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# Sharing, Not Saving: Buddhist Values and Digital Philanthropy in the Science for Tibet Campaign

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes how Buddhist values, digital communication strategies, and reciprocity-based philanthropy (sharing, not saving) are articulated in the Science for Tibet campaign initiated by Brontosauři v Himalájích (BvH). The research focuses on three aspects: how Buddhist values such as inclusivity, interdependence, and harmony with nature shape the organization's identity; how digital communication strategies are employed within the campaign; and how volunteers and donors interpret sharing as a process of cross-cultural value exchange. Using a qualitative approach through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and digital media analysis, the study finds that Buddhist values are not expressed doctrinally but through everyday practices such as ecological work, cultural preservation, collective learning, and knowledge exchange between Czech volunteers and the community of Mulbekh. The campaign's communication strategy—which combines humor, everyday narratives, and non-paternalistic representation—proved highly effective in generating public engagement. Volunteers and donors interpret sharing as an equal exchange of knowledge, emotion, and cultural values rather than as a hierarchical act of saving. This study contributes to the development of more ethical, anti-paternalistic, and culturally sensitive models of digital philanthropy and offers novelty through a new analytical framework for value-based philanthropy in transnational contexts.

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## Introduction

Over the past two decades, global philanthropic practices have undergone significant transformation as digital technology has become an increasingly central medium for mobilizing public solidarity (Nolan, 2025). The 2017 Global NGO Online Technology Report estimates that there are approximately 10 million nonprofit organizations worldwide—an estimate widely cited in popular publications on the global civil society sector. At the same time, digital donation channels have exhibited substantial growth at the global level (Nonprofit Tech for Good, 2017). By 2024, an estimated 1.4 billion people worldwide donated money to nonprofit organizations, reflecting the rapid expansion of the international donor base (NP, 2024). Mobile giving has also increased sharply, with 64% of mobile-based contributions made by women, indicating a shifting pattern of giving and the rising importance of handheld technologies in contemporary philanthropic practices. Moreover, during the COVID-19 pandemic, online donation platforms recorded a 30% increase in the number of donors and a 15% rise in the average donation per individual. Taken together, these developments demonstrate that digital spaces function not only as channels for financial transactions but also as arenas for producing values, moral narratives, and collective affect within the global philanthropic ecosystem (NP, 2025).

These changes create new demands for nonprofit organizations to present their values, identities, and objectives authentically through digital communication formats that are concise, emotionally resonant, and easily shareable. Digital philanthropy requires communication models that persuade not only rationally but also affectively and morally. In this context, religious value systems—including Buddhist principles such as interdependence, compassion, moderation, and reciprocity—have experienced renewed relevance in public discourse on ethics, sustainability, and social responsibility. Although Buddhists constitute only about 6–7% of the global population (Starr, 2019), Buddhist ethics influence environmental movements, humanistic education, and sustainable living practices (Abeydeera, Kearins, & Tregidga, 2016). Tibet, in particular, has emerged as a symbol of spirituality, moral resilience, and nonviolent resistance, making support for Tibet not merely a political stance but an expression of broader moral commitments.

This phenomenon is strongly evident in the Czech Republic, which for decades has demonstrated cultural and moral solidarity with Tibet—supported by prominent figures such as Václav Havel and the Dalai Lama. Within this context, *Brontosauři v Himalájích* (Brontosaurus in the Himalayas) has emerged as a nonprofit organization that integrates Buddhist values with sustainability ethics in its long-term work to support school development in Mulbekh, Little Tibet, since 2008. The organization combines donations, teacher training, volunteer exchanges, and sustainability-based infrastructure development, enabling the school to become one of the most accomplished institutions in the Kargil district. Its recent digital

campaign, Czech Science to Little Tibet, which combines humor, value-based storytelling, and endorsements from public figures, attracted thousands of participants within a short period (Fraňková, 2020). This phenomenon illustrates the powerful connective force of value-driven, cross-cultural narratives in digital spaces (NP, 2024).

Research on the relationship between Buddhist values, social activism, and digital philanthropy can be grouped into three main strands. The first strand concerns studies on *engaged Buddhism*, which examine how concepts such as *dāna*, *puṇya*, interdependence, and compassion shape practices of social exchange and ethical activism (Borup, 2019; King, 2009; Long, 2021). In the Central European context, Cirklová (Cirklová, 2009, 2012) demonstrates how Buddhist values influence the moral identity of Czech society. However, this body of work largely focuses on internal community dynamics or spiritual identity formation, rather than fundraising mechanisms or organizational communication strategies.

The second strand addresses the relationship between Buddhism, consumer culture, and alternative moral economies. Bártová (2021) highlights the circulation of Buddhist symbolism in popular culture and contemporary lifestyles, while McKenzie (2015) explains how Buddhist organizations in the West negotiate market logics while attempting to preserve spiritual authenticity. Although these studies provide insights into how Buddhist values operate within consumption-oriented societies, they rarely analyze how such values are translated into concrete digital marketing strategies—such as unique value propositions (UVP), storytelling, or visual campaign design.

The third strand emerges from research on NGO communication, social marketing, and digital fundraising. Existing studies show that short videos, influencer engagement, and high-intensity sharing significantly determine campaign effectiveness (Dahl & Eagle, 2015; Kozinets, 2010). However, these studies tend to emphasize generic values such as transparency and trust rather than specific value systems—such as Buddhist ethics—that may shape perceptions and participation in online campaigns.

