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Optimizing Charitable Donations in Bahrain: Insights from a Cross-Regional Study

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Abstract

This study investigates the intrinsic motivations behind charitable donations across different regions, with a focus on the Middle East, North America, and Asia, and a specific case study on Bahrain, with the goal of increasing charitable donations in Bahrain. Utilizing both primary data from interviews with local charities in Bahrain and survey responses from individuals in these regions, the research identifies key motivational factors, preferred donation sectors, and the influence of cultural, economic, and social differences. The findings reveal that in the Middle East, religious beliefs, particularly Islamic principles such as Zakat, predominantly motivate charitable giving. In contrast, North American donors are primarily driven by personal values, social responsibility, and tax incentives, while Asian donors exhibit a blend of personal values and a growing trend towards structured philanthropy influenced by new wealth. Additionally, the study highlights significant challenges faced by Bahraini charities, including the need for year-round donations and effective fund utilization. Recommendations for enhancing continuous charitable support include launching ongoing campaigns, fostering corporate partnerships, and leveraging digital marketing. The study concludes with suggestions for future research to include a more diverse population from various regions and socioeconomic backgrounds, aiming to provide a more comprehensive global perspective on charitable giving.

Keywords: charitable donations, intrinsic motivation, Bahrain, Zakat, cultural influences, philanthropy trends

I. Introduction

In 2023, global charitable donations exceeded $500 billion, reflecting a growing trend in philanthropy that transcends borders and cultures. This study examines the motivations behind charitable donations across different regions, with a focus on the Middle East, USA, and Asia. It aims to identify common factors that influence individuals' decisions to donate, the preferred sectors for donations, and how cultural, economic, and social differences shape these motivations. Through primary data collected from interviews with charities in Bahrain and a comparative analysis of survey responses from various regions, the research will highlight regional similarities and differences in charitable giving patterns.
This study will explore the following aspects pertaining to charitable donation:

1. ***Motivational Factors:*** Investigate the primary reasons why people donate, such as religious beliefs, personal values, social influence, and emotional rewards.
2. ***Preferred Sectors:*** Identify which sectors (e.g., education, health, social services) receive the most donations in different regions and why.

3. ***Cultural and Economic Influences:*** Analyze how cultural norms, economic conditions, and societal structures impact charitable giving behaviors in the Middle East, specifically Bahrain, compared to other regions.
4. ***Comparative Analysis:*** Use the data from surveys to draw comparisons and contrast the motivations and donation patterns across the regions.
5. ***Case Study Approach:*** Share the interviews conducted with Bahraini charities to provide a detailed case study that can offer deeper insights into the specific context of charitable giving in Bahrain.

This structured approach will provide a comprehensive analysis of charitable giving behaviors and highlight valuable insights from the case study of Bahrain. Bahrain, with its rich cultural heritage and diverse charitable landscape, offers a unique context for understanding regional nuances in philanthropic behavior. The case study will help illustrate how philanthropic success is not only measured by the amount of donations collected but also by how effectively these resources are utilized to aid recipients in becoming self-sufficient, thereby adding value back to society. Although the study faces limitations due to the availability of data, it employs a robust methodological approach to draw meaningful insights and provide a thorough analysis of charitable behaviors.

II. Literature Review

This literature review explores the advantages of charity, its effects on the community, and the perspectives of various religions, particularly Islamic law, regarding charitable giving.
Intrinsic Motivations for Charity

2.1 General Benefits

Donating to charity can significantly increase personal happiness and satisfaction, thereby improving overall health by reducing stress levels. It provides a sense of purpose and fulfillment by contributing to a greater good. According to Save the Children (Save the Children, n.d.), donating to charity activates regions in the brain associated with pleasure and reward, releasing dopamine and building neural connections that enhance happiness and reduce stress. Additionally, charitable donations support essential services, reduce inequality, and foster a sense of community, bridging the gap between the less fortunate and society at large (Charities Aid Foundation, n.d.)

