

## **Exploring Motivational Drivers and Economic Impact of Youth Volunteerism in Malaysia**

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### **Abstract**

This study examines the motivational factors influencing youth volunteerism in Malaysia, focusing on six key drivers: social, understanding, values, career, protective, and enhancement motivations. Using a quantitative approach, data were collected from 385 Malaysian youth volunteers and analyzed through structural equation modeling. The findings reveal that values, social, and enhancement motivations significantly influence youth volunteerism, while understanding, career, and protective motivations have no significant impact. Policy implications include designing volunteer programs that emphasize altruistic values and personal growth opportunities. These insights aim to foster sustained youth engagement in volunteerism, contributing to national development and social cohesion.

**Keywords:** Youth; Volunteerism; Motivation; Education

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### **1.0 Introduction**

Volunteerism has emerged as a crucial component of social and economic development, providing individuals with opportunities to contribute to societal well-being while fostering personal growth. Globally, youth are a driving force behind volunteerism, with an estimated 30% of young people aged 15–24 actively engaging in volunteer activities (United Nations Volunteers, 2022). In Malaysia, volunteerism has gained momentum, particularly through initiatives like Institut Penyelidikan Pembangunan Belia Malaysia (IYRES), which has mobilized over 20,000 youth to participate in community service since its inception (IYRES, 2020). According to the Department of Statistics Malaysia (2021), youth aged 15–30 constitute approximately 27.6% of the population, making them a critical demographic for fostering civic engagement. However, the 2019 National Youth Development Index reported that only 32% of Malaysian youth participate in volunteerism, indicating significant untapped potential in this area.

Despite its growing importance, understanding the underlying motivational drivers of youth volunteerism in Malaysia remains limited. While global studies emphasize factors such as altruism, career aspirations, and personal growth, the cultural and societal contexts unique to Malaysia may influence these motivations differently. Investigating these factors is essential to designing programs that

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effectively engage and sustain youth participation in volunteer activities, aligning with both national development goals and global calls for civic engagement.

The purpose of this study is to explore the motivational factors influencing youth volunteerism in Malaysia. Specifically, the study investigates the relationships between six key motivational drivers: social motivation, understanding motivation, values motivation, career motivation, protective motivation, and enhancement motivation and their impact on youth engagement in volunteer activities. By examining these factors within the unique cultural framework of Malaysia, this research aims to bridge gaps in the existing literature and contribute to both theoretical advancements and practical applications.

The objectives of this study are threefold: (1) to identify the motivational factors that significantly influence youth volunteerism in Malaysia, (2) to determine the relative strength of each motivational factor in driving youth engagement, and (3) to establish actionable recommendations for policymakers and organizations to design effective volunteer programs. By achieving these objectives, the study seeks to provide insights into fostering a sustainable culture of volunteerism among Malaysian youth, addressing both immediate societal needs and broader developmental challenges.

## 2.0 Literature Review

The Functional Theory of Volunteerism continues to serve as a robust framework for understanding youth volunteerism by explaining the motivations that drive individuals to engage in volunteering activities. This theory identifies six core functions of volunteerism: values, understanding, social, career, protective, and enhancement motivations (Yeung et al., 2017). These functions align closely with the motivational factors adopted in this study. Across different cultural and geographical contexts, recent studies emphasize the significance of these motivations. For example, values motivation consistently emerges as a dominant factor. Studies in the United States (Ertürk et al., 2022) and the United Kingdom (Smith et al., 2021) reveal that altruistic concerns, such as a desire to help others and contribute to societal welfare, significantly drive youth volunteerism. Similarly, understanding motivation described as the desire to gain knowledge and skills is widely observed in studies from Australia (Beveridge et al., 2021) and Singapore (Tan et al., 2020), where youth perceive volunteering as an opportunity for personal development. These findings align with Abdul Kadir et al. (2024), who found values and understanding to be the primary motivators among Malaysian youth.

Career motivation, while less emphasized in some cultural contexts, holds particular significance in developing economies, where volunteering can enhance employability. For instance, research in South Africa (Mkize et al., 2021) highlights how volunteering helps disadvantaged youth build practical skills and improve resumes. Protective motivation, which involves using volunteerism as a coping mechanism for personal challenges or negative emotions, is also notable. In Japan, studies by Ito et al. (2020) found that youth experiencing social isolation or mental health challenges frequently turn to volunteering as a form of therapy. Enhancement motivation, associated with personal growth and self-esteem, has been extensively studied in Canada (Pritchard et al., 2022), where it is linked to fostering resilience and well-being among youth.

