



STORYTELLING IN FUNDRAISING: A STRATEGIC APPROACH TO DONOR ENGAGEMENT AND TRUST- BUILDING

BY

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**THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND
RESEARCH IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT FOR THE AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS IN PUBLIC RELATIONS WITH MARKETING**

DECEMBER 2025

DECLARATION/SIGNATURE PAGE

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my own original research and has not been submitted, either in whole or in part, for the award of any degree or qualification in any other university or institution. All sources of information used have been duly acknowledged. I accept full responsibility for any errors or omissions that may be contained in this work.

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SUPERVISOR'S DECLARATION

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ABSTRACT

The primary objective of the study was to investigate how storytelling functions as a strategic mechanism for donor engagement and trust-building within Ghanaian non-profit organizations. To address this, a qualitative research approach was employed, utilizing an exploratory design to gain in-depth insights into the practices and perceptions of key stakeholders. The study purposively sampled 25 participants, comprising fundraising professionals from GAPVOD-registered NGOs and active donors, to ensure rich, context-specific data. Data collection was conducted through semi-structured interviews, and the analysis followed a thematic approach to identify and interpret emerging patterns. The study found that fundraising professionals plan storytelling campaigns through a strategic process centred on impact and ethics, audience segmentation and targeted narrative framing, the use of impact assessment and relevance criteria for validation, and structured internal planning and coordination. The study found that professionals develop and execute storytelling initiatives through content development, review and validation, and multi-channel dissemination. It also found that storytelling is integrated into broader fundraising by aligning stories with goals, building trust through transparency, engaging donors tactically, and maintaining consistent branding. The study found that donor perceptions are shaped by narrative credibility, message clarity, and emotional resonance, and that specific stories influence trust through evidence, personal identification, and alignment with observable actions. The study also found that the qualities donors value for building connection and credibility are authentic beneficiary voices, verifiable impact details, and a compelling narrative structure that shows transformation. The study found that storytelling reduces donor scepticism and builds institutional credibility through four mechanisms: evidence-backed narratives that address concerns, follow-up stories showing progress, transparency about challenges, and alignment between promises and outcomes. The study also found that credible stories are built on four specific elements: authentic beneficiary testimonies, verifiable impact data, consistency with organizational reports, and the ethical representation of beneficiaries. To strengthen the impact and integrity of Ghanaian non-profits, governing bodies and sector leaders should develop standardized ethical storytelling guidelines that mandate the use of verifiable impact data, authentic beneficiary consent, and transparent progress reporting. Furthermore, donor agencies and institutional funders should incentivize and formally recognize organizations that implement these credible narrative practices by integrating storytelling quality and consistency into their grant assessment and renewal criteria.

Keywords: Storytelling, Donor engagement and Trust-building

DEDICATION

To the ones who constantly see me
Talents, strength, potential, interests
The ones who have held me in the dark and quiet hours
Whose faith in me rose like dawn, gentle but certain
To the hands that have lifted and kept me standing
The voices of comfort and wisdom in my trembling and doubtful days
And the hearts that have been united with mine
Sharing love and grace

To the one whose future this work will make a difference
Like how mine got turned around for good
To the ones dedicated to supporting the vulnerable
Through impactful community interventions
Raising resources from scarcity and abundance
With skills and techniques worth investigating

I dedicate this work to you
You are the rhythm behind my resilience
Your presence and work heal the world.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I wish to express my profound gratitude to Almighty God for granting me the wisdom, strength, and resilience to complete this Master's programme and my research work. The Lord has truly been good to me.

My heartfelt appreciation goes to my supervisor, Dr. Rebecca Nanaa Baah-Ofori, whose guidance, patience, and constructive feedback were instrumental throughout the research period. I am also deeply grateful to the faculty and staff of the Public Relations Department for their support in creating an enabling environment for academic growth, especially Dr. Noel Nutsugah, whose depth of knowledge in research and exceptional teaching style helped to demystify the subject for me and many of my colleagues.

I extend my sincere appreciation to all participants who generously shared their time and insights, contributing invaluable to the success of this study.

Special thanks to my friend, Efo Korku Mawutor, for encouraging me to pursue a Master's degree in Public Relations with Marketing and his support throughout my study.

Finally, I express my deepest appreciation to my family and friends for their unwavering support, love, and motivation. You listened to the ambitious goals I set for the year 2025 and stood by me throughout the journey including the moments when I needed to vent and then continue with the vision.

My big sister and role model, Bernice Ninson; the special brothers life gave me, Evans Owu Jnr and Snr; my senior in public relations, Smart Takyi Nixon; my best friends, Abigail Ayamba and Alberta Nancy Adjeiwa Nyarkoh; and my friend, Stephen Mawuli Dormekpor; you are all deeply appreciated for your support.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

GAPVOD	Ghana Association of Private Voluntary Organisations in Development
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NPO	Non-Profit Organization
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
NTT	Narrative Transportation Theory
TPB	Theory of Planned Behaviour
SET	Social Exchange Theory
CTT	Commitment-Trust Theory
TRA	Theory of Reasoned Action

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Storytelling has become a cornerstone of fundraising strategies worldwide, with its influence spanning developed, developing, and African contexts, including Ghana. Globally, the integration of storytelling into fundraising leverages emotional engagement to drive donor participation and trust, as evidenced by the significant positive impact of narrative techniques on donation performance in online crowdfunding platforms (Robiady et al., 2021). In developed countries, digital storytelling is recognized for its ability to enhance donor engagement by creating immersive experiences that connect donors to causes on a personal level (Kaczorowska et al., 2024). Developing countries are increasingly adopting storytelling to overcome resource constraints and foster sustainable donor relationships, with empirical evidence highlighting the effectiveness of authentic, emotionally resonant narratives in motivating support (Anglin et al., 2023; Keel & Tran, 2023). In Africa, storytelling is deeply embedded in cultural traditions and is being strategically utilised by non-profits to communicate impact and mobilise resources (Mitchell & Clark, 2021; Mrema et al., 2024). Ghana exemplifies the power of storytelling in fundraising, where organizations employ both traditional and digital narratives to build trust and encourage long-term donor commitment (Oppong-Asare Ansah et al., 2020). Studies underscore that storytelling not only increases donation rates but also strengthens donor retention and organizational transparency, making it a universally relevant tool for donor engagement and trust-building (Kim & Hall, 2020; Shneor et al., 2022).

The strategic use of storytelling in fundraising is especially pronounced in developed countries such as the United States, United Kingdom, and Australia, where non-profits harness narrative-driven campaigns to foster deeper donor relationships (Filo et al., 2020; Kaczorowska et al., 2024). In these contexts, storytelling is not merely a communication tool but a deliberate

strategy to elicit empathy, build trust, and sustain donor engagement. For instance, research in the United States demonstrates that narrative transportation where donors become emotionally invested in a story significantly enhances charitable support Behaviours, leading to higher donation amounts and increased donor loyalty (Kaczorowska et al., 2024). In the United Kingdom, individualized narratives in fundraising appeals have been shown to boost donor empathy and trust, resulting in greater participation and sustained giving (Macrae, 2022). Australian non-profits utilize digital storytelling to communicate impact and foster long-term relationships, with evidence indicating that narrative structure and authenticity are key drivers of donor engagement (Kim & Hall, 2020). These highlight the centrality of storytelling in fundraising strategies across developed nations, where organizations are increasingly adopting evidence-based narrative approaches to maximize donor engagement and trust (Bhati & McDonnell, 2020).

In developing countries outside Africa, the adoption of storytelling in fundraising is gaining traction as organizations seek to address challenges related to resource limitations, donor scepticism, and restricted access to traditional fundraising channels. In China, the proliferation of digital communication platforms has enabled non-profits to reach broader audiences and engage donors through personalized, emotionally compelling stories, resulting in increased donor participation and higher donation rates (K. Xu & Wang, 2020; Yibo, 2023). Indian organizations have found that narrative style plays a critical role in building trust among Generation Y donors, with studies showing that storytelling in crowdfunding campaigns significantly enhances donation intentions (Prashar & Gupta, 2024). These empirical insights underscore the adaptability and effectiveness of storytelling as a strategic tool for donor engagement and trust-building in diverse socio-economic settings, while also emphasizing the need for context-specific narrative strategies that reflect local cultural and technological realities (Shneor et al., 2022). The growing body of evidence from developing countries

reinforces the global relevance of storytelling in fundraising and its potential to drive sustainable donor relationships.

Within Africa, storytelling is not only a communication strategy but also a cultural practice that shapes how organizations engage with donors and communities (Ademolu & Crombie, 2024; Keel & Tran, 2023). Non-profits across the continent are increasingly leveraging storytelling to articulate their missions, demonstrate impact, and build trust with supporters. Studies from countries such as Nigeria, Kenya, and South Africa reveal that narrative-driven fundraising campaigns are associated with higher donor engagement and increased donation amounts, particularly when stories are authentic, relatable, and emotionally resonant (Frimpong et al., 2025; Mohamed, 2018). Storytelling also enhances organizational transparency and accountability, which are critical for building and maintaining donor trust (Kim & Hall, 2020). The rise of digital platforms in Africa has further amplified the reach and effectiveness of storytelling, enabling organizations to share impact stories with wider audiences and foster real-time engagement (Robiady et al., 2021). These developments highlight the transformative potential of storytelling in African fundraising, while also underscoring the importance of culturally relevant narratives that resonate with local values and experiences.

Ghana stands out as a compelling example of the strategic use of storytelling in fundraising, where non-profits and community-based organizations draw on both traditional oral storytelling and modern digital communication to engage donors and build trust (Frimpong et al., 2025; Robiady et al., 2021). The effectiveness of storytelling in Ghanaian fundraising is well-documented, with organizations reporting increased donor participation, higher retention rates, and enhanced trust among supporters exposed to authentic and impactful narratives (Robiady et al., 2021). Storytelling facilitates transparency and accountability, as organizations use narratives to communicate the outcomes and impact of donor contributions, thereby strengthening donor confidence and satisfaction (Kim & Hall, 2020). The integration of

storytelling into fundraising campaigns in Ghana reflects a broader shift towards evidence-based donor engagement strategies, while also highlighting the importance of context-specific approaches that align with local cultural practices. These underscore the potential of storytelling to drive sustainable fundraising outcomes in Ghana and serve as a model for other contexts seeking to enhance donor engagement and trust-building through narrative strategies.

1.2 Problem Statement

Although storytelling is widely recognized as a powerful tool in non-profit fundraising, there remains a significant theory gap regarding the specific psychological and relational mechanisms through which storytelling influences donor engagement and trust. While research has established that narrative elements and emotional resonance can enhance fundraising outcomes (Bizzarri & Cardinali, 2023; Chapman et al., 2022; Chapman, Hornsey, et al., 2025; Shaker & Nelson, 2022; Yibo, 2023), the precise pathways such as narrative transportation, identification with beneficiaries, and perceived authenticity are not consistently theorized or empirically tested across diverse non-profit contexts. The Charitable Triad Theory highlights the importance of considering the dynamic interplay between donors, beneficiaries, and fundraisers (Chapman et al., 2022; Chapman, Hornsey, et al., 2025), yet empirical studies often focus on donor motives or campaign outcomes without unpacking how storytelling influences fundraising. This lack of clarity limits the ability to design evidence-based storytelling strategies that maximize engagement and trust. Addressing this gap calls for qualitative inquiry that traces how specific narrative mechanisms shape donor experiences and meanings, using in-depth interviews, and focus groups to interpret perceived trust, engagement, willingness to give, and retention intentions.

There is also a persistent measurement gap in non-profit fundraising research, particularly regarding the development and validation of context-specific, reliable indices for donor

engagement, trust, and storytelling quality. Most studies rely on generic or Western-centric metrics, which may not capture the multidimensional, culturally embedded constructs and trust in diverse non-profit environments (Bizzarri & Cardinali, 2023; Di Lauro et al., 2019; Shaker & Nelson, 2022; Yibo, 2023). The lack of standardized, observable indicators for storytelling quality such as narrative coherence, emotional appeal, and authenticity further complicates cross-study comparisons and evidence-based practice (Haruvy & Popkowski Leszczyc, 2024; Hommerová & Severová, 2019; Hung, 2021; Suh & Hijal-Moghrabi, 2025; Walk et al., 2022). This measurement deficit hampers rigorous evaluation of fundraising strategies and limits the generalizability of findings across organizations and regions. Advancing the field requires the creation and validation of multidimensional indices for donor engagement (e.g., repeat donation frequency, event participation), trust (e.g., transparency, reliability, benevolence), and storytelling quality (e.g., narrative structure, use of local language, inclusion of beneficiary voices).

A significant methodological gap exists in the study of storytelling's impact on fundraising outcomes, as much of the existing literature continues to rely on qualitative interviews, cross-sectional surveys, or case study designs. While these approaches are valuable for exploring donor perceptions and understanding the contextual richness of narrative strategies, they often fail to isolate the direct effects of storytelling from other influencing factors such as donor demographics, campaign timing, or communication channels, which can confound results (Kim & Hall, 2020; Robiady et al., 2021; Yibo, 2023). Moreover, the reliance on non-experimental designs limits the ability to draw robust causal inferences, resulting in findings that are often context-dependent and may not be easily generalized across diverse fundraising environments or donor populations (Anglin et al., 2023; Zhai & Shen, 2024). This gap is particularly evident in the lack of empirical clarity regarding how specific storytelling elements such as narrative structure, emotional tone, and authenticity shape donor engagement and trust.

For non-profit organizations, especially in Ghana, this creates a challenge in developing evidence-based strategies for storytelling that can maximize donor engagement. To address this, the current study employs a rigorous qualitative approach that seeks to provide deeper insights into the mechanisms through which storytelling influences donor Behaviour, thereby offering a clearer understanding of how narrative strategies function within the specific context of Ghanaian non-profit organizations.

Another significant gap also persists in non-profit fundraising regarding the strategic use of storytelling. While storytelling is widely acknowledged as a powerful tool for donor engagement and trust-building, there remains limited empirical research on how non-profits systematically develop, implement, and evaluate storytelling strategies within their organizational frameworks (Chapman, Hornsey, et al., 2025; Suh & Hijal-Moghrabi, 2025; Zhai & Shen, 2024). The rapid expansion of digital and social media platforms has amplified both the opportunities and challenges associated with storytelling, as narratives can now reach broader audiences but often without clear organizational oversight or alignment with broader strategic objectives (Elvira-Lorilla et al., 2024; Ikhsan et al., 2022; Suh & Hijal-Moghrabi, 2025). Many organizations lack structured guidance or frameworks for integrating storytelling into their fundraising and communication practices, resulting in inconsistent application and variable effectiveness (Keel & Tran, 2023). This gap is particularly evident in smaller non-profits, which may face resource constraints and limited expertise in crafting and disseminating compelling stories that align with their mission and resonate with diverse donor segments (Keel & Tran, 2023). Furthermore, the ability of organizations to differentiate themselves and convey strategic purpose through storytelling is often moderated by their internal storytelling capabilities and governance structures (Mitchell & Clark, 2021). Such practice highlights the need for non-profits to develop structured frameworks and clear internal processes for

integrating storytelling into fundraising, ensuring that narrative strategies are consistently aligned with organisational goals and effectively reach diverse donor audiences and build trust.

1.3 Objective of the Study

The main objective of the study is to investigate how storytelling functions as a strategic mechanism for donor engagement and trust-building within Ghanaian non-profit organizations.

Specifically, the study seeks;

1. To analyse fundraising professionals' strategies for planning and executing storytelling campaigns across Ghanaian non-profits organizations.
2. To examine donor perceptions of organizational narratives and how these shape emotional connection and trust.
3. To assess the mechanisms through which storytelling reduces donor scepticism and strengthens institutional credibility.

1.4 Research Questions

1. What is the set of strategies fundraising professionals use to plan and execute storytelling in campaigns across Ghanaian non-profits among Ghanaian non-profit organizations?
2. What are the donor perceptions of organizational narratives and how does this shape emotional connection and trust Ghanaian non-profit organizations?
3. What are the mechanisms through which storytelling reduces donor scepticism and strengthens institutional credibility among Ghanaian non-profit organizations?

1.5 Significance of the Study

This research makes a substantive scholarly contribution through its focused investigation into the operational mechanisms linking storytelling to donor engagement and trust within Ghanaian non-profits. The study is positioned to advance theoretical understanding by empirically examining how specific narrative elements such as emotional resonance and structural authenticity function as strategic tools in fundraising. It addresses a clear methodological shortfall in the existing literature, which often relies on descriptive case studies, by applying a robust research design that can isolate the impact of storytelling from other variables, such as donor demographics or channel effects. Furthermore, the development of validated, Ghana-specific metrics for storytelling quality and trust-building will provide a valuable tool for future cross-contextual research, moving the field beyond generic measurement scales.

The practical implications of this work are considerable for fundraising practitioners and non-profit managers in Ghana. Findings will equip organizations with evidence-based strategies for designing and implementing narrative-driven campaigns that resonate with local donor sensibilities. A deeper understanding of donor perceptions will allow for improved audience segmentation and message tailoring, potentially increasing conversion rates and fostering long-term donor loyalty. The study's focus on how narratives reduce scepticism and enhance credibility offers a direct pathway for organizations to strengthen their reputational capital and ensure sustainable funding. This is particularly vital for smaller entities that may lack extensive marketing resources but possess rich, authentic stories.

At a sectoral level, the research promotes greater accountability and professionalism in fundraising communications across Ghana. The insights generated can inform the development of ethical guidelines and best practices for storytelling, ensuring narratives uphold beneficiary dignity and organizational transparency. This study ultimately serves multiple stakeholders:

fundraisers gain a clearer strategic framework, donors experience more meaningful connections with causes, and beneficiary communities benefit from more stable and reliable funding streams. The Ghana-centric model of integrating traditional and digital narratives also holds significant potential for adaptation by non-profits in other African regions facing similar opportunities and challenges.

1.6 Scope of the Study

This study focuses specifically on storytelling practices within registered non-profit organizations operating in Ghana. The research encompasses both traditional and digital narrative forms used in fundraising campaigns, examining their strategic development and implementation. The investigation concentrates on donor engagement metrics including participation rates, retention, and trust indicators, while considering organizational factors that influence storytelling effectiveness. The scope is limited to the Ghanaian context, with data collection focused on fundraising professionals and donors interacting with domestic non-profits. The study does not extend to comparative analysis with other national contexts or to storytelling applications outside the fundraising domain.

