WHY PEOPLE PARTICIPATED IN ONLINE RELIGION:
The perspective of self-construal theory and empathy-altruism hypothesis

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study reveals why people participated in online religion that combines the self-construal theory and empathy-altruism hypothesis to explore the relationship of altruism, egoism, religiosity, and online religion.

Materials and Methods: The researcher uses the questionnaire survey method and purposive sampling method to focus on online religious practitioners' participation in online discussion forums. The researcher investigates 132 interviewees to understand their online religious inclination and behaviors. The questionnaires are the Religious Commitment Inventory-10 scale, AC Beliefs scale, and the online religion scale. Partial least squares (PLS) regression and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) are used to measure the model.

Results: Several findings emerged from this research. First, intrinsic religiosity is positively related to altruism. Second, intrinsic religiosity is positively associated with online religion. Third, extrinsic religiosity is positively associated with online religion. Fourth, egoism is positively related to online religion.

Conclusions: This online religion hypothesis has three points. First, three factors positively relate to online religion: intrinsic religiosity, extrinsic religiosity, and egoism. They, intrinsic religious practitioners, extrinsic religious practitioners, and egoists, will participate in online religion. Second, altruism is not the independent variable to impact online religion; it is the dependent variable of intrinsic religiosity. Third, according to the empathy-altruism hypothesis, empathic concern is positively related to altruism. It is the secular reason to cause altruism. According to the analysis of this study, intrinsic religiosity is positively associated with altruism. That is the religious basis to cause altruism. The online religion promoter must elevate the public-interest function to increase the possibility of altruists' participation in online discussion forums. Online religious practitioners participate in online discussion forums with multidimensional motivation to acquire spiritual information and interact with others.

KEYWORDS: egoism, altruism, intrinsic religiosity, extrinsic religiosity, online religion

1. INTRODUCTION

When terrorists attacked the World Trade Center in New York City on September 11, 2001, the association of the Internet and religiosity became apparent in two points. First, the hijackers used online information to plan and coordinate the terror attacks. Second, many religious practitioners turned to the Internet to send and receive spiritual messages and learn more about Islam. Religious practitioners were the religious surfers to seek religious or spiritual information on the Internet (Larsen & Rainie, 2001).

Internet surfing has become the main activity of everyday life and a prime approach to spiritual life for online spiritual or religious practitioners. Nearly 79% of Americans actively used the Internet in faith-related online activities within religious or spiritual organizations (Jansen, 2011). There was an abundance of sacred information to be found online. In 2020, a Google search on the word "religion" turned up more than 1 billion results and 90 million websites, and a search on "spirituality" turned up more than 136 million websites.

Religious practitioners, who attended church, were more involved in religious activities for spiritual supports, spiritual needs, belongingness of religious congregation, and physical health improvements (Krause et al., 2014). Meanwhile, the practice of meditation was associated with mental and physical health benefits. Cole et al. (2012) indicated that meditation programs could ease emotional distress and increase positive affect. Searching the Internet for spiritual-related and religious-related purposes might be linked to more significant faith, beliefs, and values (McKenna & West, 2007). Regular churchgoers revealed lower risks of all causes of mortality: cancer and cardiovascular than non-churchgoers (Huang et al., 2018).

Kopaze et al. (2019) indicated that many veterans increased religious participation and spiritual pursuit. Faith-based responders had minor mental health, suicide prevention, education, outreach, and other services while significantly providing more spiritual care. There was an opportunity to attend the supportive services that came from faith-based organizations. Ellison and George (1994) claimed that developing churchgoers' friendships with other believers through some place of worship might give them powerful social support. The worship activities generated shared emotions and beliefs to connect with others.

According to McKenna and Bargh (1998), Members of the Internet newsgroup interacted with others in the anonymous social media field. Increasingly, a variety of newsgroups have emerged, including virtual groups and discussion forums. de Valck et al. (2009) indicated that the members preferred to use the virtual community to do the information-seeking activities in different formats. They sought information via different approaches. Some members retrieved factual information through the

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community's databases, others exchanged information in discussion forums, and the others spent time on recreational activities to maintain their member pages.

Okun and Nimrod (2017) indicated that there were four essential characteristics in online communities: religious-secular discussion, which provides a platform for religious discourse, is a wide range of topics unrelated to religion; identity game, which is members participated in personal, is members attending group identity games; intense activities is the forum to maintain severe activity patterns; A unique religious expressiveness, which provides a panel to present the textual and visual content, is a platform for online debates.

Maner and Gailliot (2007) indicated that prosocial behaviors were the relationship between the providers and the recipients. Their findings suggested that the link between helping and empathic concern may be more significant in the context of kinship relationships than among strangers. People with prosocial media exposure were significantly related to prosocial behavior. The people with empathic concern were not associated with aggressive behavior (Coyne et al., 2018). Individuals who often helped strangers were not going to meet again and indirectly reciprocity (Watanabe et al., 2014). Based on altruistic motivation, prosocial behavior was more committed, extensive, and effective than helping with egoistical cause (Mastain, 2007). However, true altruism might exist in the context of offspring compassion and parent-child relationships (Hintsanen et al., 2019).

Religious prosocial behaviors, conditioned by beliefs and concerns, need religious concepts, norms, and emotions to manifest. Religious prosocial behaviors are motivated by concerns for positive self-perception, social reputation, and reciprocity. These behaviors tended to nonaggression, volunteering, cooperation, or conditional helping rather than forgiveness and sacrifice. It also played with other-oriented emotions, values, or family and socialization experiences. There are different prosocial behavioral types, including nonaggression, cooperation, conditional helping, donating, volunteering, minimal and low or average cost activities rather than high-cost activities, including forgiving and sacrifice (Saroglou, 2013).

Why did people exhibit altruistic and prosocial behavior to help strangers? It is easy to explain that individuals are rational and self-interested. The other reason is that individuals have altruistic and prosocial behaviors with the known person. Individuals helped others in their social context because the individual expected reciprocity. Altruistic and prosocial behaviors could create a reputation for acknowledgment and recognition by other people. From another viewpoint, people might help strangers because altruistic and prosocial behavior was rooted in religious beliefs and devoutness to worship the all-powerful, omniscient God or gods who reward altruistic and prosocial behavior and punish selfishness. Even the nonbelievers were prosocial supporters because they lived in religious

countries (Bennett & Einolf, 2017).

