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Philanthropy as Meaning-Driven Social Behavior: An Integrative Model of How and Why to Give in Western and Global South Contexts

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to reconstruct the concept of philanthropy through an integration of Western and Indonesian Islamic perspectives within an Indigenous Psychology framework. Philanthropy studies have tended to be dominated by Western approaches that emphasize the prosocial aspects of "how" giving for example, empathy, altruism, and social norms. However, this framework is considered inadequate to explain philanthropic practices in religious societies like Indonesia, which are steeped in spiritual values and the question of "why" giving.The research employed a qualitative approach using library research and content analysis of primary literature from two epistemological traditions: Western and Indonesian Islam. The findings demonstrate that philanthropy is a multidimensional phenomenon influenced not only by psychological mechanisms and social structures, but also by dimensions of meaning, religiosity, and cultural values. In the Indonesian context, the envirromental and everyday social practices in *pesantren* strengthen the embeddedness of philanthropy, while the modernization of Islamic philanthropic institutions is oriented toward social justice. This research produces a conceptual synthesis in the form of a meaning-based social behavior model that integrates the "how" and "why" dimensions. This model expands philanthropy theory, strengthens the Indigenous Psychology approach, and provides a more holistic and contextual framework from a Global South perspective.

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INTRODUCTION

Philanthropy is a social phenomenon that is receiving increasing attention in interdisciplinary studies, such as psychology, sociology, economics, and religious studies. Philanthropy is generally defined as the voluntary act of giving resources for the public good (Schuyt et al., 2010). From a Western psychological perspective, philanthropy is understood as a subset of prosocial behavior influenced by empathy, altruism, social norms, and individual personality characteristics (Bekkers & Wiepking, 2011; Small & Cryder, 2016; Thielmann et al., 2020). Recent studies indicate that prosocial behavior is the result of a complex interaction between dispositional and situational factors (Capraro et al., 2019; Thielmann et al., 2020). Meanwhile, from an economic perspective, giving is also influenced by mixed motivations (impure altruism), namely a combination of self-interest and concern for others (Andreoni, 1990). Recent research also confirms that the relationship between giving and happiness is contextual and influenced by culture (Aknin et al., 2020), while the meaningful dimension in giving behavior is closely related to psychological flourishing and eudaimonic well-being (Martela & Steger, 2016).

Along with global developments, philanthropy has experienced significant transformation through the digitalization and institutionalization of giving practices. In the Indonesian context, this development is evident in the use of digital platforms and Sharia-compliant crowdfunding, which expands public access and participation (Ascarya et al., 2022), as well as the transformation of Islamic philanthropy into a more

professional and technology-based form (Hassan & Noor, 2020; Sadeq, 2019). In recent developments, philanthropy is no longer understood solely as an emotional response or adherence to social norms, but is also closely linked to subjective well-being and the meaning of life. Numerous studies have shown that giving can increase happiness and life satisfaction (Aknin et al., 2012; Dunn et al., 2008), confirming that philanthropy has a deeper psychological dimension as a means of self-actualization and the search for existential meaning.

Western approaches to philanthropy studies tend to be reductionistic due to a lack of consideration of the dimensions of meaning and value (Sulek, 2010). This has been questioned, particularly due to its bias toward WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic) populations, which do not fully represent global cultural diversity (Henrich et al., 2010). This criticism is reinforced by cross-cultural studies showing significant variations in prosocial motivation across societal contexts (Apicella et al., 2020). In non-Western contexts, including Indonesia, philanthropic practices are influenced not only by individual psychological factors but also by cultural values, collective norms, and religious beliefs that shape how individuals understand and interpret the act of giving (Kailani & Slama, 2020; Kasri, 2013; Kasri & Indriani, 2022).

In the Indonesian context, philanthropy has a strong link with religious practices such as zakat, infaq, and sedekah , which not only function as mechanisms of economic redistribution, but also as expressions of social piety and moral responsibility (Fauzia, 2017; Widiastuti et al., 2022). In the perspective of Indonesian Islam, philanthropy is understood as a manifestation of social piety that integrates spiritual and social dimensions simultaneously, and is oriented not only towards individual assistance, but also towards building social justice and collective solidarity (Fauzia, 2017; Latief, 2013). If Latief (2012, 2013) emphasizes more on how philanthropic practices are integrated and embedded in the social relations of *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school) communities and daily life, then Fauzia (2017) highlights the process of modernization and Islamization of philanthropic institutions in Indonesia, as well as how philanthropy becomes an instrument to fight for social justice amidst the currents of capitalism and a limited welfare state. These two perspectives together show that philanthropy in Indonesia is multidimensional: it cannot be reduced to merely giving behavior, but is a social practice that is full of meaning, spiritual values, and transformative orientation.

