



Research paper

Altruistic Consumption Behaviour: An Exploratory Study in Kerala Context

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KEYWORDS

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the altruistic consumption behaviour among consumers in Kerala. Altruistic consumption involves consuming choices driven by concern and sympathy for others, encompassing sustainable (eco-friendly), ethical, and socially responsible products and services. As Kerala is one of the most literate and progressive states in India, the study investigates how altruistic values influence consumption patterns. The research methodology includes both qualitative and quantitative approaches, relying on consumer surveys, personal interviews for data collection. Research findings reveal that consumers in Kerala are massively favouring altruistic consumption, influenced by principles of social well-being, environmental sustainability, and cultural heritage. Nevertheless, factors such as economic limitations, brand consciousness, and the availability of choices also significantly impact these behaviours.

1. Introduction

Individuals tend to collaborate rather than behave self-centred, driven by their pursuit of positive emotions, apprehension about repercussions, and commitment to social norms (Stallen et al., 2017). Altruistic consumption refers to purchasing goods to assist others rather than satisfy personal desires. This has been explored in various contexts, including efforts to alleviate poverty, advance environmental sustainability, and enhance social relationships. The following synthesis outlines significant outcomes from multiple studies regarding altruistic consumer behaviour. Altruistic consumption patterns are shaped by an array of motivations, including those benefiting the group, moral considerations, and advantages for the demander, and benefits for the supplier. The influence of these different motivations on altruistic purchases varies with frequency, with the motivation related to the demander yielding the most substantial impact (Huiyu Xin et al., 2022).



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Altruistic consumption refers to the practice of purchasing goods motivated by concern for others or the environment rather than personal gain (Sen, 2019). Concerns around sustainability, social justice and ethical production methods around the world are fueling the global rise in ethical consumption (Nair & Thomas, 2020). Individuals often choose to consume more, especially food items, to foster comfort and enjoyment for those around them, especially in social contexts characterised by close relationships (Youjae et al., 2018). Taking these insights into account, we focus on Kerala, a region known for its high literacy rate, progressive social policies, and awareness of global challenges, and explore how these factors influence selfless spending behaviours.

1.1 Altruistic consumer behaviour

Altruism, in its general sense, relates to actions that help others, even at the expense of one's own. When it comes to consumer behaviour, it means buying items that accept fair trade, environmental protection or social equality, even if they are more expensive or convenient (Sen, 2019).

1.2 Context of Socioeconomic and Cultural Factors in Kerala

Kerala is one of the hyped states in India due to social and human development indicators such as literacy rate, healthcare, quality of life and life expectancy (Nair & Thomas, 2020). The state is popularly recognized for its values of equality, political and economic awareness and commitment to environmental factors. Residents of Kerala are knowledgeable and often take leadership roles in socially conscious movements, making the region ideal for learning selfless buying habits. (Chakraborty & Mukherjee, 2021).

1.3 Objectives of the study

The main objectives of this research are to:

- Examine the effect of altruism on consumption behaviour in Kerala.
- Investigate the demographic and socioeconomic effect on altruistic consuming decisions.
- Analyse the barriers and facilitators for altruistic consumption in the Kerala.

2. Literature Review

The rise of ethical brands, fair trade initiatives, and sustainable practices has drawn worldwide attention to altruistic consumption (Sen, 2019). Research suggests that individuals in more developed countries are more likely to engage in philanthropic spending due to their higher disposable income and deeper awareness of social issues (Chakravarthy Mukherjee, 2021). Studies of altruistic spending reveal diverse manifestations of altruistic consumption. For example, consumers may intentionally choose high-calorie foods to comfort others, especially in communal settings (Yi et al., 2018). Consumers' willingness to pay a premium for goods ethically sourced through fair trade will facilitate better contracts between vendors and suppliers (Reinstein & Song, 2008). Examples of altruistic punishment can also be observed during service recovery, where customers may reject a company's offer to rectify a situation and seek revenge for what they perceive as unfair treatment (Silva et al., 2017). Such behaviours illustrate the complex interplay between altruism and consumer choices. While the concept of altruism provides a framework for understanding the psychological basis behind product choice in global markets, further investigation is needed to fully elucidate the relationship between altruism and purchase decisions (Hopkins & Powers, 2015). These studies highlight the varied effects of altruism on consumer behaviour in different contexts.

