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Volunteer choice of nonprofit organisation: an integrated framework

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Volunteer choice of nonprofit organisation: an integrated framework

Structured abstract

Purpose – This paper explores how volunteers choose one nonprofit organisation (NPO) rather than another. It identifies the drivers of choice, and the relationship between them, to enable NPOs to strengthen their volunteer recruitment.

Design/methodology/approach - 51 service-delivery volunteers were interviewed, drawn from five leading NPOs. A laddering technique was used to understand the context in which the choice of organisation was made and the underlying personal needs and goals. The data was analysed using means-end chain methodology to uncover the relationships between, and hierarchy of, the decision drivers.

Findings - Brand, cause, and role were found to be important in meeting personal needs and goals through volunteering. The paper makes three contributions. Firstly, it presents a clearer understanding of NPO choice through adopting an integrated theoretical perspective. Secondly, it identifies the decision-making process and key relationships between the attributes of the NPO, the consequences for the volunteer, and the connection to their personal needs. Finally, the study makes an important contribution to literature through presenting a new conceptual framework of volunteer decision-making in the nonprofit context to act as a catalyst for future research.

Research limitations/implications - This research is both impactful through, and limited by, its context selection: regular service-delivery volunteers from five NPOs within two causes. The paper presents a rich research stream to extend this understanding to other nonprofit stakeholders, other causes including medical charities, and smaller NPOs.

Practical implications - In an increasingly competitive nonprofit environment with a growing need to support the vulnerable in society, NPO sustainability is dependent on their ability to recruit new volunteers. NPOs compete not only with other organisations with similar causes but also those offering similar volunteering roles, and other uses of time to meet personal needs such as sport, career, or community. Understanding how volunteers make their choice of NPO rather than other uses of their time is of vital importance to make the most effective use of scarce marketing resources. This paper contributes to that practitioner understanding.

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Originality/value - The authors are the first to extend the understanding of generic motivations of volunteers to consider specific choice of NPO. Unlike previous literature, the authors bring together theory on brand, cause, and role with personal needs. The authors are also the first to apply means-end chain methodology to the nonprofit context in order to uncover the personal underlying, less salient reasons behind NPO choice and the relationship between them.

Key words Nonprofit, Decision-making, Volunteer, Cause, Role, Means-end Chain

Paper type Research paper

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Introduction

The mandate for nonprofits to support the most vulnerable in our society has rarely been more pressing, given the recent cuts in benefits and rising numbers of people needing help (Paine and Hill, 2016). In 2018, three quarters of UK households used at least one nonprofit service, including 19% seeking advice and 11% receiving medical care (Charities-Aid-Foundation, 2018). However, provision of these services by nonprofit organisations (NPO) is dependent on attracting new volunteers and donors. The challenge for the nonprofit sector is that investment in supporter communication and research is under pressure. Not only have absolute budgets reduced but the past decade has also seen increasing public scrutiny of money spent (Exley, 2019). This has hampered the ability of NPOs to understand supporter choice, particularly why a person might choose their organisation rather than another. The motivation for this research is to contribute knowledge on this important issue, both to theory and practice.

Academic debate about supporter choice within the nonprofit context is fraught with complexity. The language is traditionally one of values-based mission (Stride and Lee, 2007) and collaboration (Kylander and Stone, 2012). This is changing in the face of increased pressure on funding and growing service need. If volunteers have choice, and charities need to attract volunteers, then it can be described as a competitive situation. Understanding what attracts volunteers to one NPO rather than another has important implications for nonprofit marketing strategy. In particular, it requires a redefinition of competitive set from the volunteer perspective to understand the alternatives considered prior to selection of one organisation. Potentially, this includes NPOs with similar missions, those that are better known, or simply more convenient to the volunteer. The implication for NPO practice is a need to recalibrate the brand positioning to ensure it resonates effectively with volunteer motivators for choice. Understanding whether that motivating connection is through cause, local community, or other factors will strengthen the effective use of scarce marketing resources.

Despite a vast body of work interrogating why people volunteer generically (Ho and O'Donohoe, 2014, Randle and Dolnicar, 2011), there remains minimal theoretical insight into the choice of specific organisations by volunteers. Given the economic significance of the sector, prevalence of volunteering amongst the population, and the pressing need to support the

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vulnerable, this is an oversight. Understanding what drives volunteer choice, in particular the process through which they select one organisation over another, is fundamental to securing service-delivery now and for the future. However, this knowledge gap also presents a real opportunity for research to deliver impact on an issue of substantive importance to NPO managers.

Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to ask "*How do volunteers decide which NPO to volunteer for?"* The paper starts by examining the relevant literature and theory underpinning NPO choice. It builds upon the body of work understanding generic motivations to volunteer and, in particular, looks at social exchange theory, to explore what people believe they will receive in return for time donated, and self and social identity theory to gain insight into how that makes them feel as an individual and how they are perceived within their family and community. The paper is unusual in the nonprofit context in adopting a holistic approach to literature, also drawing on brand and decision-making theory to inform the research. The findings are based on a qualitative sample of 51 regular, service-delivery volunteers from five well-known NPOs within two cause categories. The individual interviews were conducted using a laddering technique to probe the context of the choice of NPO as well as less salient reasons for choice, such as underlying values and personal needs. The empirical data was analysed using means-end chain methodology to identify the relationships between the drivers of nonprofit organisational choice.

This study makes several key contributions to theory and practice. It extends the theoretical understanding of volunteers from generic motivation to the drivers of specific organisational choice, building on social exchange theory. It presents empirical findings which identify the decision-making process and key relationships between the attributes of the NPO, the consequences for the volunteer, and the connection through to personal needs and values. In particular, it identifies personal needs and goals as being the start point for the decision, and choice of role as an important gateway before choice of cause or brand. It identifies that cause is the driver mostly closely linked to emotional influence on the decision, whereas local availability and convenience is the least relevant. Finally, the study makes an important contribution to literature though presenting a new conceptual framework of decision-making in the nonprofit context that emerged from the findings and which, it is hoped, will act as a catalyst for future research, including studies to understand the competitive set at each point of choice of NPO. The paper concludes with managerial implications for NPOs, so important given the

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natural churn in volunteering, need for enough volunteers to ensure organisational sustainability and the inherently competitive challenge of attracting volunteers to a specific organisation with scare resources.

Decision-making in the nonprofit context

Volunteer choice of NPO has been conceptualized as a consumer decision (Ho and O'Donohoe, 2014). In particular, *"volunteer work involves both the production of a good or service and the consumption of a symbolic good"* (Wilson and Musick, 1997, p696). For practitioners, *"from a consumer behaviour perspective, volunteering can be considered as one of the outcomes of marketing communication from nonprofit firms"* (Wymer Jr and Samu, 2002, p972). Put simply, the volunteer is a consumer of the volunteering service provision by the NPO, which is in turn made possible through their donation of time. What the organisation gains is resource. What the volunteer gains, in exchange for time given, includes intangible and symbolic factors such as social or psychological benefits (Randle and Dolnicar, 2011). Consistent with symbolic consumption in other contexts (Ekinci *et al*., 2013, Wang and Chang, 2014), the implications for marketing theory and practice are significant (Ho and O'Donohoe, 2014).

A comprehensive thematic review of nonprofit literature was undertaken and despite minimal research examining supporter decision-making processes in the nonprofit context, fragmented pockets of insight emerged through adopting a pluralistic approach to literature. The literature review found that different studies focused on one or two constructs but none brought them together to present a more holistic perspective. From the literature, five clusters of research were identified that inform our understanding of volunteer decision-making: choice driven by need, brand, role, cause, and availability/convenience. In addition, the review identified that the vast majority of the papers explored generic support for nonprofits, rather than specific level, understanding choice of one organisation rather than another. Table 1 summarises the key literature on supporter choice including the core constructs on which each paper focuses. In this way, the literature review informed both the overall purpose of the research into specific NPO choice, identified the five specific constructs to be explored through the research, and confirmed the gap in knowledge into which this research can contribute.

[Insert Table 1]

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These five research clusters are summarised as follows.

Choice driven by need

Volunteer research has focused on the 'need' level of decision-making, that is the personal values and goals the individual is motivated to fulfil in exchange for time given (Randle and Dolnicar, 2011, Bénabou and Tirole, 2003). Underpinned theoretically by social exchange theory (Löhndorf and Diamantopoulos, 2014, Venable *et al.*, 2005, Emerson, 1976), this assumes people act in their own self-interest. For this stakeholder group, that is the donation of personal time and rationally expecting benefits such as meeting goals and needs in return. The prospective benefits of achieving those personally important goals are weighed against costs of volunteering. It recognizes that time is not the only cost involved; other costs include opportunity cost of not participating in other activities, potential stigma by association with socially difficult causes (Omoto and Snyder, 1995), plus emotional cost of supporting someone potentially vulnerable.

Blau (1964) believes the social exchange is contingent on the rewarding nature of other people's reaction, if there was no reaction by others, the action would not have taken place: *"The tendency to help others is frequently motivated by the expectation that doing so will bring social rewards, the social approval of those whose opinions we value is of great significance to us"* (Blau, 1964, p17*).* This perspective is in contrast to altruism, defined as helping others selflessly (Piliavin and Hong-Wen, 1990). However, Wilson and Musick (1997) argue altruism underestimates the role of self-identity, for example, someone who thinks of themselves as the type of person who helps others. This 'helping identity' has been shown to motivate both formal and informal volunteering and also sustain length of volunteering service, supported by several psychological studies showing how the need for self and social identity is an important determinant of prosocial behaviour (Finkelstein *et al.*, 2005, Tidwell, 2005, Omoto and Snyder, 1995).

The Volunteer Function Inventory (VFI) acts as a theoretical bedrock for understanding how personal needs motivate the decision to volunteer (Clary *et al.*, 1998). The VFI argues that people evaluate the benefits of volunteering against one or more of six needs: meeting personal values, understanding (of service users), career enhancement, social, protective, and self-esteem. In this context, values are commonly described as higher-order goals (Kahle, 1983). Choice of

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NPO is informed by the body of research examining how consumers make choices to achieve their goals (Bagozzi and Pieters, 1998) and so "*it is critical to characterize a consumer's goal for a particular task when trying to ascertain why his or her choice processes take a particular form*" (Bettman *et al.*, 1998, p208). However, Clary et al. (1998) did not consider the choice of organisation with whom to volunteer. Therefore, what remains to be identified is:

RQ1: *How do the personal needs, values, and goals of the volunteer drive choice of a specific nonprofit organisation?*

Choice driven by brand

Brand has been consistently identified as a driver of consumer behaviour (Guèvremont and Grohmann, 2016, Fang *et al.*, 2012), particularly through enabling differentiation within a category (Aaker, 2003), resulting in increased consumer preference (Erdem and Swait, 2004). Specifically, within the nonprofit context, brand has been identified as enabling stakeholders to choose between NPOs dedicated to similar causes (Hankinson, 2001). Michel and Rieunier's (2012) research on NPOs showed that four dimensions of brand image (affect, efficiency, usefulness, and dynamism) explained 24 per cent of intentions to donate time and 31 per cent of money (Michel and Rieunier, 2012). An evolved scale with six dimensions (including reliability and ethicality) has been shown to explain 54 per cent of time and 51 per cent of money (Michaelidou *et al.*, 2015). Both studies recognize brand as a significant influence on the decision to support nonprofits. However, they do not explain how brand affects choice between NPOs.