According to Batson and Shaw (1991a), psychologists assumed that the motivation for all intentional actions from egoism to altruism was benefiting themselves or benefiting others. People helped others based on their rationale and reciprocation. But, the empathy-altruism hypothesis challenged this assumption. It claimed that empathic emotion evoked truly altruistic motivation with the ultimate goal of benefiting others.

Auguste Comte coined the term altruism. The scientific view of Comte was that individuals were innately altruistic. Comte claimed that the ultimate aim in the religion of humanity was to live for others. Altruism was central to the conceptions of religions (Gane, 2006). Religious charity existed as a form of love and compassion in all faiths to relieve suffering and bring happiness to others. Religious violence was a form of self-interest and self-orientation. Religious charity and religious violence might have coexisted (Saroglou, 2013).

In his dialogue Protagoras, Plato made a distinction between intrinsic values and extrinsic values. Steffen et al. (2015) found that people who hold intrinsic value correlate with positive outcomes. Those, who have extrinsic value, are associated with neutral or negative consequences.

There were different religiosity orientations: intrinsic religiosity and extrinsic religiosity (Allport & Ross, 1967). Some individuals might participate in religion via the Internet (Jansen, 2011). Thus, what are the relationships between egoism, altruism, intrinsic religiosity, extrinsic religiosity, and online religion? That is the purpose of the inquiry of this study.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Self-construal theory
Why do people participate in online religion? Eaton and Louw (2000) indicated that self-construal theory develops from different cultural conceptualizations of the self. The self-construal theory concerns how people understand who they are to live within the broad context of cultural influences (Voyer & Franks, 2014). Self-construal is also the process of the connection that develops oneself, others, and between them (Markus & Kitayama, 1991).

The first aspect of self-construal was that of independence versus interdependence. There are individualism-collectivism dimensions between western people and eastern people. Western cultures tended to stress autonomy and individualism. The self-concept of Westerners is inclined to be individualistic based on their free social context. The individual, who has an independent view of the

self, has a self-centered inclination—the self-concept of non-Westerner countries tended to stress collectivism. The individual, who has the interdependent view of the self in a broader social context, has an interdependent self-view. The individual self-view shaped individual experience, including cognition, emotion, and motivation (Markus & Kitayama, 1991).

The second aspect of self-construal was that of concreteness versus abstraction. Members with collectivist cultures, who were inclined to describe themselves in the specific and contextualized paths, experienced relatedness with others as a fundamental part of themselves. On the other hand, individualist cultures stress the inner, stable, abstract, and self-determining nature of the self (Cousins, 1989).

Kareklas et al. (2014), which used the self-construal theory, explained the theoretical basis to indicate how people think and influence organic food purchasing decisions. The research found that egoistic and altruistic motivation considerations simultaneously predicted consumer attitudes and intentions for purchasing organic food products. The researchers also indicated that societal concerns are more influential in green or organic product purchase decisions. Lastly, the study tested the effects of advertising using egoistic and altruistic claims. They found that advertising with egoistic and altruistic appeals will produce more favorable responses than an egoistic treatment or controlled advertising with altruistic claims.

Empathy always impacted the value tendency. When empathy was rising, the altruistic value was also positively increasing. If empathy declined, the self-enhancing values were rising (Persson & Kajonius, 2016). Empathy was related to altruism. Were there still other value systems to declaim the empathy-altruism hypothesis model? The most critical variable in the multidimensional research model was religiosity. Religiosity was an essential variable for people's interactions with others and living in the world. The empathy-altruism hypothesis indicated that empathy impacts altruism. Does religiosity impact altruism or egoism? What variables were affected by altruism and egoism?

According to Comte (1875), altruism and egoism were distinct motives for the individual. Comte did not deny the potential for self-serving reasons to be propelling individuals to help others. Some will seek self-benefit and self-gratification, which is called egoism. Some social behavior was an act of unselfish desire to live for others. Comte called that is altruism. So, why do online religious practitioners participate in online religion? That is the purpose of the study.

2.2 The empathy-altruism hypothesis

The empathy-altruism hypothesis was an empathic concern for special significance (Batson, 1991a). Empathic concern promoted altruistic motivation and prosocial behavior. Empathy, distinct from

selfish reason, might enhance compassionate disposition (Fry & Runyan, 2018).

According to the empathy-altruism hypothesis, empathic concern was a positive effect on some suffering people. It enhanced selfless motivation to provide aid to others. Some researchers demonstrated that mean levels of helping increase with the degree of relational closeness. The possibility of different helping motivational factors was related to the relationship quality (close or distant) (Maner & Gailliot, 2007).

Altruism could divide into three motivational conception ways. First, altruism could divide into evolutionary altruism and psychological altruism. Evolutionary altruism is a behavior that reduces one's reproductive fitness. Psychological altruism was the motivation with the ultimate goal of increasing the welfare of others (Sober & Wilson, 1999). The empathy-altruism hypothesis was concerned with psychological altruism (Batson et al., 2014).

Second, altruism focused on a particular set of helpful acts that met some standard of goodness or morality. It was not to say that altruism involved other-interest rather than self-interest. It was also not to say that self-interest was not moral and altruism was moral. It was to say that altruism was not self-interest and self-interest was not ethical, but this does not imply that altruism was moral (Rawls, 1971). Altruistic motivation can produce behavior that is moral, amoral, or immoral.

Third, Batson et al. (2014) indicated that empathy concern has four points of other-oriented emotional responses elicited by and congruent with the perceived needy welfare of someone. The first point was congruent with the other-oriented emotional response for someone to perceive another's situation. The second point, the empathic concern, included feeling empathic joy for the good fortune of others. The third point, empathic concern, was not a single, discrete emotion but consisted of a whole feeling: sympathy, compassion, soft-heartedness, tenderness, sorrow, sadness, upset, distress, concern, and grief. The fourth point, the empathic concern, was other-oriented in that it involved feeling emotions such as sentiment, sympathy, compassion, and remorse for others' feelings.

