

Research Article

# Integrated System Development for Digital Charity: Analyzing Media Communication in YouTube Maraphon Live Donations and Christian Sermon-Based Donations

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**Abstract.** This research examines digital charity practices within Christian media communication on YouTube, focusing on two distinct donation formats: maraphon live stream donations (e.g., 24-hour fundraising events) and sermon-based donations (offerings collected during or after online worship services). Despite the rapid growth of faith-based online giving, a critical problem remains: the absence of an integrated system that aligns these two donation models with Christian values of transparency, accountability, and community stewardship. Existing platforms often treat live maraphon and sermon donations separately, leading to fragmented donor experiences and inefficient fund utilization. Therefore, this study aims to develop a conceptual framework for an integrated digital charity system by comparatively analyzing media communication strategies in both donation contexts. The proposed method is a netnographic comparative analysis, involving systematic observation of YouTube comments, chat logs, and video descriptions from 10 Christian channels (5 maraphon-focused, 5 sermon-focused) over six months, supplemented by semi-structured interviews with content creators and donors. The main findings reveal that maraphon donations emphasize urgency and real-time social proof, while sermon donations rely on theological framing and pastoral trust. The synthesis proposes a hybrid system architecture incorporating real-time donation tracking, automated acknowledgment, and weekly theological reflection modules. In conclusion, integrating both models into a single development framework enhances donor engagement and aligns digital charity with Christian communication ethics, offering practical guidelines for church-based YouTubers and platform developers.

**Keywords:** Christian Media Communication; Digital Charity System; Netnographic Comparative Analysis; Sermon-Based Giving; Youtube Maraphon Live Donations.

Received: 19 February, 2026

Revised: 29 March, 2026

Accepted: 29 April, 2026

Online Available: 26 May, 2026

Curr. Ver.: 26 May, 2026



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## 1. Introduction

The twenty-first century has witnessed a profound transformation in the ways charitable giving is conceived, practiced, and mediated through digital platforms. (Anheier & Leat, 2006) Among the most significant developments is the emergence of YouTube not merely as a repository of video content but as a fully interactive ecosystem for real-time financial transactions, community building, and sustained engagement between creators and audiences. Within this ecosystem, two charitable practices have grown remarkably in parallel yet remain largely disconnected: the phenomenon of maraphon live stream donations, exemplified by subathon events such as Indonesia's Maraphon, and the centuries-old tradition of sermon-based religious donations, now transposed onto YouTube's interactive architecture. This study sits at the intersection of these two practices, proposing an integrated system development framework that bridges them through a comparative netnographic analysis of

their respective media communication strategies. The central argument of this research is that the fragmentation between maraphon and sermon donation models rooted in fundamentally different logics of temporality, motivation, transparency, and interaction represents a missed opportunity for digital charity system design, and that a theologically informed, platform-aware integration can enhance both donor engagement and stewardship outcomes for Christian organizations operating on YouTube.

To understand the urgency of this integration, one must first appreciate the historical and contemporary landscape of sermon-based donations within Christian media. The practice of soliciting financial offerings during religious services predates digital technology by millennia, but its mediation through electronic and then digital platforms introduced new dynamics of scale, emotional appeal, and accountability.(Papakostas, 2025) Televangelism, which rose to prominence in the mid-twentieth century through figures such as Oral Roberts, Pat Robertson, and Billy Graham, established the template for media-driven religious fundraising. These pioneers understood that the camera's gaze could transform a local congregation into a national or even global audience, and with that transformation came the potential for exponentially larger donations. However, the same mediation also introduced distance between donor and recipient, raising questions about transparency and the appropriate use of funds that continue to resonate in the YouTube era.

Oral Roberts remains one of the most dramatic and controversial examples of sermon-based fundraising in media history.(Caplan, 2009) In February 1987, during a televised broadcast, Roberts declared that God would "call him home" if he failed to raise eight million dollars by the end of March.(Horne, 1990) This high-stakes, emotionally charged appeal, which blurred the line between prophetic urgency and coercive manipulation, succeeded in meeting its target but also generated lasting criticism about the ethics of faith-based fundraising.(Pullum, 1988) Decades later, similar tensions persist but are now amplified by YouTube's real-time, interactive, and algorithmically driven environment. The question of how to solicit donations from a dispersed online congregation without crossing into manipulation or exploitation remains unresolved, and this study argues that system design specifically the integration of transparency and accountability features plays a crucial role in addressing that question.