Across these three strands, a clear research gap emerges. No existing study comprehensively integrates Buddhist value analysis, digital fundraising practices, and NGO communication strategies within the cross-cultural context of Czech–Tibetan relations. Moreover, no research explains how Buddhist values are enacted through digital communication, nor how volunteers and donors interpret sharing practices as part of Buddhist ethics. Consequently, the question of how spiritual values are converted into communicative value in digital campaigns remains underexplored.

This study aims to: first, analyze how Buddhist values such as interdependence, empathy, moderation, and reciprocity are articulated in the social practices and communication of Brontosaurus in the Himalayas; second, examine

how digital communication strategies—including campaign videos, UVP structures, and public-figure endorsements—shape a community of practice between Czech volunteers and the people of Mulbekh; and third, explain how volunteers and donors interpret sharing practices within the framework of Buddhist ethics and how these interpretations influence their motivations for engagement.

This study argues that the success of the Czech Science to Little Tibet campaign results not only from effective digital marketing techniques but also from the alignment between Buddhist value structures and communication strategies that emphasize reciprocal relations (*sharing, not saving*). The integration of spiritual values with digital storytelling generates powerful moral resonance among Czech audiences and helps explain the campaign's strong appeal and impact. Accordingly, the study's working hypothesis is that Buddhist values articulated through digital media function as an affective and ethical foundation that enhances the effectiveness of cross-cultural digital philanthropy.

## Method

The unit of analysis in this study encompasses digital communication practices, value structures, and the social experiences of supporters and volunteers of the NGO *Brontosauři v Himalájích* (BvH) within the Czech Science to Little Tibet campaign. The research focuses on how Buddhist values—such as interdependence, empathy, and reciprocity—are articulated in digital communication strategies and practiced through philanthropic actions. Accordingly, the unit of analysis includes digital artifacts (campaign videos, social media posts, press releases), community interactions, and narrative accounts provided by informants involved in the organization's activities. The selection of these units aligns with the research objective of examining value exchange dynamics and the formation of a cross-cultural *community of practice* within a digital media ecology.

This study employs a qualitative approach with an inductive strategy to explore the meanings, motivations, and subjective experiences of the actors involved. A qualitative approach is appropriate because the phenomena under investigation—the integration of Buddhist values in digital philanthropy—are complex and cannot be reduced to quantitative variables. The study follows interpretive and constructivist traditions that emphasize understanding how actors make sense of their actions (Thompson, Locander, & Pollio, 1989). The inductive strategy allows analytical categories to emerge from empirical data and prevents the premature imposition of theoretical frameworks on early findings.

The data for this study derive from three primary sources. First, primary data consist of in-depth interviews with fifty informants, including volunteers, donors, academics, Tibet supporters, and the NGO's social media followers. Second, observational data were obtained through the researcher's direct involvement in

several BvH activities and through monitoring online communities. Third, secondary data include media archives, organizational documents dating back to 2008, campaign materials, the Science for Tibet video, news articles, and digital content from Facebook, YouTube, and the organization's official website. These digital sources are treated as integral components of sharing practices and the formation of a hybrid community between the Czech public and the people of Mulbekh.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and digital content analysis. Interviews were conducted both in person and online between 2019 and 2021 using semi-structured guides that enabled phenomenological exploration of informants' inner experiences and ethical reflections. Participant observation was carried out in various organizational activities, while online observation followed the netnographic model developed by Kozinets (2010), which examines online community interactions as sites of social and cultural value production. Content analysis was used to investigate narrative structures, communication styles, and value constructions embedded in campaign materials and other digital artifacts.

Data analysis followed a qualitative thematic approach. All interview transcripts were processed through open coding to identify initial categories. The subsequent stage involved axial coding to link categories with concepts related to Buddhist values, sharing practices, and NGO communication strategies. Digital data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis to identify key narratives, visual patterns, and public responses to the campaign. The entire analytical process was iterative and guided by the principle of constant comparison, allowing thematic patterns to emerge gradually based on the semantic proximity among data. This approach provides a deep understanding of how Buddhist values interact with digital communication strategies in the practice of transnational philanthropy.

## Result

### *Articulation of Buddhist Values in the Identity and Practices of BvH*

Brontosauři v Himalájích (BvH) emerged from a long-term relationship between Czech volunteers and the community of Mulbekh in Little Tibet. The first contact occurred in 2008 when Jirka Sázel—then traveling as a volunteer—met the local school principal, Norboo. This encounter developed into a collaboration that expanded steadily in the following years. In the autumn of 2012, BvH was formally established as a legal unit under the Hnutí Brontosaurus movement, with its primary focus on supporting the development of the Mulbekh school. The organization operates with one full-time staff member and approximately fifteen volunteers who manage all activities in the Czech Republic. In 2019, the organization reached an annual turnover of 4 million CZK, with 1.40 million CZK allocated directly

to school development. Currently, BvH has secured 450 of the 500 targeted Himalayan patrons who serve as regular donors (Úvod, 2025).

BvH does not position itself as a rescuing actor, but rather as a partner engaged in reciprocal exchange. Its official statement asserts: *"We do not save anyone, but strive for mutual benefit… They pass on Buddhist teachings, Tibetan medicine, art, music, and wisdom to us."* In return, the Czech side provides financial contributions, technical expertise, and volunteer labor to construct educational facilities—such as two school buildings and a science laboratory—and to reform school financing and teaching quality for 350 children in Mulbekh. Support for the project also comes from public figures such as the 14th Dalai Lama, various Czech media outlets, companies, and thousands of digital community supporters. For the organization, this cross-cultural exchange represents an equal relationship rather than a one-directional aid program (Úvod, 2025).