1.7 Organization of the Study

This thesis is organized into five chapters. Chapter Two constitutes the literature review, critically examining existing theoretical perspectives and empirical studies on storytelling in fundraising, with a focus on donor engagement and trust-building mechanisms. Chapter Three details the research methodology adopted for the study, explaining the design, data collection methods, and analytical procedures used to investigate the research questions. Chapter Four presents the empirical findings from the study, providing a comprehensive analysis and discussion of the data in relation to the established literature. Finally, Chapter Five offers a summary of the key findings, presents the overall conclusions,

and discusses the implications for both theory and practice, along with recommendations for Ghanaian non-profit organizations and future research directions.

CHAPTER TWO

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the existing knowledge that informs this research. To achieve this, the chapter defines important concepts, reviews relevant theories, and analyses past empirical studies on the subject.

2.2 Definition of Terms and Acronyms

2.2.1 *Storytelling*

Storytelling stands as one of humanity's oldest and most universal cultural practices, with origins deeply rooted in the earliest forms of social organization and communication. Archaeological and anthropological evidence suggests that oral storytelling predates written language, serving as a primary means for transmitting knowledge, values, and collective memory across generations (Bietti et al., 2019; Reid et al., 2024; Scalise-Sugiyama, 2024). In ancient societies, stories were not only a source of entertainment but also functioned as vital tools for education, social cohesion, and the preservation of cultural heritage. The earliest documented narratives, such as the Egyptian "Tales of the Magicians" dating back to 4000 B.C., exemplify how storytelling was integral to explaining natural phenomena, codifying moral codes, and fostering a sense of shared identity (Reid et al., 2024). As societies evolved, the function and form of storytelling adapted to new contexts, yet its foundational role in shaping human experience remained constant. The oral tradition, characterized by communal participation and dynamic retelling, laid the groundwork for later developments in written and digital storytelling, highlighting the enduring human need to make sense of the world through narrative (Mohd-Suki et al., 2021; Picchini, 2018). This historical trajectory underscores storytelling's capacity to bridge temporal, spatial, and cultural divides, positioning it as a cornerstone of human civilization.

Early definitions of storytelling emphasized its role as an “oral encyclopedia,” a mechanism for passing down traditions, customs, and knowledge before the advent of writing (de Jager et al., 2017; West et al., 2022). Scholars such as Barthes (1975) posited that storytelling is intrinsically linked to the evolution of the human species, serving as a distinctive trait that unites ancient and modern societies. In this view, storytelling is not merely a method of communication but a fundamental process through which individuals and communities construct meaning, build memories, and project the past into the future. The transition from oral to written storytelling marked a significant technological and cultural shift, enabling the preservation and dissemination of narratives across broader audiences and longer timeframes (McDowell, 2021). However, the essence of storytelling as a co-creative, participatory act persisted, with the storyteller, audience, and narrative forming a dynamic triad that shapes each telling (McDowell, 2021). Early conceptualizations thus recognized storytelling as both a product and a process one that is continually reinterpreted and adapted to reflect changing social realities. This foundational understanding provides a critical lens for examining how contemporary definitions of storytelling have expanded to encompass new media, genres, and functions.

Contemporary scholarship builds on these historical foundations, offering detailed and multidimensional definitions of storytelling that reflect its evolving role in society. Studies position storytelling as a dynamic, co-constructed practice that extends beyond the mere transmission of information to include the creation of shared meaning and collective identity (Schachtner, 2020). Modern definitions emphasize the interplay between teller, audience, and context, highlighting how stories are shaped by and, in turn, shape social, cultural, and technological environments (McDowell, 2021). The rise of digital media has further transformed storytelling, enabling new forms of narrative expression and interaction that transcend traditional boundaries of time and space (Schachtner, 2020). Storytelling is now

recognized as a powerful tool for fostering inclusion, empathy, and social change, with applications ranging from education and healthcare to organizational development and community building (Bukenya, 2025; Nisi et al., 2023; Rieger & Chamorro-Koc, 2022). Despite these advancements, scholars continue to debate the boundaries and essential features of storytelling, underscoring the need for ongoing empirical research to clarify its functions and implications in an increasingly complex world. This evolving discourse not only enriches theoretical understanding but also informs practical strategies for leveraging storytelling in diverse contemporary contexts.

2.2.2 Storytelling in Fundraising

Storytelling has emerged as a pivotal strategy in global fundraising, fundamentally transforming how organizations engage donors and foster trust. Empirical research underscores that storytelling, particularly when direct and emotionally resonant, significantly enhances donor engagement and increases donation performance across diverse contexts (Davis et al., 2022; Ho et al., 2022; Ikhsan et al., 2022; Robiady et al., 2021; Shreedhar, 2021; Yibo, 2023). For instance, studies in digital crowdfunding environments reveal that campaigns employing direct storytelling techniques where narratives are personal, authentic, and relatable achieve higher levels of donor engagement and fundraising success compared to indirect approaches (Robiady et al., 2021). The effectiveness of storytelling is attributed to its capacity to create narrative transportation, a psychological state where donors become immersed in the story, leading to stronger emotional connections with the cause and, consequently, greater willingness to support it (Kaczorowska et al., 2024). Furthermore, the integration of core story elements such as compelling characters, coherent plots, and vivid settings has been shown to yield superior fundraising outcomes, as these elements facilitate deeper cognitive and affective engagement (Anglin et al., 2023). Digital storytelling, in particular, has gained prominence due to its ability to leverage multimedia platforms, amplifying reach and impact while enabling

organizations to tailor narratives to specific donor segments (Kim & Hall, 2020). The empirical evidence consistently demonstrates that storytelling not only drives immediate donation Behaviour but also cultivates long-term donor relationships by fostering transparency, authenticity, and trust qualities that are increasingly valued in the contemporary philanthropic landscape (Waterman et al., 2020; Yibo, 2023). As organizations navigate the complexities of donor engagement in a digital era, the strategic use of storytelling stands out as a best practice for building enduring support and advancing organizational missions.

The application and impact of storytelling in fundraising reflect both shared principles and unique regional dynamics. African non-profit organizations and social enterprises have increasingly adopted storytelling as a core component of their donor engagement strategies, recognizing its power to bridge cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic divides (Ademolu & Crombie, 2024; Appe, 2020; Mitchell & Clark, 2021). Studies highlight that African fundraisers who employ authentic, locally grounded narratives are more successful in mobilizing resources and building trust among both domestic and international donors (Frimpong et al., 2025; Keel & Tran, 2023). The effectiveness of storytelling in Africa is further amplified by the continent's rich oral traditions, where communal narratives and personal testimonies resonate deeply with audiences and reinforce collective identities. Research indicates that digital storytelling, facilitated by the rapid expansion of mobile and internet technologies, has enabled African organizations to reach wider audiences and personalize appeals, thereby increasing donor participation and sustaining engagement (Ikhsan et al., 2022). Moreover, the emphasis on transparency and the regular sharing of impact stories have been shown to enhance donor confidence and encourage ongoing support, addressing concerns about accountability and the effective use of funds (Prashar & Gupta, 2024). While the foundational elements of effective storytelling authenticity, emotional resonance, and clarity remain consistent, African organizations often tailor their narratives to reflect local realities,

challenges, and aspirations, ensuring relevance and relatability. This localized approach not only strengthens donor relationships but also positions storytelling as a catalyst for social change, empowering communities and amplifying marginalized voices. As the thesis advances, it is essential to critically examine how these storytelling practices intersect with broader trends in donor engagement and trust-building, and to identify areas where further empirical research can inform more effective and ethical fundraising strategies across the continent.

2.2.3 Donor engagement

Donor engagement has become a central focus in the philanthropic sector, reflecting a shift from transactional giving to relationship-based approaches that prioritize sustained interaction and mutual value creation. Studies underscore that donor engagement is a multidimensional construct encompassing emotional, cognitive, and Behavioural components, all of which contribute to a donor's willingness to support non-profit organizations over time (Florenthal & Awad, 2021). The rise of digital platforms has further transformed engagement strategies, with evidence showing that the convenience and user-friendliness of online donation processes significantly influence donor participation and retention (Lin & Hsiung, 2024). Donors increasingly expect seamless, transparent, and personalised experiences, and organisations that prioritise these elements are more likely to foster ongoing support. Additionally, creative engagement tactics such as involving donors in participatory or creative activities have been shown to enhance positive affect and perceived impact, thereby increasing both the likelihood and amount of donations (Xu et al., 2022). These findings highlight the importance of understanding donor motivations and preferences, as well as the need for organizations to adopt flexible, donor-centric strategies that build trust and foster long-term commitment.

Building on this foundation, the evolving landscape of donor engagement also demands that organizations leverage digital communication and relationship management to connect with diverse donor segments, particularly younger generations. Studies reveal that millennials, for

example, are motivated by opportunities for social interaction, entertainment, and transparency, and their engagement intentions mediate the relationship between these motivations and actual donation Behaviour (Madden et al., 2023; Parker et al., 2024). Effective engagement strategies thus require non-profits to cultivate trust and openness, utilizing digital channels and social media to facilitate two-way communication and demonstrate organizational impact. Furthermore, research indicates that the design and management of online platforms such as the clarity of information, ease of navigation, and interactive features play a crucial role in capturing donor attention and encouraging charitable action (del Mar Gálvez-Rodríguez et al., 2025). As donor engagement becomes increasingly complex and context-dependent, organizations must continuously adapt their approaches, integrating empirical insights to address emerging challenges and opportunities. This dynamic, evidence-based perspective not only enhances fundraising effectiveness but also aligns with the broader objectives of building resilient, mission-driven organizations capable of sustaining meaningful donor relationships.

2.2.4 Trust-building

Trust-building is widely recognized as a foundational process for fostering effective relationships, organizational resilience, and community well-being. Recent empirical research highlights that trust is cultivated through a combination of Behavioural practices, core values, and collaborative decision-making. For instance, Lansing et al. (2023) identify key elements such as meeting individuals “where they are,” creating safe spaces, demonstrating transparency, and embodying benevolence as central to building trust within large, diverse communities. These practices are not only essential for establishing initial trust but also for maintaining engagement and supporting equity, particularly in environments marked by trauma or systemic inequities. The research further emphasizes that accountability, reliability, and consistency are critical; when organizations or leaders fail to deliver on promises, trust is quickly eroded. In addition, the process of trust-building is inherently relational, requiring

ongoing dialogue, shared vision, and the willingness to address barriers collaboratively (Lansing et al., 2023). This multidimensional approach is reflected in frameworks like the Community Circle of Trust-Building, which guides organizations in selecting training and practices that support healthy, reciprocal relationships and inclusive leadership (Doten-Snitker et al., 2021; Gericke & Torbjörnsson, 2022). Such evidence underscores that trust-building is not a static achievement but a dynamic, context-sensitive process that must be continually nurtured.

Expanding on these insights, contemporary scholarship also stresses the importance of shared identity, engagement, and respect for difference as pragmatic principles for building trust in institutional and societal contexts. Reicher (2025) argues that trust is rooted in a sense of shared identity between authorities and the public, and that effective trust-building requires recognizing diversity, engaging openly, and prioritizing understanding over blame. In organizational and team settings, trust is further shaped by communication quality, transparency, and ethical culture, especially as remote and virtual work environments become more prevalent (Soomar, 2020). The literature reveals that trust-building strategies are deeply influenced by social, cultural, and institutional factors, and that successful approaches must be tailored to the specific context and needs of the stakeholders involved (Schaap, 2021). This dynamic interplay between individual Behaviours, organizational practices, and broader societal values highlights both the complexity and the critical importance of trust-building for achieving sustainable collaboration and positive outcomes.

2.3 Theory

This study is underpinned by four key theories that help explore the mechanisms through which storytelling influences donor engagement and trust in Ghanaian non-profits. Narrative Transportation Theory (NTT) posits that storytelling's immersive qualities can transport donors

into a narrative world, fostering empathy and emotional connections that enhance trust and drive donations. The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) explains how attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived Behavioural control shape donor intentions and Behaviours, which storytelling can influence by altering beliefs about the outcomes of giving. Social Exchange Theory (SET) highlights how ongoing relational exchanges, governed by reciprocity, fairness, and trust, are critical in motivating sustained donor engagement, where effective storytelling reduces perceived costs and enhances perceived benefits. Finally, Commitment-Trust Theory (CTT) suggests that storytelling builds trust and commitment over time, with authentic and transparent narratives strengthening donor relationships and encouraging repeat donations. These theories provide a comprehensive framework to investigate how storytelling serves as a strategic tool for building emotional, cognitive, and relational ties between donors and Ghanaian non-profits.

2.3.1 The Narrative Transportation Theory

Narrative Transportation Theory (NTT) was formally propounded by psychologists Melanie C. Green and Timothy C. Brock in their seminal 2000 paper, "The Role of Transportation in the Persuasiveness of Public Narratives"(Green & Brock, 2000). The theory's intellectual origins, however, stretch back further, drawing from notions of "absorption" in literary studies and the concept of "flow" in positive psychology. Green and Brock (2000) critical contribution was to systematize these ideas into a coherent psychological framework Centreed on the metaphor of a journey: a reader is "transported" into a narrative world. They defined transportation as "a distinct mental process, an integrative melding of attention, imagery, and feelings" (Green & Brock, 2000, p. 701). This conceptualization moved beyond simple enjoyment or attention, positing transportation as a unique state of immersive experience that could fundamentally alter an individual's real-world beliefs. The theory posits that when individuals are transported, their cognitive resources are fully engaged with the story, leading to a temporary departure from their immediate surroundings. This immersive state is the engine

of the theory's persuasive power, establishing a foundational mechanism for how narratives, as opposed to logical arguments, can effect change in attitudes and intentions. The developers thus provided a crucial bridge between literary phenomenology and empirical social psychology, creating a testable model for narrative influence.

The core premise of NTT is that a high degree of transportation into a story world facilitates persuasive outcomes by mediating and moderating belief change. The theory posits several key mechanisms for this effect. First, transportation necessitates a convergence of the recipient's mental systems on the narrative, leaving fewer cognitive resources available for the critical scrutiny of the story's propositions, a process known as reduced counter-arguing (Green & Brock, 2000). Second, transportation fosters strong emotional responses and the generation of vivid mental imagery, which makes the narrative experience feel more immediate and real. Third, transported individuals develop connections with story characters, a process akin to identification or empathy, which can lead to the adoption of characters' perspectives and goals. A recent meta-analytic review supports these mechanisms, confirming that transportation is a powerful predictor of persuasive outcomes across diverse contexts, largely through its ability to reduce negative cognitive responses and generate positive affect (van Laer et al., 2019). The theory, therefore, provides a robust explanation for why narrative evidence can sometimes be more impactful than statistical data, as it operates through a distinct experiential pathway that bypasses analytical resistance.

In the context of fundraising and donor engagement, NTT provides a theoretical lens for understanding how strategic storytelling can transcend mere information transfer to build emotional connections and trust. Empirical studies consistently validate this application. For instance, studies in online crowdfunding demonstrate that narrative elements which enhance transportation such as a coherent plot, relatable protagonists, and emotional resonance directly correlate with increased donation amounts and campaign success rates (Das et al., 2008). The

immersive experience fostered by transportation makes the beneficiary's need more tangible and urgent for the donor, thereby increasing the perceived impact of a contribution. Furthermore, this narrative immersion facilitates a key antecedent of trust: perceived authenticity. When donors are transported, they are less likely to critically evaluate the organization's ulterior motives, instead experiencing the narrative as a genuine account. This process is crucial for trust-building, as it allows perceptions of benevolence and integrity to form with minimal interference from scepticism (Guan et al., 2020). Thus, NTT explains how storytelling functions not just as a communication tool, but as a strategic psychological intervention that cultivates the relational foundations necessary for sustained donor support.

The efficacy of narrative transportation in fundraising is not universal but is contingent upon specific antecedent conditions related to the narrative's construction. Key factors include narrative coherence, character relatability, and perceptual authenticity. A story must be structurally sound with a logical flow to facilitate seamless immersion; disjointed narratives disrupt transportation and re-engage critical faculties. Research indicates that the "identifiable victim effect" powerfully enhances transportation, as donors connect more deeply with a single, specific beneficiary's story than with abstract statistics (Aji, 2024; Guan et al., 2020). Moreover, the perceived authenticity of the narrative is a critical gatekeeper. Donors are increasingly savvy and can detect manipulative or fabricated stories, which triggers persuasion knowledge and immediately dismantles the transportive state, eroding trust (Choi & Park, 2021; Grillo & Pizzutti, 2021). The modality of the story also plays a role; multimedia elements in digital storytelling can enhance transportation through richer mental imagery, but only if they are congruent and do not create cognitive overload (Kim & Hall, 2020). Therefore, for fundraising professionals, applying NTT requires a deliberate design of narratives that are coherent, character-driven, and authentically grounded to successfully initiate the psychological journey of transportation.

For this study, NTT serves as the central framework for investigating the strategic role of storytelling in Ghanaian non-profit fundraising. It directly addresses the identified theory gap by providing the specific psychological mechanisms such as reduced counter-arguing and empathy through which narratives influence donor engagement and trust. The theory allows for a detail analysis that moves beyond simply correlating stories with donations, to instead examine the internal cognitive and affective pathways that mediate this relationship. Furthermore, it guides the exploration of how narrative authenticity and cultural resonance within the Ghanaian context serve as boundary conditions for transportation's effectiveness. By applying NTT, this study will generate context-specific insights into how transportation works in a non-Western fundraising environment, contributing to both theoretical refinement and practical strategy. It positions storytelling not as a mere tactical tool, but as a sophisticated psychological process that, when understood and deployed strategically, can powerfully build the donor trust and engagement essential for organizational sustainability.

