implementation of God's will, promoting the dependence of individuals on each other socially. Mittermaier provides insight into the unique perspectives of volunteers in Egypt who participate in charitable activities and challenges the traditional societal notion of God as the "divine." Through this methodological approach, a broader context for defining what is considered "good" is provided, thus providing a new horizon for examining charitable giving.

The views presented by Mittermaier have been developed and supported by significant theoretical works completed by Talal Asad. Tradition is viewed as being comprised of "practices of discourse," which aspire to be true to the founding texts of the Quran and Sunna but also adapt to the constantly changing conditions of everyday life (Asad, 2003, 2019). Rather than portraying individuals as free-thinking agents who can shape their own individualities, the data collected for this project portray participants as adherent members of their social environment who influence their perceptions, emotionality, thought processes, and behaviors. Therefore, Mittermaier advocates for research methodology to take into consideration local cultures, local traditions, and cultural exchanges so that researchers can fully understand the local customs and potential for adaptation and exchange.

Previous research on volunteering in Muslim societies highlighted the significance of faith as a strong motivator, particularly among women (Al Mawali & Mohammed, 2011). Findings from a recent study on the cultural landscape of present-day Oman corroborate these findings by illustrating how moderate Islam serves as a unifying factor for the diverse ethnic groups in the Sultanate, bridging their varying backgrounds and local religious practices (Al-Ismaili, 2018).

In Oman, the idea of volunteering is perceived as part of charitable activities referred to locally as *ihssaan*, which involves showing kindness and goodness to others and oneself. The concept of *ihssaan* is part of a semantic structure that connects benevolent and altruistic behaviors scattered throughout the foundational scriptures of Islam including primarily the Holy Qur'an. "Do good. Indeed, God loves those who do good" (The Holy Quran. The Second Chapter "Al Baqara" verse 195) is only one of innumerable examples in the Quran that encourages Muslims to be good to themselves and to others. The Sunnah, or traditions of the Prophet Muhammad, serves as the second primary source of guidance for Muslims and further defines the concept of *ihssaan* as an internalized meaning of goodness which is the essence of God. When the Prophet was asked about *ihssaan*, he said: "It is to worship God as if you see Him, and if you do not see Him, He sees you." This understanding, together with other foundational Islamic teachings, has long interacted with local Omani practices and contributed to culturally embedded understandings of religious and social conduct. In this context, *ihssaan* is tightly linked to the notion of voluntarism believed to occur because of obedience to the commands of God. Rasham (2023), for example, describes voluntarism as offering something desirable to

fulfill the commands of God. It is based on obedience, which involves complying with the directives of a higher authority at both the individual and societal levels.

[...] “a gift that comes out of wealth in the face of closeness to God, and it is intended as a reward and approval from Him. It is not an obligation. It is an act of expression obedience. Accordingly, it is a name for what a person donates from him, and he is benevolent in that, and he is not to blame for leaving it because it is an obedience added to the core required duties” (Rasham, 2023, p. 96).

Currently, *ihssaan* is intertwined with contemporary ideas alongside other culturally relevant beliefs linked to social solidarity. For instance, existing research underlines the significance of honing the abilities and recognition gained by volunteers (Al-Shamli & Al-Mamari, 2015). Nevertheless, literature also stresses that these elements are pivotal in fostering active and enduring engagement in communal life (Al-Shamli & Al-Mamari, 2015). Giving is a fundamental aspect of the shared Islamic faith as a custom encompassing a belief system that has profoundly shaped the Omani perspective of the world throughout history. In conclusion, *ihssaan* is a key concept in Islam widely accepted by Oman's varied ethnic groups, serving as a central belief and guiding principle in the country's current culture. As a result, it is used as the name for significant associations in the country.

Despite the considerable initiatives and the integration of voluntary work-related connotations in the local customs, the level of volunteerism in Oman remains low, possibly sporadic. For instance, the official national statistics show that only about 30% of individuals have engaged in volunteering activities (Abuiyada, 2018; Global Review of Volunteering Report, 2015).