Brand is a difficult concept within the nonprofit sector, particularly given the wide variation in marketing activity by NPOs. Whatever their level of marketing capability, a primary objective for nonprofits is inducing people to donate time and/or money to enable them to achieve their mission. Service organisations, such as NPOs, are characterized by a lack of tangible products. Having a strong brand increases supporter trust in that invisible purchase. As causes become cluttered, with organisations appearing to address similar needs, the brand provides a short-hand way of enabling supporters to differentiate (Hankinson, 2001). In a real world of imperfect and asymmetric information, the brand signals positioning and credibility (Erdem and Swait, 2004). Those brand signals result in improved consumer perceptions of the organisation and build confidence. The subsequent reduction in uncertainty lowers both the

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perceived risk by the consumer and information costs, strengthening the consumer expected utility. There are significant implications of this argument for research on volunteer choice. A NPO brand that most successfully reduces information costs is one that the stakeholder is automatically attracted to, evoking Kahneman's (2011) autopilot system 1 thinking; where the stakeholder does not have to spend time researching potential alternatives, involving slower system 2 thinking. Likewise a NPO brand that reduces the risk of the choice for the stakeholder (Kapferer, 2001) conveys confidence that their time will be used effectively and to make a difference for example. Fombrum and Shanley (1990) have also argued that in cases where there is too much, too little or too complex information, a strong organisational reputation serves as a value signal. They believe that through this signalling effect, organisational reputation affects their ability to recruit stakeholders.

For NPOs that do invest in building awareness, there is empirical evidence of a positive benefit to reputation. The 'mere exposure effect' describes how the more a person is exposed to a brand, the more familiar it becomes and they develop a preference for it (Zajonc, 1968). Subconsciously, it is seen as a safe choice. A strong and distinctive brand enables the potential volunteer to recognize a shared sense of purpose and values (Zhang and Bloemer, 2008). In the same way, the decision-maker has been shown to be significantly influenced by how the organisation is framed (Bettman *et al.*, 1998). The brand has been seen to play a vital role in that frame, bringing intangible attributes that increase perceived value. Understanding whether that brand frame is through cause, role, or meeting personal needs strengthens communication efficacy but remains an untested area of theory. Therefore, this research seeks to identify:

RQ2: *How does brand drive choice of a specific nonprofit organisation?*

Choice driven by role

Support for a NPO can manifest itself in a variety of ways, such as becoming a donor, volunteer, advocate, or customer (Mitchell and Clark, 2019). Within each of these broad supporter roles there is also choice. In volunteering, for example, specific role choice includes service-delivery, retail, or fundraising functions. Understanding this decision-making process is at the heart of uncovering the nature of the social exchange; the needs met through front-line volunteering are quite different from those met through fundraising events or charity shop purchases.

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There is minimal research on role in the nonprofit context. What is known is the importance of role to the supporter's need for social identity (Ye *et al*., 2015, Finkelstein *et al*., 2005). Ho and Donohoe (2014) examined how volunteers managed their social identities given the stereotypes associated with different volunteering roles. White et al. (2016) examined role identity in relation to three donation roles – giving money, time, and blood. They found that the important driver of donation behaviour was the person's identity as a donor rather than having been seen as helpful or other general personality characteristics (van Ingen and Wilson, 2016). This particularly resonates with the role acquisition function within symbolic consumption theory (Hoyer *et al*., 2012) where role directly relates to personal identity, particularly in the absence of other productive roles (van Ingen and Wilson, 2016).

The UK National Lottery funded research study, 'Pathways into Participation' (Brodie *et al*., 2011) examined three types of non-profit support roles – individual (such as donating and buying Fairtrade), social (formal and informal volunteering), and public (voting and social action). Although it did not specifically examine motivations for one support role compared to another, the research did consider how participation changed throughout a person's life and the different pathways through those roles. They examined factors enabling or limiting participation in different roles:

> *"We found that people's involvement changes over their life course as they experience different life events and triggers ... We observed how people follow a range of pathways to move between different types of activity, with one form of engagement often prompting or leading to another"*(Brodie *et al*., 2011, p69).

What is not yet understood is the implication of role in the stakeholder decision process: whether for example role is synonymous with cause, role choice leads to specific cause or brands, or whether the relationship is with the brand and subsequent a variety of support roles such as fundraising, donating and advocacy considered. Therefore, despite knowing that role is generically important, the way role contributes to volunteer decision-making remains under-researched. This research seeks to identify:

RQ3: *How does the desire for a specific role drive choice of a nonprofit organisation?*

Choice driven by cause

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Henke and Fontenot (2009) argue cause selection is driven by personal need. They identify that for American donors the:

> *"warm glow that comes with giving is a significant predictor of giving to causes for children and the elderly, while a sense of civic duty is a significant predictor of giving to weatherize homes and provide medical assistance for the poor, [and] help low-income people find work."* (Henke and Fontenot, 2009, p16)

The relationship is between the personal need the supporter is seeking to fulfil and perceived characteristics of different causes. Sargeant et al. (2008b) identified distinct personality traits for NPOs within three types of cause - labelled service, class, and faith. For example, education and arts charities were seen as elite and upper-class, which appealed to some donors but were rejected by others. Donors had clear expectations for the way service-delivery charities should behave, particularly with respect to the people they supported. Personal identification and congruity with faith-based charities determined whether NPOs within this cause were attractive or not.

Randle et al. (2013), in their analysis of volunteer data from the World Values Survey, also explore choices at cause level, observing five clusters - church, political, professional associations, leisure, and a fifth category labelled 'altruism'. They argue that switching from one organisation to another is more likely to occur within a competitive cluster than across clusters, for example, from a labour union to a political party rather than supporting older people. They also observed within a cluster, causes could be complimentary – so volunteers supporting a sports club are more likely to also support youth work or cultural activities rather than support a political party or the church. This could be through increased overall volunteering hours or dividing time between the two organisations. Either way, the implication from this research for a NPO seeking to recruit new volunteers is to consider competition at the cause cluster level, not just brand or individual cause level.

Classifying and labelling in a relevant way is important as it eases the burden of the decision-making process. Mogilner et al. (2008) showed this particularly held for 'novices', people making a decision where they were unfamiliar with the subject. Categorisation was less important for people who were already experts on the subject. This has interesting implications for NPO recruitment: helping the potential volunteer navigate NPO choices on offer through

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effective clustering by cause. Therefore, this research builds on this literature by seeking to identify:

RQ4: *How does cause drive choice of a specific nonprofit organisation?*

Choice driven by availability and convenience

Within consumer behaviour literature, the relationship between brand choice and availability is well described (Shah *et al.*, 2015). Consumer considerations are based on "*personal circumstances interacting with available alternatives and other environmental factors*" (Shocker *et al.*, 1991, p187), such as proximity, ease of transport, delivery costs, and stock availability. The effect is to reduce alternatives considered from 'awareness set' to 'consideration set'. A lack of availability nearby can influence the consumer to select a brand that was not their first choice (Rundle-Thiele and Bennett, 2001). Geographical proximity in particular has been found to be particularly influential for consumers who are new to the category (Janakiraman and Niraj, 2011). Within nonprofit practitioner guides, nearness of location has been seen as a key driver of volunteer recruitment by NPOs (Whittich, 2000) and the 'Pathways to Participation' report (Brodie *et al.*, 2011) identified local availability as a potential constraint on voluntary engagement. However, within the nonprofit context, there are few academic studies that examine the role of local availability and practical convenience on the choice of NPO. This research seeks to identify:

RQ5: *How does local convenience drive choice of a specific nonprofit organisation?*

The five constructs identified through the thematic literature review were personal need, brand, role, cause, and local convenience. What remains unclear is the relevance and relationship between all these decision drivers and their impact on specific NPO selection. Therefore, the overall purpose of this research is *to explore how volunteers choose one nonprofit organisation (NPO) rather than another through adopting a holistic perspective.*

The paper presents the rationale for the methodology, including the choice of means-end chain analysis. It goes on to discuss the empirical findings on why people choose one NPO rather than another with whom to volunteer. A new conceptual framework for volunteer choice of NPO is then proposed that identifies the drivers of choice and relationship between them. The

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paper concludes with contributing to NPO practice and presenting a springboard of ideas for future research.

Methodology

Volunteer motivation has historically been researched through quantitative questionnaires (Mowen and Sujan, 2005, Clary *et al.*, 1998). However, for this study depth interviews were identified as the best fit for three reasons. Firstly, probing through face-to-face interviews enables the researcher to uncover abstract and implicit motivators as well as functional and explicit ones. This is particularly relevant in the nonprofit context, where abstract attributes, such as anticipated benefits when needs are met, have been found to be more significant than for commercial brands (Venable *et al.*, 2005). Secondly, the socio-environmental context within which the individual makes the decision can be explored, including whether the organisation is personally relevant. Finally, depth interviews are not dependent on the relative ranking of attributes within a competitive set as, for example, with repertory grid. The issue of competitive set within the nonprofit context is both under-researched and unclear, in particular whether the volunteer compares other brands, causes, roles, or uses of time/money. Therefore, depth interviews present an opportunity to explore decision-making behaviour from the perspective of the individual volunteer.

Sample and data collection

The fieldwork was conducted in the UK with five leading NPOs, across two causes, informed by eight preliminary interviews with nonprofit marketing and research specialists. These specialist interviews recommended causes with strong competition where brands work to provide differentiation for potential supporters, consistent with research approaches taken by other studies into UK charities (Venable *et al*., 2005, Sargeant *et al*., 2008a). In addition, they advised against health causes as there is often a direct link between the cause, often a specific disease, and one organisation, for example Parkinson's UK or Diabetes UK, making it difficult to separate cause from brand. The causes chosen were 'children and young people' and 'advice and listening'. The organisations selected were all well-known national organisations (Harris-

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Interactive, 2018). This was to overcome an issue, identified in previous nonprofit research (Randle and Dolnicar, 2011), where low brand awareness significantly impacted responses.

The sample comprised 51 regular volunteers, across 16 locations. 82 per cent of the sample were women. All made their choice of NPO within the previous 12 months and all had selected service-delivery roles (rather than fundraising or retail). The choice of regular, service-delivery role brings a sense of commitment, not just opportunity cost of time but often also emotional cost of involvement. Therefore, the decision to volunteer is more likely to be actively considered than occasional fundraising support, for example. As a result of that higher involvement, conscious decision-making, the rationale for choice is likely to be more easily recollected and described.