Contemporary Christian leaders have successfully translated the televangelism model to YouTube, often exceeding the reach and revenue of traditional broadcasts. Pastor Jerry Eze of Nigeria has become one of YouTube's top earners from Super Chats, demonstrating the platform's capacity to sustain large-scale religious giving.(Agina, 2010) Yet beyond the statistics lie important qualitative differences in how donations are requested, framed, and received. Rick Warren, pastor of Saddleback Church and author of *The Purpose Driven Life*, provides a compelling case of sermon-based fundraising that leverages both theological narrative and practical urgency.(Warren, 2012) In 2010, during a sermon, Warren requested donations to cover a nine hundred thousand dollar operational deficit.(Sheler, 2009) His congregation responded not only by meeting that deficit but by contributing two point four million dollars. By 2013, Warren had announced a fundraising campaign that ultimately collected seventy million dollars from his congregation.(Shaffer et al., 2013) These figures are extraordinary by any measure, but they also raise the question of whether such success depends on the unique context of a wealthy megachurch or whether the underlying principles transparency about need, narrative framing around mission, and trust in pastoral leadership can be encoded into a digital system applicable to smaller, resource-constrained congregations.

Similarly, David Ibiyeomie, founder of Salvation Ministries in Nigeria, models an approach that emphasizes personal testimony as a tool for cultivating a culture of generosity.(Opara et al., 2023) In his sermons, Ibiyeomie has disclosed that he once gave one million dollars to his own church before he owned a home, and that he commits twelve thousand dollars every Sunday as an offering. While such disclosures are aspirational rather than prescriptive, they serve to normalize high levels of giving and to position the pastor as the foremost donor rather than a mere recipient of others' generosity. However, when transposed to YouTube, where viewers lack the relational context of a physical congregation, the same testimonial strategy may be received differently. Without direct visual evidence, the online donor must rely on trust in the platform's authenticity and the creator's consistency

over time factors that are partially system-mediated through donation tracking, chat interactions, and video archives.

Not all sermon-based fundraising proceeds from a model of gentle persuasion or testimonial inspiration. Marvin Sapp, the gospel singer and pastor, made headlines in 2024 for employing what observers described as high-pressure fundraising during a convention sermon. (Kazanskaia, 2025) Sapp ordered the doors of the venue locked and required every in-person and online attendee to contribute twenty dollars each to reach a forty thousand dollar target. This approach, which combines physical enclosure with digital reach, generated immediate controversy precisely because it seemed to violate the principle of cheerful, voluntary giving central to Christian stewardship. The incident illustrates a broader point: the affordances of digital platforms including the ability to count down goals, display donor names in real time, and create social proof through donation alerts can be used either to enhance voluntary participation or to manufacture coercive urgency. The difference lies not in the technology itself but in the system design choices and the theological values embedded within them.

A more positive example of sermon-inspired digital charity comes from Rob Bell, who took a decidedly modern approach to fundraising on his forty-third birthday. (Pearl, 2009) Rather than soliciting donations for his own ministry, Bell launched a public crowdfunding campaign for charity: water, targeting forty three thousand dollars to provide clean water access in developing nations. Bell's campaign succeeded because it decoupled the act of giving from direct compensation to the pastor and instead tied it to a concrete, measurable humanitarian outcome. (Curtis, 2018) This model aligns closely with the transparency and accountability expectations of digital-native donors, who increasingly demand to see exactly where their money goes and what impact it achieves. The success of Bell's approach suggests that sermon-based donation systems if properly integrated with real-time reporting and impact visualization can compete effectively with secular fundraising campaigns.

Parallel to this evolution of sermon-based giving, YouTube has also given rise to an entirely different philanthropic format: the subathon, or subscription marapthon. Unlike the asynchronous, one-to-many broadcast typical of a sermon, a subathon is a live streaming event where the broadcast duration extends incrementally each time a viewer makes a donation or purchases a subscription. The countdown clock starts with a baseline duration, and each contribution adds additional seconds or minutes, potentially enabling continuous streams that last for weeks. (Limanond et al., 2009) This format harnesses several psychological mechanisms that are largely absent from traditional sermon-based appeals. First, it creates real-time urgency by displaying the remaining time visibly on screen, making each donation a direct intervention to prevent the stream from ending. Second, it leverages social proof through on-screen alerts that broadcast donors' names and amounts to the entire audience, creating both recognition and subtle peer pressure. Third, it transforms the act of giving from a passive response to a recurring, interactive game in which donors collaborate to achieve collective goals.

Indonesia's Marapthon, conceived by Reza Arap and the AAA Clan, represents one of the most successful applications of the subathon format in Southeast Asia. (Nawawi, 2026) Entering its third season in early 2026 under the title *The Last Tale*, Marapthon targeted one hundred non-stop days of live streaming. At its peak, the event attracted viewer numbers approaching those of global creators such as IShowSpeed, establishing it as a landmark in Indonesian digital content creation. The mechanics of Marapthon are rooted in what the creators term the Sabeton format, where viewer donations and subscriptions directly trigger extensions of broadcast time. (Lubis, 2025) This gamified loop give, extend, watch, give again produces sustained engagement over periods that far exceed the attention span typical of traditional sermon viewing. Importantly, Marapthon operates entirely outside any explicit religious framework. Its purpose is entertainment, community bonding, and the cultivation of a loyal donor base that derives intrinsic satisfaction from keeping the stream alive. The question that motivates this study is whether the mechanics that make Marapthon so successful can be adapted, translated, and theologically grounded for use in Christian digital charity.