METHODOLOGY

This research employed a quantitative research methodology. For the study, researchers developed an original questionnaire. The questions were written utilizing local language as a means to determine beliefs, emotions, and actions regarding current volunteering practices. The study participants were segmented into three groups. This paper focuses on the first group, which constitutes the majority of the study sample, with 399 respondents (81.1%) out of a total of 492 individuals. This segment has a positive attitude toward volunteering, and they are willing to engage in volunteer activities. The second segment is made up of 76 respondents (15.4%) who had previous experience with volunteering. The third segment is made up of 17 respondents (3.5%) who hold a negative attitude toward volunteering.

- B1: Relief from fear and anxiety
- B2: Compassion for others
- B3: Attainment of appreciation
- B4: Career improvement
- B5: Deal with diverse groups of people
- B6: Employment

- B7: Homeland service
- B8: Generosity
- B9: Family service
- B10: God's rewards in this world and the hereafter
- B11: Service for humanity with no discrimination
- B12: Individual will

The questionnaire did not measure *ihssaan*, *tattawwu'*, or *mutawa* as separate constructs. Rather, these concepts are reflected conceptually in locally framed motivations such as generosity (B8), family service (B9), divine reward (B10), service to humanity (B11), and individual will (B12). Thus, these sociocultural concepts provide an interpretive framework for understanding the measured motivations rather than representing independent survey variables.

The sampling procedure for obtaining study participants involved the use of snowball or network sampling. Snowball/network sampling employs 'index' participants, which are chosen randomly from a larger pool of people. These selected participants will then introduce researchers to their peers, family, and friends. Since this type of sampling is very cost-effective because it uses the participant's own network to locate interactions among peer groups, subcultures, and societies (LeCompte et al., 1999), there were already good relationships established with the index participants; they were students enrolled at Dhofar University. These participants were met with regularly and communicated with through social media to keep in touch. As a nonprobability sampling method, snowball/network sampling does not ensure population representativeness; therefore, the findings should not be interpreted as statistically representative of all Omani university students.

Ethical considerations were observed throughout the study. Prior to participation, informed consent was obtained from all participants. Participants were informed that their participation was entirely voluntary and that they were free to decline participation or withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or adverse consequences.

The statistical analysis identified clusters based on participants' motivations for volunteering and compared these groups across socioeconomic characteristics. Cluster analysis is becoming one of many tools researchers use to categorize/segment a large body of population data into meaningful patterns (Leech et al., 2014). Cluster analysis was performed in the current study utilizing SPSS software and consisted of four steps. Step one involved the display of statistics related to participants' sociodemographic characteristics. Step two involved analyzing the correlation matrix to determine the highest correlation among all the motivation items. The third step consisted of applying factor analysis to create cohesive and consistent motivation item categories. The resulting motivation factor categories were evaluated using Cronbach's alpha (Amado Mateus et al., 2023). Finally, step four involved performing cluster analysis to divide participants into three categories of motivation. Participants were classified

into three motivational groups based on their responses to 12 motivation items representing five motivational factors. The groups were then compared across socioeconomic and demographic characteristics using chi-square tests.

The validity and reliability of the motivational measures were examined as part of the statistical analysis. Construct validity was assessed through exploratory factor analysis of the 12 motivation items, consistent with recent applications of factor and cluster analysis to culturally situated student perceptions (Yussupova & Tarman, 2025). Factor retention was guided by the scree plot and the eigenvalue-greater-than-one criterion, with oblique rotation applied to allow for possible correlations among the underlying dimensions. Items with factor loadings of 0.30 or higher were used to define the extracted factors. Internal consistency reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha for each of the five resulting motivational factors, with coefficients ranging from 0.535 to 0.943. Together, these procedures were used to examine the empirical structure and internal consistency of the motivational dimensions employed in the subsequent cluster analysis.

RESULTS

The statistical analysis (table 1) indicates a higher proportion of women than men in the sample. The majority of participants have a high level of education and live in urban settings. Nearly half of the respondents were married (47.6%), and a similar proportion were employed or self-employed (45.9%).

Objective 1: Sociocultural Motivational Dimensions of Volunteering

Table 2 displays the correlations between the 12 motivation items for participating in volunteering activities. It indicates that several variables are significantly correlated at a level of 0.01. Many of these correlations are strong enough to justify the use of distinct scales (Loewenthal & Lewis, 2020). For instance, "B4: Volunteering to fight Corona will enable me to build relationships in possible workplaces" shows a high correlation with "B2: Volunteering to fight Corona is because I will feel compassionate for others." The correlation coefficient for this relationship is 0.89.