2.3 Egoismandaltruism

The word egoism, first introduced by Plato, is derived from the Latin word ego, and its original meaning is "I". The thought of selfishness supplanted the bond of religious theology. Researchers have given the issues of self-interest and egoism a lot of attention. Many scholars have conducted in-depth explorations of egoists, providing fruitful results in philosophy, ethics, and psychology. It is also along with other fields: economics and social biology (Gentzler, 2012).

Egoism could divide into ethical egoism and psychological egoism. Ethical egoism was a moral

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principle that emphasized the self-interest of an individual. Ethical egoism was normative and could identify into two broad themes: individual egoism and universal egoism. Individual egoism was the attitude that the egoist would look at himself, not for one else. Universal egoism was the attitude in which the egoist believes that all persons ought to do as they did and others had the equal right to do the same (Carlson, 1973).

Psychological egoism was also named psychological hedonism, which claimed that human action was motivated by the agent's desire to experience pleasure (Tilley, 2015). The egoist was concerned with self-interests, which was egocentric (McElwee & Dunning, 2005). Egoism is constituted by the attitudes or inclinations that encompass self-consciousness and self-interest. The acts of egoists came from attitudes of self-centeredness (Bizumic & Duckitt, 2007). When individuals are reminded of money, their behavior becomes self-centered. Individuals depleted money; their actions became other-centered (Mok & Crem, 2018).

Adam Smith contended the aggregate effect in a free-market capitalist system. He believed that economic participants who maintained long-term self-interest would benefit society and directly attend to society's needs more than individuals who did not preserve long-term self-interest (Smith, 1776). Thus, profit as a means of manifesting self-interest was the behavior of a refined self-interest (Hu & Liu, 2003).

Individuals faced life issues according to the instinct of self-interest and self-protection, perpetually striving to maximize self-interest (Faulhaber, 2006). Individuals faced social affairs from the self and public benefits. Thus, people could realize self-interest reasonably and benefit society and the public interest by their actions. Most people could maintain equilibrium in the relationship between these two interests when engaging in prosocial behaviors with self-interest. The pro-environmental action did not maximize self-interest but benefited others and the environment (de Groot & Steg, 2009).

Egoists also engaged happiness to satisfy self-interest. Self-interest manifested in the doctrine of desiring and pursuing the ultimate goal was self-interest and staunch egoists. Psychological egoists sometimes strived for self-benefit because they finally did it for themselves (Feinberg, 2013).

In other words, there were many ways of expressing altruistic behavior: selfless help to another person, support and assistance of disadvantaged people, caring for each other, self-sacrifice in war, patronage, and charity. All of the above behaviors were altruistic (Dibou, 2012). According to the perspective of sociobiology, altruistic behavior might benefit the group rather than the individual (Wilson, 1975).

There were several characteristics of altruism. First, there was the difference between goodness and

morality. Second, that was also a difference as self-sacrifice. Third, altruism was the factor of distinction between the two within the self-other relationship. Integrity, ethics, and self-sacrifice were some virtues related to oneself. Altruism was the characteristic of someone caring about others. It was not necessarily the same as goodness, morality, or self-sacrifice. One reason was that altruism might be a motivational orientation, whereas virtue, ethics, and self-sacrifice might result from actions (Batson & Shaw, 1991a).

According to Morrison and Severino (2007), scientific groundwork on altruism was based on four directions: psychological development, biological mediation, sociocultural evolution, and the spiritual expression of altruism. Spirituality could positively impact altruism (Saslow et al., 2013). Someone could have the altruistic intention to yield benefits for the benefit of others. The motive was selfless, but the result of the action did not involve self-sacrifice. Altruism was a quality related to motives; self-sacrifice was the consequences of actions (Sober, 1991).

Batson and Shaw (1991b) indicated that these definitions of altruism and egoism had several implications. First, the difference was qualitative between altruism and egoism, not quantitative. It was the ultimate goal to distinguish between altruistic and egoistic motivation. Second, the motive of someone cannot be both altruistic and egoistic motivation. The ultimate goal was defined as a single motivation. Third, both altruistic and egoistic motivations can simultaneously coexist within a single person. Fourth, altruism and egoism were goal-directed activities, not spontaneous, automatic, and goalless actions. Fifth, an individual might have altruistic or egoistic motivations that are unknown to them. Sixth, both altruistic and egoistic motives may or may not evoke a variety of behaviors. Seventh, altruistic motivations need not involve self-sacrifice.

Swami et al. (2010) indicated that the model of environmental concerns mentioned three factors: egoistic, altruistic, and biospheric concerns. Egoistic and altruistic marketers had different goals in marketing. Moderately egoistic marketers have their sales gain more than value addition of consumers in the marketing target, and moderately altruistic marketers had value addition of consumers more than the sale gain of themselves (Ramanathan & Swain, 2019). Furthermore, other-benefit appeals generated more favorable donation support than self-benefit in a situation that heightens public self-image concern. The efficacy of benefit-other versus self-benefit appeals was moderated by contextual characteristics and individual differences (White & Peloza, 2009).

Egoistic or hedonic values were negatively related to altruistic or biospheric values in environmentally responsible behavior. Compassion was positively associated with extra payment for fair trade clothes, and hedonic value was negatively associated with additional payment for fair trade clothes (Geiger & Keller, 2018). Bal and Van den Bos (2015) conducted two studies, which indicated that a self-focused

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view enhanced derogatory reactions and suppressed helping the victim. For the victim, the other-focus improved assisting others and decreased scathing responses, especially when the victim involved a firm belief in a just world threat. So, we could say that the self-focus increased egoism and hedonic value-enhanced selfishness. The other focus improved altruism and compassion also enhanced selflessness.

2.4 Religiosity

The synonymous religiosity was the same with such terms: religiousness, orthodoxy, faith, religious belief, piousness, devotion, and holiness (Lewis, 1978). Religiosity would be term as different religious dimensions rather than being equivalent to religiosity. Religiosity exists in an unascertainable, imprecise, and complex nature. Manyother disciplines address religiosity from different viewpoints: theologians, religious educators, psychologists, and sociologists (Holdcroft, 2006).

