

FUNDRAISING IN HIGHER EDUCATION: A SOCIAL EXCHANGE THEORY FRAMEWORK FOR SUSTAINABLE DONOR ENGAGEMENT

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Abstract. Fundraising has evolved into an increasingly important strategic function for higher education institutions pursuing financial sustainability in a competitive educational environment. However, many fundraising activities still lack a strong theoretical framework to explain donor behaviour and long-term relationship-building. This study aims to establish a fundraising framework for higher education grounded in social exchange theory. The research employed a conceptual framework development technique through content analysis of relevant academic literature from top academic databases. The findings expose five inter-related characteristics of institutional inputs, donor perceptions, relational mechanisms, donor behavioural intentions, and fundraising outcomes. Trust was the primary mechanism linking institutional activities to donor responses. The framework underlines the importance of openness, the organisation's credibility, good communication, and alignment of values in building sustained donor involvement. Contextual factors also affected the efficacy of fundraising. The research reveals that fundraising is essentially a relational, reciprocal process. Future research should empirically test the concept in other higher education settings.

Keywords: *higher education fundraising, social exchange theory, donor behaviour, trust development, fundraising framework*

Introduction

Higher education institutions are facing difficulties in financial management characterised by the pressure of diminishing public revenue, inflated administration costs, and increasing demands for higher education, research, and contributions to society. Fundraising has become a key focus for institutions' development and sustainability due to these challenges. Today, colleges have resorted to seeking donations to support research activities, student leadership modules, capital works, and even social outreach programmes. Furthermore, increased philanthropic donations to maintain and enhance entities such as higher education institutions have become more pronounced recently, as they support the financial health and equity of the institutions involved (Shaker, 2023). In addition, modern fundraising practices focus on building and maintaining favourable long-term donor relationships rather than on narrow, transaction-oriented approaches (Greenhalgh and Montgomery, 2024). Factors such as institutional goodwill toward donors, levels of donor trust, and stewardship further support the nurturing of trust between donors and beneficiaries, thereby ensuring their retention (Hoskins and Hoskins, 2024). There has been a paradigm shift toward modern opportunities in fund collection, reflecting the strategic roles of stakeholder relations, public relations, and the public in the institutional design and planning of higher education institutions.

However, most institutions remain entrenched in outdated methods, even as fundraising continues to expand. Many fundraising campaigns prioritise attracting new contributors and achieving short-term financial objectives. Such tactics are short-sighted in that they fail to account for relational and psychological factors, offering only a hint of the evolution of the engaged donors' donating capacities. Proper fundraising is about creating good fulfilment in which everyone, the contributor and the receiving organisation, gets actual benefit (Madden et al., 2023). Specifically, donor behaviour is evaluated through three key variables: the financial value of the contribution, the duration of the philanthropic commitment, and the underlying factors that prompt donor attrition (Hesse and Boenigk, 2024). This study demonstrates the necessity of post-donation communication to increase repeat donations and commitment to an organisation (Hesse, 2025). Despite improvements in this area, deficiencies remain, particularly in donor behaviour, connection skills in donor management, and, most importantly, charity marketing. Therefore, a significant portion of fundraising efforts in higher education institutions must be redirected to further develop the theoretical framework that explains the processes linking institutional actions and donor behaviour, which ultimately secures philanthropic resources.

The primary purpose of this paper is to develop a theoretical framework for fundraising in higher education within the social exchange theory paradigm. This perspective views fundraising as an ongoing relational process rather than a mere transactional event. It relies on reciprocal exchanges focused on mutual interests, goodwill, and continuous institutional advancement. The theory provides fundraisers with a way to figure out how individuals judge trades and decide whether to act. The aforementioned professional behaviours, excellent practices, and effective communication contribute to the development of bond capital and set expectations for both short- and long-term relationships between two or more individuals (Shaker, 2023). At a higher level of clarity, trust becomes a basic antecedent to the individual's willingness to contribute and the drive to maintain these efforts (Greenhalgh and Montgomery, 2024). Hence, the above-mentioned arguments regarding these elements underscore the importance of hedonic donor experience, behavioural loyalty to the institution, building connections, and meeting overall fundraising goals (Wymer and Čačija, 2023). As such, this notion is important because it advances the current understanding and practice of fundraising, notably at universities. The development of this framework is expected to combine this work with training for university staff, scholars, and postgraduates who wish to apply the principles set out in practice.