The very high correlation between B2 and B4 (.892) indicates substantial overlap and possible item redundancy. Because both items were subsequently grouped within the same factor, this strong association may have influenced the factor solution and should be considered when interpreting the Compassion & Career Relationships dimension.

To identify consistent factors and their related motivation items, factor analysis was the most suitable approach. The scree plot and the eigenvalue-greater-than-one criterion were used to determine the number of factors to retain (Williams et al., 2010). An oblique rotation was applied, as it was not possible to know if the factors are correlated with each other (Hoban et al., 2005). A loading of 0.30 was used as the minimum exploratory criterion; however, all items retained in the final factor solution had absolute loadings of at least 0.429. The extracted

factors are named according to the items loaded in each factor. Cronbach's alpha was examined to estimate the internal consistency of the extracted factors (Alshawi et al., 2023).

Following a factor analysis of the original 12 motivation items/variable data set, five distinct factors were identified and named based on the items they encompass. Cronbach's alpha was used to assess the internal consistency of these factors, which are detailed in Table 3 along with the corresponding motivation items. The first factor represents "Compassion & Career Relationships," including motivations B2 and B4. The second factor represents "Faith and Humanism," including motivations B10 and B11. The third factor is named "Personal Protection & Career Development," including motivations B1, B3, B5, and B6. The fourth factor represents "Homeland Duty & Individual Will," grouping two motivation items: B7 and B12. The fifth and final factor is named "Generosity & Family," including B8 and B9.

Table 3.

Motivation factors to participate in volunteering activities resulting from factor analysis with Cronbach α

	Factors	Loading	Cronbach α
Compassion & Career Relationships	B2: Because I feel compassion for others	-0.997	0.943
	B4: Enables me to build relationships in the places I want to work	-0.895	
Faith & Humanism	B10: An endeavor to please God in this world and the hereafter	0.622	0.743
	B11: A service to all of humanity, and for me there is no difference between one person and another	0.995	
Personal Protection & Career Development	B1: Relieves me of fear and anxiety about the danger of the epidemic	0.538	0.656
	B3: To achieve appreciation	0.570	
	B5: Teaches me how to deal with diverse groups of people	0.507	
	B6: Could improve my job situation	0.700	
Homeland Duty & Individual Will	B7: Duty toward the homeland	0.667	0.624
	B12: Expression of my individual free will	0.689	
Generosity & Family	B8: one of my generosity	-0.783	0.535
	B9: in the service of my family and clan	-0.429	

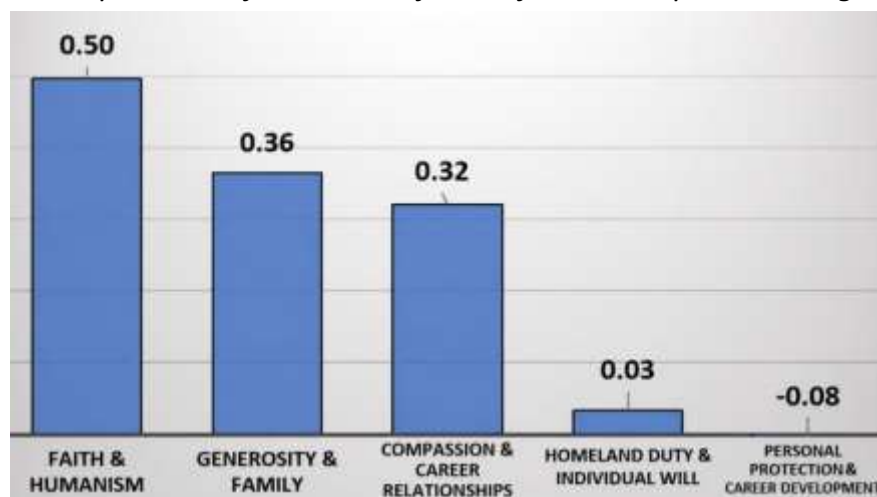
Internal consistency varied across the extracted factors. In particular, the Cronbach's alpha of 0.535 for the Generosity and Family factor indicates limited internal consistency; therefore, this exploratory factor should be interpreted cautiously.