Nevertheless, these two key sources need to be read critically. The evidence presented by Latief (2012, 2013) (2012, 2013) derives from qualitative studies focused on particular *pesantren* contexts, so their findings are rich in contextual meaning but limited in sample size and representativeness; they are not intended to be generalized to all *pesantren* or Muslim communities in Indonesia. (Fauzia, 2017) , in turn, relies primarily on historical review and analysis of relatively large and well-organized Islamic philanthropic institutions, so the available evidence better reflects institutional practices and dynamics than the motivations of individual donors. Accordingly, both sources are stronger in explaining context, practice, and institutional change than in measuring why individuals give. These limitations do not diminish their value as conceptual foundations, but they explain why this study positions both as material for theoretical synthesis that still requires empirical testing in future research.

In Western literature, the studies of Schuyt et al. (2010)and Bekkers & Wiepking (2011)occupy a central position as the foundation of the how-to paradigm, emphasizing the mechanisms, psychological determinants, and measurement of philanthropy. Conversely, in the Indonesian context, the studies of Latief (2012, 2013)and Fauzia (2017)serve as bridging nodes connecting Islamic philanthropy with studies of local communities, faith-based social welfare, and institutional modernization. Latief (2012)shows that philanthropic practices in Islamic boarding schools are embedded in social relations and daily religious practices, and are supported by a strong culture of giving within the community. Meanwhile, Fauzia (2017)complements it with an analysis of how modern Islamic philanthropic institutions such as Dompet Dhuafa , Rumah Zakat, and LAZISMU integrate traditional Islamic values with demands for professionalism, public accountability, and a social justice agenda. Thus, the development of contemporary

philanthropy in Indonesia is not only marked by the professionalization of institutions, but also by the strengthening of community bases and dynamic religious values.

The differences between the Western approach and the Indonesian Islamic context indicate the existence of two main paradigms in understanding philanthropy, namely as a behavioral mechanism (how giving) and as a meaning-based practice (why giving). The Western approach tends to emphasize psychological and structural aspects, while the local-religious context as expressed in complementary ways by Latief (2012, 2013) on communal embeddedness and Fauzia (2017) on modernization-for-social- justice emphasizes spiritual values, the meaning of life, and moral identity. These two paradigms developed in parallel without adequate conceptual integration, thus giving rise to a research gap. Therefore, this study aims to develop an integrative framework based on Indigenous Psychology by connecting the dimensions of how giving and why giving in understanding philanthropy as meaning-driven social behavior, by integrating insights from Latief (2012, 2013)on the communal roots of philanthropy and Fauzia (2017) on the dynamics of modernization and social justice in Indonesian Islamic philanthropy. This research is a further development of Hidayat et al. (2026)which examines philanthropic behavior from a multidisciplinary perspective, and provides a more contextual and comprehensive theoretical contribution to the study of philanthropy in the non-Western world.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research is a qualitative library research with a systematic comparative approach (Snyder, 2019). This approach was chosen to compare and integrate two epistemological traditions Western and Indonesian Islam in understanding philanthropy.

Corpus Analysis

This study examines twelve key works divided into three representative corpora using purposive sampling (Patton, 2015). The first corpus focuses on Western micro-behaviors, including Bekkers & Wiepking (2011); Capraro et al. (2019); Pfattheicher et al. (2022); Thielmann et al. (2020). The second corpus places a Western macro-institutional perspective, including Breeze (2021); Schuyt et al. (2010); Sulek (2010). The third corpus focuses on the context of the Global South, Islamic Indonesia, with works Latief (2012, 2013); Fauzia (2017); Kailani & Slama (2020); Kasri (2013); Widiastuti et al. (2022)as contemporary complements. Corpus selection was carried out based on three criteria, namely scientific influence (high citation rate), paradigmatic representation, and contextual relevance to the research objectives Gough et al. (2017).

