Perceptions of People Acting upon Karmic Beliefs

Daniel S. Hellman

ANR: 120323

SNR: 2004753

June 2020

Tilburg University

Supervisor: How Hwee Ong

2nd Assessor: Dr. Olga Stavrova

Abstract

This paper is a study on person perception of people acting upon karmic beliefs. There is existing research on karmic beliefs, yet there is little research on how people perceive others acting upon karmic beliefs. People do good for many reasons, one motivator being belief in karma. Based on motivations, do-gooders are not always perceived as good or moral people. My study aims to answer how motivation to do a good deed for karmic gains, material gains, or emotional gains influences perception of the do-gooder's moral character, trustworthiness, and altruism. An online survey was answered by 202 participants. In the survey participants were randomly assigned to read one of three vignettes in which a character, Jane, was motivated by either karmic, material, or emotional gains to do a good deed. Participants then rated Jane on perceived moral character, altruism, and trustworthiness. Differences in these perceptions were compared between the three motives to do a good deed. Results suggest that karmic gains did not differ significantly from material gains as motivation to do a good deed regarding perceived moral character, altruism, or trustworthiness. On the other hand, emotional gains as a motivation was largely higher than material and karmic gains as motivation to do a good deed in perceived moral character and altruism, and moderately higher in perceived trustworthiness. However, a person motivated by karmic gains to do a good deed was perceived positively regarding perceived moral character and trustworthiness, yet neutrally in perceived altruism.

Keywords: karmic belief, karmic gain, belief in a just world, person perception, moral character, altruism

Perceptions of People Acting upon Karmic Beliefs

Karma is considered the result of one's actions. Good actions are rewarded with so called good karma and bad actions are punished by bad karma. Although karmic beliefs are more prevalent in Asian cultures, many people in the Western world have karmic beliefs (White, Norenzayan, & Schaller, 2019). Karmic concepts are present in everyday language. Examples of this are phrases such as ''what comes around goes around'' and ''you reap what you sow''. Karmic beliefs are also seen in popular culture such as movies and literature. Internet Movie Database, IMDb, lists 199 titles under keyword search for *karma* (IMDb, 2020). Long running American TV-series Grey's Anatomy has several quotes on karma. One example is from an episode called *'What Have I Done to Deserve This?'* where one of the main characters ponders karma: '' No matter how hard we try, we can't escape our karma. It follows us home. I guess we can't really complain about karma. It's not unfair. It's not unexpected. It just evens the score.'' (Grey's Anatomy Quotes Tumblr, 2011).

The focus of this paper is to study how karmic beliefs are perceived, and more specifically how karmic gains as a motivation for prosocial acts are perceived. Karmic beliefs influence people's daily lives and have real life implications, especially when making choices on how to act towards others or whether it is worthwhile to do good for other people. Many people would like to live in a just world where people are motivated to do good for others (Lerner, 1980)**.** There is plenty of research on karma as a belief system and studies on belief in a just world. However, there is little to no research on how people perceive others acting upon karmic beliefs. This gap helped forming the research question of this study: how the motivation for doing a good deed for karmic gains, material gains, or emotional gains influences perception of

the do-gooder's moral character, trustworthiness, and altruism? Karmic gains are compared with material and emotional gains. They were chosen because an applicable study about material and emotional gains as motivation to do good for other people already exists (Carlson & Zaki, 2018).

Karma can be described as believing that good is rewarded by good, and bad is punished by bad outcomes. White and Norenzayan (2019) have written an in-depth article about belief in karma. They argue that the concept of karma shares similarities with many common justice belief systems. Karma can take the form of a resource, viewed as an imaginary bank account into which deposits are made by doing good deeds. These deposits are further exchanged for good outcomes in daily life. They can also be used for compensating bad actions. Karma can also be viewed as more positively as a feature of actions where good intentions and behavior are rewarded (White & Norenzayan, 2019).

Karmic beliefs have clear real-life implications and affect how people act and behave in their daily lives. Converse, Risen, and Carter (2012) studied *karmic-investments,* such as increasing prosocial behavior in the form of monetary donations. These donations were given in situations in which the desired outcome was uncertain and out of one's own control, such as seeking a job. They found that desiring certain results increased donations when people felt they had no control of the outcome. In fact, karmic-investments increased when individuals lacked control of the situation compared to those who felt they were in control of their job search. Karmic-investments were rewarded by increased optimism in the job seeker's mind for a positive outcome in their job search (Converse et al., 2012). In other words, the job seekers did something good to increase their perceived possibilities of getting a desired outcome, a job in this case.

Believing that people get what they deserve is an important aspect of karmic belief. White, Norenzayan, and Schaller (2019) have studied the prevalence of karmic beliefs in various

cultures and religions. They noted that surrounding culture shapes karmic beliefs. This was evident in the comparison of karmic belief in different countries. They also associated belief in karma with *belief in a just world*, belief in a moralizing God, religious participation, and cultural context. However, karma was not reducible to these constructs. Belief in a just world seems the most relevant of these constructs with regards to karmic belief in the Western world because it does not involve religious beliefs. Lerner (1980) introduced the just world theory in his ground-breaking social psychology book. As with karmic beliefs, the just world theory supports the idea that people have a need to experience the world as a place where justice is prevalent and people get what they deserve based on their behavior. Lerner further argued that people are motivated to behave as if the just world existed (Lerner, 1980; Alves & Correia, 2008).