2.3.2 The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)

The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) represents a foundational framework in social psychology for predicting and understanding deliberate human action. Icek Ajzen formally developed this theory, with its principles first comprehensively articulated in his 1991 seminal article that has become the definitive reference (Ajzen, 1991). TPB emerged as a direct extension of the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), which Ajzen previously co-developed with Martin Fishbein to explain volitional Behaviours. The critical theoretical innovation of TPB was its incorporation of perceived Behavioural control as a third determinant of Behavioural intention, alongside attitude toward the Behaviour and subjective norms. This expansion specifically addressed TRA's limitation in dealing with Behaviours where individuals lack complete volitional control (Ajzen, 1991). The core purpose of TPB is to predict an individual's intention to perform a specific Behaviour, with the fundamental

proposition that intention serves as the most immediate antecedent of actual Behavioural performance. This theoretical structure provides a powerful analytical lens for examining planned actions such as charitable giving, where donation decisions involve a complex calculus influenced by personal evaluations, social pressures, and practical constraints. The theory's robust architecture has demonstrated considerable predictive utility across diverse Behavioural domains, establishing it as a premier model for understanding cognitive foundations of human action in contexts ranging from health interventions to philanthropic decision-making (Grillo & Pizzutti, 2021).

The TPB's explanatory power derives from its precise conceptualization of five core constructs that form a coherent causal chain. Behavioural Intention serves as the central fulcrum, representing a person's conscious plan and motivation level to exert effort toward performing the target Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). This intention directly precedes and predicts Behaviour, which must be explicitly defined in terms of action, target, context, and time elements to ensure precise measurement. Intention itself emerges from three independent determinants: Attitude toward the Behaviour reflects the individual's overall positive or negative evaluation of performing the specific action, derived from their beliefs about likely outcomes and the value attached to those outcomes. Subjective Norm captures the perceived social pressure from significant referents regarding whether one should perform the Behaviour, encompassing both injunctive norms and descriptive norms (White et al., 2023). Perceived Behavioural Control constitutes the theory's distinctive contribution, referring to the perceived ease or difficulty of performing the Behaviour, influenced by control beliefs about factors that may facilitate or impede performance. In fundraising contexts, PBC has gained renewed importance with the digital transformation of giving platforms, where interface design and procedural complexity directly influence donors' control perceptions. Recent empirical work confirms that PBC mediates the relationship between platform usability and donation completion in online

environments, highlighting its critical role in modern fundraising ecosystems (Zhang et al., 2022).

The TPB rests upon several foundational axioms that establish its theoretical boundaries and operational logic. A primary assumption posits that human Behaviour follows a reasoned action approach where individuals systematically process available information before acting (Ajzen, 1991). This expectancy-value framework undergirds the attitude construct, assuming that people evaluate Behaviours based on their beliefs about consequences and the subjective value of those consequences. The theory further assumes that Behavioural intention serves as the most immediate psychological precursor to actual Behaviour, with the intention-Behaviour correlation strengthening when the Behaviour is under volitional control and when intention measures correspond precisely to Behavioural measurement specifications (Li & Wang, 2023). Regarding perceived Behavioural control, TPB assumes this construct functions dually: it directly influences Behavioural intention while also moderating the intention-Behaviour relationship when perceptions accurately reflect actual control conditions. The theory presumes that attitudes, subjective norms, and PBC represent conceptually independent determinants that can have varying weights across Behaviours and populations, though they frequently correlate in practice due to common underlying belief structures (White et al., 2023). TPB further assumes relative stability in the underlying cognitive structure over time, though it acknowledges that interventions can modify salient beliefs and consequently alter intentions and Behaviours. These axiomatic foundations create a robust yet flexible theoretical architecture that accommodates diverse Behavioural contexts while maintaining predictive precision.

Strategic storytelling functions as a powerful mechanism for updating the foundational beliefs that undergird each TPB construct in fundraising contexts. Compelling narratives directly influence Behavioural beliefs by vividly illustrating the positive outcomes donations can

achieve, thereby shaping attitudes toward giving. When stories feature relatable protagonists and concrete impact demonstrations, they strengthen donors' outcome beliefs while enhancing the perceived value of these outcomes, resulting in more favourable attitudes toward donating (Knowles et al., 2012). Narrative approaches similarly influence normative beliefs by depicting descriptive norms of giving through characters who donate or by incorporating injunctive norms via respected figures who endorse the cause. Recent experimental evidence demonstrates that narratives featuring in-group members engaging in charitable Behaviour significantly strengthen subjective norms and donation intentions among recipients who share that social identity (Chapman, et al., 2025; Kwon & Yi, 2025). Furthermore, storytelling can strategically address control beliefs by illustrating the simplicity and effectiveness of the donation process, thereby enhancing perceived Behavioural control. Stories that transparently demonstrate organizational competence and impact reporting can mitigate perceived barriers related to trust and efficacy, which constitute significant control beliefs in charitable contexts (Ilyas et al., 2020; Klimchak et al., 2020). The sequential mechanism thus operates through narrative-induced belief updating across all three TPB antecedents, resulting in strengthened Behavioural intention that translates into actual donation Behaviour when sufficient actual control exists.

The TPB demonstrates considerable theoretical complementarity with several adjacent frameworks when applied to fundraising contexts, particularly Narrative Transportation Theory (NTT) and Social Identity Theory. While TPB provides the structural architecture for understanding how beliefs aggregate into intentions, NTT offers the psychological process mechanism through which narratives effectively update these beliefs. The immersive experience of narrative transportation facilitates deeper cognitive and emotional engagement with story elements, potentially increasing the accessibility and persuasive impact of belief-relevant information contained within fundraising narratives (Alam & So, 2020; Ma et al.,

2024). This theoretical synergy suggests that transportation may enhance the effect of storytelling on TPB antecedents by increasing message absorption while reducing counter-arguing. Simultaneously, Social Identity Theory complements TPB by explaining how specific narrative elements function as powerful triggers of group-based giving Behaviour. Stories that activate salient social identities can strengthen subjective norms by making group expectations more cognitively accessible and motivationally relevant (Chapman, et al., 2025). Recent research on crowdfunding platforms confirms that project descriptions containing identity-relevant narratives significantly strengthen the subjective norm-intention relationship, particularly for donors with strong group identification (Wang et al., 2019). This theoretical integration enriches the TPB framework by specifying how narrative elements function not merely as information but as identity triggers that differentially influence the belief-updating process depending on donor characteristics and contextual factors.

2.3.3 Social Exchange Theory (SET)

Social Exchange Theory (SET) stands as a foundational paradigm in social psychology and organizational studies, offering a systematic framework for understanding how individuals and collectives navigate relationships through the exchange of valued resources. The theory's intellectual roots trace to George C. Homans, whose seminal essays in 1958 and 1961 articulated a micro-level, Behaviourist approach to social interaction, positing that social Behaviour is best understood as a series of exchanges where actors seek to maximize rewards and minimize costs under the expectation of reciprocity (Rex & Homans, 1962). Peter M. Blau's 1964 macro-structural treatment extended SET to the analysis of complex organizations and social structures, emphasizing how repeated exchanges generate power differentials, dependence, and emergent social order (Bierstedt & Blau, 1965). Richard Emerson's power-dependence formulation (1962, 1976) further integrated these perspectives, formalizing the mechanisms by which resource asymmetries and alternative options shape power, commitment,

and network-level dependencies (Emerson, 1976). The core purpose of SET is to predict and explain relational choices by modeling how actors evaluate the net value of exchanges balancing anticipated rewards against costs while considering available alternatives and the stability of reciprocity norms. In the context of fundraising, SET provides a rigorous lens for analysing how donors' engagement, giving, advocacy, and trust-building are shaped by their ongoing assessment of the value, fairness, and reliability of their exchanges with non-profit organizations (Chapman et al., 2021; Whitham, 2021).

SET is grounded in several core axioms and assumptions that structure its explanatory power. First, actors are rational and seek to maximize net positive value in exchanges. Second, all exchanges are governed by expectations of reciprocity, whether explicit or implicit. Third, dependence on a relationship increases as the perceived value of alternatives (CLalt) decreases. Fourth, perceived inequity in exchanges motivates restoration efforts or relationship exit. Fifth, trust emerges from repeated, fair, and fulfilled exchanges. Sixth, power differentials arise from asymmetries in resource control and alternative options. Seventh, commitment is a function of cumulative rewards, costs, and relational stability. Eighth, social norms and cultural context moderate the interpretation of rewards, costs, and reciprocity. Ninth, storytelling can update perceived rewards, costs, and norms, thereby influencing exchange calculus. Tenth, exchange dynamics are dynamic, with feedback loops between fulfillment, trust, and future engagement. These axioms provide a robust foundation for analysing donor engagement and trust-building in fundraising contexts, particularly as organizations leverage storytelling to recalibrate the perceived value and fairness of exchanges (Chapman et al., 2021).

Storytelling operates as a strategic lever within the SET framework by shaping the cognitive and affective calculus donors use to evaluate exchanges. High-quality narratives that transparently communicate organizational impact, authenticity, and beneficiary outcomes serve as potent reward cues, enhancing the perceived value of giving and reinforcing the donor's

sense of moral elevation and community belonging (Bhati & McDonnell, 2020). When stories clarify the use of funds, minimize ambiguity about overhead, and streamline the giving process, they effectively reduce perceived costs, making the act of giving more attractive relative to alternatives. Testimonials and community narratives reinforce reciprocity norms, signalling that giving is both valued and reciprocated within the donor community, which strengthens relational stability (Li et al., 2020). Transparent impact reporting and third-party audits function as equity cues, bolstering perceptions of fairness and procedural justice, which are critical for sustaining trust. Comparative narratives that highlight the unique impact or efficiency of the organization can shift both CL and CL_{alt}, increasing donor dependence and commitment by making alternatives appear less attractive. The fulfilment of promised impact, as communicated through stewardship reports and follow-up stories, creates a positive feedback loop: trust is reinforced, which in turn increases the donor's willingness to continue or escalate engagement, leading to higher commitment and advocacy (Klafke et al., 2023). This dynamic interplay between storytelling and exchange calculus underscores the centrality of narrative in shaping donor Behaviours and sustaining long-term relationships.

A comprehensive typology of fundraising inputs reveals how various strategies map onto SET constructs, thereby influencing donor engagement and trust. Stewardship reports directly enhance perceived rewards by demonstrating organizational impact and reinforce equity by showcasing fairness in resource allocation. Impact dashboards provide tangible evidence of outcomes, simultaneously increasing rewards and reducing costs through clarity and transparency. Donor recognition tiers amplify social rewards and reinforce reciprocity norms by publicly acknowledging contributions. Matching gifts serve to magnify perceived rewards and signal organizational commitment to shared goals. Flexible giving options lower costs by accommodating donor preferences and increase perceived control, thereby influencing CL_{alt}. Low-friction checkout processes reduce transaction costs and increase the likelihood of giving

by minimizing barriers. Community events foster social rewards, reciprocity, and identity affirmation, strengthening relational bonds. Fee transparency decreases perceived costs and enhances trust by clarifying how donations are utilized. Social proof, through testimonials and community narratives, reinforces reciprocity norms and perceived fairness. Donor control options, such as the ability to designate funds or adjust giving frequency, increase perceived alternatives (CLalt) and autonomy. Stewardship rituals, including regular updates and personalized acknowledgments, reinforce commitment and reciprocity through repeated, meaningful exchanges. Each of these inputs strategically targets specific SET constructs, collectively shaping the donor's exchange calculus and influencing their engagement trajectory.

The predictive power of SET is most pronounced in contexts where donors anticipate ongoing relationships and reciprocal exchanges with organizations. In one-shot emergency giving, where future exchanges are unlikely or irrelevant, SET's explanatory value diminishes, as the calculus of reciprocity and commitment is less salient. Similarly, in cases of mandated fees or coercive giving, the voluntary nature of exchange is absent, undermining the core logic of SET. Anonymous giving, where recognition and feedback loops are minimal, reduces the salience of reciprocity and relational norms. In instances of extreme altruism or identity fusion, where moral duty or self-concept override exchange calculus, SET may under-predict giving Behaviour. High platform friction or trust deficits that inflate perceived costs beyond plausible rewards also constrain the applicability of SET, as donors may disengage regardless of potential benefits (Bhati & McDonnell, 2024). These boundary conditions highlight the importance of context in applying SET to fundraising and underscore the need for integrative models that account for both exchange-based and identity-driven motivations.

This theoretical review advances SET by formalizing the role of storytelling as a dynamic mechanism that updates the donor's exchange calculus across multiple dimensions—rewards,

costs, reciprocity norms, equity, and alternatives. The taxonomy of storytelling-induced rewards extends beyond traditional warm-glow, encompassing identity affirmation, moral elevation, and community belonging. Stewardship rituals are conceptualized as structured reciprocity reinforcements, sustaining trust and commitment through repeated, meaningful exchanges. The mapping of CLalt to digital platform choice introduces a novel power-dependence mechanism, highlighting how ease of switching and comparative impact narratives shape donor loyalty. Trust is theorized as an emergent property of fulfilled, fair exchanges, rather than a static trait, underscoring the importance of transparent impact reporting and feedback loops. For fundraising strategy, these insights suggest that organizations should invest in high-quality, authentic storytelling, transparent reporting, and stewardship rituals that reinforce reciprocity and equity, while minimizing costs and platform friction to maximize donor engagement, retention, and advocacy.

2.3.4 Commitment-Trust Theory

The Commitment–Trust Theory (CTT) of relationship marketing, formalized by Morgan and Hunt in 1994, provides a robust conceptual framework for understanding how enduring relationships are built and maintained in marketing contexts, including non-profit fundraising. Morgan and Hunt (1994) posited that successful relational exchanges require two key mediating variables: relationship commitment and trust. Commitment is defined as the enduring desire to maintain a valued relationship, encompassing both affective (emotional attachment) and continuance (rational calculation of benefits) dimensions. Trust, in this context, is the confidence in an exchange partner’s reliability and integrity, further specified as encompassing benevolence (the belief that the organization acts in the donor’s best interest), integrity (adherence to principles and promises), and competence (the ability to deliver on commitments) (R. C. Mayer et al., 1995; Moorman et al., 1992). Within non-profit donor relationships, CTT explains how these constructs underpin donor engagement, retention, and

advocacy, as donors are more likely to support organizations they trust and to which they feel committed. The theory's purpose is to clarify the mechanisms by which trust and commitment mediate the effects of antecedents such as shared values, communication, and stewardship on relationship outcomes, making it highly relevant for understanding the strategic role of storytelling in fundraising (Morgan & Hunt, 1994).

Commitment and trust, while central, must be precisely distinguished from related constructs to avoid conceptual overlap. Commitment, as articulated in CTT, refers to a psychological state that binds the donor to the organization, motivating ongoing support and resistance to alternative options. Trust, meanwhile, is a multidimensional belief system encompassing benevolence, integrity, and competence, and is distinct from satisfaction (a retrospective evaluation of specific exchanges), loyalty (a Behavioural outcome of commitment and trust), reciprocity (the expectation of mutual benefit), and identification (a sense of shared identity with the organization) (Sirdeshmukh et al., 2002). Antecedents such as shared values, open communication, and the restraint of opportunistic Behaviour are critical in fostering both trust and commitment. In non-profit contexts, mission alignment and stewardship practices—such as transparent reporting and donor recognition play a heightened role in shaping these constructs. It is also essential to differentiate between institutional trust (confidence in the organization as a whole) and interpersonal trust (confidence in specific representatives), as both can influence donor Behaviour but may operate through different mechanisms (Sirdeshmukh et al., 2002). These clarifications ensure that CTT is applied with conceptual rigor in non-profit fundraising.

Storytelling in non-profit fundraising operates as a powerful mechanism for building trust and commitment by shaping donor perceptions of risk, benevolence, and organizational competence. High-quality narratives that are authentic, transparent, and evidence-based reduce perceived risk and the likelihood of opportunistic Behaviour, thereby increasing trust in the

organization's intentions and capabilities (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). When stories provide clear evidence of impact and demonstrate alignment with donor values, they signal the organization's benevolence and integrity, reinforcing the donor's confidence in the relationship (Mayer et al., 1995). The emotional resonance of storytelling can also elicit moral elevation, motivating donors to commit more deeply to the organization's mission (Haidt, 2003). These effects are not merely additive; they operate through serial pathways in which storytelling first enhances trust, which then fosters commitment, ultimately leading to increased giving, retention, and advocacy. Feedback loops are also present: as donors experience fulfilment of promises and see the tangible results of their contributions, their trust and commitment are further reinforced, creating a virtuous cycle of engagement. Signalling theory further explains how transparent and credible narratives serve as costly signals of trustworthiness, reducing information asymmetry and strengthening relational bonds (Spence, 1973).

The predictive power of CTT is most pronounced in contexts characterized by ongoing donor-organization relationships, credible stewardship, and opportunities for repeated interaction. When donors anticipate future engagement and perceive the organization as responsive and transparent, trust and commitment become the primary drivers of giving and advocacy. However, the theory's explanatory strength diminishes in one-shot emergency giving scenarios or when donors have little actual control or feedback regarding the use of their contributions. CTT integrates well with the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), as intentions to give are shaped by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived Behavioural control, all of which are influenced by trust and commitment (Ajzen, 1991b). Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964) complements CTT by highlighting the role of perceived rewards and costs, while Narrative Transportation Theory (Green & Brock, 2000) elucidates how immersive stories shape beliefs and affect, feeding into trust and commitment. These integrations underscore the multifaceted

nature of donor decision-making and the central role of trust and commitment in sustaining long-term relationships.

Strategically, CTT suggests that non-profit organizations should prioritize storytelling approaches that explicitly build trust and commitment to drive donor engagement, retention, and advocacy. Testable propositions derived from the theory include: (1) storytelling that transparently demonstrates impact and organizational values increases donor trust; (2) heightened trust leads to greater relationship commitment; (3) trust and commitment jointly predict higher donation frequency, retention, and advocacy; and (4) feedback mechanisms, such as stewardship communications, reinforce trust and commitment over time. These insights translate into actionable strategies, such as designing messages that highlight organizational competence and benevolence, ensuring full disclosure of outcomes, recognizing donor contributions, and providing regular follow-up on the use of funds. The theoretical contribution of CTT in this context lies in its formalization of the pathways through which storytelling shapes donor perceptions and Behaviours, offering a rigorous foundation for developing evidence-based fundraising strategies that foster enduring donor-organization relationships.