The various motivations were standardized by converting them into z-scores for comparison on a uniform scale. This standardization revealed that the most important motivation among study participants to volunteer is faith and humanism. The z-score is comparatively high in comparison with the other motivations such as "Homeland Duty & Individual Will" and "Personal Protection & Career Development". According to the findings,

the respondents are also motivated to volunteer for generosity and family or because they want to protect other people and create new relationships. The z-scores for these two motivations are high and come respectively in the second and third positions.

Figure 1.

The importance of motivation factors for the sample according to score z scale.



Objective 2: Motivational Profiles of Prospective Volunteers

The identification of homogeneous groups based on motivation factors for volunteering was achieved through cluster analysis. The scales of the five factors were converted to Z scores. Utilizing Ward's method and Euclidean distance, the cluster approach facilitated the determination of groups via agglomerative hierarchical clustering (Hair et al., 2019). A three-cluster solution was identified, as displayed in Figure 2.

Figure 2.

Volunteer motivation clusters derived from hierarchical cluster analysis using standardized motivation factor (z-score) profiles.

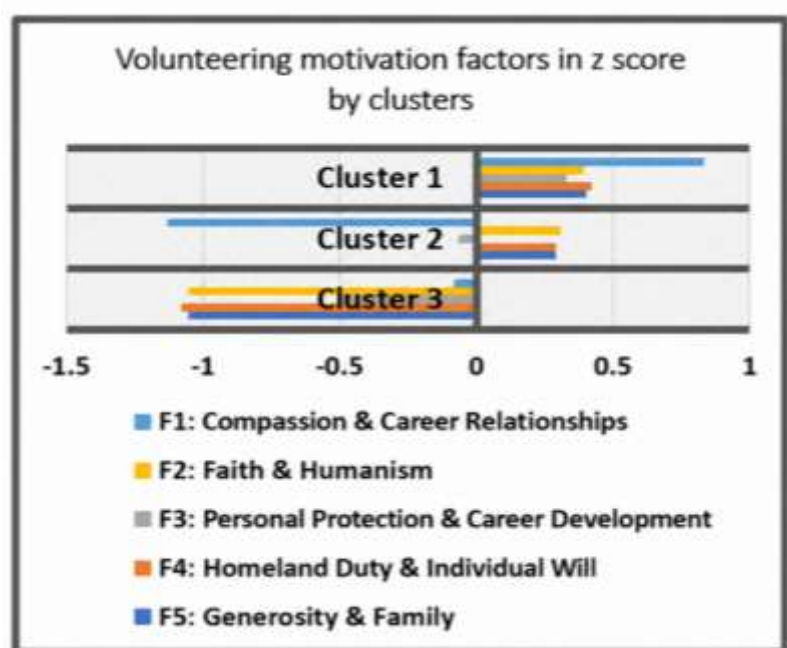


Figure 2 presents the results of the cluster analysis to identify homogeneous groups according to motivation factors for volunteering.

Data in Figure 2 demonstrate that cluster one participants have much higher motivation than the other two clusters regarding every aspect related to volunteering. Cluster two participants are motivated only as it relates to factors 2, 4, and 5. Cluster three participants have very little drive toward every area. Descriptive statistics were analyzed to provide an overview of the demographics and socioeconomic characteristics, such as age, education, sex, work status, family size, marital status, place of residence, and income levels, for each cluster.

Objective 3: Sociodemographic Differences across Motivational Profiles

The chi-square test was utilized to assess whether there existed statistically significant variation among the subsegments. Statistically significant differences among the three groups were found only with respect to age and education. Comparison of cluster composition showed that students aged 41 or older represented 19.3% of the medium-motivation group, 14.9% of the high-motivation group, and 4.9% of the low-motivation group. In this way, it is possible that the adult population in the 26-40 year old range comprises the largest segment of students classified as being the least motivated.

Furthermore, looking at the academic achievement of the groups showed that the second group called "medium motivation" (75%) and the first group called "high motivation" (75.2%), had a greater number of students with superior educational levels than the third group called "low motivation" (66.4%). Thus, these results also illustrate that people with a higher level of education are more likely to be located in the highest-motivation groups.

