

# The Antecedents of Charity Trust and its Influence on Charity Supportive Behavior

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## Abstract

This study develops and test a model that evaluates eight antecedents of charity trust and its influence on volunteering and donating. Secondary data from a national Australian survey (N = 1377) was collected and data was analyzed using partial least square path analysis. Key findings include identifying individual and organizational antecedents of charity trust and its influence on charity supportive behavior. Results show that organizational transparency is a very strong antecedent, followed by the individual awareness level of an individual towards the organization. We also examined the effect of gender as a moderating influence but did not find a significant effect. We conclude with managerial implications and areas for future research.

**Keywords:** Charity trust, trust antecedents, donation behavior, volunteering

## Introduction

Trust between charities and their donors has been purported to be a cornerstone of donor cultivation and retention (Burnet, 1992; Sargeant & Lee, 2002). The fundraising literature has long viewed trust as a vital element in the solicitation process (Bruce, 1994; Mullin, 1995; Sumption, 1995). Even though trust has been considered elemental in aiding the charity sector in garnering public support, there have been few attempts to conceptualize the antecedents of charity trust in more detail and link trust with behaviors of interest (Farwell, Shier, and Handy 2019; Sargeant & Lee, 2004; Sargent, Ford, & West 2006; Torres-Moraga, Vásquez-Parraga, & Barra, 2010).

Given the importance of trust for the third sector, it is surprising that comparatively little empirical evidence on antecedents of charitable trust is available in the extent literature. This is unfortunate given prior concerns that trust in the charity sector is declining (Gaskin 1999). Recently, Farwell, Shier and Handy (2019) analyzed three factors, institutional trust, accountability and transparency, and familiarity, and find that all three have significant effects on public's trust in nonprofit organizations. Çarkoğlu, Aytaç, and Campbell (2018) found that institutional trust was positively associated with giving behavior.

Other studies highlighted the relevance of donor-nonprofit communication (Sargeant and Lee, 2004), reputation (Schultz et al. 2018), or find other relevant factors like the individual trust disposition (Hassan et al. 2018). However, a shortcoming of previous studies is that they do not precisely enough differ between factors that are embedded in the individual donor relationship with the nonprofit and those that are more organizational driven factors such as reputation.

Directly related to this conceptual gap, Hager and Hedberg (2016) highlight the need for more conceptual rigors on the conceptualizations of donor-nonprofit trust relationships and

outcomes. Logically, the antecedent and potential outcomes of public's trust in nonprofit organization (Becker, 2018) differs in nature from donors' trust, if the relationship is long-term. In our study, we focus on donors not on public's trust in charities. A third gap in the literature relates to the relationships between trust and behavioral outcomes. Katz (2018), for example, find in an Israeli population that familiarity and perceived influence both have significant effects on donations, but for trustworthiness no effect was found.

We argue that previous studies have overemphasized donation behaviors (Alhidani et al., 2018). Other behaviors, like volunteering and its relationship with charity trust have received comparatively little research attention. Therefore, we will analyze both the effect of charity trust on donations and volunteering.

In our attempt to address some of these gaps in the literature, we conducted a secondary data analysis of survey data originally commissioned by the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC) in 2015. In our donor analysis, we will attempt to help fill some of the identified literature gaps. We will examine (1) antecedents of charity trust, (2) the influence of charity trust on donating and volunteering, and (3) the moderating influence of gender on the effect of charity trust on donating and volunteering.

## **Conceptual Background**

Before presenting our conceptual model, we first begin by describing some notable prior literature on charity trust. Sargeant and Lee (2004) reported that individuals' attitudes toward the charity sector influenced their trust in the sector. They also reported that positive donation experiences influenced trust in the charity sector. Bekkers (2003) reported that charities should try to increase the public's trust by signaling their trustworthiness. He recommends the

establishment of an accreditation system and public familiarity with the system. Sargeant and Lee (2004) found that trust in a charity influenced whether someone donated to that charity during the year. Hager and Hedberg (2016) reported that charitable confidence influences charitable giving.

Furneaux and Wymer (2015) found that people tend to trust charities with which they are familiar, and which are transparent in their reporting. Organizational size, importance, reputation and national significance were also antecedents of trust. People are more likely to volunteer or donate to charities they trust.