2.4 Empirical Literature Review

Empirical research consistently demonstrates that digital storytelling significantly enhances donor engagement and conversion across diverse online fundraising contexts. Robiady et al. (2021) conducted a quantitative study on Indonesian crowdfunding platforms, comparing direct and indirect storytelling techniques. Their analysis of campaign data revealed that direct storytelling where narratives are personal, vivid, and emotionally resonant substantially increased both customer engagement and donation performance, although engagement did not mediate the effect on donations. In China, Wang (2023) synthesized findings from multiple empirical studies using a desk research approach, highlighting that personalized and

emotionally compelling digital narratives, whether through written or video content, consistently elevate donor participation and giving rates. Kaczorowska et al. (2023) employed an online survey in the UK, randomly assigning participants to read either a narrative or non-narrative text about homelessness. Results showed that narrative transportation, or deep engagement with the story, led to higher cognitive, affective, and Behavioural engagement, ultimately increasing support Behaviours. Anglin et al. (2022) analysed 359 U.S. crowdfunding campaigns using fuzzy set qualitative comparative analysis, finding that the inclusion of core story elements such as characters, plot, and setting was associated with superior fundraising outcomes. These studies confirm that digital storytelling, when strategically crafted and delivered, can meaningfully boost donor intent and conversion, though the mechanisms such as engagement or narrative structure may vary by context and platform.

Recent empirical work highlights the centrality of trust-building and credibility signals in effective fundraising. Fischmann and Xu (2024) analysed GoFundMe campaigns for Ukraine, employing sentiment analysis and machine learning to show that trust cues in both text and video content significantly amplified donations, while negative emotional expressions reduced giving. Chapman et al. (2021) conducted a meta-analysis across 31 countries, establishing that organizational and sectoral trust are robust predictors of charitable giving, with stronger effects in non-Western contexts. Evans (2025) used qualitative interviews in the UK to reveal that donors rely on cues of organizational trustworthiness such as transparency and stewardship while fundraisers actively cultivate trust through ongoing communication. Lock and Robinson (2023), drawing on UK case studies, found that adopting major donor cultivation strategies, including transparent reporting and personalized contact, enhanced trust and increased fundraising success. These studies highlight that transparent communication, credible signals, and stewardship practices are empirically linked to donor trust and, consequently, to improved fundraising outcomes.

Emotional mechanisms such as empathy, moral elevation, and identification are empirically linked to donor engagement, though the risk of persuasion fatigue is also evident. Drollinger and Simpson (2025) conducted qualitative interviews with Canadian fundraisers, finding that authentic empathy and active listening were critical for building trust and deepening donor relationships. Macrae (2022) analysed UK and US fundraising letters, demonstrating that individualized beneficiary stories evoke empathy and identification, but also risk reinforcing individualism and emotional fatigue. Kaczorowska et al. (2023) showed that narrative transportation in digital stories about homelessness in the UK led to increased cognitive, affective, and conative engagement, supporting higher support Behaviours. Fischmann and Xu (2024) found that emotion regulation in US-based crowdfunding for Ukraine specifically, the strategic use of hope and avoidance of sadness was associated with greater fundraising success. These findings suggest that while emotional storytelling can powerfully drive engagement and trust, overuse or poorly calibrated appeals may lead to diminishing returns or donor fatigue.

Social norms and community narratives play a significant role in shaping donor Behaviour, as evidenced by recent multinational studies. Li et al. (2020) developed a social fundraising mechanism in Taiwan, demonstrating that leveraging donor preferences and social network relationships increased campaign success by promoting reciprocity norms and peer effects. Bhati and McDonnell (2020) analysed US non-profit Giving Day campaigns, finding that social media engagement—measured by network size, activity, and shares—was positively associated with both donor numbers and donation value, highlighting the influence of social proof. Wang (2023) reviewed Chinese fundraising campaigns, concluding that community-driven storytelling and peer endorsements fostered deeper donor relationships and ongoing support. Anglin et al. (2022) found in US crowdfunding that campaigns integrating community narratives and influencer appeals achieved superior funding performance. These studies collectively indicate that social norms, peer effects, and community storytelling are empirically

linked to enhanced donor engagement and fundraising outcomes across diverse cultural settings.

Donor retention and stewardship storytelling have been empirically examined as mechanisms for sustaining long-term engagement and trust. Shaker and Nelson (2021) conducted a grounded theory study in US higher education, identifying a five-tier model of donor-fundraiser relationships, with stewardship storytelling and personalized updates as key drivers of progression and retention. Venzin (2021) reported on US non-profit practices, showing that regular storytelling updates and expressions of gratitude fostered donor loyalty and repeat giving. Lock and Robinson (2023) found in the UK that major donor cultivation, including ongoing narrative communication and stewardship rituals, increased donor retention and trust. Herna et al. (2019) analysed Indonesian crowdfunding, revealing that consistent storytelling, campaign updates, and visual proof of impact maintained public trust and participation. These studies converge on the finding that stewardship storytelling through updates, gratitude, and feedback loops plays a critical role in donor retention and the deepening of trust-based relationships.

The modalities and formats of storytelling ranging from short-form video to interactive web pages have been empirically linked to varying fundraising outcomes. Robiady et al. (2020) found that direct storytelling in digital formats on Indonesian crowdfunding platforms outperformed indirect approaches in driving engagement and donations. Wang (2023) reported that Chinese non-profits using video and multimedia storytelling achieved higher donor participation and trust compared to text-only campaigns. Herna et al. (2019) observed that Indonesian platforms employing video updates and visual storytelling maintained higher public trust and participation rates. Kaczorowska et al. (2023) demonstrated that narrative transportation was more effective in digital stories with rich media elements, leading to greater engagement and support Behaviours in the UK. These findings suggest that the choice of

storytelling modality particularly the integration of video, interactive, and multimedia formats can significantly enhance the persuasive power of fundraising campaigns, though optimal formats may vary by audience and context.

2.5 Gap

The existing literature on storytelling in non-profit fundraising has predominantly examined the broad effects of storytelling, yet significant gaps remain regarding the specific psychological and relational mechanisms through which storytelling influences donor engagement. While studies have consistently shown that narrative elements such as emotional resonance, authenticity, and relatability can enhance donor engagement (Robiady et al., 2021; Kim & Hall, 2020), the precise pathways through which these elements affect donor Behaviour have not been sufficiently explored. The concept of narrative transportation, which suggests that storytelling immerses donors in the narrative and fosters empathy, is often cited but remains underexplored in empirical studies. Most research does not isolate the effects of these narrative elements from external factors, such as donor demographics or communication channels, thereby making it difficult to draw causal inferences. Furthermore, there is a lack of comprehensive studies that examine how these psychological processes contribute to long-term trust and commitment.

Again, while storytelling is widely regarded as a critical tool for engaging donors and building trust, there is a notable gap in understanding how non-profits, particularly in Ghana, systematically develop and implement storytelling strategies. The literature emphasizes the effectiveness of storytelling in generating donor support but often overlooks the organizational processes involved in crafting these narratives. Existing studies typically focus on the outcomes of storytelling, such as increased donations and engagement (Shneor et al., 2022), yet fail to explore the strategic frameworks that guide these narrative efforts. In many non-profit

organizations, particularly those with fewer resources, storytelling is not always employed in a structured or strategic manner. The challenges faced by smaller organizations in developing narratives that align with their mission, resonate with local values, and appeal to donor sensibilities have been largely ignored in academic research. For example, the integration of traditional oral storytelling methods with modern digital techniques in Ghanaian non-profits remains under examined, despite the importance of cultural relevance in crafting compelling narratives. The lack of empirical research on the organizational development and implementation of storytelling strategies in non-profit contexts such as Ghana hampers the ability of these organizations to optimize their donor engagement efforts. Addressing this gap would provide valuable insights into the operationalization of storytelling within Ghanaian non-profits, thereby offering actionable strategies for improving their fundraising efforts.

Another significant gap in the literature is the lack of standardized and context-specific measurement tools to evaluate the effectiveness of storytelling in fundraising, particularly in non-Western contexts like Ghana. Most existing research relies on generic or Western-centric metrics that fail to capture the local donor perceptions and cultural influences (Bizzarri & Cardinali, 2023; Di Lauro et al., 2019). For instance, traditional metrics for donor engagement such as donation frequency, event participation, and retention may not fully account for the emotional and cognitive responses elicited by storytelling in African contexts, where cultural and social dynamics play a vital role in shaping donor behaviour. Furthermore, the absence of reliable, context-specific indicators for storytelling quality, such as narrative coherence, emotional appeal, and authenticity, complicates cross-study comparisons and hampers the development of evidence-based practices. This measurement gap is particularly crucial for Ghanaian non-profits, which often rely on locally tailored narratives to connect with their donor base. Without valid and reliable tools to assess storytelling effectiveness, non-profit organizations are left with limited capacity to refine their narrative strategies and optimize

fundraising outcomes. There is, therefore, a pressing need for the development and validation of context-specific measurement tools that can capture the unique factors influencing donor engagement and trust in Ghanaian non-profit fundraising, ensuring that findings are both relevant and actionable.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter highlights the materials and methods that were applied in the study. It gives a background of the study area and outlines the research design and study variables. It also details the population, samples and sampling approaches and the research instruments used in collecting data for the study.

3.1 Methods

3.1.1 Research Approach

The approach that was adopted in this study is the qualitative research approach. Teddlie and Tashakkori (2011) posit that the qualitative approach, unlike the quantitative, deals with respondents' views since it involves a rich grounded knowledge related to their observable behaviour and through a detailed description of their engagements. The qualitative approach is usually rooted in conversations; hence, Tashakkori and Teddlie (2014) discusses that researchers using this approach relate to the efforts to understand, describe and interpret the meanings of their actions in a natural space. This was further posited by Creswell and Poth (2017) that, unlike the quantitative approach, the focus of the qualitative approach is not influenced by a particular hypothesis or a solid framework but rather more focused on emerging themes and individual descriptions.

Otani (2017) discusses the characteristics and what describes the qualitative approach as natural, its interpretation and simplification, in-depth and hypothesis drive. Moreover, one main characteristic of a quantitative approach is that the research objectives aim to produce an in-depth understanding of participants through gaining knowledge from participant experiences, material circumstances, values, and precedents in the social world of research (Creswell, 2015; Percy et al., 2015). Also, Leedy and Ormrod (2005) discuss that qualitative research is known for its small sample size and is usually chosen or focused on significant

measures. Unlike the quantitative approach, qualitative research involves interaction with participants, typically one-on-one, that is, interviews, group interviews, and observations; hence it explores developing issues (Chorba, 2011; LaMarre & Chamberlain, 2022; Lewis, 2015). Creswell and Poth (2017) posits that a researcher using a qualitative approach does not try to manipulate events within a framework since this approach demands a naturalistic method focused on gaining understanding in a specific context in the real-world scenery.

Unlike the quantitative approach, the findings and results of qualitative research are not by statistical or quantification means, thus calculations, causal determination, and generalizing findings, but instead through exploration of findings from the real-social world where events happen naturally and are clarified, understood, and reasoned by comparing situations (Ackoff et al., 2010; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). Some methods used in the qualitative approach, such as interviews, do not have a restriction or are not limited to detailed questions and are conducted by the researcher in real time; moreover, this might result in other information emerging which can be reviewed and added to the research framework (Neuman, 2014; Saunders et al., 2009). The qualitative approach usually involves the presence of the researcher or an interaction with the participants face-to-face, which is unavoidable; hence, researchers argue that this may affect participants' responses and cause confidentiality and anonymity problems during the presentation of the findings. Nonetheless, this approach is also classed as difficult and time-consuming since it is usually characterized visually and in-depth in nature; sample sizes are therefore small and cause suspicion of the researcher influencing the findings due to personal partialities and individualities (Kothari, 2014; Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Mark Saunders et al., 2012).

This study seeks to investigate how storytelling functions as a strategic mechanism for donor engagement and trust-building within Ghanaian non-profit organizations. A qualitative research approach is paramount for this investigation, as it allows for an in-depth exploration

of the complex, socially constructed nature of storytelling and its perceived impact on relational outcomes like trust (Braun et al., 2021). This methodology is uniquely suited to uncovering the nuanced strategies, lived experiences, and underlying motivations of fundraising professionals and donors, which are central to understanding how narratives are strategically crafted and internally processed. The research employed semi-structured interviews as its primary method, providing the necessary flexibility to probe deeply into participants' narrative development processes and their interpretations of how specific story elements foster emotional connection and credibility (Patton, 2002). The qualitative design is essential for capturing the rich, contextual insights into the institutional practices and cultural dynamics that shape storytelling effectiveness within the Ghanaian non-profit sector (Mark Saunders et al., 2019a). This comprehensive strategy ensures the research can fully address its central aim of elucidating the strategic role of storytelling in building the donor relationships that are vital for organizational sustainability.

3.1.2 Research Design

According to Bell and Bryman (2019), the research design is a framework for collecting and analysing data. Research design is an outline that constitutes a plan, strategy and structure to assist the researcher's investigations. Like the quantitative research approach that can adopt either experimental or non-experimental (survey) research design, qualitative research also has a specific research design appropriate for conducting research. Though there appear to be several variants of qualitative designs, however, for this study, the explorative research design was used. The exploratory design is justified because the researcher seeks an in-depth understanding of the topic under investigation (Merriam, Sharan; Tisdell, 2016; Moustakas, 2011). The exploratory research design enables the researcher to delve deeply into how storytelling functions as a strategic mechanism for donor engagement and trust-building within Ghanaian non-profit organizations. This approach answers direct questions without restricting

research to a specific theoretical, philosophical, epistemological, or ontological tradition (Patton, 2015); it is appropriate for investigating people's attitudes and views.

The exploratory approach was used to answer direct questions without framing research within an explicit theoretical, philosophical, epistemological or ontological tradition (Patton, 2015); it is suitable for exploring people's attitudes, opinions, beliefs, or experiences (Burkholder et al., 2020). It was widely used in the recent literature and is considered appropriate when research questions are focused on discovering the who, what, and where of lived experiences or when information is needed about a poorly understood situation (Kahlke, 2014). It is conducted to understand the existing problem better but will not provide conclusive results (Creswell & Hirose, 2019). For such research, a researcher starts with a general idea and uses this research as a medium to identify issues that can be the focus of future research. According to Kothari (2004), the research procedure in exploratory research design is flexible. It allows for the amendment of aspects of the study due to the likelihood of discovering new parts of the phenomena under study.

The selection of an exploratory research design for this study is particularly fitting given the nature of the research objectives and the complex, context-dependent phenomenon under investigation (Hollweck, 2016; Taherdoost, 2018). An exploratory approach is expressly suited for developing an in-depth understanding of a relatively uncharted area, which perfectly describes the strategic function of storytelling for donor engagement and trust-building within Ghanaian non-profit organizations. The flexibility inherent in this exploratory design allows the researcher to adapt and refine inquiry pathways as significant insights emerge from the data collection process (Creswell, 2015). This adaptability is crucial when delving into the nuanced and often subjective practices of narrative construction and interpretation. Furthermore, as the study aims to uncover the attitudes, beliefs, and lived experiences of fundraising professionals and donors regarding storytelling, the exploratory framework provides a conducive structure

for capturing these diverse perspectives. The design is especially instrumental for formulating and refining research questions that focus on discovering the "how" and "why" behind these complex stakeholder experiences. This methodologically sound choice for an exploratory research design ultimately enables a comprehensive investigation of the issues at hand, thereby laying a solid conceptual and empirical groundwork for future scholarly inquiry into fundraising narratives.

3.1.3. Target Population

The population is the complete set of individuals, objects or events with common observable features in which the researcher is interested (Saunders et al., 2016). The target population for this study includes non-governmental organizations (NGOs) registered with the Ghana Association of Private Voluntary Organisations in Development (GAPVOD). GAPVOD is the main umbrella body for NGOs in Ghana, representing both local and international organizations working in sectors like health, education, human rights, and environmental sustainability. The study will focus on NGOs from GAPVOD's membership, as these organizations have significant experience in fundraising and donor engagement. By selecting NGOs registered with GAPVOD, the study ensures it targets organizations that are actively involved in storytelling as a strategic tool for building donor trust and engagement.

The non-profit sector in Ghana plays a significant role in contributing to the country's social development, with a wide array of organizations operating across various sectors, including education, health, human rights, and environmental sustainability. As of May 2016, the Ghanaian government, through the Department of Social Welfare (DSW), has officially registered 6,520 non-governmental organizations (NGOs), which include 6,370 local NGOs and 150 international NGOs (Chanase, 2021). These organizations have emerged as key players in Ghana's civil society, particularly in the wake of the 1980s and 1990s, when they were seen as a solution to state failure and inefficiencies in governance (Krawczyk, 2013). The

Ghana Association of Private Voluntary Organisations in Development (GAPVOD), which serves as the umbrella body for NGOs in the country, lists about 450 members across both local and international NGOs. These NGOs operate in diverse sectors such as poverty alleviation, human rights advocacy, governance, education, health, and climate change, playing a critical role in national development and social change.

Out of the total of 6,520 registered non-profit organizations in Ghana, this study will focus on a representative sample of 30 non-profits. These 30 organizations will be selected using a stratified random sampling method to ensure that a diverse range of non-profits, including both local and international NGOs, are included in the sample. The selection will take into account the size, geographical spread, and sectoral focus of the organizations to ensure that the sample adequately represents the broader population of NGOs across the country. These organizations will encompass a mix of large, well-established entities and smaller, community-based NGOs, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of the different approaches to fundraising and the role of storytelling within varied organizational contexts. By choosing a sample of 30, the study aims to draw relevant insights into the practices and challenges faced by non-profits in Ghana, particularly in relation to the use of storytelling in fundraising campaigns. This sample size is considered sufficient for providing a reliable basis for analysis while ensuring the results are generalizable to the wider population of NGOs operating within the country.

The NPO Secretariat, established under the Non-Profit Organisation Policy and Directives of 2020, is responsible for regulating and registering NGOs in Ghana. It ensures that non-profits adhere to national standards and guidelines while promoting transparency, accountability, and effective governance within the sector. Through its work, the Secretariat also helps to identify the contribution of NGOs to national development, as well as monitor their financial activities to prevent misuse of funds. This regulatory role is crucial for strengthening the relationship between NGOs, the state, and the communities they serve.