Review of literature

Social exchange theory aims to address the complex phenomenon of relational evaluation, which individuals engage in, guided by benefits, costs, and opportunities for reciprocation. This model asserts that social action is inclined towards the possibility of obtaining benefits and a sense of fairness. In fundraising activities, for example, donors commonly consider whether their contributions will indeed achieve their objectives or align with their values. According to Madden et al. (2023), fundraising is best described as a developmental process primarily focused on building relationships through genuine appreciation, interfaces, and interactions with stakeholders over time. Alborough and Hansen (2023) added that the objective of fundraising is not the mechanical fact of asking for donations; rather, it is about relational activities in the fundraising process. Lacerda et al. (2025) further underlined the role of reciprocal steps, cooperation, and

rapport-building in ensuring an organisation's sustainability and stakeholders' confidence. These studies indicate that fundraising can be defined as an organised process comprising structured interactions in which both donors and institutions are active participants. Ethical and genuine marketing is vital to donor confidence, and people want to see how resources are used and the value generated. Universities that practice excellent communication and solid governance procedures generally find it easier to solicit charity funding. Rossi et al. (2023) state that well-executed or transparent fundraising development by a charity or organisation, with some degree of real donors' interaction, greatly enhances the trustworthiness of such an institution. Walk et al. (2022) also observed another development: that any improvement in the legitimacy of the organisation and the professionalism of the donors is connected with increases in donor satisfaction. Zhang and Yan (2025) conducted a study and found that transparency affects donors, notably those in structures associated with credible reputations and transparent fundraising practices. In practice, maintaining transparent financial operations effectively addresses common financing challenges by reassuring donors of the institution's integrity.

Donor perceptions play a central role in fundraising decision-making processes. Individuals evaluate the benefits, fairness, and costs associated with giving before deciding whether to support an institution. Perceived benefits may include social impact, personal fulfilment, recognition, or value alignment. Mason et al. (2025) highlighted that communication quality and stakeholder accessibility shape donor perceptions, organisational credibility, and long-term engagement. Furthermore, Wu and Dai (2025) reported that both financial and performance transparency signals significantly increase potential donors' willingness to donate, with financial transparency signals being more sensitive. Additionally, Wang (2022) emphasised that organisational commitment in the nonprofit sector is positively influenced by engaged leadership, community engagement, formalisation, and perceived intangible support, with tangible support, such as perceived fair pay, having an indirect effect. These findings indicate that donor perceptions serve as important mediators between institutional actions and fundraising outcomes. Trust remains one of the most frequently cited predictors of fundraising success. Relationship-based fundraising models emphasise trust as a mechanism to reduce uncertainty and strengthen donor confidence. Trust develops through repeated interactions, effective communication, and positive donor experiences. Illustrating this dynamic, Dean and Reiser (2021) demonstrated that trust between the public and wealthy philanthropists is crucial, and recent calls for higher income tax rates and wealth taxes may be partly due to a lack of trust in for-profit philanthropy. Furthermore, on an internal level, Iddrisu (2025) highlighted that organisational culture significantly impacts trust in public organisations by enhancing communication and building employee relationships. Faseur et al. (2025) found that individual donors' perceptions of ethical practices in nonprofit organisations are influenced by their evaluations of fundraising practices in terms of authenticity, honesty, effectiveness, accountability, efficiency, freedom of choice, and respect. Consequently, trust serves as a strategic relational asset in higher-education fundraising, potentially encouraging donor retention and long-term involvement.