Data analysis

The analysis in this study was conducted using the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967)which was carried out in four stages (Miles et al., 2014). The first stage was secondary data collection, namely gathering information from twelve predetermined works. The second stage focused on data reduction by organizing and sorting the findings into two main aspects: the "how giving" dimension and the "why giving" dimension. In the "how giving" dimension, data were processed based on indicators such as empathy, altruism, social norms, and institutional structures, while in the "why giving" dimension, data were grouped based on factors such as religious values, meaning of life, and social piety. The third stage was the presentation of the data in a comparison matrix, so that patterns and differences between the findings could be seen more clearly. Finally, the fourth stage was drawing conclusions and conceptual synthesis, namely formulating the findings and integrating them into a more complete conceptual understanding. Furthermore, this study adheres to the principle of theoretical saturation, which is the condition when the twelve analyzed works are deemed sufficient to answer the research questions (Creswell & Poth, 2024).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study suggest that understanding philanthropy needs to shift from a purely behavioral approach to one that integrates the meaningful dimension. In the Western tradition, philanthropy is generally explained through psychological mechanisms such as empathy and altruism (Batson, 2010; Pfattheicher et al., 2022; Van Lange et al., 2006), as well as structural factors such as social norms and institutions (Bekkers, 2021; Thielmann et al., 2020). However, this approach becomes limited when applied in the context of a religious society like Indonesia, where philanthropy is driven not only by psychological factors but also by spiritual experiences and the search for meaning in life (Einolf, 2013; Krause, 2016; Van Tongeren et al., 2016). Existential studies also emphasize that prosocial actions are one of the main sources of meaning in life (Tongeren & Tongeren, 2021).

From an Islamic perspective, philanthropy is inseparable from the concept of worship and human relations with God, thus integrating horizontal (social) and vertical (spiritual) dimensions (Singer, 2008). The motivation for giving in this context often goes beyond economic rationality and is closely related to moral values, rewards, and the meaning of life (Fauzia, 2017; Retsikas, 2014). Religiosity has also been shown to have a significant influence on behavior across various cultural contexts (Bennett & Einolf, 2017). Thus, philanthropy in Indonesian Muslim society cannot be reduced to merely prosocial behavior, but rather as a social practice rich in meaning and spiritual value.

This finding is reinforced by studies in the Indonesian context, which show that philanthropic practices are embedded in everyday social relations and religious values. Research by Latief (2012, 2013)emphasizes that Islamic philanthropy, particularly in the context of *pesantren* and local communities, functions not only as a mechanism for social assistance but also as an expression of collective piety integrated into the social fabric of society. Meanwhile, Fauzia (2017)complements this perspective by showing that Indonesian Islamic philanthropy has undergone a significant process of modernization and Islamization, where philanthropic institutions such as Dompet Dhuafa , Rumah Zakat, and LAZISMU not only distribute aid but also become agents of social justice amidst the limited role of the welfare state. While Latief highlights the communal roots and embeddedness of philanthropy in the daily lives of Islamic boarding school communities, Fauzia emphasizes how Islamic philanthropic values have been adapted into modern institutional forms that are professional, accountable, and oriented toward social justice. These two perspectives together show that philanthropy in Indonesia is multidimensional: rooted in communal traditions while transforming into modern institutional forms.

Furthermore, trust in institutions is a crucial factor in donation behavior (Kasri & Ramli, 2019), while the development of digital philanthropy has also changed the interaction patterns between donors and beneficiaries (Saxton & Wang, 2018). Kailani & Slama (2020)show that social media has accelerated the practice of Islamic philanthropy in Indonesia, creating new intermediaries between givers and recipients that transcend traditional geographic and institutional boundaries. Social capital has also been shown to strengthen the sustainability of community-based philanthropic practices (Putnam, 2020), and individual moral identity plays a crucial role in philanthropic behavior (Aquino & Reed, 2002). In collectivist societies, social norms and group identity have an even greater influence than individual factors (Triandis, 2018).

Furthermore, philanthropy in the Indonesian context is also closely related to Islamic social finance instruments such as zakat, which has been shown to have a significant impact on poverty alleviation and social welfare (Beik & Arsyianti, 2016; Muneeza & Mustapha, 2020). Bibliometric studies show that research on Islamic philanthropy in Indonesia focuses largely on the issues of zakat, the ethics of giving, poverty, and social development (Huda & Soleh, 2023). [Fauzi (2013)also emphasized that religious motives have been shown to be the primary driver of philanthropic behavior in Indonesian society a finding reinforced by subsequent studies (Hamidi, 2023; Puspitasari, 2016)while psychological factors such as empathy and altruism continue to operate within the framework of religious meaning and collective culture (Anggraini & Hartini, 2022; Wardani, 2021).] This suggests that the dimension of how giving does not stand alone, but is integrated with why giving as a source of meaning for action.