Each volunteer interview sought to understand the choice of NPO in relation to the five constructs identified from the literature and explore the sequence and relative importance of those constructs. The volunteer interview probed choice of NPO from the perspective of the person who had already made that decision, in effect examining actual rather than intended purchase, identified as a more enduring predictor of future consumer behaviour (Manyiwa and Crawford, 2002). All the participant volunteers were successful in enacting their decision: they were all currently volunteering for the NPO they decided they wanted to volunteer for. Although interesting to explore at a future date, this research design was not extended further to include those who considered one NPO but chose another, or those who chose one NPO but were unsuccessful in winning the role, as it would have added further complexity to the analysis.

In addition, two senior managers from each of the five participating NPOs were interviewed to understand the volunteering recruitment process and nature of the volunteering roles within that organisation. These practitioner interviews particularly strengthened the accuracy of the subsequent coding.

Data analysis

To understand the relationship between the organisational attributes selected and personal needs met, the data was analysed using means-end chains (MEC) (Inoue *et al.*, 2017, Walker and Olson, 1991, Gutman, 1997). MEC methodology frames a marketing problem as a specific consumer decision to be made (Zasuwa, 2016, Grunert and Grunert, 1995), in this case, charities

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needing to attract more volunteers to their organisation. During interview, the participant is encouraged to 'ladder' up from the salient attributes of the organisation through benefits received (consequences) to personal needs and values fulfilled. Through understanding the connections between levels of abstraction, the laddering method enables an insight into decision-making that may be subconscious and emotional, as well as rational and salient. MEC models vary in structure. The popular four layer model assumes the perceived benefits (consequences) of the decision have both functional and psychosocial elements (Jägel *et al.*, 2012). However, this is less prevalent within the nonprofit context. Therefore, for this research, the parsimonious three layer model was adopted (Reynolds and Olson, 2001) in which 'attributes' (concrete or abstract) lead to 'consequences' (functional or psychosocial) which lead to 'values' (terminal or instrumental) (Reynolds and Gutman, 1988).

The technique selected for uncovering those attributes, consequences, and values was direct elicitation (Manyiwa and Crawford, 2002, Bech-Larsen and Nielsen, 1999) combined with soft laddering (Menvielle *et al.*, 2014). The research considered the limitations of both the MEC laddering method and the choice of soft laddering as a technique. MEC can be seen as both time-consuming and complex. In addition, there are significant variations in how the technique is practically conducted (Russell *et al.*, 2004, Phillips and Reynolds, 2009), but also debate about whether it explores underlying motivations (Reynolds and Olson, 2001) or cognitive structure (Grunert and Grunert, 1995).

In hard laddering the respondent produces the ladders themselves, one by one, working up the levels of abstraction and then moving onto the next attribute. Hard laddering tends to use self-administered questionnaires and, as a result, is usually quicker and cheaper (Jägel *et al.*, 2012). However, although time consuming and requiring a higher level of interviewer skill (Scholderer and Grunert, 2005), soft laddering has been found to uncover a more detailed picture of perceptions and beliefs (Reynolds and Olson, 2001), as well as allowing a more natural flow of speech during the interview (Bech-Larsen and Nielsen, 1999). Soft laddering is seen as the original technique and is the most commonly used laddering method for interviews (Russell *et al.*, 2004), with ladders constructed by the researcher based on the interview transcription and audio files.

The MEC analysis involved five rounds of coding including two with external secondary coders. All the coding and data analysis was done manually. Following a thorough

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familiarisation phase, the data chunking stage identified and captured key passages within the transcripts. The coding emerged through the analysis rather than being pre-determined. The initial coding was 'open coding', labelling each data chunk within an interview with a code then moving onto the next interview. The open codes were then allocated to concepts, in this case categorised as to whether they were attribute, consequence, or value. The Code Book was then simplified. The data was then re-coded with the perspective of having been through the whole data set and based on the simplified codes. The codes were then clustered into themes and the dataset categorised into higher level themes (axial coding). The linking stage for means-end chains is the connection between data chunks (and their codes) at different levels of abstraction, so attribute to consequence or consequence to value, or all three within each respondent. Building these ladders and understanding the connections is 'the chain' in MEC. Only then can de-duplication take place, removing coding ladders that exactly match, within one respondent's data.

The use of secondary coders is unusual in MEC methodology given the complexity of coding against different levels of abstraction (Grunert and Grunert, 1995). However, the increased time investment was felt to be worthwhile given the positive benefits for external validity. The first coder had significant experience of the nonprofit sector, although not directly with any of the organisations involved, and an excellent linguistic ability to interpret meaning. The objective was not only to sense-check the actual allocation of the data chunks but also to sense-check the code labels themselves. The first inter-coder check took place at the end of the fieldwork for category 1 (children's NPOs) and was based on free sorting, so developing her own codes. Afterwards, there was a discussion to match her set of code labels to those within the Code Book and to discuss which data chunks were allocated to those labels. The result was the renaming of several of the code labels as well as a three stage iterative process of re-allocating the data chunks where there was a mismatch. The final result at the end of the iterative process was an 80% match. After the fieldwork for the second category was completed and analysed, a second round of secondary coding was undertaken. The purpose of this round was to enable the whole data set to be analysed and to provide rigour. In this case, the coder was an academic researcher. At this advanced stage of the process, the data chunks were coded against the Code Book rather than free coding. Three iterative rounds of discussion were needed to identify data chunks where there were two or more potential interpretations. After the discussions and movement on both sides, the final result was an 85% inter-coder match.

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The data was analysed at direct relationship level, for example, attribute-consequence and consequence-value but also at the indirect relationship level, attribute-value. Overall, there were 221 complete unique ladders (three stage) and 703 direct relationship pairs (two stage), as described in Table 2.

[Insert Table 2]

The implication matrix (IM), as shown in Table 3, details the direct relationships between each attribute-consequence and consequence-value as well as the indirect relationships between attributes and values, through whichever consequence route. Dominant perceptual patterns were then visualized using hierarchical value maps and key relationships emerged. An explanatory note for the reader is given below the matrix.

[Insert Table 3]

Findings

The research identifies that meeting personal needs are the foundation for NPO choice. It explains the importance of the brand to volunteers and the impact of type of volunteer role. The research offers insight on the relationship between cause and brand for volunteers in their choice of organisation but also identifies the lack of importance of convenience factors in meeting higher order needs and goals.

Personal needs as the foundation for NPO choice

The laddering technique reveals the connections between the attributes that attracted the volunteer to a specific organisation, the perceived consequences of those attributes, and how they fulfil personal needs (Zasuwa, 2016). Volunteers identified seven major needs as reasons for their specific choice of NPO. These were ‘Self-respect’, ‘Social recognition’, ‘Sense of accomplishment’, ‘Sense of belonging’, ‘Living my values’, ‘Pleasure’ and, to a lesser extent, ‘Excitement’.

The findings extend our understanding of the relationship between personal needs and organisational choice in three specific and important ways. Visually, MEC are commonly depicted with needs/values at the end of the chain, reflecting the interview discussion flow.

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However, this study identifies that meeting those needs/values is the ultimate reason for the choice of organisation. Through conceptualizing the decision as being driven by personal needs, the choice of volunteering as a way of meeting those needs can be seen in the context of other solutions. For example, the need for a 'Sense of accomplishment' can be met through career success, family, or sport.

The results also identify that previous constructs of volunteer motivation, such as within the VFI, are more often attributes or consequences than higher order needs and values. For example, the VFI category of 'Social' is described as being with friends and also taking part in socially recognized activities (Clary *et al.*, 1998). Within this research, taking a role that has the attribute of being 'Social', that is working with other people, meets that motivation but then connects to feeling "Part of a team" (consequence), which ultimately enables the volunteer to achieve a 'Sense of belonging' (value) to a group. This deeper understanding stems from the methodological choice of laddering interviews which enable the volunteer to go beyond top of mind reasons for volunteering, to make connections through to personal needs and values that may be implicit or abstract and, therefore, not immediately obvious.

Furthermore, the research extends our theoretical understanding of volunteer motivation through clarifying types of needs and values. When participants in this research discussed values, they described them in terms of altruistic and empathetic personal values. Other higher order needs, such as seeking a 'Sense of belonging' or 'Self-respect', were delivered through other categories of motivation (such as social or personal development). These are not the wide range of personal values of Bilsky and Schwartz (1994): they are not a holistic measure of self but are needs met through a specific decision, in this case to volunteer with a particular NPO.

Therefore, the findings extend our understanding of volunteer motivation. The data identifies the needs and values the person is seeking to fulfil through the decision to support a specific NPO, beyond the traditionally identified generic motivations to volunteer. The desire to meet personal needs and values is the foundation from which other decisions flow, for instance choice of a specific brand, role, and cause. The first research proposition is:

P1: The decision to volunteer for one NPO rather than another is anchored in meeting higher order needs and values.

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Importance of brand to volunteers

This research contributes a deeper understanding of how brand drives specific NPO choice, extending previous studies that identified brand as an important generic construct. The MEC relationships reveal the role of brand in volunteer choice of a NPO. Figure 1 shows the total number (N = x) of times each thematic code (attribute, consequence, or value) was present in unique direct relationship ladders across the whole dataset. The fact that brand was present within 57 unique ladders, the single most cited attribute, is not surprising as a key parameter of the sample was that the NPOs were all well-known. 47 of those mentions (n=10+12+9+7) could be attributed to four main consequences. The volunteers chose a 'Big name' because they perceived it would enable them to 'Make a difference' (19 times) and through their volunteering for that organisation, would 'Feel valued' by others, 'Feel useful' themselves or it would 'Help (their) career'. Ultimately, they believed volunteering for a big name organisation would bring a 'Sense of accomplishment' (n=36+10+16), 'Self-respect', 'Social recognition', 'Pleasure' and enabling them to 'Live my values, as shown in Figure 1.