Believing in a just world has positive consequences. This might apply to karmic beliefs as well. Alves and Correia (2018) found that when people were asked to convey a positive image of themselves, they expressed a higher level of belief in a just world, than when asked to create a negative image of themselves. Moreover, higher belief in a just world was seen as having more social desirability and social utility. Therefore, higher belief in a just world was seen more preferred and useful (Alves & Correia, 2018). Karmic beliefs are more than simply a belief in a just world. In addition to belief in a just world, karmic beliefs set an expectation for this world to reward believer's good actions. Consequently, karmic beliefs seem to be more dynamic, whereas belief in a just world seems more stable. Karmic beliefs could be more result orientated, while belief in a just world is more of an indication of how the world is perceived generally.

Perceived altruism

Person perception is a term used in psychology for how people perceive others. In this study person perception is evaluated using three focuses: perceived altruism, moral character,

and trustworthiness. The purpose of perceived altruism is to inform whether the good deed, the motivation for the good deed, and the do-gooder are perceived as selfish or altruistic. *Altruism* is often referred to as prosocial behavior which does not benefit oneself. Yet sometimes prosocial behavior also benefits oneself. Batson (2011) described altruism as a motivational state with intentions of increasing another party's welfare. Carlson and Zaki (2018) studied laypeople's perception on whether prosocial behavior is seen as truly altruistic if there are gains involved. They were interested in the difference between gains as consequence and motive of the prosocial behavior. The gains involved with the prosocial behavior in their study were material, social, emotional, and other-oriented. Material and social gains from prosocial behavior were considered less altruistic and even slightly selfish when compared to emotional gain or other-oriented motivation. However, prosocial behavior motivated by emotional gains remained altruistic (Carlson & Zaki, 2018). Carlson and Zaki (2018) argued that emotional gains motivating prosocial acts remain truly altruistic, and signal a positive image of the do-gooder, for example in regard to moral character and moral consistency. On the other hand, social and material gains as a motivation for prosocial behavior show a self-interest motive, which they argued could be possibly perceived as a requirement for doing the good deed.

In karmic belief one does good deeds to gain good outcomes for oneself called karmic gains. Karmic gains might not necessarily be genuinely altruistic because of the expectation of a reward. However, unlike concrete material gains that motivate prosocial behavior, the reward of karmic gains is not real, as it has objectively nothing to do with the past good deed. Since the reward is not real, it might be perceived as slightly more altruistic than direct material gains. However, people who do good deeds motivated by karmic gains can be perceived as selfish because of their expectation of a reward. This expectation of a reward regardless of whether the

reward is real or not, may be perceived in a similar manner as material gains. Therefore, karmic gains can be perceived in two different ways depending on whether the reward is considered real or not. This in turn may determine how altruistic the do-gooder is perceived. Self-interest motive is a common explanation for behaviors and perceptions of others. This is especially applicable in the Western world (Miller, 1999). Possibly people will perceive karmic gains as a motivation for doing a good deed as not truly altruistic, because of past research showing self-interest motives as more common. Hence, I predict (H_1) that karmic gains will be perceived as less altruistic than emotional gains as a motivation to do a good deed.

Perceived moral character

In this study moral character was selected as the second focus because it has a predominant role in person perception. Karmic beliefs refer to a moral justice system in which karma affects life outcomes depending on the morality of one's actions and decisions (White & Norenzayan, 2019). Person perception has been explained by using two dimensions, warmth and competence (Fiske, Cuddy, & Glick, 2007; Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002 in Goodwin et al 2014). A factor analysis was conducted by Goodwin, Piazza, and Rozin (2014) to distinguish moral character as a third dimension in person perception. Moral character shares elements from the original two dimensions (Goodwin, Piazza, & Rozin, 2014). Goodwin (2015) stated that moral character plays a predominant role in person perception because it indicates a person's intentions and orientations toward good or bad. Further, Landy, Piazza, and Goodwin (2016) found that impressions of sociability (warmth) and competence are dependent on a person's morality. Higher morality is always perceived positively, whereas immorality is perceived negatively. In other words, higher sociability or competence is seen positively only in moral individuals. Therefore, moral character has a predominant role in person perception.

If moral character indicates whether a person's intentions are good or bad, then people perceived as altruistic may also be perceived as moral and therefore good. Perceived morality of doing a good deed might be linked with altruism. Altruism can be considered good since it benefits others instead of oneself, whereas its opposite, selfishness, is rarely valued**.** Belief in altruism has also been found to have a positive relationship on how morality is valued (Bergner & Ramon, 2013). There are also philosophers who support this view. Doris, Stich, and Walmsley (2020) argue that altruism is important for morality. They go as far as stating that without altruism there is no morality (Doris, Stich, & Walmsley, 2020). This suggests that laymen might also associate altruism with moral character.

Most morality research is focused on moral judgements and negative scenarios instead of evaluating or judging prosocial behavior. This study focuses on prosocial behavior, which is positive. With regards to moral actions Critcher, Inbar, and Pizarro (2013) found that while judging the morality of prosocial acts, quick decisions were more morally praiseworthy than decisions made after longer reflection. They argued that this was the case because quick decisions were perceived as more certain and the motivation seemed clearer. This indicates that perceived moral character with regards to karmic gains may be lower than emotional and material gains, because the motivation behind karmic gains is more elaborate. Hence, the second hypothesis (H_2): 'Karmic gains as a motivation for doing a good deed will be perceived lower in moral character than emotional and material gains as a motivation for doing a good deed.'