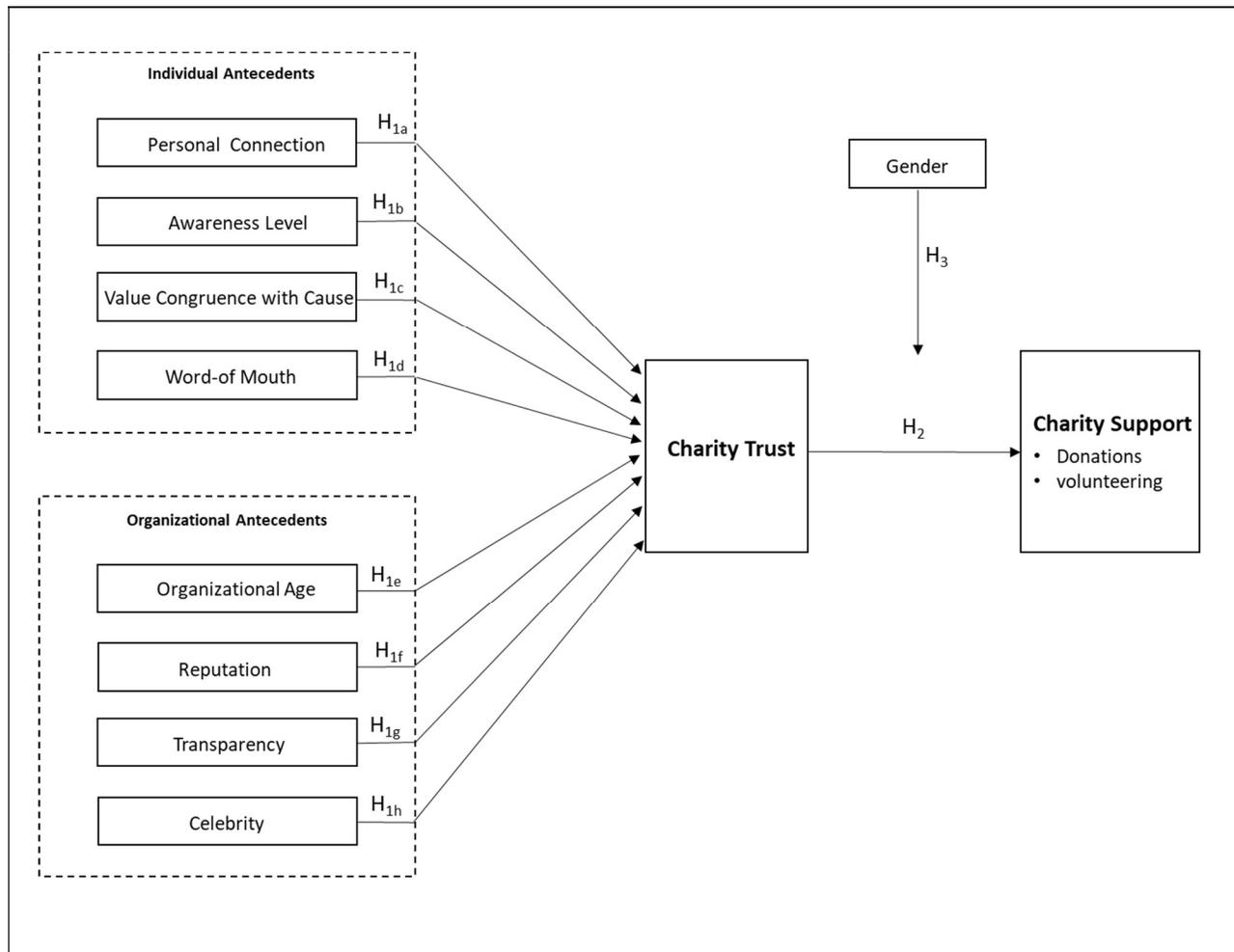
Farwell, Shier and Handy (2019) reported that trust in business and trust in community leaders are associated with trust in charities. They reported that people who believe charities need more financial accountability hold less trust in charities. They found that familiarity with a charity, including having donated to the charity, influence trust in a charity. They found that people who perceived that charities were transparent about their programs, how their money was spent, and their overall impact had higher levels of trust in charities.

## **Conceptual Model**

Figure 1 visualizes the structure of our conceptual framework in an overview. We differentiate between two broad categories of antecedents: donor variables and organizational variables. Moreover, we presume a positive relationship between charity trust and supportive donor behavior like donations and volunteering. Gender is conceptualized as a moderator. Consistent with the conceptualization of trust by Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman (1995) in our present context is the willingness of the individual charity donor to be vulnerable to the actions of the charity with the expectation that the charity will use the donation in a manner consistent

with the donor's expectations. Hence, public trust in charities is important (Bekkers, 2003). It is unlikely that individuals will support an untrustworthy charity (Huatuco et al., 2014). They need to have enough trust in a charity in order to have confidence that their support will be used properly (Gaskin, 1999). People give to a charity because they trust it (Hager & Hedberg, 2016).

**Figure 1.** Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses.



### Individual Antecedents of Charity Trust

In examining the potential influencers of public trust in charities afforded by this secondary data analysis, we begin with the variable we call personal connection, defined

operationally in Table 1. All other things being equal, we believe it is reasonable to predict that one's personal connection to a charity will have a positive influence on trust for that charity.

Trust in an organization is actualized in the trust one places on individuals working on behalf of the organization (Misztal, 2013). Hence, personal bonds between members of the public and individuals working on behalf of the charity influence trust in that charity. It is likely that the interpersonal trust one has through personal connections with members of a charity enhances one's trust in the charity. The mechanism through which this influence occurs might be a halo effect, or some other associative effect. Hence, our first hypothesis follows.

