Mobilising Hope: A Quantitative Study of Donor Behaviour in a Crowdfunding Campaign in Kerala

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ABSTRACT

Crowdfunding is a powerful mechanism for mobilising financial resources for humanitarian and crisis-related causes. This study examines Kerala donation-based crowdfunding in 2024 for the release of Abdul Rahim from the death penalty in Saudi Arabia. The research employs a quantitative methodology to analyse the donor behaviour, such as motivations, perceptions of transparency and engagement in the campaign. The data was collected through a survey via Google Forms, which collected 139 responses. The study's findings highlight the role of social media in promoting crowdfunding efforts, the psychological underpinnings of donor behaviour, emphasising the motivations and perceptions of the donor, and the importance of financial transparency in fostering trust. The results provide the importance of a framework for designing effective, transparent, and emotionally compelling crowdfunding campaigns that emphasise the role of digital platforms, collective action, and psychological motivators in crisis-driven fundraising through social media mobilisation.

Keywords: Crowdfunding, Donor Behaviour, Financial Transparency, Collective Action, Social Media Mobilisation.

1. INTRODUCTION

Crowdfunding has emerged as a critical tool in mobilising resources during emergencies and providing swift financial aid to distressed individuals or communities, attracting public interest in raising money. Also, crowdfunding has been an innovative method for financing projects and businesses, leveraging internet-based platforms to connect fundraisers with a large, dispersed audience of potential contributors [1], [2]. This alternative funding model gained traction following the 2008 financial crisis, offering opportunities for entrepreneurs facing difficulties in securing traditional funding. Crowdfunding encompasses various forms, including donations, investments, and rewards-based models, with contributors often receiving physical, financial, or social rewards in exchange for their support [1]. The phenomenon has experienced rapid growth, now accounting for tens of billions of dollars annually [3].

Crowdfunding, also called public fundraising, has various forms: reward-based, donation-based, loan-based, and equity crowdfunding [3]–[5]. The application of crowdfunding in crises such as disaster relief, medical emergencies, and legal aid has gained prominence globally. Studies on crowdfunding success highlight that emotionally compelling narratives, social media outreach, and influencer endorsements have significantly increased donor participation [6]. Also, diaspora communities play a significant role in transnational crowdfunding, contributing substantial financial support for causes in their home countries [7].

Crowdfunding platforms often resemble charitable donations to public goods rather than traditional entrepreneurial finance, according to [2]. While tangible rewards can be used to motivate contributions, their effectiveness is often limited. Instead, intangible motivations play a crucial role in crowdfunding success. These include direct psychological rewards, reciprocity, and social interactions. This understanding of crowdfunding as a donation-like mechanism has important implications for platform design and entrepreneurial funding strategies. The study highlights the

unique characteristics of crowdfunding that distinguish it from traditional financing methods and emphasises the importance of leveraging intangible motivations to encourage contributions [2].

Objectives
a. To analyse the role of social media in mobilising financial resources for crisis-driven crowdfunding campaigns.
b. To examine the donor behaviour, motivations, perceptions and engagement during a crowdfunding campaign.
c. To understand the contribution of influencer endorsements, diaspora communities, and digital outreach to enhancing crowdfunding success.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Technological Enablers and Platform Design

Technological advancements have improved donor confidence by enhancing accountability and fraud prevention by providing more trust, social capital and transparency, which could be considered significant predictors of crowdfunding success [4], [8]. Platforms such as Milaap, Ketto, and ImpactGuru have enabled people to directly appeal to the public to support those in need rather than going through bureaucratic financial institutions, providing support for urgent causes. These platforms directly connect with people in need and help them reach their goals faster, enabling everyone to fundraise for the cause.