Perceived trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is a moral character trait which might diverge from other moral character traits when considering good deeds motivated by karmic gains. Cottrell, Neuberb, and Li (2007) found that people valued trustworthiness above all other traits used in their study in nearly all

social settings, ranging from casual acquaintances to employee relationships. White, Kelly, Shariff, and Norenzayan (2019) found that thinking about karma made karmic believers less selfish. This might increase prosocial behavior. Karmic belief might make believers more reliable and trustworthy as it encourages prosocial behavior.

Karmic believers can be assumed to do good for two reasons. Firstly, to gain good outcomes, and secondly to avoid bad outcomes. This may indicate that believers in karma might be perceived more positively with regards to trustworthiness if the motivation behind their deeds is to do good. On the other hand, avoiding bad karma might also be perceived as a reason for not doing bad. Because avoiding bad karma gives a reason for not making others suffer, it might increase the perceived trustworthiness of the do-gooder. However, perceived trustworthiness might not increase with karmic gains as a motivation, because as with material gains, the motivation might be perceived as selfish. On the other hand, emotional gains as a motivation for doing a good deed could be perceived as less selfish. Therefore emotional gains as a motivation for doing a good deed may be perceived as most trustworthy out of the three motivations. Since karmic belief encourages prosocial behaviour, which might make the karmic believers more trustworthy, I predict that (H_3) karmic gain as a motivation to do a good deed will be perceived as more trustworthy than material gain as a motivation.

Method

A modified design with additional measurements from Carlson and Zaki (2018) was used to find an answer to the research question: how the motivation for doing a good deed for karmic gains, material gains, or emotional gains influences perception of the do-gooder's moral character, trustworthiness, and altruism?

Design

In this research, motivation for prosocial behavior was used as an independent variable with three between-subject conditions. These conditions were manipulated by a vignette study in which participants read a text where a character was motivated to do a good deed either by karmic, material, or emotional gains. After reading the text, participants evaluated the vignette character's perceived three traits (altruism, moral character, and trustworthiness) as dependent variables.

Participants

A priori power analysis for an independent samples t-test was conducted to find a suitable sample size. The power analysis showed that 192 participants were enough for the study (power = 0.8, group size = 64, $d = 0.5$, and two-tailed $\alpha = 0.05$). For simplicity, the initial goal was to gather 200 participants. A pre-registration was done via aspredicted.org (see Appendix B). In the end, data collection was closed after 202 participants had completed the questionnaire. Participants were recruited by distributing the survey link on my Facebook social media wall as well as WhatsApp, and through an online gaming platform, Blizzard Entertainment battle.net chat. My fellow students also assisted in distributing the survey link to their own social networks. Only participants 18-years-old and above were accepted in this research. Participants ($M_{age} = 27.58$, $SD = 10.99$) consisted of 103 males, 87 females, 4 other, and 8 people who preferred not to inform their gender.

Procedure

Participants were first required to agree with an informed consent, in which the participants were made aware that they have the right to withdraw at any time or refuse to participate entirely. After agreeing with the informed consent, participants were randomly

assigned into conditions to read a vignette of Jane donating blood motivated by either karmic, material, or emotional gains. The vignette was taken from perceived altruism research done by Carlson and Zaki (2018). A karmic condition was further added for this research. The conditions differ in their motivation with a single sentence as follows: Jane considers that she would (i) gain good karma, which will bring a good outcome in the future, such as getting the job she wants [karmic gain], (ii) receive a gift card [material gain], or (iii) feel good [emotional gain] if she made a donation (Appendix A). The karmic gains condition had some information to describe the concept of karmic belief. The use of the word ''future'' in the vignette is intended to give the impression that the good outcome is not an immediate result of doing a good deed. In addition, mentioning ''good karma'' is meant to make participants aware that Jane is motivated by karmic belief. Finally, stating that she wanted a job is meant to be interpreted as reward that objectively does not having anything to do with the act of donating blood, hence it is not a real reward. The participants were spread into three conditions: karmic gains condition ($n = 71$), material gains condition ($n = 64$), and emotional gains condition ($n = 67$). After reading the vignette, participants rated Jane on perceived moral character, trustworthiness, and altruism in a randomized order. Following this, participants were asked to inform their age and gender. Finally, participants were debriefed of the purpose of the study and their part in it.

Materials

To measure perceived moral character six morality traits (honesty, moral, fair, humble, respectful, and compassionate) were selected from Landy, Piazza, and Goodwin (2016). Originally their scale had four more items: responsible, principled, disciplined, and trustworthiness. However, results of factor analyses showed high cross-loadings with the competence dimension for responsible, principled, and disciplined (Landy, Piazza, & Goodwin,

2016). Hence, this study also refrained from using the previous traits.Trustworthiness was removed from the questions because the study measures it separately. For the remaining six traits, the questions were, for example, ''How honest is Jane?''. Participants answered on a 9-point scale; 1 (Not at all) to 9 (Very much). This form of questioning was repeated for each of the six traits. A reliability analysis was then conducted for the six items. Cronbach's showed excellent reliability for the six items regarding perceived moral character $\alpha = 0.9$.

Haesevoets, Hiel, Folmer, and Cremer (2014) provided further six statements regarding trusting intentions, which were used to measure perceived trustworthiness in this study. The six statements were included i.e. ''I trust this Jane'' in Table 1. The trustworthiness scale might have been unclear in stating ''I trust this Jane.'', instead of saying ''I trust Jane.''. The same clarity problem occurred in all six statements. Trusting intentions toward Jane were measured on a 7-point scale from 1 (Certainly not agree) to 7 (Certainly agree). Negative questions (2, 3, and 5) were reverse-coded. Cronbach's alpha was measured, and it revealed a poor reliability of $\alpha = 0.66$.