*H<sub>1a</sub>: A personal connection to a charity has a positive influence on trust.*

**Table 1. Variables and Scaling**

| <b>Nomological Position</b> | <b>Variable Name</b> | <b>Item statement(s)</b>  | <b>Scaling</b>                 |
|-----------------------------|----------------------|---|--------------------------------|
| Trust Antecedent            | Org_Age              | I trust charities that have been established a long time.   | Likert scale (0 = SD; 10 = SA) |
| Trust Antecedent            | Transparency         | I trust charities that let the public know how they use their resources, including money from donations.  | Likert scale (0 = SD; 10 = SA) |
| Trust Antecedent            | Awareness Level      | I trust charities that are well known.  | Likert scale (0 = SD; 10 = SA) |
| Trust Antecedent            | Reputation           | The charity has an excellent reputation   | No=0, Yes=1                    |
| Trust Antecedent            | Celebrity            | I trust charities with well-known supporters and patrons.   | Likert scale (0 = SD; 10 = SA) |
| Trust Antecedent            | Value Congruence     | The charity was for a worthy cause.   | No=0, Yes=1                    |
| Trust Antecedent            | Personal Connection  | I trust charities that I have a personal connection to.   | Likert scale (0 = SD; 10 = SA) |
| Trust Antecedent            | WOM                  | Word-of-mouth referrals   | No=0, Yes=1                    |
| Moderator                   | Charity Trust        | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Most charities are trustworthy.</li> <li>2. I trust charities to be well managed and efficient.</li> <li>3. I trust charities to ensure that a reasonable proportion of donations make it to the end cause.</li> <li>4. I trust charities to ensure that their fund raisers are ethical and honest.</li> <li>5. I trust charities to act in the public interest.</li> <li>6. I trust charities to make a positive difference to the cause that they are working for.</li> </ol> | Likert scale (0 = SD; 10 = SA) |
| Moderator                   | Gender               | Select your gender.   | 1 = female; 2 = male           |
| Outcome                     | Volunteer            | Do you volunteer for a charity?   | 0 = no; 1 = yes                |

|         |               |   |                 |
|---------|---------------|---|-----------------|
| Outcome | Regular donor | In the last year I made regular donations to a charity. | 0 = no; 1 = yes |
|---------|---------------|---|-----------------|

One's level of awareness of a charity refers to the degree to which a charity is well-known to oneself. It is reasonable to believe that well-known charities are more trusted than less-known charities. There is a tendency to trust that which is familiar and distrust that which is unfamiliar (Dunn & Schweitzer, 2005; Luhmann, 2000). In prior research familiarity with a charity has been found to be a factor influencing trust and confidence in the charity (Sargeant & Lee, 2002). Torres-Moraga, Vasquez-Parraga, and Barra (2010) found that familiarity with a charity influenced public trust in the charity. Hence, our next hypothesis follows.

*H1b: The individual awareness level has a positive influence on charity trust.*

Charities communicate the values inherent in their missions as a central component of their brand management strategy (Saxton, 1995; Stride, 2006). It is reasonable to predict that a perceived value congruence between an individual's values and a charity's cause, indicated by the degree to which an individual believes a charity's cause to be worthy, would influence favorable outcomes. Research in the human resources field has found favorable outcomes resulting from employees' perceived congruence between their own values and those of their employers (Ostroff & Judge, 2007). In investigating the causal influence of value congruence on employee outcomes, Edwards and Cable (2009) found that trust was a mediator of the influence of employee value congruence and favorable employee outcomes. That is, a perceived value congruence influences employee trust which, in turn, influences favorable employee outcomes. Prior research has indicated that value congruence promotes the development of trust in relationships (Lau, Liu, & Fue, 2007; Williams, 2001). This is consistent with other research which has found that personal and social similarity influence trust (Levin, Whitener, & Cross, 2006). It is reasonable to predict, then, that perceived congruence between an individual's core

values and those inferred by the nature of a charity's mission (i.e., its cause) influences an individual's trust in that charity (MacMillan et al., 2005). The degree to which an individual believes a charity's cause to be worthy of support is derived from the individual's values. For example, if a person's values are such that she believes helping children is important, then she is likely to perceive a charity's efforts to help children as representing a worthy cause.

*H<sub>1c</sub>: The perceived worthiness of a charity's cause has a positive influence on charity trust.*

The final individual charity trust antecedent is word-of-mouth (WOM) referrals. That is, WOM referrals that vouch for a charity influences an individual's trust in the charity. Research on the influence of online WOM referrals has found that online WOM referrals positively influences consumer trust (Abubakar & Ilkan, 2016; Awad & Ragowsky, 2008; Ha, 2004). It is reasonable to believe that a similar effect occurs when people are exposed to WOM referrals for a charity. The more one is exposed to WOM referrals for a charity, the more one would tend to perceive the charity favorably and the more likely one would trust the charity.