2.2 Business Benefits

Companies often engage in charitable activities to enhance their corporate image and fulfill their corporate social responsibility. This can lead to increased customer loyalty, improved employee satisfaction, and better stakeholder relationships. In many regions, businesses receive tax deductions for charitable contributions, providing significant financial incentives. Paul Wormald (Hawsons, 2016) highlights that involving staff in charitable work builds stronger working relationships and increases employee motivation. According to a 2013 Foresters survey (Rimmer, 2013), 82% of customers said they would choose a company that donates to charity over one that does not, illustrating the positive impact on brand image.

2.3 Religious Motivations

Most religions actively encourage charity as a core value. In Islam, charity is a fundamental aspect and a key pillar known as Zakat, which requires Muslims to donate a portion of their wealth to those in need. Similarly, Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, and Buddhism all promote charitable giving. Studies have shown that individuals who are more involved in religious practices tend to give more to charity (Krafess, 2005). This suggests a strong link between religiosity and charitable behavior. For instance, a study by Marripedia (n.d.) found that religiously active individuals donated 30% more

to charitable causes than their nonreligious counterparts, highlighting the influence of religious teachings on promoting altruism and social responsibility.

2.4 Cultural and Social Factors

With increased global connectivity and awareness of international issues, more individuals are inspired to donate to causes beyond their immediate community, such as disaster relief or global health initiatives. Personal experiences, such as witnessing poverty or being affected by a particular cause, can strongly motivate individuals to give. Those with stable incomes are also more likely to donate. The National Council of Nonprofits (2019) outlines how charitable organizations provide essential services such as food, shelter, and healthcare, contributing to the overall health and stability of communities. Additionally, giving to charity encourages social cohesion and engagement with society, enabling people to take an active role in the growth of their community (House of the Harvest, 2023).

The literature reviewed highlights the multifaceted motivations for donating to charity, encompassing personal happiness, business benefits, religious teachings, and cultural and social factors. Each of these motivations plays a crucial role in promoting charitable behavior and contributing to the overall well-being of communities. Future research could further explore the psychological mechanisms underlying these motivations and the long-term impacts of charitable giving on both donors and recipients.

III. Methods

This study utilized a mixed-methods approach, incorporating both primary and secondary data collection methods.

3.1 Primary Data Collection

3.1.1 Interviews with Charities

The first form of primary data collection focused on the perspective of charities themselves. Multiple face-to-face interviews were conducted with representatives from seven charities in Bahrain to provide a comprehensive analysis of their key challenges and success stories. The interviewees were aged between 30-45 years and represented charities predominantly affiliated with child care, such as orphanages, autism centers, and care for children with other mental and physical disabilities.

Interview Participants

Subject	Gender	Age Bracket	Charity Name	Focus Area	Location
1	Male	35-45	Alia Institute for Autism	Children with Autism	Bahrain
2	Male	25-35	Alia Institute for Autism	Children with Autism	Bahrain
3	Male	35-45	Sanabel Orphanage	Orphans	Bahrain
4	Female	20-25	Kind Kil youm	Migrant Workers	Bahrain
5	Female	25-35	Our Responsibility	Orphans	Bahrain
6	Female	25-35	Royal Humanitarian Foundation	Orphans, Widows, Education	Bahrain
7	Female	35-45	Bahrain4All	Children with Special Abilities	Bahrain

These interviews provided valuable insights into the daily operations, formation, growth, and current obstacles faced by these charities. The qualitative responses were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed to identify common themes and patterns.

3.1.2 Surveys

The second form of primary data collection involved a survey distributed to individuals in three regions: the Middle East, Asia, and North America. The survey targeted middle to upper-class citizens who could potentially afford to engage in charitable donations. The survey collected both quantitative and qualitative data through Google Forms.