Table 1

Trusting intentions statements

Statements
1: I trust this Jane.
2: I have no trust in this Jane.
3: I think this Jane would deceive me if she would benefit from it.
4: I think this Jane can be trusted
5: I think this Jane would lie to me if she would gain from it
6: I think this Jane means well for me.

Finally, a measurement for perceived altruism was chosen from Carlson and Zaki (2018) in the form of three questions regarding Jane's selfishness/altruism (How selfish/altruistic do you think Jane is?), her motivations' selfishness/altruism (How selfish/altruistic do you think Jane's motivation for the action was?), and selfish/altruism of her good-deed (How selfish/altruistic do you think Jane's action was?). Perceived altruism was measured with an 11-point scale from 1 (Extremely selfish) to 11 (Extremely altruistic). As with perceived trustworthiness and moral character, a reliability analysis was conducted on the three items for perceived altruism. Cronbach's alpha exposed an acceptable reliability of $\alpha = 0.75$.

Results

Three one-way ANOVAs were conducted to compare the effects of reading a vignette character's motivation (karmic gain, emotional gain, or material gain) to do a good deed as the factor, and the character's perceived moral character, trustworthiness, and altruism as dependent variables. All tests in this study used the α level of .05. Two of the one-way ANOVAs indicated both significant differences and large effect sizes when comparing the vignette character's motivations to do a good deed with perceived altruism $F(2,199) = 32.321$, $p < .001$, $\eta2 = .245$, and perceived moral character $F(2,199) = 12.277$, $p < .001$, $\eta2 = .11$. Although significant difference was found between the vignette character's motivations to do a good deed with perceived trustworthiness, the effect was small $F(2,199) = 5.001$, $p = .008$, $\eta2 = .047$. These results show that the text manipulation influenced all the dependent variables (perceived altruism, moral character, and trustworthiness).

As the previous tests showed differences between motivations to do a good deed and perceptions of altruism, moral character, and trustworthiness, further tests were performed to see

where the differences were. Figure 1 and Table 2 showed initial support for similar perceptions

regarding karmic and material gains as a motivation to do a good deed. In Table 3 Pearson

correlation showed a moderately positive relationship between perceived moral character and

both perceived trustworthiness and altruism. Perceived altruism and trustworthiness were found

to share a weak positive relationship. All the following tests were independent sample t-tests

comparing differences in perceived altruism, moral character, and trustworthiness between

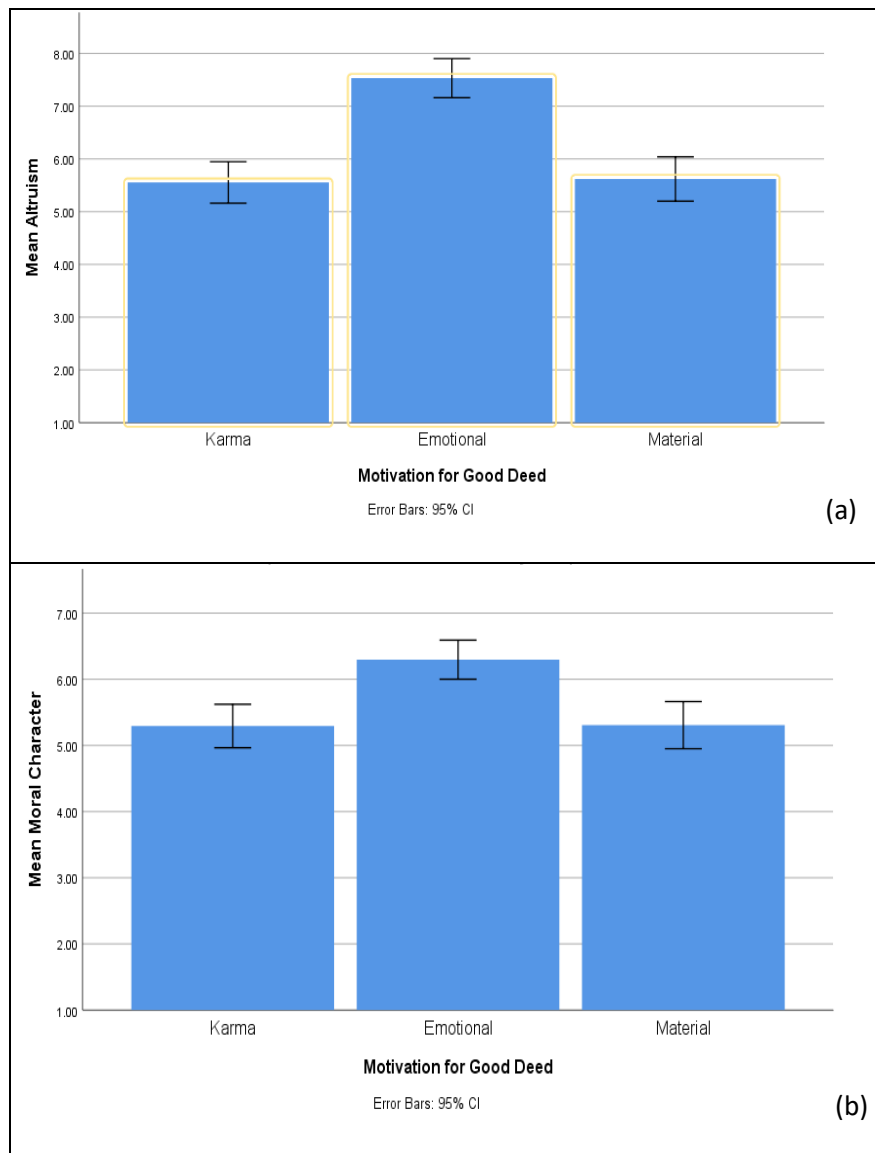karmic, emotional, and material gains as a motivation to do a good deed.