2.2 Psychological and Behavioural Theories Underpinning Crowdfunding

Crowdfunding platforms have revolutionised entrepreneurial pitching, making it increasingly prevalent in various settings. The psychology behind successful crowdfunding pitches involves a complex interplay of mood, passion, and emotion. Entrepreneurs who can effectively convey enthusiasm and emotional connection to their projects are more likely to engage potential benefactors and secure funding. The study suggests that the emotional state of both the entrepreneur and the audience plays a crucial role in pitch success. Passionate delivery and authentic emotional expression can create a stronger connection with potential investors, increasing the likelihood of support. Additionally, the research indicates that the overall mood of the crowdfunding environment can influence decision-making processes. Understanding these psychological factors can help entrepreneurs tailor their pitches to maximise their chances of success in the competitive crowdfunding landscape. Crowdfunding is transforming the landscape of idea realisation and project funding. [9] conducted a study to understand the motivations behind crowdfunding participation. They identified several key motivations for project creators, such as fundraising, increasing awareness, connecting with others, gaining approval, maintaining control, and learning. For supporters, motivations encompass collecting rewards, helping others, supporting causes, and being part of a community. The study also revealed deterrents to participation, such as fear of failure for creators and lack of trust for supporters.

Consumers make different decisions when crowdfunding compared to traditional purchasing, with crowdfunding activating a more interdependent mindset and increasing demand for social-good products [10]. The study found that active

involvement in the crowdfunding process is crucial for this effect, as it disappears when the product is already on the market [10]. Additionally, the increased demand for social-good products among crowdfunding participants only occurs when collective efficacy is high, meaning allies believe in the group's ability to effect change [10]. These findings suggest that crowdfunding platforms can play a significant role in promoting products with positive social and environmental impacts.

[11] investigated the psychological effects of crowdfunding participation on consumers. Their research revealed that individuals who participate in crowdfunding develop a stronger personal connection and identification with the venture compared to those who simply purchase the product through traditional means. This increased identification stems from the sense of helping and supporting the venture. As a result, crowdfunding participants demonstrate higher levels of engagement, including increased consumption of the venture's products and more positive word-of-mouth behaviour. The study suggests that crowdfunding can effectively build stronger relationships with a venture's initial customer base. Furthermore, the research indicates that a stronger identification with the venture can lead to changes in their self-concept, as they perceive the venture as "theirs" [11].

[12] investigated how mental representations of products in reward-based crowdfunding campaigns influence funding decisions and campaign success. Greater psychological distance was found to negatively impact individual contributions and overall campaign performance. Project innovativeness, worker skills, abilities, honesty, and kindness would positively affect crowdfunding success. Education level was found to strengthen the relationship between innovation and funding success. The study concludes that social factors play a more significant role in crowdfunding than economic considerations and that crowdfunding can support both innovative and traditional projects [13].

The study on the psychological determinants of investor motivation in social media-based crowdfunding projects for innovative startups [14] highlights the significant role of social media-based platforms in connecting project creators with potential investors, emphasising how these platforms are reshaping traditional fundraising methods. The research reveals that investor behaviour in social media-based crowdfunding differs substantially from mainstream investment environments, with platform features playing a crucial role in persuading individuals to contribute financially. The determinants of an individual's intention to engage in crowdfunding include individual motivations from extrinsic and intrinsic perspectives, such as increasing self-esteem, charitable behaviour, altruism, personal skills development, and image enhancement [14]. Social motivations from an extrinsic perspective of cultural factors and contract formalisation and intrinsic perspective of enjoyment in collaboration and social recognition or social identification with the crowdfunding community and a sense of belongingness, perceived sympathy, openness and trustworthiness [14].

The openness positively correlates with crowdfunding success, while narcissism shows an inverted U-shaped relationship. However, the effects of other personality traits, including the Big Five, self-efficacy, innovativeness, locus of control, and need for achievement, are largely inconclusive [15]. Projects with more two-way

communication between fundraisers and contributors in forums tend to have tremendous success, while unilateral signals from fundraisers do not show the same effect. The authors conclude that this multi-theory approach advances understanding of crowdfunding dynamics and could apply to both online and traditional entrepreneurship contexts [16].