Fundraising results increasingly measure donor retention, loyalty, advocacy, and endowment development, in addition to direct cash donations. Sustainable fundraising is about building meaningful connections with donors over time. Kazanskaia (2025a) has shown that nonprofit organisations can identify and monitor the effectiveness of

international fundraising using key performance indicators, digital technologies, and transparent reporting procedures to build partnerships and ensure sustainability. Apart from these operational tactics, Kazanskaia (2025b) highlighted that personalisation, culturally appropriate communication, and digital innovation may encourage trust, loyalty, and long-term relationships among foreign donors. Yulisetiari et al. (2025) went further to explore the psychological factors behind this loyalty and suggested that social value, processed beliefs, and pleasure from donating have a beneficial effect on contentment, and satisfaction has a positive effect on loyalty, whereas unwanted gifts harm loyalty. Cultural norms, religious reasons, and economic realities may influence donor conduct in diverse situations, such as the halal food industry (Hashim et al., 2023), management (Ruzulan et al., 2023), and training (Tumiran and Mohammad, 2024). These considerations demonstrate that a complex combination of institutional, relational, and environmental factors determines fundraising outcomes. In essence, the researchers unanimously point out that the foundations of successful fundraising lie in reciprocal relationships built on trust, transparency, communication, and organisational credibility. Social exchange theory provides a strong framework for understanding donors' behaviours and building relationships. Prior studies have identified numerous factors influencing charitable engagement. Yet these characteristics remain scattered across different streams of literature. Therefore, a more complete paradigm is needed that integrates institutional inputs, donor perceptions, relational processes, behavioural goals, and fundraising outcomes to enhance fundraising theory and practice in higher education.

Materials and Methods

The study used a conceptual framework approach developed based on qualitative content analysis and theory synthesis. Framework development is particularly relevant when the current state of knowledge is scattered across multiple streams of literature and has to be integrated into a comprehensive conceptual model (Benli and Kocaman, 2026; Mason et al., 2025; Giannelos et al., 2024). The approach was based on the identification, analysis, and synthesis of academic evidence related to fundraising, donor behaviour, relationship management, trust development, and social exchange theory (Lacerda et al., 2025; Greenhalgh and Montgomery, 2024; Alborough and Hansen, 2023). Content analysis provides a systematic approach for analysing the concepts, structures, and relationships reported in contemporary fundraising scholarship (Benli and Kocaman, 2026; Noetel et al., 2022). Such an approach has been commonly employed in conceptual research to develop theoretical frameworks that can inform future empirical research (Benli and Kocaman, 2026; Metz et al., 2022). The intent was not to test hypotheses but to develop a theory-based fundraising framework appropriate for higher education. Thus, the framework development process highlighted conceptual integration, theoretical consistency, and practical applicability. The first step involved a systematic search of the academic literature on higher education fundraising and donor behaviour. The relevant publications were identified in major academic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, ScienceDirect, Emerald Insight, SpringerLink, Wiley Online Library, and Google Scholar. Search terms included “higher education fundraising”, “university philanthropy”, “donor behaviour”, “donor retention”, “trust”, “relationship fundraising”, “fundraising outcomes”, “social exchange theory” and “philanthropic giving”. Additional searches used these terms with Boolean operators to

enhance coverage and relevance. The preference was for peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2021 and 2026 to ensure contemporary theoretical and practical relevance. We developed the basic assumptions of social exchange theory and the scholarship of fundraising by referring to earlier seminal works only when necessary.

In the second phase, inclusion and exclusion criteria for literature selection were defined. The inclusion criteria required that the studies focus on fundraising, donor relations, philanthropy, nonprofit management, university advancements, or other behavioural dimensions (Hesse, 2025; Ng, 2024; Shaker, 2023). Research on trust, transparency, organisational credibility, donor perceptions, communication effectiveness, and relationship quality was prioritised because it is relevant to social exchange theory (Wu and Dai, 2025; Desai et al., 2025; Abd Jalil et al., 2024; Greenhalgh and Montgomery, 2024). Studies unrelated to fundraising processes or donor behaviours were excluded. To ensure academic rigour, conference papers, editorials, book reviews, and non-peer-reviewed material were excluded. The chosen literature corpus served as the theoretical foundation for identifying recurring constructs and relationships after the screening process. This process ensured that the resulting framework was based on contemporary scholarly evidence rather than isolated observations. The third stage was an analysis of the contents of the selected literature and its categorisation by theme. Concepts, variables, and theoretical propositions were systematically extracted and coded according to their functions in the fundraising process (Benli and Kocaman, 2026; Noetel et al., 2022). Similar concepts were then combined into higher-level thematic categories. Common themes identified in the analysis were institutional characteristics, donor evaluations, relational dynamics, behavioural intentions, and fundraising performance (Lacerda et al., 2025; Lai and Nguyen, 2025; Kim et al., 2024). The major institutional factors were transformed into institutional credibility, governance transparency, academic reputation, and value alignment (Wu and Dai, 2025; Anand et al., 2024; Rossi et al., 2023). Donors consistently perceived benefits and costs as related to their sense of fairness (Faseur et al., 2025; Madden et al., 2023). Relational variables were associated with trust, communication effectiveness, relationship quality, and past experiences with engagement (Desai et al., 2025; Greenhalgh and Montgomery, 2024; Kim et al., 2024; Madden et al., 2023). These categories subsequently became the nucleus of the proposed conceptual framework.