Survey Participants

Region	**Count**
Middle East	34
Asia	11
North America	5
Total number of participants:	50

The survey consisted of a mix of open-ended and closed-ended questions designed to understand motivation factors and donating patterns. The responses were analyzed using statistical methods and presented using pie charts, bar charts, and other graphical representations.

3.1.3 Secondary Research and Data Analysis

Secondary research involved reviewing existing literature on the benefits of charity, its effects on communities, and the religious and cultural factors influencing charitable giving. Data from interviews and surveys were triangulated with findings from secondary sources to provide a robust analysis.

3.1.4 Ethical Considerations

Informed consent was obtained from all interview participants, and confidentiality was maintained throughout the study where required. Survey participants were assured of the anonymity of their responses.

IV. Results

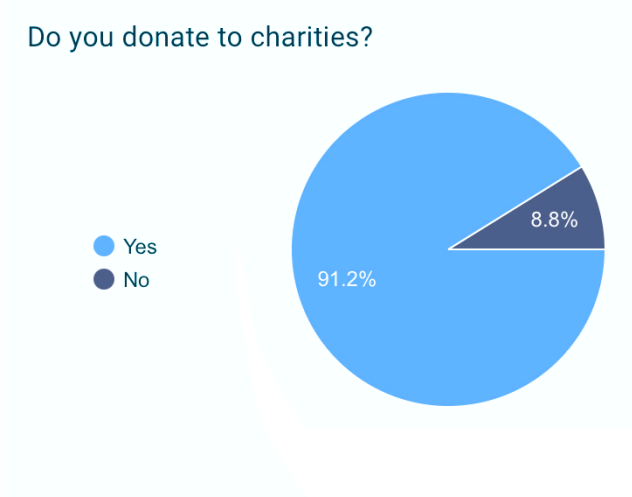
4.1 Interviews Conducted

Of the seven interviews conducted with local charities in Bahrain, key findings identified that those involved in charities chose to participate as a way to contribute to society and improve the future of the less fortunate. The age profile of those interviewed was primarily under 40, indicating a trend of people getting involved in charitable organizations at a younger age. There are numerous small to mid-sized charities in Bahrain, but they often lack collaboration and cohesion, which sometimes hinders their effectiveness, as most charities do not work in parallel with others.

In Bahrain, religious months such as the holy month of Ramadan typically drive the highest collection of donations in the year, as this is the month when every Muslim must pay their zakat, an obligatory charity calculation in Islam based on personal wealth and savings. This is followed by the summer and winter holidays, as many charities work with large corporate donors during these months to provide summer camps and activities for orphans and special needs children. The key struggle for many charities is not only collecting donations but ensuring that funds are used effectively to add value to the community and integrate beneficiaries into society.

4.2 Surveys Conducted

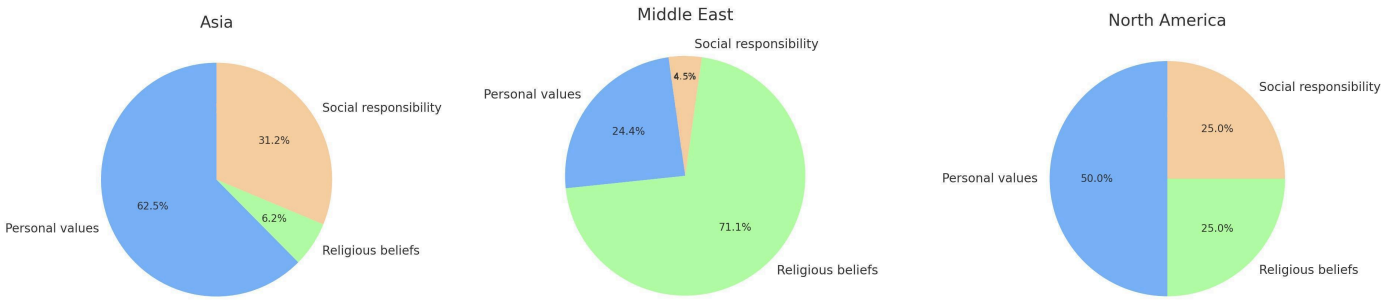
Of the 50 respondents to the survey, the majority were based in the Middle East (68%), followed by Asia (22%) and North America (10%). Regardless of the region that respondents belonged to, an overwhelming majority (more than 91%) indicated that they do donate to some form of a charitable organization. The key reason for the small percentage of respondents not donating was due to concerns about a lack of transparency and accountability once the money has been donated. Notably, among the few respondents who currently choose not to donate to charity, their locations vary. This indicates that while the factors influencing individuals to donate may vary, the reasons for withholding charitable aid remain largely unchanged.