*H<sub>1d</sub>: WOM referrals has a positive influence on charity trust.*

### **Organizational Antecedents of Charity Trust**

Next, we will develop four hypotheses on organizational antecedents of charity trust. Research suggests that the age of an organization is related to perceived trust in an organization. Tapp (1996) reported an association between the age of a charity and the degree to which the charity brand was developed. That is, over time charity brands become more developed, generally not by virtue of proactive marketing management but rather by becoming better known (Tapp, 1996). In general, people donate to charities with which they are familiar (Gunther,

2017). Having an established charity brand is a key means of influencing brand familiarity. A more established brand helps the charity attract donors as donors have a better understanding of the organization (Sargeant, Ford, & Hudson, 2008). Hankinson (2000) argues that as the public is exposed to the brand over time, public trust for the charity brand develops. Hudson (2008) writes that developing a brand requires building stakeholder familiarity with the charity. Stakeholders learn more about the brand and its work, and why it is worthy of support. Hudson (2008) and Tapp (1996) argue that developing the brand enhances trust in the charity. Hence, because the age of the charity is associated with the degree to which its brand is developed and because a developed charity brand ought to engender more trust in the charity than an undeveloped charity brand, we offer the following hypothesis.

*H<sub>1e</sub>: The age of the charity has a positive influence on charity trust.*

Next, we examine the influence of charity reputation on charity trust. Bendapudi, Singh, and Bendapudi (1996) argue that a charity's external image might be the most important determinant of its ability to attract donations. Schlegelmilch (1988) reported in his study that donors had a more positive image of the target charity than non-donors. Webb, Green, and Brashear (2000) found that a favorable attitude toward a charity was related to donations to that charity. Meijer (2009) reported that a charity's reputation influences the donations it can attract. Bennett (2013), Bennett and Ali-Choudhury (2009), and Bennett and Gabriel (2003) have empirically linked charity reputation with favorable donor outcomes. It is reasonable to believe that charity trust might be involved in the relationship between charity reputation and favorable donor outcomes. It is likely that reputation and trustworthiness are related. Indeed, Torres-Moraga, Vásquez-Parraga, and Barra (2010) reported that a charity's reputation influenced trust in the charity. Based on this prior research, then, we offer the following hypothesis.

*H<sub>1f</sub>: Charity reputation has a positive influence on charity trust.*

It is reasonable to believe that organizational transparency is an antecedent of trust. In the stakeholder literature organizational transparency has been shown to be an important influencer of stakeholder trust (Schnackenberg & Tomlinson, 2016). When charities disclose high quality information to the public about how it uses its donations, the perceived honesty and integrity of the charity increases and the perceived donor risk (that the donation will not be used as intended) decreases (Hyndman & McConville, 2018). Although individual charities have little influence over the general society-level trust in the charitable sector, they can signal their own trustworthiness to the public (Bekkers, 2003). One means of signaling trustworthiness is by voluntarily disclosing accurate information about how a charity uses its donations.

*H<sub>1g</sub>: Transparency has a positive influence on charity trust.*

The next potential charity trust antecedent we shall examine is the influence of well-known and trustworthy supporters and patrons; summarized here under the term celebrities. The literature on celebrity endorser effects is appropriate for understanding this influence. The mechanism through which celebrity endorsers influence charity trust is akin to that of personal connections on charity trust. In a sense, celebrities are vouching for their respective charities. One study found that individuals' perceptions of a charity endorser's character influenced their perceptions of the charity (Samman, McAuliffe, & MacLachlan, 2009). That is, if individuals believed a celebrity is genuinely committed to the charity, then their perceptions of the charity improved, thereby enhancing public charity trust. Harris and Ruth (2015) found that celebrity-affiliated charities enjoy increased donations. Harris and Ruth argue that celebrities are essentially using their reputations as collateral to the charity and the potential loss of celebrity

reputation enhances public trust in the charity. In effect, well-known charity supporters and patrons would risk their own reputations by associating with an untrustworthy charity. The association, then, symbolizes a degree of trust the well-known person has in the charity and signals to the public the trustworthiness of the charity.

*H1h: Having well-known celebrities has a positive influence on charity trust.*

### **Relationship between Charity Trust and Charity Support**

In their study of donors in the U.K., Sargeant and Lee (2004) reported a positive relationship between charity trust and giving behavior. Sargeant and Lee (2002) reported a positive relationship between charity trust and the propensity to donate as well as the donated amount. Naskrent and Siebelt (2011) reported a positive relationship between charity trust and donor retention. Sargeant and Hudson (2008) found a relationship between donor trust in the charity and donor retention.

In addition to supporting a charity by donating, individuals can support a charity through by volunteering. Starnes (2007) reported that volunteers' trust in their organizations influences their commitment. Wymer and Rundle-Thiele (2016) reported that individuals' feelings of loyalty toward a charity influenced their volunteering. Trust, like feelings of loyalty and commitment, are positive affective states directed at a charity. Hence, we believe it is reasonable to predict an influence of charity trust on volunteering as well as donating. We refer to supporting a charity through donating and volunteering as charity support.