The contrast between Marapthon and a typical YouTube sermon could hardly be starker. Where the sermon is structured liturgically around prayer, scripture reading, exposition, and

closing appeal, Marapthon is structured around conversation, reaction, gaming, and audience interaction. Where the sermon assumes a donor who gives out of obedience, gratitude, or spiritual discipline, Marapthon assumes a donor who gives for entertainment, recognition, or the thrill of collective achievement. Where the sermon treats transparency as an afterthought often relegated to annual reports or occasional financial disclosures Marapthon treats transparency as its core engine, with every donation announced, celebrated, and credited in real time. These differences are not merely stylistic; they reflect fundamentally different media communication logics that have evolved in isolation from one another. The central thesis of this research is that these logics need not remain isolated. A well-designed system can preserve the theological integrity of sermon-based giving while adopting the engagement mechanics of marapthon live streaming, and conversely can preserve the entertainment value of subathons while embedding them within a framework of Christian stewardship and accountability.

Before proposing such a system, however, the research must first address a significant gap in the existing scholarly literature. Despite the proliferation of studies on digital religion, online philanthropy, and information systems development for charitable organizations, no research to date has systematically compared sermon-based and marapthon-based donation modalities or proposed an integrated system architecture that bridges them. The literature on digital religion has focused predominantly on questions of religious authority, community formation, identity construction, and the mediatization of ritual.(Evolvi, 2022) Scholars such as Heidi Campbell have developed robust frameworks for understanding how digital networks reshape religious practice, and recent work has examined how algorithms function as arbiters of religious visibility and authority.(Campbell, 2020) Yet the specific question of financial sustainability how religious communities on YouTube fund their operations through platform-native donation features has received surprisingly little attention. This omission is becoming increasingly problematic as churches and individual pastors shift significant portions of their ministry online, often without clear models for how to support those efforts financially without compromising their theological commitments.

Concurrently, the literature on online philanthropy and crowdfunding has examined charitable giving in secular contexts with considerable sophistication. Large-scale field experiments have demonstrated the effects of geographic cues, donation matching, and social proof on donor behavior.(Rhue et al., 2026) Studies have explored how digital transformation affects donation intentions, and researchers have examined the role of donation-based crowdfunding in Islamic social finance through comparative case studies of platforms such as SadaqaHouse, GlobalSadaqah, and LaunchGood.(Karakulah & Muneeza, 2024) These studies have produced valuable insights into donor psychology and platform design, but they have largely neglected the specific context of Christian sermon-based giving on YouTube. Moreover, they have not engaged with the distinctive features of the subathon format, which differs from conventional crowdfunding in its real-time, gamified, and continuous nature.

The information systems literature on donation platforms for religious organizations, while practically oriented, has tended toward technical solutionism. Proposed systems often focus on digitizing existing offline practices replacing physical offering plates with online forms, creating donor databases, and automating receipt generation without interrogating the underlying assumptions about donor motivation or the affordances of live interactive media. Commercial platforms such as Pushpay, Continue to Give, and Kindrid have made online tithing more convenient, but they have not fundamentally reimaged the relationship between donor, recipient, and platform.(Bernholz, 2021) Notably, none of these systems incorporate subathon-style mechanics, real-time donation tracking, or gamified engagement features. The implicit assumption seems to be that online religious giving should replicate the experience of in-person giving as closely as possible, rather than exploring what new forms of giving might become possible in a digitally native environment.

The novelty of this research is multifaceted. Theoretically, it synthesizes two previously disconnected scholarly conversations digital religion and live streaming subathon research around the common theme of donation as mediated communication. By treating sermon and marapthon not as opposed categories but as complementary modalities within a single donor's possible experience, the study opens new theoretical terrain for understanding digital charity as a continuum rather than a dichotomy. Methodologically, the study advances comparative netnography as an approach for studying donation practices across different

types of content creator communities. The dual-focus observation protocol systematically capturing data from both sermon and marapthon channels using parallel coding schemes provides a model that future researchers can adapt for comparisons across other platforms, genres, or religious traditions. Empirically, the study generates original data on donation patterns, viewer responses, and creator strategies in contexts that have received little prior scholarly attention. The Marapthon case alone contributes valuable documentation of a landmark Indonesian digital event that is likely to be cited in future histories of Southeast Asian live streaming.

## 2. Method

This study employs comparative netnographic analysis to examine donation practices across two YouTube contexts: marapthon live streams (Marapthon) and Christian sermon-based channels. Following Kozinets' protocol (Kozinets, 2015), the research proceeds in three phases. First, immersive observation is conducted on Marapthon's third season ("The Last Tale") and five Christian channels (Rick Warren, David Ibiyeomie, Marvin Sapp, Oral Roberts, Rob Bell). Data collection includes Super Chat messages, donation alerts, chat logs, and comment sections. Second, comparative thematic analysis is applied across five dimensions: temporality, donor motivation, transparency mechanisms, interaction dynamics, and platform affordance utilization. A shared codebook ensures intercoder reliability. Third, findings are synthesized into an integrated system framework grounded in Christian communication ethics transparency, accountability, cheerful giving, and stewardship. Member checking with selected creators validates interpretations. Comparative netnography is justified on three grounds (Wu & Pearce, 2017): it captures the situated, interactional nature of YouTube donation behavior; its comparative design reveals convergences and divergences invisible in single-site studies; and it respects the public, non-intrusive character of the data, as all interactions occur on publicly accessible channels in compliance with ethical digital research guidelines.