Glock and Stark (1965) identified five dimensions of religiosity: ideological, ritualistic, experiential, intellectual, and consequential. Specific tenets of religiosity constituted the ideological dimension. The ritualistic domain involved the worship experience in the religious community. The experiential dimension focused on the personal faith experience of transcendent encounters. The intellectual extent was the expectation of a believer to be informed and know the sacred principles of faith and scriptures. The consequential and intellectual dimensions were that accepted the knowledge of religiosity.

As for the five dimensions, religiosity is the desire to pursue value. Rokeach (1973) viewed values as hierarchic and distinguished between two types of values. The first types were terminal values that individuals want to achieve throughout their lives. Terminal values could divide into personal or social values. The second types were instrumental values that individuals are behavioral expressions in a situational context. Instrumental values could divide into capacity values or moral values.

Allport and Ross (1967) indicated that the Religious Orientation Scale (ROS) could divide into two dimensions: intrinsic religious orientation and extrinsic religious orientation. The former refers to religion as an end in itself, and the latter refers to religion as a self-serving means. Intrinsic religious orientation corresponds to a mature faith, and extrinsic religious orientation corresponds to an instrumental belief.

People with intrinsic religious orientation lived by religion, whereas a person with extrinsic religious orientation used religion as an instrument. Intrinsic religiosity had the interest to serve others, and this may be the ultimate motivation for believers. Extrinsic religiosity had an instrumental and practical orientation. It may provide security, solace, sociability, distraction, status, and self-justification

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through religion. In theological terms, intrinsic religiosity followed God. The extrinsic religiosity followed God and oneself (Allport & Ross, 1967).

A value also was the enduring belief that a particular conduct mode or existential end-state was preferable personally or socially in opposing or inverse conduct or existential end-state (Rokeach, 1973). Intrinsic religiosity was a dimension of religious involvement to serve others, and that is the end in itself or goal of terminal value. Extrinsic religiosity was someone's means of instrumental value (Chau et al., 1990). Intrinsic religiosity was significantly associated with tolerance; extrinsic religiosity was significantly associated with prejudice (Allport & Ross, 1967).

Donahue (1985) classified religious people according to four-fold typology: the high and low level of intrinsic or extrinsic religiosity. The intrinsically religious person has the typology of high intrinsic religiosity and low extrinsic religiosity. The extrinsically religious person has high extrinsic religiosity and low intrinsic religiosity. The indiscriminately pro-religious has high on intrinsic religiosity and high on extrinsic religiosity. The non-religious person has low intrinsic religiosity and low extrinsic religiosity.

2.5 Online religion

What is religion? Religion could view as a Cultural System. The formal definition of religion includes: (1) a system of presenting symbols; (2) establishing the believers having powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations; (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence; (4) presenting these conceptions with a vivid aura of factuality and (5) the moods and motivations are realistic (Frankenberry & Penner, 1999; Geertz, 1993).

Religion comprises manufactured, constructed, invented, or imagined concepts and does not represent objective reality. Schilbrack's first viewpoint of religion is that religion is a relative invention. According to his idea, it is a particular system of beliefs. It is embodied in a bounded community. It is also a cultural constructional system and is "out there" in the world. From another viewpoint of his, religion is a distorted cultural phenomenon and social construction imposed it. The third viewpoint is that the structure of religion is ideologically motivated, and religion provides services for those who developed it (Schilbrack, 2010).

Schilbrack (2004) indicated that ritual activities are the forms of thinking, especially metaphysical thinking. Religion does not exist apart from the thinking, speaking, and acting of humans. All the religious phenomena are human's ways of thought, spoken and acted behavior. If humans do not recognize sacred objects, there would be no more religious objects (Schilbrack, 2010). So, religion is metaphysic of ritual, and religious philosophy or metaphysics should help one realize the truth

(Schilbrack, 2004).

According to Hinnells (2005), the word "religion" denotes those who identify as members of a religious group. It is also an act of thought and is religious when a person supposes practicing their religion. Religion also means that people are involved in religious organizations and think they are functioning religiously. So, the definition of religion also is very secular and practical. In the networked society, religion is more complicated than traditionally in the classic era.

Campbell (2012) indicated that networked religion online is not only transferred faith but highlighted shifts occurring within broader Western culture. Networked religion has five central traits: networked community, storied identity, shifting authority, convergent practice, and multisite reality—all of these shifts include two main characteristics. First, many social and structural shifts were observed to be unique to religion online and changed within the Internet on the social sphere. Thus, the online practice was related to the values or systems of offline culture. Second, this trend shifted within the general approach and conception of religion, especially in the offline context within Western culture.

According to Dawson & Cowan's clarification of Helland (2000), religion online provides information and services related to different religious groups and traditional beliefs. The online faith is inviting internet visitors to participate in spiritual practices. The distinction of communication and participation is clear to differentiate online religion from religious groups (Dawson & Cowan, 2004).

Online religious practitioners participated in a networked community of cyber churches. Individuals created a space to engage in worship-based online activities. Thus, it made the third place of socialization between public and private forums, providing a website to build personal social connections with others online and affiliated with a large religious discussion forum (Campbell, 2012).

The religious practitioners recognized religion with their ultimate connection to a reality outside the natural world. Spiritual practitioners were fully committed to the faith of genuine religiosity that the secular world cannot experience. Nowadays, the Internet is prevalent and virtually ubiquitous across the globe. People attended cyberspace activities via computer-mediated communication (CMC) worldwide, communicating via networks that involve religious affairs (Ess, 1996). Dawson & Cowan (2004) indicated that the Internet is not a reality separate from the real world but an electronic extension.

According to Lau (1989), believers and nonbelievers differed in their value system. First, believers showed a significant preference for and possession of moral and relational values, but much less on the personal-extrinsic, competency, and egoistic values. Second, the difference could be diminished

and eliminated by controlling for the strength of believers' influence and nonbelievers' religious schema. Third, the religious schema occupied a less central position in the cognition system of the nonbelievers. As a result, each believer faced questions concerning the meaning and value of life. Online religious practitioners have a close, interactive and creative relationship with religion. Religion prescribes rituals based on the supernatural premise and supernatural assumption. The manifestation of formal religion and religiosity was related to the altruistic concern. Overall, there were close similarities in the relationships of egoism, altruism, religiosity, and online religion. Other than empathic concern, were there other variables that impact altruism?

