

# International Research on “Internet Philanthropy”: Evolutionary Trajectory, Hot Topics and Future Outlook (2000-2023)

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## Abstract

Internet philanthropy represents an effective model for the digital and decentralized transformation of traditional charitable practices. Having emerged earlier abroad, international internet philanthropy offers valuable theoretical and practical insights for China’s philanthropic development. Utilizing the CiteSpace bibliometric tool, this study conducted a panoramic knowledge map analysis of 2784 key international internet philanthropy research papers published between 2000 and 2023. Findings reveal: 1) The United States leads in internet philanthropy research. Globally, this field has progressed through three phases: a slow growth period, a fluctuating rise, and a rapid explosion; 2) Key international research topics center on four dimensions: motivational determinants of online giving, social media dissemination and utilization in online philanthropy, empirically grounded internet philanthropy governance, and corporate social responsibility fulfillment; 3) Emerging subfields indicate that human sperm donation, medical crowdfunding, and food banks have become frontier issues in international internet philanthropy research. Preliminary exploration of these topics can accelerate the transformation of China’s internet philanthropy sector—shifting from a singular focus on “fundraising” to maximizing public welfare value and reshaping the philanthropic ecosystem.

## Keywords

International Internet Philanthropy, Evolutionary Trajectory, Hot Topics, Frontier Outlook, Bibliometrics

## 1. Introduction

The rapid proliferation of internet technology enables traditional philanthropy to

reinvent itself through digital channels like social media, charitable websites, and mobile apps. This significantly expands the scope and volume of charitable activities, driving structural transformations within the online philanthropic sphere.

Compared to traditional offline charitable giving, internet philanthropy offers distinct advantages in convenience and accessibility. It not only saves donors considerable time and effort while lowering barriers to participation but also enables charitable platforms and social organizations to amplify their information reach through digital media. Consequently, this has spurred research on topics such as the behavioral motivations behind citizen donations, social media engagement, and the formation of social enterprises, while also generating new demands for enhancing the quality and efficiency of social governance.

In China, with the completion of the revised Charity Law and the incorporation of third-distribution policies into foundational institutional arrangements, the anticipated charitable policy effect of “charity by all to promote common prosperity” has begun to materialize. However, compared to Western developed nations, China still lags significantly in both total donation amounts and its proportion of GDP, as well as in the share of personal donations within the total. Consequently, the charitable donation sector retains vast room for development. For instance, the 2020 Giving USA Report by the Giving USA Foundation indicates that total charitable donations in the United States reached \$471.44 billion in 2020, with individual donations accounting for 68.6% of the total. In contrast, data from the 2020-2021 China Charitable Donation Report released by the China Charity Federation shows: China’s total charitable resources in 2020 amounted to approximately \$63.0487 billion, equivalent to only 13.4% of the U.S. total during the same period. Moreover, corporate entities rather than individuals were the primary donors, with corporate contributions accounting for 70.66% of the total in 2020, while individual donations constituted merely 25.13%. This indicates that a social atmosphere conducive to individual philanthropy has yet to take root in China, with low levels of initiative and enthusiasm for personal charitable giving. However, the information age—particularly the emergence of internet-based philanthropy—presents an opportunity for China to actively promote the high-quality development and transformation of modern public welfare and charitable endeavors, enabling rapid catch-up with advanced Western nations. To this end, a comprehensive review and analysis of international literature is necessary to provide research insights and policy reserves for vigorously advancing the “internet philanthropy” model in China’s new stage of development.

## 2. Research Methods and Literature Overview

### 2.1. Research Method

To comprehensively understand the academic landscape of internet philanthropy research, we employ the cutting-edge bibliometric tool CiteSpace. This tool primarily utilizes the concept of “co-occurrence clustering” to extract information units from scientific literature (including references at the document level, key-

words, subject terms, disciplines, and field classifications at the thematic level, as well as authors, institutions, countries, and journals at the entity level). It then reconstructs these units based on the types and strengths of connections between them, forming distinct network structures (e.g., keyword co-occurrence, author collaboration, co-citation networks). Nodes in these networks represent information units, while links denote connections (co-occurrences) between nodes. Finally, by measuring, statistically analyzing (e.g., clustering, salient term detection), and visualizing nodes, links, and network structures, we uncover implicit patterns and regularities in the knowledge structures of specific disciplines and fields.

The term “Internet philanthropy” studied herein comprises the keywords “Internet” and “philanthropy”, emphasizing the collective term for charitable activities conducted via the Internet. Current academic circles lack a unified definition for Internet philanthropy. Literature includes similar expressions like “online philanthropy”, “Internet public welfare”, and “online public welfare”, alongside traditional terms directly using “Internet philanthropy” or “Internet + philanthropy”. This study defines Internet philanthropy as a concept similar to E-philanthropy: it involves the use of digital technologies and online platforms to facilitate charitable donations, volunteerism, and social good initiatives, specifically enabling individuals and organizations to engage in giving and supporting causes via the internet (Zhang et al., 2021a). To maximize comprehensiveness, the author employed “Internet”, “network”, and “online” as thematic search terms for “internet” in foreign-language literature. Through literature review and consultation of Microsoft Bing Dictionary, broad charitable terms like “charity”, “philanthropy”, and “beneficence” were unified as thematic search terms, with a primary focus on charitable donation domains.

During the search and review process, it was observed that queries for keywords related to “Internet philanthropy” yielded a significant number of papers focused on organ donation, blood donation, and organ transplantation topics such as flavin transplantation and kidney transplantation. This clearly diverged from the core focus of this paper, which centers on “Internet philanthropy” involving monetary or material donations. After repeated refinement, the author finalized the search query as: TS = (online OR network OR Internet) AND TS = (charity OR philanthropy OR beneficence OR “charitable giving” OR donation) NOT TS = (organ donation OR blood donation OR transplant\*).

Furthermore, the author selected the globally significant academic database Web of Science for literature retrieval. After confirming that the Web of Science Core Collection provides comprehensive indexing of all content, and customizing the publication date range from “2000-01-01” to “2023-12-31” while restricting document types to articles, a total of 2784 valid documents were retrieved. This study exclusively relies on the Web of Science Core Collection (WoS) due to its extensive indexing of high-quality, peer-reviewed journals and its ability to provide reliable citation data, which is crucial for conducting a robust bibliometric analysis (Birkle et al., 2020). WoS is particularly well-suited for tracking the evo-

lution of academic research, as it covers a wide range of journals across disciplines with consistent citation metrics.

We chose to focus solely on peer-reviewed journal articles as they represent the most stable and academically rigorous source of information in the fast-evolving field of internet philanthropy. Articles are generally subject to thorough vetting, making them a reliable foundation for assessing the state of research. Although other document types—such as conference papers, reports, and reviews—could provide supplementary insights, we excluded them to maintain focus on high-impact, peer-reviewed publications that typically define the field’s intellectual trajectory. Including non-article document types might introduce noise, given the rapid pace of digital innovation, with some formats often reflecting more preliminary or less formalized stages of research (Figure 1).