Graphic 1. *Source: Google Form Survey June 2024*

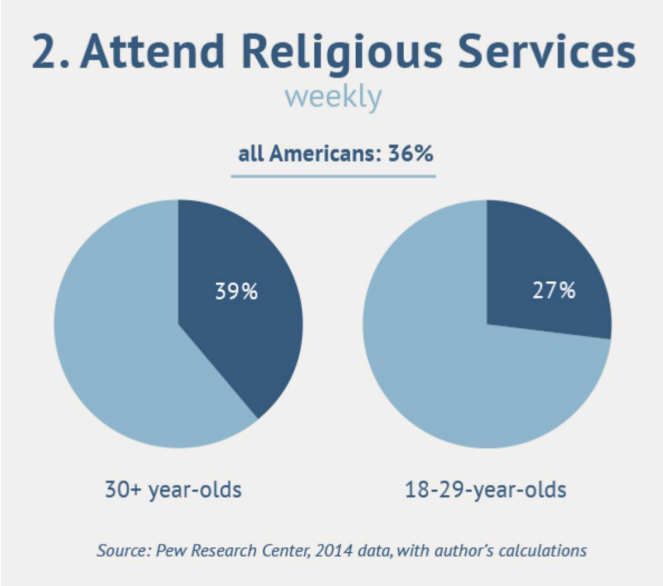
Data from the survey further highlights that the key factor motivating individuals to donate in the Middle East is religious beliefs, with 71% of respondents (24 individuals) stating this as a major contributing factor. In contrast, in Asia, only 6.2% (1 individual) and in North America, 25% (1 individual) cited religious beliefs as their motivation. In other parts of the world, personal values and social responsibility are more prominent reasons for donating to charity.

4.3 Key Motivational Factors by Region



Graphic 2. *Source: Google Form Survey June 2024*

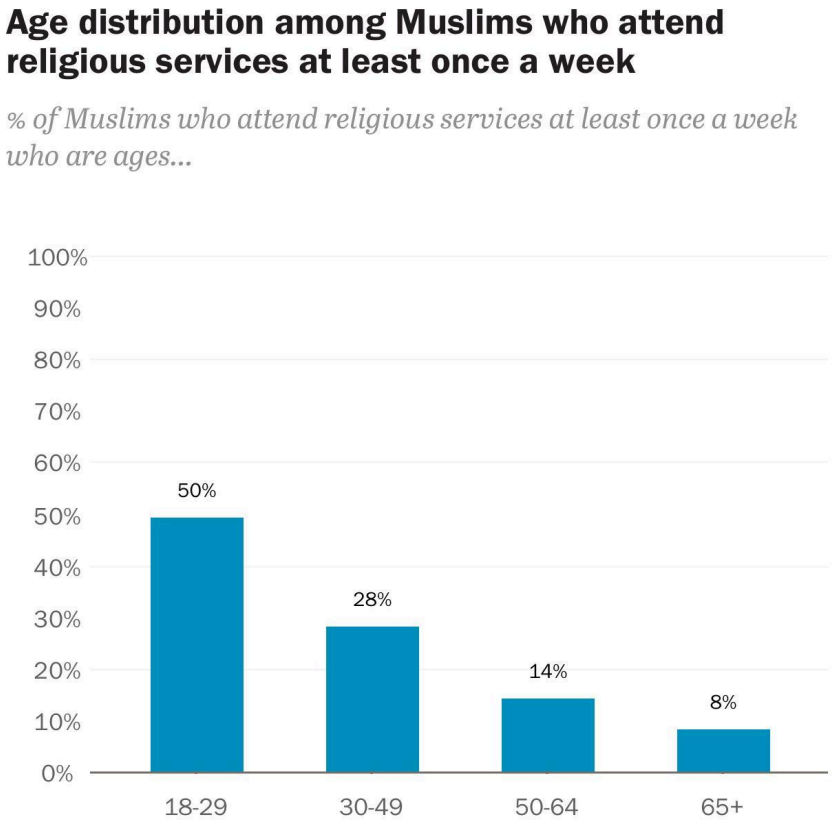
With charity being an integral part of Islamic practice, it is apparent why in the Middle East, a predominantly Muslim region, religious beliefs are the key factor motivating individuals to donate to charities. A review of additional secondary data collected in 2014 (Philanthropy Roundtable, 2019) highlighted weekly religious service attendance in America, reiterating the correlation between religion and charity motivation (see Graphic 3).