2.6 Merged theoretical framework

In this study, the researcher focused on those who belong to interactive online religious forums. The researcher was interested in discovering whether such groups indeed tend to attract unaffiliated with any local religious organizations. The researcher investigated whether they were involved in online religious groups to yield self or social benefit and further sought to understand the roles of altruism, egoism, and religiosity in online religion.

Does intrinsic-extrinsic religiosity impact egoistic or altruistic motives? People who were egoists or altruists engaged in social actions to maximize or minimize personal social rewards. The internal reward gain induced altruistic behavior. Research indicated that individuals cause by other-benefit motives. The empathy-altruism hypothesis suggested that individuals have the other-directed ultimate desire, whereas psychological egoism told that individuals' desire was self-directed. Thus, we can say that individuals had the other-directed ultimate desire for other-benefit and had the self-directed ultimate desire for self-benefit (Sober & Wilson, 1999).

The motive of self-benefit refers to the person having a self-regarding desire to maximize perceived self-interest. The individual might satisfy the benefit-self motive incompatible with the benefit-other motive (Shaver, 2019). The motive of benefit-other refers to giving individuals help or appeal to benefit-other. The individual may align with the motive of altruism and benefit-other, rather than benefit-self (Park & Lee, 2015).

There were three reasons to explain why people who self-benefit would feel empathy. Helping to satisfy self-benefit motive enables one to (1) reduce empathy arousal to avoid aversion; (2) do not get social-punishment or self-punishment for not helping; (3) gain social reward or self-reward for doing what was good and right. The empathy-altruism hypothesis does not deny that the self-benefit of empathy-induced helping exist, but instead that the motive evoked by empathy and self-benefit is unintended (Batson et al., 2002).

The empathy-altruism hypothesis could be a multidimensional theory. The sufficiency and effectiveness of the empathy-altruism hypothesis were disputable as a result of its psychological mechanism. People's beliefs are toward altruism, free will, and nonreductionism. People's views were not toward psychological egoism, determinism, and biological reductionism (Bergner & Ramon, 2013).

The united theoretical framework combines egoism, altruism, intrinsic religiosity, extrinsic religiosity, and online religion. The researcher wanted to merge existing theories and supply more explanatory power than the initial theory model. Figure 1 shows the unified theoretical model of the online religion hypothesis.

Figure 1. The online religion hypothesis research model.
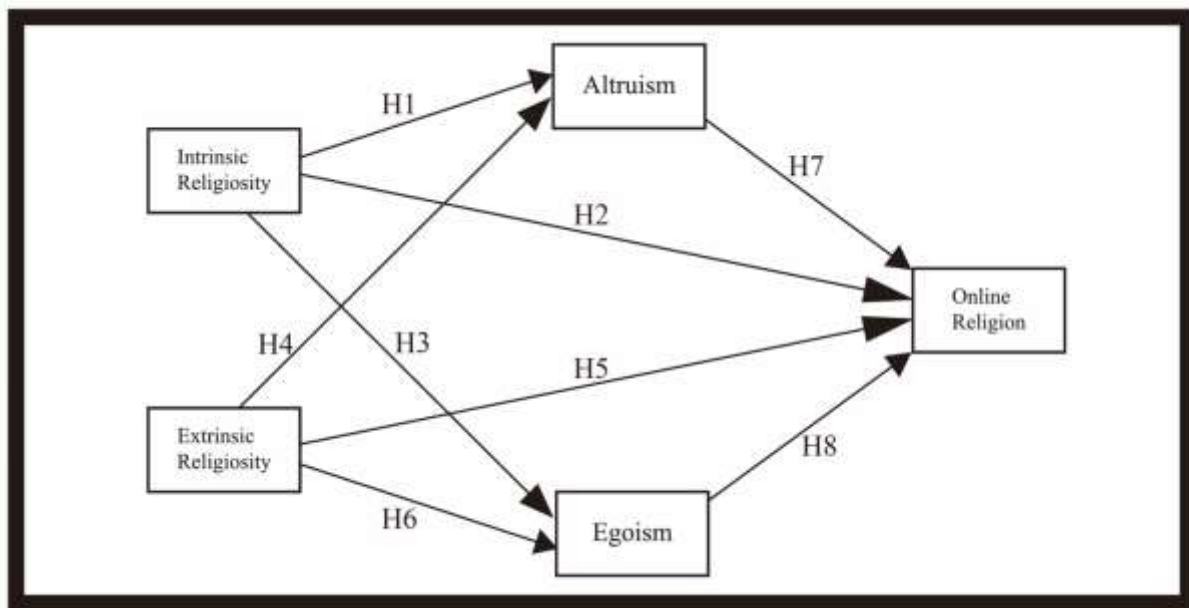
3. HYPOTHESIZED RELATIONSHIPS

According to Hroch et al. (2018), intrinsic religiosity could associate with mental health. Intrinsic religiosity was weakly positively associated with altruism and narcissistic religiosity. However, there was no connection between altruism and narcissistic religiosity. Altruism was less narcissistic in religiosity. Altruists often coped with stress in a task-centered approach, while those disappointed with God tended to be inclined to emotion-centered coping.

According to Chau et al. (1990), intrinsic religiosity could associate with altruism. Intrinsic religiosity could promote selfless concern or altruism for other-benefit. The relationship between altruism and intrinsic religiosity was positive (Ji et al., 2006). The relationship between egoism and extrinsic

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religiosity was also positive (Stavrova & Siegers, 2014). Hence, hypothesis one (H1) is that intrinsic religiosity is positively related to altruism. And, hypothesis three (H3) is that intrinsic religiosity is negatively related to egoism.

Chau et al. (1990) indicated that extrinsic religiosity was negatively related or nonrelated to altruism. Extrinsic religiosity was positively associated with egoism (Stavrova & Siegers, 2014). Hence, hypothesis four (H4) is that extrinsic religiosity is negatively related to altruism. And, hypothesis six (H6) is that extrinsic religiosity has a positive impact on egoism.

Armfield and Holbert (2003) indicated that religiosity was negatively related to Internet use. According to Short et al. (2015), extrinsic religiosity was associated with Internet pornography use. The person with extrinsic religiosity had used Internet pornography. The person with intrinsic religiosity had never used Internet pornography. According to these research studies, intrinsic religiosity is negatively related to Internet use. And, intrinsic religiosity was positively associated with online religion. Hence, hypothesis two (H2) is that intrinsic religiosity has a positive impact on online religion. And, hypothesis five (H5) is that extrinsic religiosity has a positive effect on online religion.