DISCUSSION

Overall, social behavior is driven by a society's historical traditions resulting from various types of modernization processes. Five primary factors that motivate volunteers were identified; however, only three related factors appeared to have an influence on volunteer motivation. Faith/humanism was found to be the most influential factor in terms of motivating volunteers, followed by generosity/family and compassion/career relationships, indicating that understanding volunteer activity and the driving forces behind this action requires the evaluation of the socio-culture surrounding volunteers.

The study findings indicate that participants base their motivation on faith and humanism. In a study on voluntarism within a comparable Muslim society, Mittermaier (2014) presents a distinctive perspective of "Islamic volunteering." Studying a local voluntary and charitable organization operating in Egypt called *Risalah*, the research examines connections between the Western notion of "compassion" and local practices identified as a religious duty.

Compassion is a two-sided relationship that may be hierarchically composed of a "donor" and a "recipient" whereas duty, as practiced by the members of *Risalah*, is a "triadic system of mediation—between God, donor, and recipient [that] runs counter to the notion of an autonomous yet compassionate volunteer" (Mittermaier, 2014, p. 527). The Mittermaier study

highlights another important area related to the role of intent within Islamic ethical principles. Intent in the context of Islamic ethics relates to carrying out or acting according to God's will and contributing to social cohesion. These concepts reflect a distinct form of "Islamic volunteerism" that differs from traditional understandings of altruism, compassion, and individual charitable giving, and therefore represents a different approach to charitable engagement. This is a primary outcome of the present research, demonstrating the extent to which volunteering is connected to religion and faith. Recent studies have shown that the study of the modern Omani cultural landscape provides evidence supporting many of these same findings. For example, belief in a moderate interpretation of Islam functions as an integrating force among many ethnically diverse groups in the Sultanate, regardless of the different ethnicities or local religious beliefs they may practice (Al-Ismaili, 2018). Likewise, faith was identified as a major motivator for female participation in volunteer work based upon the results of a study completed by Al Mawali and Mohammed (2011).

The significance of faith and humanism has also been recognized through cross-cultural comparative studies examining differences between the Western concept of voluntarism and culturally specific interpretations of charity (Valenzuela-Garcia et al., 2019). Such comparisons also discuss how colonialism and conquest were factors in creating and maintaining inequality in power relationships between cultures (Appadurai, 1996).

Asad (2003) delves into how individuals within Muslim societies reshape their connection to the Divine Will, impacting their perception of living purposefully and responsibly. Instead of viewing individuals as independent subjects capable of shaping their behavior freely, the research suggests understanding individuals as *compliant agents* who actively engage in their social environments influenced by long-standing traditions that significantly impact their perspectives, emotions, thoughts, and actions in the world.

Research findings indicate that generosity plays a significant role in motivating people to volunteer. In Muslim societies, being generous has a positive impact. Providing social support through time, effort, or donations is linked to improved spiritual well-being, and specifically, volunteering is connected to a longer life expectancy (Rashid, 2021). The act of generosity can result for example in *Sadaqah* or charity, which is done voluntarily (Bonner, 2003). Many studies consider that there is a common ground between generosity and charity (Bonner, 2003).

Volunteering is viewed by Omanis as part of *ihssaan*, a local charitable belief based on the Islamic faith. This notion underlies social service organizations and is evident in daily interactions among Omanis. The related phrase *'hssant* (you did excellently) for example, to which people react with *ahssana allahu 'ilayk* (may God be gracious to you), pervades all daily interactions in Oman. *ihssaan* then belongs to a semantic network connecting gracious and selfless behaviors. It is indeed strewn across the founding texts of Islam, which find theological and practical support in the Holy Qur'an and Sunnah.

In traditional beliefs, volunteering is driven by generosity and the value of family connections. Within the study community, family bonds hold significant importance and are

deeply rooted. The local perspective emphasizes finding fulfillment without seeking material benefits, as self-worth is based on personal actions rather than expecting something in return. In Omani culture, Gibalis, who are from the coastal plain and mountains of the Dhofar region in southern Oman, are known for their giving nature without anticipating any form of reciprocation. In Gibali traditions, giving and receiving should be effortless, following Emerson's idea of offering without expecting anything in return (Emerson, 2007, p. 111). Gifts symbolize family or friendship in the community, with the Arabic word "*Hadiyyah*" meaning "gift" emphasizing giving without expecting reciprocation.