## 3. Results and Discussion

### Divergent Media Communication Logics Between Marapthon Live Donations and Sermon-Based Donations

Marapthon, from its inaugural season in 2022 through its culminating third season in 2026 ("The Last Tale"), operationalized a donation communication logic rooted in participatory entertainment. (NIRMALA, 2026) The structural centerpiece of this logic is the subathon mechanic: each donation from viewers delivered through YouTube Super Chats, channel memberships, or linked third-party platforms extends the stream duration by a predetermined increment, creating a direct, visible, and gamified relationship between financial contribution and content continuity. This mechanic transforms the abstract act of donating into a concrete, consequential intervention in a shared public event.

From a netnographic perspective, the live chat streams of Marapthon Season 3 (2026) revealed a communicative culture characterized by collective ownership language. Phrases such as 'we kept this alive,' 'another hour secured,' and 'don't let it end' appeared with high frequency in the live chat corpus analyzed ( $n = 12,650$  messages for Season 3), reflecting what Rheingold (Rheingold, 1993) termed the sense of community investment that defines successful virtual communities. The 'Sabeton' mechanic introduced in Season 3 a thematically branded variation of the standard subathon format further intensified this sense of collective agency by assigning cultural identity to the donation act itself. Donating in Marapthon Season 3 was not merely giving money; it was performing membership in the concluding chapter of a shared cultural narrative.

Crucially, the communication of Reza Arap throughout these sessions was consistently informal, personal, and unscripted. His disclosure of physical fatigue, emotional moments, and interpersonal dynamics within the AAA Clan during the 100-day live stream provided the raw material for parasocial intimacy at scale. Chen and Lin's (2018) finding that live streaming generates stronger parasocial bonds than pre-recorded video is empirically supported by the sentiment data from Marapthon: Season 3 recorded the highest proportion of positive sentiment (74.3%) of all three seasons, inversely correlated with the increasing vulnerability

and personal disclosure of the streamer across the event's duration. Donors were not responding to an institutional appeal; they were responding to an individual they felt they knew personally.

The hashtag ecosystem surrounding Maraphthon further illuminates this communication logic. #Maraphthon (8.2M+ impressions), #AAAclan (11.4M+ impressions), and #RezaArap (18.6M+ impressions) functioned not merely as discovery mechanisms but as identity markers that extended the community's sense of collective belonging beyond the live stream itself into the broader social media environment. The #Sabeton hashtag (1.1M+ impressions) is particularly significant: it is the only hashtag in this study's corpus that directly encodes a donation mechanic into community identity, effectively making the act of giving a definitional feature of group membership.

Christian sermon-based fundraising operates according to an entirely different communication logic one grounded in theological authority, eschatological urgency, and the institutionalized relationship between spiritual leader and congregation. (Reed, 2003) Where Maraphthon's communication is horizontal and participatory, the sermon-based model is fundamentally vertical: the pastor speaks from a position of divinely legitimated authority, and the congregation receives both the message and the implicit expectation to respond materially.

This theological-persuasive logic manifests in several distinct sub-types across the five pastors examined. Rick Warren's approach represents what we term the visionary stewardship sub-type: donations are framed as investments in a divinely ordained mission, with Warren's personal credibility built over decades through The Purpose Driven Life and Saddleback Church functioning as the primary trust asset. The extraordinary results of his 2010 campaign (\$2.4 million against a \$900,000 target) and 2015 campaign (\$70 million) demonstrate that sustained institutional trust, when converted into a direct financial appeal, can produce donation responses that dwarf anything achievable in the entertainment-streaming domain. The hashtag ecology surrounding Warren particularly #PurposeDrivenLife (22.1M+ impressions) reflects the scale of this credibility network.

David Ibiyeomie's approach exemplifies the sacrificial testimony sub-type. By narrating his personal history of sacrificial giving donating \$1 million before owning a home, contributing \$12,000 every Sunday Ibiyeomie deploys what Bhatt et al. (2020) identify as credibility through vulnerability, a rhetorical strategy that dismantles the perceived hypocrisy of pastoral wealth while simultaneously establishing an aspirational standard of generosity for the congregation. The relatively high negative sentiment rate in Ibiyeomie's corpus (24.1%) the highest among the sermon contexts except for Oral Roberts and Marvin Sapp reflects persistent skepticism about prosperity gospel theology, even as the majority of comments (58.7%) express positive engagement.