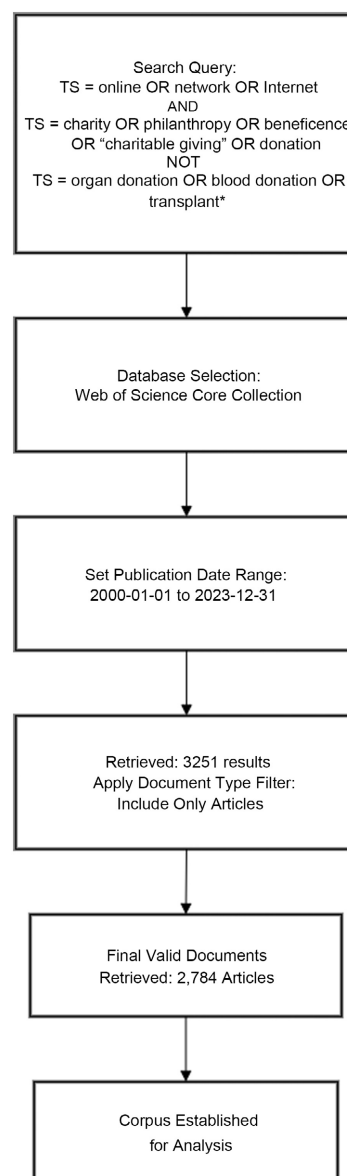


Figure 1. Flowchart of literature search and screening procedure.

## 2.2. Literature Overview

### 2.2.1. Changes in Publication Volume and Citation Frequency

Through analyzing the temporal changes in the volume of statistical literature, the author observed that since 2000, the number of publications on the theme of “Internet philanthropy” in the Web of Science core database has shown an overall upward trend. By period, prior to 2008, publication volume remained generally low, indicating limited attention to the topic. However, from 2009 to 2017, publication volume began fluctuating upward, with a significant increase in total output. From 2018 through 2022, publication volume experienced rapid explosive growth, peaking in 2021. Although 2022 saw a slight decline compared to 2021, the volume remained at a relatively high level. Further analysis of citation frequency reveals that the 2784 publications generated 60,250 citations (excluding self-citations), totaling 62,552 citations (including self-citations). The average citations per publication stood at 22.47, with citation frequency trends broadly aligning with publication volume patterns.

### 2.2.2. Distribution by Country/Region

Using CiteSpace’s visualization tools for authors and country output, the distribution of authors and countries contributing to the literature reveals that the United States leads globally in publication volume, having published 860 papers, accounting for 30.89% of the total global output. Followed by the United Kingdom with 653 publications. In contrast, China published only 244 articles in global mainstream journals between 2000 and 2023. Although ranking third in total volume, its publication count remains significantly lower than that of the US and UK. In summary, the United Kingdom and the United States demonstrate a clear lead in research on “Internet philanthropy” compared to other nations. While China’s research in this field shows promising developments, it must accelerate efforts to align with global research frontiers by expanding international collaboration.

**Table 1.** Distribution of literature by discipline and country/region.

Discipline Category	Number of Papers	Country Distribution	Number of Papers
Business	211	USA	860
Management	147	UK	653
Public Environmental Occupational Health	145	PEOPLES R CHINA	244
Economics	135	AUSTRALIA	198
Obstetrics and Gynecology	128	GERMANY	158
Social Issues	108	CANADA	139
Health Care Sciences Services	104	SPAIN	100
Medicine General Internal/Reproductive Biology	97	SCOTLAND	99
Communication	95	ITALY	93
Environmental Sciences	94	NETHERLANDS	89

Further analysis using keyword visualization to examine the specific research characteristics of these three countries reveals that the U.S. academic community shows particular interest in studying “plague pagans”, likely influenced by the religious movement theories presented in Rodney Stark’s *The Rise of Christianity*. The UK predominantly employs qualitative research methods, while China’s current research focus centers on medical crowdfunding. Additionally, in common research domains, network governance, health information, and corporate social responsibility represent research hotspots in the international internet philanthropy field that exhibit no national differences.

### 2.2.3. Theoretical Perspectives and Methodologies in Literature Research across Disciplines

In terms of disciplinary distribution, the author further utilized the Web of Science literature visualization function to analyze the subject categories of research publications. Findings reveal that “Internet philanthropy” research exhibits distinct interdisciplinary characteristics, with the top ten disciplines by publication volume primarily concentrated in business and economics, management, sociology and communication studies, and medical disciplines (see [Table 1](#)). Further analysis reveals that different academic fields focus on distinct aspects of internet philanthropy research. They also exhibit unique characteristics in research methodology selection, content, subject focus, theoretical perspectives, and research objectives. To examine the specific features of internet philanthropy research across disciplines, the following section provides a comparative overview using economics, management, sociology, and communication studies as examples.

#### 1) Business and Economics

Business and economics disciplines primarily employ empirical research methods for online philanthropy. Data collection often involves surveys, experiments, and interviews, followed by analyses such as variance analysis, regression analysis, cluster analysis, mediation and moderation effects analysis, structural equation modeling, and text analysis. These studies emphasize exploring individual donation behavior characteristics and incentive mechanisms, summarizing charitable marketing strategies, and examining corporate innovation within the philanthropic sector.

Research content primarily centers on how factors like personal traits, interpersonal interactions, charity marketing, and social environments influence donors’ giving intentions, aiming to advise charities on securing greater philanthropic resources. For instance, using parallel sequential mediation analysis on online survey data to examine the relationship between long-term personality thinking patterns and charitable giving to the homeless, offering references for nonprofit program strategy development ([Labban et al., 2023](#)); combining online and experimental data to investigate how donors’ social class influences others’ giving behavior, thereby providing optimization strategies for charitable marketing ([Zhao et al., 2023b](#)); employing an internet-based experimental survey design, conducting variance analysis on nationally representative samples of precise and impre-

cise donation amounts, and proposing sponsorship advertising strategies for online philanthropic marketing (Ndasi et al., 2022).

Integrating advances in business and economics research reveals that these studies primarily enrich internet philanthropy research from two perspectives: transactional environments and corporate donor types. The former focuses on charitable giving in non-routine contexts, emphasizing the influence of accompanying consumption and investment behaviors. This approach extends the ecosystem of charitable giving and treats it as an indirect factor affecting other market transactions. For instance, the field defines the integration of charity with retail checkout as “checkout philanthropy”, examining consumer attitudes toward retailers and the characteristics of willingness to donate to online checkout charities (Labban et al., 2023); applying the injured-healer model and emotional contagion model to examine the interaction between positive/negative emotions and checkout charity in shopping scenarios (Coleman & Peasley, 2023); investigating how religiously motivated charitable giving influences trading behavior among investors in a specific national stock market (Asutay et al., 2023). The latter focuses on diverse corporate donors, addressing the relative neglect of corporate giving in disciplines that emphasize individual philanthropy. For instance, from a network activism perspective, it examines the social consequences of public attention and investigates the pressure-side factors driving corporate social engagement: (Luo et al., 2016); analyzing the correlation between corporate cash resources, financial performance, and philanthropy, and integrating this into the corporate social responsibility research framework (Seifert, 2003); demonstrating the overlooked role of entrepreneurial spirit in charitable activities by reviewing medieval entrepreneurs’ philanthropic support for municipal infrastructure (Casson & Casson, 2019).

Theoretically, most studies favor psychological frameworks to analyze donor behavior, while others extend mainstream business and economic theories. For instance, incorporating price elasticity concepts, research on donors’ differing charitable intentions under reimbursement and matching subsidy mechanisms concludes that matching grants effectively stimulate giving (Gandullia & Lezzi, 2018). Leveraging cross-price elasticity theory, it examines the dual roles of arts and education institutions as both donation beneficiaries and service providers, exploring the possibility of donors purchasing services while making charitable contributions (Heger et al., 2021); from an institutional change perspective, it investigates the motivations of non-listed companies to emulate listed peers in formulating charitable policies and brand strategies (Yang et al., 2023).