The fourth phase involved conceptual mapping and framework development. The relationships between the identified constructs were analysed using the principles of social exchange theory (Lacerda et al., 2025; Madden et al., 2023). This means that people assess exchanges in terms of expected rewards, perceived costs, and the benefits of reciprocity (Lacerda et al., 2025; Petzinger and Jung, 2024; Madden et al., 2023). In this view, institutional inputs were regarded as antecedent variables affecting donor perceptions (Wu and Dai, 2025; Abd Jalil et al., 2024). Donor perceptions also influence the formation of trust and relational mechanisms (Faseur et al., 2025; Greenhalgh and Montgomery, 2024; Ghoorah et al., 2021). The relational mechanisms linking donor behavioural intentions, including willingness to donate, intentions to contribute again, and advocacy behaviour, were linked (Wu and Dai, 2025; Lai and Nguyen, 2025; Kim et al., 2024). These behavioural intentions ultimately translate into fundraising outcomes such as donor retention, donation frequency, donation amount, and endowment growth (Hesse, 2025; Yulisetiari et al., 2025; Hesse and Boenigk, 2024). Contextual moderators were added to account for environmental effects on

fundraising efficacy (Benli and Kocaman, 2026; Sembinova et al., 2025; Chu, 2023). These four steps of framework development are simplified into a chart as in *Figure 1*.

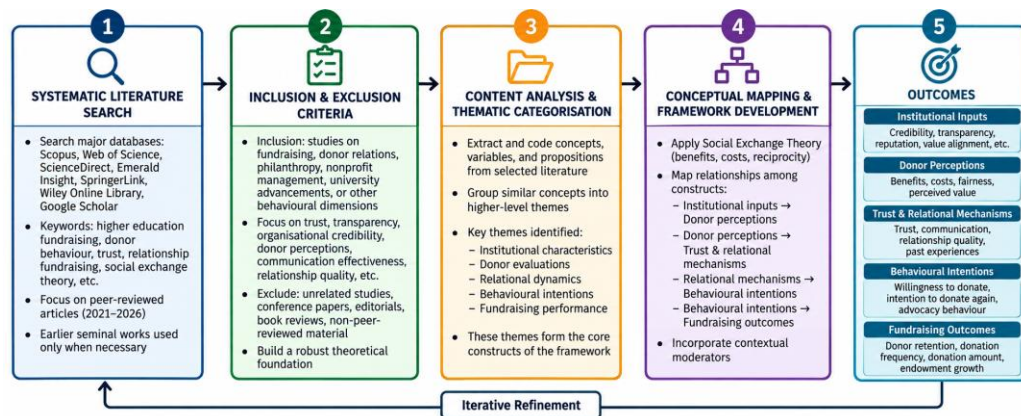


Figure 1. Overview of the conceptual framework development process.

The selected research approach offers several benefits for conceptual and theoretical development. First, it allows disparate texts to be integrated into a common explanation model (Benli and Kocaman, 2026; Noetel et al., 2022). Second, content analysis helps identify recurring concepts that might otherwise be scattered across disciplinary boundaries (Benli and Kocaman, 2026; Noetel et al., 2022). Third, the approach to framework development is useful for theory building in domains where empirical evidence remains scattered (Benli and Kocaman, 2026; Metz et al., 2022). Fourth, the emergent framework can serve as a basis for future quantitative and qualitative studies. Finally, the conceptual model provides practical guidance to university administrators in developing evidence-informed fundraising strategies (Hesse, 2025; Ng, 2024; Shaker, 2023). The study develops a framework that is both academically rigorous and practically relevant for higher education fundraising through systematic literature review and theory synthesis.