Campbell (2012) indicated that religious practice online was not a transforming religion but was shifting within the broader Western culture. The networked religion concept had five essential traits: networked community, storied identities, shifting authority, convergent practice, and multisite reality. Valsala & Menon (2019) indicated that individuals were all comprised of egoism and altruism, so one had the characteristics of self-gratification and self-transcendence. Hence, hypothesis seven (H7) is that altruism has a positive impact on online religion. And, hypothesis eight (H8) is that egoism has a positive effect on online religion.

4. RESEARCH DESIGN

4.1. Measurement instruments and questionnaire development
According to Worthington et al. (2003), the Religious Commitment Inventory-10 (RCI-10) was the interviewees' self-report for assessing their religiosity and attitudes toward life. It investigated the general cognitive view and attitude expression. The RCI-10 scale had two constructs: six and four items, including intrinsic religiosity and extrinsic religiosity.

The egoism and altruism scales used to measure beliefs about adverse consequences (ACs) assessed interviewees' egoistic and altruistic attitudes towards religiosity. According to Snelgar (2006), the AC Beliefs scale had two constructs: egoism and altruism scales. The egoistic AC belief items assessed interviewees' values of egoism. The altruistic belief items set interviewees' values of altruism.

Another construct was online religion. Artino (2009) indicated that online learning was the overall satisfaction with the online learning course and assessed a three-item satisfaction subscale adapted from Artino (2008). Online religion was also the same as an online religious course, as spiritual practitioners learned something and interacted with others on the online religious forum. Three items were inquiring about online religious experience and satisfaction. That is the reason for online religion persisting of spiritual practitioners.

The researcher investigated all interviewees via an online survey questionnaire. The scales included the Religious Commitment Inventory-10 scale, AC Beliefs scale, online religious experience scale, and demographic variables. All items were translated into Chinese with a seven-point Likert scale anchored from 1 "strongly disagree" to 7 "strongly agree."

The online religious study researched how online and offline religious behaviors became bridged, blended, and blurred. The online spiritual practitioners sought to integrate their real holy lives into the websites or forums within the different online religious cultures (Campbell & Evolvi, 2019). These online religious research studies focused on several critical areas, including the religious community, identity online, ritual websites, and ethics online. The research method employed qualitative methods, such as ethnographic studies, to involve online participant observation, interviews, content analysis, and discourse analysis.

The researcher used questionnaire methods to understand how egoism or altruism are related to religiosity. And how religiosity affects online religion (see Appendix). All data were analyzed with Smart PLS (version 2.0). The significance level was calculated by bootstrapping 250 samples 500 times. Simultaneously, the convergent validity, factors loading, Cronbach's α, composite reliability (CR), and average variation extracted (AVE) are analyzed and tested using the mensuration model. The questionnaire was designed to ensure content and face validity. A pretest was conducted with online practitioners from online religious forums. Based on the investigated results from fifty samples, the pretest version of the form has not changed.

4.2. Data collection and demographic profiles

Survey participation was voluntary from several online religious forums. The investigator posted a message on the online media inviting online spiritual practitioners to answer. A total of 132 questionnaires came from interviewees, and all were valid. The demographic characteristics of all 132 respondents included 58 (43.9%) males and 74 (56.1%) females. The age range was 18–20 years old (4 cases, 3.0%), followed by 21–30 years old (32 cases, 24.2%), 31–40 years old (18 cases, 13.6%), 41–50 years old (31 cases, 23.5%), 51–60 years old (42 cases, 31.8%), and over 60 years old (5 cases,

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3.8%). The education levels of the interviewees included junior/senior high school and under 12.1% (16 cases), college degree (66 cases, 50.0%), and graduate degree and over 37.9% (50 cases). Marriage status included unmarried (50 cases, 37.9%), married (64 cases, 48.5%), and divorced and other (18 cases, 13.6%). Religious beliefs included Buddhism (43 cases, 32.6%), Taoism (25 cases, 18.9%), Christianity (17 cases, 12.9%), folk beliefs (25 cases, 18.9%), and nonbelievers (22 cases, 16.7%).

4.3. Data analysis

The researcher had used partial least squares (PLS) regression and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to analyze the collected data. PLS software assessed the proposed theoretical framework, tested the hypothesized model among research constructs and checked it. Later on, the bootstrapping method utilized the mediating role of variables inside our research framework.

5. RESULTS

5.1. The measurement models

The Cronbach's α and CR of all constructs were more than 0.7 and 0.8. There was a high degree of internal consistency for all of the constructs. The factor loading of the constructed items was more prominent than 0.7, while only two items, both within the Altruism construct, were lower than 0.7 but still more than 0.6 (see Table 1). The measurement had an excellent convergent effect.

Table 1. Factor Loading, Cronbach's α, rho_A, CR, AVE of Constructs					
Construct	Item	Factor Loading	Cronbach's α	CR	AVE
Altruism	A1	0.743	0.725	0.818	0.475
	A2	0.605			
	A3	0.601			
	A4	0.733			
	A 5	0.747			
Egoism	E 1	0.822	0.875	0.914	0.727
	E 2	0.908			
	E 3	0.892			
	E 4	0.783			
Extrinsic religiosity	Ex 1	0.922	0.912	0.938	0.791
	Ex 2	0.918			
	Ex3	0.904			
	Ex 4	0.807			

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Intrinsic religiosity	In 1	0.736	0.916	0.934	0.702
	In 2	0.882			
	In 3	0.880			
	In 4	0.824			
	In 5	0.887			
	In 6	0.807			
Online religion	O 1	0.910	0.899	0.937	0.832
	O 2	0.955			
	O 3	0.869			

5.2. The structural model

The structural model showed that the path coefficients range from -0.038 to 0.369. The interpretation of variation (R^2) offered an impact on Altruism, R2=0.149; an impact on egoism, R2=0.018; and Online religion, R^2=0.266 (see Figure 2).