[Insert Figure 1]

What is more interesting is the way the brand contributes to the choice of organisation through self-efficacy; the strongest pathway from selecting a well-known nonprofit brand is a perception by the volunteer of their ability to be effective. Across the interviews, 'Living my values' was mentioned 49 times but 18 of these were connected with the specific consequence of 'Make a difference', evidence of a strong relationship between consequence and value. The volunteer wants to feel their time will be used well, that they will be able to make a difference and achieve their goals through the role, including meeting their needs of self-respect and being able to live their values. This resonates with the literature on the importance of self-efficacy to employees (Kraemer *et al.*, 2017). As Thomas explained:

> *"If you have a well-established national charity* (A: Big name) → *then you hope that over time they had looked at how they best deliver their service* (C: Make a difference) → *I couldn't work for an organisation I didn't respect."* (V: Self-respect) (Charity 4)

In this way, a well-established brand enables the volunteer to feel worthwhile, enabling their personal value of 'Sense of accomplishment' to be met. They view the well-known brand as effective and, therefore, trust their time will not be wasted. The role of trust in underpinning social exchange is particularly important in contexts, such as nonprofit, where intangible and

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social benefits feature strongly (Venable *et al.*, 2005, Arnett *et al.*, 2003, Löhndorf and Diamantopoulos, 2014). The research also identifies the relationship between brand and meeting the personal needs of self-respect and social recognition (He *et al.*, 2012). Luke, for example, who worked full time in a bank and volunteered as a counsellor one evening a week, explained:

> *"The brand is very powerful and people think you are a hero or some sort of unsung hero. I think you go up in people's estimations when you say that."* (V: Social recognition) (Charity 5)

This strongly resonates with the literature on prestige and status bestowed by brands (Baek *et al.*, 2010). Volunteering for a well-known brand has, for some volunteers, a real kudos with a direct link to self-esteem, social recognition and organisational identification (Ashforth *et al.*, 2008). The data revealed the importance of brand in the choice of NPO. It showed the direct relationship between choice of a well-known brand and ability to meet the personal needs of the volunteer. Therefore, the role of brand in NPO choice is identified as twofold: enabling the volunteer to make a difference, 'self-efficacy', and meeting their needs for self and social identity. The second set of research propositions are:

P2a: People volunteer for well-known brands to ensure time will be used effectively.

P2b: People volunteer for well-known brands due to the perceived impact on their self and social identity.

Nature of the volunteering role

This research identifies role as a driver of volunteer decision-making in the nonprofit context. Role was cited in 113 (n=29+55+29) unique ladders, with dominant perceptual patterns shown in Figure 2. For example, 11 volunteers made a direct link between being able to 'Make a difference' through it being a 'Hands on' role.

[Insert Figure 2]

The volunteers selected roles that were a 'Challenge', that were 'Hands on' and that used their existing 'Skills/experience'. These directly laddered to volunteers wanting to 'Make a difference', 'Feel useful', 'Feel valued', and be 'Still learning'. For example, Figure 2 shows that having a role that was a 'Challenge' was mentioned 29 times but 13 of these were with the

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consequence of enabling the volunteer to be 'Still learning'. Likewise, through volunteering, being able to 'Make a difference' was key: mentioned 85 times overall in the interviews and 29 times in relation to it being a 'Hands on' role. Ultimately, the needs they were seeking to fulfil from such a hands on and challenging role were a 'Sense of accomplishment ', 'Living my values', and 'Self-respect' for themselves but also 'Social recognition' by others for taking on such a challenging support role. To understand this in relation to Figure 2, 'Sense of accomplishment' was mentioned 91 times across the interviews (n=91) and 70 (n=8+10+16+36) of those mentions were connected with these four main consequences of the role itself.

For the first time, the data identifies the importance of role as a specific and distinct construct within the volunteer choice of NPO. Strongly present within the findings, the MEC ladders reveal how the broad decision to become a volunteer enables the person to feel useful and valued, building their sense of self but also how they are perceived by the wider world including within their own family. In particular, the consequences of feeling useful and valued lead through to a sense of accomplishment, self-respect, and social recognition. This was particularly important to Benita, who had recently retired from a busy nursing role in a hospital.

> *"You do feel as if you're slightly thrown on the rubbish tip when you retire unless something leads you on into that retirement that gives you a purpose."* (Charity 1)

Benita decided to support through volunteering. Other people support nonprofits through alternative ways that better fit their needs, such as becoming a donor, customer, or advocate. This can be conceptualized as a broad competitive set within which volunteering roles reside. There was little evidence in the data of the volunteer supporter group adopting multiple roles of support for an organisation. Volunteering was the best fit for their needs. However, it did not preclude lower level involvement support for other NPOs, such as making ad hoc donations or buying clothes from a charity shop.

In addition, the partipant also made a specific role choice. The specific characteristics of role are driven by the type of volunteering selected for the research. Service-delivery volunteering is not a decision taken lightly; the regular time commitment made is considerable and if the volunteer fails to honour their commitment, the service beneficiary is let down. Different volunteering roles were peceived to meet different needs, for example providing a challenge or social recognition. Margaret, for example, had taken early retirement from her management consulting job, was comfortably well-off but wanted to keep exercising her brain.

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> "*I didn't want charity shop work or anything like that. I wanted something that would be reasonably intellectually stimulating.*" (Charity 5)

Future research into other types of volunteer roles (such as retail or fundraising), or other nonprofit support roles, are likely to reveal different specific role characteristics.

Therefore, an important driver of NPO choice is the perceived ability of the organisation to offer roles that not only meet the broad need to feel useful through having a role at all, but also the specific needs of the individual. The third research proposition:

P3a: People select a role to support nonprofits depending on which personal needs and values they want to meet.

P3b: The decision about choice of role, such as volunteering, comes before brand or cause.

Cause and emotion

The results identify cause as an important driver for NPO choice, cited in 55 unique ladders. 35 of those mentions (n=22+6+7) were in connection to three main consequences of cause which is that it enabled the volunteer to 'Make a difference', 'Feel useful', and 'Give back'. For 'Cause', two dominant perceptual pathways were revealed, as illustrated in Figure 3.

[Insert Figure 3]

Wanting to 'Make a difference' was the strongest consequence volunteers were seeking through their choice of cause. However, what this delivered for the volunteer was a real connection to personal 'Sense of accomplishment' as well as enabling them to live according to their values and, therefore, make decisions consistent with their sense of self. Through empathy to the cause specifically, and wanting to make a difference generally, they perceive that they gain personally in what they achieve and how they live their lives. Janet, for example, identified volunteering as a counsellor as a way of using her listening skills and feeling more fulfilled while her partner was away with the armed forces.

> *"Just to give it a bit more of a ... a purpose and meaning I suppose. If you feel that you're actually helping people ... it's kind of got a bit more of a reward to it."* (V: Sense of accomplishment) (Charity 5)

And also, for Tamsin, a single mother of a toddler, as a way to give back for help received.

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"Because of the service I received when I was a service user I wanted to give back too … I can't give in a monetary way because of my finances and my personal circumstances. So one of the best ways for me to give back is my time." (C: Way to give back) (Charity 2)

The results find no evidence of a linear decision process where people identified a cause to support and then considered how best to deliver that support, subsequently choosing volunteering. That is, despite being prompted in interviews, no participant had considered donating instead. The research identifies that the choice of role drives the choice of cause. These supporters identified regular, service-delivery volunteering as the best fit to meet their needs and then made choices about cause and brand.

In addition, the research identifies two other new and interesting dimensions of cause as a decision driver. Firstly, the strength of the language within the discussion on cause, for example *"feel very strongly", "really important to me", "feel very passionate", "privileged and honoured*", revealed the depth of emotion involved. Emotion has been found to stimulate action, particularly helping actions such as prosocial behaviour (Cialdini *et al.*, 1987) and achievement of goals (Frijda, 1987, Bagozzi and Pieters, 1998). Interestingly emotion is also one of the few proven differentiators between NPO brands (Michel and Rieunier, 2012). In this way, emotion attached to cause choice not only drives the decision to volunteer but also the choice of specific organisation with whom to volunteer.

Secondly, the depth of relationship between the individual volunteer and the cause varied considerably. It can be conceptualized as a spectrum from interest in the cause through empathy, relevance, and, finally, a deep personal connection.

Interest: "*I'm aware of how much families and parents can struggle."* (Charity 1, volunteer 4)

Empathy: *"I feel very strongly really that the children in our society often have a pretty raw deal, that they are the saviour of our society."* (Charity 1, volunteer 1)

Relevance: *"I always had it in the back of my mind because I was brought up in care for the first 13 years of my life."* (Charity 1, volunteer 8)

Personal: *"I feel very passionate about the particular role of being a* [charity/role] *because I know that there's children out there like myself who are being abused on a*

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regular basis and have nobody to speak to about it, so it feels very empowering." (Charity 2, volunteer 8)

In the data, it is the decision-making around cause that appears most closely related to the literature on prosocial behaviour and empathetic emotion (Wieseke *et al.*, 2012, Verhaert and Van den Poel, 2011). The more empathetic a person feels towards cause, the more likely they are to support that cause. They see themselves as someone who helps, whether that is private recognition or recognized by a wider social group. The volunteer makes choices about cause consistent with their values and need for a sense of accomplishment. For example, Sarah, who had recently moved south for work after leaving University, felt it bought:

"A feeling of doing something worthwhile. Giving back to society." (Charity 5)

The research also identifies that strength of cause, as a driver, derives from personal engagement with the cause itself and demonstrates this through developing a spectrum of emotional connectedness to cause. Where there is personal relevance, the motivation to select a NPO within that cause is stronger. Therefore, this research identifies cause as a key driver of specific NPO choice but also discovers that choice of cause follows choice of role (reinforcing Proposition 3b). The fourth research proposition:

P4: Emotional engagement with the NPO is most closely linked to cause.

The influence of local availability and convenience

Despite being identified as a potential decision-driving construct from the literature review, the results clearly demonstrate that 'local convenience' factors were not seen as fulfilling any higher order personal needs and values. 47 volunteers did identify the importance of needing something that 'Fits with my life' in a practical, functional way, as shown in Figure 4.

[Insert Figure 4]

They perceived this could be achieved through a choice of NPO that was convenient in terms of time and location, mentioned 70 times (n=41+29) in the interviews overall. Local convenience/availability of volunteering opportunities is consistently identified as important within nonprofit practitioner reports. However, no participant made the connection between convenience and meeting their higher order needs through choice of organisation. Therefore, this

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research identifies that local convenience acts as a constraint on choice set rather than driving the final NPO selection.

In addition, the MEC methodology, based on laddering interviews, was found to be insightful in understanding the reasons behind these practical considerations. For those working in call centres, traditionally defined convenience of location (proximity) was important. However, for some working one-to-one with beneficiaries, location was important for a different reason; the volunteer wanted to avoid any potential social difficulty. They preferred the volunteering to be at 'arm's length', mentioned 10 times. Myra, for example, understood that supporting a parent face-to-face, every week, would be quite intense so not meeting them at other times was important.

"I don't want to bump into them when I step out my front door." (Charity 1)

The final proposition:

P5: Local availability and convenience of volunteering roles acts as a constraint on, not a driver of, NPO choice.

Therefore, through means-end analysis of 51 laddering interviews with volunteers, supported by research expert and practitioner interviews, the findings identify the drivers of nonprofit organisational choice. The full hierarchical value map is shown in Figure 5. To avoid further complexity, this map only shows the higher level relationships, defined as those which explain 70%+ of the subsequent level and also have a minimum count of 3+. As is common in MEC visualisation, the thickness of the line in the hierarchical value map is in scale to the number of mentions so 10 mentions = 10 point thickness.

[Insert Figure 5]

The research builds on extant literature and extends our understanding of volunteering, identifying which factors are important in the decision-making process underpinning specific organisational choice. The findings provide the insight to present an integrated conceptual framework of volunteer decision-making.