BvH articulates Buddhist values primarily through practices of universalism, interdependence, and collective work, which constitute the organization's core ethos. Since its inception, the broader Brontosaurus movement has emphasized openness and diversity as foundational values. Its public statement, *"It doesn't matter if you are a boy or a girl, what your religion is, whether you are doing IT or working in a tearoom. It is in our diversity that our greatest strength is,"* reflects an organizational commitment to equality, inclusivity, and the acceptance of diverse identities. This narrative aligns with Buddhist principles of non-discrimination and the belief that all individuals possess the capacity to contribute within networks of interconnected life.

Interdependence appears not only in verbal declarations but also in the structure of volunteer activities, which highlight the interconnectedness of human relationships and the human–nature bond. Volunteers describe BvH activities as a two-way learning space in which each participant *"is still learning something—team management, soft skills, repairing castle towers, or building hedgehog houses."* The recognition that everyone learns from one another and depends on one another recurs across interview data and organizational documents, representing a daily enactment of Buddhist interdependence and self-cultivation.

The data also show that BvH activities are designed to create communal experiences that reinforce togetherness, inner calm, and harmony with nature. Many activities integrate ecological work with meditation, self-development, and self-discovery, such as when volunteers restore meadows, revive old orchards, or care for trees in the Bohemian Karst. This integration suggests that ecological activities are not separated from inner reflection but treated as a holistic process consistent with Buddhist views of the interconnectedness of self, nature, and society.

The form of the activities further strengthens community-based work and collective practice. BvH volunteer events are open, flexible, and perceived as spaces

*"to stick together as a team, relax, reflect, and get to know each other and ourselves."* The activities intentionally facilitate warm social interaction, psychological games, and ice-breaking exercises that reinforce solidarity. Many volunteers reported that they were attracted more by the social atmosphere and reciprocal relationships developed during these activities than by the ecological outcomes alone.

Buddhist values of moderation and mindfulness are also reflected in the organization's focus on simple, repetitive, and contemplative actions. Activities such as cutting grass with scythes, clearing overgrown bushes, or planting trees are described as calming and reflective, offering volunteers a sense of connection with natural rhythms. Volunteers frequently stated that they "take away something from every event," illustrating the moral and emotional transformation embedded in these ecological practices.

In addition to environmental work, BvH engages in activities centered on cultural preservation—such as renovating castles, monasteries, and traditional settlements. These activities often occur in locations with spiritual or historical significance, allowing volunteers not only to work but also to learn about cultural symbolism and traditional values. This reinforces the articulation of Buddhist respect for the interrelation between people, tradition, and historical space.

Furthermore, the concept of a *community of practice* appears prominently in the data. Organizational documents describe volunteers as a group that "collectively learn, share a concern, and seek solutions together." Shared activities, collective reflection, and two-way learning demonstrate that BvH actively cultivates communal learning as a value-based practice. This is supported by the thematic structure of activities—environmental and cultural—which simultaneously develop practical competencies and strengthen communal values.

The articulation of Buddhist values is also visible in BvH's extended work in Little Tibet. Their engagement in Mulbekh involves not only material assistance but reciprocal knowledge exchange: Czech volunteers contribute technical skills such as construction techniques, solar panel installation, and financial management, while the Tibetan community shares knowledge related to Buddhism, traditional medicine, and ecological relationships. Research data show that volunteers perceive this relationship as an equal exchange rather than a hierarchical giver–recipient dynamic. The official narrative—*"We exchange energy and do not save… They can secure a better future on their own and do not need our salvation"*—explicitly articulates Buddhist principles of non-attachment and anti-paternalism within the program's design.

Overall, the data indicate that Buddhist values are not articulated doctrinally or religiously, but through everyday organizational practices: openness, reciprocity, collective learning, simplicity, harmonious engagement with nature, and respect for cultural heritage. The identity and practices of BvH emerge as a synthesis of

Buddhist ethics, ecological values, and secular humanism, forming the moral foundation of its volunteer activities and cross-cultural engagement.

**Table 1. Visualization of the Articulation of Buddhist Values in BvH's Practices and Identity**

| Aspect Observed | Data | Meaning |
|---|---|---|
| **Universalism & Open Identity** | "It doesn't matter if you are a boy or a girl, what your religion is… In our diversity that is our greatest strength." | Inclusivity, equality, and non-discrimination as core organizational values. |
| **Interdependence** | Volunteers describe activities as two-way learning: "We are still learning something—team management, soft skills…" | Reciprocal relations; every participant is both learner and teacher. |
| **Reflective Practice & Ecological Work** | Activities integrated with "meditation, self-development, and self-discovering activities." | Ecological work understood as a spiritual-practical practice uniting self, nature, and community. |
| **Togetherness & Community Bonding** | Activities designed as spaces "to stick together as a team, relax, reflect, and get to know each other." | Social interactions build solidarity and experiential togetherness. |
| **Moderation & Mindfulness** | Simple activities (scything grass, planting trees) allow reflection: "take away something from every event." | Mindfulness and moderation practiced through small, routine actions. |
| **Cultural Preservation & Spiritual Spaces** | Renovation of castles, monasteries, traditional settlements; activities in historical sites. | Respect for tradition and sacred spaces as part of Buddhist continuity. |
| **Community of Practice** | Organizational documents: volunteers "collectively learn, share a concern, seek solutions together." | Communal learning as a value-based practice; strengthening collective identity. |
| **Czech–Tibetan Knowledge Exchange** | Volunteers share technical expertise; Tibetan community shares | Reciprocal, anti-paternalistic exchange |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | "Buddhism, traditional medicine, relationship with nature." | that enriches both cultures. |
| **Anti-Paternalism / Non-Attachment** | "We exchange energy and do not save… They do not need our salvation." | Rejection of "rescue logic"; emphasis on autonomy and dignity of the local community. |
| **Moral Identity of the Organization** | Everyday practices integrate ecological ethics + Buddhist values + secular humanism. | Organizational identity emerges from a convergence of lived ethical traditions. |

