www.ijarp.com ISSN 2456-9992 Page: 01-10

Research Article

International Journal Advanced Research Publications

Volume: 02

Issue: 11

DONOR TRUST AND ENGAGEMENT IN NONPROFIT FUNDRAISING: A STUDY OF SAVERA NATIONAL TRUST, NOIDA

*[1]Semon Pechak, [2]Dr. Disha Sharma

[1]Amity Business School, Amity University Chhattisgarh.

[2]Assistant Professor, Amity University Chhattisgarh.

Article Received: 12 October 2026, Article Revised: 01 November r 2026, Published on: 20 November 2026

***Corresponding Author: Semon Pechak**

Amity Business School, Amity University Chhattisgarh.

Doi: https://doi-doi.org/101555/ijarp.5569

ABSTRACT

Donor trust, not the size of the request, decided whether people gave to Savera National Trust: 15 of the 17 respondents who felt confident about the Trust donated, while none of the 4 who were neutral or low in trust did. This paper studies fundraising at a young, volunteer-driven non-profit in Noida through the lens of relationship marketing. It examines how donors judge the Trust's credibility and openness, how three outreach channels (personal networking, social media messages and phone calls) were used, and what stops people from giving. Primary data came from a structured questionnaire answered by 21 donors and prospective donors in Delhi-NCR, selected by convenience sampling, and was supported by field observation during an eight-week internship (08 June to 08 August 2026). Data were analysed with percentage analysis, cross-tabulation and a chi-square test, checked with Fisher's exact test. Trust and the decision to donate were significantly associated (chi-square = 12.35, df=1 , p = 0.0004; Fisher's exact p = 0.0025). Two-thirds of the stated reasons for hesitation (14 of 21) concerned doubt about genuineness, unclear use of money or lack of proof, and 81% of respondents wanted regular updates on how donations are used. The paper proposes a low-cost donor-trust framework: introduce the organization clearly, show proof of legitimacy, explain the use of funds, match channel to donor, and follow up with thanks and updates. Because the sample is small and non-random, the results are indicative rather than conclusive.

KEYWORDS: Donor trust, Nonprofit fundraising, Donor engagement, Relationship marketing, Transparency, Outreach channels, India.

1. INTRODUCTION

In India's non-profit sector, fundraising succeeds or fails on trust. Over the last decade the sector has grown across education, healthcare, disability support, food security and community welfare, serving people whom markets and government reach less easily. Growth has also meant more organizations competing for the same small group of donors, while news of fake charities and fraud has made the public more careful. Few clear rules govern how donations may be solicited, so a well-meaning person approached by an unfamiliar organization may reasonably ask, "Is this organization real? "Non-profit marketing applies marketing principles to social causes. Unlike a commercial customer, a donor receives no direct return, so emotional connection, credibility and transparency carry the weight that price and product features carry elsewhere. Fundraising can therefore be read as relationship marketing: the donor is the "customer", the cause is the "product", and the goal is a lasting bond rather than a single gift (Burnett, 2002). Savera National Trust, set up in 2022 and headquartered in Noida, Uttar Pradesh, is a typical case. It works in education, healthcare, food security and clean water, through a network of more than 300 volunteers, and reports having supported over 2,300 children. Much of its money comes from individual donors reached by staff, volunteers and interns through personal contacts, phone calls and social media messages. During the first weeks of the researcher's internship in the Trust's Marketing and HR department, many people hesitated to give. The hesitation was rarely unwillingness to help: people did not know the Trust and could not tell whether the request was genuine. Once the donor pitch was strengthened with proof of the Trust's work, the first donations of Rs. 2,500 were collected in Week 2. The research problem is therefore as follows: Savera National Trust runs real welfare programmes but meets refusals and low interest when individuals are approached, largely because the public does not know the organization well. The paper asks which factors make its fundraising work, and which ways of communicating with donors build trust and encourage giving.

