

Workplace Friendship and Workers Altruistic Behaviour of Private Universities in Rivers State

Emmanuel Aziegbe Akhigbe¹ & Bosede Olugbenga David Alonge²

Department of Administrative Studies, Faculty of Management and Social Sciences,
Nigerian British University, Asa, Abia State

Abstract: *This survey study explores the connection between workplace friendship and workers altruistic behaviour of private universities in Rivers State. The study population comprises of 172 academic staff of private universities in Rivers State. The study was a census study and copies of questionnaire were used for collecting data. Workplace friendship was operationalized in friendship opportunity and friendship prevalence while worker altruistic behaviour was measured using helping behaviour and Prosocial behaviour. The retrieved data was analysed employing Partial Least Squares – Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM), conducted using Smart PLS 4.0 in order to ascertain the relationship between the predictor and criterion variable. The findings reveal a significant positive relationship between workplace friendship dimensions and worker altruistic behaviour. In conclusion, the study underscores the presence of a tangible link between workplace friendships and the display of altruism within private universities in Rivers State. Consequently, the study recommended the management of the private universities should encourage regular team-building activities and collaborative projects to facilitate opportunities for employees to form friendships within the workplace as such will help enhance prosocial behaviour.*

Keywords: *Workplace Friendship, Friendship Opportunity, Friendship Prevalence, Worker Altruistic Behaviour, Helping behaviour, Prosocial Behaviour.*

Introduction

In the realm of organizational behaviour, the dynamics of workplace friendships and their impact on worker altruistic behaviour have emerged as crucial variables warranting scholarly investigation. Worker altruistic behaviour is defined as voluntary actions aimed at benefiting colleagues or the organization without expecting immediate rewards (Bekkers et al. 2019). Altruism in the workplace enhances satisfaction (Aknin & Whillans, 2020) and contributes to a positive work environment, fostering trust, cooperation and reciprocity among employees (Feng & Guo, 2017). Worker altruistic behaviour encompasses the promotion of collaboration and teamwork among faculty and staff assisting colleagues with tasks, sharing knowledge, or offering support, to create a culture of cooperation that is essential for achieving institutional goals and enhancing productivity (Li et al., 2014; Erkubilay, & Şentürk, 2020). In private university settings, where interdisciplinary research, teaching collaborations, and administrative teamwork are prevalent, the fostering of altruistic behaviours among workers strengthens organizational cohesion and facilitates the attainment of collective objectives. When employees engage in altruistic behaviours, such as volunteering for additional duties, providing mentorship to junior colleagues, or participating in institutional initiatives, it fosters a sense of

camaraderie, trust, and mutual respect among colleagues (Cetin, et al., 2015). This positive climate helps increase the degree of work satisfaction, reduced turnover intentions, and enhanced employee well-being, ultimately promoting a conducive work environment where individuals feel valued and supported.

Additionally, worker altruistic behaviour correlates with increased job satisfaction and engagement among employees in private universities (Pérez, et al., 2014). By engaging in actions aimed at benefiting others without expecting immediate rewards, workers experience greater fulfilment in their roles and demonstrate higher levels of motivation, commitment, and discretionary effort. This heightened job satisfaction not only enhances individual well-being but also contributes to organizational effectiveness by improving employee performance and retention rates (Dziuba, et al., 2020). Furthermore, worker altruism is intimately related to the idea of organizational citizenship behaviour (OCB) (Wagner & Rush, 2000). Altruistic acts, such as assisting students outside of regular duties, participating in institutional committees, or supporting departmental initiatives, exemplify OCB – discretionary behaviours that enhance the entire functioning and success of the organization. Employees who exhibit altruistic behaviour demonstrate a willingness to go above and beyond their formal job requirements, thereby promoting a culture of excellence and continuous improvement within the university community. Understanding the factors that influence worker altruism, including the presence of workplace friendships, can provide insights into promoting prosocial behaviours and enhancing organizational effectiveness. Altruistic behaviour plays a vital role in shaping organizational culture, climate, and effectiveness and fostering collaboration, enhancing job satisfaction, and promoting organizational citizenship, altruistic behaviours (Chan, & Kuok, 2020).