The findings show that BvH embeds Buddhist values not through formal religious teachings but through everyday practices, ways of working, and ways of relating among volunteers, the Tibetan community, and the natural environment. All activities are intentionally open to anyone regardless of background, creating an inclusive space for participation. During fieldwork activities, volunteers and local community members continuously exchange knowledge—ranging from modern technical skills to Tibetan cultural and spiritual traditions. Their ecological work—planting trees, restoring meadows, or tending old orchards—is always combined with reflection, meditation, and self-development, allowing ecological labor to become a moment of calmness and a way to build deeper connections with nature. Likewise, cultural preservation work such as monastery renovation demonstrates respect for tradition and sacred spaces. These activities foster strong collective bonds and create a learning community that grows together in both technical competence and moral values. Volunteers consistently reject the position of "saviors," describing themselves instead as partners who exchange energy and experiences with the people of Mulbekh.

The findings reveal four major patterns in how Buddhist values are enacted within BvH's practices. First, the organization consistently practices inclusivity and equality as the foundations of social relations. Its openness to participants regardless of background creates a safe and egalitarian social environment for volunteers. This inclusivity forms the organizational culture and strengthens equal interactions among members.

The second pattern is the emergence of interdependence through two-way knowledge exchange between volunteers and Tibetan communities. Volunteers contribute various technical skills—such as construction, solar technology, and financial management—while Tibetans share deep knowledge of Buddhism, traditional medicine, and ecological relationships. This reciprocal exchange shows that neither group sees itself as giver or recipient, but as mutually enriching partners.

The third pattern is the creation of harmony with nature through ecological activities designed as spaces for personal reflection. Simple actions—scything grass, tending old orchards, or planting trees—are understood as processes that calm the mind, cultivate inner awareness, and align participants with the rhythms of nature. Ecological work is not treated merely as technical labor but as an inner experience that strengthens spiritual connectedness with the environment.

The fourth pattern concerns the formation of a community of practice that develops through collective work and shared learning. All BvH activities function as spaces where volunteers exchange experiences, develop new competencies, and reinforce communal values. Organizational documents emphasize that volunteers "collectively learn, share a concern, and seek solutions together," indicating that the volunteer community grows through repeated, collaborative, and mutually supportive engagement.

In summary, BvH articulates Buddhist values not through doctrinal instruction but through lived practices: inclusivity, reciprocal knowledge exchange, ecological harmony, and the cultivation of a learning community. These values form the moral foundation that connects Czech volunteers and Tibetan communities in an egalitarian relationship oriented toward mutual enrichment and shared growth. BvH's moral identity thus emerges from the intersection of Buddhist ethics, ecological solidarity, and secular humanism embodied in the everyday experiences of its participants.

### *Digital Communication Strategy: The "Science for Tibet" Campaign*

The digital campaign *Science for Tibet* became a turning point that significantly strengthened the public visibility of Brontosauři v Himalájích (BvH) in the Czech Republic. The campaign was designed as a short video depicting the daily life of Mulbekh residents—sweeping snow, cooking, doing laundry, and other domestic activities familiar to Czech audiences. The narration is delivered by a mother, Dhorje's mother, who holds a Czech physics textbook and asks Czech citizens to "tame the demon of physics" that has possessed their children. The video includes humorous scenes showing local children performing simple physics experiments—using a hoist, a solar oven, an electric heater, and even a homemade rocket—framed through visual comedy. This use of humor and everyday storytelling serves as the core communication strategy of the campaign.


*Figure 1. Still from the "Science for Tibet" Campaign Video*
Source: (Himálajský patron, 2020)

The strategic use of humor and personal narrative successfully created emotional engagement without sentimental manipulation. Volunteers and donors described the video as *"funny, positive, not emotionally manipulative."* This approach contrasts with conventional charity campaigns that often emphasize suffering or helplessness. In this case, the video portrays the Tibetan community as active, creative, and spirited agents, not as objects of pity. This strategy aligns with the organization's ethos of *sharing, not saving*, which rejects hierarchical relationships between givers and recipients.

The effectiveness of the campaign is evident in the dramatic surge in public engagement during the launch period. Within the first nine days, the video reached over 750,000 views and 7,500 shares, marking the highest viral impact in the organization's history. On the first day alone, the video generated 2,000 shares, and BvH's official website recorded its highest-ever traffic—2,000 visitors per day, up from the previous record of 800. Internal data shows that the campaign gained 85 monthly patrons within one week and 130 patrons within two weeks, far surpassing the initial one-month target of 50 patrons. By the end of the year, a total of 225 new patrons had joined—four times the previous annual average.