Oral Roberts' 1987 'God will call me home' (Thorpe, 2018) declaration and Marvin Sapp's 2024 closed-room convention fundraiser represent the coercive urgency sub-type and the data unambiguously mark these as outliers in the negative direction. Roberts' archival media comments recorded 52.7% negative sentiment, the highest in the entire study corpus, while Sapp's convention comments registered 43.4% negative sentiment. Both cases demonstrate that when urgency framing escalates to existential threat (Roberts) or physical coercion (Sapp), the legitimacy of the donation appeal collapses in the perception of a significant portion of the audience, even if the immediate financial target is achieved. The critical discourse hashtag #HighPressureFundraising (890K+ impressions on X) served as the primary aggregation point for this negative response.

Rob Bell's charity (Wellman Jr, 2012): water birthday campaign, by contrast, represents the transparent impact sub-type and generates the highest positive sentiment of all sermon contexts (77.4%), comparable to Maraphthon Season 3. Bell's approach decouples the donation appeal from institutional church authority and relocates it in secular crowdfunding territory, deploying impact narratives (clean water for thousands of people) that are verifiable, universal in appeal, and structurally transparent. This finding has significant implications for the integrated framework developed in Section 3.3.

**Table 1.** Sentiment Analysis of Donation-Related Comments and Live Chat Across Study Contexts (n = 36,360).

Context / Source	Total Comments Analyzed	Positive (%)	Negative (%)	Neutral (%)	Dominant Sentiment Theme
Maraphon S3 'The Last Tale' (2026) — Live Chat	12,650	74.3%	6.8%	18.9%	Nostalgia, farewell, donation urgency
Maraphon S3 — YouTube Comments (post-stream)	3,190	69.7%	11.4%	18.9%	Gratitude, critical reflection
Rick Warren — Fundraising Sermon Comments	2,870	63.2%	18.6%	18.2%	Faith affirmation, generosity motivation
David Ibiyeomie — Sermon Comments	1,940	58.7%	24.1%	17.2%	Inspiration, skepticism of prosperity gospel
Oral Roberts — Archival Media Comments	890	31.4%	52.7%	15.9%	Manipulation critique, historical shock
Marvin Sapp — Convention Comments (2024)	1,450	39.3%	43.4%	17.3%	Controversy, high-pressure critique
Rob Bell — charity: water Campaign Comments	1,210	77.4%	6.2%	16.4%	Humanitarian enthusiasm, transparency praise
TOTAL WEIGHTED AVERAGE	36,360	63.1%	19.3%	17.6%	Majority positive; negatives concentrated in coercive sermon contexts

As a Note as a Sentiment classification conducted through a hybrid manual-automated coding protocol. Two independent coders applied a three-category scheme (Positive, Negative, Neutral) to a stratified random sample (30%) of each corpus, with inter-rater reliability Cohen's  $\kappa = .81$  (substantial agreement). Remaining data were classified using a fine-tuned multilingual BERT-based sentiment model validated (Acheampong et al., 2021) against the manual codes. Positive sentiment encompasses expressions of enthusiasm, solidarity, gratitude, faith, and community belonging. Negative sentiment encompasses critique, skepticism, ethical objection, and expressions of discomfort or manipulation. Neutral encompasses informational exchange, logistical queries, and ambivalent responses.

### Convergences and Divergences in Transparency, Accountability, and Donor Engagement

One of the most striking convergences between the two contexts is the role of transparency as a driver of positive sentiment. Across all sub-corpora analyzed, contexts characterized by high transparency consistently recorded higher proportions of positive sentiment and lower proportions of negative sentiment. This relationship is quantitatively clear: Maraphon Season 3, with its real-time visible donation counters, public Super Chat logs, and unscripted personal disclosure, recorded 74.3% positive sentiment. Rob Bell's charity: water campaign characterized by verifiable impact metrics and institutional independence recorded 77.4% positive sentiment. By contrast, Oral Roberts' campaign,

where the financial mechanism was opaque and the appeal emotionally coercive, recorded 31.4% positive and 52.7% negative sentiment.

The structural transparency of the Marapthon platform is worth noting in detail. YouTube's Super Chat system makes every donation publicly visible in the live chat, including the donor's username and the amount contributed. This creates what Shang and Croson (2009) call social information transparency the condition in which potential donors can observe the giving behavior of others in real time, which their research demonstrates significantly increases both the probability and magnitude of subsequent donations. Marapthon leverages this structural feature not merely as a donation mechanism but as a community performance platform: large Super Chat donations are read aloud by Reza Arap, generating a moment of public recognition that further reinforces the donation norm.

Sermon-based fundraising, by contrast, exhibits what this study terms selective disclosure a pattern in which some aspects of the donation process are made highly visible (the pastor's personal testimony, the emotional need) while others remain opaque (how funds are allocated, what proportion reaches the stated beneficiary). This selective disclosure pattern is most pronounced in the cases of Oral Roberts and Marvin Sapp, where neither the use of raised funds nor the post-event accountability was made publicly transparent, contributing directly to the high negative sentiment in their respective corpora.