### 2.1 Empirical studies on youth volunteerism

Social motivation, rooted in the desire to connect with others and fulfill societal expectations, consistently emerges as a critical factor. Yeung et al. (2017) identified social motivation as arising from interpersonal needs and societal norms. For instance, in the United Kingdom, Smith et al. (2021) reported strong social motivations among youth participating in community-based programs. Similarly, Tan et al. (2020) highlighted peer influence as a significant driver of volunteerism in Singapore. Despite cultural variations, social motivation remains a common thread, fostering both individual and community development. Based on these arguments, the following hypothesis is developed:

H1: Social motivation has a positive relationship with youth volunteerism.

Understanding motivation, reflecting the desire to gain knowledge, skills, and new experiences, is another significant driver of youth volunteerism. According to Yeung et al. (2017), individuals often volunteer for personal development and intellectual enrichment. Recent studies highlight the importance of understanding motivation among youth. For example, Beveridge et al. (2021) found that Australian youth prioritize learning and self-improvement when engaging in volunteer activities. Similarly, Tan et al. (2020) observed that Singaporean youth view volunteering as an avenue to explore interests and acquire career-relevant competencies. Based on these insights, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Understanding motivation has a positive relationship with youth volunteerism.

Values motivation, grounded in altruism and the desire to contribute to societal welfare, is widely recognized as one of the most influential factors driving youth volunteerism. Yeung et al. (2017) described values motivation as reflecting an individual's commitment to helping others and supporting ethical principles. Research consistently highlights its prominence. For instance, Smith et al. (2021) noted that youth in the United Kingdom are strongly motivated by empathy and moral responsibility, while Abdul Kadir et al. (2024) found similar patterns among Malaysian youth, particularly in volunteer programs addressing social issues. These findings support the following hypothesis:

H3: Values motivation has a positive relationship with youth volunteerism.

Career motivation, particularly significant in contexts where volunteering enhances employability, also plays a vital role. Yeung et al. (2017) linked career motivation to the desire for work experience and professional growth. Studies in developing economies, such

as South Africa (Mkize et al., 2021), emphasize how youth use volunteering to build resumes and acquire professional skills. Similarly, in Singapore, Tan et al. (2020) highlighted that youth often seek volunteer opportunities aligned with their career aspirations. Based on these observations, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H4: Career motivation has a positive relationship with youth volunteerism.

Protective motivation, which involves using volunteerism as a means to address personal challenges or negative emotions, plays an essential role in youth volunteerism. According to Yeung et al. (2017), protective motivation reflects the use of volunteering to reduce guilt, manage stress, or enhance self-esteem. Ito et al. (2020) found that Japanese youth experiencing social isolation often turn to volunteering as a form of emotional support. Similarly, Abdul Kadir et al. (2024) identified protective motivation as significant among Malaysian youth seeking emotional resilience and purpose. These findings lead to the following hypothesis:

H5: Protective motivation has a positive relationship with youth volunteerism.

Enhancement motivation, emphasizing personal growth and self-improvement, remains a crucial driver of youth volunteerism. Yeung et al. (2017) noted that this motivation reflects the desire to enhance self-esteem and achieve fulfillment. Empirical evidence consistently highlights its importance. For instance, Pritchard et al. (2022) observed that Canadian youth engage in volunteer work to boost confidence and develop personal skills. Similarly, Abdul Kadir et al. (2024) found that Malaysian youth are motivated by the psychological satisfaction derived from volunteering. Based on these findings, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H6: Enhancement motivation has a positive relationship with youth volunteerism.