2.1 Ethical Consuming in India

While ethical consumption is still developing in India, there is a growing recognition of sustainability and social justice. Several studies have examined how religion, cultural values, and economic influences influence ethical consumption behaviours (Nair & Thomas, 2020). However, few studies have focused on the distinct consumer demographics of Kerala (Chakraborty & Mukherjee, 2021).

2.2 Consumer behaviour in Kerala

Kerala's consumer market is shaped by high levels of literacy, awareness of international trends and an actively engaged population. Ethical and environmental issues are increasingly present in consumer conversations, especially among middle- and upper-class individuals (Nair & Thomas, 2020). Previous studies indicate an increase in ethical purchasing habits, which are also influenced by economic factors (Sen, 2019).

2.3 Research Gap

Previous studies have examined consumer motivations and activities in various sectors, but there is a lack of research examining the cultural, demographic and socioeconomic aspects that shape this altruistic behaviour in Kerala. Kerala's distinctive social system, which includes high levels of literacy, proactive social policies, and significant remittance income from the diaspora, may lead to different reasons for engaging in altruistic purchases compared to other parts of India. Moreover, there has been a lack of attention to the factors that inhibit or promote selfless (altruistic) consumption in this context. Many studies either focus on Western markets or analyse Indian consumers broadly without entering into Kerala's unique consumer base. This study aims to address this gap, how philanthropy influences purchase choices, identify key influencing factors, and assess market-specific barriers and motivations influencing altruistic consumption behaviour in Kerala.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1 Research Design

The research utilises a mixed-methods strategy, merging qualitative and quantitative information to present a thorough understanding of altruistic consumption in Kerala.

3.2 Sampling

300 respondents from different areas in Kerala were chosen using a stratified sampling method that included urban, semi-urban, and rural regions. The sample was created to guarantee diversity in age, income, and educational categories.

3.3 Data Collection

The required data for this research were collected through three means:

- Surveys: Data on purchasing habits, altruistic motivations, and brand perceptions was collected using structured questionnaires.
- Interviews: Thorough interviews with 30 participants gave detailed insights into individual reasons and obstacles for altruistic purchasing.

3.4 Analysis of data

Analysis involved the use of correlation analysis, heat map analysis and chi-square test for quantitative data from surveys, and thematic coding for qualitative data from interviews and focus groups.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Demographic effect on altruistic consumption

Table 1

| Demographic Factor | Categories | Percentage of Respondents (%) |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Age | 18-25 | 23% |
| | 26-35 | 27% |
| | 36-45 | 26% |
| | 46-55 | 14% |
| | 56 and above | 10% |
| Education | High School | 13% |
| | Undergraduate Degree | 41% |
| | Postgraduate Degree | 34% |
| | Professional Degree | 12% |
| Income Level (per annum) | Below INR 2,00,000 | 16% |
| | INR 2,00,001 - INR 5,00,000 | 34% |
| | INR 5,00,001 - INR 8,00,000 | 31% |
| | Above INR 8,00,000 | 19% |
| Location | Urban | 49% |
| | Semi-urban | 31% |
| | Rural | 20% |

(Source: Primary data)

Table 1 illustrates how demographic factors such as age, education, income, and location impact impulsive consumption behaviour among respondents. How these factors could be related to altruistic consumption behaviours is described here:

- Age:** The large numbers of participants are aged 26-35 years old (27%), with the next highest groups being 36-45 (26%) and 18-25 (22%). Consumers in the 18-35 age group tend to be more altruistic because of their lifestyle, social influence, and financial flexibility, making them important targets for selfless purchases. The older demographic (56 and above) tend to be more cautious with their finances, reflecting their lower percentages.
- Education:** 41% of those surveyed have completed a bachelor's degree, while 34% have achieved a master's degree, showing a well-educated group. Increased levels of education may result in better decision-making, which could decrease spur-of-the-moment purchases. Nevertheless, well-educated people with extra money may also be attracted to altruistic consumption based on status, particularly in upscale or luxury sectors.
- Level of income:** 35% belong to the income group of INR 2,00,001 - INR 5,00,000, while 30% fall within the INR 5,00,001 - INR 8,00,000 bracket. Collectively, these middle-class individuals are prone to making spur-of-the-moment purchases that they can afford. Individuals in the upper 20% income bracket (earning more than INR 8,00,000) might engage in more spontaneous altruistic due to their increased discretionary budget. Respondents with lower incomes (15% earning less than INR 2,00,000) are less inclined to exhibit altruistic behaviour because of their financial limitations.
- Location:** Half of urban consumers are regularly exposed to altruistic buying behaviour. As per the data, Semi-urban (31%) and rural (20%) individuals might face fewer chances for altruistic consumption. In conclusion, Young, educated, urban individuals with moderate to high incomes have the greatest likelihood for altruistic consumption behaviour. Their disposable income, availability of urban options, and exposure to marketing might lead to altruistic consumption.

4.2 Motivating Factors of altruistic Consumption

Table 2 Key motivating factors for altruistic consumption

| Factors of Motivation | Percentage of Respondents Indicating High Importance (%) |
|---------------------------------|--|
| Environmental Concerns | 44 |
| Support for Social Welfare | 37 |
| Religious or Cultural Values | 23 |
| Brand's Ethical Practices | 32 |
| Fair Trade or Local Artisanship | 20 |
| Long-term Health and Well-being | 16 |

(Source: Primary data)

** Given the opportunity to record multiple motivating factors for the respondents, the total percentage is seen to be more than 100

Table 2 displays different reasons and the percentage of participants who find them very important in impacting their choices.

Environmental Concern (44%): This is the main driving factor, indicating an increasing acknowledgment and emphasis on environmental sustainability by consumers. A lot of individuals are inclined to choose brands or products that show a commitment to the environment.

Support for Social Welfare (37%): Social welfare is a key incentive as well, indicating that consumers appreciate companies or products that support societal welfare, like through charitable efforts or ethical business practices.

Ethical practices: 32% of respondents view Brand's Ethical Practices as significant, suggesting that transparency, fairness, and integrity in business operations influences altruistic consumption in a positive manner.

Religious or Cultural Values (23%): While not essential for most respondents, they remain important for a considerable portion. Brands that cater to particular religious or cultural values may attract altruistic consumers.

Support for local artisans or fair trade practices is not a top priority altruistic consumption, indicating a lower ranking in terms of importance compared to other factors such as ethical sourcing. Long-term health and well-being are not primary motivators for the majority of participants, suggesting that, although significant, they may not be the primary influencing factor in altruistic consumer choices. The data indicates that ethical, environmental, and social factors impact consumer decisions, but the level of importance of these motivations varies greatly. Businesses looking to target this market need to prioritise environmental sustainability and

social welfare, as these issues are of utmost importance to a large number of customers. Religious, cultural, and health reasons could attract specific, niche groups within the population.

4.3 Altruistic consumption and Age groups

Table 3 Age wise altruistic consumption

| Age Group | Prefer Ethical Products (%) | Prefer Sustainable Products (%) | Prefer Local Products (%) |
|-----------|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 18-25 | 60 | 50 | 25 |
| 26-35 | 55 | 45 | 30 |
| 36-45 | 50 | 40 | 35 |
| 46-55 | 35 | 30 | 40 |
| Above 55 | 30 | 20 | 50 |

(Source: primary data)

** Given the opportunity to record multiple preference factors for the respondents, the total percentage is seen to be more than 100

Table 4 Correlation Analysis between Altruistic Consumption and Age of respondents

| Relationship | Correlation coefficient | P-Value |
|--|-------------------------|---------|
| Age Vs. Altruistic consumption of ethical products | -0.98 | 0.0035 |
| Age Vs. Altruistic consumption of Sustainable products | -0.99 | 0.0017 |
| Age Vs. Altruistic consumption of local products | 0.99 | 0.0016 |

The correlation analysis of age and various types of altruistic consumption indicates the following findings: A significant opposite relationship exists between age and altruistic consumption of ethical products, indicating that as individuals get older, and their inclination towards ethical products diminishes. This relationship holds statistical significance. There is a clear negative correlation, showing that as age increases, there is a decrease in preference for sustainable products. This relationship also holds statistical significance. A strong positive correlation exists, indicating that as age goes up, and the favour for fair trade or local goods also rises. This relationship has a significant statistical impact. Therefore, younger individuals have a higher tendency to favour ethical and sustainable products, whereas older individuals are more inclined towards fair trade or locally sourced products.