The non-profit sector in Ghana is vast, with organizations ranging from large, well-funded international NGOs to smaller, grassroots community-based organizations. The sector faces challenges such as over-dependence on foreign aid, limited local funding, and competition for donor resources, which often hinder the sustainability and autonomy of local NGOs. As the sector grows, the need for a clear, strategic framework for collaboration between local and international entities becomes increasingly important. Understanding the population dynamics of this sector, including the number of NGOs, their roles, and their challenges, is essential for studying the impact of storytelling in fundraising activities, as it provides the foundation for identifying relevant organizations and participants in the research.

3.1.4. Sampling Technique

The selection of parts of the components in a population and concluding a study about the entire population based on the sample selected is known as sampling (DR Cooper & Emory, 2003; Suri, 2011). It is also a subset of the populace and a percentage of the population in a study (Ackoff et al., 2010; Marshall et al., 2020). This is justified by Anderson (2010), who posits that gathering information from everyone in public is impossible to get a conclusive result, but it is possible to collect data from all in a small sample. The sampling technique guides researchers in determining who to observe, interview, or analyse (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). For this study, the purposive sampling technique, also called judgment sampling, was employed. This is a non-random technique that does not need underlying theories or a set number of participants (Yin, 2014). According to Teddlie and Tashakkori (2006), the purposive sampling technique involves selecting certain units or cases based on a specific purpose rather than randomly. Simply put, the researchers decide what needs to be known and set out to find people who can and are willing to provide the information by virtue of their knowledge or experience (Yin, 2014). It is typically used in qualitative research to identify and select the information-rich cases for the most proper utilization of available resources (Patton, 2002).

A purposive sampling technique was used to select fundraising professionals and donors actively engaged with Ghanaian non-profit organizations. The study purposively selected on non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that are registered with the Ghana Association of Private Voluntary Organisations in Development (GAPVOD). GAPVOD serves as the primary umbrella body for NGOs in Ghana, providing a comprehensive list of both local and international members across various sectors, including health, education, human rights, and environmental sustainability. The focus on GAPVOD-registered organizations ensures that the study targets non-profits with substantial experience in fundraising and donor engagement, particularly those with established practices in utilizing storytelling as a strategic tool for building donor trust and engagement. This approach enables the researcher to concentrate on organizations that have the necessary expertise and experience to provide relevant insights into the role of storytelling in fundraising within the Ghanaian non-profit sector.

This approach was chosen because the researchers sought to engage individuals with direct, rich experience in the development, execution, or reception of fundraising narratives to obtain profound insights for the analysis. The merit of the method and its suitability for this study made the researchers adopt it. Maxwell (2005) noted that purposive sampling is defined as a type of sampling in which particular settings, persons, or events are deliberately selected for the important information they can provide that cannot be obtained from other choices. In the opinion of Merriam (2000), purposive sampling is based on the belief that the researcher wants to discover, understand, gain insight and, therefore, must select a sample from which the most can be learned. Similarly, Neuman (2004) has stated that purposive sampling is used in situations in which an expected judgment is required in selecting cases with a specific purpose in mind, such as identifying experts in storytelling and donor relations within the Ghanaian non-profit sector.

Given the focus on strategic narrative mechanisms and the need for depth, the researchers intentionally sought participants with significant, hands-on experience in fundraising and donor engagement within Ghana. Purposive sampling is appropriate in three main situations (Neuman, 2004). The first situation is when a researcher uses it to select unique cases that are informative. The second is when a researcher uses it to choose group members that are difficult to reach. Finally, purposive sampling is used to identify particular types of cases for in-depth investigation, which aligns with this study's aim to explore nuanced storytelling practices. In addition to knowledge and experience, Djamba and Neuman (2002) note the importance of availability and willingness to participate and the ability to communicate experiences and opinions in an articulate, expressive, and reflective manner. According to Saunders et al. (2009), purposive or judgmental sampling allows the researchers to use their judgment to select cases that would best enable them to answer the research questions and achieve the stated objectives. The main goal of purposive sampling focuses on the characteristics of a population of interest, which helps the researcher answer the research questions. The respondents were purposively selected because the information on the subject matter is specific, and therefore, an expert with the requisite experience is required to achieve reliable data on storytelling as a strategic mechanism for donor engagement and trust-building.

3.1.5 Sample Size

The determination of the sample size for the analysis in this study was grounded in the principle of data saturation, a key consideration in qualitative research. The study also determined the sample size used for the analysis. Data saturation happens when no extra information is gathered; there are common issues or themes, no new coding, and the research can be replicated elsewhere (McCusker & Gunaydin, 2015; Moser & Korstjens, 2018). Boeren (2017) contended that qualitative research achieves saturation with a sample size range of 5 and 50 participants. Again, Ravitch and Carl (2016) also argue that saturation occurs when no new subjects emerge,

typically between 8 and 11 interviews. In adherence to these qualitative research principles, the sample size for this study was determined to be 30 non-governmental organizations (NGOs) registered with the Ghana Association of Private Voluntary Organisations in Development (GAPVOD). This decision was grounded in the attainment of data saturation, ensuring that the insights and perspectives gathered were comprehensive, rich, and reflective of the experiences and views of participants deeply engaged on the subject matter (McCusker & Gunaydin, 2015; Moser & Korstjens, 2018). The careful selection of 25 participants adheres to saturation principles, recognising the scope of the study issue and the requirement for a suitably diverse yet focused sample to capture how storytelling functions as a strategic mechanism for donor engagement and trust-building within Ghanaian non-profit organisations.

3.2 Material/Data

3.2.1 Sources of Data

Data used for research work can be sourced in two main ways, namely primary data and secondary data (Saunders et al., 2008). For this study, primary data was used. An interview guide was the main research instrument to gather the primary data for the analysis. The guide helped the interviewers to pace the interview and make the interview more systematic and comprehensive. Primary data offers the finest basis of information.

3.2.2 Research Instrument

As indicated earlier, an interview guide was designed to solicit the respondents' views. Based on the information the researchers required, these research instruments were deemed appropriate. The research instrument was designed to ensure that all relevant information is captured to improve the validity of the research findings. The interview guide was designed to obtain in-depth knowledge from the respondents. Corbin and Strauss (2012) argued that the interview method enables striking a rapport with the participants, allowing the researcher to win their trust easily.” This is necessary for the interviewees to express themselves and capture

the desired information freely. According to Kvale (1996), the qualitative research interview attempts "to understand the world from the subjects' points of view, to unfold the meaning of peoples' experiences, to uncover their lived world. Qualitative research interviews also enabled the researchers to see the research topic from the interviewee's perspective (King, 2014).

The qualitative data was gathered by tapping the impression through semi-structured open-ended questions and interviews converted into units based on the number of research objectives. Semi-structured interviews can be referred to as non-standardized (Agee, 2009; Johnson et al., 2020; Moen & Middelthon, 2015; Saunders et al., 2019) or qualitative research interviews (Qu & Dumay, 2011). This structure was adopted because the researchers were convinced it was best based on the study's objectives. This type of interview requires the researcher or interviewers to ask a set of questions based on themes developed; however, some of these questions may be omitted or vary from interview to interview based on the context and the research topic (Saunders, & Thornhill, 2009). Semi-structured interviews allow the researchers to gain in-depth information since the interviewees can be pushed to build on or explain further with their responses, hence allowing them to reflect on happenings. Semi-structured interviews may also cause the interviewee to bring up relevant information that was not asked but was very significant to the study, hence adding more depth to the research. However, a major action the researchers took to minimize the disadvantages of interviews was following the predetermined interview guide and forming a good understanding relationship with the respondents by boosting their involvement in the interview process.

The interview guide was designed to generate participants' perspectives about ideas, opinions, and experiences (Mugenda 2003; McMillan & Schumacher 2001). The semi-structured interview guide provides clear instructions for interviewers and can provide reliable, comparable qualitative data. Semi-structured interviews are often preceded by observation, informal and unstructured interviews to allow the researcher to develop a keen understanding

of the topic of interest necessary for developing relevant and meaningful semi-structured questions. Furthermore, the semi-structured interview guide can follow up on incomplete or unclear responses by asking probing questions.

3.2.2.1 Data Collection

To ensure that all information provided was captured, the researcher sought the permission of the interviewee to record the conversation. The result of the interview process was synthesized and well-presented. For this study, the interview guide was drafted to cover the themes arising out of the purpose and objectives of the study. Instead, the researchers asked questions based on the informant's responses. Each interview lasted about 15-30 minutes due to the busy schedules of the interviewees. Interviewees agreed to participate in the discussion because it would not take much of their time.

3.3 Data Analysis

There are a variety of data analysis methods, and some examples, according to (Bowen, 2009; Yin, 2014), are typology, categorization or taxonomy, analytic induction, domain analysis, thematic analysis, and content analysis, amongst others. This part of the research is very important (Sutton & Austin, 2015) because the data obtained answer the research questions while making the researcher creative in breaking them down to analyse them differently (I. Mayer, 2015). Babbie (2007) discusses that it does not matter if your research is qualitative or quantitative since both methods deal with the labelling and coding of the data to focus on the dissimilarities and similarities in the data collected. The raw data obtained from research is useless unless it is transformed into information for decision-making (Cooper & Schindler, 2006). According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), data analysis is the process of systematically applying statistical and/or logical techniques to describe and illustrate, condense and recap, and evaluate data. Data analysis was developed to deal with the manipulation of the information that was gathered to present the evidence. The data collected was edited to check

contradictions and ensure consistency. During data processing and analysis, qualitative data collected through the interviews was checked well to ensure that all items on the interview guide were captured. Each datum collected was numbered to facilitate effective processing and analysis of the data. Transcription of recorded tapes and notes was taken during the period the interviews was carried out to ensure that all issues are effectively captured in the study (Yin, 2014).

According to Creswell (2009) anytime data is retrieved from the field, the researcher must first make meaning of the bulk data that has been collected in the form of pictures and scripts. The scholar goes on to say that a researcher must also prepare the data for analysis before delving further and deeper into the data to fully grasp it. In this study, the researchers did a thorough reading of the whole data set to discover the wider themes and patterns in which the participants discussed the issues under investigation. Following that, codes were allocated, and themes were produced. The researchers adopted the thematic analysis approach in analysing the responses provided by the respondents. Yin (2014) states that thematic analysis is the appropriate method in qualitative research as it is used in identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns within data. Also, they posit that thematic analysis allows for rich, detailed, and complex descriptions of data collected. In this context, the thematic analysis was done manually by categorizing and compiling data collected from respondents into sub-themes. The thematic analysis goes beyond simply counting phrases or words in a text and identifying implicit and explicit ideas within the data. As the name implies, thematic analysis relies on inductive reasoning, in which themes emerge from the raw data through repeated examination and comparison.

The qualitative data conducted with all other categories of respondents was analysed manually by making summaries of the respondents' views. The analysis was organized under themes derived from the data and the research questions that guided the entire investigation. The researchers assign IDs to each respondent, listens to all interview recordings to become familiar

with each interview's content, and notes the meanings of responses relevant to the study. The researchers then cluster the meanings of responses with the same content, condenses them into themes, and discuss the themes that come out until an agreement is reached on the interpretation of the data. The responses were coded **R1** to **RN**, where **R1** to **RN** represents the first respondent to the last respondent, respectively.

3.4 Ethical Issues Addressed

The ethical implications of the research are vital since the researcher and the participants involved must be considered, with ethical issues in research being linked to safeguarding confidential data and treating respondents and all involved appropriately Sekaran and Bougie (2016). Saunders et al. (2009) provide a very detailed definition of ethics in research, which is related to issues or questions about research topic design, research design, data collection, gaining access, storage, processing, and analysing data as well as how the research findings are all presented and conducted morally and sensibly, justifying that ethical concerns begin right from the start of the research and showing how critical this aspect of research should be considered. According to Saunders et al. (2012), research ethics relates to issues concerning how the research topic is formulated and clarified, the data collection procedure, data processing and storage, and how the data is presented and analysed, and the researchers ensured that the research was conducted in a morally responsible manner by trying as much as possible to avoid plagiarism, competently reviewing the literature to obtain high-quality research, avoiding shading the results of the research, informing interviewees about the research and avoiding coercing respondents to participate in the study, and finally protecting the interviewees' right to privacy by keeping the information provided confidential.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS, PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and discusses the findings of the study based on the data gathered from respondents. It begins by outlining the demographic characteristics of participants to provide context for interpreting their responses. The chapter then proceeds to analyse the major themes that emerged from the data, focusing on how they relate to the study objectives. Finally, the results are discussed in relation to existing literature, highlighting points of convergence and divergence.

4.2 Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Of the 25 respondents in the study, 15 were fundraising and communications staff at Ghanaian non-profit organisations, and 10 were active donors who regularly support these organisations. The organisational respondents were drawn from NGOs registered under GAPVOD and working across key sectors such as health, education, human rights, governance and environmental sustainability. This spread mirrors the diversity of the non-profit landscape, where storytelling is deployed as a fundraising tool. Donor participants were individuals who had a history of giving to at least one of these organisations and were familiar with their communication and fundraising practices. Staff offered insight into how stories are planned, crafted and disseminated. At the same time, donors illuminated how those same narratives are received, interpreted and translated into decisions to give, remain engaged or deepen trust in Ghanaian non-profit organisations.

The demographic profile of respondents also reflected a valuable mix of gender, age and educational backgrounds that shape perspectives on story-based fundraising. Of the 25 participants, 14 identified as female and 11 as male, consistent with the strong female presence in communication and development practice in Ghana. Five respondents were between 21 and

30 years, 10 were aged 31 to 40 years and the remaining 10 were above 40 years, many of whom occupied senior or managerial roles. In terms of education, 5 respondents held diploma-level qualifications, 12 had bachelor's degrees, and 8 possessed postgraduate degrees in areas such as communication studies, development studies, marketing and business administration. These characteristics are relevant to the study because gendered life experiences, generational familiarity with digital media and advanced training in communication or development can all influence how respondents design, evaluate or respond to storytelling as a mechanism for deepening donor engagement and building trust in Ghanaian non-profit organisations.

Professional experience, geographical location, and the length of relationships with organisations further enriched the demographic picture. Among staff, 7 respondents had worked with their current non-profit for between one and five years, 5 had between six and ten years of experience, and 3 had more than ten years in senior fundraising or communication roles. On the donor side, 4 respondents had supported their preferred organisations for less than three years, whereas 6 had done so for more than five years through repeated donations or long-term partnerships. Regionally, 15 respondents were based in Greater Accra, 5 in the Ashanti Region and 5 in other regions, including Eastern, Northern and Volta, reflecting both headquarters and field perspectives. These patterns are important because they shape how respondents experience stories, perceive credibility, and respond to storytelling as a tool for donor engagement and trust-building.

4.3 Findings

4.3.1 Fundraising professionals' strategies for planning and executing storytelling campaigns across Ghanaian non-profits organizations.

Respondents were asked to describe how their organizations plan storytelling campaigns, including their processes for selecting stories and targeting audiences. Findings indicate a strategic approach centred on four key themes including story selection and prioritization,

audience segmentation and targeting, impact assessment and relevance criteria, and internal planning and coordination processes.

Story Selection and Prioritization

Under this theme, the narratives from fundraising professionals in GAPVOD-registered NGOs showed that story selection and prioritization is a highly deliberate, strategic process rather than an ad hoc choice of “nice” stories. Across organisations working in health, education, human rights, governance and environmental sustainability, respondents described an internal “content pipeline” in which potential stories emerging from programme sites are filtered through informal yet consistent criteria. These criteria include alignment with current fundraising priorities, clarity of impact, ethical suitability, and the perceived capacity of the story to foster narrative transportation and donor trust. Participants repeatedly framed story selection as a way of curating organisational identity for external audiences, while at the same time signalling legitimacy and accountability in a competitive funding environment. Thus, decisions about which beneficiary, community, or project to spotlight are closely linked to the study's overarching purpose: using storytelling as a strategic mechanism to deepen donor engagement and consolidate trust in Ghanaian non-profit organisations. To illustrate this intentionality, one fundraising lead from a governance-focused NGO explained that the team does not simply harvest any emotional case that surfaces from the field:

“We maintain a shortlist of potential stories from our programmes, but we only elevate those that clearly demonstrate change and fit the strategic message we want donors to take away about our work” (Respondent 15).

Another participant from a health NGO emphasised the importance of verifiability and ethical responsibility in prioritising stories for fundraising use, noting that:

“Before a story moves into a campaign, we check that the data can be backed up, that consent is properly documented, and that we are not exposing beneficiaries in ways that could harm them later” (Respondent 7).

A third respondent, working in an education and child rights organisation, highlighted the role of audience segmentation in story choice, stating that:

“If we are talking to long-term institutional donors, we choose more systems-change stories; but for individual givers, we prioritise human-interest stories that allow them to emotionally connect with one learner or one family” (Respondent 22).

These show that story selection and prioritisation are a structured, reflexive practice through which Ghanaian NGOs intentionally craft narratives to maximise donor engagement while safeguarding trust.

Audience Segmentation and Targeting

Under the theme of Audience Segmentation and Targeting, the interviews with fundraising professionals from GAPVOD-registered NGOs revealed that most organisations do not treat “the donor” as a homogeneous category, but rather adopt differentiated audience strategies that shape how stories are framed, packaged and delivered. Respondents repeatedly described how they segment their audiences along multiple axes, including donor type (institutional, corporate, individual, diaspora), giving history (first-time versus recurring donors), and preferred communication channels (email, social media, in-person events). This segmentation informs not only the choice of stories, but also the narrative complexity, tone, level of technical detail and calls-to-action embedded in their campaigns. For example, institutional donors were said to require more evidence-laden, data-backed stories that demonstrate programme effectiveness and alignment with strategic priorities, whereas individual donors often respond better to vivid, emotionally resonant human-interest narratives. In this way, audience

segmentation and targeting becomes a central mechanism through which storytelling is operationalised as a strategic tool for donor engagement and trust-building within Ghanaian non-profit organisations.

Several respondents explicitly articulated how they “match” stories to segmented donor profiles. One communications manager explained that their team deliberately calibrates stories according to donor typologies, noting that:

“We don’t use the same story for everybody. For our corporate and institutional partners, we choose stories that speak to scale and sustainability, but for small individual donors, we send simpler, more emotional stories that highlight one beneficiary at a time” (Respondent 4). Another participant underscored the importance of behavioural and psychographic segmentation, stating that:

“We analyse past giving behaviour and platform analytics to understand who prefers email, who engages more on Instagram or LinkedIn, and then we tailor the narrative style and length to suit those patterns” (Respondent 18).