Research objectives are predominantly grounded in the perspective of charitable organizations, offering recommendations for internet-based charitable advertising and marketing, as well as enhancing the scientific rigor of fundraising. For instance, studies have validated the feasibility of crowdfunding incentives in student support from the perspective of scaling university crowdfunding initiatives (Cho et al., 2019); based on the threshold effect and escalation of commitment

theory, studies confirmed the importance of soliciting opinions in fundraising strategies for engaging potential donors in charitable activities (Pittarello & Kogut, 2022). Using embedded words in donation ads as a natural experiment, researchers proposed practical suggestions for activating potential donors' empathy and increasing donation amounts (Ma et al., 2023). Through analyzing GoFundMe's marketing case in the nonprofit charitable donation market, this study explores its successful experiences, controversies and challenges, so as to provide references for other charitable organizations (Wade, 2023).

Overall, the current literature on internet philanthropy within business and economics disciplines has demonstrated increasing maturity in applying methodologies from psychology and sociology. Research strategies relying on quantitative analysis of experimental or survey data have significantly contributed to theoretical discoveries and methodological innovations within the field, thereby initiating a shift in internet philanthropy research toward examining individual behavioral choices in charitable giving. Simultaneously, within the discipline, scholars increasingly employ economic concepts such as price elasticity and performance analysis to examine the characteristics of internet philanthropy. They maintain a focus on enterprises as key market actors while progressively integrating donors into more complex financial market frameworks. Research has expanded beyond traditional fundraising marketing to encompass charitable activity performance evaluation, corporate social responsibility assessment, and governance of the public welfare ecosystem. This shift reflects a transition from a marketing-oriented perspective of "how to secure donations" to a resource-oriented focus on "how to effectively utilize donations".

## 2) Management, Sociology, and Communication Studies

Within management, sociology, and communication studies, existing literature focuses on multi-stakeholder communication issues, emphasizes the development and application of technological platforms, examines donors' ethical concerns and the mechanisms of social capital expansion, and explores the logic behind the formation of nonprofit attributes in grassroots organizations driving charitable behavior.

In terms of research methodology, interviews are more commonly employed compared to business and economics disciplines.

In terms of research content, the first approach incorporates nonprofit management modules but places greater emphasis on examining the influencing factors of crowdfunding operations from a group and project perspective. For instance, one study analyzed data from 889 donation-based crowdfunding campaigns on a Korean platform using an information processing model, identifying the accessibility and authenticity of donation information as key determinants of crowdfunding success (Kim et al., 2022). Second, research focuses on fundraising operations within specific contexts. For instance, studies in sports settings examine the interaction dynamics and fundraising strategies between participants (fundraisers) and donors in charitable sporting events (Filo et al., 2020); in the

hospitality management context, examining the impact of corporate philanthropy on consumers' perceived enthusiasm and brand attitudes (Xiong et al., 2023); analyzing specific charitable motivation types and their intensity variations among bidders in auction settings (Leszczyc & Rothkopf, 2010). Third, public management strategies: increasing analysis of administrative institutions and public policies. For example, discovering that fundraising success in higher education institutions correlates with factors such as institutional privilege, internal organizational culture, and external socioeconomic and political environments (Breeze et al., 2011); in public education financing, online public education crowdfunding was found to positively improve student academic performance (Gao et al., 2021); a comparative analysis of three UK charitable relationships drew attention to philanthropy's role in reshaping state-market-civil society dynamics (Daly, 2011).

In terms of research subjects, disciplines such as management, sociology, and communication studies examine internet philanthropy more broadly than business and economics. They focus not only on charitable organizations but also on various companies engaging in philanthropic activities; they examine not only external marketing strategies to increase fundraising but also the internal benefits philanthropy generates for companies. For instance, experimental studies examining corporate charitable donations during customer promotional activities have demonstrated the social value of short-term corporate philanthropy: (Singh et al., 2019). Other research explores the unique productivity gains experienced by public and nonprofit sector employees when contributing to social causes: (Tonin & Vlassopoulos, 2015). Furthermore, this discipline places particular emphasis on the role of human-media interactions in social philanthropy within internet philanthropy research. Consequently, it places special importance on the introduction of internet media and social platforms. For example, studies specifically analyze the impact of exposure to prosocial media content and the formation of positive social comparisons on donations to stigmatized groups (Zuniga et al., 2022); Exploring the positive role of linguistic coordination between individuals in enhancing compliance with charitable donations (Wan Mohamad Nazarie & Williams, 2021); designing personalized charitable advertisements to alter donors' empathy and attitudes, thereby facilitating pathways to assist stigmatized social groups (Bartsch & Kloss, 2019).

In theoretical application, the discipline actively incorporates sociological concepts, integrating psychological and communication models to explore human-society interaction factors. This approach investigates how online platforms' information transmission and technological support influence charitable organizations and behaviors, driving comprehensive theoretical innovation. For instance, by incorporating the concept of social capital, it explores the interplay of social capital in online and offline charitable activities through the latent relationship between internet technology, social capital, and prosocial behavior (Cox et al., 2019). Based on social exchange theory, it examines the relationship between ex-

pectations, commitments, and charitable donations, analyzing the mediating and moderating roles of trust and social status (Liu, 2019); based on innovation diffusion theory, it investigates the technological importance of online peer-to-peer donations in charitable sports activities (Filo et al., 2022).

Overall, management studies, sociology, and communication studies have significantly expanded the research framework for internet philanthropy. In the early phase, emphasis was placed on individual prosocial behavior, advocating for the deepening of isolated personal traits into the interactive process between individuals and society. During the middle phase, fundraising activities were concretized within different specialized management scenarios, strengthening project-based thinking while highlighting the mediating role of media platforms. In the later phase, research strategies gradually aligned with administrative institutions and public policy, forming a governance theme centered on charitable awareness, thereby providing references for co-creating charitable value across society. Future research can further explore sociological concepts and theories to analyze factors influencing collective charitable donation decisions, deepen studies on individual prosocial behavior by linking charitable giving with volunteer services, and develop intensive pathways through enriched management scenarios and premium charitable projects. Concurrently, strengthening policy and media platform research—combined with economic and political environment analysis—will enable continuous tracking of philanthropic outcomes and optimized technical support.

### 3. Evolutionary Trajectory and Core Issues in International Internet Philanthropy Research

#### 3.1. Evolutionary Trajectory

Using CiteSpace's timeline visualization feature, the author displayed the temporal evolution of literature keywords while simultaneously employing keyword salience analysis. Analysis of the integrated timeline and keyword emergence reveals (see Table 2) that internet philanthropy research exhibits distinct developmental phases: a slow growth period (2000-2008), a fluctuating rise (2009-2017), and a rapid surge (2018-present).