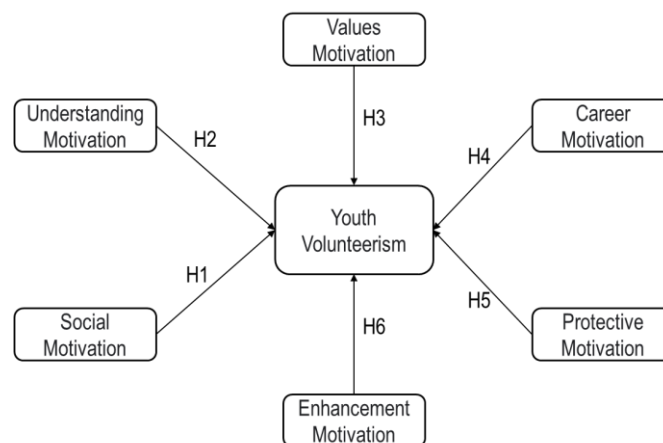


Fig.1. Research Framework

Figure 1 illustrates a research framework for this study. This study addresses significant gaps in youth volunteerism literature by integrating a comprehensive motivational framework and examining its economic implications within a developing country context. While existing literature often focuses on specific motivations, this study synthesizes six drivers' values: understanding, social, career, protective, and enhancement, and evaluates their collective impact on youth volunteerism in Malaysia. By situating these motivations within Malaysia's unique sociocultural environment, this research offers comparative insights with studies conducted in developed countries such as Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom, as well as emerging economies like South Africa.

Additionally, this study explores the economic impact of youth volunteerism, an under-researched area in Malaysia. By linking motivational factors to benefits such as employability and skill development, it provides actionable recommendations for policymakers, non-governmental organizations, and educational institutions to foster a volunteerism culture that benefits both society and youth. Through its dual focus on theoretical integration and practical implications, this research significantly contributes to the academic discourse and policy strategies on youth engagement.

### 3.0 Methodology

This study employs a quantitative research design to investigate the motivational drivers influencing youth volunteerism in Malaysia. A descriptive and correlational approach was used to explore the relationships between various motivational factors and youth engagement levels. Primary data were collected through a structured survey questionnaire distributed via both online platforms and face-to-face interactions, ensuring broader reach and accessibility. The survey instrument was developed by adapting validated questionnaires from previous research to suit the study's objectives and the Malaysian context. The questionnaire measured six motivational factors values, social, career, protective, understanding, and enhancement motivations using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

The study employed purposive sampling to ensure that participants represented Malaysian youth actively engaged in volunteer activities. A sample size of 385 respondents was targeted, as this was deemed adequate for robust statistical analysis using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) (Hair, 2022). The survey also included questions assessing the frequency,

intensity, and type of volunteer activities to evaluate engagement levels comprehensively. Data analysis was conducted using PLS-SEM to examine the relationships between motivational drivers and youth volunteerism, as outlined in the study's conceptual model. This method allowed for the identification of significant predictors and the testing of hypothesized relationships.

This methodology provides a structured approach to understanding the motivational drivers of youth volunteerism in Malaysia. By focusing exclusively on primary data collected through a combination of online and face-to-face methods, the study ensures the relevance and reliability of its findings. These results will contribute to the literature on youth volunteerism and inform practical strategies for enhancing youth engagement in volunteer activities.

#### 4.0 Findings

Based on the results in Table 1, Social Motivation demonstrates strong reliability and validity with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.842, Rho-A of 0.880, composite reliability (CR) of 0.890, and average variance extracted (AVE) of 0.620, indicating it effectively captures the construct's essence. Understanding Motivation also shows excellent reliability and validity, with high values across all indicators, particularly an AVE of 0.773, confirming its robust contribution to the framework. Values Motivation stands out with the highest reliability, evident from a Cronbach's alpha of 0.920, Rho-A of 0.933, CR of 0.947, and AVE of 0.810, showcasing its critical role. Career Motivation has moderate reliability and validity, with an AVE of 0.536, suggesting it is a weaker but still relevant construct. Protective Motivation shows acceptable reliability with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.728 and AVE of 0.556, indicating moderate explanatory power. Finally, Enhancement Motivation exhibits excellent reliability with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.934 and an AVE of 0.820, highlighting its strong role in the model. These results validate the importance of these constructs in understanding youth volunteerism.

Table 1: Indicators of latent construct validity

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	Rho-A	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Social Motivation	0.842	0.880	0.890	0.620
Understanding Motivation	0.856	0.868	0.912	0.773
Values Motivation	0.920	0.933	0.947	0.810
Career Motivation	0.831	0.872	0.873	0.536
Protective Motivation	0.728	0.742	0.832	0.556
Enhancement Motivation	0.934	0.941	0.950	0.820

Table 2 presents the Inner Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values for the latent variables to assess multicollinearity in the model. All VIF values are below the commonly accepted threshold of 5, indicating no severe multicollinearity issues among the constructs. Values Motivation has the highest VIF (3.458), suggesting it shares the most variance with other constructs, but it remains within acceptable limits. Protective Motivation and Social Motivation have lower VIFs (2.793 and 2.908, respectively), indicating moderate correlations. Enhancement Motivation and Understanding Motivation also exhibit stable VIF values (3.211 and 3.121), supporting the validity of the model. Overall, the results confirm that the constructs are reliable for structural equation modeling.