Graphic 3.

The chart in Graphic 3 indicates that in general, fewer younger Americans (18-29 years old) attended religious services weekly compared to older Americans (30+ years old) in 2014. The second graphic shows that within the Muslim community, younger Muslims (18-29 years old) were more likely to attend religious services weekly compared to older age groups. This data implies a cultural difference in religious practices between the general American population and the Muslim community. Younger Muslims tend to be more active in attending religious services compared to their American

counterparts. This further supports the notion that religious practices and beliefs are more central to the lives of Muslims, and since the Middle East is predominantly Muslim, there is a direct correlation between higher attendance at religious services and their motivations for donating to charity.

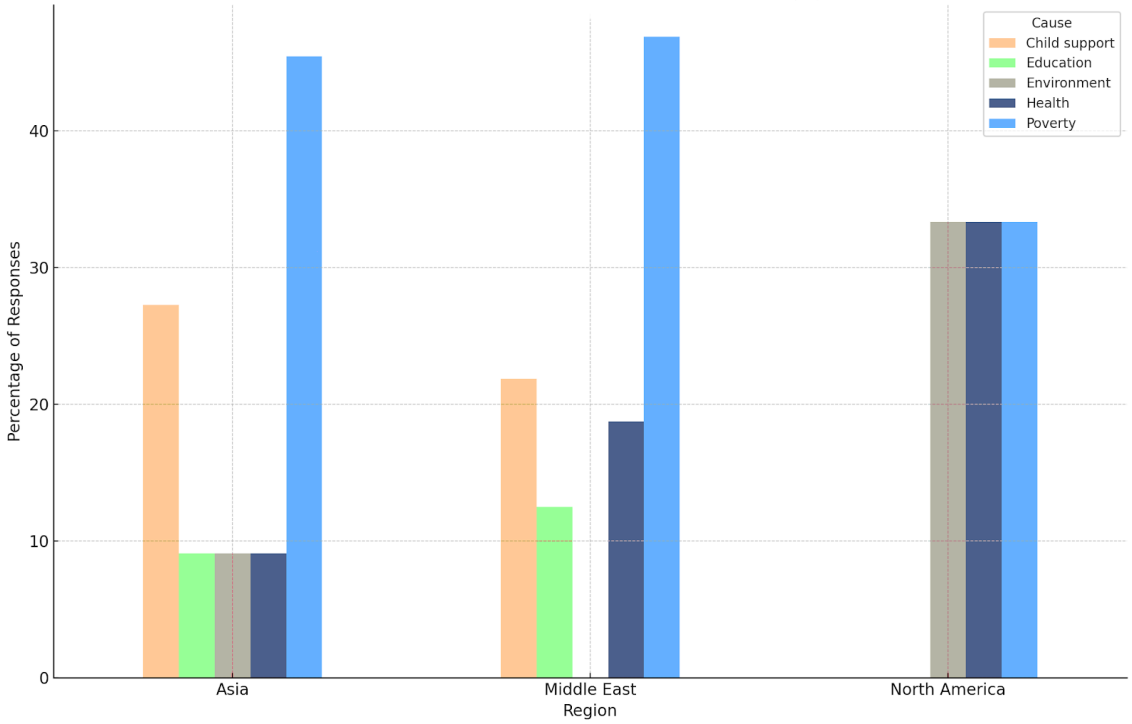