Altruism plays a significant role in the decision to participate in crowdfunding. Additionally, the "warm glow" effect, or the positive feeling derived from helping others, influences the amount of money contributed. Interestingly, the researchers found that monetary incentives could potentially discourage crowdfunders from contributing, a phenomenon known as the "crowding out" effect. These insights have important implications for business strategies, as understanding the motivations behind crowdfunding contributions can help platforms design more effective incentives and predict how management changes might impact individual giving behaviour [17], [18].

The Big Five personality traits influence crowdfunding performance. Their findings reveal that certain personality characteristics significantly affect funding outcomes. Specifically, creators exhibiting higher levels of openness and conscientiousness tend to achieve greater crowdfunding success. Conversely, neuroticism is negatively associated with funding performance. Also, the mediating role of campaign characteristics, such as project description quality and the number of updates, in the relationship between personality traits and crowdfunding outcomes [19].

Personal and social traits influence individuals' intention to participate in crowdfunding [20]. Social identification with the crowdfunding community and innovativeness positively affect participation intention. Additionally, attitudes toward helping others and interpersonal connectivity indirectly impact participation intention through social identification with the crowdfunding community. Companies and fund-seekers should focus on strategies that promote social identification and develop consumers' social relationships within the crowdfunding community [20].

2.3 Kerala Crowdfunding Case: A Humanitarian and Digital Success

The case of the crowdfunding campaign for Abdul Rahim portrays that social solidarity, digital engagement and financial transparency can drive mass support for a cause. In 2024, Abdul Rahim, a native of Kerala, was imprisoned in Saudi Arabia for over 18 years and was facing the death penalty. People all over the world raised an amount of approximately Rs. 35 crore through crowdfunding for releasing Abdul Rahim after the victim's family pardoned him in exchange for 'blood money' of 15 million Saudi riyal [21]. The collective action for the crowdfunding included commoners, celebrities and influencers who showcased their unity and generosity in saving him from a death sentence. Rahim was sentenced to death in 2019 under the Saudi law of murder after he was involved in a tragic incident where he accidentally dislodged the life-supporting device of a disabled boy who needed constant care, leading to his death. The legal action committee organised a crowdfunding campaign that collected over Rs. 30 crore through the 'SAVEABDULRAHIM' app; the remaining amount was received through offline contributions. The campaign was actively carried out through social media, including the participation of influencers, politicians, NRIs,

businessmen, and social activists. This campaign transcends geographic boundaries, uniting people from different backgrounds to achieve a common humanitarian goal, a power of collective action and compassion ("Real Kerala Story: Keralites Crowdfund Rs 35.45 Cr to Save Man on Death Row in Saudi," 2024) [22], [23].

The psychological factors influencing the success of the crowdfunding campaign for Abdul Rahim's release were supported significantly by several theories of human psychology explaining donor behaviour. The Empathy-Altruism Hypothesis [24] posits that people are more likely to help when they feel empathy towards the recipient. The portrayal of Abdul Rahim's dilemma during the campaign fostered a strong emotional connection, prompting individuals to donate. The Theory of Planned Behaviour [25] explains how attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control influence decision-making. The social norms of community solidarity in Kerala played a key role in increasing donor participation. Many donors experience psychological benefits from charitable giving, often called the warm-glow effect, which is explained through the theory of warm-glow giving [18]. This effect was reinforced by public acknowledgements of donations and community praise, encouraging sustained contributions to the cause. The Kerala diaspora's strong regional and cultural identity motivated them to contribute to the cause, seeing it as an extension of their collective responsibility, a sense of belonging and self-worth from their group memberships derived from the Social Identity Theory [26]. The Principle of Reciprocity [27] states that people tend to give back when they receive something. The community-driven nature of the campaign, where individuals felt their contributions were reciprocated by social support and recognition, played a significant role in donation behaviours. The Prosocial Behaviour and Social Influence [24] explain that high visibility social media engagement during the campaign portrays where the donors shared their contributions publicly, seeing other people donate created a social contagion effect on encouraging more people to contribute.