The distinction between prosocial behavior, altruism, and philanthropy further emphasizes the complexity of these concepts. Prosocial behavior refers to actions aimed at improving the well-being of others, while altruism emphasizes selfless, intrinsic motivation (Pfattheicher et al., 2022). Philanthropy has a broader scope because it involves social structures, institutions, and resource distribution. It can even be understood as encompassing economic, political, religious, and kinship dimensions simultaneously (Alexander, 2018; Hanifah, 2023).

Based on these overall findings, this study produces a conceptual synthesis that philanthropy is a meaning-driven social behavior, namely social behavior formed from the interaction between psychological mechanisms and dimensions of meaning. Within this framework, empathy, social norms, and social networks function as mechanisms that enable the act of giving, while religious values, the meaning of life, and transcendental orientation provide direction and moral legitimacy to these actions. This perspective aligns with the theory of the meaning of life, which emphasizes that humans are driven by the search for meaning in their lives (Frankl, 2006). The integration of Latief (2012, 2013)insights on communal embeddedness and Fauzia's (2017) insights on modernization for social justice strengthens this model by demonstrating that meaning in philanthropy is not universal, but rather constructed locally through the interaction of tradition, religion, and contemporary institutional dynamics.

Table 1. Comparison of West vs. the Global South in the study of philanthropy

Dimensions	West(Bekkers & Wiepking, 2011; Schuyt et al., 2010)	Global South / Indonesia(Fauzia, 2017; Latief, 2012, 2013)
Main Orientation	How giving (behavioral mechanism)	Why giving (meaning and value)
Focus of Analysis	Structure, measurement, psychological determinants	Social practices, religiosity, meaning of life
Motivation to Give	Empathy, altruism, social norms, economic rationality	Worship, social piety, moral obligation, reward
Unit of Analysis	Individual / population	Integrated social communities/practices
Key Concepts	Public good, altruism, moral identity	Religious-social meaning, zakat, alms, social justice
Paradigm	Positivistic, universalist	Interpretive, contextual, holistic
Literature Position	Global core (core)	Local bridging node: Latief & Fauzia
Practical Example	Giving Tuesday, secular crowdfunding, tax-based donations	Zakat through BAZNAS/Lazismu, Islamic boarding school alms, sharia crowdfunding
Criticism of the Approach	Reductionistic, WEIRD bias, ignores spiritual dimension	Less standardized, weak in cross-cultural generalization
Key Figures	Bekkers & Wiepking (2011); Schuyt et al. (2010)	Fauzia (2017); Latief (2012, 2013)

Table 1 regularly distinguishes philanthropy in the Western tradition (which tends to be mechanistic, individualistic, and universalistic) from philanthropy in the Indonesian context (which tends to be meaning-based, communal, religious, and contextual). This distinction is not merely a cultural accessory, but rather reflects two distinct epistemologies about what giving is and why humans do it.

Table 2. Conceptual Synthesis of Western and Global South Philanthropy

	How to Give (Behavioral Mechanisms)	Why Giving (Meaning & Faith)
Meaning-Driven Philanthropy	Altruism, Empathy, Social norms, Cost-benefit analysis	Religiosity, Social piety, Moral obligation, Meaning of life

Table 2 is the conceptual heart of the entire manuscript. It not only presents data but also concisely summarizes the author's proposed new theoretical model: philanthropy as meaning-driven social behavior. In this model, the "how to give" dimensions (altruism, empathy, social norms , cost-benefit) and the "why to give" dimensions (religiosity, social piety, moral obligation, meaning of life) are no longer viewed as alternatives or opposites, but as two sides of the same coin that together explain why people give. The concept of meaning-driven behavior itself is increasingly used to explain value-based social action (Steger et al., 2019), and aligns with the development of indigenous psychology, which emphasizes the importance of cultural context in understanding human behavior (Kim et al., 2006). Furthermore, this approach also

supports the development of global social theory that is more inclusive of the "Global South" perspective (Connel, 2025).