*H2: Charity trust has a positive influence on charity support (donating and volunteering).*

## **Gender as a Moderator**

With respect to gender, prior research has reported that gender can be useful in differentiating charity support and other behaviors of interest (Wymer, 2012; Wymer, Self, & Findley, 2008; Wymer & Samu, 2002). For example, prior research has found that women tend to engage more in volunteering than do men (Einolf, 2011). Some research finds that women are slightly more likely to donate to charities than are men, but the research on gender differences in charitable donations is mixed (Einolf, 2011). Çarkoğlu, Aytaç, and Campbell (2018), for example, report that men were more likely to donate than women.

Women tend to score higher on measures of caring and empathy (Rhoads, 2004). It is unclear the extent to which this gender difference in caring and empathy explains the tendency of women to donate more than men (De Wit & Bekkers, 2016; Mesch et al., 2011). Whether or not this difference in caring and empathy is associated with a difference in trust is unclear. In research on trust violations, women were found to be less likely to lose trust and more likely to restore trust than were men (Haselhuhn et al., 2015).

The prior literature has found gender differences in some aspects of charitable giving and volunteering and in some aspects of trust (Wymer, 2011; 2012; Wymer & Samu, 2002; Wymer, Self, & Findley, 2008). It is reasonable to believe, then, that gender differences in the influence of charity trust on giving and volunteering may exist. Thus,

*H<sub>3</sub>: Gender moderates the influences of charity trust on charity support.*

## Methods

### Data Collection and Sample

Consistent with the methodological procedures of Furneaux and Wymer (2015) and Farwell, Shier and Handy (2019), we obtained data previously collected by the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC) for a national survey commissioned in 2015<sup>1</sup>. Data were collected from a nationally representative sample of 1,761 Australian adults in a government commissioned survey to better understand public attitudes and beliefs about the charity sector (ACNC, 2015). Parts of the survey contained questions on public trust and confidence in charities as well as charitable support that we extracted for further examination. We transformed 135 missing values of the charity trust variable by mean replacement. The sample consisted of 1,003 (56.96%) women and 758 (43.04%) men. 276 participants (15.67%) were actual volunteers, and 298 participants (16.92%) made regular donations to a charity during the last year.

### Measures

The antecedent variables were measured using single-item measures, whereas the endogenous variables, charity trust and charity support, were assessed by scales with more than one item (ACNC, 2015). With respect to the use of single-items measures, some scholars find that the predictive validity of single-item measures are as predictive as established multi-item scales (Bergkvist & Rossiter, 2007). Particularly for certain marketing constructs that consist of a

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<sup>1</sup> For a detailed description of the survey, its procedures, and the sample; we refer the reader to a comprehensive report of the survey, which is available online at [https://www.acnc.gov.au/ACNC/Pblctns/Rpts/2015\\_PTC/ACNC/Publications/Reports/Public\\_Trust\\_2015.aspx](https://www.acnc.gov.au/ACNC/Pblctns/Rpts/2015_PTC/ACNC/Publications/Reports/Public_Trust_2015.aspx).

concrete singular object, scholars have argued for the appropriateness of the use of well-developed single-item scales (Bergkvist & Rossiter, 2007; Gardner, Cummings, Dunham, & Pierce, 1998). Given the exploratory nature of this study, and its use of secondary data, we believe the use of single-item scales for the charity trust antecedents are suitable (Wymer, McDonald, & Scaife, 2014). In contrast, we measured charity trust with a reflective measurement scale, using six items. We further operationalized charity support with a formative measurement model using two scales; one which refers to donation behavior and the other one to volunteering. Table 2 provides additional information on our measures.

**Table 2.** Measurement Items and Descriptive Analysis

| <i>Construct</i>  | <i>Measurement</i>   | <i>Loading</i> | <i>t-value</i> | <i>N</i>     | <i>%</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> |
|---|--|----------------|----------------|--------------|----------|----------|-----------|
| <b>Individual Antecedents</b>   |  |                |                | <b>1,761</b> |          |          |           |
| Personal connection*  | I trust charities that I have a personal connection to.  |                |                |              |          | 6.37     | 2.32      |
| Awareness level*  | I trust charities that are well-known.   |                |                |              |          | 6.37     | 2.16      |
| Value congruence with cause   | The charity was for a worthy cause.  |                |                | 977          | 55.5     |          |           |
| Word-of-Mouth   | Word-of-mouth-referrals  |                |                | 169          | 9.5      |          |           |
| <b>Organizational Antecedents</b>   |  |                |                | <b>1,761</b> |          |          |           |
| Organizational age*   | I trust charities that have been established a long time.  |                |                |              |          | 6.51     | 2.21      |
| Reputation  | The charity has an excellent reputation.   |                |                | 918          | 55.2     |          |           |
| Transparency*   | I trust charities that let the public know how they use their resources, including money from donations. |                |                |              |          | 6.92     | 2.35      |
| Celebrity*  | I trust charities with well-known supporters and patrons.  |                |                |              |          | 5.48     | 2.39      |
| <b>Charity Trust* [AVE = 0.76; CR = 0.95; <math>\alpha</math> = 0.94]</b> |  |                |                | <b>1,626</b> |          |          |           |
|   | Most charities are trustworthy.  | 0.89           | 96.57          |              |          | 6.75     | 2.32      |
|   | I trust charities to be well managed and efficient.  | 0.92           | 181.62         |              |          | 6.78     | 2.44      |
|   | I trust charities to ensure that a reasonable proportion of donations make it to the end cause.          | 0.92           | 140.45         |              |          | 6.82     | 2.37      |
|   | I trust charities to ensure that their fundraisers are ethical and honest.                               | 0.92           | 147.12         |              |          | 6.86     | 2.32      |
|   |  | 0.75           | 50.65          |              |          | 6.09     | 2.32      |
|   | I trust charities to act in the public interest.   | 0.84           | 79.97          |              |          | 7.04     | 2.13      |