Discussion

Conceptual framework

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The research interrogates choice beyond simply the attributes of the NPO. It explores the rationale for decision-making within the personal and social context within which that individual decision is made. Through the laddering technique, the volunteer is able to reflect on their NPO decision-making process and identify the genuine reasons underpinning their choice. Specifically, four characteristics of the decision-making process have been identified.

1. Decision anchor. The choices of role, cause, and brand fulfil specific personal needs. Participants articulated the importance of meeting personal values and needs as the foundation of the decision-making process.
2. Importance of role. This framework introduces, for the first time, choice of role as a decision driver based on ability to meet personal needs. The type of role acts as a gateway through which choices of cause and brand are made. There was no evidence that these volunteers considered other broader support roles, despite supporting other NPOs in lesser ways.
3. Cause vs brand. The decision-making sequence between cause and brand revealed two distinct pathways. For some participants, the brand was an automatic choice following the decision to volunteer and the cause was a consequence of the brand choice. The brand was synonymous with a particular cause. For others, the stronger relationship was with the cause, particularly where there was personal relevance or empathy. The subsequent choice of brand within cause was then driven by saliency and/or strength of reputation.
4. Convenience. Practical considerations of local convenience were not found to be connected to higher order needs and values. Discovering suitable roles at the right time and place was a constraint on choice rather than a driver of choice.

Through this research, five direct relationships (R1-5) and one relationship constraint (R6) have been identified. Examples from the data for each relationship are shown in Table 4.

[Insert Table 4]

R1 Need→ Role: There was no evidence of volunteers progressing directly from meeting personal needs to choice of brand or cause. These decision drivers were seen through the lens of role choice, through deciding to volunteer. The participants in this research, for example, did not select a specific NPO and then consider how best to support it. The relationship between meeting personal needs and the volunteering role selected is at two levels. At a generic level, having a volunteering role at all is a way of meeting certain needs and

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values. In addition, specific volunteering roles will also meet specific needs so service-delivery volunteering will meet different needs to being a school governor, for example.

R2 Role → Brand: Having made the decision on role, in this case service-delivery volunteering, participants then identified the brand with whom to volunteer. Well-known brands were selected not simply due to awareness but to what the volunteers believed that brand would enable, such as making a difference to someone's life. They also brought self-respect and social identity benefits. Finally, some brands were an automatic choice for a type of role; they were well known for having specific types of roles, such as counselling.

R3 Role → Cause: For other participants, having decided to volunteer, they selected a cause that was personally relevant to them. This acts as a second pathway. Some causes were well known for having specific roles; once the volunteer had decided that a type of volunteering role met their needs, they knew which causes to look at that would be able to offer them those roles.

R4: Cause→ Brand: In some cases, the most salient brand within a cause was selected. For others, it was the brand identified as the most 'typical' of the work within that cause.

R5: Brand→ Cause: Finally, for other participants the brand was identified directly as a way to fulfil personal needs through volunteering. This was either through a strong personal connection to the brand or simply through strong awareness of the brand. For both, the cause was a consequence of the choice of brand.

R6: Local convenience as a moderator: Local availability of volunteering roles with selected causes and/or brands acts as a constraint on choice set.

The identification of these relationships, and specifically their sequencing, enables a new integrated conceptual framework for volunteer choice of NPO to emerge from this research, as shown in Figure 6.

[Insert Figure 6]

Theoretical contribution

This research addresses a substantive gap in our understanding of volunteer decision-making in the nonprofit context. The contributions of this paper on nonprofit choice are threefold:

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integrated theoretical perspective, empirical findings, and a new conceptual framework. Firstly, the paper contributes to a clearer understanding of the drivers of NPO choice through adopting a holistic integrated theoretical perspective of how these different drivers combine and interact to drive organisational choice within the nonprofit context. Extant literature has to date focused on generic motivators for supporting the nonprofit sector and tends to focus on one or two constructs. Overall, five constructs were identified through the literature review but the relevance and relationship between them had not been explored. In addition, although there is a significant body of work understanding the reasons why people volunteer (Ho and O'Donohoe, 2014, Randle and Dolnicar, 2011), what was not known was how that motivation is delivered through choice of one organisation rather than another. There is clear evidence of the importance of brand in driving nonprofit support (Michaelidou *et al.*, 2015, Michel and Rieunier, 2012, Venable *et al.*, 2005) but minimal discussion on choice of specific nonprofit brand, beyond an observation of self-congruity (Randle and Dolnicar, 2011). In addition, the perceived benefits of choosing a particular cause (Henke and Fontenot, 2009, Sargeant *et al*., 2008b) and the importance of volunteering for role identity (van Ingen and Wilson, 2016, White *et al.*, 2016, Finkelstein *et al.*, 2005) were identified through the research as important drivers of a specific NPO. Finally, local convenience has also been identified as a potential driver of NPO choice (Brodie *et al.*, 2011). In this way, the paper draws on the wider literature on generic nonprofit support and applies it to the context of specific organisational choice.

The second main contribution is that the empirical findings contribute to identifying the decision-making process and key relationships between the attributes of the NPO, the consequences for the individual volunteer, and the connection through to personal needs and values. Analysis of the data revealed the dominant perceptual pathways on personal needs, cause, brand, and type of volunteering role. Meeting personal needs and values, often visualized as the end of the 'chain', were found to be the foundation for the decision, reflecting the importance of social exchange theory in the nonprofit context (Venable *et al.*, 2005) and what was received in return for time given. This is in contrast to literature on altruism but reflects the importance of social identity on prosocial behaviour (Wilson and Musick, 1997).

For the first time, role was identified as a key driver of supporter NPO choice with two levels of decision about role observed. The choice of volunteering as a way of meeting personal needs is a broad choice. The type of volunteering, whether regular or ad hoc, service-delivery, retail, or fundraising for example is a specific choice. Each type of role reflects different

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attributes, with service-delivery volunteering found to meet needs of being hands on, a challenge and enabling the volunteer to use their existing skills and experience. The consequences of selecting this type of role directly linked to their ability to make a difference to the lives of others but interestingly also meet personal needs and goals; enabling the volunteer to feel respect within themselves (self-respect) and with others (social recognition). Another important finding was how role interacts with other NPO choice drivers. Role was identified as preceding brand and cause choice; that is, the decision to volunteer was made before specific organisational choice. There was no evidence of cause/brand selection and then consideration of how best to support that organisation, for example, through donations of money or goods.

Cause was identified as exhibiting a strong connection to emotion in decision-making. The strength of relationship to cause was identified to reflect the literature on emotion in prosocial behaviour (Bagozzi and Pieters, 1998, Cialdini *et al.*, 1987, Frijda, 1987). The paper identifies a spectrum of emotional connectedness with cause. The findings also demonstrate two different pathways to decision-making about cause and specific NPO choice. For participants with a strong attachment to a particular cause, the subsequent choice of brand was either automatic (due to typicality or category dominance) or from a competitive set within the cause.

However, for other participants, the brand was the primary driver and cause was a consequence of that choice. The relationship was directly with the specific brand, either through personal relevance, strong brand awareness or being known for a specific type of volunteering (or a combination of all three). The research identifies how brand drives choice of NPO, through volunteers describing a correlation between volunteering for a well-known brand and meeting their need for self-efficacy (Kraemer *et al.*, 2017). They believe their time will not be wasted and they will be able to make a difference. In addition, selecting a well-known nonprofit brand is driven by the need for social identity and status (He *et al.*, 2012, Baek *et al.*, 2010). The research also explores the relationship between local convenience and choice of NPO and identifies its role as a moderator, rather than driver, of decision-making.

The third major contribution of the research is to present a new conceptual framework of volunteer decision-making in the nonprofit context, based on five propositions, which it is hoped will act as a catalyst for future research. The framework presents an integrated perspective of NPO choice, based on empirical findings from volunteers of five leading organisations. The framework has significant theoretical implications for the concept of competitive set in the

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nonprofit context. At each point within the decision-making process, there is a potential competitive set. For example, there are different ways of fulfilling particular personal needs, such as the need for self-respect is met through supporting a charity but also, potentially, rewarding paid employment, higher education, or achievement of sporting goals. Within role, there are different ways to support a NPO, such as ad hoc fundraising or making regular donations. Likewise, within the competitive sets for cause and brand there is a wide choice available, but each competitive set is framed within context so, for example, amongst other well-known brands, brands with a personal connection, or within a particular cause. This extends our understanding of competitive set in the nonprofit context.

Managerial contribution

Concepts of marketing, brand, and competition sit uneasily in nonprofit practice, jarring with discussion of mission, collaboration, and altruism. However, the tightening of nonprofit funding, increasing calls on potential volunteers' time, and relentless proliferation of NPOs are now the reality of this sector. Given the natural churn in volunteering, strengthening the efficacy of volunteer recruitment is fundamental to mission sustainability. There is a direct and significant consequence on NPO growth and profitability if service-delivery resources are not attracted to their specific organisation.

The research encourages NPOs to better understand the consumer decision-making process of volunteers, anchored in meeting personal needs and values. The task for NPO managers is to understand how effective they currently are, and aspire to be, at meeting those needs. In addition, discovering the personally salient drivers of choice for their existing volunteers explains how their organisation is currently framed for this important supporter group. Each decision driver, whether personal need, type of role, cause, or brand, has an associated competitive set with implications for recruitment hook and media choices. In addition, the research identifies the importance of brand to NPOs. Building strong brands enables the NPO to meet the personal needs of the volunteer through trust, self-efficacy, and status. Being well-known helps deliver the social exchange in return for time committed. Therefore, the research identifies the importance of brand as a competitive lever within the nonprofit context. This has significant practitioner implications for volunteer recruitment and communication strategy, for example whether the motivating message is anchored in the role,

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the cause, and meeting personal need or focusing on building awareness of the brand within the target audience.

Limitations and future research

This research is both impactful through, and limited by, its context selection: one volunteer group within one sector. In addition, MEC methodology, identified as a strong fit for the topic of the research, is novel in this context where quantitative surveys are the norm. However, the findings of the research and development of a new conceptualization of supporter decision-making present a rich seam for future research, as shown in Table 5.

[Insert Table 5]

Each of the five direct relationships identified present a challenge to be tested. In particular, developing our understanding of the automatic choice of brand (with cause as a consequence, R5) or framing brands through cause (R4) have important implications for nonprofit brand positioning and marketing communications. This has great significance in a sector where funding is scarce and spend is closely scrutinized.

Within the NPO context, the generalizability of the framework would be strengthened through replication with other causes, including the nonprofit health sector, as well as other volunteering roles, such as retail or fundraising. Within volunteering, the research can be extended to consider those who considered one NPO but chose another or were unsuccessful in completing the recruitment process. In addition, the framework can be replicated with other key supporter groups such as donors and product/service consumers as well as differing nonprofit environments, for example, in the developing world. Finally, a fertile area for future work is developing theory through testing the presence and structure of competitive set associated with each of the decision drivers present within this new framework.