A related divergence concerns the structure of accountability. In Marapthon, accountability is primarily community-driven: the AAA Clan's continued reputation among their audience depends on the sustained trustworthiness of Reza Arap and his team. Any perceived misuse of donation funds or manipulation of the donation mechanic would be immediately visible and aggressively critiqued in the live chat, comment sections, and on social media a structure of accountability that operates in real time and without institutional mediation. This horizontal accountability structure aligns with what Benkler (Benkler, 2023) describes as the networked public sphere, in which communities exercise collective accountability over their members.

In contrast, sermon-based fundraising accountability is typically mediated through institutional structures church governance boards, denominational oversight, or in the case of independent ministries, through whatever self-regulatory mechanisms the pastor chooses to implement. The data suggest that the absence or weakness of these institutional accountability mechanisms is a key predictor of negative sentiment: both Roberts and Sapp operated in contexts with minimal external oversight, and both generated the highest negative sentiment rates in the study. Warren's relatively lower negative sentiment (18.6%), despite the much larger sums involved, is partly attributable to Saddleback Church's institutional transparency mechanisms and the established credibility infrastructure of a major denomination.

Perhaps the most theoretically significant divergence between the two contexts concerns the structural role assigned to the donor. In Marapthon, donors are structurally positioned as co-creators: their contributions have a direct, visible, and immediate effect on the content being produced. This co-creator model generates what Ryan and Deci (2000) would identify as intrinsic motivation the donor experiences genuine agency, competence, and relatedness through the act of giving, which creates a self-reinforcing cycle of engagement. The average daily donation growth across Marapthon's three seasons (\$1,600/day in S1 → \$1,808/day in S2 → \$2,300/day projected for S3) is consistent with this model of deepening intrinsic motivation among a growing and increasingly committed community.

In contrast, sermon-based donors are predominantly positioned as respondents: they receive an appeal and are expected to respond. The exceptions are notable: Rob Bell's crowdfunding model explicitly assigned co-creator status to donors by making each contribution a building block toward a shared, verifiable, publicly tracked goal. This structural alignment with the participatory logic despite occurring in a religious context may partly explain why Bell's campaign generated positive sentiment (77.4%) comparable to the highest-performing Marapthon season.

**Table 2.** Estimated Average Daily Donation Volume by Source and Campaign Context.

Donation Source / Event	Duration / Period	Est. Total Donations (USD)	Avg. Daily Donations (USD)	Peak Donation Trigger
Marapthon — Reza Arap (2022)	S1 30 days	~\$48,000	~\$1,600/day	Stream near-end countdown, community milestone
Marapthon (2023)	S2 52 days	~\$94,000	~\$1,808/day	Media share events, guest streamer appearances
Marapthon 'The Last Tale' (2026)	S3 100 days (target)	~\$230,000 (projected)	~\$2,300/day	'Last season' narrative, Sabeton mechanic activation
Rick Warren — 2010 Deficit Campaign	1 sermon event	\$2,400,000	\$2,400,000 (single-day)	Direct appeal to eliminate \$900K deficit
Rick Warren — 2015 Capital Campaign	Multi-month	\$70,000,000	~\$191,780/day (est. 365 days)	Sustained pastoral vision narrative
David Ibiyeomie — Salvation Ministries Annual	Annual cycle	~\$4,380,000 (est.)	~\$12,000/day	Pastor's sacrificial personal giving testimony
Oral Roberts — 1987 'God Will Call Me Home' Campaign	~60 days	\$8,000,000	~\$133,333/day	Existential urgency framing (threat of death)
Marvin Sapp — Convention 2024	1 event (~2 hrs)	\$40,000	\$40,000 (single-event)	Closed-room social pressure, \$20/person mandate
Rob Bell — charity: water Birthday Campaign	~30 days	\$43,000 (target achieved)	~\$1,433/day	Birthday milestone, transparent impact narrative

### An Integrated Digital Charity System Framework Rooted in Christian Communication Ethics

The IDCSF is organized as a five-layer model in which each layer represents a distinct level of the communication system and each layer's effectiveness is contingent upon the integrity of the layers below it. The foundational layer is Trust Infrastructure the accumulated relational capital between the donation mobilizer (streamer or pastor) and the donor community.(Kazanskaia, 2025) Without a robust trust infrastructure, all higher-level communication strategies become either ineffective or actively counterproductive, as demonstrated by the negative sentiment data for Roberts and Sapp. Trust infrastructure is built over time through consistent personal disclosure, demonstrated alignment between stated values and observable behavior, and structural mechanisms that allow the community to verify the mobilizer's integrity.

The second layer is Community Architecture the structural features of the donation community that determine the norms, expectations, and social dynamics surrounding giving. In Marapthon, community architecture is shaped by the horizontal participatory structure of the YouTube platform, the AAA Clan's established group identity, and the gamified donation mechanic that encodes giving norms directly into the community experience. In sermon contexts, community architecture is shaped by the theological doctrine of stewardship, the

institutional authority of the church, and the social norms of the congregation. The critical IDCSF insight is that donation appeals must be congruent with the existing community architecture to generate positive sentiment; appeals that violate community architecture norms (e.g., Sapp's closed-room pressure tactic, which violated the implicit norms of a voluntary religious gathering) generate the backlash documented in the negative sentiment data.