2. Scope of the Study

1. Focuses on donor trust and engagement in the fundraising of Savera National Trust, Noida
2. Covers individual (retail) donors and people approached to become donors; institutional, CSR, grant and government funding are excluded
3. Compares three outreach channels: personal networking, social media messages and phone calls

4. Limited to people contacted in Delhi-NCR during the internship period, 08 June to 08 August 2026 (about eight weeks)
5. Looks at the Marketing and HR side of the Trust; its finances and programme delivery are not examined
6. Offers low-cost suggestions that a small, volunteer-based non-profit can use.

2. Literature Review

1. Sargeant (1999) developed an early model of donor behaviour showing that giving depends on how efficient the organization is perceived to be and how strongly the donor identifies with the cause.

2. Hankinson (2001) found that a clear, consistent organizational identity strengthens donor confidence and helps a charity stand out, which supports steady and clear messaging.

3. Burnett (2002) proposed relationship fundraising, placing the individual donor rather than the single transaction at the centre of fundraising strategy.

4. Eikenberry and Kluver (2004) argued that commercial-style donor-acquisition tactics can clash with the trust-based, mission-driven relationships that non-profits need, warning against pushy outreach.

5. Bennett (2006) showed that early relationship quality and communication strongly predict how long a donor keeps giving, supporting early follow-up with new donors.

6. Shier and Handy (2012) found that donor characteristics and the perceived credibility of an organization's website and programme influence the decision to donate.

7. Auger (2014) found that transparent communication raises perceived trustworthiness, and that the effect is strongest for lesser-known organizations, which is directly relevant to a young Trust.

8. Boenigk and Scherhag (2014) reported that relationship-based (donor-priority) fundraising gave better long-term results than transactional approaches.

9. Alhidari et al. (2018) described trust through ability, benevolence and integrity, each of which affects individual donations through a different path.

10. Archambeault and Webber (2018) concluded that visible financial safeguards and accountability are critical for keeping donor trust, especially after a credibility breach.

11. Koksal (2022) found that donors respond differently to cognitive and emotional appeals depending on their processing style, so one pitch will not suit every donor.

12. Priante et al. (2022) showed that fundraisers inside supportive social and organizational networks raise more money, so organizational trust signals help individual outreach.

13. Morgan and Hunt (1994) proposed the commitment-trust theory: trust and commitment are the key ingredients of lasting relationships, so a donor who trusts an organization is more likely to keep giving. **Blau (1964)** described relationships as social exchange, in which the donor gives money and expects honesty, impact and recognition in return.

Taken together, these studies show that donors give when they trust the organization, feel connected to the cause and are treated as people. Most of them concern other countries or large, well-known charities; few examine how a small, young Indian non-profit can build trust with individual donors through personal outreach in a short period. This study addresses that gap.

4. Objective of the Study

1. To understand what donar think about the Trust's credibility and openness (transparency)
2. To study the outreach methods used (personal networking, social media messages and phone calls) and their reach
3. To identify the main barriers that stop donors from engaging and giving
4. To test whether donor trust and the decision to donate are associated
5. To recommend a simple, low-cost fundraising and donor-communication framework for small non-profits

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study adopts a descriptive-cum-exploratory research design with a mainly quantitative approach. Descriptive research is used to describe what donors think about the Trust and how it reached them; the exploratory element looks for the deeper reasons behind donor doubt.

a) **Primary Data:** A structured questionnaire was given to donors and prospective donors approached during outreach in Delhi-NCR. It had five parts: respondent profile, outreach channel, trust and credibility (five-point scale), engagement and communication (five-point scale), and barriers. Informal talks with the industry mentor and volunteers and the researcher's field observations supported the data.

b) **Secondary Data:** Weekly internship progress reports, the Trust's promotional and impact material (presentations and posters), the Trust's website, and books and research papers on donor behaviour, trust and fundraising.