| I trust charities to make a positive difference to the cause they are working for. |   |              |      |
|--|---|--------------|------|
| <b>Charity Support</b>   |   | <b>1,761</b> |      |
| Donation   | In the last year I made regular donations to a charity. | 298          | 16.9 |
| Volunteering   | Do you volunteer for a charity?                         | 276          | 15.7 |
| <b>Gender</b>  |   | <b>1,761</b> |      |
| Female   |   | 1,003        | 57.0 |
| Male   |   | 758          | 43.0 |

Notes: M = Mean; SD = Standard deviation; AVE = Average variance extracted; CR = Composite reliability;  $\alpha$  = Cronbach's alpha. \* Items measured on a 10-point scale with anchors of *strongly disagree* (0) and *strongly agree* (10); all other items are binary measured with *no* (0) and *yes* (1).

## Data Analysis

To estimate the relationships of our structural model, we applied the variance-based PLS path modeling technique, using the statistical software SmartPLS 3.0 (Ringle, Wende & Becker, 2015). Compared to other structural equation modeling (SEM) approaches, PLS is advantageous in this study for three main reasons. First, PLS path modeling allows testing of complex models through a series of ordinary least squares regressions to maximize the variance explained for all endogenous constructs (Hair, Hult, Ringle & Sarstedt, 2016). Examining the antecedents of the charity trust construct and its relationship with charity support as well as the moderating role of gender, this approach is highly suitable for explaining the relationships between the different constructs. Second, PLS path modeling is particularly feasible for studies that are explorative in nature, and scholars aim to identify unidentified rather than well-established causal relationships (Henseler, Ringle & Sinkovics, 2009), which is the case here. Third, PLS path modeling application is non-parametric data, which does not assume normally distributed data compared to other SEM approaches (Hair et al., 2016).

To test the moderating effect of gender on the relationship between charity trust and charity support, we estimate distinct PLS path models, with gender as a categorical variable to

split the sample (Henseler & Fassott, 2010). We assess the differences in path coefficients by means of a PLS multigroup analysis (Rigdon, Ringle & Sarstedt, 2010; Sarstedt, Henseler & Ringle, 2011). Potential significant differences in the group-specific path coefficients indicate the moderating effect of gender.

## **Results**

### *Measurement Model Evaluations*

At first, we examined the reflective measurement model of charity trust in terms of reliability and validity criteria. The results provide evidence of the measure's sound psychometric properties. The Cronbach's  $\alpha$  value of 0.94 largely exceeded the recommended threshold value of 0.70, which indicates high internal consistency among the variable (Hair et al., 2016). The composite reliability (0.95) and average variance extracted (0.76) also were above the suggested threshold values of 0.70, and 0.50 respectively (Hair et al., 2016; Henseler, Ringle, & Sinkovics, 2009).

Second, we validated the formative measurement model of charity support. Whereas reliability is not meaningful in the measurement of formative constructs, scholars suggest testing their external validity (Diamantopoulos and Winklhofer, 2001). In doing so, we evaluated the multicollinearity of the indicators that is undesirable in formative models as it causes estimation difficulties (Diamantopoulos and Winklhofer, 2001). The variance inflation factors (VIF) for both items is 1.004, which indicates no multicollinearity issues.

### *Structural Model Evaluations*

To test hypotheses H<sub>1a-h</sub> and H<sub>2</sub>, we first created a main effects model that specified the relationships between the charity trust antecedents and the endogenous constructs of charity trust and charity support. By assessing the structural model, we estimated the path coefficients and the adjusted coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) for the endogenous charity trust variable. Regarding the latter, the data show that as much as 71% of the variance of charity trust can be explained by its antecedents ( $R^2 = 0.71$ ). In turn, we find that 3% of the variance of the variable charity support can be explained by charity trust and its exogenous antecedent variables ( $R^2 = 0.03$ ). The level of statistical significance of the coefficients was determined through a SmartPLS bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 iterations. Once the significance of individual path coefficients has been supported, they can be interpreted like standardized beta coefficients in an OLS regression. See Table 3.