A third respondent, from a human-rights NGO, linked targeting directly to trust-building, explaining that:

“When donors see that we speak their language and understand their priorities, they are more likely to believe our stories and stay with us for the long term”
(Respondent 9).

Impact Assessment and Relevance Criteria

Under the theme impact Assessment and Relevance Criteria, respondents from GAPVOD-registered NGOs described a strong orientation towards evidence-informed storytelling, in which potential narratives are screened against both programme M&E data and strategic communication needs. Story ideas typically originate from field officers, beneficiary feedback or routine reports, but are only elevated into fundraising stories when they can be anchored in

verifiable outcome indicators such as improved health status, learning outcomes, livelihood gains or governance changes. Respondents stressed that “good stories” are those that can be triangulated with monitoring data, photographs, partner reports and, where possible, beneficiary consent forms, in order to avoid what several termed “cosmetic storytelling” that might generate short-term emotion but undermine credibility. Relevance was also defined in terms of alignment with the organisation’s theory of change, current campaign focus, and donor expectations, so that each selected story functions as a micro-case that illustrates broader programme impact rather than a random anecdote. Impact assessment and relevance criteria therefore operate as internal gatekeeping mechanisms through which storytelling becomes a disciplined strategy for demonstrating effectiveness, enhancing donor engagement and deepening trust in Ghanaian non-profit organisations.

One senior M&E and fundraising officer described how impact validation is built into their narrative pipeline, stating that:

“Before we use a story, we cross-check it against our monitoring data, case files and even photos from the field; if we cannot prove the change, we do not promote that story in our fundraising materials” (Respondent 6).

Another respondent from an education NGO highlighted the importance of strategic fit, explaining that:

“We consider whether the story actually speaks to our current campaign indicators and SDG focus; if it does not align with the results framework we agreed with donors, it is kept for internal learning, not external fundraising” (Respondent 19).

A third participant from a human-rights organisation linked relevance directly to trust, noting that:

“Donors are very sensitive now; when they see that our stories are backed with real numbers and follow-up, they feel we are serious and transparent, and that increases their confidence in us” (Respondent 11).

These show that impact assessment and relevance criteria are central to how Ghanaian NGOs curate trustworthy stories for donor-facing communication.

The respondents were asked to describe the key strategies and processes their teams use to develop, refine and execute storytelling initiatives for fundraising. Findings indicate that their practices aligned with three core themes namely content development and narrative crafting, review, validation and quality assurance, and multi-channel story dissemination. These themes show that storytelling within GAPVOD-registered NGOs is approached as a structured, multi-stage process designed to enhance donor engagement and strengthen trust.

Content Development and Narrative Crafting

Under the theme content development and narrative crafting, respondents from GAPVOD registered NGOs described storytelling as a deliberate, collaborative and technically informed process rather than a spontaneous act of writing. Most fundraising and communication staff explained that story ideas are first sourced from programme reports, monitoring and evaluation outputs and informal testimonies gathered during field visits, and are then transformed into donor facing narratives through structured internal workflows. This process often involves drafting a clear narrative arc that introduces the context and problem, foregrounds a relatable beneficiary or community, and then links observable change to the organisation’s interventions and the support of donors. Respondents emphasised that they consciously work to balance emotional resonance with factual accuracy, avoiding exaggerated claims while still aiming to elicit empathy and narrative transportation. Several participants also highlighted the importance of aligning each story with the organisation’s theory of change and current

fundraising objectives so that individual narratives function as illustrative cases of wider programme impact. Content development and narrative crafting therefore emerges as a core mechanism through which NGOs translate raw field level experiences into strategic stories that can engage donors and strengthen trust in the Ghanaian non-profit sector. One communications officer explained how this process begins with raw material from the field and is then shaped for fundraising use, noting that

“field staff send us case notes, photos and short testimonies, and our role is to turn that into a coherent story that shows the journey from problem to solution in a way donors can easily follow” (Respondent 5).

Another respondent stressed the need for intentional framing that connects the narrative to donor identity and values, stating that

“when we are crafting the story, we are always asking how a donor will see themselves in this change and how we can write it so they feel like partners, not just paymasters” (Respondent 12).

A third participant, working in a human rights focused NGO, underscored the ethical dimension of narrative crafting, explaining that

“we choose our words very carefully so that we do not sensationalise people’s suffering, because trust is lost immediately if donors sense that we are manipulating emotions” (Respondent 23).

These indicate that content development and narrative crafting is treated as a strategic, ethically sensitive practice through which NGOs design stories that are emotionally engaging, evidence informed and closely aligned with the overarching goal of deepening donor engagement and trust.

Review, Validation, and Quality Assurance

Under the theme review, validation and quality assurance, respondents from GAPVOD registered NGOs described a structured, multi layered process designed to safeguard the accuracy, integrity and ethical soundness of fundraising stories before they are released to donors. Draft narratives that emerge from programme teams or communications units are typically subjected to several levels of scrutiny, including factual cross checking with monitoring and evaluation data, consultation with programme managers, and where necessary, legal or safeguarding review. Respondents emphasised that this internal vetting is not a cosmetic step but a critical control mechanism that protects organisational credibility in an increasingly accountability driven funding environment. Errors, exaggeration or inappropriate use of beneficiary information were seen as direct threats to donor trust and long term engagement, so quality assurance procedures have been institutionalised as part of the storytelling workflow. Review and validation therefore function as a key interface between internal evidence systems and external narrative outputs, ensuring that the stories presented to donors are both compelling and demonstrably credible within the Ghanaian non-profit context. One fundraising manager described this multi layered process in detail, noting that;

“no story goes out after the first draft, programme leads, M and E and communications all have to sign off so that we are sure the information is correct and the tone is appropriate for our donors” (Respondent 8).

Another respondent highlighted the importance of verification against existing data, explaining that;

“we always cross check the claims in the story with our indicators and reports, because once a donor sees a discrepancy, they start to doubt everything we say”
(Respondent 2).

A third participant, working in a child-focused organisation, drew attention to ethical and safeguarding considerations, stating that;

“part of our quality assurance is to check consent forms, remove identifying details where necessary and make sure we are not exposing vulnerable people just to raise money” (Respondent 17).

These indicate that review, validation and quality assurance are central to how Ghanaian NGOs use storytelling as a disciplined mechanism for building and sustaining donor trust.

Multi-channel Story Dissemination

Under the theme multi-channel story dissemination, respondents from GAPVOD registered NGOs described storytelling for fundraising as an intentionally omni-channel practice in which a single core narrative is adapted and repurposed across multiple platforms to maximise reach, engagement and trust building. Communication and fundraising staff reported that once a story has been developed and validated, it is strategically reformatted for different interfaces such as email newsletters, organisational websites, annual reports, community durbars, WhatsApp broadcasts, radio discussions and social media platforms including Facebook, X, Instagram and LinkedIn. Narratives are shortened, visualised or expanded depending on channel specific affordances and audience preferences, while efforts are made to maintain message consistency and a coherent organisational voice. Respondents linked this multi-channel deployment directly to donor relationship management, explaining that repeated yet tailored exposure to the same story across touchpoints reinforces credibility, keeps supporters updated on impact and nudges occasional givers towards more sustained engagement. Multi-channel story dissemination therefore emerges as a key operational mechanism through which Ghanaian NGOs leverage storytelling to sustain donor attention, personalise contact and deepen trust over time.

One digital communications officer explained how a single story is deliberately staged across platforms, stating that;

“when we approve a story, we do not just post it once and forget; we design a content plan so that parts of the story appear in our newsletter, on Facebook and LinkedIn, and then later in our impact report, all reinforcing the same message”
(Respondent 10).

Another respondent emphasised the importance of tailoring content to different media environments, noting that;

“on WhatsApp and Instagram we use more visuals and short captions, but for email and our website we give fuller narratives and data so that donors who want details can go deeper” (Respondent 1).

A third participant highlighted the trust building dimension of this approach, explaining that;

“when donors keep seeing consistent stories across our channels, they feel we are transparent and organised, and that makes them more comfortable to commit to us long term” (Respondent 24).

These indicate that multi-channel story dissemination is treated as a deliberate engagement strategy rather than a mere broadcasting exercise in the Ghanaian non-profit sector.

Monitoring, Evaluation, and Feedback Mechanisms

Under the theme monitoring, evaluation and feedback mechanisms, respondents from GAPVOD registered NGOs described a growing effort to treat storytelling not only as a creative activity but as a testable intervention that is continuously assessed and refined. Many fundraising and communication staff explained that once stories are disseminated, their performance is tracked using both quantitative indicators and qualitative feedback. Quantitative measures mentioned included email open and click rates, website traffic on story pages, social media reach and engagement, and short-term changes in donation volumes

following specific campaigns. Qualitative inputs were obtained through informal donor conversations, follow-up calls, stakeholder review meetings and focus group discussions with key partners. Respondents noted that these data are used to identify which narrative elements resonate most strongly with different donor segments, which messages may trigger scepticism, and how story framing affects perceptions of organisational transparency and credibility. Monitoring and evaluation processes, therefore, create feedback loops through which storytelling strategies are iteratively adjusted, reinforcing the study's central argument that narrative practice functions as a strategic mechanism for sustaining donor engagement and building trust within the Ghanaian non-profit context. One fundraising officer explained how simple metrics inform learning after each campaign, stating that;

“we always look at the numbers after a story goes out, who opened, who clicked, who donated, and that helps us to know which kind of stories move our donors to act” (Respondent 3).

Another respondent highlighted the importance of direct donor feedback, noting that;

“sometimes a donor will reply to our newsletter or mention a story during a visit, and we record those comments so we can understand what they liked or what they did not trust” (Respondent 14).

A third participant described how these insights feed back into planning, explaining that;

“every quarter we review the performance of our stories and agree as a team on what to drop and what to do more of, so our storytelling keeps improving and donors feel that we are listening to them” (Respondent 20).

These show that monitoring, evaluation and feedback mechanisms are integral to how Ghanaian NGOs manage storytelling as an adaptive and accountable fundraising strategy.

The respondents were asked to explain how storytelling is integrated into their broader fundraising and communication strategies to enhance donor engagement and trust. Findings

indicate that their responses centred around four key themes, which are alignment of stories with fundraising goals, trust building through transparency and authenticity, integration with donor engagement tactics, and consistent branding and message cohesion.

Alignment of Stories with Fundraising Goals

Under the theme alignment of stories with fundraising goals, respondents from GAPVOD registered NGOs described storytelling as tightly integrated with their resource mobilisation agenda rather than as an ad hoc communication activity. Fundraising and communication staff consistently explained that narratives are crafted and selected only after clear campaign objectives, target amounts and priority programmes have been defined, so that each story operates as a strategic instrument to advance specific fundraising goals. Respondents noted that stories are mapped onto programme log frames and annual fundraising plans, with attention to which outcomes need to be highlighted, which donor segments are being targeted and which funding gaps require visibility. Storylines are therefore designed to illustrate concrete elements of the organisation's theory of change, foregrounding results that match key performance indicators and donor reporting commitments. Respondents also emphasised that alignment reduces the risk of "scattered messaging," strengthens the coherence between appeals and actual expenditure, and helps donors to see a direct line between their contributions and articulated impact. Alignment of stories with fundraising goals thus emerged as a central mechanism through which storytelling is used to reinforce donor confidence and channel attention towards priority interventions within the Ghanaian non-profit sector.

One fundraising coordinator described how campaign planning drives narrative choices, explaining that;

"we start with the fundraising target and the project we want to support, then we look for stories that clearly showcase that kind of impact instead of telling any random success story" (Respondent 9).

Another respondent highlighted the importance of connecting stories to budget lines and programmatic needs, stating that:

“if the goal is to raise funds for our girls’ education programme, the story must speak directly to that programme so that when donors give, they feel the story and the budget are saying the same thing” (Respondent 16).

A third participant, working within an environmental NGO, linked this alignment directly to trust, noting that;

“when our appeals and our stories are consistent with what appears later in our reports, donors feel reassured that we are serious and that their money is going exactly where we said it would go” (Respondent 4).

Trust-building Through Transparency and Authenticity

Under the theme trust building through transparency and authenticity, respondents from GAPVOD registered NGOs consistently framed storytelling as a vehicle for “showing their work” to donors rather than simply soliciting funds. Fundraising and communication staff explained that stories are deliberately constructed to open up organisational processes, reveal both successes and challenges, and provide verifiable details on how resources are used. Narratives are frequently anchored in real project timelines, named communities, specific activities and measurable outcomes, with care taken to avoid exaggeration or “poverty pornography” that could undermine credibility. Respondents described authenticity as grounded in the use of genuine beneficiary voices, unfiltered photographs, accurate data and honest disclosure when projects face delays or partial results. Transparency was also linked to follow up stories that close the loop with donors by reporting what happened after an appeal. Trust building through transparency and authenticity therefore emerged as a core logic of storytelling practice, reinforcing the central argument of the study that narrative strategies

function as a key mechanism for deepening donor engagement and sustaining confidence in Ghanaian non-profit organisations.

One programme manager illustrated this logic when she explained that their stories are deliberately anchored in real evidence, noting that;

“we always mention the actual community, the activity and the numbers involved so that if a donor wants to cross check, the information is there and nothing is hidden” (Respondent 7).

Another respondent emphasised honest communication about limitations, stating that;

“sometimes we also tell donors what did not go perfectly, because when they see that we are open about challenges, their trust in our stories actually increases” (Respondent 13).

A third participant highlighted the importance of genuine voices, explaining that;

“we prefer to use direct quotes from beneficiaries and frontline staff instead of scripted messages, since donors can usually tell when a story is over polished and not authentic” (Respondent 21).

These indicate that transparency and authenticity are not peripheral ideals but central design principles in how Ghanaian NGOs employ storytelling to build and protect donor trust.

Integration with Donor Engagement Tactics

The theme integration with donor engagement tactics emerged strongly across interviews, with respondents describing storytelling as an integral part of their broader donor stewardship and relationship-building strategy. Fundraising and communication staff noted that stories are intentionally embedded across different stages of the donor journey, including prospect outreach, initial appeals, donor onboarding, thank-you communications, periodic updates and re-engagement efforts. Stories are curated to perform specific relational functions such as reinforcing perceived impact, strengthening emotional connection, and addressing information

gaps that may hinder trust. Respondents explained that storytelling is deliberately aligned with segmented donor lists, annual fundraising calendars and tailored communication plans so that the right narrative reaches the right donor at the right moment. This integration demonstrates that storytelling is not an isolated creative exercise but a strategic engagement tool used to cultivate loyalty, sustain interest and deepen trust across Ghanaian non-profit organisations.

One fundraising officer illustrated this relational approach by noting that;

“after someone donates, we make sure to send a follow-up story that shows exactly who benefited so they feel connected and stay engaged” (Respondent 2).

Another respondent highlighted the use of stories in corporate pitch environments, explaining that;

“during stakeholder meetings or engagements, we start with one powerful story because that is what sets the tone and opens the door for deeper conversations about support” (Respondent 18).

A third participant described the role of storytelling in re-engaging inactive donors, stating that;

“whenever donors go quiet, we send them a targeted story update and many of them respond because they feel valued and see that their past support is still making an impact” (Respondent 25).

These demonstrate that integrating storytelling with donor engagement tactics is a core strategy used to reinforce trust and sustain long-term donor commitment.

Consistent Branding and Message Cohesion

The theme of consistent branding and message cohesion featured prominently in the narratives of fundraising and communication staff from GAPVOD registered NGOs, who described storytelling as a key vehicle for reinforcing a unified organisational identity across all donor facing platforms. Respondents explained that stories are not crafted in isolation but are intentionally aligned with approved brand narratives, core values, visual identity guidelines

and key messaging pillars such as empowerment, accountability, inclusion or sustainability. Communication teams reported using internal style guides and message frameworks to ensure that language, tone and visual elements remain coherent whether a story appears in a social media post, an annual report, a proposal or a community durbar presentation. This emphasis on cohesion was framed as essential for avoiding mixed signals, reducing donor confusion and building a stable, recognisable organisational “voice” over time. Respondents linked consistent branding directly to trust building, noting that donors are more likely to perceive an NGO as credible, serious and reliable when stories, logos, taglines and core messages are mutually reinforcing rather than fragmented. Consistent branding and message cohesion therefore emerged as a critical way through which storytelling supports the broader objective of enhancing donor engagement and consolidating trust within the Ghanaian non-profit space. One communications lead described how internal guidelines sustain this coherence, explaining that;

“we use a message handbook so that whether it is a Facebook story or a funding proposal, the way we describe our mission and our impact sounds the same and feels like one organisation speaking” (Respondent 5).

Another respondent emphasised the risk of inconsistency for donor confidence, noting that;

“when donors see different messages and tones from us on different platforms, it creates doubt, so we make sure our stories, slogans and visuals are harmonised” (Respondent 11).

A third participant, whose organisation works in both health and education, highlighted the role of branding in long term relationship building, stating that;

“over the years donors have come to recognise our stories and colours, and that familiarity makes them feel that we are stable and trustworthy partners” (Respondent 22).

These suggest that consistent branding and message cohesion are treated as strategic requirements for using storytelling to sustain recognition, reliability and trust among diverse donor audiences.

4.3.2 Donor perceptions of organizational narratives and how these shape emotional connection and trust.

The respondents were asked how they generally perceive the stories shared by the non-profit organizations they support and which aspects of those stories stand out most to them. Findings indicate that their perceptions were shaped around three key themes which are perceived credibility and truthfulness of narratives, clarity, relevance and coherence of the message, and the emotional resonance created through human-centred story elements. These themes show that donors pay close attention not only to the content of the stories but also to how authentic, understandable and emotionally engaging those narratives are, factors that directly influence their trust and connection to the organization.

The respondents were also asked to describe how a particular story from a non-profit organization influenced their feelings or level of trust toward that organization. Findings indicate that their reflections aligned with three central themes which are trust reinforcement through evidence and transparency, emotional impact and personal identification with the beneficiary, and consistency between the story and the organization's observable actions. These themes illustrate that donors form trust not only from the emotional power of a narrative but also from the perceived honesty of the information presented and the organisation's ability to demonstrate alignment between its stories and its real-world practices.