We proved four research hypotheses, and the others had not passed. There were five factors with eigenvalues of more than 1. The utmost explanatory amount of a single factor was 30.471%, which was less than 50%. The cumulative interpretation variation was 73.829%, and the result of the analysis showed that the common method variation had no significant effect on the study. The results of all the validated research hypotheses are displayed below (see Table 3).

Figure 2. Structural model PLS results

Table 3. The t-value of Research Hypotheses and Path Coefficients				
No.	Hypotheses	t-value	p-value	Results
H1	Intrinsic religiosity is positively related to Altruism	4.087	0.369***	supported
H2	Intrinsic religiosity is positively related to Online religion	2.576	0.301**	supported
H3	Intrinsic religiosity is negatively related to Egoism	1.241	0.158	Not supported

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H4	Extrinsic religiosity is negatively related to Altruism	0.206	0.021	Not supported
H5	Extrinsic religiosity is positively related to Online religion	2.263	0.201*	supported
H6	Extrinsic religiosity is positively related to Egoism	0.258	-0.038	Not supported
H7	Altruism is positively related to Online religion	0.152	0.009	Not supported
H8	Egoism is positively related to Online religion	3.188	0.216**	supported

6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

6.1. Discussion

This study investigates the empathy-altruism hypothesis's multidimensionality in the sample of religious practitioners participating in online discussion forums. Additionally, the online religion hypothesis theorizes a five-factor structure that would prove a one-dimensional model. Several findings emerge from this research. First, intrinsic religiosity is positively related to altruism. Second, intrinsic religiosity is positively associated with online religion. Third, extrinsic religiosity is positively associated with online religion. Fourth, egoism is positively related to online religion.

The religious practitioners who participate in online discussion forums have high visibility in modern societies. This research investigates the direct and interactive effects of religiosity, altruism, egoism, and online religion. According to the empathy-altruism hypothesis, empathic concern will induce altruism. (Tang & Tang, 2010).

Intrinsic religiosity enables posttraumatic religious practitioners to identify with an ultimate goal. The ultimate goal is to strengthen religious and spiritual beliefs, have transcendent experiences, and gain a deeper understanding of religion and spirituality to manifest a personal relationship with God. The participant with intrinsic religiosity faces trauma and distress, allowing a process of questioning and meaning-making to experience individual life and spiritual growth (de Castella & Simmonds, 2013). Intrinsic religiosity can boost online believers' degree of altruism. The benefit-others belief corresponds to the demand of universal self for the believer. Thus, intrinsic religiosity is positively related to altruism. Religious practitioners with intrinsic religiosity are inclined to exhibit other-interest, showing concern for others instead of displaying self-interest.

Indeed, there was evidence that intrinsic religiosity and altruism have a close relationship. The believer with intrinsic religiosity is altruistic, worshiping God and sacred objects, not self-interest but other interests. According to van Elk et al. (2017), Protestants had a higher general religiosity score. They believed more strongly in an afterlife. They felt a benevolent God and considered more strongly in predestination than Catholics. At the same time, they felt less in free will. Protestants have more prosocial behaviors than Catholics. Thus, intrinsic religiosity can improve individuals' altruistic behavior to concern other-benefit. Religious practitioners have an ultimate belief about ones' life in online discussion forums on websites and following God or sacred objects. They interact with others with altruistic behavior to promote other-interest.

Singh (2014) indicated that young Sikhs go online for several reasons, distinguishing between seeking knowledge versus online interaction with the individual user. Online religion behaviors entailed religious practitioners interacting with others within online discussion forums or websites. Spiritual practitioners participate in religious activities within cyberspace and may or may not participate in offline religious activities or interactions. Intrinsic religiosity, extrinsic religiosity, and egoism are positively related to online religion. (see Figure 3).

Intrinsic religiosity is positively related to online religion. Intrinsic religiosity is the ultimate goal for religious practitioners to look for a significant meaning in life. The spiritual practitioners with intrinsic religiosity have the intention to find out the true meaning of life. They may be looking for information and resources on the Internet and participating in online discussion forums to talk with others. Thus, intrinsic religiosity is positively related to the capacity for online religion to approach the ultimate goal. Religious practitioners participated in online religion to follow God's ultimate purpose or sacred objects.

Religious practitioners have extrinsic religiosity to achieve instrumental goals. They have a relationship with other believers in online and offline contexts to approach an instrumental goal. Throughout most cultures, religion is an essential component of an individual's life. Extrinsic religiosity is the belief in seeking God and seeking oneself and having an instrumental goal. In this research finding, extrinsic religiosity is also positively related to online religion.

Religious practitioners having extrinsic religiosity are motivated by the intent to approach an instrumental goal. They might be looking for information and resources on online discussion forums for self-interest. Thus, extrinsic religiosity is positively related to online religion to come to the instrumental goal. Religious practitioners attended online religion to follow the instrumental purpose of self and follow God's direction or sacred objects.

Intrinsic religiosity characterizes the belief that something has its right. It is valuable for itself to approach the ultimate goal and the way of an ultimate goal. Extrinsic religiosity illustrates the idea that something has an instrumental purpose or practical value. Online religion can satisfy both intrinsic religiosity and extrinsic religiosity within online discussion forums.

Garfield et al. (2015) indicated that Buddhists followed moral creeds to eliminate egoism by eliminating the sense of self. The formal religion wanted to stop the egoism of the religious believers. But online religion is impacted by egoism. An egoist is someone who has a self-interest intention. Egoists retain self-consciousness to pursue self-interest. Thus, egoists participate in online religion to pursue self-interest. Religiosity may eradicate the sense of self and enable the practitioner to achieve selflessness.

The empathy-altruism hypothesis claims that the ultimate goal of prosocial motivation or altruism induced by empathy is increasing the welfare of others in need. According to the study, intrinsic religiosity evokes altruism. Online religious practitioners with intrinsic religiosity stimulate altruism to benefit others and engage in prosocial behavior.

According to this research, intrinsic religious believers seek the spiritual self and unity with God or sacred objects. Extrinsic religious believers seek the benefit-self and unity with God and themselves. Egoists pursue self-interest and the satisfaction of individual needs. Online religion meets the needs of intrinsic spiritual practitioners, extrinsic religious practitioners, and egoistic believers.