Table 2: Inner variance inflation factor (VIF) value

Latent Variable	Social Motivation	Understanding Motivation	Values Motivation	Career Motivation	Protective Motivation	Enhancement Motivation
Social Motivation	2.908	-	-	-	-	-
Understanding Motivation	-	3.121	-	-	-	-
Values Motivation	-	-	3.458	-	-	-
Career Motivation	-	-	-	3.012	-	-
Protective Motivation	-	-	-	-	2.793	-
Enhancement Motivation	-	-	-	-	-	3.211

#### 4.4 Hypothesis testing results

The relationships between motivational factors and youth volunteerism were tested using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). Table 3 presents the results of hypothesis testing.

Table 3: Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Beta Direct effect	t-value	p-value	Results
H1 Social Motivation → Youth Volunteerism	0.426	2.887	0.004	Significant
H2 Understanding Motivation → Youth Volunteerism	0.417	1.588	0.113	Not Significant
H3 Values Motivation → Youth Volunteerism	0.648	3.101	0.002	Significant
H4 Career Motivation → Youth Volunteerism	0.211	1.690	0.092	Not Significant
H5 Protective Motivation → Youth Volunteerism	0.150	0.640	0.522	Not Significant
H6 Enhancement Motivation → Youth Volunteerism	0.632	4.857	0.000	Significant

The results indicate that social, values, and enhancement motivations significantly influence youth volunteerism, aligning with the proposed hypotheses (H1, H3, H6). Other motivational factors showed weaker or non-significant relationships, suggesting the need for targeted interventions to strengthen these areas.

#### 4.5 Summary of findings

The findings highlight the multidimensional nature of youth volunteerism in Malaysia. High levels of commitment and engagement were observed, driven primarily by social, values, and enhancement motivations. Volunteer programs were generally perceived as effective but require enhancements to maximize their impact. The economic value derived from youth volunteerism further point out its significance as a strategic resource for social and economic development.

### 5.0 Discussion

This study offers valuable insights into the motivational factors influencing youth volunteerism and their relevance to established theories and the Malaysian context. The findings reveal a significant positive relationship between Social Motivation (H1) and youth volunteerism, supporting the Functional Theory of Volunteerism (Yeung et al., 2017), which highlights social motives as fulfilling the need for interpersonal connections and societal expectations. In Malaysia, the collectivist cultural norms may amplify the importance of social bonds, aligning with Smith et al. (2021), who emphasized social motivations in group-based volunteering. However, limited networking opportunities within volunteering platforms may hinder sustained engagement and require targeted program enhancements. The non-significance of Understanding Motivation (H2) raises concerns about the perceived value of skill acquisition in Malaysian volunteer programs. While the Functional Theory posits understanding as a critical function of volunteerism, the findings suggest a mismatch between program offerings and youth expectations. This contrasts with Beveridge et al. (2021), who emphasized the role of experiential learning in Australia. Enhancing the educational value of volunteer programs through structured training and skill-building components could bridge this gap and better align with youth aspirations.

Values Motivation (H3) emerged as a strong driver of youth volunteerism, reaffirming its central role in both theory and practice. This aligns with global studies (Abdul Kadir et al., 2024; Ertürk et al., 2022), highlighting the influence of altruistic tendencies and cultural values in motivating Malaysian youth. Volunteer organizations can leverage this motivation by emphasizing the societal impact of their programs, fostering a sense of purpose among value-driven individuals. However, translating altruistic intentions into long-term engagement remains a challenge, requiring improvements in organizational efficiency and the creation of meaningful volunteer experiences. The non-significance of Career Motivation (H4) and Protective Motivation (H5) challenges assumptions about their importance in the Malaysian context. While career-related goals are often significant in developing economies (Mkize et al., 2021), Malaysian youth may not perceive volunteering as a professional asset. Similarly, protective motivation's lack of significance may reflect the cultural reliance on external support systems over self-driven coping mechanisms (Ito et al., 2020). Addressing these gaps requires organizations to better communicate the career-related and emotional benefits of volunteering, aligning program designs with the expectations of career-oriented youth.