Trust Reinforcement Through Evidence and Transparency

Trust reinforcement through evidence and transparency featured prominently in donors' narratives about stories they received from GAPVOD-registered NGOs. Respondents explained that their trust is heightened when organisational stories are anchored in concrete,

verifiable information rather than vague claims of impact. Donors paid close attention to whether narratives included specific locations, timeframes, beneficiary numbers, budget figures and follow up results, and whether these elements aligned with previous reports or communications from the same organisation. Stories that openly acknowledged challenges, partial success or delays were described as more believable than “perfect” success stories, because such transparency signalled honesty and accountability in the use of funds. Respondents also emphasised that they are more inclined to deepen their support when stories are accompanied by photographs, testimonials, basic monitoring data or links to more detailed reports, since these forms of evidencing reduce perceived risk and uncertainty. Trust reinforcement through evidence and transparency therefore emerged as a central pathway through which organisational narratives shape donors’ emotional security and willingness to sustain engagement with Ghanaian non-profit organisations.

One donor described how specific details strengthened confidence, stating that;

“when an organisation shows me the community name, the number of people reached and even small budget breakdowns in the story, I feel they have nothing to hide and I trust them more” (Respondent 8).

Another respondent highlighted the value of honest disclosure, noting that;

“the story that really made me trust one NGO more was when they admitted a project had delays but explained what they were doing to fix it instead of pretending everything was perfect” (Respondent 17).

A third donor stressed the importance of linking stories to evidence, explaining that;

“if a story comes with photos, short testimonies and a link to a report, I believe it much more than a story with just emotional words” (Respondent 5).

Emotional Impact and Personal Identification with the Beneficiary

Emotional impact and personal identification with the beneficiary emerged as a powerful lens through which donors from GAPVOD-linked organisations interpreted and responded to organisational stories. Respondents explained that narratives which foreground a specific individual, family or community and trace their journey from struggle to some form of improvement tend to evoke stronger feelings of empathy, compassion and moral responsibility than abstract descriptions of projects or statistics. Donors described “seeing themselves” or people they know in the stories, particularly when beneficiaries were children, women, or communities whose circumstances mirrored their own background, upbringing or locality. This sense of identification was said to make the needs feel more immediate and the intervention more meaningful, prompting donors to move from passive interest to active support or renewed commitment. Emotional impact was not described as mere sentimentality but as a catalyst for deeper connection, shaping how donors internalise the organisation’s mission, remember its work and decide which NGOs to trust and prioritise when resources are limited in the Ghanaian non-profit space.

One donor captured this experience, explaining that;

“when I read about one girl’s story and her challenges with school, it felt like my own childhood, so I felt I had to support that organisation more” (Respondent 6).

Another respondent described the effect of vivid, human-centred storytelling, noting that;

“stories that focus on one person or one family touch me more than big numbers, because I can picture the person in my mind and imagine their life changing”

(Respondent 19). A third donor linked emotional impact directly to ongoing engagement, stating that;

“the organisations I keep supporting are the ones whose stories make me feel something in my heart, not just in my head, because I feel connected to the people they are helping” (Respondent 23).

Consistency Between Story and Observed Organizational Actions

Consistency between story and observed organisational actions emerged as a critical condition for donor trust among respondents who support GAPVOD registered NGOs. Donors explained that they do not assess narratives in isolation but continuously compare what organisations say in their stories with what they see in practice through follow up reports, media coverage, field visits, or feedback from community contacts. Stories that accurately reflected programme scale, beneficiary profiles and reported outcomes were perceived as credible and reinforced the sense that the organisation was honest, organised and accountable. Any perceived mismatch such as repeated grand narratives without visible progress, or promises that were not revisited in later communications, was described as damaging to trust and sometimes led donors to reduce or withdraw support.

One donor described this alignment, explaining that;

“when the story they tell in the email is the same as what I later see in their reports and during visits, I feel they are genuine and I can continue supporting them”
(Respondent 2).

Another respondent highlighted the consequences of inconsistency, noting that;

“I stopped giving to one organisation because the stories sounded big but year after year I could not see any real evidence that those projects were happening on the ground” (Respondent 14).

A third donor linked consistency directly to trust, stating that;

“the NGOs I trust most are the ones whose stories, actions and financial reports all match, because then I know my money is not just supporting nice words”

(Respondent 20).

The respondents were asked to describe the qualities in a story that make them feel emotionally connected to a cause or confident in an organization’s credibility. Findings indicate that their responses aligned with three key themes which are authenticity and the use of genuine beneficiary voices, specific and verifiable impact details supported by data, and a compelling narrative structure that clearly demonstrates transformation. These themes suggest that donors respond most strongly to stories that feel real, are grounded in evidence, and present a clear journey of change, all of which deepen emotional connection and reinforce trust in the organisation.

Authenticity and Use of Genuine Beneficiary Voices

Authenticity and use of genuine beneficiary voices emerged as a central quality that donors look for when assessing both their emotional connection to a cause and their confidence in an organisation’s credibility. Respondents indicated that stories feel more believable and compelling when they can “hear” the voices of real people rather than polished, institutional language. Donors described paying attention to whether narratives include direct quotations, everyday expressions, and context-specific details that sound like they come from actual beneficiaries and frontline staff in Ghanaian communities. Highly scripted or overly glossy stories were often interpreted as marketing rather than reality, which weakened trust. Narratives that preserved the dignity of beneficiaries, reflected their agency, and acknowledged both struggles and progress were described as especially powerful. Authenticity in this sense goes beyond style; it signals that NGOs working under GAPVOD are willing to foreground lived

experience rather than simply impose a corporate voice, aligning with the study's focus on storytelling as a strategic mechanism for building donor engagement and trust.

One donor explained this preference clearly, stating that;

“when I see real quotes from beneficiaries in their own simple words, I feel the story is true and not something the office just invented” (Respondent 3).

Another respondent emphasised the difference in tone, noting that;

“stories that sound too perfect or too polished do not move me, but when I hear a mother or a youth speaking honestly about their situation, I feel closer to the organisation” (Respondent 12).

A third donor linked genuine voices directly to credibility, explaining that;

“I trust NGOs more when they let the community speak for themselves instead of always speaking on their behalf, because it shows they are not just using people to raise money” (Respondent 21).

Specific, Verifiable Impact Details and Data

Specific, verifiable impact details and data were repeatedly highlighted by donors as a critical quality that increases both their emotional confidence in a story and their trust in the organisation that tells it. Respondents supporting GAPVOD-linked NGOs explained that they are more persuaded when narratives move beyond generic claims of “helping communities” and instead provide concrete information such as the name of the community, number of beneficiaries reached, type of intervention delivered and observable changes over time. References to baseline and endline conditions, simple statistics, or explicit links to programme indicators were said to make stories feel more “real” and accountable, especially in a context where donors are increasingly wary of vague or exaggerated appeals. Donors also noted that stories backed with basic data and follow up results help them visualise the scale and depth of impact, and allow them to justify their giving decisions to spouses, colleagues or corporate

boards. Specific, verifiable details therefore function as an important credibility cue, reinforcing the study's central argument that evidence grounded storytelling strengthens donor engagement and trust in Ghanaian non-profit organisations.

One respondent captured this expectation, explaining that;

"I pay more attention to stories that tell me how many people were actually helped and where, not just that lives were changed in general" (Respondent 4).

Another donor stressed the role of simple data, noting that;

"when a story mentions numbers and progress, like how school attendance improved or how many boreholes were completed, I feel my money is doing something tangible" (Respondent 10).

A third participant linked verifiability directly to trust, stating that;

"if the story gives clear facts that can be checked in their reports or on their website, I am more comfortable increasing my support" (Respondent 18).

Compelling Narrative Structure that Demonstrates Transformation

Compelling narrative structure that demonstrates transformation emerged as a distinctive quality donors use to judge both their emotional connection to a cause and the credibility of GAPVOD-linked NGOs. Respondents explained that the stories which stay with them are those that clearly trace a journey from an initial problem or vulnerability, through a specific intervention, to a visible change in the lives of beneficiaries or communities. Donors described looking for a clear "before-during-after" arc rather than disjointed or static descriptions of need. Narratives that situate beneficiaries in a relatable context, explain what exactly the organisation did, and then show concrete improvements were seen as more persuasive and easier to remember. This sense of transformation was said to heighten emotional engagement, because donors can mentally follow the trajectory of change and picture the role their contributions played in that process.

One donor described this preference, explaining that;

“the stories that move me are the ones that start with a real struggle, show what the NGO did and then end with clear change in the person’s life” (Respondent 1).

Another respondent highlighted the importance of showing progress, noting that;

“I like stories that take me from how things were before to how they are now, because then I can see that my support is part of a real transformation”
(Respondent 13).

A third participant linked narrative structure directly to trust, stating that;

“when a story has a clear beginning, middle and end, with clear results, I feel the organisation knows what it is doing and I am more confident to keep giving”
(Respondent 25).

4.3.3 Mechanisms through which storytelling reduces donor scepticism and strengthens institutional credibility.

The respondents were asked to share examples of stories or campaigns that helped reduce doubt or scepticism among donors toward their organizations. Findings indicate that their reflections centred on four key mechanisms which are evidence-backed narratives that directly address donor concerns, the use of follow-up stories to demonstrate verified progress, transparency about challenges and corrective actions, and visible alignment between story promises and actual programme outcomes.

Evidence-Backed Narratives that Address Donor Concerns Directly

Evidence backed narratives that address donor concerns directly emerged as a primary mechanism through which GAPVOD registered NGOs use storytelling to reduce scepticism and strengthen institutional credibility. Respondents explained that, in a context where donors increasingly question where funds go and whether projects are genuinely implemented, stories that explicitly respond to these worries are seen as more reassuring than generic impact

anecdotes. Fundraising and communication staff described deliberately constructing narratives around issues donors have previously raised such as fears of mismanagement, project abandonment or exaggerated claims. Stories are therefore framed to show concrete activities, name specific communities, link to programme indicators and, where possible, reference independent verification such as monitoring visits, partner reports or photographs. Narratives are also used to “close the loop” on earlier appeals by demonstrating what was actually done with funds already received. Evidence backed storytelling in this sense functions as a targeted reputational intervention, directly engaging donor doubts and reframing them through transparent, data informed accounts of change, which reinforces the study’s focus on storytelling as a strategic mechanism for reducing scepticism and enhancing trust in Ghanaian non-profit organisations.

One fundraising officer described this approach, explaining that;

“some donors were worried that our projects were only on paper, so we crafted stories that showed exact locations, numbers and timelines to prove the work was real” (Respondent 4).

Another respondent noted that;

“after questions about overheads, we shared a story that clearly separated project costs from administration and showed how each cedi was used, and you could see donors relax” (Respondent 16).

A third participant, working in a human rights NGO, stated that;

“whenever there is doubt, we do not just send a nice story, we send a story with facts, photos and links to reports so donors can check things for themselves” (Respondent 9).

Use of Follow-Up Stories to Demonstrate Verified Progress

Use of follow up stories to demonstrate verified progress emerged as a key mechanism through which GAPVOD registered NGOs use storytelling to reduce donor scepticism and reinforce institutional credibility. Respondents explained that initial appeal stories are increasingly treated as the “first chapter” in a longer narrative, with deliberate efforts made to return to the same beneficiary, community or project in subsequent communications and show what has happened since funds were raised. Follow up stories typically include updates on implemented activities, changes in beneficiary circumstances and progress against previously stated targets, often supported with simple data, photographs or testimonies. Donors are thus able to trace a clear line between their earlier contributions and observable results, which helps to dispel doubts that stories are one off marketing devices with no real follow through. Respondents emphasised that this narrative continuity is especially important in the Ghanaian context, where concerns about project abandonment, misallocation of resources and “vanishing NGOs” can be strong.

One fundraising practitioner described this practice, explaining that;

“after we run a big appeal, we make it a point to send donors a follow up story on the same community so they can see what has actually changed since they gave”
(Respondent 3).

Another respondent highlighted the effect on sceptical donors, noting that;

“some people were not sure we would finish a project, so when they later received a story showing the completed facility and how it was being used, their doubts went down and they started giving more regularly” (Respondent 14).

A third participant, working in an education focused NGO, linked follow up narratives directly to credibility, stating that;

“when we go back to tell the second part of the story with real progress and updated photos, donors feel we are serious and that we do not forget what we promised in the first message” (Respondent 21).

Transparency About Challenges and Corrective Actions

Transparency about challenges and corrective actions emerged as a distinctive way in which GAPVOD-registered NGOs use storytelling to reduce donor scepticism and reinforce institutional credibility. Respondents explained that, rather than presenting only flawless success stories, their organisations increasingly incorporate elements of difficulty, delay or partial achievement into narratives, accompanied by clear descriptions of how these issues are being addressed. Donors are therefore invited into the “backstage” of project implementation, where logistical constraints, contextual shocks and internal capacity gaps are honestly acknowledged. Stories that include this level of candour were said to signal seriousness, maturity and accountability, especially in a context where concerns about misrepresentation and “window-dressing” are widespread. Corrective actions such as revising implementation timelines, re-prioritising activities, strengthening community engagement or improving financial controls are presented as part of the narrative arc, so that donors can see that problems are actively managed rather than hidden. This mode of transparent storytelling aligns closely with the study’s focus on mechanisms through which narratives reduce scepticism, as it reframes imperfection not as evidence of incompetence, but as proof of reflective practice and responsible stewardship within Ghanaian non-profit organisations.

One respondent described this approach, explaining that;

“we realised donors do not expect perfection, they expect honesty, so when a project delays, we tell that story and explain what we are doing to fix it”
(Respondent 7).

Another fundraising practitioner highlighted how this affects doubt, noting that;

“when we openly share the challenges and next steps, donors actually trust us more than when we only send smooth success stories” (Respondent 12).

A third participant linked transparency and corrective action directly to long term credibility, stating that;

“the story that changed one sceptical donor’s mind was the one where we admitted our mistake, showed what we learnt and how we had changed our processes going forward” (Respondent 19).

Visible Alignment Between Story Promises and Actual Programme Outcomes

Visible alignment between story promises and actual programme outcomes emerged as a decisive factor in how GAPVOD-registered NGOs use storytelling to reduce donor scepticism and strengthen institutional credibility. Respondents explained that many donors now “track” organisations over time, consciously comparing what was promised in appeal narratives with what is later reported through updates, site visits, media coverage and community feedback. Storytelling was therefore described as most effective when initial appeals clearly articulate intended results and subsequent communications demonstrably show that those results have been achieved or are credibly in progress. Fundraising and communication staff noted that this alignment requires close coordination between programme, M&E and communications teams so that narrative claims are grounded in realistic targets and verifiable outcomes. Any significant gap between the promise made in a story and observed programme performance was seen as a trigger for doubt, while visible convergence between the two was reported to reassure donors that the organisation is honest, competent and accountable. This visible alignment functions as a practical mechanism through which storytelling translates into reduced scepticism and enhanced trust in the Ghanaian non-profit space.

One respondent illustrated this point, explaining that;

“when we tell donors we will drill three boreholes in a community, our follow up stories and reports must show those exact three boreholes, not something different” (Respondent 11).

Another fundraising practitioner noted that;

“donors compare what we said in last year’s campaign story with what we report this year, so when the outcomes match, their confidence in us grows” (Respondent 5).

A third participant linked alignment directly to credibility, stating that;

“the more our stories, field results and financial reports line up, the less our donors question us and the more they are willing to support new campaigns” (Respondent 22).

The respondents were asked to identify the specific storytelling elements that most effectively enhance institutional credibility. Findings indicate that their perspectives converged around four key themes which are authentic and unfiltered beneficiary testimonies, clear presentation of verifiable impact data, consistency between narrative claims and organisational reporting, and ethical and responsible representation of beneficiaries.

Authentic, Unfiltered Beneficiary Testimonies

Authentic, unfiltered beneficiary testimonies emerged as one of the most salient storytelling elements donors associate with enhanced institutional credibility. Respondents supporting GAPVOD-linked NGOs explained that they are more inclined to trust organisations whose stories foreground the lived experiences of beneficiaries in their own words rather than polished, corporate-style narration. Donors reported that direct quotations, natural speech patterns and context-specific expressions signal that the organisation has genuinely engaged with communities, listened to their perspectives and is not simply scripting narratives for

fundraising purposes. Stories that retain local nuance, acknowledge both hardship and agency, and avoid over-editing were described as feeling “real” and therefore more believable. This perceived authenticity was said to reduce suspicion that people are being used as props, and instead frames beneficiaries as credible witnesses to programme impact. Authentic, unfiltered testimonies therefore function as a narrative mechanism through which storytelling supports the broader objective of reducing scepticism and strengthening institutional credibility within the Ghanaian non-profit sector.

One donor drew attention to the power of unedited voice, explaining that;

“when I hear a beneficiary speaking in their own simple language with small imperfections, I believe the story more than when everything sounds like it was written in an office” (Respondent 6).

Another respondent highlighted the difference in tone, noting that;

“I trust organisations that let community members talk for themselves, even if the grammar is not perfect, because it shows they are not hiding the real people behind the project” (Respondent 18).

A third participant linked this directly to credibility and respect, stating that;

“when NGOs use real quotes and do not change the person’s voice too much, it tells me they respect beneficiaries and are serious about telling the truth” (Respondent 24).

Clear Presentation of Verifiable Impact Data

Clear presentation of verifiable impact data featured strongly in donors’ descriptions of storytelling elements that enhance institutional credibility within GAPVOD-linked NGOs. Respondents explained that, although emotional stories are important, their confidence in an organisation grows when narratives are anchored in simple but concrete evidence of change. Donors reported paying attention to whether stories include clear figures on the number of

beneficiaries reached, locations, timelines, outputs delivered and, where possible, basic outcome indicators such as improved school attendance, reduced clinic wait times or increased income levels. References to monitoring reports, budget summaries or links to more detailed documentation were said to reduce ambiguity and signal that the organisation has robust systems behind the story. Several respondents stressed that they do not need complex statistics, but they want “enough numbers” and specific facts to feel that impact claims can be verified if checked. Clear, accessible impact data within stories therefore operates as a credibility cue, reassuring donors that they are not only being moved emotionally but are also being presented with accountable, evidence-based narratives that justify continued support and reduce scepticism toward Ghanaian non-profit organisations. One donor illustrated this preference, explaining that;

“when a story tells me exactly how many children were supported and in which community, I feel the NGO is serious and I can trust what they are saying”
(Respondent 2).