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Figure 1. Dominant perceptual patterns of 'Brand'

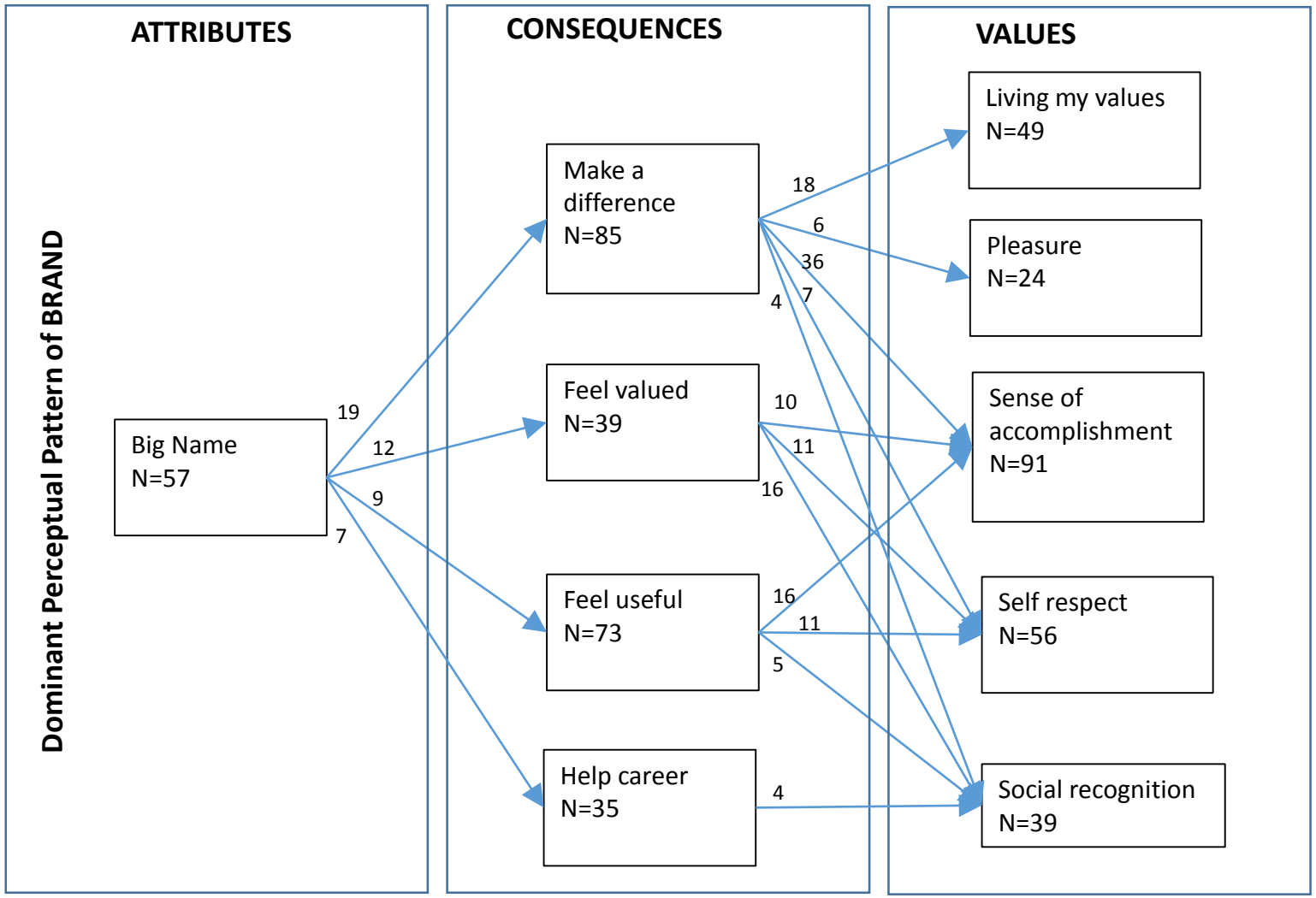

Figure 2. Dominant perceptual patterns of 'Role'

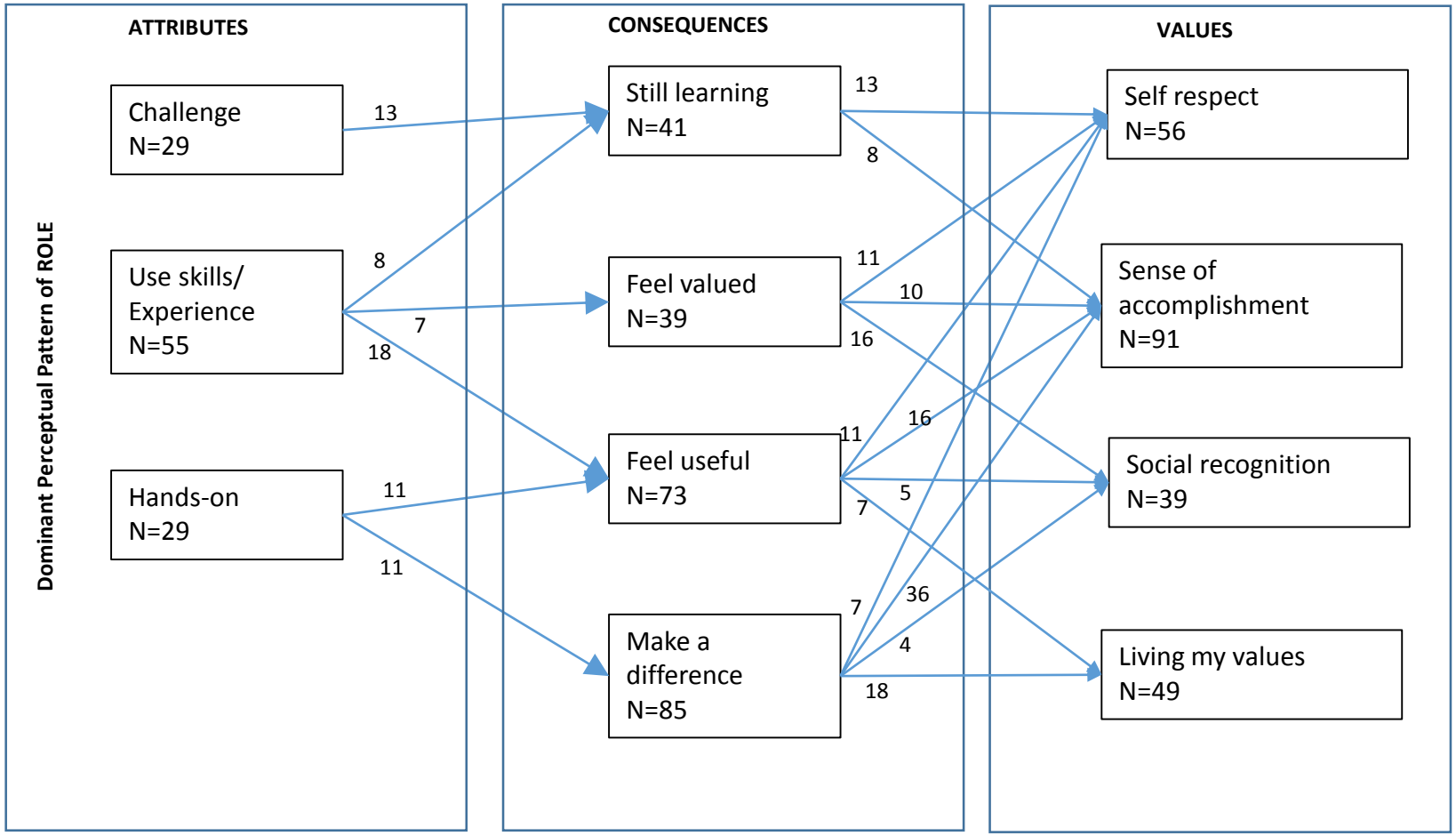

Figure 3. Dominant perceptional patterns of 'Cause'

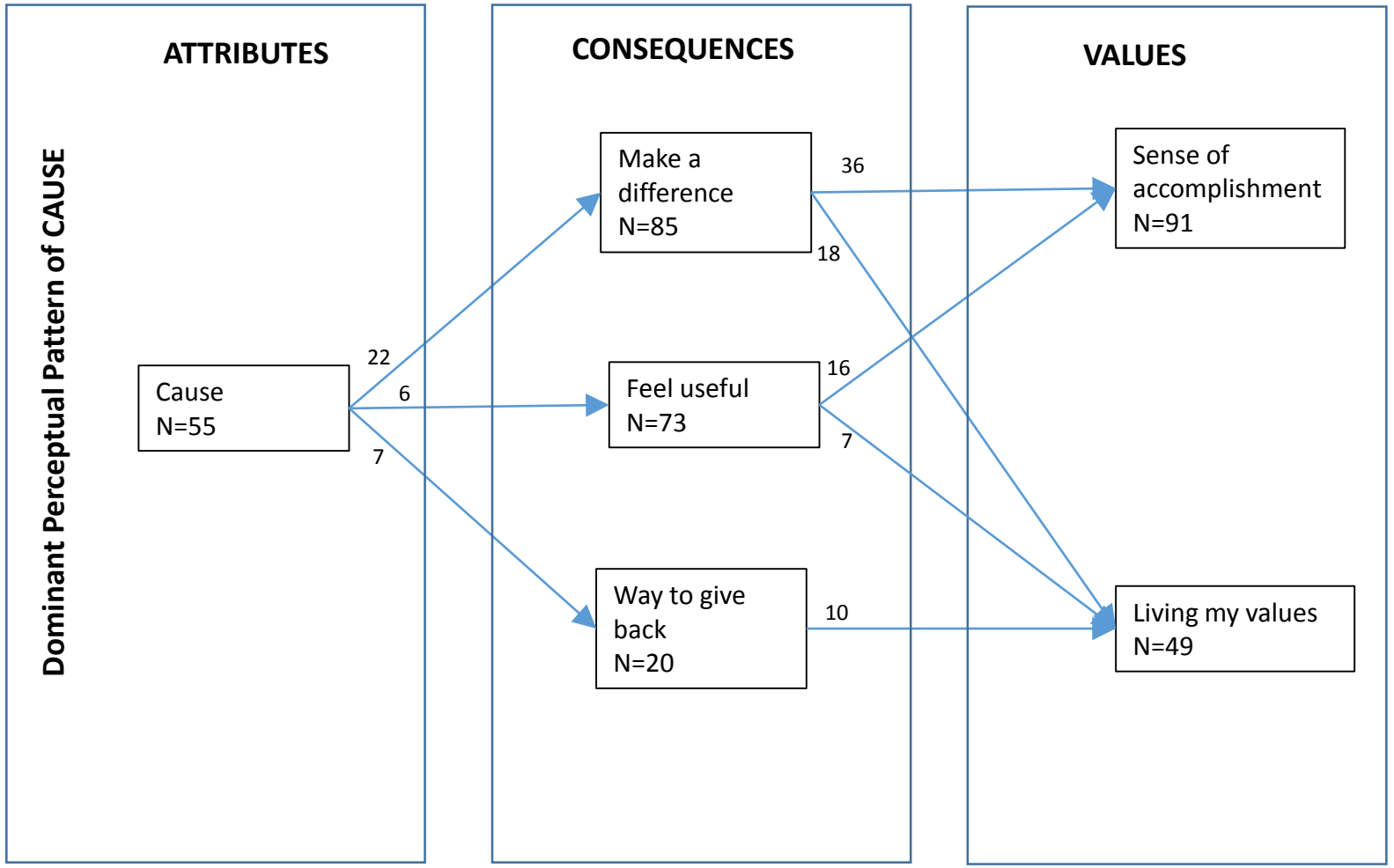

Figure 4. Dominant perceptual patterns of 'Local Convenience and Availability'