Graphic 4. [1]

4.4 Preferred Sectors for Donations

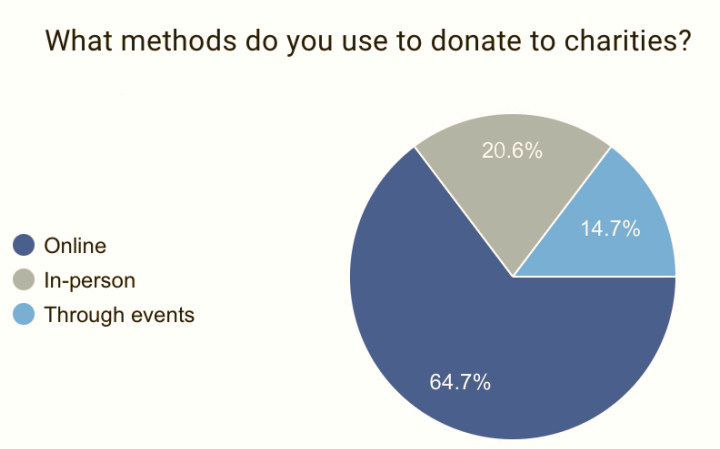
The table below highlights the key sectors/causes that each region prioritizes. In the Middle East and Asia, "Poverty Alleviation" receives the most emphasis, with more than 40% (17 respondents) of donations, followed by charities that focus on "Child Support" with around 24% (9 respondents). It's interesting to note that respondents from North America gave equal importance to Poverty Alleviation, Healthcare, and Environment-related charities, while in the Middle East, none of the respondents chose Environment as one of the key sectors they donated to.

[1] Pew Research Center. (n.d.). Muslims who attend religious services at least once a week. Pew Research Center. Retrieved June 6, 2024 from https://www.pewresearch.org/religious-landscape-study/database/attendance-at-religious-services/at-least-once-a-week/religious-tradition/muslim/.