**Table 2.** Keyword emergence chart for overseas internet philanthropy research.

Bursty Keywords	Year	Strength	Begin	End
public goods	2011	4.26	2011	2018
networks	2008	6.14	2012	2017
donation	2001	4.03	2012	2013
altruism	2011	4.63	2013	2016
risk	2014	4.5	2014	2018
personality	2015	4.31	2015	2016
governance	2015	4.12	2015	2018

**Continued**

social media	2015	4.15	2016	2017
evolution	2017	6.34	2017	2018
quality	2002	5.64	2017	2020
planned behavior	2018	4.58	2018	2019
education	2014	4.09	2018	2019
performance	2012	5.81	2019	2020
motivations	2019	4.11	2019	2021
community	2018	5.3	2020	2021
quality of life	2020	4.67	2020	2021
empathy	2021	7.82	2021	2023
mental health	2020	6.07	2021	2023
perceptions	2015	5.96	2021	2023
public health	2021	5.59	2021	2023

**3.1.1. Slow Growth Period (2000-2008)**

In the early stages, research on internet philanthropy was relatively limited, and keyword emergence was not obvious. From the overall literature perspective, early studies focused on donors' behaviors, motivations, attitudes, and expectations. They conducted quantitative analyses of individual donation characteristics and influencing factors, or explored new models driving changes in donation behavior. A key feature was replacing traditional charitable giving with online or digital platforms, while examining how this digital transformation influenced donors' micro-level attitudes. From 2007 onwards, driven by the rapid growth of global charitable organizations and the proliferation of private philanthropic foundations established by entrepreneurs, discussions on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) gained momentum worldwide. Research perspectives shifted from individual donors to micro-enterprises during this period. This not only conceptually expanded the scope of entities implementing internet philanthropy and actively constructed the theory of social enterprises but also significantly enhanced the social vitality of charitable giving.

**3.1.2. Period of Fluctuating Growth (2009-2017)**

Starting from 2008, the internet gradually developed into an indisputable buzzword, marking the true entry of global philanthropy into the internet era. The application of the internet not only accelerated the reach of charitable giving but also multiplied donation amounts in practice. It can be said that internet technology injected a catalyst into the development of charitable and public welfare endeavors. Compounded by the impact of the 2008 global financial crisis, this period coincided with deepened government intervention and widespread implementation of public policies in the philanthropic sector, leading to a resurgence of altruistic thinking worldwide. After 2015, social media rapidly emerged as the new

buzzword, driving further integration of social media elements into charitable giving within the context of embedded internet technology. Charitable donations benefited from the rapid growth of new media organizations. As the concept of governance gained prominence in 2015, becoming a hot research area in philanthropy, internet philanthropy studies began to shift toward an institutionalist focus on charitable trust and transparency.

### 3.1.3. Rapid Expansion Phase (2018-Present)

After 2018, as numerous international foundations and public welfare organizations shifted toward a philanthropic capitalism operational model, foreign internet philanthropy research began to further explore the commercial attributes of philanthropy. Representative studies not only emphasized the social capital support for internet philanthropy but also focused on researching the large number of social enterprise organizations that emerged, differing from traditional foundations. Many publications viewed internet philanthropy as a new type of social organization with potential commercial strategic value and social public welfare value. They not only encouraged the government to strengthen policy support for such organizations but also advocated for the active participation of domestic elites and wealthy groups. Internet philanthropy is gradually evolving into a planned, government-backed corporate endeavor focused on achieving commercial value and organizational efficiency.

## 3.2. Key Research Themes

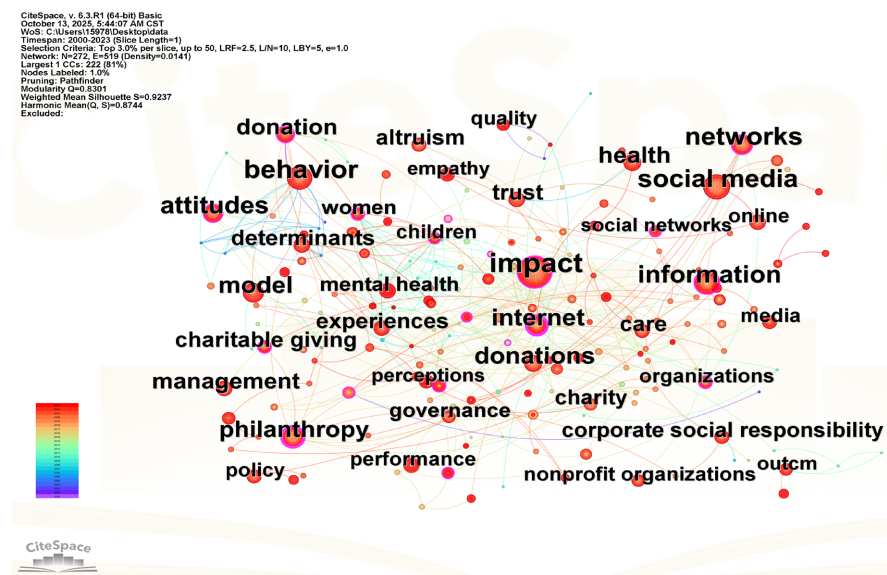
Furthermore, the author employs CiteSpace's network analysis tools to elucidate the core themes in international internet philanthropy research from 2000 to 2023. In CiteSpace, the time range was set from 2000 to 2023 with a 1-year slice duration, which helps capture the development and changes in the research field over an extended period. The node type was set to "Keyword", and the top 3.0% of items with the highest citation frequency or occurrence frequency were selected from each slice, with a maximum of 50 items per slice, facilitating the focus on core themes and hotspots in the research field. Meanwhile, the Pathfinder was used for pruning, and the "Pruning sliced networks" and "Pruning the merged network" functions were enabled to make the knowledge network graph clearer and easier to interpret<sup>1</sup>. As a result, a keyword co-occurrence map graph with a Network Density of 0.0141 was obtained. After clustering, the Q value was 0.8301, which is greater than 0.3, indicating a significant structure; the S value was 0.9237, which is greater than 0.7, suggesting good homogeneity within the clusters.

Within this knowledge map, node count represents keyword quantity, edge count reflects keyword connections, and circle size indicates keyword frequency—larger circles denote higher frequency. These high-frequency keywords fundamentally reflect representative terminology in the "Internet philanthropy" field from 2000 to 2023, while also revealing research hotspot clusters during this pe-

<sup>1</sup>In the end, the number of documents processed in the CiteSpace program was 2664.

riod. Combining the keyword co-occurrence knowledge map reveals that core topics in international Internet philanthropy from 2000 to 2023 primarily focused on four aspects: Determinants of Online Donation Behavior, Media Communication and Its Application, Internet Philanthropy Governance, and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) fulfillment.

Here, the motivation behind online donation behavior focuses on exploring why individuals or organizations engage in online giving, addressing the “why” question. Understanding donors’ motivations helps tailor approaches to enhance their willingness to donate. Research on social media dissemination in online philanthropy, meanwhile, examines the communication channels influencing internet donations against the backdrop of rapid digital expansion and rising internet penetration. This can be viewed as a key factor affecting online giving, focusing on the methods and tools used to disseminate such donations. Internet philanthropy governance refers to mechanisms regulating and supervising online donation activities. It functions as a disciplinary system for all parties involved in online giving, employing hierarchical monitoring, standardized adjudication, and procedural inspections to ensure harmonious and healthy operation of the online charitable environment. Enterprises play a vital role in online philanthropy. Corporate social responsibility (CSR) represents the ethical and societal obligations undertaken by enterprises in online giving and can also be viewed as a key motivator for corporate online philanthropy. Research on CSR implementation is crucial for the sustainable development of enterprises in the charitable sector. While the four research topics above have distinct boundaries, they are interconnected and overlapping, collectively forming the research landscape of internet philanthropy. Below, we will elaborate on each topic separately (Figure 2).