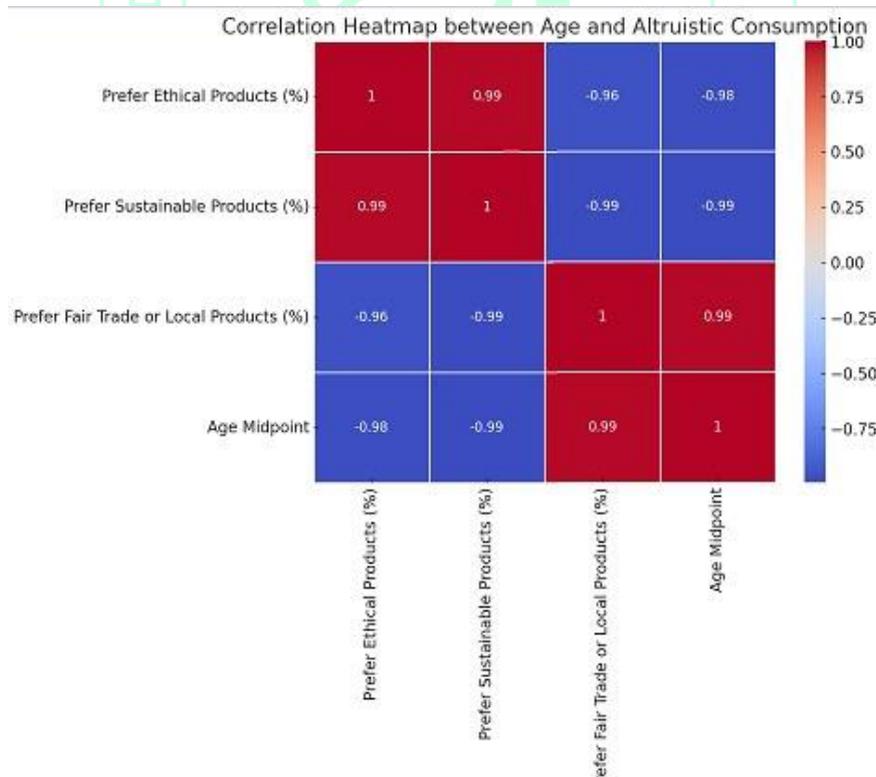


Fig. 1 Correlation Heat map between Age and Altruistic Consumption

This is a correlation heat map showing the relationship between age and different types of altruistic consumption. A heat map provides a visual depiction of the intensity of correlations. Blue indicates that as people age, their preference for ethical and sustainable products decreases. There is a direct relationship between age and favouring fair trade or local products (shown in red), with increasing age indicating a preference for these products.

4.4 Altruistic Consumption based on Location

Table 5 Chi-square test to differences in altruistic consumption according to region

| | Sustainable Product | Socially responsible products | local products | Row Totals |
|----------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| Urban | 55 (52.08) [0.16] | 45 (39.58) [0.74] | 25 (33.33) [2.08] | 125 |
| Semi-Urban | 40 (39.58) [0.00] | 25 (30.08) [0.86] | 30 (25.33) [0.86] | 95 |
| Rural | 30 (33.33) [0.33] | 25 (25.33) [0.00] | 25 (21.33) [0.63] | 80 |
| Column Totals | 125 | 95 | 80 | 300 (Grand Total) |

A chi-square test shows significant differences in altruistic consumption across regions. While socially responsible products are more popular, local products are less popular in urban areas than expected. In semi-urban areas, the consumption of local products is slightly higher than expected, while in rural areas, the variation is much lower for all product types. The highest variation is found for local products in urban areas and socially responsible products in urban and semi-urban areas.