**Table 3.** Structural Model.

| <i>Hypotheses</i>                                | <i>Path Coefficient</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>t-Value</i> | <i>H supported</i> |
|--|-------------------------|-----------|----------------|--------------------|
| <b>Individual Antecedents</b>                    |                         |           |                |                    |
| H1a: Personal connection → charity trust         | 0.14                    | 0.03      | (5.30) ***     | Yes                |
| H1b: Awareness level → charity trust             | 0.20                    | 0.04      | (4.95) ***     | Yes                |
| H1c: Value congruence with cause → charity trust | 0.05                    | 0.01      | (3.48) ***     | Yes                |
| H1d: Word-of-mouth → charity trust               | -0.02                   | 0.01      | (1.34) n.s.    | No                 |
| <b>Organizational Antecedents</b>                |                         |           |                |                    |
| H1e: Organizational age → charity trust          | 0.18                    | 0.04      | (4.29) ***     | Yes                |
| H1f: Reputation → charity trust                  | 0.03                    | 0.01      | (2.26) *       | Yes                |
| H1g: Transparency → charity trust                | 0.41                    | 0.03      | (16.26) ***    | Yes                |
| H1h: Celebrity → charity trust                   | 0.06                    | 0.02      | (2.69) **      | Yes                |
| <b>Charity Support</b>                           |                         |           |                |                    |
| H2: Charity trust → charity support              | 0.16                    | 0.02      | (7.62) ***     | Yes                |

Notes: SD = Standard deviation; \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ ; n.s. = not significant; SmartPLS bootstrapping settings: 5,000 iterations.

Regarding the influence of the antecedents of charity trust, all hypotheses except H<sub>1d</sub> are supported. We find positive and statistically significant path coefficients for three individual antecedents with a path coefficient of 0.14 for connection, 0.20 for awareness level, and a weak path coefficient of 0.05 for cause. For the organizational antecedents, we find the strongest effect for transparency on charity trust is a path coefficient of 0.41, followed by organizational age with 0.18. Moreover, we find weak but significant path coefficients of 0.03 for reputation and 0.06 for celebrity.

Our findings also support H<sub>2</sub>. We find a positive and significant path coefficient from charity trust to charity support (0.16).

#### *Moderating Influence of Gender*

In order to test the moderating effect of gender on the relationship between charity trust and charity support (H<sub>3</sub>) we conduct a multigroup analysis, comparing the two models for female and male individuals and test for differences between the models. Specifically, we used independent samples t-tests (Rigdon, Ringle & Sarstedt, 2010) to evaluate differences in path coefficients. In doing so, the path coefficients' standard errors are obtained from independent bootstrap analyses of each of the models and are used for the parametric t-test together with the original sample path coefficients. With the non-significant t-value of 0.59 for the difference in the group variable, H<sub>3</sub> is not supported. It follows that gender does not moderate the relationship between charity trust and charity support. Table 4 provides the results of the multigroup analysis.

**Table 4.** Results of Multigroup Analysis: Moderating Influence of Gender.

| <i>Hypothesis</i>                               | <i>Group:<br/>Gender</i> | <i>Path<br/>Coefficient</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>t-Value</i> | <i> Diff <br/>M</i> | <i>t-Value</i> | <i>H<br/>supported</i> |
|---|--------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------|----------------|---------------------|----------------|------------------------|
| H3: Gender * Charity trust →<br>charity support | Female                   | 0.18                        | 0.03      | (6.70)<br>***  | 0.03                | (0.59)<br>n.s. | No                     |
|   | Male                     | 0.15                        | 0.03      | (4.73)<br>***  |                     |                |                        |

Notes: M = Mean; SD = Standard deviation; \*p < .05; \*\*p < .01; \*\*\*p < .001; n.s. = not significant; SmartPLS bootstrapping settings: 5,000 iterations.

## Discussion

In this exploratory investigation, our first research question examined the antecedents of charity trust. The data reveal that seven of the eight hypothesized antecedent relationships with charity trust have a significant influence, indicating the diverse range of trust antecedents. We found the strongest antecedent influence on charity trust to be transparency on charity trust; that is, individuals are more likely to trust charities that communicate how they use their resources. This finding fits well in recent discussions on charity trust and the development of strategies and tools for building, maintaining and restoring organizational trust in the nonprofit sector (Bekkers, 2003; Prakash & Gugerty, 2010; Farwell, Shier, & Handy, 2018). Both scholars and practitioners argue that accountability approaches focusing on transparency to be useful in signaling the organization's trustworthiness to the public (Slatten, Guidry & Austin, 2011).