Table 2

Means, Standard Deviations, and Participants for Perceptions of Motivations for Doing a Good

Deed

	Motivations		
Perceptions	Karmic	Material	Emotional
	($n = 71$)	($n = 64$)	($n = 67$)
	M, (*SD*)	*M*, (*SD*)	*M*, (*SD*)
Altruism	5.55, (1.66)	5.62, (1.68)	7.53,(1.52)
(1 = Extremely selfish,			
11 = Extremely altruistic)			
Moral Character	5.29, (1.39)	5.31, (1.43)	6.30,(1.21)
(1 = Not at all,			
9 = Very much)			
Trustworthiness	4.54, (0.65)	4.53, (0.59)	4.86,(0.79)
(1 = Certainly not agree,			
7 = Certainly agree)			

Scale sizes are shown below each perception.

Figure 1 (a,b, and c)

Means and error bars of perceived altruism, moral character, and trustworthiness separated
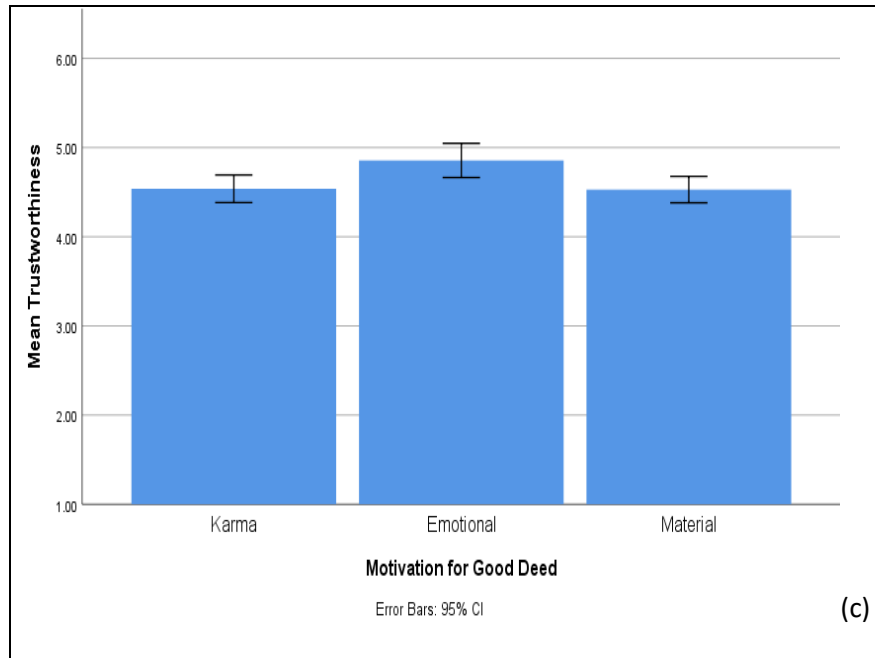
based on motivations to do a good deed.

(a)

(b)

Error Bars: 95% CI   (c)

Table 3

Pearson Correlations between Dependent Variables

Perceptions	1	2	3
1.Altruism	-		
2.Moral Character	.566*	-	
3.Trustworthiness	.338*	.539*	-

Perceived altruism

Both karmic and material gains as a motivation to do a good deed were perceived as significantly less altruistic than emotional gains as a motivation, and the effect for both comparisons was large (Table 4). Carlson and Zaki's (2018) results were partially replicated. Emotional gains as a motivation to do a good deed was perceived largely as more altruistic than material gains as a motivation to do a good deed. On the other hand, material gains were not

considered below the midpoint of the scale for perceived altruism in the 11-point Likert scale as shown in Table 2. Material gains were not found to be selfish as they were above the midpoint of the scale. Karmic and material gains as a motivation to do a good deed did not differ regarding perceived altruism.

Table 4

Independent Samples t-tests Results of Perceived Altruism Ratings Between Motivations to Do a Good Deed

Comparison	t	df	p	d	CI$_{95\%}$
Emotional vs. Material	6.84	129	.001	1.19	[1.36,2.47]
Karmic vs. Emotional	-7.29	136	.001	-1.24	[-2.52,-1.44]
Karmic vs. Material	-0,23	133	.820	-0.04	[-0.64,0.50]

Perceived moral character

Karmic and material gains as a motivation to do a good deed were both different in perceived moral character and trustworthiness when compared with emotional gains as a motivation to do a good deed as can be seen in Table 5. Regarding perceived moral character, the results show that material and karmic gains as motivation to do a good deed were found to be different with medium effect sizes when compared to emotional gains as a motivation to do a good deed. There was no significant difference between perceived moral character and material and karmic gains as a motivation to do a good deed.