Results and Discussion

The framework development process produced the Fundraising in Higher Education Framework, Grounded in Social Exchange Theory, which conceptualises fundraising as a reciprocal, relationship-based process rather than a transactional activity (Lacerda et al., 2025; Greenhalgh and Montgomery, 2024; Madden et al., 2023). The framework synthesises materials on donor behaviour, principles of institutional governance, and social exchange theory into a structured model that explains how sustainable fundraising results are generated via interrelated relational processes (Benli and Kocaman, 2026; Abd Jalil et al., 2024; Alborough and Hansen, 2023). The approach highlights five key dimensions: institutional inputs, donor perceptions, relational processes, donor behavioural goals, and fundraising results. Additional contextual moderators are also included to control for environmental factors that impact donor decision-making and fundraising efficacy (Benli and Kocaman, 2026; Sembinova et al., 2025; Chu, 2023). Thus, the framework offers a comprehensive explanation of the association between institutional activities and charitable outcomes. The framework helps represent the reasons for dependence on certain factors and includes elements such as institutional inputs, donor attitudes, relational mechanisms, donor intentions to

act, fundraising results, and contextual factors. The graphical representation enhances understanding by illustrating the various components of the framework, how they are interconnected, and their contributions to understanding the relationships, including the feedback loops. The institutional inputs represent the first perspective within the framework. The analysis is based on the transparency of governance, the credibility of institutions, academic appeal, and overall mission match (Wu and Dai, 2025; Anand et al., 2024; Abd Jalil et al., 2024). These factors indicate the organisation's capabilities, and they are thought to positively affect donors' willingness to give (Wu and Dai, 2025; Zhang and Yan, 2025). Transparency in governance builds confidence in one's responsiveness when questioned (Wu and Dai, 2025; Ghoorah et al., 2021). Organisational credibility improves the organisation's effectiveness and acceptability (Anand et al., 2024; Rossi et al., 2023). The standing of academics is a measure of the standard of institutional education and social benefit. Value alignment refers to the degree to which the stated purposes of an organisation or community are perceived as aligned or misaligned with the community's needs and priorities. These factors thus form the basis for the creation and maintenance of donor perceptions (Faseur et al., 2025; Greenhalgh and Montgomery, 2024).

The second dimension comprises donor perceptions, including perceived benefits, perceived fairness, and perceived costs (Faseur et al., 2025; Madden et al., 2023). Donors evaluate fundraising opportunities by assessing expected outcomes and exchange value. Perceived benefits refer to both tangible and intangible rewards associated with philanthropic giving. Perceived fairness reflects donor judgements regarding ethical conduct, transparency, and equitable treatment (Faseur et al., 2025; Suh and Hijal-Moghrabi, 2023). Perceived costs involve financial, psychological, and opportunity-related considerations associated with making donations. The framework proposes that favourable donor perceptions increase trust formation and strengthen relationship development, thereby encouraging positive fundraising behaviours (Lai and Nguyen, 2025; Greenhalgh and Montgomery, 2024; Ghoorah et al., 2021). Fundraising in a higher education framework grounded in social exchange theory is illustrated as in *Figure 2*.