Sampling Technique: Convenience sampling was used because time was short and the study depended on people the researcher could reach. The sample is 21 respondents (target 20 to

30) from Delhi-NCR, collected in Weeks 5 and 6 of the internship. Participation was voluntary, answers were kept confidential, and no sensitive personal information was recorded.

Hypotheses: H0: There is no significant association between donor trust in Savera National Trust and the decision to donate. H1: There is a significant association between donor trust in Savera National Trust and the decision to donate.

Statistical Tools: Frequency distribution and percentage analysis; cross-tabulation of trust against the donation outcome; chi-square test of association, with Fisher's exact test as a check because of small expected counts, at a 5% level of significance (alpha = 0.05); charts and tables prepared in MS Excel.

6. Data Analysis and Interpretation

During the internship, the first approaches met hesitation because people did not know the Trust. After the pitch was refined with proof points about the Trust's work, volunteer network and reach, the first donations of Rs. 2,500 were collected in Week 2. The questionnaire results (n = 21) follow.

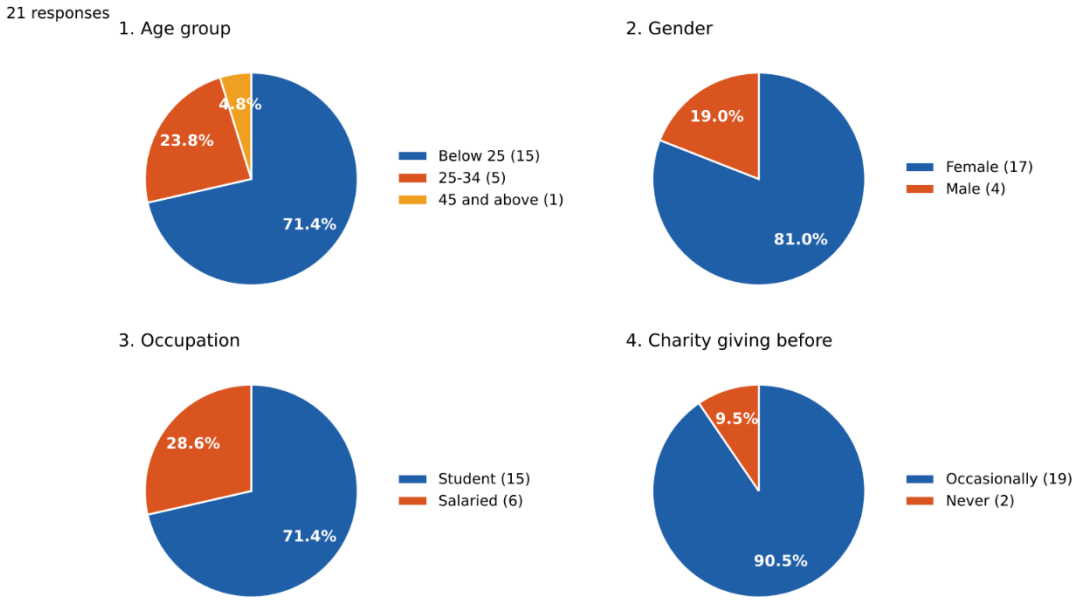

Figure 1: Profile of respondents by Age Group, Gender, Occupation, Charity Giving Before.

Interpretation: The sample is young, mostly female and student-dominated: about 95% of respondents are under 35, 81% are women and 71.4% are students, so the findings mainly reflect young women's views. Giving is common but not habitual: 90.5% have donated

occasionally, 9.5% have never donated and none gives regularly, which leaves room to convert occasional donors into regular ones.