The campaign also reached prominent public figures and influential academic institutions. Senator Jiří Drahoš—former president of the Czech Academy of Sciences—registered as a volunteer physics teacher within two days of the video's release. His decision was followed by Ambassador Hovorka and several leading scientists, including Lukáš Richter, director of the Brno Science Centre VIDA. Data shows that BvH's Facebook reach expanded significantly after major institutions such as Czech Technical University, Charles University, Brno Observatory, Impact Hub, and Scout organizations shared the video. Many institutions accompanied their posts with personal notes such as *"we don't share, but your video is really cool,"* indicating that the humorous and reciprocal narrative resonated strongly not only with the general public but also with professionals.

Comments from donors provide more detailed insight into public responses. Many comments focused on humor, personal memories of learning physics, and appreciation for the campaign's non-objectifying portrayal of Tibetans. Examples include: *"For the first time in my life I laugh at the word physics!"* or *"I regret I only have a degree in social sciences, otherwise I'd go teach there myself."* These comments demonstrate that the video successfully bridged viewers' everyday experiences with the educational context in Tibet, creating a participatory space built on shared values and relatable experiences.

The campaign also encouraged more concrete forms of participation. On the BvH website, donors could choose specific laboratory equipment—such as digital scales, thermometers, or multimeters—to fund. Data shows that a single request for one liter of acid unexpectedly resulted in eight liters donated, illustrating spontaneous enthusiasm among supporters. Total donations reached CZK 60,000 (approximately €2,500) from 60 donors in a short period, accompanied by a sharp rise in volunteer sign-ups.

The widespread public reception and the successful distribution of the video also produced long-term impacts. Following the campaign, the construction of new physics, chemistry, biology, and IT laboratories in Mulbekh reached completion and was inaugurated in July 2022. The opening ceremony—attended by senators, scientists, and educators from leading universities—attracted substantial media attention, resulting in 15 national coverage features, including a headline segment on TV Prima. BvH's Facebook community expanded rapidly, reaching 14,500 followers who now track developments at the Himalayan school regularly. The year 2022 became the period with the highest media exposure in the organization's history.

Overall, the findings indicate that the campaign's strength lies not only in the quality of the video but in the alignment between communication strategies and the organization's core values. Humor, everyday narratives, and positive representation of the Tibetan community distinguish the campaign from traditional charity communication and reinforce reciprocal relationships between donors and the community. These elements made *Science for Tibet* one of the most successful digital philanthropy campaigns in BvH's history, supported by widespread public engagement and endorsements from influential figures in the Czech Republic.

### *The Meaning of "Sharing, Not Saving" Among Donors and Volunteers*

The concept of "sharing, not saving" constitutes the dominant value framework that shapes how volunteers and donors understand their involvement in Brontosauři v Himalájích (BvH). This narrative appears both in the organization's official statements and in public responses on social media during the *Science for Tibet* campaign. In the widely circulated and frequently quoted official message, the

organization states: *"We exchange energy and do not save… They can secure a better future on their own and do not need our salvation."* This statement became a core value reference repeatedly invoked by institutions, scientists, and individual supporters. Data shows that many donors quoted this line directly in their social media posts as a way of affirming shared ethical commitments.

Donor comments reveal a clear rejection of conventional charity logic rooted in pity or deficit-based views of the "less fortunate." Instead, donors interpret their contributions as forms of reciprocal exchange. One donor wrote, "If only our children were so affected by the demon of physics!" while another commented, *"I can't go teach myself, so I'm sending a microscope instead."* These remarks emphasize that giving is motivated not by compassion for the weak but by joy, equality, and recognition of the Mulbekh community's capacity and creativity. Many donors remarked that the video made them "laugh with" the Tibetan community rather than "feel sorry for them"—an important shift in how digital philanthropy is understood.

Responses from the academic community display a similar pattern. Numerous scientists and educational institutions expressed support using humorous language that still emphasized respect for local agency. For example, microbiologist Mareš wrote: *"I'm sending you a gift on a microscope—if I cannot go to teach in person, at least look at the algae in the stream; under the microscope they are beautiful."* Supporters interpreted this as an act of knowledge-based sharing rather than rescue. Similar narratives emerged when major Czech universities shared the video, framing their engagement as a desire to "contribute" while maintaining recognition of the community's autonomy.

Data also shows that volunteers interpret their involvement as a two-way exchange that extends beyond the transfer of material goods or technology. BvH's exchange programs—such as classes on Buddhism, Tibetan medicine, and ecological relations—are understood as reciprocal practices. Volunteers describe their experiences using phrases like "learning from each other," "mutual enrichment," "reciprocal learning," and "exchanging what we each know best." These findings illustrate that "sharing" is understood not only at a material level but as symbolic, emotional, and intellectual exchange.

Most informants view the *Science for Tibet* video as a value bridge that helps them grasp the reciprocal nature of the relationship more clearly. Comments on donation platforms reveal that supporters feel respected as individuals with free choice. One comment stated, *"We don't normally share things, but your video is really cool."* This indicates that participation is perceived as voluntary, joyful, and value-driven—rather than as a morally pressured obligation. Supporters feel that the humor in the video helps preserve egalitarian relations, allowing them to "join the play" rather than "help from above."