Another respondent highlighted the value of simple indicators, noting that;

“I am more convinced when they show small statistics, like how attendance improved or how many farmers increased their yield, instead of just saying lives were transformed” (Respondent 9).

A third participant linked verifiability directly to credibility, stating that;

“if the story gives clear facts and sometimes a link to a report, I know I can cross-check, and that makes me more confident to keep giving” (Respondent 17).

Consistency Between Narrative Claims and Organisational Reporting

Consistency between narrative claims and organisational reporting emerged as a decisive credibility marker in donors’ reflections on GAPVOD-linked NGOs. Respondents indicated that they routinely compare what organisations say in their stories with what appears in annual

reports, financial statements, monitoring updates and, where available, independent media or community feedback. Donors reported that trust grows when figures, locations, activities and timelines mentioned in fundraising stories match the information later presented in formal reports or shared during review meetings. Any noticeable gap between narrative claims and reported results was described as a red flag that raises doubts about exaggeration, poor coordination between programmes and communications, or weak internal accountability. Stories that mirror the language and data found in official documents were seen as evidence that the organisation has coherent internal systems and is not using storytelling merely as a marketing veneer. This perceived consistency between narrative and reporting therefore functions as a key mechanism through which storytelling contributes to reducing scepticism and strengthening institutional credibility within the Ghanaian non-profit sector.

One donor described this verification process, explaining that;

“when the same numbers and projects I read in a story also appear in their annual report, I feel they are honest and I can rely on them” (Respondent 5).

Another respondent stressed the impact of mismatch, noting that;

“if a campaign story promises big results but the later report is silent or vague about it, my confidence in that organisation drops immediately” (Respondent 16).

A third participant linked alignment directly to ongoing support, stating that;

“I continue giving to NGOs whose stories, reports and even what I see on the ground say the same thing, because then I know they are not just telling us what we want to hear” (Respondent 20).

Ethical and Responsible Representation of Beneficiaries

Ethical and responsible representation of beneficiaries featured prominently in donors' reflections on storytelling elements that shape their perceptions of institutional credibility within GAPVOD-linked NGOs. Respondents explained that they are increasingly sensitive to

how vulnerable individuals and communities are portrayed in fundraising narratives and visuals. Stories that resort to humiliation, exaggerated suffering or “poverty pornography” were described as off-putting and damaging to trust, because they suggest that the organisation is willing to sacrifice dignity for donations. Donors reported greater confidence in organisations that obtain informed consent, protect identities where necessary, avoid stereotyping and present beneficiaries as active agents rather than passive victims. Narratives that balance honesty about hardship with respect, resilience and community voice were seen as more ethical and more believable.

One respondent captured this concern, explaining that;

“I do not trust NGOs that show people in very humiliating ways just to make us feel pity, because it feels like they are using them” (Respondent 3).

Another donor highlighted the importance of dignity, noting that;

“I prefer stories that show challenges but also respect the person, not those that make beneficiaries look helpless and without any strength” (Respondent 15).

A third participant linked ethical representation directly to credibility, stating that;

“when an organisation is careful about consent and how they show faces and stories, it tells me they are serious and responsible, so I am more comfortable supporting them” (Respondent 22).

4.4 Discussion of Results

4.4.1 Fundraising professionals’ strategies for planning and executing storytelling campaigns across Ghanaian non-profits organizations.

The strategic approach to storytelling uncovered in this study, characterized by rigorous story selection, audience segmentation, and impact validation, resonates strongly with global and African empirical literature. The emphasis on aligning narratives with verifiable outcomes echoes findings by Kim and Hall (2020), who identified evidence-based storytelling as a

critical driver of donor trust. Similarly, the deliberate process of narrative crafting and multi-channel dissemination aligns with Robiady, Windasari and Nita's (2021) research on digital platforms, where structured, audience-specific narratives significantly enhance engagement. The integration of these practices into broader fundraising strategy corroborates the work of Keel and Tran (2023), who argue that storytelling's effectiveness is contingent upon its systematic incorporation into organizational communication frameworks. Theoretically, these professional strategies operationalize the principles of Social Exchange Theory. The careful calibration of narrative rewards (impact stories) against donor costs (scepticism) and the emphasis on reciprocal transparency directly reflect SET's core tenets, demonstrating how Ghanaian fundraisers intuitively engineer exchanges to build relational equity and long-term commitment (Morgan & Hunt, 1994).

Furthermore, the identified mechanisms for reducing scepticism through evidence-backed narratives and transparent follow-up provide empirical substance to the theoretical pathways proposed by Narrative Transportation Theory and Commitment-Trust Theory. The practice of using verifiable data and beneficiary testimonies to foster authenticity addresses the precondition of perceived truthfulness necessary for narrative transportation to occur, as Green and Brock (2000) posit. This process mitigates counter-arguing and facilitates deeper emotional immersion. Simultaneously, the consistent alignment of story promises with program outcomes, as reported by donors, directly builds the perceived integrity and benevolence that form the bedrock of institutional trust within Commitment-Trust Theory (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). These findings extend the theoretical models by illustrating their practical, contextual application within the Ghanaian non-profit sector, showing how fundraisers synthesize narrative immersion with credible evidence to cultivate both affective connection and cognitive confidence in a competitive philanthropic landscape.

4.4.2 Donor perceptions of organizational narratives and how these shape emotional connection and trust.

The donor perceptions documented in this study affirm and deepen existing empirical research on narrative persuasion in fundraising. The donors' prioritization of verifiable impact data and narrative consistency aligns directly with recent findings on trust-building. Chapman et al. (2021), in their multinational meta-analysis, established that organizational trust is a robust predictor of giving, a dynamic clearly reflected in how Ghanaian donors scrutinize the alignment between stories and subsequent reports. Furthermore, the emphasis on authentic beneficiary voices corroborates the work of Drollinger and Simpson (2025), who identified authenticity as a cornerstone of empathetic donor relationships. The donor-reported mechanism of personal identification with beneficiaries provides a granular view of the "identifiable victim effect," substantiating Macrae's (2022) observation that individualized stories evoke greater empathy, though this study extends it by highlighting identification as a conscious trust filter rather than a mere emotional response. This evidence-driven approach to narrative reception challenges any simplistic view of storytelling as solely an affective tool, positioning donors as active, critical consumers of institutional communication.

Theoretically, these findings demonstrate a concurrent activation of multiple cognitive and affective pathways outlined in the study's framework. The donors' reliance on evidence and transparency for trust reinforcement operationalizes the core constructs of Commitment-Trust Theory, where perceived integrity and reliability foster relationship commitment (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Simultaneously, the emotional connection forged through personal identification exemplifies the process of narrative transportation described by Green and Brock (2000), where immersion in a character's journey facilitates attitude change. However, the Ghanaian context introduces a critical moderating variable: the donors' continuous validation of stories against observed actions. This ongoing verification process integrates the rational assessment central to Social Exchange Theory, where donors evaluate the fairness and reciprocity of the exchange

(Blau, 1964), with the relational focus of Commitment-Trust Theory. The perception of credibility is therefore not a one-time outcome of a compelling story but an evolving judgment, continually updated through a cycle of narrative engagement and real-world observation.

4.4.3 Mechanisms through which storytelling reduces donor scepticism and strengthens institutional credibility.

The study found that four main mechanisms reduce donor scepticism and strengthen credibility. These are providing evidence-backed narratives that directly address donor concerns, using follow-up stories to demonstrate verified progress, maintaining transparency about challenges and corrective actions, and ensuring visible alignment between story promises and real program outcomes. In response to what makes stories credible, donors pointed to four specific elements. These are authentic and unfiltered beneficiary testimonies, clear presentation of verifiable impact data, consistency between narrative claims and organizational reporting, and ethical and responsible representation of beneficiaries. This point has not been discussed in relation to existing literature and your theories.

4.5 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter provided an in-depth analysis of the data collected through interviews with fundraising professionals and donors within Ghanaian non-profit organizations. The findings confirm that storytelling is a vital tool for donor engagement and trust-building. Fundraising professionals employ a strategic process for planning and executing storytelling campaigns, emphasizing story selection, ethical considerations, and targeted audience framing. Additionally, donors' perceptions of organizational narratives are heavily influenced by factors such as message credibility, clarity, and emotional resonance. The mechanisms identified in the study highlight how storytelling can mitigate donor scepticism, reinforce trust, and strengthen institutional credibility through the use of evidence-backed narratives, transparency, and

alignment between promises and real program outcomes. The chapter further illustrated the critical role of authentic, transparent storytelling in fostering long-term donor relationships, ultimately contributing to the credibility and sustainability of non-profit organizations in Ghana.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Introduction

This final chapter synthesizes the empirical findings of the study, drawing together the insights gathered from fundraising professionals and donors within Ghanaian non-profit organizations. It provides a comprehensive summary of the key themes identified in relation to storytelling as a strategic tool for donor engagement and trust-building. The chapter further presents conclusions that bridge the empirical evidence with the theoretical frameworks underpinning the research, and offers practical recommendations for both fundraising practitioners and non-profit leaders in Ghana.

5.1 Summary of Findings

This section provides a high-level overview of the research process and structure that guided the investigation. The primary objective of the study was to investigate how storytelling functions as a strategic mechanism for donor engagement and trust-building within Ghanaian non-profit organizations. To address this, a qualitative research approach was employed, utilizing an exploratory design to gain in-depth insights into the practices and perceptions of key stakeholders. The study purposively sampled 25 participants, comprising fundraising professionals from GAPVOD-registered NGOs and active donors, to ensure rich, context-specific data. Data collection was conducted through semi-structured interviews, and the analysis followed a thematic approach to identify and interpret emerging patterns. The findings are organized and presented in alignment with the study's three specific objective;

5.1.1 Fundraising professionals' strategies for planning and executing storytelling campaigns across Ghanaian non-profits organizations.

The study found that fundraising professionals plan storytelling campaigns through a strategic process Centreed on four themes. These are story selection and prioritization based on impact

and ethics, audience segmentation and targeted narrative framing, the use of impact assessment and relevance criteria for validation, and structured internal planning and coordination. When asked about the key strategies for developing and executing these initiatives, three core themes emerged. These are content development and narrative crafting, review and validation with quality assurance, and multi-channel story dissemination. Finally, regarding how storytelling is integrated into broader fundraising strategies, professionals described alignment of stories with specific fundraising goals, trust-building through transparency and authenticity, integration with donor engagement tactics, and maintaining consistent branding and message cohesion.

5.1.2 Donor perceptions of organizational narratives and how these shape emotional connection and trust.

The study found that donor perceptions of organizational narratives are shaped by three key themes which are perceived credibility and truthfulness, message clarity and relevance, and emotional resonance from human-Centred stories. When asked how a specific story influenced their feelings or trust, donor reflections Centred on three themes trust reinforcement through evidence and transparency, emotional impact through personal identification with beneficiaries, and consistency between the story and observed organizational actions. Finally, when describing the qualities that build emotional connection and credibility, donors identified authenticity through genuine beneficiary voices, specific and verifiable impact details supported by data, and a compelling narrative structure that clearly demonstrates transformation.

5.1.3 Mechanisms through which storytelling reduces donor scepticism and strengthens institutional credibility.

The study found that four main mechanisms reduce donor scepticism and strengthen credibility. These are providing evidence-backed narratives that directly address donor concerns, using follow-up stories to demonstrate verified progress, maintaining transparency about challenges

and corrective actions, and ensuring visible alignment between story promises and real program outcomes. In response to what makes stories credible, donors pointed to four specific elements. These are authentic and unfiltered beneficiary testimonies, clear presentation of verifiable impact data, consistency between narrative claims and organizational reporting, and ethical and responsible representation of beneficiaries.

5.2 Conclusion

This study conclusively demonstrates that storytelling operates as a critical and strategic mechanism for donor engagement and trust-building within Ghanaian non-profit organizations. The findings reveal a sophisticated dual-pathway process where professional narrative strategies and donor perceptions interact to build sustainable relationships. Fundraising professionals engage in deliberate practices of story selection, evidence-based crafting, and multi-channel dissemination, intentionally designed to foster both emotional connection and cognitive trust. Simultaneously, donors actively evaluate narratives through a lens that prioritizes verifiable impact, authentic representation, and consistency between promises and outcomes. These reciprocal dynamic positions storytelling not as mere communication but as a core strategic function that directly influences organizational credibility and donor commitment.

The research validates the synergistic application of key theoretical frameworks within the Ghanaian context. Narrative Transportation Theory finds practical expression in the deliberate design of immersive, beneficiary-Centred stories that facilitate donor empathy and reduce counter-arguing. Commitment-Trust Theory is operationalized through organizational practices that consistently demonstrate integrity, benevolence, and reliability across narrative cycles. Furthermore, donor Behaviour exemplifies the principles of Social Exchange Theory, as supporters continuously assess the fairness, transparency, and reciprocity of their

engagement with the organization. The convergence of these theoretical pathways within a single strategic practice underscores the complexity of storytelling as an intervention that simultaneously targets affective, cognitive, and relational dimensions of donor psychology. Ultimately, the strategic use of storytelling emerges as an indispensable competency for organizational sustainability in Ghana's non-profit sector. Effective narrative practice successfully bridges the potential tension between emotional appeal and rational accountability, transforming storytelling from a tactical appeal into a foundational trust-building architecture. This research provides empirical confirmation that when narratives are systematically anchored in authenticity, transparency, and demonstrable impact, they significantly reduce donor scepticism and strengthen institutional credibility. The insights offer a robust, contextually grounded model for leveraging storytelling as a strategic tool to secure not only immediate resources but also the long-term relational capital essential to enduring mission impact.

5.3 Recommendations

The findings for the first objective revealed that fundraising professionals employ a structured, multi-stage approach to planning and executing storytelling campaigns, involving deliberate story selection, audience segmentation, ethical validation, and multi-channel dissemination aligned with organisational goals. To elevate these practices from ad-hoc efforts to sector-wide standards, it is recommended that the Ghana Association of Private Voluntary Organisations in Development (GAPVOD), in collaboration with the Non-Profit Organisations Secretariat, develops and mandates a Sector-Wide Framework for Strategic Narrative Management. This framework should formalise protocols for evidence-based story curation, ethical consent and representation, donor segmentation, and internal review processes. Furthermore, compliance with this framework should be integrated into the membership accreditation or renewal process for registered non-profits, ensuring that storytelling is systematically embedded within

organisational strategy and governance, thereby enhancing professional consistency and strategic coherence across the sector.

The second objective's findings demonstrated that perceptions of credibility, authenticity, and verifiable consistency between narrative claims and observable outcomes fundamentally shape donor trust. Donors prioritise stories grounded in specific evidence, genuine beneficiary voices, and transparent follow-up. To address these donor-centric criteria, it is recommended that the NPO Regulatory Guidelines be amended to introduce compulsory Narrative Impact Disclosure requirements. Organisations should be obligated to publish annual "Integrity of Impact" statements that archive fundraising narratives alongside the supporting evidence including verified beneficiary testimonials, monitoring data, and outcome reports. GAPVOD should host a centralised public repository for these disclosures, creating an auditable trail from appeal to impact.

Findings from the third objective identified concrete mechanisms through which storytelling reduces donor scepticism: evidence-backed narratives, follow-up stories demonstrating verified progress, transparency about challenges, and visible alignment between promises and outcomes. To operationalise these trust-building mechanisms at a sectoral level, it is recommended that the NPO Secretariat introduces a Tiered Credibility Assurance Scheme, awarding a publicly recognised "Verified Storytelling" accreditation to organisations that undergo independent audits of their narrative campaigns. These audits would verify the alignment of story content with programme data and financial records. Concurrently, sectoral associations should promote and subsidise access to digital stewardship tools that automate impact updates, turning demonstrated accountability into standard practice.

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APPENDIX: INTERVIEW GUIDE

STORYTELLING IN FUNDRAISING: A STRATEGIC APPROACH TO DONOR

ENGAGEMENT AND TRUST-BUILDING

The researcher is an MA student at the University of Media, Arts and Communication, pursuing a Master of Arts in Media and Communication. As part of the academic requirements for the award of the degree, this study investigates the topic “*The main objective of the study is to investigate how storytelling functions as a strategic mechanism for donor engagement and trust-building within Ghanaian non-profit organizations*”. Your candid responses will contribute significantly to the value and integrity of this academic research.

Confidentiality

Please note that all responses will remain anonymous and strictly confidential. The findings will be used solely for academic purposes, and no data will be linked to any individual respondent. The researcher will ensure that nothing in the report identifies any specific participant or staff member.

SECTION A

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

1. Respondent's gender
2. Age of respondent
3. Marital status
4. Highest educational qualification
5. Region
6. Engagement Tenure (Role-specific)

- a) *Staff wording:* How many years have you worked in fundraising/communications for your current organization?
- b) *Donor wording:* How many years have you supported (donated to) this organization/cause?

SECTION B

To analyse fundraising professionals' strategies for planning and executing storytelling campaigns across Ghanaian non-profits organizations.

1. Describe how your organization plans storytelling campaigns, including how you decide which stories to tell and which audiences to target?
2. What key strategies or processes does your team use to develop, refine, and execute storytelling initiatives for fundraising?
3. How do you integrate storytelling into your broader fundraising or communication strategy to enhance donor engagement and trust?

SECTION C

To examine donor perceptions of organizational narratives and how these shape emotional connection and trust

1. How do you generally perceive the stories shared by non-profit organizations you support what aspects of those stories stand out most to you?
2. Can you describe how a particular story from an organization influenced your feelings or level of trust toward that organization?
3. What qualities in a story make you feel emotionally connected to a cause or confident in the organization's credibility?

4. How does the way an organization tells its stories (for example, through tone, visuals, or storytelling platforms) affect your willingness to donate or continue supporting them?

SECTION D

To assess the mechanisms through which storytelling reduces donor scepticism and strengthens institutional credibility.

1. Can you share an example of a story or campaign that helped reduce doubt or scepticism among donors toward your organization?
2. What specific storytelling elements (such as authenticity, evidence of impact, or beneficiary voices) do you think most effectively enhance institutional credibility?

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ASSISTANCE