2.4 Mass Psychology and Crowdfunding Dynamics

Mass psychology explains how collective emotions, social influences, and herd behaviour drive crowdfunding participation. People's decisions to donate are not always purely rational; they are often shaped by social proof, emotional contagion, and group dynamics. Several key psychological mechanisms explain how mass psychology influences crowdfunding success. People are more likely to donate when they see others contributing, particularly when the campaign reaches a "tipping point" of engagement. High visibility of donations (e.g., real-time donation counters, trending hashtags, or viral shares) creates peer validation, encouraging more people to contribute. The Bandwagon Effect suggests that once a campaign gains momentum, new donors feel compelled to participate to align with the majority.

Mass crowdfunding campaigns leverage emotional narratives that evoke empathy, outrage, or urgency, triggering a collective emotional response. Strong in-group identification—such as regional, religious, or national solidarity—drives participation. For instance, in Kerala's case, the diaspora and local communities united around a common cause. Social media accelerates emotional contagion, where sentiments like compassion or outrage spread rapidly, reinforcing collective action .

2.5 Motivations and Barriers to Participation

Limited-time campaigns, countdowns, and urgent appeals create time pressure, making individuals more likely to act immediately. Donors may feel that not contributing makes them outsiders, especially when influential figures or celebrities endorse the campaign. Endorsements from public figures, activists, or religious leaders increase credibility and perceived legitimacy. Trust in the messenger (rather than just the message) plays a crucial role in mass crowdfunding dynamics.

Some donors contribute due to moral responsibility, believing they should support others because they might need help in the future. The principle of reciprocity (helping others because they would do the same) strengthens community-based crowdfunding models. Individual responsibility is diluted in large-scale crowdfunding, meaning people may donate smaller amounts, assuming others will also contribute. This effect works both positively ("small donations add up") and negatively ("someone else will help, so I don't need to").

Hence, this study seeks to examine the psychological, technological and sociocultural dimensions of crowdfunding participation by analysing the Kerala campaign model for Abdul Rahim as a case study highlighting the emotional appeal, digital mobilisation and collective identity coverage to drive large-scale public engagement for a humanitarian cause.

3. METHODS

This study employed a quantitative research design to investigate donor motivations, perceptions, and engagement during the Abdul Rahim crowdfunding campaign. A self-developed questionnaire, after expert validation, was used as the primary data collection tool. The questionnaire was designed in Malayalam, the regional language, to ensure accessibility and comprehensibility for the target population. All questions were presented in a multiple-choice format, and participants were permitted to select multiple responses where applicable to capture the complexity and nuance of their motivations and experiences. The survey was disseminated via Google Forms across various social media platforms, ensuring wide digital reach. A combination of convenience sampling techniques was employed.

The questionnaire was divided into two parts, beginning with a screening question that asked whether the participant had contributed financially to the campaign. Participants were asked to respond to explore motivations for donating or to the section exploring reasons for not contributing. Additional items covered financial capacity, prior expectations regarding the fundraising outcome, sources of campaign awareness, and emotional and social responses to the campaign's success.