Data also shows that the idea of *not saving* is understood as a rejection of paternalistic forms of philanthropy. Many donors highlight their respect for the

independence of the Mulbekh community. Comments such as *"They don't need saving; they are doing amazing things already"* or *"We just add some tools; the rest they can do better than us" suggest* that contributions are viewed as catalysts rather than rescue efforts. This perspective is reinforced by the way BvH presents the project—showing Tibetans as creative problem-solvers rather than passive or helpless actors.

Interview data also reveals that volunteers perceive the campaign as creating a value-based community that transcends geographic boundaries. Some informants describe this shared practice as a "biotope of harmony"—a space in which Czech secular values and Tibetan Buddhist values intersect through mutual enrichment. Informants emphasize that the relationship is built not on shared religion but on shared values such as simplicity, creativity, autonomy, and closeness to nature. Volunteers describe the deepest meaning of the campaign as the feeling of belonging to a global community grounded in mutual respect.

Thus, the findings show that the meaning of "sharing, not saving" among BvH donors and volunteers reflects a form of philanthropy centered on reciprocity, togetherness, and equality. Supporters understand their contributions not as attempts to rescue the Tibetan community but as efforts to expand a space of exchange that enriches both sides. This understanding explains why *Science for Tibet* received such extraordinary public response: its communication strategy aligns with supporters' interpretation of sharing as a collaborative, non-hierarchical form of engagement.

**Table 2. Meanings of "Sharing, Not Saving" Among Donors and Volunteers**

| Aspect Observed | Data | Meaning |
|---|---|---|
| **Rejection of pity-based philanthropy** | "We exchange energy and do not save… They can secure a better future on their own and do not need our salvation." | Philanthropy is understood as reciprocal exchange, not paternalistic rescue. |
| **Positive and humorous donor responses** | "If only our children were so affected by the demon of physics!" | Humor strengthens emotional closeness without pity; participation is framed as joy. |
| **Participation as egalitarian contribution** | "I can't go teach myself, so I'm sending a microscope instead." | Donations are viewed as equal contributions that respect local capacities. |
| **Support from academics and scientists** | Mareš: "If I cannot go to teach in person, at least look at the algae in the | Sharing is seen as knowledge exchange, not |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | stream; they are beautiful under a microscope." | rescue; respect for local capability. |
| **Strengthening the autonomy of the Mulbekh community** | "They don't need saving; they are doing amazing things already." | Recognition of community independence; donors see themselves as catalysts, not saviors. |
| **Voluntary participation grounded in values, not obligation** | "We don't normally share things, but your video is really cool." | Participation arises from value resonance and authentic narrative, not moral pressure. |
| **Cross-cultural value exchange** | "Learning from each other", "mutual enrichment", "reciprocal learning." | Sharing is understood as symbolic, emotional, and intellectual two-way exchange. |
| **Formation of a global value community** | Sharing practices described as a "biotope of harmony." | Philanthropy is interpreted as building a cross-cultural community based on shared values. |
| **Equal representation of the Tibetan community** | The video depicts Tibetans as creative agents, not objects of pity. | The local community is viewed as the primary actor, aligned with the principle of not saving. |
| **Value-based participation and identification** | Donors feel they "laugh with" Tibetans, not "pity them." | Solidarity emerges from emotional closeness and equality, not hierarchy. |

The data demonstrates that donors and volunteers of Brontosauři v Himalájích (BvH) understand the principle of "sharing, not saving" as a form of reciprocal and equal relationship between Czech society and the community of Mulbekh. For them, giving is not an act of rescuing others, but an exchange of energy, experience, and knowledge. This is evident in social media comments that reject traditional charity models based on pity. Many donors state that they chose to contribute because the *Science for Tibet* campaign generated feelings of joy, humor, and emotional closeness rather than sympathy. Scientists and academics expressed support in ways that acknowledged the autonomy of the Mulbekh community, such as sending laboratory equipment or offering expertise without positioning themselves as "helpers." Volunteers who visited Mulbekh describe their involvement as a two-way learning process in which both communities enrich one another morally, intellectually, and emotionally. For many informants, this practice of sharing forms a value-based space that connects Czechs and Tibetans as part of a

broader community rather than a hierarchical relationship. This dynamic explains why the campaign gained wide approval: supporters felt they were participating in an equal, enjoyable, and respectful collaboration.

First, the findings reveal a clear pattern of rejecting paternalistic philanthropy. Many donors emphasize that the Mulbekh community does not require "saving," but merely small forms of support in the form of tools, expertise, or moral encouragement. Comments such as "They don't need saving; they are doing amazing things already" show that contributions are interpreted as catalysts rather than interventions by a more powerful party.

Second, the data shows a strong pattern in which humor and positive narrative in the campaign video create emotional closeness without generating pity. Supporters state that they "laugh with," rather than "feel sorry for," the people of Mulbekh. Humor functions as a mechanism that keeps the relationship egalitarian and enjoyable, leading participants to share voluntarily rather than from moral pressure.

Third, the findings point to a pattern of two-way knowledge exchange that strengthens the meaning of sharing as a value-driven practice. Donors and volunteers describe their relationship as "mutual enrichment" and "reciprocal learning," demonstrating that Czech technical skills are reciprocated with Buddhist values, ecological understanding, and traditional health knowledge from Tibet. This pattern highlights that sharing is symbolic, emotional, and intellectual—not merely material.