Enhancement Motivation (H6) demonstrated strong significance, highlighting the importance of personal growth and self-improvement. This finding supports the Functional Theory's enhancement function and aligns with Pritchard et al. (2022), who highlighted self-esteem and fulfillment as key motivators for Canadian youth. In Malaysia, the prominence of enhancement motivation suggests that volunteer programs should focus on transformative experiences that help participants achieve personal milestones and build confidence. Such an approach can combat youth disengagement while fostering a sense of purpose and achievement. The broader implications of this study span both theoretical and practical domains. Theoretically, the findings provide empirical support for the Functional Theory of Volunteerism, while highlighting contextual variations in motivational factors. The non-significance of career and protective motivations suggests that localized cultural, economic, and social factors shape volunteerism in Malaysia, contributing to cross-cultural research and offering comparative insights for Southeast Asian contexts.

Practically, the findings emphasize the need for volunteer programs to emphasize altruistic and enhancement motivations. Policymakers, NGOs, and educational institutions should design initiatives that clearly communicate societal impact while offering opportunities for personal growth. Incorporating skill-building activities and transformative experiences can attract youth seeking self-improvement. Additionally, aligning volunteering with professional aspirations by addressing career-related benefits could broaden its appeal among career-oriented individuals. These strategies are particularly relevant for nations aiming to promote civic engagement and youth empowerment as part of their development goals. By addressing the diverse motivations of young volunteers, organizations can foster sustainable cultures of volunteerism, generating long-term social and economic benefits that extend beyond immediate participation. These findings provide actionable recommendations for creating inclusive and impactful volunteer programs tailored to the unique motivations of Malaysian youth.

### 6.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

This study explored the motivational drivers of youth volunteerism in Malaysia, identifying the significant roles of Social Motivation, Values Motivation, and Enhancement Motivation, while revealing that Understanding Motivation, Career Motivation, and Protective Motivation were not significant factors. These findings align with the Functional Theory of Volunteerism, offering valuable insights into youth motivations while highlighting the gaps between their expectations and the current structure of volunteer programs. However, the study has limitations that must be acknowledged. The findings are context-specific to Malaysia, limiting their generalizability to other cultural settings. Additionally, the limitation of this study is the exclusion of moderating and mediating factors, which could provide additional insights into the complex relationships between motivational drivers and youth volunteerism. Lastly, the study focuses exclusively on motivational factors, overlooking the role of organizational and structural dynamics in influencing youth volunteerism.

Despite these limitations, this research makes significant contributions to the understanding of youth volunteerism in developing economies. By integrating global perspectives with local cultural contexts, the study advances theoretical knowledge while offering practical insights for policymakers and organizations. The findings emphasize the importance of addressing key motivational drivers, particularly altruistic values and opportunities for personal growth, while identifying areas where current programs may fall short in meeting youth aspirations.

To improve the situation, volunteer organizations should prioritize designing programs that emphasize societal impact and personal development, appealing to Values Motivation and Enhancement Motivation. Efforts should also focus on integrating training, certifications, and mentoring into volunteer activities to address the gap in Understanding Motivation, which is often linked to skill acquisition and career development. Furthermore, organizations must actively promote the career-related benefits of volunteering, such as networking opportunities and professional exposure, to better align with the aspirations of career-oriented youth.

For future research, several new directions are recommended. Investigating organizational and structural factors such as leadership quality, program accessibility, and resource availability could provide a more holistic understanding of youth volunteerism. Comparative studies across Southeast Asia could offer insights into how cultural differences influence motivational drivers. Longitudinal research would be valuable in examining how youth motivations evolve over time and how volunteering impacts long-term civic engagement. Additionally, future studies could explore how demographic variables such as socioeconomic status, education level, and gender intersect with motivational factors, providing a deeper, more nuanced perspective on youth volunteerism. By addressing these areas, future research can guide the development of more effective, inclusive, and sustainable volunteer programs that foster long-term civic engagement and contribute to broader social development goals.

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## Paper Contribution to Related Field of Study

This study contributes to the field of volunteerism by advancing the understanding of youth motivations within a developing economy context, integrating cultural and theoretical perspectives. It provides practical insights for designing effective volunteer programs and highlights the interplay of motivational factors, bridging gaps between theory and practice in youth civic engagement.

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