There were 139 responses representing a diverse cross-section of contributors to the campaign. The sample primarily consisted of young adults, with 80.6% of respondents aged between 20 and 30 years, 18% between 30 and 40 years, and the remaining respondents below 20 years. 64% of respondents were female, 34.5% were male respondents, and the remaining participants preferred not to disclose their gender. The sample of 88 (63.3%) people contributed money and 51 (36.6%) people were not. The collected data was quantitative and was analysed using descriptive statistics techniques.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study was conducted to understand donor engagement during the crowdfunding campaign. The respondents were allowed to select multiple sources from which they became aware of the crowdfunding campaign. The majority, 89.1% of respondents, knew about it through social media platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, etc. 19.6% of the respondents became aware through YouTube and online media channels. Other sources included newspapers (5.8%), charitable organisations (8.7%), friends or family (13.8%) and Boby Chemmanur's Boche Charitable Trust campaign (9.4%).
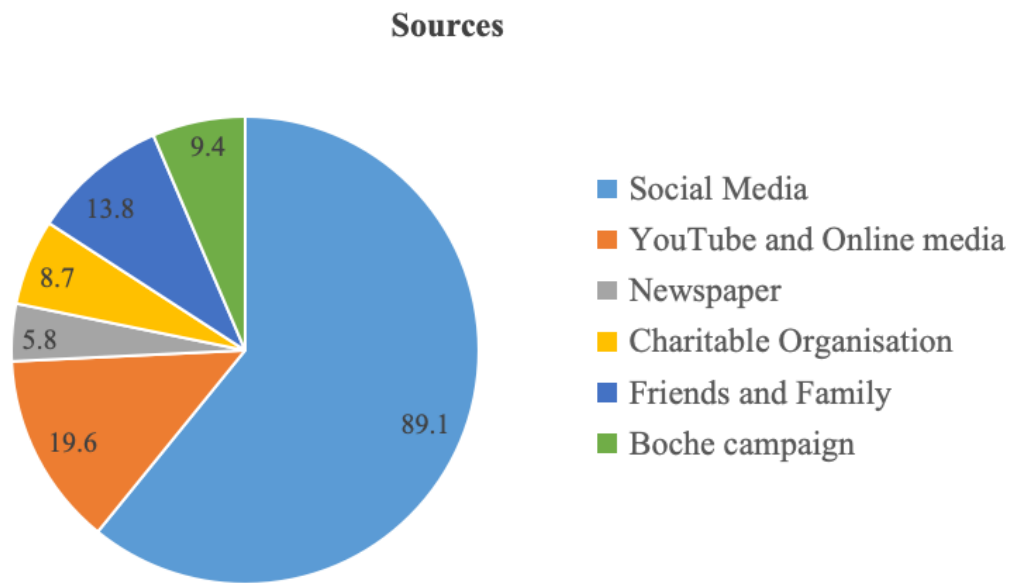
Sources

Figure 1. Sources of the news

Table 1. Responses to Common Questions

Questions	Items	Number	Percentage
1. How did you come to know about the news of Abdul Raheem?	Social Media (Facebook, Instagram, etc.)	123	89.1%
	YouTube/ Online channels (e.g., 24 News, Media One, Asianet, etc.)	27	19.6%
	Via News Papers	8	5.8%
	Via charity organisations	12	8.7%
	Via Family/ Friends	19	13.8%
	Via 'Yajana Yathra' by Boby Chemmannur	13	9.4%
2. Did you expect that the target of 34 crore would be achieved quickly?	Yes	50	36%
	No	89	64%
3. Have you contributed?	Yes	88	63.3%
	No	33	23.7%
	No, but I shared the message with many	18	12.9%
4. How did you feel when you found out that the target of 34 crore had been collected?	A Malayali is awesome	49	35.5%
	There are many people around us with humanity and kindness	112	81.2%

	If I ever face such a need, there will be many people to help me as well	23	16.7%
	When everyone stands together, even the greatest tasks can be achieved easily	83	60.1%
	This was possible because of Bochay (Bobby Chemmannur) stepping in	21	15.2%
	This turned out to be good marketing for Bochay	17	12.3%
	In the guise of this, many more corrupt practices may happen in the future	3	2.2%
	The fundraising happened this way because he was a Muslim	2	1.4%
	Others	5	3.5%

The respondents did not expect the required amount to be collected within a short period, with 64%, while 36% expected the fund to be collected within a short time. 63.3% contributed financially to the campaign, 23.7% did not donate, and 12.9% did not donate but actively shared the campaign message to spread awareness. Among those who were able to donate, 72.7% indicated that they had the financial means to contribute, while 26.1% stated that they used the money that was allocated for other purposes and some borrowed funds to make their contributions.