**Figure 2.** Co-occurrence map of keywords from 2664 foreign online philanthropy literature.

### 3.2.1. Determinants of Online Donation Behavior

At its core, charitable giving is a widely recognized practice with substantial soci-

etal benefits. In the internet era, online donations have become an irreversible new channel for philanthropy. However, internet-based charitable giving differs from traditional offline donations, featuring unique motivational determinants.

First, examining different entities, donation identification models and test results for individuals and organizations indicate: donations to organizations are more influenced by outcome-related factors, while donations to individuals are more influenced by interaction-related factors (Gleasure & Feller, 2016); regarding gender differences, no significant disparity exists between men and women in charitable giving. This is because although men exhibit lower levels of donation motivation than women, they possess greater resources and social capital, which compensates for their relatively lower motivation levels (Einolf, 2011).

Among other factors determining online donation behavior, social relationships play a crucial role, exerting a strong direct influence on donation willingness and average donation size (Meer, 2011). For instance, on social networking sites, the strength of online relationships significantly impacts donors' charitable attitudes and reinforces the consistency between their attitudes and behaviors (Farrow, 2011). Simultaneously, social relationships—particularly perceived social pressure—are recognized as drivers for executing specific donation behaviors, underscoring the importance of social external factors in influencing these motivations within charitable giving research. Furthermore, moral norms, as one of the primary predictors of charitable donation intentions, are considered significant predictors of future online donation willingness alongside attitudes, perceived behavioral control, and past behaviors (van der Linden, 2011). Particularly in online charitable crowdfunding projects by individuals or organizations, perceived credibility and empathy factors play significant additional roles in determining online donation intentions (Liu et al., 2018).

Second, some studies have also found that individuals' religious and secular beliefs are significantly associated with online donations (Brown & Ferris, 2007). This is because religious and secular beliefs enhance donors' levels of online social capital. For donations within certain religious communities, philanthropy may not yield direct economic capital returns but can indirectly generate cultural, social, and symbolic capital, which may subsequently translate into economic benefits (Harvey, Maclean, Gordon, & Shaw, 2011). Thus, online charitable behavior is viewed as a universal tool for capital conversion (Tilcsik & Marquis, 2013).

Furthermore, the emotional attachment of donors to the cause and their functional dependence on social media significantly influence donation behavior. This occurs when social factors—such as identification, interaction, and information value—persist, or when technological factors (conditions of coexisting sociality and personalization) are present (Wan et al., 2017). Donors may proactively seek out and implement anonymous giving to assist individuals with whom they have limited social connections—a novel donation behavior emerging from internet philanthropy.

Finally, beyond donors and donation platforms influencing giving behavior,

third-party rating agencies exert significant influence in the donation market. This stems from their role in collecting, interpreting, and reporting ratings based on charitable organizations' accounting data and other information, thereby assisting donors in selecting among numerous fundraising entities. Extensive research indicates that rating agencies significantly influence donor decisions by ranking charities based on fundraising and administrative ratios (Meer, 2014). Specifically, more positive ratings directly increase donation amounts, while organizations experiencing negative rating changes receive fewer donations (Gordon et al., 2009).

### 3.2.2. Online Donations, Social Media Dissemination, and Their Applications

The rapid development of social media enables the public not only to donate online but also to further support charitable causes by sharing philanthropic information. Thus, as a unique space for users to engage in public communication, emotional exchange, and social relationship building via the internet (Hamm et al., 2013), social media exerts a profound influence on charitable giving.

A telling example is how the interactive nature of social media platforms has transformed the way organizations conduct charitable donation campaigns (Baek & Yoon, 2022). Compared to conventional crowdfunding websites, social media enables crowdfunding projects to spread more rapidly to the widest possible audience (Huang et al., 2021). It offers a convenient, low-cost way to support charitable causes: sharing information online (Takashina et al., 2022). Simultaneously, the dissemination and interaction processes on social media significantly positively influence donors' trust and satisfaction, thereby enhancing their willingness to donate (Feng et al., 2017). Currently, most charitable organizations consistently leverage social media to promote emotional appeals through embedded advertisements, thereby advancing public welfare initiatives (Conlin & Bauer, 2022). Consequently, social media platforms offer undeniable potential for non-profit organizations in planning, supporting, and executing successful fundraising campaigns (Bhati & McDonnell, 2020).

Beyond transforming interactivity, social media can support charitable development by facilitating online volunteering. For instance, users can post tweets about charitable donations to provide information, encourage contributions, motivate others to act, and even build online communities that significantly amplify charitable outreach (Khan et al., 2018). Additionally, social media can enhance the intimacy between philanthropic celebrities and their followers, deepening the impact of celebrities' charitable actions and boosting awareness of both offline and online volunteer services among followers (Click et al., 2017). Overall, while leveraging celebrities or renowned organizations aids in disseminating charitable messages, group-level analysis indicates that requests for causes and donations initiated by family and friends still predominantly drive young people's participation in charitable volunteer activities on social media (Dean, 2020).

In exploring why social media successfully influences online charitable giving,

most literature attributes this to how donation information dissemination on social media precisely meets the demands of both donors and causes. In other words, social media marketing provides nonprofits and charities with a timely, targeted, highly engaging, and low-cost channel to reach people (Yousef et al., 2022). Coincidentally, contemporary youth increasingly prefer online engagement and actively exercise their donation autonomy based on individual judgment (Konstantinou & Jones, 2022). Consequently, enhanced social networks have become a significant driver motivating prosocial behaviors like online donations and information sharing on social media (Ashraf, Zhang, & Ozpolat, 2023).

It is worth noting that in reality, social media-driven charitable activities do not necessarily succeed, which is partly related to the immediacy of donors' needs and cultural value differences. Charitable donations inherently align with the Chinese cultural value of "relieving urgent needs rather than chronic poverty". Therefore, when charitable organizations leverage social media for online fundraising, the most critical factor influencing donor participation is the immediacy of need (Xue & Zhou, 2022). Additionally, social media's ability to transcend temporal and spatial boundaries expands the scope and impact of charitable giving. However, this also introduces risks. Since different regions and cultures often have distinct norms and values, these differences inevitably influence donors' behavioral attitudes (Chen et al., 2021). When internet issues such as trust and security arise (Ahn, Sura & An, 2018), donations are inevitably suppressed. This represents the counterproductive effect of inappropriate social media use on internet philanthropy (Dehdashti et al., 2022).

### 3.2.3. Empirically Grounded Internet Philanthropy Governance

In the international field of internet philanthropy, converting "one-time donors" into "recurring donors" is a significant research topic. Achieving this goal necessitates a focus on internet philanthropy governance.

Specifically, for individuals with multiple online donation experiences, the most critical factor influencing continued giving is fundraising trust (Zhang et al., 2021a). Therefore, leveraging efficient and rigorous internet philanthropy governance to enhance an organization's social reputation, foster a favorable charitable fundraising environment, and build fundraising trust serves as an effective means to encourage sustained online giving.

So, how can internet charity governance foster sustained fundraising trust? Existing research suggests information disclosure is a key area of study. Recent findings indicate that among disclosed information and disclosure methods, organizational profile, performance, and governance disclosures have the most significant impact on internet charity (Rossi et al., 2022). This is because, unlike conventional businesses, the primary entities in online philanthropy—nonprofit organizations—place greater emphasis on performance and annual report disclosures than on financial disclosures (Saxton et al., 2014). This stems from the inherent characteristics of nonprofit organizations. For instance, in Western developed nations, most nonprofit founders are required to disclose fundraising li-

censes obtained from relevant regulatory bodies. They must also disclose laws and regulations compliant with international standards protecting platform users (Sirisawat et al., 2022). Some countries also mandate that organizations disclose terms ensuring no quid pro quo exists when accepting donations (Fridman & Luscombe, 2017). Additionally, certain nations stipulate that charitable organizations' websites should evolve toward more information-rich and relational environments, ensuring stakeholders can access information ranging from ongoing work and dispersed fund usage to organizational governance structures (Gandia, 2011).