The second strongest antecedent effect on charity trust is the awareness level; that is people are more likely to trust well-known charities. The prior literature argues that familiarity with an organization is the prerequisite for subsequent engagement with an organization (Keller, 2003). Our findings are also consistent with prior research which finds that brand awareness and

brand familiarity are essential in developing greater supporter commitment to the nonprofit brand (Boenigk & Becker, 2016; Faircloth, 2005; Juntunen, Juntunen, & Autere, 2013; Wymer, Gross, & Helmig, 2016). This finding goes along with research on another antecedent, the organization's age. Being long-established and historically anchored likely signals the charity's trustworthiness (Wiedmann, Hennigs, Schmidt, & Wuestefeld, 2011), as our findings show.

We also find that the charities to which people have a personal connection to are more trusted. From literature on relationship marketing we know that strengthening organizational identification and personal connection through relationship management approaches is essential in evoking supportive behavior towards nonprofit organizations (Boenigk & Helmig, 2013). Moreover, we find significant influences of celebrity, cause, and reputation on charity trust, indicating that there are a variety of influences on charity trust. That is, people tend to trust charities with well-known supporters and patrons, those with an excellent reputation, and those they believe to have worthy causes.

With respect to the second part of the analysis, we provide empirical results on the relationship between charity trust and charity support. The data reveal an effect from charity trust on charity support, from which the latter includes both donation and volunteering behavior. From the prior consumer behavior literature, there is support that trust plays a central role in the development of consumer-brand relationships, influencing behavioral outcomes. However, given that only a small part of the variance of charity support can be explained by charity trust and its antecedents, it is important to consider additional factors and mechanisms that influence charity support, such as mechanisms of giving (Bekkers & Wiepking, 2011), and factors for volunteering (Wymer & Rundle-Thiele, 2016).

With respect to examining the moderating influence of gender on the influence of charity trust on support behaviors, our results were not significant.

### *Research Implications*

This study contributes to the charity trust literature in several ways. First, despite its importance, the academic discussion of charity trust mainly focuses on donor trust, whereas inquiries on how to increase the organization's trustworthiness among the general public has been taken on only more recently (Farwell, Shier, & Handy, 2018; Furneaux & Wymer, 2015). Given an increased competitive environment in nonprofit sectors worldwide, as well as accordant shifts from a "trust-me" to a "show-me" attitude among the public and supporters of nonprofit organizations (Greiling, 2014), understanding influences on and the effects of charity trust have emerged in importance. Considering the increased demands on charities and their communication tactics, our investigation adds to our understanding of the important role of charity trust, hoping to inspire future research on this topic.

Second, few studies have investigated charity trust among the general public from an empirical perspective. With this study, we provide insights into the antecedent influences on charity trust and show the variety of trust antecedents. By introducing seven charity trust antecedents that add to our knowledge of influences on the public's trust of charities, this research contributes to the literature. Moreover, our findings enhance our understanding of the relationship between charity trust and support behaviors.

### *Managerial Implications*

Besides its relevance for research, our study also has managerial implications. Nonprofit organizations are increasingly confronted with more intensive competitive environments in a context of highly-publicized scandals that effect public confidence the whole sector (Archambeault & Webber, 2018; Slatten, Guidry & Austin, 2011). Such challenges require innovative approaches for cultivating and retaining public support. To help inform managerial decision-making, our study finds that charity trust influences donation and volunteering behaviors. Our results show managers some of the antecedents of charity trust that they can emphasize in their marketing and communication activities.

We advise nonprofit managers to build their organizational trust strategy upon the identified trust antecedents, in a suggested order. First, and our study confirms the importance of disclosing how the organization uses its resources. Transparent communication, particularly about donations, are an essential tool to build trust. Second, managers should place an emphasis on increasing brand awareness and familiarity with the charity, and our data reveal that people tend to trust well-known charities. Particularly, smaller and medium-sized organizations that are less-known should engage in activities that increase brand awareness and familiarity. Third, if the charity has been established for a long time, nonprofit managers should inform the public about the organization's age. Our findings show that individuals tend to trust long-established charities. Hence, organizations may be able to influence public trust by emphasizing the history and duration of the charity.

Fourth, we recommend that nonprofit managers establish relationship marketing or supporter cultivation and retention activities and programs in order to strengthen organizational identification and personal connections with their organizations. Such programs generally involve progressive engagement and regular communication. Finally, publicizing the support of

well-known individuals may influence public trust in the organization. The influence of this antecedent was not strong in our study. However, it is the combination of antecedent influences that has the overall greatest effect on trust. Therefore, the celebrity effect should not be overlooked.

### *Limitations and Further Research*

This study offers novel contributions to charity trust research; still, it has some limitations that suggest directions for further research. First, given the constraints inherent in secondary data analysis, we relied upon single-item scales for our charity trust antecedents. We believed this was acceptable, although not optimal. Further research could build on this explorative research on antecedents and could include equivalent multi-item scales to predict the relationships with the charity trust construct.

Our outcome variable was but a general measure of supportive behavior. Future research in needed to add further refinement to influences on refined and more varied measures of outcome variables that are desired by charitable organizations.

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