Table 2. Responses of those who contributed (Total Respondents-88)

Questions	Items	Number	Percentage
1. The time you knew about this fundraising campaign...	I had some money	64	72.7%
	I gave from money I kept for another purpose	23	26.1%
	I borrowed money and contributed	1	1.1%
2. What motivated you to contribute?	The thought that I, too, can be a reason for someone's rescue,	65	73.9%
	Lessons my religion taught me about helping others	46	52.3%
	The empathy towards his mother	30	34.1%
	The belief is that things are transparent because there is an app.	16	18.2%
	frequent exposure to the campaign on social media	12	13.6%
	imagining myself in a similar situation	24	27.3%
	He is from my Religion	3	3.4%
	He is a Keralite	16	18.2%
	Other	3	3.3%

The primary motivation for the donors for their contributions was the belief in playing a role in saving someone's life, with 73.9%. Another major influential factor was the teachings of religions emphasising helping others with 52.3%. Also, empathy for Abdul Rahim's mother, imagining oneself in a similar situation, and frequent exposure to the campaign on social media contributed to the motivation for donating. The transparency of the funding through the app motivated the donors by gaining their trust. Only 3.4% were motivated to donate because Abdul Rahim was a Keralitte and had a sense of regional identity.

Table 3. Responses of those who didn't contribute (Total Respondents-51)

Questions	Items	Number	Percentage
1. I haven't contributed money because...	I wanted to contribute, but I didn't have cash in hand	24	45.3%
	When I went to contribute, the app was stopped because the required amount had already been collected.	16	30.2%
	My small contribution wouldn't have made much of a difference	2	3.8%
	Even if I didn't contribute, the 34 crore would still be collected.	5	9.4%
	Instead of spending such a large amount to save one person, this money could have been used to do many other good deeds.	1	1.9%
	There is a possibility that the money I contribute may not reach those in need and could be taken by others	6	11.3%
	Others	8	15.2

Among the 51 participants who did not financially contribute to the Abdul Rahim crowdfunding campaign, multiple reasons were cited for their non-participation. The most frequently reported barrier was lack of immediate financial availability, with 45.3% (n = 24) stating that they wished to contribute but did not have cash in hand at the time. A significant portion, 30.2% (n = 16), reported that by the time they attempted to contribute, the crowdfunding application had already been closed due to reaching the target amount—highlighting a limitation in platform accessibility and timing.

A smaller proportion, 9.4% (n = 5), expressed the belief that their individual contribution was unnecessary, assuming that the campaign would reach its goal without their support. Similarly, 3.8% (n = 2) felt their donation was too insignificant to make an impact. Only 1.9% (n = 1) articulated a utilitarian objection, suggesting that the large amount collected could have been used for alternative social purposes benefiting a broader population.

Concerns regarding trust were also evident, with 11.3% (n = 6) expressing doubt about the transparency of fund utilisation, fearing potential misappropriation. Lastly, 15.2% (n = 8) selected "Other" and provided diverse reasons, including confusion about how to donate, technical difficulties, hesitation due to lack of personal connection to the beneficiary, or assumptions that the goal would be met without their involvement.

Discussion

The study explored the dynamics of donor engagement during the donation-based crowdfunding campaign initiated to secure Abdul Rahim's release. The findings reveal a multifaceted interplay of digital outreach, emotional motivators, cultural values, and technological trust mechanisms that influenced public participation, highlighting social media's dominant role in propagating crowdfunding campaigns, consistent with previous research on digital engagement and donor participation [6], [28], [29]. There was a high reliance on social media platforms, implying the necessity of using social media strategies to maximise outreach and engagement for crowdfunding.