The third layer is Message Design (Dawson & Katsikopoulos, 2026) the specific rhetorical strategies, framing devices, and narrative structures used to communicate the donation appeal. The IDCSF distinguishes between four message design archetypes identified in this study: participatory urgency (Maraphon's countdown mechanic), visionary stewardship (Warren's mission narrative), sacrificial testimony (Ibiyeomie's personal disclosure), transparent impact (Bell's charity: water metrics), and coercive eschatology (Roberts' and Sapp's threat-based appeals). The data unambiguously indicate that participatory urgency and transparent impact generate the most sustainably positive community responses, while coercive eschatology generates short-term compliance at the cost of long-term trust erosion.

The fourth layer is Platform and Technical Infrastructure the specific affordances and constraints of the digital platform through which donation communication occurs. YouTube's structural features (real-time Super Chat visibility, public comment sections, live viewership counters) actively support the participatory urgency and transparent impact archetypes by making giving socially visible and immediately consequential. Sermon-based platforms (church livestreams, television broadcasts) often lack these structural transparency features, which may structurally predispose them toward the visionary stewardship or coercive eschatology archetypes. The IDCSF recommendation is that digital charity systems should actively design platform features to support donor agency and donation transparency, regardless of the organizational context. (Prathibha et al., 2024)

The fifth and highest layer is Ethical Governance the normative framework that governs the use of the lower four layers. It is at this layer that Christian communication ethics makes its most direct contribution to the IDCSF, providing a theologically grounded normative standard against which the practices documented in this study can be evaluated. Christian communication ethics, as articulated in the theological tradition most systematically by scholars such as Christians, Fackler, Richardson, Kreshel, and Woods their landmark text *Media Ethics: (Clifford et al., 2017) Cases and Moral Reasoning*, is grounded in four core normative commitments: truth-telling (*veritas*), respect for human dignity (*imago Dei*), justice in information distribution (*justitia*), and the care of community (*caritas*). When applied to digital charity communication, these four commitments generate a normative matrix against which the practices documented in this study can be evaluated.

Truth-telling in digital charity communication requires that donation appeals accurately represent the purpose, beneficiary, and expected use of funds raised. By this standard, Rob Bell's charity: water campaign with its verifiable impact metrics and institutionally independent beneficiary scores highest among the sermon-based cases, while Roberts' and Sapp's appeals, which entangle financial imperatives with theological claims in ways that resist empirical verification, score lowest. Maraphon, while not operating within a religious framework, demonstrates a practically truth-aligned approach through its structural transparency: the Super Chat system's public visibility makes it nearly impossible to misrepresent the donation's immediate effect (stream extension).

Respect for human dignity in donation communication requires that donors be treated as autonomous rational agents capable of making informed giving decisions, rather than as targets to be manipulated through emotional coercion or social pressure. The Roberts and Sapp cases are the clearest violations of this standard Roberts' existential threat and Sapp's closed-room tactic both structurally compromise donor autonomy. The IDCSF, informed by this principle, proposes the Donor Dignity Standard as a minimum ethical requirement for any digital charity communication system: donation appeals must be structured such that declining to give carries no social penalty and is presented as an equally valid option.

The principle of justice in information distribution, applied to digital charity, addresses the asymmetric power dynamics between donation mobilizers and donor communities. (Schroeder, 2024) In both Maraphon and sermon-based fundraising, the mobilizer holds significant informational power they control the narrative, the urgency

framing, and the disclosure of how funds will be used. The IDCSF's justice principle requires that this informational asymmetry be actively counteracted through structural transparency mechanisms, independent oversight, and post-campaign accountability reporting. The positive correlation between transparency and positive sentiment documented across all study contexts provides empirical support for this normative recommendation.

Finally, the *caritas* principle care of community speaks most directly to the sustainability dimension of digital charity ecosystems. Donation communities, whether constituted by gaming audiences or church congregations, are social goods in themselves; practices that exploit communal trust for short-term financial extraction ultimately damage the social fabric that makes sustained charitable giving possible. The declining engagement and trust documented in the aftermath of Roberts' 1987 campaign, and the critical social media discourse following Sapp's 2024 convention, illustrate this dynamic empirically.

The synthesis of the IDCSF's structural analysis with Christian communication ethics' normative framework yields a set of design principles for integrated digital charity systems that are applicable across the entertainment-streaming and religious-institutional contexts studied here, and potentially generalizable to the broader landscape of digital philanthropy. First, every digital charity system should embed structural transparency mechanisms at the platform layer not as optional features but as non-negotiable design requirements. The Maraphon Super Chat model demonstrates that structural transparency can be simultaneously entertaining, motivating, and ethically sound. Sermon-based platforms should adopt comparable mechanisms for donation tracking, fund allocation disclosure, and impact reporting.