Existing literature and the result of this research underscore the significance of these ethnographic concepts in understanding the conclusions drawn in the present article. Risse (2019) conducted extensive observations that offer numerous examples illustrating how residents of Salalah, the capital city of southern Oman's Dhofar province, prioritize independence in various aspects such as communication, travel, fishing, and relationship choices. Risse highlights the cultural significance of respecting individuals' autonomy while fostering a societal culture that values community norms and individual aspirations. Despite their generous nature, gifts are seen as impersonal (Risse, 2015, pp. 290–291) and should be prioritized for those serving the family and clan (Bensaid et al., 2013).

Compassion and career relationships: The relationship between these two variables and the concept of volunteering becomes clear when considering the meaning of the Arabic word for "volunteer" in connection to related words derived from the same linguistic root. Volunteering in Arabic is called *tattawwu'* which essentially refers to obedience, i.e. the implementation of orders of a higher authority and not necessarily the desire of the individual volunteering person, even if volunteering is expressed by him or her. The supreme authority here is God and its benevolent meanings, which are embodied in the actions of people seeking to obtain His approval and satisfaction. Further, the word *tattawwu'* is derived from the root *tawa'a*, from which another word with a clearer connotation originates, the word *muttawwa'* (plural *mutawa'in*). This is a socio-religious role performed by persons believed to have been chosen by God in preaching for the true religion. The role is not for the sake of personal gains. It is out of a belief that *Mutawa'un* are doing a duty to God. In conclusion, obedience and duty strengthen social relationships which ultimately lead to a greater sense of protection among relatives, friends, colleagues, and other community members, fostering an innate willingness to help one another.

Considering the motivating factors, the cluster approach enables the identification of three main groups. The first group, comprising 25.3% of the respondents, is highly motivated by volunteering. Their scores for the five factors are above average. The second group, representing 44.1% of the respondents, consists of individuals with moderate motivation. For this group, the scores exceed the average for three factors: "Faith and humanism," "Generosity and family," and "Homeland Duty & Individual Will." The third group consists of respondents with low motivation to volunteer. Only two variables, age, and education, are significant in

distinguishing the three respondent groups based on their motivation levels. The results indicate that the most motivated groups are predominantly individuals over 40 years old with a high level of education.

The importance of socioeconomic factors in relation to volunteering has been demonstrated through many different research studies (Luria et al., 2017). The value of volunteering in providing opportunities for social contact, personal satisfaction, and self-fulfillment throughout an individual's life span has also been recognized (Hendricks & Cutler, 2004). People who have had greater access to education are generally more likely to volunteer. Volunteers may also have larger social networks and the financial means to contribute to the betterment of society. Education is very important in Islam in order to become closer to Allah. Older generations, who are usually parents, have great influence and follow the way of God and His Messenger.

As people age, the social motivations for volunteering increase (Dávila & Díaz-Morales, 2009). There are many reasons why people volunteer, depending upon their age and current stage of life.

Social, human, and cultural capital are essential to volunteering. Studies demonstrate that older generations use human and social resources much more than younger generations because they participate extensively in volunteer work. Younger generations need more spiritual and social support to encourage them to volunteer. As people become older, they develop both mentally and spiritually and therefore can comprehend and relate to abstract ideals such as altruism, which is commonly inspired by abstract teachings and regular worship (Oesterle et al., 2004). In the Muslim community, age is highly valued, and with age comes a deeper understanding of humility and the importance of serving others through obedience to God's commandments. As individuals take on roles like parenthood, they acquire more responsibilities and authority towards others. It is expected that the combination of age and education would likely lead individuals to exhibit positive behaviors beneficial to society, such as engaging in volunteer work (Shabkan & Al-Shahrani, 2021).