The respondents indicated that they first became aware of the campaign through social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram, underscoring the centrality of digital ecosystems in mobilising collective action. This aligns with prior research suggesting that social media functions as a digital amplifier, enabling rapid dissemination of emotionally compelling content and activating large-scale donor networks [6], [30]. The virality of this campaign, further supported by YouTube and online media coverage, confirms that platforms with high user engagement and visual storytelling capability were critical conduits for awareness and mobilisation. The relatively lower engagement from traditional sources such as newspapers and NGOs suggests a paradigm shift from conventional charitable communication to peer-driven digital crowdfunding models.

Through digital platforms, there was an increase in visibility and facilitated engagement, allowing individuals to share donation links, updates, and emotional appeals. The campaign's virality demonstrated the power of digital networks in accelerating financial contributions, making social media an essential tool for future fundraising programs. This finding is also supported by [30], highlighting that social media exposure significantly influences donation intention by increasing trust, engagement, and the campaign's visibility, also focusing on the importance of online peer influence, where seeing others donate encourages participation.

Also, psychological factors played a significant role in donating behaviour. The primary motivator cited was the moral imperative to "play a role in saving a life", echoing the altruistic dimension of Self-Determination Theory [31]. Religious teachings that emphasise charity and moral duty motivated respondents, demonstrating the influence of cultural-religious schemas in shaping donor behaviour. Interestingly, only a few were driven by regional identity, challenging the assumption that ethnic or regional solidarity is a dominant driver in transnational humanitarian crowdfunding. Instead, empathy for Abdul Rahim's mother, exposure to emotionally charged content, and social media repetition were more potent motivators—aligning with mass psychological principles such as emotional contagion and narrative transportation.

The high percentage of respondents who donated due to empathy, religious values, and perceived social responsibility aligns with the Empathy-Altruism Hypothesis [24] and Social Identity Theory [26]. Also, the emotional response to the campaign's success indicates the power of collective action and community-driven philanthropic nature. However, on the other hand, [30] found that attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control did not significantly influence donation intention, suggesting that while personal beliefs and social norms might play a role in traditional giving, online donation behaviour influenced more by trust, platform credibility and ease of transaction.

A significant proportion of respondents did not anticipate that the targeted amount would be raised in a short span, reflecting initial scepticism about the feasibility of large-scale, public-led fundraising. However, the fact that Rs. 34 Crore was raised in an unprecedentedly short period exemplifies the power of digitally-coordinated collective action, contradicting traditional assumptions about the limitations of public fundraising.

Notably, those who contributed despite financial strain, either reallocating budgeted funds or borrowing money, speaks to the depth of emotional investment and social obligation felt by participants, even at personal cost—resonating with the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) Theory, where emotional stimuli trigger internalised cognitive-affective responses, resulting in altruistic action despite rational constraints.

The results reinforced the importance of trust and transparency in donation-based crowdfunding. The use of the dedicated app for crowdfunding provided real-time updates and contributed to donor confidence, which aligned with studies on digital trust and financial transparency [32]. [30] highlighted that donors are more likely to contribute when the platform is professionally and visually appealing, where the information is clearly presented, with live updates and financial tracking, which is easy to navigate and user-friendly.

While many were willing to donate, respondents also cited financial limitations as the primary barrier, and few could not contribute due to app closure. Moreover, the absence of ideological opposition, i.e., no respondent believed Abdul Rahim should not be saved, suggests an overwhelming public consensus driven not by political or legal considerations but by humanitarian impulse.

The emotional aftermath of the campaign's success was equally instructive. The majority of respondents felt reassured by societal compassion, while others saw it as proof of collective efficacy. These perceptions are illustrative of positive reinforcement loops in prosocial behaviour—when people witness the successful outcomes of collective action, their belief in civic engagement and social solidarity is strengthened. Pride in the community and confidence in social responsiveness

further reinforce the potential of crowdfunding to become a social integrator, particularly in diasporic or transregional contexts.