Theoretical Contributions and Novelties

This study contributes a unified model of philanthropy as *"meaning driven social behavior"* that bridges the paradigms of "how giving" (Western) and "why giving" (Global South/Indonesian). Its novelty lies in three main aspects. First, unlike Western work that emphasizes behavioral determinants (Bekkers & Wiepking, 2011; Schuyt et al., 2010)and Islamic philanthropy studies that are often descriptive or fragmented (Fauzia, 2017; Latief, 2013), this study synthesizes psychological, social, and spiritual dimensions within one framework. It advances philanthropy research from purely behavioral explanations to meaning-based explanations, while preserving the strengths of both traditions. Specifically, it is the first based on the author's research to systematically compare and integrate Latief (2012, 2013) on *pesantren* based communal embeddedness with Fauzia (2017)on modernization and social justice in institutional Islamic philanthropy. Second, the study strengthens Indigenous Psychology as a contextual approach to prosocial behavior. It extends Indigenous Psychology into philanthropy by showing that constructs such as zakat, alms , and social piety cannot be fully understood through a Western universalistic lens Connel (2025). Methodologically, it affirms that epistemologies can be integrated through systematic comparison without treating one as the universal benchmark.Third, it offers a Global South conceptual framework that moves beyond criticizing WEIRD bias (Henrich et al., 2010)by actively constructing theoretical alternatives grounded in Indonesia. Rather than applying Western theories to Indonesia (Anggraini & Hartini, 2022; Kasri, 2013), it builds a model from local practices and then compares it with global theory an approach aligned with decolonial thinking Connel (2025). Overall, this research contributes threefold: theoretical (the meaning-driven model), methodological (integrative comparative approach), and practical (a framework for values-based and institutional philanthropy in Indonesia).

Further Research Development

First, empirical validation is needed using quantitative or mixed-methods designs to examine how “how giving” (eg, empathy, altruism, social norms) and “why giving” (eg, religiosity, meaning in life, social piety) jointly predict philanthropic behavior. This can be supported by developing and validating a meaning-driven philanthropy scale that combines Western indicators (eg, Schuyt et al. (2010)with local items such as zakat payment intentions, community-based almsgiving (sadekah), and participation in sharia crowdfunding. Second, instruments should be culturally contextualized rather than borrowed wholesale from other settings. Cross-cultural adaptation of existing scales is necessary, alongside new items reflecting Indonesian practices such as donations via *pesantren* based digital platforms, neighborhood-level sedekah (RT/RW), and professional/digital zakat. Third, comparative studies should broaden the scope by examining philanthropic practices across religious groups (Muslim, Christian, Hindu, Buddhist) within Indonesia and across Southeast Asia. This will strengthen generalizability while identifying culturally specific values and meaning (Apicella et al., 2020; Henrich et al., 2010) orientations .Patterns, motivations, and distribution of giving, including digital philanthropy mediated by technology (Ascarya et al., 2022; Kailani & Slama, 2020; Saxton & Wang, 2018). Finally, longitudinal studies are recommended to track how major events (eg, COVID-19 or natural disasters) affect the dynamics of “how” and “why” people give, clarifying whether meaning dimensions remain stable or change over time (Tongeren & Tongeren, 2021).

CONCLUSION

Philanthropy should not be reduced to prosocial behavior explained solely by individual psychological processes. Instead, it is a multidimensional phenomenon that links behavioral, social, cultural, and existential dimensions. While Western scholarship frames philanthropy through the "how" of giving shaped by empathy, altruism, norms, moral identity, and institutions, this perspective alone is insufficient to explain philanthropic practices in religious and collective settings such as Indonesia. Indonesian Islamic studies show that philanthropy is embedded in lived social relations, especially *pesantren* life (Latief , 2012, 2013) and is also linked to the modernization of Islamic institutions that advance social justice (Fauzia , 2017). Accordingly, in this context, giving is not only about how people give, but also why they give through religiosity, moral obligation, social piety, and the pursuit of meaning. Using an Indigenous Psychology approach, this study develops a meaning-driven model of philanthropy, where "how" (psychological

mechanisms) interacts with "why" (dimensions of meaning). Empathy, norms, and social networks enable giving, while religiosity, life meaning, and transcendental orientation provide purpose and moral legitimacy. This model highlights philanthropy as a value laden social practice shaped by cultural context. The study contributes by integrating Western and Global South perspectives, strengthening Indigenous Psychology as a contextual framework for prosocial research.

The novelty of this study lies in being the first attempt, to the authors' knowledge, to construct an integrative model that combines the psychological dimension (how to give) and the spiritual dimension (why to give) in the Indonesian context, which have so far been discussed separately in Western literature and in Islamic philanthropy studies. Rather than merely summarizing previous findings, this study shows that meaning in philanthropy is constructed locally through the interaction between communal *pesantren* traditions and institutional modernization, thereby offering a conceptual foundation for developing meaning-based instruments that remain scarce. Although conceptual and limited to Indonesian Muslims, the model supports future empirical testing and the development of culturally grounded philanthropy instruments, as well as broader cross religious and cross cultural studies.

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