Research results show that only 25.3% of the respondents are highly motivated to volunteer. Despite efforts and the integration of voluntarism-related practices into local traditions, the rate of voluntarism in Oman remains low or inconsistent. For instance, the percentage of participants who have ever volunteered in this study for example is approximately 15%, which is lower than the national average of 32% (National Center for Statistics and Information, 2023). Only 15.4% of the 492 participants in this study engaged in any volunteer activities. Therefore, the analysis focused on the 399 respondents who expressed a desire to volunteer but had not done so, aiming to uncover the motivations that could potentially encourage them to volunteer.

Although it has been reported through global volunteer reviews that Oman and the MENA are not among the most popular places to volunteer (Global Review of Volunteering Report, 2015), the present study suggests that relying solely on these studies to examine Omani

volunteerism does not accurately represent the blending of traditional practices with contemporary volunteerism, which can be said to operate according to its own inherent logic. The way volunteers engage with communities in Oman is unique to itself and cannot be easily compared to other volunteer engagement models. As such, volunteerism in Oman is based on an independent sense of community (the community) and many times consists of long-term reciprocal relationships as discussed by Mauss (2011) in *The Gift*. Therefore, local concepts of volunteering appear to be shaped by the ongoing interaction between state-driven modernization efforts and the deep-rooted traditions of local communities.

CONCLUSIONS

This study demonstrates that volunteering intentions among Omani university students cannot be adequately explained through models that frame volunteering primarily as autonomous choice or instrumental self-interest. Instead, prospective volunteering is embedded in a moral and sociocultural order in which service derives meaning from faith, communal responsibility, and social relationships. The predominance of faith and humanism indicates that volunteering is understood not merely as a discretionary activity, but as an ethical practice through which individuals enact culturally grounded notions of goodness, obligation, and belonging.

The results demonstrate how intentions emerge as an expression of inherited social norms and obligations to family, community, and the divine. As such, Omani volunteerism is not solely a result of either tradition or modernity but rather reflects the interaction between them. It provides explanation for why there has been no direct correlation between positive opinions about volunteering and long-term engagement in it: the formalized nature of most volunteer opportunities does not reflect local definitions of service.

The main academic contribution of the study is in broadening volunteerism theory beyond mostly Western, individual-focused explanations by showing that intentions to volunteer can be shaped through culturally rooted and relational expressions of agency. From a methodological perspective, the application of regionally focused motivational items, exploratory factor analysis, and cluster analysis uncovers the framework of motivation and the variety of potential volunteers. The emphasis on individuals prepared to volunteer but not yet involved further differentiates motivational readiness from real participation.

These results suggest that volunteer programs in Oman need to link institutional opportunities with local (and therefore meaningful) values of *ihsan*, reciprocity, and shared responsibility; while still allowing volunteers to pursue their own ambitions for self and career development. The results confirm that theories of volunteering and ways to measure it must be sensitive to the culture in which voluntary acts acquire both moral authority and social value.

Several constraints should be recognized. Because this is a cross-sectional study, it is not possible to infer causality from the data. In addition, the use of snowball/network sampling may limit the generalizability of the findings beyond the study sample. Additionally, instead of using volunteered time (the ultimate measure of volunteers), the study based its measures of

intention-to-volunteer (which can sometimes represent what people say they will do) as opposed to reported actions. Finally, several of the extracted motivation dimensions exhibited relatively low reliability, and should be taken into consideration when examining the implications of the present study's results.

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APPENDIX

Table 1.*Characteristics of the respondents (N: 399)*

	Variables	Sample size	Percentage
Gender	• Female	276	69.2
	• Male	123	30.8
Age	• 18-25	164	41.1
	• 26-40	180	45.1
	• More than 40	55	13.8
Education	• Low	74	18.5
	• Medium	36	9.0
	• High	289	72.5
Job	• Unemployed	149	37.3
	• Housewife	67	16.8
	• Employed or Self-employed	183	45.9
Family Size	• 2-4	105	26.3
	• 5-7	252	63.2
	• More than 7	42	10.5
Family pattern	• Father, mother and sons	266	66.7
	• Father, mother, sons, grandparents	47	11.7
	• Father, mother, sons, grandparents uncles, and aunts	86	21.6
Marital status	• Single	193	48.4
	• Married	190	47.6
	• Divorced or widowed	16	4.0
Mode of living	• Urban	321	80.5
	• Pastoralist	78	19.5
Income	• Low	37	9.3
	• Medium	330	82.7
	• High	32	8.0