These findings suggest that successful crowdfunding campaigns integrate transparent communication, digital engagement and psychological triggers to maximise donor participation and trust for crowdfunding during a crisis, emphasising the role of social networks, trust-building mechanisms and transparent financial management in facilitating huge amounts of donations.

The results of this research can serve as a model for designing sustainable and transparent crowdfunding campaigns for future humanitarian initiatives.

Implications

The study's findings have several implications, highlighting the importance of designing effective, transparent, and emotionally compelling crowdfunding campaigns. Also, social media is considered the primary medium for mobilisation, causing the campaign's virality and demonstrating the importance of leveraging digital networks to maximise the reach.

The findings reveal that crowdfunding in humanitarian crises is not merely a financial phenomenon but a socio-psychological process influenced by emotional resonance, digital design, social norms, and perceived transparency. The campaign's success was made possible not only through effective digital mobilisation and narrative framing but also because it activated collective empathy and moral imagination. The role of mass psychology—emotional contagion, social proof, peer pressure, and moral urgency—was crucial in converting passive awareness into active participation.

Going forward, digital crowdfunding platforms must leverage trust-building technologies, maximise temporal accessibility, and incorporate multi-level donor engagement strategies (monetary, emotional, and social). In doing so, they can transcend the limitations of traditional charity models and redefine public participation in social justice and humanitarian efforts.

The live updates on the fund collection and utilisation enhance donor confidence and reduce scepticism about fund misuse. Empathy and moral obligation can drive participation, and these can be incorporated by personal storytelling and emotional appeals to strengthen donor engagement. Encouraging information sharing and social proof can significantly enhance campaign success, even among those who cannot contribute financially, and it makes them feel included in participation monetarily and non-monetarily.

Limitations

The study is subject to several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the sample size was relatively moderate (N = 139), which may limit the generalisability of the findings beyond the study context. Although the responses provide meaningful insights into donor behaviour during the Abdul Rahim crowdfunding campaign, a larger and more demographically diverse sample could have strengthened the robustness of the conclusions.

Also, the data collection was conducted exclusively through an online survey using Google Forms circulated via social media. This methodological choice inherently excludes individuals who were not active on digital platforms or who may have contributed through offline channels, such as direct cash donations, in-person transfers, or participation in local community fundraisers. Given that the campaign also received substantial offline support, the findings may not fully represent the breadth of public engagement across all segments of the population.

These limitations underscore the need for future research to adopt mixed-method approaches, incorporating offline data collection and broader demographic representation to develop a more comprehensive understanding of crowdfunding dynamics in diverse contexts.

CONCLUSION

This study analyzes donor behavior in a donation-based crowdfunding campaign conducted in Kerala, India, to free Abdul Rahim from the death penalty in Saudi Arabia in 2024. The research reveals the significant role of social media in mobilizing funds, as well as the psychological motivations underlying donor engagement, including empathy, moral obligation, and social solidarity. The findings show that financial transparency through crowdfunding applications increases donor trust, while intrinsic motivations such as empathy and a desire to help play an important role in the decision to contribute. This campaign also highlights the importance of collective action and social identity in increasing participation. The study shows that successful crowdfunding campaigns depend not only on financial transparency and effective digital platform design, but also on the use of emotional elements, compelling narratives, and the role of the community in driving contributions. With widespread social media engagement and support from influencers, the campaign successfully raised funds in a short period of time, exceeding initial expectations. These findings also confirm the application of social psychology theories, such as the Empathy-Altruism Hypothesis and Social Identity Theory, which motivate donors to participate. As a recommendation, future crowdfunding platforms need to utilize technology that builds trust, maximizes time accessibility, and develops multi-layered donor engagement strategies to increase campaign success. The experience from this campaign can serve as a model for designing more transparent and community-based crowdfunding campaigns in the future.

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