The interplay between altruistic behaviour and workplace friendships within private universities is a dynamic and multifaceted phenomenon that significantly influences organizational dynamics and employee interactions. Altruistic behaviours, characterized by selfless acts aimed at benefiting others without expecting immediate rewards, often manifest within the context of workplace friendships, further shaping the nature and dynamics of these relationships (Feng & Guo, 2017;). Workplace friendships provide a conducive environment for the expression of altruistic behaviour among colleagues (Lemay & Wolf, 2016). The establishment of trust, mutual respect, and emotional bonds inherent in friendships creates a supportive context where individuals feel comfortable offering assistance, guidance, or support to their friends in need (Sprecher, 2023). This sense of camaraderie and solidarity fosters a culture of reciprocity, where altruistic acts are reciprocated and further strengthen the bonds of friendship.

Workplace friendships shape the organizational culture, employee engagement, and overall productivity. Research indicates that strong interpersonal relationships among colleagues foster a sense of belonging and satisfaction, leading to improved productivity at work and commitment (Dewi, et al., 2020, Ragins & Kram, 2023). In the context of private universities, where collaboration and teamwork are paramount, the presence of supportive workplace friendships can enhance communication, knowledge sharing, and innovation among faculty and staff (Yang, & Shiu, 2023; Chung & Jackson, 2021). Moreover, the Nigerian cultural context places a high value on social connections and communal support, influencing interpersonal dynamics within organizational settings. Thus, exploring the nature and implications of workplace friendships in Rivers State's

private universities becomes essential for understanding how cultural norms intersect with organizational behaviour. Thus, this study seeks to contribute to both theoretical knowledge and practical implications for organizational management. Insights gained from this research can inform strategies for fostering supportive workplace cultures, promoting collaboration, and nurturing employee well-being in Nigerian higher education institutions

Statement of the Problem

The challenges of altruistic behaviour that affect workplace friendships in private universities encompass a range of dynamics that can influence interpersonal relationships and organizational dynamics. Employees engaging in altruistic behaviour may fear being taken advantage of or exploited by others, particularly if their acts of kindness are not reciprocated or valued equally within the workplace friendship (Rachlin, 2002). This perception can strain relationships and erode trust among colleagues. Private universities often operate within competitive environments, where individuals may prioritize personal advancement or achievement over collaborative efforts. In such settings, altruistic behaviour may be viewed as a hindrance to individual success, leading to reluctance in engaging in acts of kindness that could benefit others (Bolino & Grant, 2016). Altruistic behaviour often involves the allocation of personal resources, such as time, effort, or expertise, to assist others. However, in resource-constrained environments typical of many private universities, employees may feel reluctant to extend themselves altruistically due to concerns about personal or professional burnout, especially if their contributions are not adequately recognized or rewarded (Kong, 2018). Engaging in altruistic behaviour can sometimes lead to overcommitment, where individuals find themselves burdened by excessive demands on their time and energy. In workplace friendships, this risk is amplified as individuals may struggle to set boundaries or prioritize their own well-being, leading to resentment or strain in relationships.

Workplace friendships rely on mutual understanding and reciprocity. However, differences in expectations regarding the extent and nature of altruistic behaviour can create tension and misunderstanding among colleagues (Pillemer & Rothbard, 2018). The prevailing culture within private universities can significantly impact the expression and reception of altruistic behaviour among employees. Cultures that prioritize individual achievement or competition over collaboration may discourage acts of kindness or cooperation, hindering the development of strong workplace friendships. The attitudes and behaviours of organizational leaders serve a vital purpose in forming the workplace culture and influencing the dynamics of workplace friendships. If leaders fail to model or recognize altruistic behaviour, employees may be less inclined to engage in such actions, leading to a lack of cohesion and camaraderie among colleagues.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of the study is to examine the association between workplace friendship and worker altruistic behaviour of private universities in Rivers State. The specific objectives are:

1. To determine the relationship between friendship opportunity and helping behaviour of private universities in Rivers State.
2. To determine the relationship between friendship opportunity and Prosocial behaviour of private universities in Rivers State.

3. To determine the relationship between friendship prevalence and helping behaviour of private universities in Rivers State.
4. To determine the relationship between friendship prevalence and prosocial behaviour of private universities in Rivers State.