Table 5

Independent Samples t-tests Results of Perceived Moral Character Ratings Between Motivations to Do a Good Deed

Comparison	t	df	p	d	CI$_{95\%}$
Emotional vs. Material	4.28	129	.001	0.75	[0.53,1.45]
Karmic vs. Emotional	-4.50	136	.001	-0.78	[-1.44,-0.56]
Karmic vs. Material	-0.06	133	.954	-0.01	[-0.49,0.47]

Perceived trustworthiness

Both material and karmic gains as a motivation to do a good deed continued to show significantly different results in perceived trustworthiness when compared to emotional gains as a motivation to do a good deed as seen in Table 6. The difference was moderate. Differences between material and karmic gains as a motivation to do a good deed remained non-significant regarding perceived trustworthiness.

Table 6

Independent Samples t-tests Results of Perceived Trustworthiness Ratings Between Motivations to Do a Good Deed

Comparison	t	df	p	d	CI$_{95\%}$
Emotional vs. Material	2.70	122.408*	.008	0.47	[0.09,0.57]
Karmic vs. Emotional	-2.59	136	.011	-0.44	[-0.56,-0.08]
Karmic vs. Material	0.08	133	.934	1.19	[-0.20,0.22]

Levene's test showed significant differences in variance of emotional vs. material test. Df was adjusted accordingly.

Discussion

The research question is aimed at finding an answer to how motivation for doing a good deed for karmic gains, material gains, or emotional gains influences perception of the do-

gooder's moral character, trustworthiness, and altruism. H_1 predicted that karmic gains as a motivation for doing a good deed would be perceived as less altruistic than emotional gains. The results show substantial support with large effect sizes for this hypothesis. As previously stated, karmic gains as a motivation for doing a good deed could be perceived based on self-interest with regards to the expectation of a reward. This in turn would make it less altruistic. On the other hand, the reward could be seen as not real and therefore more altruistic. The results suggest that people perceive the motivation from a self-interest perspective. Because material and emotional gains as a motivation for doing a good deed were found not to be significantly different, there is reason to believe that the expectation of a reward in karmic gain is perceived as relevant regarding altruism.

For perceived moral character it was predicted in H_2 that karmic gains as a motivation for doing a good deed would be perceived lower in moral character than emotional and material gains as a motivation for doing a good deed. A possible explanation for this is that karmic gains have a more elaborate reasoning, which in turn shows uncertainty, and is therefore perceived as less moral. In contrast, material and emotional gains as motivations are clearer and exhibit quick thinking (Critcher, Inbar, & Pizarro, 2013). Results support the hypothesis with regards to emotional gains, but not material gains. A possible reason why material and karmic gains as a motivation to do a good deed were not significantly different from each other in perceived moral character of the do-gooder, might have to do with how altruism was perceived. Good deeds motivated by karmic and material gains were perceived as neither altruistic or selfish. This might also explain why they were not perceived as moral. This coincides with the philosophers who emphasized the importance of altruism on morality (Doris, Stich, and Walmsley, 2020), and that belief in altruism has a positive relationship with the importance of morality (Bergner & Ramon,

2013). As neither karmic or material gains as a motivation for doing a good deed were perceived as altruistic, they were possibly considered more selfish and therefore also less moral than emotional gains. Some evidence for this is seen in the medium positive relationship between moral character and altruism as seen in Table 3. Additionally, the differences between karmic and material gains as a motivation to do a good deed in comparison to emotional gains as motivation showed very large differences in both perceived altruism and moral character. Alternative explanations regarding differences in manipulations are provided in the limitations section.

Lastly, with regards to perceived trustworthiness H_3 predicted that karmic gain as a motivation to do a good deed will be perceived as more trustworthy than material gain as a motivation. No support was found for H_3. There was no significant difference between material and karmic gains as a motivation for doing a good deed regarding perceived trustworthiness. Karmic believers were predicted to be more trustworthy because of their belief motivating them to be and remain good. This did not seem to increase their perceived trustworthiness in this study. Perceived trustworthines with relation to karmic gains could be higher if the scenario was negative, for example while avoiding bad karma. People might perceive that the person avoiding bad karma would not cause harm to them because it would lead to punishment, hence possibly increasing perceived trustworthiness. Differences between material and karmic gains, when compared to emotional gain as a motivation, were also moderate while differences between other dependent variables were large. Trustworthiness may require real interactions and not simply reading of a do-gooder vignette character. Alarcon et al. (2018) found that perceived trustworthiness is important in the beginning when determining whether to engage in trusting behavior. Following trusting behaviors then have a part in determining future perceived

trustworthiness. These trusting behaviors could make the do-gooder motivated by karmic gains to be perceived higher in trustworthiness than when motivated by material gain (Alarcon et al., 2018). Furthermore, it is possible that karmic and material gains as a motivation to do a good deed might seem as if a reward is always necessary in order to do a good deed. This might make karmic and material gains as a motivation more selfish for the perceiver, which in turn might make the perceiver put more thought into whether the do-gooder seems trustworthy.

Based on this study karmic gain as a motivation for doing good deeds is perceived slightly positively. As all the scales were of two extremes, the mid-point of the scale can be considered neutral. For example, for karmic gains as a motivation to do good in regard to perceived altruism has an average score of 5.55 (Table 2) in a scale which ranges from 1 (Extremely selfish) to 11 (Extremely altruistic). As 5.5 is the center of the scale karmic gains is perceived neutral with regards to perceived altruism. Therefore, slightly positive can be considered as not far away from the mid-point, but still on the positive side. Material gains as a motivation to do a good deed were perceived in a very similar manner as karmic gains as a motivation. The differences in perceptions between karmic and material gains for doing a good deed were hardly noticeable. However, emotional gain as a motivation was perceived most positively regarding all measurements of perceived altruism, trustworthiness, and moral character.