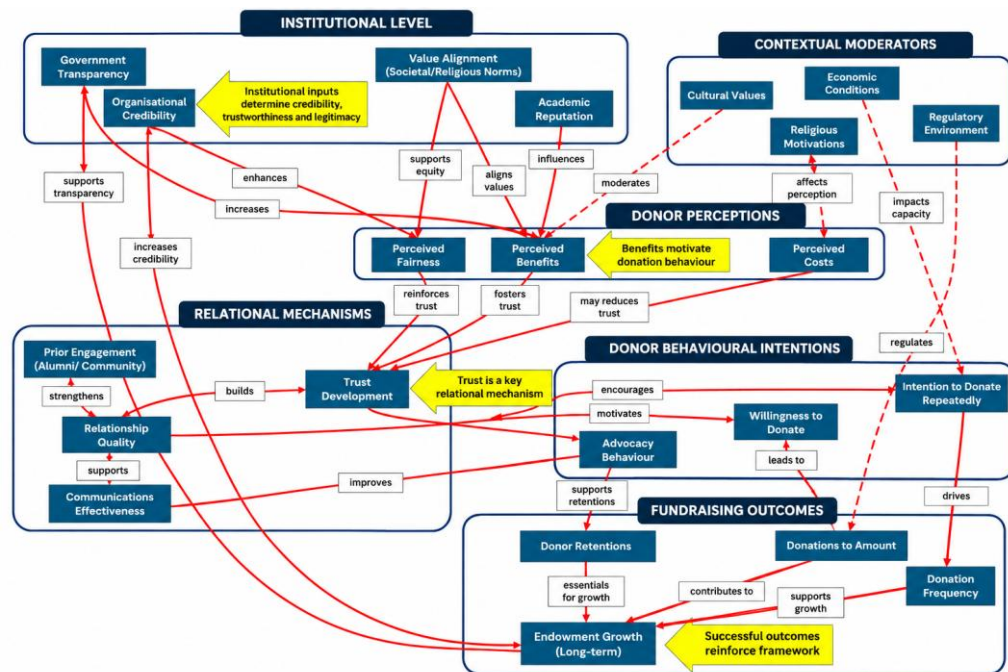


Figure 2. Fundraising in higher education framework grounded in social exchange theory.

Social exchange theory proposes that individuals form relationships and remain in them because of the advantages they expect to obtain from the other side (Lacerda et al., 2025; Madden et al., 2023). In higher education fundraising, the eagerness to comply with external frameworks, such as openness and accountability, as well as the methods used to engage contributors, creates a hurdle to relationships functioning as a field for transactions. In other words, Suh and Hijal-Moghrabi (2023) emphasise the need for non-governmental organisations to use ethical communication in fundraising and to ensure equality between contributors and recipients in this setting. Furthermore, in another study, Mujahidin et al. (2023) found that trust is a key factor in how philanthropists evaluate such partnerships. The results indicate that organisations that promote fundamental principles are likely to undermine cooperation for the sake of donor convenience. In line with these results, Parker et al. (2024) stated that a culture of trust, including openness and willingness, substantially affects customer retention and donor excitement. All these explanations appear to support the reasoning of this paradigm. That is, institutional involvement results in archetypical behaviours that, in the end, facilitate the mobilisation of resources aimed at attaining long-term goals. The critical argument about institutional hierarchies further explains the framework for describing the donor's viewpoint. Governance transparency has become increasingly important because contemporary donors demand accountability regarding the utilisation of philanthropic contributions (Wu and Dai, 2025; Ghoorah et al., 2021). In light of this, Anand et al. (2024) observed that organisational reputation remains a key determinant of donor confidence and fundraising effectiveness. Furthermore, Abd Jalil et al. (2024) similarly found that donors value fundraisers and institutions that demonstrate both competence and ethical behaviour. Ultimately, Greenhalgh and Montgomery (2024) reported that trust in philanthropists' relationships with charities influences their decisions to give or withhold funding. Consequently, organisational credibility and academic reputation serve as important signals that reduce uncertainty and strengthen donor confidence (Wu and Dai, 2025; Anand et al., 2024). These observations support

the framework's positioning of institutional inputs as the foundational antecedents of donor perceptions.