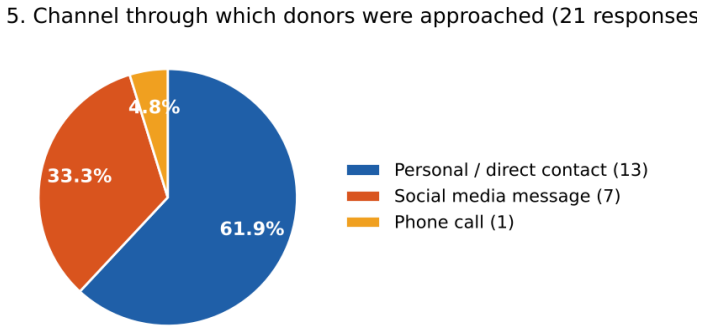

Figure 2: Channel Through Which Donors Were Approached.

Interpretation: Personal networking and direct conversation reached 13 of 21 respondents (61.9%), social media 7 (33.3%) and phone calls only 1 (4.8%). The Trust therefore relies mainly on face-to-face outreach, with limited use of phone and digital channels. The sample is too small to compare the donation rate of each channel reliably.

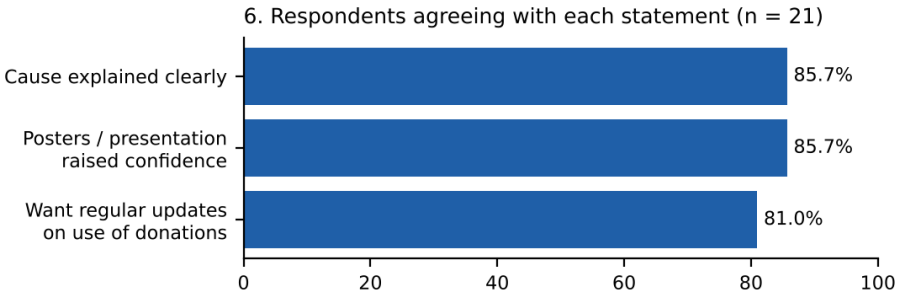

Figure 3: Respondents Agreeing With Each Statement.

Interpretation: Outreach communication worked well: 18 of 21 respondents (85.7%) said the cause was explained clearly and the same share said the posters and presentation made them more confident about the Trust. Donors also expect openness after giving, as 17 of 21 (81%) want regular updates on how donations are used.

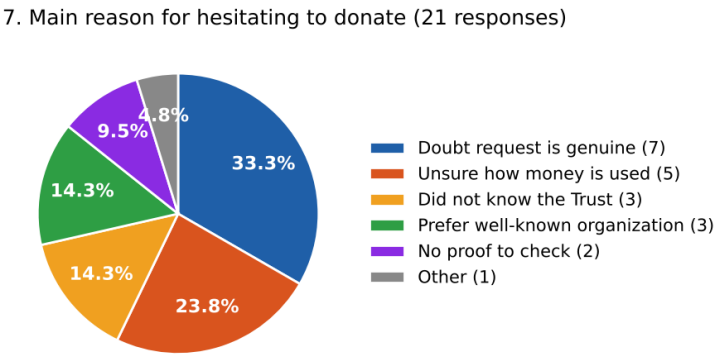

Figure 4: Main Reason For Hesitating To Donate.

Interpretation: Hesitation is driven mainly by trust and transparency. Doubt about genuineness (33.3%), unclear use of money (23.8%) and lack of proof to check (9.5%) together account for 14 of 21 reasons (66.7%). Low awareness (14.3%) and a preference for well-known organizations (14.3%) account for a further 28.6%.

Trust and the decision to donate (cross-tabulation)

	Donated	Did not donate	Total
Trusts the Trust	15	2	17
Neutral / does not trust	0	4	4
Total	15	6	21



Figure 5: Trust And Decision To Donate.

Hypothesis test: The chi-square test gave a value of 12.35 (df = 1, p = 0.0004). Because three of the four cells have expected counts below 5, Fisher's exact test was also run and gave p = 0.0025. Both are below 0.05, so H0 is rejected and H1 is accepted.