Table 2.*Bivariate correlation matrix between motivation items*

	B1	B2	B3	B4	B5	B6	B7	B8	B9	B10	B11	B12
B1	1											
B2	.262*	1										
B3	.298*	0.07	1									
	*		6									

B4	.234 [*] *	.892 **	0.04 5	1								
B5	.323 [*] *	0.06 2	.245 [*] *	0.05 3	1							
B6	.314 [*] *	0.07 6	.431 [*] *	0.08 3	.333 [*] *	1						
B7	.205 **	0.07 8	.106 [*] *	0.08 7	.258 [*] *	0.07 0	1					
B8	0.06 3	0.07 4	.174 [*] *	0.03 6	.212 [*] *	.216 [*] *	.297 [*] *	1				
B9	.243 **	0.06 2	.251 **	0.02 3	.229 **	.250 **	.213 [*] *	.367 [*] *	1			
B10	- 0.00	.178 [*] *	- 0.01	.134 [*] *	0.08 9	- .153	.394 [*] *	.295 [*] *	.155 [*] *	1		
B11	0.06 8	.209 [*] *	0.08 2	.135 [*] *	.239 [*] *	- 0.08	.380 [*] *	.341 [*] *	.186 [*] *	.603 [*] *	1	
B12	.262 **	.142 **	.118 *	.123 *	.326 **	.136 **	.455 **	.271 **	.272 **	.339 **	.334 **	1

N= 399 - ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 4.

Socio-demographic profiles of motivation clusters (N =399)

	Cluster (25.3%) High motivation	Cluster (44.1%) Medium motivation Motivation in 3 factors only	Cluster (30.6%) Low motivation	Chi-square (p-value)
Gender				.121
• Female	68 (67.3%)	115 (65.3%)	93 (76.2%)	
• Male	33 (32.7%)	61 (34.7%)	29 (23.3%)	
Age				.008
• 18-25	42 (41.6%)	71 (40.3%)	51 (41.8%)	
• 26-40	44(43.7%)	71(40.3%)	65(53.3%)	
• More than 40	15(14.9%)	34(19.3%)	6(4.9%)	
Education				.026
• Low	12 (11.9%)	29 (16.5%)	33 (27.0%)	
• Medium	13 (12.9%)	15 (8.5%)	8 (6.6%)	
• High	76 (75.2%)	132 (75%)	81 (66.4%)	

Working status				.140
• Unemployed	36 (36.6%)	57 (32.4%)	56 (45.9%)	
• Housewife	17 (16.8%)	29 (16.5%)	21 (17.2%)	
• Employed or Self-employed	48 (47.5%)	90 (51.1%)	45 (36.9%)	
Family size				.094
• 2-4	34 (33.7%)	43 (24.4%)	28 (23.0%)	
• 5-7	55 (54.5%)	120 (68.2%)	77 (63.1%)	
• More than 7	12 (11.9%)	13 (7.4%)	17 (13.9%)	
Family pattern				.054
• Father, mother and sons	57 (56.4%)	122 (69.3%)	87 (71.3%)	
• Father, mother, sons, grandparents	19 (18.8%)	19 (10.8%)	9 (7.4%)	
• Father, mother, sons, grandparents, uncles & aunts	25 (24.8%)	35 (19.9%)	26 (21.6%)	
Marital				.209
• Single	44 (43.6%)	79 (44.9%)	70 (57.4%)	
• Married	52 (51.5%)	90 (51.1%)	48 (39.3%)	
• Divorced or widowed	5 (5.0%)	7 (4.0%)	4 (3.3%)	
Mode of living				.102
• Urban	82 (81.2%)	134 (76.1%)	105 (86.1%)	
• Pastoralist	19 (18.8%)	42 (23.9%)	17 (13.9%)	
Income				.106
• Low	14 (13.9%)	12 (6.8%)	11 (9.0%)	
• Medium	83 (82.2%)	150 (85.2%)	97 (79.5%)	
• High	4 (4.0%)	14 (8.0%)	14 (11.5%)	