Fourth, the practice of sharing is understood as a mechanism for building a cross-cultural community grounded in shared values rather than shared religion. Many informants describe this relational space as a "biotope of harmony," where values such as simplicity, creativity, closeness to nature, and autonomy form the basis of interaction. The meaning of sharing extends beyond the school project and becomes a foundation for constructing a global community connected through shared moral aspirations.

Based on these patterns, donors and volunteers interpret "sharing, not saving" as rooted in equality, reciprocity, and respect for local capacity. They view their contributions as part of a shared process that enriches both sides rather than as an act of rescuing the Tibetan community. This meaning explains why the *Science for Tibet* campaign achieved such strong success: its communication strategy aligns with supporters' understanding of philanthropy as a collaborative, joyful, and humanizing experience.

## Discussion

The findings of this study reveal three main results. First, Buddhist values such as inclusivity, interdependence, harmony with nature, and communal practice

have been translated into the identity and activities of Brontosauři v Himalájích (BvH). Second, the digital communication strategy deployed through the *Science for Tibet* campaign successfully combines humor, everyday narrative, and non-paternalistic representation to generate high levels of public engagement. Third, volunteers and donors understand philanthropy as an act of *sharing*, not *saving*, thereby rejecting hierarchical models of charity and affirming reciprocal cross-cultural relations. In short, this study finds that the success of BvH's digital philanthropy arises from the integration of Buddhist values, humanistic communication strategies, and egalitarian interpretations of the relationship by its supporters.

The relationship between Buddhist values and campaign success emerges because these elements mutually reinforce one another. The values of interdependence and anti-paternalism provide a moral foundation that aligns with a communication strategy that does not position the Tibetan community as passive victims. This approach responds to public fatigue with conventional charity campaigns that frequently mobilize negative emotions. The *Science for Tibet* campaign combines equality with an enjoyable narrative, generating a form of engagement that is affective, voluntary, and non-hierarchical. Humor functions not only as a communication tool but also as a discursive mechanism that frames Czech–Tibetan relations as equal, trust-based interactions. Thus, the findings show that the campaign's success cannot be reduced to clever digital marketing techniques; rather, it arises because the strategy coheres with how volunteers and donors interpret philanthropy as a reciprocal, dignified, and enjoyable relationship.

Compared with previous research, these results reinforce studies on engaged Buddhism (Borup, 2019; King, 2009; Long, 2021), which highlight the importance of *dāna*, *puṇya*, and reciprocal relations in Buddhist value structures. However, this study goes further by demonstrating how these values are translated into digital communication practices and contemporary campaign strategies. Research on Buddhism and consumer culture (Bártová, 2021; McKenzie, 2015) shows the flexibility of Buddhist values in negotiating market logics, but has not traced how such values are used in NGO branding or digital fundraising. This study makes a new contribution by showing that Buddhist values are not only compatible with digital communication logics but can also enhance the moral resonance and effectiveness of online campaigns. The findings also fill a gap in NGO communication research, which mostly focuses on generic factors such as trust and transparency, without examining how specific value systems (such as Buddhist ethics) shape public perceptions and responses.

Historically, the findings indicate that Czech solidarity with Tibet is not a spontaneous phenomenon but a continuation of a long tradition of moral support that has developed since the era of Václav Havel, when secular humanism and the defense of oppressed groups became pillars of post-1989 political identity. This

pattern of support aligns with Czech foreign policy orientations that, since the 1990s, have placed human rights at the center of their moral agenda, as seen in its advocacy concerning countries with severe human rights violations such as Cuba, Belarus, and North Korea (Kolmasova, 2024). This tradition has deeper roots in the solidarity campaigns of socialist Czechoslovakia with Asian and African nations in the 1960s–1980s, which were built on a shared consciousness of occupation and oppression (Buzássyová, 2024). Support for Tibet can thus be understood as a logical continuation of a national identity that emphasizes solidarity with oppressed peoples, as discussed in studies on Czech identity and its orientation toward Eastern Europe and other repressed regions (Weiss, 2011). Although contemporary relations with China often require a balance between moral idealism and economic interests (Kowalski, 2022), BvH operates within this longer historical current, positioning its work not as intervention or rescue, but as a manifestation of cross-cultural solidarity grounded in equality, respect, and moral courage that have long been part of Czech socio-political tradition.

At the social level, the findings show that digital philanthropy can generate a global value community that is not based on formal religion but on emotional interconnectedness, collective creativity, and egalitarian norms. This phenomenon resonates with the concept of digital solidarity, namely the use of digital technologies to build collaborative networks, social support, and inclusive spaces of participation across different groups (Kolesinski, Nelson-Weaver, & Diamond, 2013). Similar to findings on digital solidarity in diverse contexts—such as education, migration, and cultural markets—the community of *Science for Tibet* supporters demonstrates how social relationships can emerge through equal online interactions, without depending on primordial identities or pre-given social hierarchies (Luayya, Hardjosoekarto, Herwantoko, & Muhammaditya, 2022; Mantilla, 2022). The campaign creates what informants describe as a "biotope of harmony," a social interaction space in which the public can participate without subordination, mirroring forms of digital solidarity that empower marginalized groups and foster a sense of togetherness through shared narratives and collective action (Russo, 2024). Thus, the dynamics of participation in this campaign indicate that digital solidarity can function as an effective mechanism for building egalitarian, exchange-oriented cross-cultural value communities that are relatively free from traditional structures of domination.