However, within the nonprofit sector, does higher disclosure always yield better outcomes? Research findings reveal some controversy, specifically indicating that disclosure levels are influenced by industry sector and technological application. First, regarding industry differences: most countries permit religious and healthcare-related non-profit organizations to disclose less information, while educational non-profits tend to disclose more accountability information (Tremblay-Boire & Prakash, 2015). Compared to the past, contemporary nonprofits must disclose information beyond government requirements to genuinely enhance trust relationships (Zhou & Ye, 2021). Secondly, regarding technological application, internet fundraising platforms necessitate heightened focus on security, privacy, and project review mechanisms. Therefore, blockchain technology could be considered for implementation in online philanthropy. Compared to the trust crisis caused by opaque information disclosure in many developing countries' non-profit organizations (Wu & Zhu, 2020), some developed nations have adopted blockchain technology to ensure trust, transparency, and chronological integrity between donors and beneficiaries (Saraswat et al., 2022). Moreover, blockchain's one-time account addresses can protect personal information (Lee et al., 2018). This significantly enhances the trustworthiness of domestic charitable services.

#### **3.2.4. Corporate Social Responsibility Implementation**

Broadly speaking, philanthropy constitutes one form of corporate social responsibility (CSR) activity, and enterprises are also among the primary donors in online philanthropy. Research on CSR thus offers valuable insights for the philanthropic sector. CSR fulfillment centered on charitable giving not only generates positive societal impacts but also benefits the enterprises themselves (Gordon et al., 2009). Cross-national research reveals that companies with high market value not only demonstrate substantial financial profits but also cultivate strong public images through extensive participation in environmental practices and other philanthropic endeavors (Zhao et al., 2023a). Furthermore, when enterprises engage more extensively in social responsibility activities, they establish broader connections with governments. Economically, these companies generally receive higher government subsidies (Lin et al., 2015).

How should we interpret these behavioral outcomes? Research suggests this primarily stems from the perceived social justice and spillover effects generated

by CSR fulfillment. When a donation initiative supports the local community, corporate social responsibility fulfillment produces significant spillover effects on behavioral outcomes (primarily corporate image) (Choi et al., 2019). Simultaneously, the social justice perceptions generated by donations moderate the relationship between corporate brand image and CSR motivation (Balqiah et al., 2022), a relationship particularly evident in online donations. Some studies also indicate that a company's centrality within social networks significantly influences donation levels, with deeper market embeddedness correlating with higher donation amounts (Wu et al., 2018). Here, corporate social responsibility fulfillment through donations manifests not only as a commitment to shared interests but also as a creation of corporate social value (Arco-Castro et al., 2020)<sup>2</sup>. Particularly following the widespread adoption of internet philanthropy, the fulfillment of corporate social responsibility has increasingly transformed into a vital business strategy, serving as an equally significant motivator for employees across all public and nonprofit sectors (Tonin & Vlassopoulos, 2015).

#### 4. Frontiers in Overseas Internet Philanthropy Research

To explore cutting-edge topics in internet philanthropy, the author further employed Citespace's keyword and citation clustering functions. By referencing emerging keywords and peripheral topics from co-occurrence maps, three frontier research areas in international internet philanthropy were identified: human sperm donation, medical crowdfunding, and food banks.

##### 4.1. Human Sperm Donation

Human sperm donation, a specialized field within public welfare and philanthropy, traces its origins to the first documented pregnancy using frozen sperm in 1953. However, research on related donations stagnated due to controversies surrounding the privacy, ethics, and legal aspects of artificial sperm donation. It wasn't until the widespread adoption of the internet and social media, coupled with advancements in cryopreservation technology, that research on human sperm donation revived within the charitable donation sector. This revival enabled couples facing male infertility to achieve conception using donor sperm.

Recent research has examined the motivational factors driving human sperm donation. Scholars note that sperm donation differs from other material donations due to stringent quality screening and information security assessments. Consequently, current sperm donation primarily relies on staff proactively contacting donors and targeted outreach campaigns. However, most sperm donors are motivated by altruism, primarily seeking the personal fulfillment of helping others. Alternatively, they may be driven by material incentives, free health screenings, or opportunities for medical examinations. Furthermore, a significant

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<sup>2</sup>In China, companies are also exploring ways to integrate internet philanthropy into consumers' daily lives, making gamified charity a trendy approach. For instance, Alipay's "Ant Forest" serves as a prime example of internet philanthropy being gamified.

issue in sperm donation is that many donors harbor ethical concerns about the donation itself, exhibiting severe distrust in the information or security practices of sperm banks. Consequently, potential donors under traditional donation models are reluctant to establish any financial or legal ties with recipient families. They also worry that anonymous donation carries the ethical risk of unintentional marriages between half-siblings among future generations (Ping et al., 2011).

With the rapid development of the internet, online sperm banks—operating outside specialized regulatory oversight and relying on dedicated sperm bank websites or social media—have gradually emerged. This model transforms the donation process and subsequent interactions into a new form of informal, non-legal contact (Bergen & Delacroix, 2019). Unlike traditional sperm bank donation models, internet sperm banks directly connect recipients and donors, establishing a comprehensive communication mechanism that fosters closer information exchange and social interaction between the two parties. Current research on internet sperm banks established in developed countries reveals that donors are predominantly married men, with the majority of donations occurring within cohabiting relationships. This further contributes to the separation of reproduction from marriage. Simultaneously, men who have donated via internet sperm banks exhibit a more pronounced desire for procreation, fundamentally motivated by the wish to perpetuate their own favorable genetic traits (Woestenburg et al., 2016). However, the emergence of new online sperm banks also introduces significant social risks. For instance, current online sperm donation lacks clear legal liability frameworks and exclusion rules, potentially triggering personal, medical, and legal disputes. Additionally, the absence of systematic medical screening for online sperm donors may raise questions about the legal legitimacy of parental status for children conceived through such donations, potentially leading to exploitation of recipients. Moreover, the unregulated nature of online sperm donation heightens concerns about the risk and sociopsychological impact of unions between half-siblings sharing the same father (Graham et al., 2019).

Certainly, some foreign literature has also noted the progress of human sperm donation in China over the past two decades. For instance, the acceptance rate among potential sperm donors under 35 years old in China is relatively high, as is the rate among married men with children. This may relate to the potential impact of age and reproductive history on sperm quality. Regarding donation motivations, beyond altruistic tendencies, Chinese donors are also more driven by curiosity. However, compared to other countries, China lags slightly in leveraging the internet to improve sperm donation processes, with economic development stage and cultural differences being the primary factors contributing to this gap.

## 4.2. Medical Crowdfunding

Driven by the 2008 financial crisis, crowdfunding has gradually emerged as a popular strategy to alleviate special medical expenses. As a widely adopted form of internet-based donation, medical crowdfunding leverages social media platforms.

Donors narrate the urgency of their illnesses and financial hardships to establish a peer-to-peer donation model, thereby supplementing gaps in public healthcare coverage.