The positive aspect of karmic gains as a motivation to do a good deed is not enough to overcome the more selfish expectation of reward and increase the positive perception of the do-gooder. Belief in a just world without asking for benefits in the future might be perceived more favourably, but this would not be an expression of karma. To summarize, it seems that expressing a wish to gain a good outcome in the future is perceived similarly to doing a good

deed motivated by a direct material gain. People seem to perceive prosocial behaviour motivated by karmic beliefs from a self-interest perspective instead of a more positive view of focusing on a moral system which encourages prosocial acts.

Limitations

Two relevant limitations that could have influenced the perceptions of karmic gains as a motivation to do a good deed are the number of vignettes and possibly more importantly the magnitude of the expectation in the karmic gains condition. Having a larger number of vignettes would help to provide a stronger case for differences between motivations for prosocial acts. More vignettes would also allow for different ways of framing the prosocial acts. For example, a reason why material gains were not perceived as slightly selfish as in Carlson and Zaki (2018) might be because in their study there were more vignettes. Different scenarios might change how people perceive the motivations behind deeds. For example, helping someone pick up their fallen groceries for material gains may be viewed more poorly than donating blood for material gains. An important limitation of this study is the magnitude difference between the karmic gains and material gains conditions. In the material gains condition the vignette character was motivated to donate blood for a gift card, but in the karmic gain condition the character hoped to get a job she wanted. When comparing a job to a gift card the difference is quite significant. Possibly participants thought that in the karmic gains condition the character expected a reward worth thousands, while in the material condition it could have been perceived as pocket change. I believe this difference might be a reason why participants rated karmic gains as a motivation for doing good deeds at the same level as material gains. If it was mentioned that the character wanted to donate blood because belief in karma will bring a generally good outcome in the future, the emphasis might be less relatable to material gains as a motivation.

In this study karma was about doing good to get a job, but karma could be associated with a general good outcome or an other-oriented outcome such as wish for a recovery of someone close. If the outcome of the karmic gain condition was other-oriented it might be perceived as more moral and altruistic, possibly even more trustworthy. This would also imply that the expectation and type of reward is relevant when evaluating karmic gains as a motivation for prosocial acts. Possibly by using a general good outcome perceivers would consider a more prosocial or positive aspect of karma. This might give a different evaluation regarding karma than a specific expectation.

Future Research

Future research on perceptions of people doing good motivated by karmic beliefs could focus on the magnitude of the good-doers expectations. This is because perceptions may differ if someone is more modest in their expectations versus having bigger or greedier expectations. Framing could also influence how someone doing a good deed with karmic gains as a motivation is perceived, for example if doing good motivated by karma is mentioned along a non-specific good outcome expectation. Lastly, there is the opposite side of perceptions of karmic belief to be researched known as bad karma. This could include studying people's perceptions on a person motivated to do good by avoiding bad future outcomes or events.

Conclusion

The results indicate that karmic gains as a motivation for good deeds seem to be perceived nearly equivalently to material gains regarding perceived altruism, moral character, and trustworthiness. Emotional gains as a motivation for doing good deeds is perceived most positively in all measurements. It is worth noting that karmic gains as a motivation for doing a good deed was never perceived negatively. In fact, karmic gains as motivations were rated as

neutral in perceived trustworthiness and slightly positive in perceived moral character and altruism. To conclude, the current study implies that good deeds motivated by karmic beliefs are perceived positively.

References

Alarcon, G.M., Lyons, J.B., Christensen, J.C. et al. (2018). The effect of propensity to trust and perceptions of trustworthiness on trust behaviors in dyads. *Behavior Research Methods 50*,(5) 1906–1920. https://doi.org/10.3758/s13428-017-0959-6

Alves, H., & Correia, I. (2008). On the normativity of expressing the belief in a just world: Empirical evidence. *Social Justice Research, 21*, 106-118. doi:https://doi.org/10.1007/s11211-007-0060-x

Alves, H., & Correia, I. (2018). Personal and general belief in a just world as judgment norms. *International Journal of Psychology, 45*(3), 221-231. doi:doi: 10.1080/00207590903281120

Batson, D. C. (2011). *Altruism in humans.* Oxford University Press.

Berger, R. M, & Ramon, A. (2013) Some implications of beliefs in altruism, free will, and nonreductionism. *The Journal of Social Psychology, 153*(5), 598-618. doi:10.1080/00224545.2013.798249

Carlson, R. W., & Zaki, J. (2018). Good deeds gone bad: Lay theories of altruism and selfishness. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 75*, 36-40. doi:https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2017.11.005

Converse, B. A., Risen, J. L., & Carter, T. J. (2012). Investing in karma: when wanting promotes helping. *Psychological Science, 23*(8), 923-930. doi:https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797612437248

Cottrell, C. A., Neuberg, S. L., & Li, N. P. (2007). What do people desire in others? A

    sociofunctional perspective on the importance of different valued characteristics. *Journal*

    of Personality and Social Psychology, 92(2), 208-231. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.92.2.208

Critcher, C. R., Inbar, Y., & Pizarro, D. A. (2013). How quick decisions illuminate moral

    character. *Social Psychological and Personality Science, 4*(3), 308-315.