Research Questions

1. How does friendship opportunity relate with helping behaviour of private universities in Rivers State?
2. What is the relationship between friendship opportunity and prosocial behaviour of private universities in Rivers State?
3. How does friendship prevalence relate with helping behaviour of private universities in Rivers State?
4. What is the relationship between friendship prevalence and prosocial behaviour of private universities in Rivers State?

Research Hypotheses

- Ho₁: There is no significant relationship between friendship opportunity and helping behaviour of private universities in Rivers State.
- Ho₂: There is no significant relationship between friendship opportunity and Prosocial behaviour of private universities in Rivers State.
- Ho₃: There is no significant relationship between friendship prevalence and helping behaviour of private universities in Rivers State.
- Ho₄: There is no significant relationship between friendship prevalence and Prosocial behaviour of private universities in Rivers State.

Review of Related Literature

This study is founded on the social exchange theory. This theory, propounded by Peter Blau in 1964, suggests that social conduct stems from an exchange mechanism, where individuals calculate the costs and benefits of their actions in social interactions. In the context of private universities in Rivers State, workplace friendships could be regarded as a way of social interaction where individuals develop relationships with their colleagues based on mutual support, trust, and camaraderie. These friendships can establish a nurturing and positive work setting where people feel appreciated and respected. According to Social Exchange Theory, when individuals perceive that they are receiving support and friendship from their colleagues, they are more prone to participate in charitable behaviours towards them. This could manifest as helping behaviours, cooperation, and willingness to go above and beyond their job duties to support their friends and colleagues. In the context of private universities, worker altruistic behaviour could include actions such as helping colleagues with their workload, sharing resources and knowledge, mentoring junior faculty or staff, and actively contributing to a positive and collaborative work culture. The relationship between workplace friendship and worker altruistic behaviour can be explained through the principle of reciprocity inherent in Social Exchange Theory. When individuals feel supported and valued by their friends in the workplace, they are more inclined to give back those feelings by engaging in behaviours that benefit their friends and colleagues.

Workplace Friendship

Workplace friendship is a vital component of modern organizational dynamics, significantly influencing employee satisfaction, productivity, and overall well-being (Leiter & Maslach, 2016; Maslach, & Leiter, 2017). Workplace friendship fosters a supportive environment where individuals thrive, enhances job satisfaction, and engagement (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Moreover, strong social bonds among colleagues promote collaboration, effective communication, and teamwork, thereby boosting productivity and organizational performance (Reich & Hershcovis, 2011). These friendships also serve as a buffer against workplace stressors, contributing to employees' psychological resilience (Sias et al., 2004). Cultivating workplace friendships is facilitated by factors such as physical proximity, shared interests, and organizational culture that values social connections.

Friendship Opportunity

Friendship opportunity refers to the conducive circumstances within a social context that enable individuals to develop and maintain friendships. It encompasses various factors such as shared experiences, common interests, and proximity that facilitate the formation of social bonds (Adler & Elmhorst, 2008). The importance of friendship opportunity in the workplace lies in its substantial effect on worker fulfilment, job satisfaction, and organizational effectiveness. When employees have the chance to develop meaningful friendships at work, it fosters a positive and supportive environment, leading to several advantages including better work satisfaction, greater amounts of engagement, and enhanced teamwork, and enhanced productivity (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001).

Friendship Prevalence

Friendship is a universal aspect of human existence, transcending cultural boundaries and societal contexts (Luijten, et al., 20220). From the formative friendships of childhood to the enduring companionships of adulthood, the prevalence of these relationships underscores their importance in social development and emotional well-being (Garcia & Sikström, 2014). Research indicates that robust social connections, including friendships, contribute significantly to individuals' overall happiness and mental health outcomes (Helliwell & Putnam, 2004). Moreover, the advent of digital communication and social media platforms has expanded the scope of friendships, enabling connections that transcend geographical limitations (Valkenburg & Peter, 2007). Nonetheless, the quality and depth of friendships may vary depending on cultural norms, individual traits, and life circumstances (Diener & Seligman, 2002). Despite such variances, friendships universally enrich human experiences by offering companionship, empathy, and shared moments of joy and adversity (Buote et al., 2007).