Graphic 5. *Sectors receiving the most donations by region.*

4.4.2 Donation Methods

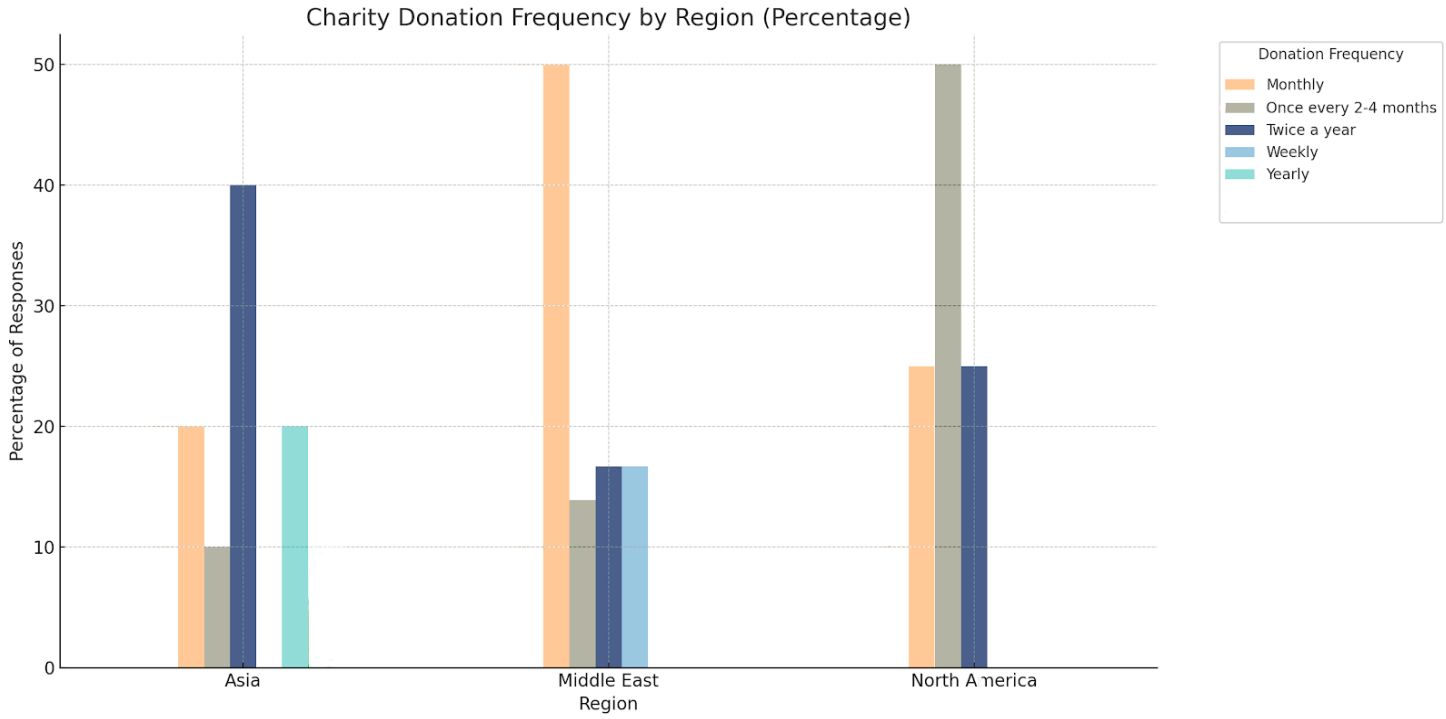


Graphic 6.

A pie chart above shows that a majority of respondents (64.7%) prefer to donate online, highlighting the convenience and transparency provided by online donation options. Most charities now offer online platforms that efficiently process donations and provide updates on how and when the funds are used, increasing donor confidence in the organization's accountability.

4.4.3 Frequency of donations

The Middle East sees the highest frequency of donation with 50% of the respondents donating monthly while in Asia 40% choose to donate biannually and in North America the majority, 50% choose to donate once every 2-4 months.



Graphic 7.

V. Discussion

5.1 Middle East

In the Middle East, charitable giving is heavily influenced by religious beliefs and obligations. Many individuals donate as part of their adherence to Islamic principles, such as Zakat, a form of almsgiving treated as a religious obligation. As the primary data collection highlights, 71% of the survey respondents from the Middle East indicated religious beliefs as the key motivator for donating to charities. Charitable giving holds a significant place in Islamic teachings, where it is seen as both a religious duty and a means of promoting social justice.

Muslim Aid (2023) discusses the importance of charity in Islam, highlighting concepts such as Zakat. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said, “The believer’s shade on the Day of Judgement will be his charitable acts.” Jamal Krafess (2005) states that humanitarian aid in Islam is an obligation, akin to prayer and other pillars of Islam. He notes that Islam favors, stimulates, and reinforces humanitarian action, calling for it to be exercised daily. There is also a voluntary charity known as Sadaqah, with many Muslims increasing their donations during Ramadan when good deeds count for more. These forms of charity not only help those in need but also purify the giver's wealth and soul. This religious duty underscores the profound cultural and social significance of charity within Islamic communities.