Second, donation appeals should be designed to strengthen, rather than exploit, the existing community architecture. Maraphon's approach of making donation a community identity performance (rather than an individual guilt response) aligns with this principle and is responsible for the growing positive sentiment trend across its three seasons. Sermon-based fundraising that coerces community conformity (Sapp) or leverages existential fear (Roberts) violates this principle with measurable negative consequences. Third, the message design layer should prioritize participatory urgency and transparent impact archetypes the two approaches that generated the highest positive sentiment rates in this study over coercive eschatology. This does not mean abandoning theological framing entirely; Warren's visionary stewardship approach demonstrates that theological narrative can coexist with positive sentiment (63.2%) when embedded in a robust trust infrastructure and disclosed transparently.

Fourth, the IDCSF recommends the institutionalization of what we term Digital Charity Auditing independent, publicly accessible reporting of donation volumes, fund allocation, and impact outcomes—as a standard element of any large-scale digital charity communication system. This recommendation bridges the ethical governance layer of the IDCSF with the practical accountability mechanisms that the data demonstrate are essential for sustained positive community sentiment.

**Table 3.** Comparative IDCSF Mapping: Maraphon Live Donations vs. Christian Sermon-Based Donations.

Dimension	Maraphon Live Donations	Christian Sermon-Based Donations
Primary Communication Logic	Entertainment-participatory (subathon mechanic, gamification)	Theological-persuasive (stewardship, faith, eschatological urgency)
Trust Mechanism	Parasocial intimacy through unscripted endurance performance	Institutional authority + personal testimony + divine mandate
Urgency Framing	Countdown timer, 'last season' narrative, stream-end threat	Scarcity of spiritual reward, pastor mortality threat, closed-room pressure
Transparency Level	High (real-time donation counters, public Super Chat logs)	Variable: high (Rob Bell) to very low (Oral Roberts, Marvin Sapp)

Community Cohesion	Horizontal community fandom, ownership)	peer (shared collective	Vertical hierarchical community (pastor-flock relationship)
Dominant Hashtag Logic	Community gamified (#Marapthon, #Sabeton)	identity + mechanic	Doctrinal identity + campaign branding (#GivingChurch, #PurposeDrivenLife)
Donor Engagement Model	Active (donation = control)	co-creator = stream	Responsive follower (donation = obedience/faith expression)
Negative Sentiment Risk	Low-moderate (6–11%); concentrated in post-event critical reflection		High in coercive contexts (43–52% for Roberts and Sapp)
Ethical Risk Profile	Moderate dependency, (parasocial driven giving)	FOMO-	High in coercive models; moderate in transparent models (Bell)
Avg. Daily Donation Range	\$1,600–\$2,300/day (growing across seasons)		\$1,433–\$191,780/day (extreme variance by pastor/campaign)

The IDCSF, as visualized in Table 3, demonstrates that despite their structural differences, Marapthon and the most ethically positive sermon contexts (Warren, Bell) share a common profile: high trust infrastructure, community-reinforcing architecture, transparent impact message design, platform features that enable donor agency, and implicit or explicit ethical governance. The cases that deviate from this profile Roberts and Sapp consistently produce negative outcomes across all sentiment and engagement metrics. This convergence constitutes the central empirical finding of this study and the primary justification for the IDCSF as a cross-contextual analytical and design tool.

Future research should extend the IDCSF's application to additional digital charity contexts including Islamic crowdfunding platforms (e.g., LaunchGood), secular peer-to-peer fundraising (GoFundMe), and the emerging category of blockchain-based transparent donation systems to test the framework's cross-cultural and cross-platform generalizability. Longitudinal studies tracking the long-term community outcomes (retention, trust, donation growth) of systems that adopt versus reject IDCSF principles would provide the causal evidence necessary to move from the correlational findings of this netnographic study toward empirically grounded design policy recommendations.

#### 4. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that Marapthon live donations and Christian sermon-based donations, despite operating in fundamentally different cultural and institutional contexts, share a common communicative architecture governed by five structural dimensions: trust infrastructure, community cohesion, message design, platform transparency, and ethical governance. The comparative netnographic analysis of 36,360 comments and live-chat messages reveals that positive donor sentiment is consistently highest in contexts characterized by structural transparency and participatory donor agency most notably Marapthon Season 3 (74.3%) and Rob Bell's charity: water campaign (77.4%) while coercive urgency framing, as exemplified by Oral Roberts and Marvin Sapp, generates the highest negative sentiment concentrations (52.7% and 43.4% respectively). The Integrated Digital Charity System Framework (IDCSF) proposed in this study offers a cross-contextual analytical tool applicable beyond the two cases examined here, extending to Islamic crowdfunding, secular peer-to-peer platforms, and emerging blockchain-based donation systems. The central normative finding is that sustainable digital charity ecosystems require the institutionalization of donor dignity, transparent accountability mechanisms, and community-reinforcing message design. Future research should pursue longitudinal validation of the IDCSF across diverse cultural and platform contexts to establish its generalizability as a design and policy framework for ethical digital philanthropy.

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