Another significant contribution of the framework is its explicit treatment of donor perceptions as mediating variables. Donors rarely respond directly to organisational characteristics; instead, they interpret institutional actions through subjective evaluations concerning benefits, fairness, and costs (Faseur et al., 2025; Madden et al., 2023). In their general review, Benli and Kocaman (2026) highlighted the antecedents of charitable giving and categorised them as innate and correctable causes. The relevant literature was reviewed, and preliminary conclusions were drawn, offering suggestions for approaching different market segments in an ever-changing charitable economy. For example, Kim et al. (2024) found that "poor communication" negatively affected donors and donor relationships. Some research, such as Ghoorah et al. (2021), has highlighted the need for charitable organisations to establish more effective financial reporting systems to help them raise donations. In other words, standard financial reporting cannot serve as the sole measure of success, as these practices are inherently shaped by distinct organisational cultures. Khan's (2025) study found that a well-developed, intersectoral communication strategy mitigates the contradictions that might arise with donors and, in some aspects, leads to increased donations. Taken together, the reviewed studies support the proposition that donor perceptions serve as the basic bridge connecting organisations and donors. Trust is the most important relationship-driven dynamic linking donor intentions to social actions within this structure (Lai and Nguyen, 2025; Greenhalgh and Montgomery, 2024; Mujahidin et al., 2023). While the concept of trust is heavily scrutinised in broader contexts, it remains absolutely central to modern fundraising science, which demands people-oriented relationship strategies (Iddrisu, 2025; Petzinger and Jung, 2024). In support of this view, Petzinger and Jung (2024) find that responsible giving involves not only a shift in power to communities to tackle issues through local partners but also a reduction in power, combined with an increase in trust among participants, for more informed grantmaking and the strengthening of social capital. Similarly, Metz et al. (2022) observe that fostering trust among conflicting interests in projects leads to greater motivational, capacitating, and prompting factors, resulting in better implementation outcomes for the proposed private-sector initiatives. Giannelos et al. (2024) contend that it would be misleading to view public engagement as free of problematic issues, particularly for research funding agencies, given the hurdles involved in creating such relationships. However, proactively addressing such concerns is the best approach; situation-appropriate strategies and ethical competency are recommended. Encountering these hurdles, however, does not erase the function of purposeful ties; in fact, Lai and Nguyen (2025) propose that investing in relationships within nonprofit organisations would significantly impact organisational embedding among donors and volunteers, especially where relational conflicts are defined. Within these dimensions, the theory does not regard trust as a simple function of successful interaction but as a motivator that leads to future social action and the commitment of a donor whom the relationship manager strives to retain.

Some research has stated that trust and its significance to donor intentions are more empirical questions than theoretical ones. A donor's trust in an institution is more likely to bring about donations, support, and defence of the organisation's cause, and to develop relationships, than turning one-time contributors into regular donors (Lai and Nguyen, 2025; Greenhalgh and Montgomery, 2024; Mujahidin et al., 2023). Rossolini

et al. (2021) found that persuasive information and persuasive design, including message framing, a green manner of speaking, and numerical targets, are highly effective at converting one-time contributors into regular donors. Noetel et al. (2022) also demonstrated that enhanced communication strategies, without any strategic communication, contribute to increased donor support by focusing on the beneficiaries of the services, optimising the allocation of funds, making a case for the impact, and highlighting the tax deduction for contributions. Moreover, Desai et al. (2025) found a strong correlation between donor engagement and relationship quality. This concept can be extended to acknowledge the active role of both partners as equals. Jones et al. (2024) noted that trust-based philanthropy, such as a monthly working group, can be instrumental in facilitating collaboration and joint projects, particularly among funders and recipients, thereby enabling a greater impact. Hence, the behavioural intentions of the donors represented a greater degree of social exchange in the field of fundraising education. In the framework, the world of activities aimed at resource mobilisation goes well beyond purely financial balance and suggests updated attitudes towards elective philanthropy. Fundraisers used to think that the amount of money raised was the most important measure of success. However, recent observations suggest that theoretical work in the context of fundraising focuses more on donor satisfaction and donation behaviour (particularly repeat giving), as well as advocacy behaviour related to complaints from organisers (Yulisetiari et al., 2025; Hesse, 2025; Hesse and Boenigk, 2024). In this regard, Sinha et al. (2025) explained that donors may be positively or negatively inclined toward expected donations based on the characteristics of their social sphere, which can help mitigate donor boredom, reengage dormant donors, and reduce solicitation resistance. Advanced studies, such as those conducted by Kazanskaia (2025c), use the aforementioned techniques to demonstrate that a coded engagement strategy for donors, which emphasises building mutual ties through regular information sharing and recognition and encourages donor participation, is effective in reducing donor turnover for charitable organisations. To exacerbate these issues, Hoskins and Hoskins (2024) suggested that while acquiring seasoned adult donors is easier, youths, who are more likely to stop giving after a single donation, do not follow this pattern. Young donors have higher disposable income and social resources, enabling them to seize opportunities to increase their giving. Moreover, in achieving high-substance giving, Kazanskaia (2025d) highlighted the role of major sponsors as the most instrumental in the growth and sustenance of nonprofit organisations, while maintaining a balance between developing physical and directional donor identities is an essential aspect of fundraising and long-term relationships. Having said this, all these observations confirm the model's well-founded approach in defining the success of fundraising in various aspects.