The region also sees significant donations directed towards local causes, particularly those addressing poverty and health. Political and economic instability, as well as ongoing conflicts, have heightened the need for charity and humanitarian aid, making charitable activities a crucial aspect of societal support.

5.2 North America

In North America, charitable giving is driven by a mix of personal values and social responsibility. Individuals often donate to a wide range of causes, including education, health, and poverty alleviation. There is a strong tradition of philanthropy, with many high-net-worth individuals and organizations making substantial contributions. Online donations and fundraising events are prevalent methods of giving. Additionally, tax incentives for charitable donations play a significant role in encouraging giving in this region. The presence of these incentives underscores the importance of a supportive legal and economic framework in fostering charitable activities.

5.3 Asia

Asia exhibits diverse patterns of charitable giving, influenced by both personal values and social responsibility. In countries like India and China, philanthropy is growing, often spurred by rising wealth and increasing awareness of social issues. Donations are frequently directed towards education and poverty alleviation, with both local and international causes receiving support. The region's growing middle class and the emergence of new wealth (Buchholz, 2020) contribute to an increase in charitable activities. Methods of donation vary widely, including online platforms and traditional in-person giving. This diversity in donation methods reflects the region's blend of modern and traditional practices.

Key Motivational Factors

- ***Middle East:*** Predominantly religious motivations, with charity viewed as a duty and moral obligation.
- ***North America:*** Driven by personal values, social responsibility, and tax incentives.
- ***Asia:*** A blend of personal values and social responsibility, with a growing trend towards structured philanthropy driven by new wealth.

These regional differences highlight the importance of context in charitable giving and suggest that strategies to encourage donations may need to be tailored to the specific motivations and cultural practices of each region.

Criticisms and Challenges

Despite its benefits, charity faces several criticisms and challenges. Many argue that charity can create dependency and fail to address the root causes of social issues. Some view charity as a temporary fix that can perpetuate systemic inequalities rather than fostering sustainable development. This critique highlights the need for more strategic and sustainable approaches to charitable giving. Additionally, there are concerns about the effectiveness and transparency of many charitable organizations. According to a BBC report (n.d), many would-be donors are deterred from contributing due to uncertainty about where their money is going. This emphasizes the importance of transparency and accountability in charitable organizations to maintain donor trust and ensure the effective use of funds.

VI. Conclusion

6.1 Summary of Findings

This study found that in Bahrain, a Muslim nation, intrinsic motivation to donate to charities is driven largely by religious beliefs. The obligation to pay Zakat during the holy month of Ramadan plays a significant role in charitable giving. Childcare for orphans and special needs children are prioritized causes, with substantial support from the

government-backed charity founded by the King of Bahrain. However, a key struggle for most charities in Bahrain is securing year-round donations and effectively utilizing these funds to help beneficiaries become independent and integral members of society.

6.2 Recommendations

To ensure continuous year-round donations and promote a culture of sustained giving, Bahraini charities can consider several strategies:

1. ***Year-Round Campaigns:*** Launch campaigns highlighting the need for ongoing support throughout the year, not just during religious holidays or specific seasons.
2. ***Corporate Partnerships:*** Engage local businesses and corporations to secure regular donations or sponsor specific projects.
3. ***Educational Initiatives:*** Implement programs in schools and universities to foster a culture of continuous giving among the youth.
4. ***Digital Marketing:*** Utilize social media platforms and digital marketing to maintain a constant presence and remind potential donors of ongoing needs.
5. ***Transparency and Trust:*** Ensure transparent reporting on fund usage and regularly communicate the impact of donations to build trust and demonstrate value.
6. ***Collaboration:*** Encourage collaboration among charities to organize joint campaigns and share resources, reaching a wider audience and encouraging year-round donations.

6.3 Future Research

Given the limited sample size of this study, future research should include a larger and more diverse population from various religions, regions, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Expanding the research to include Europe, South America, and Australia would provide a more comprehensive global perspective and allow for more detailed recommendations.

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