Interpretation: Of the 17 respondents confident about the Trust, 15 (88.2%) donated, while none of the 4 neutral or low-trust respondents did. Trust and the decision to donate are

significantly associated. This is an association, not proof of cause, and with 21 responses it is indicative only. Trust was measured through confidence gained from the posters and presentation, which is a proxy for the full trust dimensions.

7. Limitations of the Study:

1. Small sample of 21 respondents.
2. Use of convenience sampling; many respondents came from the researcher's own network.
3. Sample is young (71.4% below 25), mostly female (81%) and mostly students.
4. Self-reported answers may reflect social-desirability bias, and stated intentions may not become action.
5. Study covers one organization and one area (Noida and Delhi-NCR).
6. Eight-week period too short to observe repeat giving.
7. Researcher collected data while also asking for donations, which may have influenced responses.
8. Only individual donors and three outreach channels studied; channel use was too uneven (13, 7 and 1) to compare donation rates.
9. Trust was measured through a proxy item, and chi-square on a small sample gives only an indication.

8. CONCLUSION

At the Savera National Trust, trust was key to donations: 15 respondents out of 17 had confidence to donate (the count for neutral or low-trusted respondents was 0, which makes a statistically important conclusion; $p = 0.0025$). People were not averse to the cause, but they could not trust the Trust: 66.7% of the reasons pointed out by respondents were about trustworthiness, usage of funds, and reliability. When the request was backed by the proof, people started donating: as much as 85.7% of people claimed that explanation from the Trust and its advertisement made them trust the organization.

The findings are consistent with the literatures, demonstrating that the essential features of a donor in terms of their giving ability, inclination to help, honesty, and willingness to share information about finances are those that predispose them to give and to keep contributing (vAlhidari et al., 2018; Auger, 2014; Burnett, 2002). In view of the fact that most participants were only occasional donors while about 81% of them would like to be kept posted about the new developments, it can be stated that the most promising activity would be providing

ongoing updates and thus converting occasional donors into regular ones. The results are interpreted as a very solid foundation upon which one not very big charity organization can be built. Further research could involve increasing the size of the sample in order to get a broader representation of the population, using a wider variety of cities and donors, estimating the efficiency of each of the methods, and conducting a longitudinal study of donor behaviour.

9. SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1.Present Trust properly. Start every approach with a simple 30-second introduction including who the Trust is, when it was established, in which locations it operates and who it helps.

2. Make evidence checking easy. 33.3% had doubts about the authenticity of the request, while 9.5% had nothing to check. Prepare a one-page fact sheet and QR code or link with information about registration, photos of the programme and a contact person.

3. Publish a note “where the donation goes”. 23.8% were not sure how the money will be spent. Show simple examples of what a small donation would result in and publish a summary.

4. Send the information on the impact regularly. 81% are asking for updates. A brief monthly WhatsApp or social media message containing one photo and one story can cost nothing.

5. Continue using posters and presentation material. 85.7% confirmed that using them increases confidence levels. Always update them and take with you during outreach sessions.

6.Make regular donors out of occasional ones. 90.5% gave occasionally but no one is a regular donor. Make a small monthly donation option available, and remind the donor about giving in a soft way before holidays or at the beginning of the academic year.

7. Personal contact first, social media second After meeting people, it is important to use social media to provide evidence and updates so that people can validate the Trust.

8. Use the phone for follow-up One participant received a follow-up call. Calling the participants afterwards to thank them and respond to any queries strengthens their trust.

9. Increase awareness first Before asking people, note that 14.3% of them were not aware of the Trust. Regular posts, videos and volunteer stories can familiarize people with the Trust.

10. Help fundraisers Each volunteer or intern should be provided with the same fact sheet, training, and the letter of assignment. Soft-selling must be practiced.

11. Engage more types of donors More efforts should be made to reach working people and older adults by using websites, universities, and community organizations as well as tracking the results by emails each month (donor’s name, channel, date, amount).

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