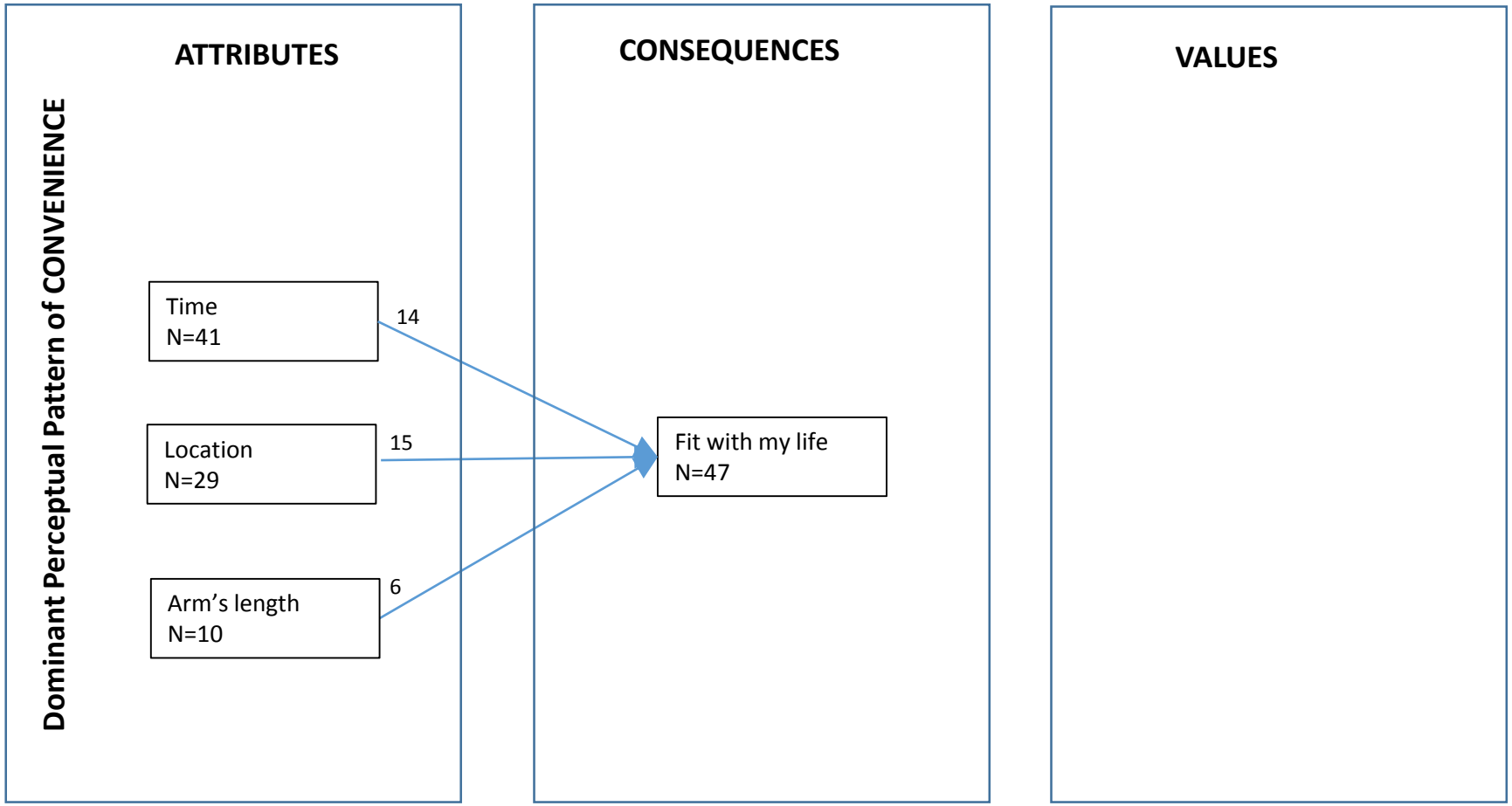

Figure 5. Full hierarchical value map

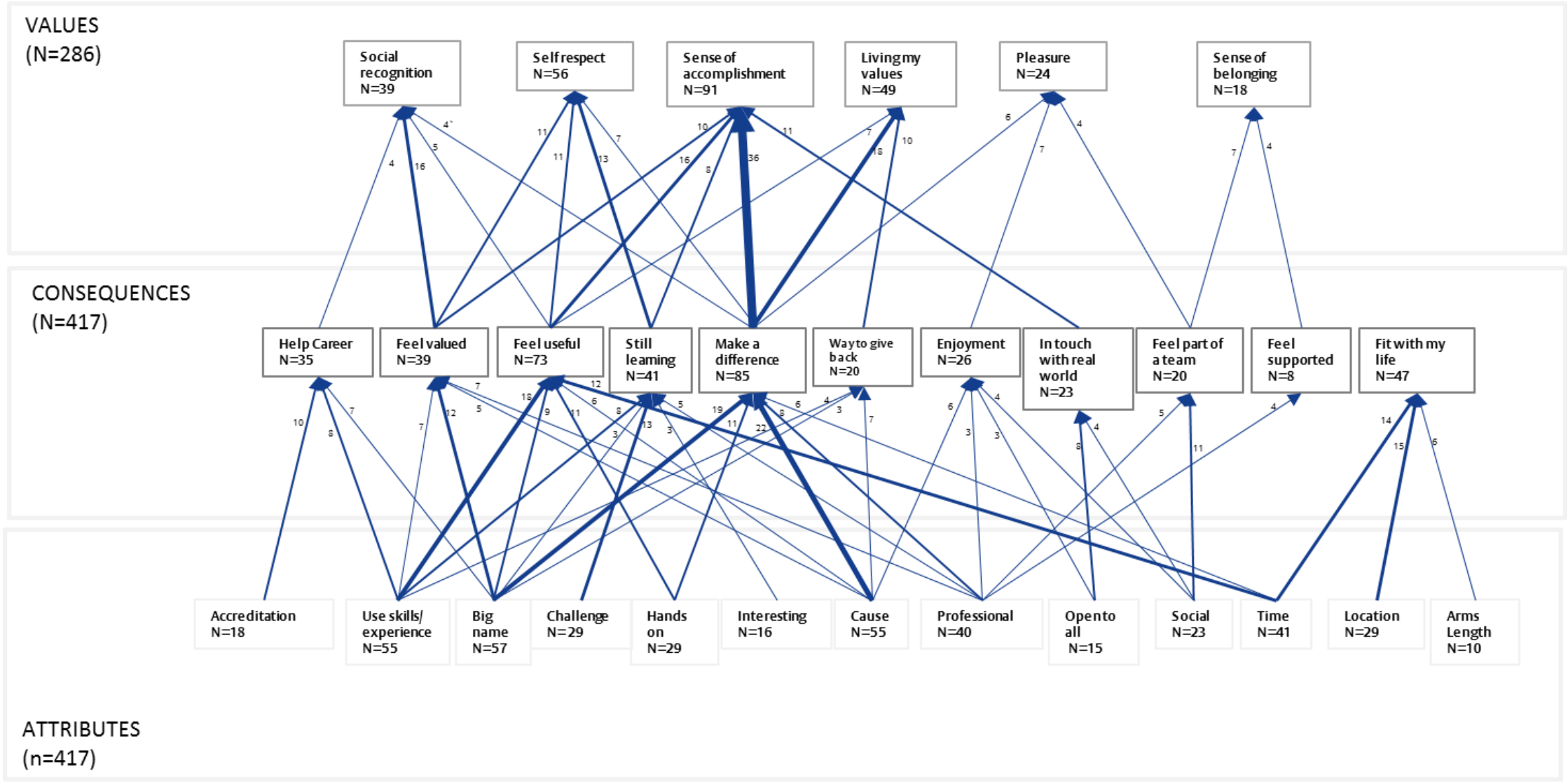

Figure 6. Conceptual framework for supporter choice of nonprofit organisation

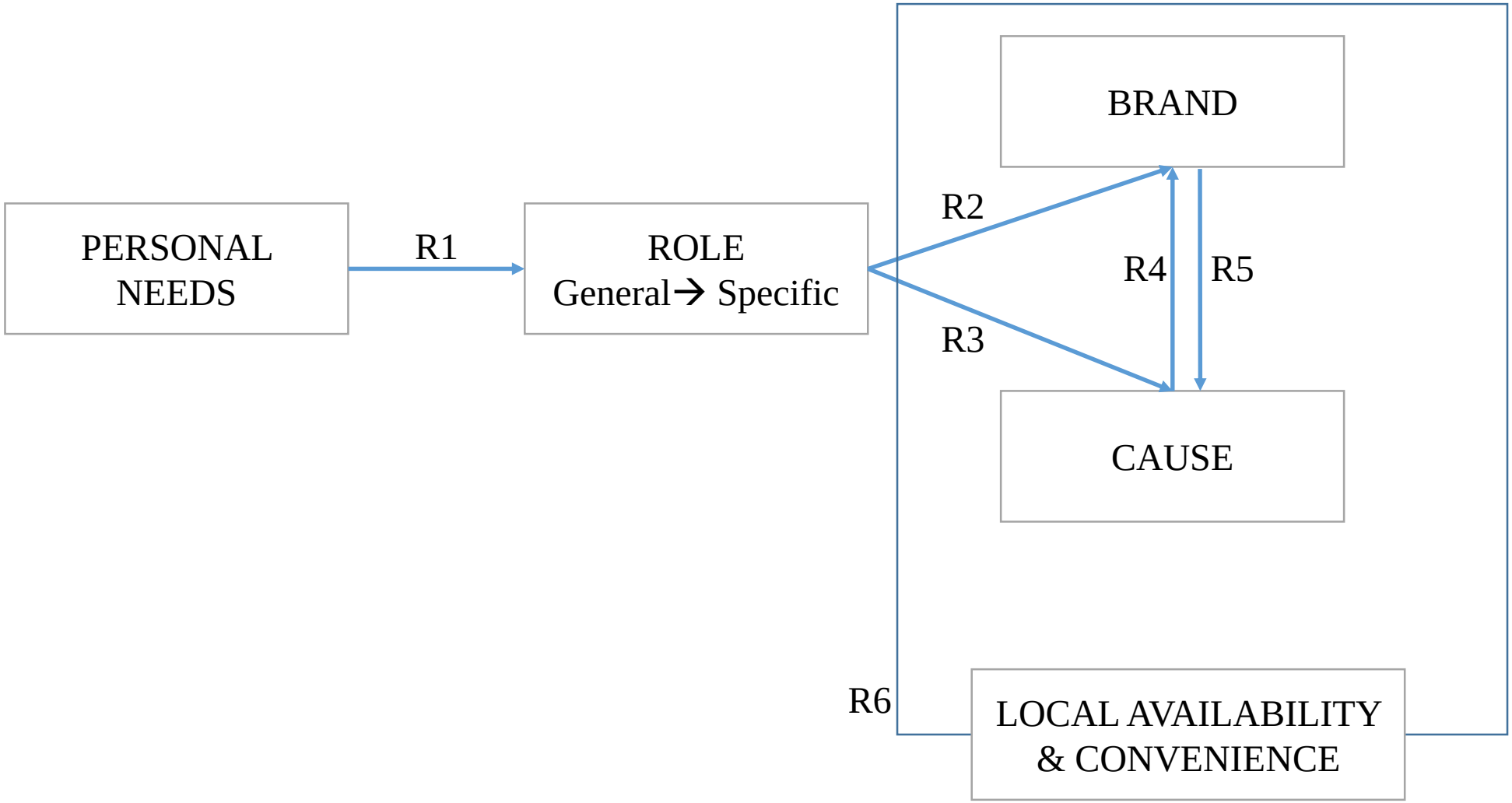

Table 1: Relevant nonprofit decision-making literature

Authors	Needs/ values	Cause	Role	Brand	Availability	Generic or Specific[1]
Wymer & Samu (2002)	√					Generic
Clary et al. (1998)	√					Generic
Mowen & Sujan (2005)	√					Generic
Omoto and Synder (1995)	√					Generic
Michel and Rieunier (2012)				√		Generic
Michaelidou et al. (2015)				√		Generic
Stride & Lee (2007)	√			√		Generic
Venable et al. (2005)				√		Generic
Kylander & Stone (2012)	√			√		Generic
Mitchell & Clark (2019)	√		√			Generic
Hankinson (2001)				√		Generic
Ho & O'Donohoe (2014)	√		√			Generic
White et al. (2016)	√		√			Generic
Finkelstein et al. (2005)	√		√			Generic
Henke and Fontenot (2009)	√	√				Generic
Sargeant et al. (2008)	√	√		√		Generic
Randle et al. (2013)	√	√				Specific
Brodie et al. (2011)		√			√	Specific
This paper	√	√	√	√	√	**Specific**

[1] Whether the research examines generic motivations to support nonprofits or specific choice of a nonprofit organisation.

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Table 2. Means-end chain sample profile and results

	Total	Category 1	Category 2
Sample profile			
Number of participants	51	28	23
Number of organizations	5	3	2
Number of locations	16	8	8
Results			
Total complete ladders (A-C-V)	221	112	109
Total direct relationships	703	372	331
Number of direct relationships: attribute-consequence (A-C)	417	229	188
Number of direct relationships: consequence-value (C-V)	286	143	143

Category 1 – Three NPOs supporting Children and Young People

Category 2 – Two NPOs providing Advice and Listening support.

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Table 3. Implication matrix

IMPLICATION MATRIX COMBINED DATASET			CONSEQUENCES										VALUES						
			Feel Useful	Feel Valued	Still learning	Make a difference	Help career	Fit with my life	Feel part of the team	Feel supported	Way to give back	Enjoyment	In touch with real world	Self respect	Social Recognition	Sense of accomplishment	Sense of belonging	Living my values	Pleasure	Excitement
	Thematic code number		14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31
ATTRIBUTES	OPEN TO ALL	1	0.00	1.00	1.00	2.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	3.00	8.00	0.00	0.00	0.05	0.00	0.04	0.00	0.00
	SOCIAL	2	1.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	11.00	2.00	0.00	4.00	4.00	0.01	0.00	0.04	0.04	0.00	0.04	0.01
	CAUSE	3	6.00	5.00	2.00	22.00	3.00	3.00	0.00	0.00	7.00	6.00	1.00	0.06	0.01	0.13	0.02	0.10	0.00	0.00
	LOCATION	4	4.00	0.00	0.00	2.00	0.00	15.00	4.00	0.00	1.00	1.00	2.00	0.01	0.01	0.00	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02
	SKILLS/EXP	5	18.00	7.00	8.00	4.00	8.00	2.00	0.00	1.00	4.00	1.00	2.00	0.06	0.04	0.13	0.00	0.01	0.01	0.01
	PROFESSIONAL	6	4.00	7.00	5.00	8.00	1.00	3.00	5.00	4.00	0.00	3.00	0.00	0.04	0.03	0.04	0.03	0.03	0.02	0.01
	CHALLENGE	7	4.00	0.00	13.00	5.00	1.00	1.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	2.00	2.00	0.10	0.00	0.09	0.01	0.00	0.01	0.01
	HANDS ON	8	11.00	1.00	2.00	11.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	2.00	0.01	0.03	0.08	0.01	0.04	0.01	0.01
	ARMS LENGTH	9	0.00	0.00	1.00	1.00	0.00	6.00	0.00	0.00	2.00	0.00	0.00	0.02	0.03	0.00	0.00	0.02	0.00	0.00
	BIG NAME	10	9.00	12.00	3.00	19.00	7.00	2.00	0.00	0.00	3.00	2.00	0.00	0.05	0.10	0.04	0.01	0.05	0.04	0.02
	ACCREDITATION	11	2.00	2.00	2.00	0.00	10.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	1.00	0.00	0.02	0.02	0.01	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	TIME	12	12.00	3.00	1.00	6.00	3.00	14.00	0.00	0.00	2.00	0.00	0.00	0.02	0.02	0.05	0.00	0.06	0.02	0.00
	INTERESTING	13	2.00	0.00	3.00	5.00	1.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	2.00	2.00	0.01	0.00	0.05	0.00	0.01	0.02	0.00
CONSEQUENCES	FEEL USEFUL	14	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	11.00	5.00	16.00	1.00	7.00	2.00	3.00
	FEEL VALUED	15	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	11.00	16.00	10.00	2.00	2.00	2.00	1.00
	STILL LEARNING	16	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	13.00	3.00	8.00	1.00	0.00	2.00	2.00
	MAKE A DIFFERENCE	17	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	7.00	4.00	36.00	1.00	18.00	6.00	0.00
	HELP CAREER	18	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	6.00	4.00	1.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00
	FIT WITH MY LIFE	19	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	3.00	3.00	1.00	0.00	2.00	1.00	0.00
	FEEL PART OF A TEAM	20	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	7.00	0.00	4.00	1.00