The online religion hypothesis indicates that online religion contains the dynamic complexity of functions to satisfy spiritual or religious practitioners' needs. Online religion is not merely limited to the worship function but also has social and economic processes to approach the practical goal. Thus, the spectrum of intrinsic religious practitioners, extrinsic religious practitioners, and egoists will all participate in online religion. Altruists do not participate in online faith because online religious behavior is not related to benefit-other. Online religion merely provides a platform for transcending self and benefit-self behaviors. Thus, online religious networks and discussion forums are complex environments. Online spiritual practitioners participate in online discussion forums with multidimensional motivation to acquire religious information and engage in social interaction.

Figure 3. The Merged Structural Model
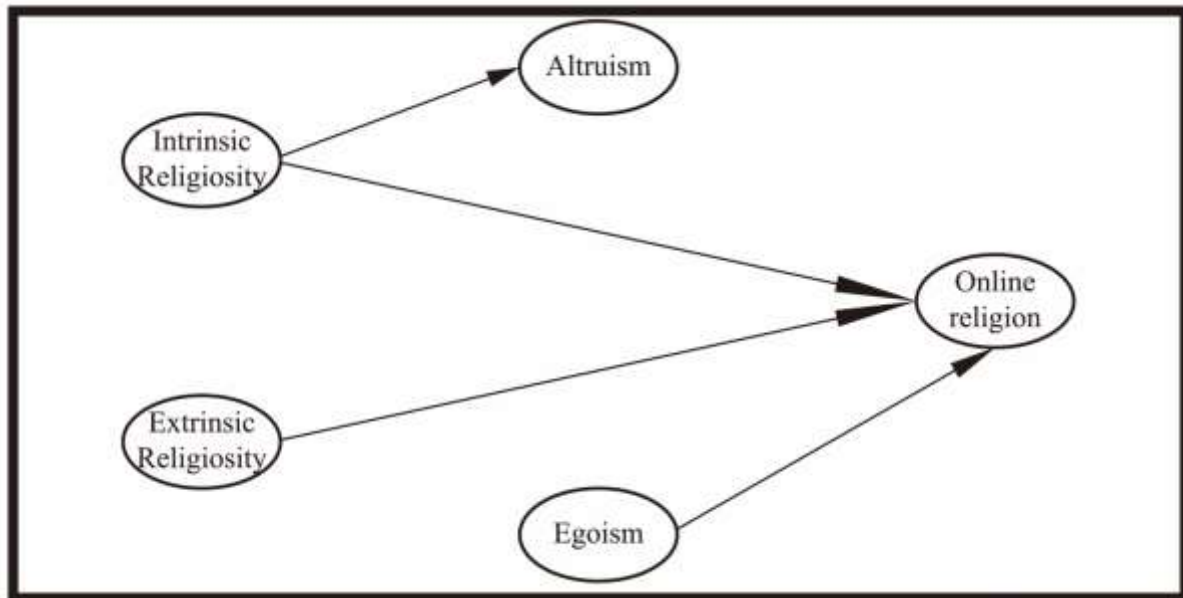
6.2. Limitations and future research

This study contains some weaknesses that require mentioning. First, this study uses questionnaires to interview religious practitioners from online discussion forums in Taiwan. The generalization of research findings has some limitations. It might be suitable for online spiritual practitioners, not for general netizens. Future research should expand to acquire broader demographic data.

Second, the questionnaire comprises the five-factor items: intrinsic religiosity, extrinsic religiosity, altruism, egoism, and online religion. However, this study wants to combine multidimensional items to maintain the effectiveness of the five-factor items. Future studies ought to address the multidimensionality of items. Moreover, additional research is required to look for other online religious behavior variables.

Third, the model predicts that intrinsic religiosity, extrinsic religiosity, and egoism impact online religion. Intrinsic religiosity is positively related to altruism. However, the research findings can improve by integrating additional factors into the model. Future research might follow such anticipated effects on the united theoretical framework to extend future research findings.

The findings of the study offer a methodological improvement to the psychometric investigation of the online religion context. The study provided an example to test the theoretical structure with PLS and the proposed factor structure with CFA. The PLS and CFA techniques constituted the well-

developed underlying theory. The use of PLS and CFA allows for the theoretical evaluation of multidimensional models to be combined. The one-dimensional model appeared to provide an excellent overall fit for the religiosity-altruism-egoism-online religion items in this study.

In all, the presence of a theorized measurement model and an abundance of the literature suggest a discrepant alternative; PLS and CFA may be best used to determine which model provides the best fit in this study. These principles might apply to psychometric investigations of other instruments across disciplines. This study is limited primarily by its focus on the online religious environment in Taiwan's context. As such, these findings might not be directly about other countries. However, future online religion research can utilize the methodologies outlined in other studies to provide additional related results.

However, the five-factor and one-dimensional model demonstrates a relatively statistically significant better fit than the pre-existing model. Thus, the findings support the use of the online religion hypothesis as a five-factor instrument. In all, convergent validity endorses each of the five-factor dimensions through correlation analyses in this study.

6.3. Conclusion

This online religion hypothesis hasn't been thoroughly explored in literature. The researcher tests these hypotheses to have three conclusions. First, there are three factors related to online religion: intrinsic religiosity, extrinsic religiosity, and egoism. Intrinsic religious practitioners, extrinsic religious practitioners, and egoists will participate in online religion. Intrinsic spiritual practitioners want to find out the ultimate goal and to touch God or sacred objects directly. Extrinsic religious practitioners wish to approach the practical purpose and to extend the online spiritual value to oneself. Egoists want to come to the self-interest goals and satisfy their needs.

Second, altruism is not the independent variable to online religion within the model. It is the dependent variable of intrinsic religiosity. Altruism and online religion are not related to each other. Online religion does not provide the comprehensive mechanisms necessary to help others or concern for others. Altruists do not feel urged to participate in online discussion forums yet. However, they might join offline religious organizations, devoting their time to activities that benefit-other.

Third, according to the empathy-altruism hypothesis, empathy concern will impact altruism. There is a secular reason to cause altruism. According to this study, intrinsic religiosity impacts altruism. There is a religious basis to cause altruism. The online religion promoter must elevate the public-interest function to increase the altruists' participation in online discussion forums.

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