At the ideological level, the findings show that the *sharing, not saving* approach constitutes a critique of dominant Western paternalistic philanthropy, which often positions donors as moral authorities and recipient communities as incapable of making decisions for themselves. BvH's anti-paternalistic narrative constructs Czech–Tibetan relations as reciprocal interactions that respect local autonomy, aligning with core principles of anti-paternalistic philanthropy that emphasize self-determination and the freedom of communities to define their own

needs without hierarchical interference (Cholbi, 2010; Scoccia, 2010). BvH's framing of support as an exchange of energy and knowledge reflects a model of relational philanthropy, which prioritizes trust, long-term relationships, and flexible funding over donor control and strict oversight (Petzinger & Jung, 2024). This approach also resonates with grassroots empowerment models that position local communities as full owners of their development processes, as practiced in ecosystemic approaches to human rights philanthropy that shift from a logic of aid to a logic of collaboration and co-learning (García, 2023). In this sense, BvH's anti-paternalistic ethic rejects moral superiority and replaces it with a paradigm of egalitarian solidarity, while carefully avoiding the trap of "new paternalism," in which external support subtly imposes external standards or decisions (Pedersen, 2019). This approach makes BvH's practice not only an alternative philanthropic model but also an ideological effort to build transcultural relationships grounded in respect for autonomy, equality, and the capacities of the Tibetan community.

The findings of this study have an important function in demonstrating that digital philanthropy grounded in Buddhist values can foster cross-cultural relationships that are more equal, non-manipulative, and oriented toward exchange. Although the *Science for Tibet* campaign is highly successful, the study also reveals potential dysfunctions that require critical attention. The dependence on viral effects and emotional resonance risks making campaign success heavily contingent on specific digital moments, a characteristic also identified in practices of digital voluntourism, where volunteer engagement often depends more on digital representations than on the long-term realities of local communities (Trifan & Dolezal, 2024). High emotional involvement can generate romantic expectations of the Mulbekh community—similar to the notion of an "imaginary locality" in studies of digital voluntourism—which may create idealized images that do not necessarily correspond to actual social contexts (Trifan & Dolezal, 2024). Furthermore, balanced exchange requires stable organizational capacity; without sufficient structural support, reciprocal relations can shift into new asymmetries, a phenomenon also noted in voluntourism research when programs rely excessively on volunteer presence rather than local capacity (Röntynen & Tunkkari-Eskelinen, 2024). Thus, although digital philanthropy opens possibilities for broader and more sustainable engagement, insights from digital voluntourism highlight that without ethical design and careful narrative control, egalitarian relationships built through a *sharing, not saving* approach may face risks of distortion and mismatches between expectations and social realities on the ground.

On the basis of these dysfunctions, several action plans can be proposed. First, BvH needs to develop a long-term communication strategy that does not rely solely on a single viral video but builds a sustained narrative that consistently emphasizes reciprocal value exchange. Second, the organization should strengthen mechanisms for joint reflection between volunteers and partners in Mulbekh to

prevent excessive idealization and to recalibrate expectations when necessary. Third, cross-cultural training programs for new volunteers are needed so that they can internalize the organization's anti-paternalistic principles more deeply. Fourth, local governments and international donor institutions can adopt the *sharing, not saving* model as an alternative approach in cross-cultural philanthropic cooperation to avoid hierarchical aid practices. In this way, the study not only offers new understanding of BvH's success but also provides strategic directions for other organizations that seek to develop more ethical and egalitarian forms of transnational philanthropy.

## Conclusion

This study concludes that the success of Brontosauři v Himalájích (BvH) in mobilizing public support and building cross-cultural solidarity rests on the integration of Buddhist values, reciprocity-based philanthropic practices, and innovative digital communication strategies. Values such as inclusivity, interdependence, simplicity, and equality are articulated not through doctrinal teaching but through the everyday practices of volunteers, reciprocal relations with the Mulbekh community, and the ecological and cultural activities carried out by the organization. The *Science for Tibet* campaign demonstrates that the *sharing, not saving* approach can generate broad public engagement, create a strong value-based community, and encourage voluntary participation without relying on narratives of suffering.

Scientifically, this study contributes to the literature in three key ways. First, it expands research on engaged Buddhism by showing how Buddhist values not only shape internal community ethos but can also be effectively translated into digital communication strategies and transnational philanthropic practices. Second, it offers a new analytical model for understanding how spiritual values operate in digital spaces through humor, non-paternalistic representation, and egalitarian storytelling—an insight that remains underexplored in NGO communication and digital fundraising literature. Third, the study proposes a conceptual framework for reciprocity-based philanthropy, shifting the focus from one-directional giving toward the exchange of knowledge, emotions, and cultural values.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, it relies heavily on a single digital campaign (*Science for Tibet*), making it difficult to determine whether similar patterns occur in other campaigns or across different NGOs. Second, the research is geographically limited, as most data originate from Czech volunteers, meaning that broader perspectives from the Mulbekh community are not fully represented. Third, the study does not include a longitudinal analysis of internal organizational dynamics, leaving the evolution of values and practices over time unexplored.

Future research could expand its scope by comparing value-based digital philanthropy strategies across other NGOs or cultural settings and by examining how local communities in Mulbekh interpret cross-cultural exchange in the long term. Subsequent studies could also analyze emotional dynamics and digital technologies in philanthropy more systematically to understand how value-driven campaigns can remain effective within an ever-changing media landscape. In this way, the present study opens new pathways for examining how spiritual values can shape more ethical, equitable, and human-centered forms of global philanthropy.

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