Altruistic Behaviours

Altruistic behaviours can also contribute to the establishment and upkeep of friendships at work (Uhl-Bien et al., 2011). According Grant (2020) when individuals engage in acts of kindness or support towards their colleagues, it fosters feelings of gratitude, appreciation, and interpersonal warmth, which are foundational elements of friendship (Linton, 2023; Berscheid & Reis, 2023). Altruistic behaviours such as offering help with work-related tasks, providing emotional support during challenging times or celebrating

successes together can deepen existing friendships and facilitate the development of new ones within the workplace. When altruistic actions are directed towards friends or close colleagues, they may carry greater meaning and significance, leading to heightened feelings of satisfaction, gratitude and social connectedness (Sprecher, 2023).

Helping behaviour

Helping behaviour is a fundamental aspect of human interaction that involves voluntarily assisting others in need (Eisenberg & Miller, 1987). This behaviour encompasses a wide range of actions, including offering emotional support, providing tangible assistance and engaging in acts of kindness (Penner et al., 2005). Research suggests that helping behaviour is impacted by a number of variables, including; empathy and situational cues (Batson et al., 1981; Penner et al., 2005). Additionally, social norms and cultural values play a significant role in shaping individuals' willingness to engage in helping behaviour (Levine et al., 2005). Studies have shown that helping behaviour not only benefits the recipient but also contributes to the well-being and satisfaction of the helper (Mojzisch & Schulz-Hardt, 2010). Performing deeds of charity and assisting others can promote positive emotions, enhance self-esteem, and foster a sense of connectedness within communities (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005). Moreover, the reciprocal nature of helping behaviour often leads to the formation of strong social bonds and increased social cohesion (Penner et al., 2005).

Prosocial behaviour

Prosocial behaviour is characterised as selfless deeds meant to help individuals, is a crucial aspect of human social interaction (Eisenberg & Fabes, 1998). This behaviour encompasses various forms of helping, sharing, cooperating and comforting individuals in need (Eisenberg et al., 2015). Research suggests that prosocial behaviour is impacted by a number of individual, situational and contextual factors (Caprara et al., 2012). Individual characteristics such as empathy, moral reasoning and prosocial dispositions plays a big part in forecasting one's likelihood to engage in prosocial acts (Eisenberg et al., 2006; Carlo et al., 2010). Moreover, situational cues and social norms can also impact the expression of prosocial behaviour, as individuals may be more likely to help in situations where altruism is expected or where they perceive others as deserving of assistance (Van Lange et al., 2019).

Empirical Review

Feng & Guo (2017). investigate the relationship between altruism and well-being among Chinese undergraduate college students. Two groups were examined: one self-reported altruism and self-reported helping behaviours (N1 = 525), while the other assessed peer-rated altruism (N2 = 189). Results revealed that self-reported altruism and helping behaviours directly impacted well-being, mediated by self-esteem. Self-reported acts of compassion on well-being were mediated by family socioeconomic position through self-esteem, particularly benefiting students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. These findings highlight the positive effects of altruism in collectivistic societies like China, suggesting potential encouragement for more engagement in voluntary social service.

Erkubilay & Şentürk (2020). investigate the impact of altruism, peer support, and leader support on employee voice. Utilizing a quantitative research approach, the study

employed a questionnaire technique to collect data from employees at Bolu Forest Regional Directorate and affiliated Forest Management Directorates. The findings revealed a positive and significant relationship between altruism behaviour, peer support, leader support, and employee voice. Additionally, demographic characteristics such as job title and education level were found to significantly influence voice behaviours among employees. The discussion underscores the importance of fostering a supportive environment within organizations to encourage useful voice behaviour, with peer and leader support playing key roles. Furthermore, altruism emerges as an intrinsic motivator that bolsters voice behaviour, highlighting its value as a desirable individual trait.

Pérez, et al., (2014). explores attitudes and work engagement as predictors of altruistic behaviour. Using a cross-sectional design, data were collected from 472 employees across 25 Spanish public higher education centres. Hypotheses were tested using hierarchical regression analysis. Findings reveal that higher levels of affective commitment, particularly in work engagement, correlate with increased altruistic behaviour. Notably, work engagement significantly contributes to explaining additional variance in altruistic behaviour beyond commitment. To promote such discretionary behaviours, management interventions should focus on fostering stronger employee job-role connections and organizational commitment.