The rise of medical crowdfunding in developed nations stems from two factors: first, fiscal crises within healthcare and social assistance systems, highlighting the privatization and profit-driven financing constraints in the U.S. healthcare market; second, the sharing and cluster economies enabled by internet technology, which foster collaboration among shared interests and create cross-regional, cross-sectoral medical resource networks.

Recent research reveals that compared to other crowdfunding categories (e.g., education, poverty, environment), medical internet crowdfunding projects exhibit overall lower success rates (Ba et al., 2021). This is primarily because medical crowdfunding campaigns overly rely on social networks to establish the ethical assumptions of established internet information platforms. Meanwhile, personal characteristics such as ethnicity, gender, and social class, along with regional factors like local information and communication technology, government policy support, and the distribution of charitable organizations (Ba et al., 2020), all influence the ethical values formed by people's use of participatory media (Paulus & Roberts, 2018). In practice, patients' social media literacy and self-marketing capabilities significantly influence the crowdfunding amounts they secure, while social transmission often amplifies donors' selection and biases (Kenworthy et al., 2020), further placing fundraisers at a disadvantage (Berliner & Kenworthy, 2017). Simultaneously, on medical crowdfunding platforms, information disclosure by fundraisers is considered transactional in nature, constituting a necessary condition for successful fundraising (Snyder & Crooks, 2021). Yet it is precisely the enduring trace of online information sharing and the vulnerable position of patients that intensify the ethical issues surrounding disclosure (Kubheka, 2020).

Back in China, medical crowdfunding has gradually emerged as a research frontier. Some scholars have leveraged internet-based medical crowdfunding platforms like Tencent Charity to conduct localized deconstruction studies focusing on the crowdfunding donation behavior itself (Zhang et al., 2021b). In platform design, warm-toned medical crowdfunding pages fostered greater emotion-based trust than cool-toned ones (Zhang et al., 2021c). Regarding crowdfunding dissemination, research indicates that implementing social recommendations enhances the positive effect on fundraising capacity, emphasizing that social capital and reputation enhancement significantly boost the success rate of medical crowdfunding projects (Li et al., 2022). Furthermore, the credibility of groups participating in reposting and the strength of their relationships with supporters can positively promote sharing behavior among potential supporters (Zhou et al., 2022).

### 4.3. Food Banks

Food banks are nonprofit organizations that systematically collect, store, and redistribute surplus food resources. Originating in North America during the 1960s,

they experienced rapid growth alongside welfare state austerity and severe economic downturns in the 1970s and 1980s, as well as the rise of corporate philanthropy and privatized food assistance in the 1990s. Over the past few decades, developed nations have progressively institutionalized them, transforming them into an emerging food relief mechanism. They have now expanded to over 100 countries and regions worldwide (Warshawsky, 2023), becoming the most widely adopted and globally scalable practice model in the field of internet philanthropy.

At its core, a food bank functions as a “humanitarian supply chain” for livelihood assistance, aiming to plan and implement the long-term, stable transfer of food and other essential supplies. Unlike emergency disaster relief or project-based development aid, livelihood assistance represented by food banks more closely resembles commercial supply chains. It anchors to the needs of food-insecure populations, establishes stable upstream-downstream partnerships, fosters reliable information and resource sharing, and simultaneously maintains a dual-function flexibility to adapt during crises. This serves the overall sustainable optimization of the social environment (Narayanan, 2024).

In recent years, food banks have exhibited increasingly pronounced digital characteristics. Evolving from traditional one-to-one supply channels to integrated provision under the sharing economy, they have formed new economies of scale, spurring the emergence of new organizations and startups.

Building on this, some food banks have evolved into community charitable resource centers, complementing their functions with medical and dental clinics while providing clothing, towels, personal hygiene items, and childcare services to vulnerable populations (Mousa & Freeland-Graves, 2017). Some developed countries have further expanded this model by establishing Social Supermarkets (SSMs). SSMs primarily operate by receiving surplus food and consumer goods free of charge from retail partners and selling them at discounted prices to low-income individuals (Michelini, Principato, & Iasevoli, 2018). This trend clearly demonstrates the institutionalization of food banks.

Undoubtedly, the advantages of institutionalizing food banks are evident. As a governance arrangement, it brings together multiple participants from the public, private, and nonprofit sectors. On one hand, governments promote food banks through legal and policy measures, mitigating food insecurity while strengthening grassroots governance and maintaining social stability. On the other hand, participating private companies gain tangible benefits—tax incentives, government payments, marketing and promotional opportunities—while demonstrating corporate social responsibility and significantly enhancing their social reputation (Lohnes, 2021).

Notably, food banks played a vital role in emergency relief during the global COVID-19 pandemic. However, this period also exposed their structural issues and the fragility of the charitable system. The structural problem lies in the inherent contradiction: while food banks effectively reduce food waste, they simultaneously rely heavily on surplus food. Creating an inherent operational conflict. Pur-

suing scale at the expense of addressing local government failures in food security policy risks obscuring systemic shortcomings, undermining efforts to tackle community hunger and food insecurity, and further eroding governmental accountability and responsibility (Coque & Gonzalez-Torre, 2017). Complete replacement of charitable food assistance would further jeopardize the widespread application of public food welfare programs; This harm is particularly pronounced during the COVID-19 pandemic. As food banks operate primarily on a voluntary basis—a quintessentially labor-intensive endeavor—(Tarasuk & Eakin, 2005) they depend on ample surplus food and volunteer resources. However, sudden public crises like the pandemic have caused severe shortages in both areas, directly leading to the closure of some food banks and rendering their functions ineffective.

Moreover, food banks themselves carry inherent risks. Donated food often consists of surplus items exceeding demand, products nearing expiration, or goods difficult to sell due to appearance, freshness, grade, size, or cosmetic defects. While charities may avoid costly food disposal or landfill by claiming “good deeds” and creating a “halo effect”, recipients remain vulnerable to harm from food poisoning and allergens. “Good Samaritan laws” in developed nations largely exempt charitable organizations from liability, but this may conversely foster a “gambler’s mentality” among them.

Finally, focusing on China’s domestic context, the relatively late start of food bank development presents additional socioeconomic and psychological challenges. From a legal perspective, the application of laws governing food donations in China remains unclear, with ambiguous delineation of legal responsibilities among donors. This creates legal risks for the long-term, stable development of food banks. Second, public awareness and trust in food banks remain low. This dampens enthusiasm for donations and support. Even with “volunteer” taste-testing guarantees, public confidence in food safety persists, significantly undermining credibility and operational expansion. Furthermore, in terms of operational capacity, food banks in China face a shortage of professional management and operational talent. This results in a lack of scientific planning and effective management in key areas such as food collection, storage, and distribution, leading to significant resource wastage.

## **5. Discussion on Future Research Directions and Implications for China**

### **5.1. Discussion on Future Research Directions**

Reviewing international trends in online philanthropy development and research priorities reveals deeper exploration of motivational factors underlying human charitable behavior. This includes not only analyzing individual donation intentions but also investigating the impact of interpersonal interactions within the internet environment. In contrast, Chinese research often remains confined to controlling variables based on fixed, singular factors. This highlights a potential future research direction grounded in China’s traditional mutual aid philosophy and the

expansion of altruistic thinking within the internet context.