Furthermore, the framework's structure allows for contextual moderators that arguably contribute to fundraising effectiveness (Benli and Kocaman, 2026; Sembinova et al., 2025; Chu, 2023). These operational processes do not occur in isolation. The organisation's fundraising functions are directly related to broader external processes in its operational and strategic design. These are the conditions that could affect willingness and ability to donate. resources. Even those physical resources are understood as a subset of economic resources. The most important factors in a cross-cultural perspective on higher education fundraising include active donor engagement, institutional alignment with social change, and the community's philanthropic values. According to Chu (2023), religious orientations impact attitudes toward charitable

activities and philanthropic institutions. For instance, some religions may promote charity and others may prohibit it. According to the study by Sembanova et al. (2025), intrinsically religious people have positive views toward charitable actions, are more empathic, and engage in more beneficial sociopolitical projects. Similarly, Gold (2023) also found that successful nonprofit fundraising relies on managing donors' social identities, such as their demographics, motivations, and the nature of their donation, through the lens of social identity theory. Thus, the addition of contextual moderators results in greater explanatory power and practical applicability of the framework. In essence, the specified structure contributes to university finances, further research by presenting us with coherent theory from different perspectives and practical techniques. The theme-related literature focuses more on associations between donor trust, communication, and organisational credibility; donor retention is studied as an independent variable (Lai and Nguyen, 2025; Greenhalgh and Montgomery, 2024; Shaker, 2023). As shown by Shneor et al. (2023), higher donations are obtained overall when there are stronger pre-existing ties between those who raise funds and those who fund them. Justifying targeted segmentation strategies, Kazanskaia (2025e) noted that the identification and differentiation of global donor populations go beyond research and understanding; client-oriented strategies are important. Such an approach helps hold more funds, which will be especially useful in more developed capitalist economies. In addition, Ng (2024) highlighted that introductory relationship marketing helps religious-based nonprofit organisations promote their purposes by enhancing a sense of belonging. In light of the challenges faced by nonprofit organisations, Nkansah and Kowarsch (2025) argue that advanced fundraising capacity, primarily through data and machine learning, equips and empowers nonprofit and educational institutions, thereby enhancing their donor engagement strategies and financial sustainability. This approach highlights the importance of integrating data-driven donor engagement strategies to overcome potential solicitation resistance and ensure long-term financial sustainability.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study contributes to the development of the Fundraising in Higher Education Framework Grounded in Social Exchange Theory to explain how sustainable fundraising outcomes emerge in educational institutions (Benli and Kocaman, 2026; Hesse, 2025; Ng, 2024). The conceptual model includes five dimensions: institutional inputs, donor perceptions, relational mechanisms, donor behavioural intentions, and fundraising outcomes (Benli and Kocaman, 2026; Lai and Nguyen, 2025; Kim et al., 2024). The framework conceptualises fundraising as a trust-based, reciprocal relationship, significantly influenced by transparency, credibility, and reputation in donor perceptions (Wu and Dai, 2025; Lacerda et al., 2025; Abd Jalil et al., 2024; Greenhalgh and Montgomery, 2024). These perceptions influence trust, relationship quality, and engagement (Desai et al., 2025; Lai and Nguyen, 2025; Greenhalgh and Montgomery, 2024). Crucially, trust is the key mechanism that links institutional actions to donor intentions, such as advocacy and repeat giving, which in turn lead to highly sustainable outcomes, such as donor retention and endowment growth (Hesse, 2025; Lai and Nguyen, 2025; Petzinger and Jung, 2024; Hesse and Boenigk, 2024). The model also incorporates contextual moderators, such as cultural, economic, and religious factors (Benli and Kocaman, 2026; Sembanova et al., 2025; Chu, 2023). The framework provides theoretical development and practical guidance to university

administrators and should be empirically validated in future studies (Benli and Kocaman, 2026; Nkansah and Kowarsch, 2025; Ng, 2024) in different institutional contexts. Future comparative research on public, private, and faith-based institutions, as well as the mediating effects of donor trust and communication, will increase the generalisability and practical relevance of the framework (Iddrisu, 2025; Lai and Nguyen, 2025; Greenhalgh and Montgomery, 2024).

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this study.

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