Methodology

This study utilized a cross-sectional survey design to explore the correlation between workplace friendship and worker altruistic behaviour of private universities in Rivers State. The study population covered 172 academic staff of private universities in Rivers State. The study was a census study and data were collected with structured questionnaire, the questionnaire items were rated on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). In computing the Data analysis, Partial Least Squares – Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM), Smart PLS 4.0 was employed to assess the bivariate hypotheses.

Table 1: Reliability Test

	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability
Prosocial behaviour	0.857	0.896
Friendship opportunity	0.916	0.937
Friendship prevalence	0.920	0.940
Helping behaviour	0.911	0.938

Every construct had values for both Composite and Cronbach's Alpha dependability that were higher than 0.7. Our structures are hence credible.

Table 2: Validity Test

	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	Prosocial behaviour	Friendship opportunity	Friendship prevalence	Helping behaviour
Prosocial behaviour	0.593	0.770			
Friendship opportunity	0.716	0.336	0.846		
Friendship prevalence	0.727	0.313	0.262	0.853	
Helping behaviour	0.726	0.124	0.105	0.291	0.852

The average variance extracted (AVE) of all the constructs are greater than 0.5 which signifies the presence of convergent validity. It has been confirmed that each construct is unique from the others by the diagonal values (bold) being greater than the AVEs. Thus, discriminant validity for each and every construct was supported by the model.

Analysis and Discussion

From 172 copies issued, 151 questionnaires were returned and used in the study. PLS-SEM was used to test hypotheses on the relationship between workplace friendship and worker altruistic behaviour. The signals reflect the various components of the Latent variable. The variable link is depicted diagrammatically in the Path Diagram in Figure 1 Workplace Friendship (WOF), Friendship Opportunity (FRO), Friendship Prevalence (FRP), Worker Altruistic Behaviour (WAB), Helping Behaviour (HEB) And Prosocial Behaviour (PRB).