Secondly, regarding social media applications, foreign literature not only examines the impact of social media on monetary donations but also analyzes the online voluntary dissemination of information itself, balancing both the advantages and disadvantages of social media. China, however, still lacks sufficient analysis and discussion on the transmission of information itself. In the field of internet philanthropy governance, foreign countries have already developed technologies like blockchain to optimize governance by analyzing governance dilemmas. This holds reference value for addressing trust and security challenges in China's internet philanthropy and promoting sustainable donations. For enterprises, strengthening the promotion of corporate social responsibility fulfillment while enhancing both social and economic benefits will be one of the opportunities for the rapid advancement of internet philanthropy in China.

Regarding cultural differences, foreign literature emphasizes the influence of individualistic, autonomous decision-making in internet philanthropy, leading to more precise project design with a focus on data accuracy and standardized processes. In contrast, internet philanthropy in China is characterized by strong group mobilization, where narrative storytelling amplifies emotional resonance to drive public participation. Against the backdrop of increasingly frequent Sino-Western collaboration in internet philanthropy, future online philanthropy initiatives should better balance individualism and collectivism, utilitarianism and moralism, maximizing social impact through their strategic integration.

Finally, regarding the outlook for domestic and international research frontiers, human sperm donation should be grounded in human ethics and requires further compliance studies. It warrants broader attention in China, leveraging its advantages while mitigating risks, and advancing through internet-enabled fertility technologies. As medical crowdfunding research gains traction domestically, China is emerging as a new player in this field. Platforms like Tencent Charity have enabled multidimensional analyses of donor decision-making factors in medical crowdfunding. However, internet-based perspectives remain insufficient and should account for variations in human intent within online contexts. Furthermore, the digital characteristics of food banks present new research directions for internet philanthropy. Utilizing the internet as a platform to coordinate offline physical sharing can further strengthen grassroots governance innovation and reshape the new order of social governance.

## **5.2. Implications for Research on Internet Philanthropy in China**

Overall, current international research on internet philanthropy exhibits pronounced interdisciplinary characteristics. On one hand, studies have shifted focus from individual factors driving fundraising volume growth to the qualitative aspects of internet philanthropy projects, while also promoting collaboration with administrative bodies to govern the internet philanthropy ecosystem. China's current research predominantly explores "how to secure more donations", primarily

focusing on individual personality traits. It remains insufficient in examining the richness of individual factors, the interplay of personal roles, and the dynamics between individuals and society. Furthermore, it fails to extend the chain of influence factors backward and lacks sufficient discussion on the marketing aspects of internet philanthropy. Application scenarios tend to be abstract and simplified. There is a need to broaden and deepen the subsequent exploration of preliminary influencing factors. Simultaneously, domestic research exhibits limited diversity in subjects, with insufficient exploration of charitable practices by specialized organizations and corporations. There is also inadequate linkage with corporate social responsibility (CSR) research, hindering the establishment of a comprehensive framework for internet philanthropy studies. On the other hand, Chinese internet philanthropy research has yet to develop an open-minded approach, often remaining confined within its own disciplinary theories and methodological techniques. By integrating concepts and perspectives from economics, management, sociology, psychology, and communication studies, incorporating the roles of administrative bodies and public policy analysis, and leveraging new technologies like artificial intelligence, a systematic approach to internet philanthropy governance can be formed to build a Chinese-style internet philanthropy ecosystem.

It should be recognized that future internet philanthropy will shift from “how to raise more money online” and “how to enhance transparency to build donor trust” toward “how to maximize public benefit value after fundraising” and “how to reshape the industry ecosystem.” While this transformative trend is increasingly evident in international research, domestic efforts remain anchored in the upstream phase of fundraising within internet philanthropy. Consequently, China must actively engage with international research findings and trends to accelerate localized studies on internet philanthropy. Through dialogue, we should explore synergies between foreign and domestic research, leveraging cross-cultural exchange and knowledge sharing to forge distinctive Chinese approaches to internet philanthropy and reshape the industry’s ecosystem. Therefore, drawing on international internet development experiences, China must prioritize addressing the following issues to actively advance internet philanthropy:

First, resolving the industry’s trust crisis in internet philanthropy. Overseas trends show that while internet philanthropy significantly boosts public engagement, it also places charitable organizations under public scrutiny—acting as a magnifying glass that heightens demands for transparency and project efficiency. Consequently, greater openness and transparency are critical to accelerating China’s localized internet philanthropy development. Therefore, it is essential to further refine external oversight mechanisms for charitable organizations’ transparency. This involves not only continuing to improve the existing regulatory framework—which relies on strong legal deterrence, government oversight, and industry self-regulation—but also drawing on international experience to expedite the establishment of third-party evaluation mechanisms.

Second, strengthen the legal framework and regulations governing internet phi-

lanthropy. Compared to developed nations, China's legal standards require further refinement. Due to the incomplete and lagging nature of the internet philanthropy legal system, the vast majority of internet crowdfunding platforms currently lack the qualifications to serve as charitable information release platforms. However, the Charity Law does not explicitly define the legal status and responsibilities of crowdfunding platforms. Therefore, future revisions to the Charity Law should focus on defining the responsibilities and obligations of internet charity platform operators while establishing clear criteria for verifying their eligibility, thereby mitigating risks of fraudulent fundraising.

Third, significantly enhance the professional capabilities of online charitable organizations or platforms. International research indicates that developed countries' online charitable organizations have accumulated significant talent pools, with online philanthropic professionals and institutions generally possessing specialized social welfare expertise. China, however, exhibits notable deficiencies in these areas. Therefore, diverse educational and training initiatives are needed to cultivate talent and enhance the professional capabilities of China's online charitable institutions. Simultaneously, to elevate organizations' expertise in online philanthropy, government and market entities should actively explore collaborative approaches to assist and support nonprofit organizations in advancing their technical capabilities. Finally, it is also necessary to establish a corresponding internet public welfare and charity industry association. This would pool resources to collectively address new phenomena, issues, and situations in internet philanthropy, thereby achieving resource sharing and information exchange within the industry to a certain extent.

### 5.3. Limitations

This study exclusively relies on data retrieved from the Web of Science Core Collection (WoS), due to its high-quality indexing standards, comprehensive coverage of peer-reviewed international journals, and compatibility with CiteSpace, the bibliometric tool employed. WoS is particularly valued for its curated and citation-rich metadata, which facilitates accurate co-citation, co-authorship, and keyword analyses in scientometric research. However, we acknowledge that excluding Scopus, PubMed, and non-English language databases (such as CNKI, ScELO, and Russian Science Citation Index) may introduce disciplinary and regional biases. For instance, Scopus includes a broader range of conference proceedings and journals in the social sciences, PubMed offers deeper biomedical coverage, and non-English databases may reflect philanthropic practices more prevalent in specific linguistic or regional contexts (e.g., Latin America, China, or Russia). As a result, the current analysis may underrepresent contributions from certain countries or subfields—particularly those publishing in local languages or in health- and policy-oriented outlets not indexed by WoS.

Meanwhile, the potential impact of the Recency Effect is also one of the limitations of this study. Specifically, due to their short circulation time, the citation

counts of papers published in 2022-2023 are inherently lower than those of earlier papers. However, the core logic of CiteSpace's burst-keyword detection algorithm relies on short-term and high-frequency citations. This discrepancy may result in some keywords that truly represent emerging directions in the field failing to be effectively identified as burst keywords, leading to incomplete capture of the latest research hotspots. In essence, the Recency Effect is an inherent limitation rooted in the timeliness of citation data, and further verification will require extending the observation period in subsequent studies.

## Conflicts of Interest

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

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