    doi:10.117/1948550612457688

Doris, J., Stich, S., & Walmsley, L. (2020). Empirical approaches to altruism. Edward N. Zalta

    (ed), *The Standford Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* (Spring 2020 edition) Retrieved from

    https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2020/entries/altruism-empirical/

Goodwin, G. P. (2015). Moral character in person perception. *Current Directions in*

    Psychological Science, 24(1), 38-44. doi:https://doi.org/10.1177/0963721414550709

Goodwin, G. P., Piazza, J., & Rozin, P. (2014). Moral character predominates in person

    perception and evaluation. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 106*(1), 148-

    168. doi:10.1037/a0034726

Greys Anatomy Quotes. (2011, October 30). Tumblr. https://greys-anatomy-

    quotes.tumblr.com/post/12151099020/one-way-or-another-our-karma-will-lead-us-to-

    face

Haesevoets, T., Hiel, A. V.;Folmer, C. R., & Cremer, D. D. (2014). What money can't buy: The

    psychology of financial overcompensation. *Journal Of Economic Psychology, 42*, 83-95.

    doi:https://doi.org/10.1016/j.joep.2014.02.001

IMDb. (2020). ''Karma'' search results.

    https://www.imdb.com/search/keyword/?keywords=karma&ref_=fn_al_kw_1

Landy, J. F., Piazza, J., & Goodwin, G. P. (2016). When it's bad to be friendly and smart: The desirability of sociability and competence depends on morality. *Personality and Social Bulletin, 42*(9), 1272-1290. doi:10.1177/0146167216655984

Lerner, M. J. (1980). *The belief in a just world: A fundamental delusion.* New York: Plenum Press. doi:doi:10.1007/978-1-4899-0448-5

Miller, D. T. (1999). The norm of self-interest. *American Psychologist, 54*(12), 1053-1060. doi: https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/0003-066X.54.12.1053

White, C. J., & Norenzayan, A. (2019). Belief in karma: How cultural evolution, cognition, and motivations shape belief in supernatural justice. *Advances in experimental social psychology*, 1-63.

White, C. J., Kelly, J. M., Shariff, A. F., & Norenzayan, A. (2019). Supernatural norm enforcement: Thinking about karma and god reduces selfishness among believers. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 84*, 103797. doi:10.1016/j.jesp.2019.03.008

White, C. J., Norenzayan, A., & Schaller, M. (2019). The content and correlates of belief in karma across cultures. *Personality & Social Psychology Bulletin, 45*(8), 1184-1201. doi:https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167218808502

Appendices

Appendix A

While walking home, Jane notices a billboard urging passersby to donate blood. After reading

the billboard more closely, Jane considers that she would

- [Material] receive a gift card

- [Emotional] - feel good

- [Karmic] – gain good karma, which will bring a good outcome in the future, such as
  getting the job she wants

if she made a donation. Motivated by this consideration, the following day Jane donates

blood at a local clinic.

Appendix B

AS PREDICTED

Perceptions of people acting upon Karmic beliefs (#38317)

Created: 03/31/2020 03:08 PM (PT)
Shared: 04/01/2020 03:55 AM (PT)

This pre-registration is not yet public. This anonymized copy (without author names) was created by the author(s) to use during peer-review. A non-anonymized version (containing author names) will become publicly available only if an author makes it public. Until that happens the contents of this pre-registration are confidential.

1) Have any data been collected for this study already?
No, no data have been collected for this study yet.

2) What's the main question being asked or hypothesis being tested in this study?
How does the motivation for doing a good deed (i.e., for karmic gains, material gains, emotion gains) influence perception of the do-gooder on (i) moral character, (ii) trustworthiness, and (iii) altruism.

3) Describe the key dependent variable(s) specifying how they will be measured.
1. Perceived moral character will be measured by seven traits; honesty, moral, fair, , humble, respectful, and compassionate (1 = Not at all; 9 = Very much). (Landy et al., 2016)
2. Perceived trustworthiness will be measured through a six item questionnaire regarding trusting intentions (1 = Certainly not agree; 7 = Certainly agree). (Haesevoets et al., 2014)
3. Perceived altruism is measured via three questions regarding the perceived altruism of the character, the characters action, and the motivation of the action (1 = Extremely selfish; 11 = Extremely altruistic). (Carlson & Zaki, 2018)

4) How many and which conditions will participants be assigned to?
Three randomized between-subject conditions: karmic gains, material gains, or emotional gains.

5) Specify exactly which analyses you will conduct to examine the main question/hypothesis.
question/hypothesis.
One-way ANOVA for each dependent variable ((i) moral character, (ii) trustworthiness, and (iii) altruism) to test for differences between the three conditions (karmic gain, material gain, and emotional gain).
Followed by independent- sample t-tests to compare the dependent variable means between each condition.

6) Describe exactly how outliers will be defined and handled, and your precise rule(s) for excluding observations.
Forced responses will be used on dependent variables, and all participants who complete them will be accepted. No outliers.

7) How many observations will be collected or what will determine sample size? No need to justify decision, but be precise about exactly how the number will be determined.
Based on a power analysis 192 participants is enough for the three conditions, but for simplicity the aim will be 200 participants or until 30th, April, 2020 when the data will be analyzed regardless of the amount of participants.
Two tailed power analysis Power=.80, Group size = 64, Effect size = 0.5, and (α) = 0.05.

8) Anything else you would like to pre-register? (e.g., secondary analyses, variables collected for exploratory purposes, unusual analyses planned?)
Nothing else to pre-register.