4.5 Barriers to Altruistic Consumption in Kerala

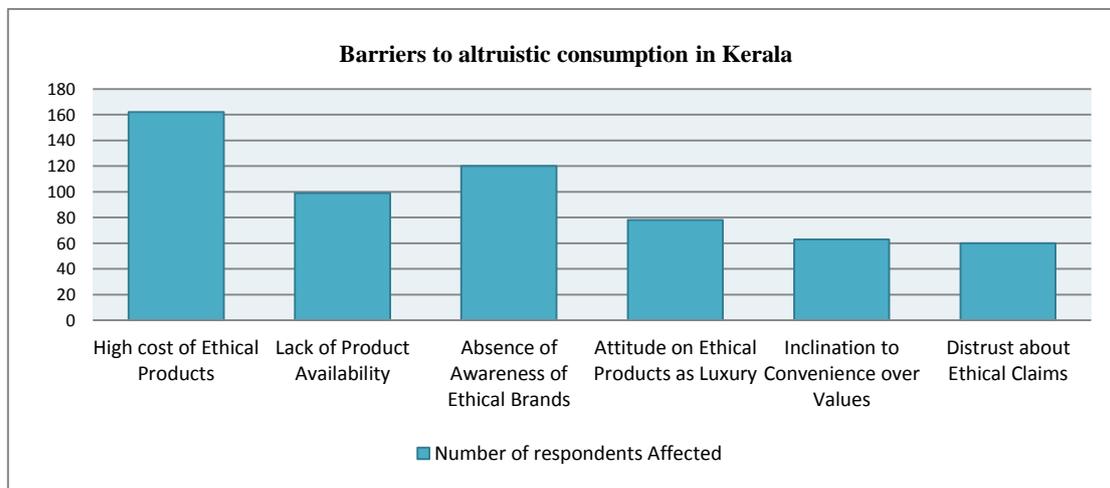


Fig. 2 Barriers of altruistic consumption

High prices and limited awareness of ethical goods are the primary barriers to philanthropic purchasing in Kerala. More than half of those surveyed (54%) identified high prices as a major barrier, impeding their ability to engage in ethical consumption. 40% observed a lack of knowledge about ethical brands, showing that marketing and education for these products is inadequate. Additionally, 33% of those surveyed noted a lack of easy access to ethical products. Exacerbating these barriers are the perception of ethical goods as luxuries (26%), a preference for convenience over values (21%), as well as some scepticism towards ethical statements (20%), all of which collectively impede the widespread adoption of altruist consumption in the area. Consumers who respond have a good perception of ethical and eco-friendly products in Kerala. However, awareness of specific products that embody altruistic values is limited. Young people tend to be more familiar with international products that advocate for sustainability, while older individuals show a preference to support local and traditional products.

5. Conclusions

Altruistic consumption is increasingly popular among consumers in Kerala, particularly among the young, educated and urban demographics. However, financial constraints and limited availability of sustainable products hinder widespread adoption. The high cost of ethically produced products prevents many low-income consumers from being able to afford them, limiting their availability. Moreover, a significant section of the population is not aware of the benefits of ethical consumption. Policymakers and marketers must work together to address these challenges. Policymakers have the ability to encourage businesses to provide cost-effective and environmentally friendly products, while marketers can increase visibility and increase availability through focused advertising and expanded distribution channels. Through improved education and outreach initiatives, altruistic consumption will become more widespread in Kerala, ultimately benefiting consumers, society and the environment.

6. Implication of the study

This study shows a shift towards altruistic consumption in Kerala that prompts businesses to adopt ethical and socially responsible practices to fulfil consumer values. This trend offers market opportunities for brands that offer sustainable and eco-friendly products, but financial constraints may hinder consumer choices. To overcome these challenges, companies must focus on pricing strategies, brand awareness and product accessibility. Cultural traditions also play a role in shaping consumer behaviour, emphasizing the need for businesses to be culturally sensitive in their marketing approach. Policy makers can support this shift towards responsible consumption through incentives and campaigns. Further research is needed to explore how altruistic behaviours vary across socio-economic classes and Indian states.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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