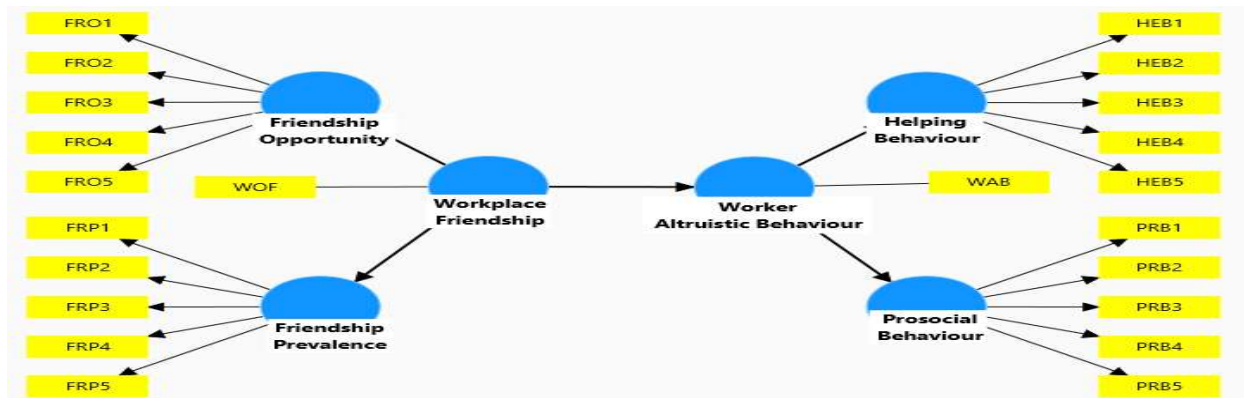


Figure 1: Research Model

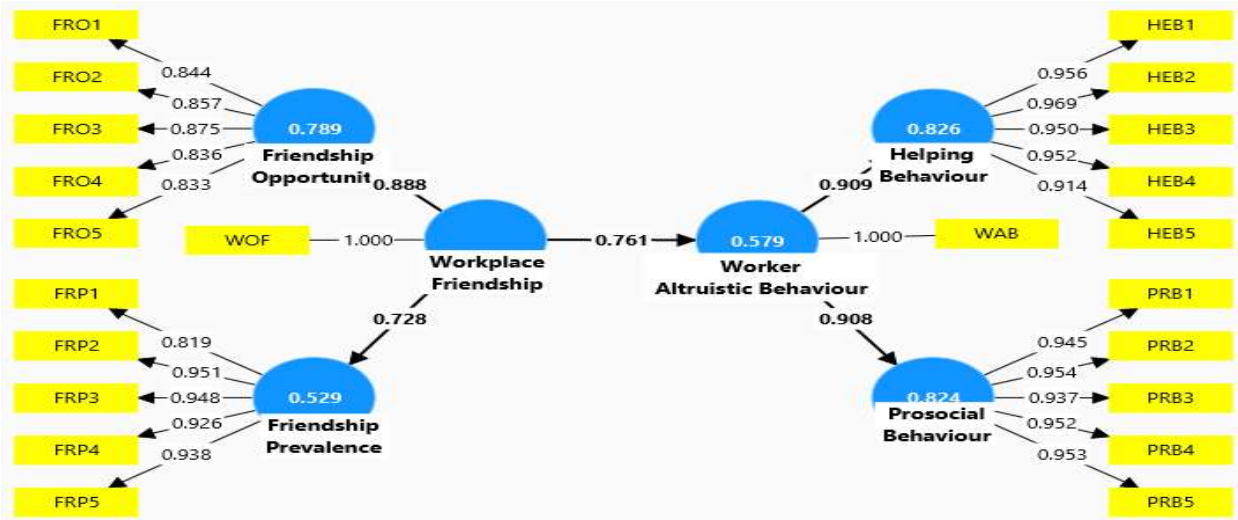


Figure 2: Output for Outer Loadings of Indicators
 Figure 2 shows that all the response items for the constructs satisfied the threshold condition of 70%.

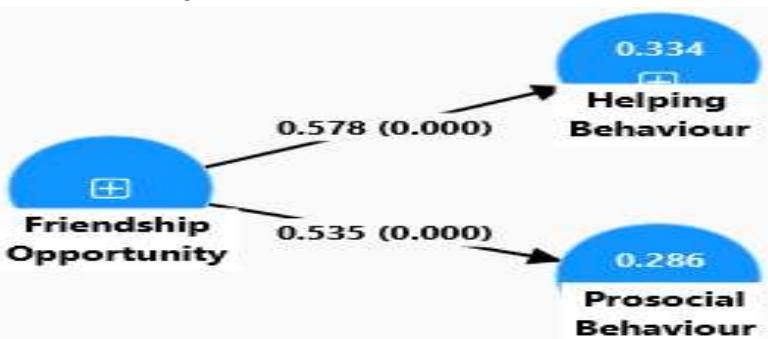


Figure 3: Hypotheses 1 and 2
 The path relationship analysis presented in Figure 3 indicate that there are positive and significant paths between Friendship opportunity and Helping behaviour (where, $\beta = 0.578$; $p = 0.000$; and $R^2 = 0.334$), and Friendship opportunity and Prosocial behaviour (where, $\beta = 0.535$; $p = 0.000$; and $R^2 = 0.286$). Therefore, the null hypotheses 1 and 2 were rejected and the alternate hypotheses were accepted.

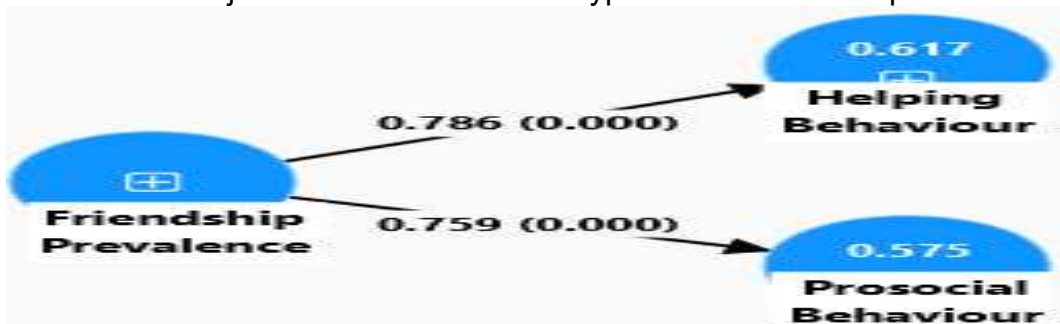


Figure 4: Hypotheses 3 and 4
 The path relationship analysis presented in Figure 4 indicate that there are positive and significant paths between Friendship prevalence and Helping behaviour (where, $\beta = 0.786$; $p = 0.000$; and $R^2 = 0.617$), and Friendship prevalence and Prosocial

behaviour (where, $\beta = 0.759$; $p = 0.000$; and $R^2 = 0.575$). Therefore, the null hypotheses 3 and 4 were rejected and the alternate hypotheses were accepted.

Ho₁: There is no significant relationship between friendship opportunity and helping behaviour of Private universities in Rivers State.

The result of the analysis for hypothesis one showed that there is a significant relationship between friendship opportunity and helping behaviour of Private universities in Rivers State. It was also observed that the relationship between the two variables is positive and strong. The null hypothesis is rejected. The coefficient of determination (R^2) was 0.334. Which implies that friendship opportunity accounts for 33.4% total variation in helping behaviour. This supports the work of Feng and Guo (2017) that friendship opportunity in the workplace lies in its significant impact on employee well-being, job satisfaction, and organizational effectiveness, leading to the formation of strong social bonds and increased social cohesion.

Ho₂: There is no significant relationship between friendship opportunity and prosocial behaviour of Private universities in Rivers State.

The result of the analysis for hypothesis two indicated that there is a significant relationship between friendship opportunity and prosocial behaviour of Private universities in Rivers State. The coefficient of determination (R^2) was 0.286. Which implies that friendship opportunity accounts for 28.6% total variation in capital resilience. The null hypothesis is rejected and the alternate hypothesis accepted. This confirms the report of Helliwell and Putnam (2004) that robust social connections, including friendships, contribute significantly to individuals' overall happiness and mental health outcomes and altruistic behaviours.

Ho₃: There is no significant relationship between friendship prevalence and helping behaviour of Private universities in Rivers State.

The result of the analysis for hypothesis three indicated that there is a significant relationship between friendship prevalence and helping behaviour of Private universities in Rivers State. The coefficient of determination (R^2) was 0.617. Which implies that friendship prevalence accounts for 61.7% total variation in helping behaviour. The null hypothesis was rejected. This result affirms the report of Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001) who asserted that when employees have the chance to develop meaningful friendships at work, it fosters a positive and supportive environment, leading to several benefits such as increased job satisfaction, higher levels of engagement, improved teamwork, enhanced productivity and helping behaviour.

Ho₄: There is no significant relationship between friendship prevalence and prosocial behaviour of Private universities in Rivers State.

The result of the analysis for hypothesis four indicated that there is a significant relationship between friendship prevalence and prosocial behaviour of Private universities in Rivers State. We find that there is strong positive bond between friendship prevalence and capital resilience. The coefficient of determination (R^2) was 0.575. Which implies that friendship prevalence accounts for 57.5% total variation in capital resilience. It is concluded, based on the decision rule, that the null hypothesis is rejected. This is congruent with the work of Pérez, et al., (2014) that work engagement significantly

contributes to explaining additional variance in altruistic behaviour beyond commitment, fostering positive emotions such as happiness and fulfillment.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study reveals a strong link between workplace friendships and altruistic behaviours in private universities across Rivers State. It suggests that fostering opportunities for friendships among employees enhances their propensity for helping and prosocial behaviours. Additionally, the prevalence of workplace friendships positively correlates with both helping and prosocial behaviors, emphasizing the importance of cultivating robust social networks within the organizational context. Overall, the findings underscore the significant role of workplace friendships in shaping a supportive and compassionate work environment, with implications for employee well-being and enhanced altruistic behaviour. Drawing from the conclusion, it is recommended that;

1. The management of the private universities should encourage regular team-building activities and collaborative projects to facilitate opportunities for employees to form friendships within the workplace as such will help enhance prosocial behaviour.
2. The management of the institution should periodically organize social events that can strengthen social bond as such will help enhance altruistic behaviour in the workplace.
3. The management of the institutions should promote inclusivity and respect for all employees as such will help enhance workplace friendship and thus lead to increased helping behaviour.
4. The management of the private universities should promote a work climate that encourages workplace friendship in order to improve prosocial behaviour among the workers.

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