	FEEL SUPPORTED	21	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	2.00	4.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	WAY TO GIVE BACK	22	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	2.00	3.00	2.00	2.00	10.00	0.00	0.00
	ENJOYMENT	23	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	4.00	0.00	4.00	7.00	0.00
	IN TOUCH WITH REAL WORLD	24	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	11.00	0.00	5.00	0.00	2.00

Explanatory note for the reading: The data is presented in the format 'XX.YY' where XX is the direct relationship count and YY the indirect relationship count. Implication matrices are traditionally shown in this way. For example, overall there were 18 unique direct relationships between people wanting to use their skills/experience (attribute code 5) with 'Feel useful' (consequence code 14), shown as '18.00' in the implication matrix. Likewise, there were 11 unique direct relationships between 'Feel useful' (consequence code 14) and 'Self-respect' (values code 25), shown as '11.00'. The indirect relationship link attributes and values. For example there were six unique complete ladders that started with 'Use skills and experience' and, through various consequence routes, ended with 'Self-respect' (shown as '00.06' in the Implication Matrix). Some of these will have taken a decision path through 'Feeling useful'.

Table 4. Data examples for each framework relationship

RELATIONSHIPS	DRIVER	EXAMPLE (where Ch1v3 refers to Charity 1 volunteer 3)
Relationship 1: Need → Role	Personal values and needs met through role acquisition	*"I think as you get older you do have to feel you are somebody. You know I think when I retired ... I suddenly thought, well who the hell am I?"* Ch1v3
	Choice of specific volunteering role meets specific values/ needs	*"I'm much more hands on. I'd rather do a hands on thing."* Ch4v2
Relationship 2: Role→ Brand	Decision to volunteer leads to salient brand	*"Because obviously it's a big charity and it's well heard of and it's well respected and it just feels good."* Ch3v8
	Automatic choice where NPO is associated with specific volunteering roles	*"I read through key things that attracted me. There wasn't any status. It was quiet, you do it behind the scenes. You just come into the center."* Ch5v10
Relationship 3: Role→ Cause	Decision to volunteer for personally relevant cause	*"I just thought I'm sure with a little bit of support there are families out there where they wouldn't end up in care. For me I didn't have a good time in care."* Ch1v8
	Cause known for that type of volunteering	*"I feel very passionate about the particular role of being a* [charity/role]." Ch2v8
Relationship 4: Cause→ Brand	Most salient brand within that cause	*"I know the staff well so I thought this is the best place to volunteer because I know them."* Ch3v4
	Typical brand selected	*"I suppose I would have thought anything else would have been not quite so good."* Ch5v13.
	Local brand selected	*"I think it's more giving back something to the community."* Ch1v6
Relationship 5: Brand→ Cause	Personal connection to specific brand (cause as consequence)	*"Because I was a regular visitor here ... I feel comfortable here. I know the staff well so I thought this is the best place to volunteer because I know them."* Ch3v4
	Strong brand awareness drives behavior rather than cause	*"I think they're in a league of their own. In a lot of respects they... it's such a unique thing that we do, there's no other charity that really offers the same support."* Ch4v3
Relationship 6: Moderator - Local Convenience	Practical convenience of time and location as moderator of choice.	*"I wouldn't want to travel far to do it. I am quite happy that it is local."* Ch1v4

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Table 5. Future research avenues

PROPOSITION	RESEARCH AVENUES
P1: The decision to volunteer for one NPO rather than another is anchored in meeting higher order needs and values.	To what extent do the personal needs and values met by volunteering differ by cause sector? How do the personal needs and values met by volunteering for large NPOs differ from volunteering for smaller NPOs? To what extent do the personal needs and values met by volunteering for national NPOs differ from volunteering for local NPOs? Which (combinations of) needs and values are most effective in segmenting volunteers, beyond traditional life-stage definitions? Which options are considered as alternative ways to meet those personal needs and values instead of volunteering: effectively what is volunteering competing with? To what extent does the understanding about the importance of meeting personal needs and values challenge traditional volunteer recruitment strategies?
P2a: People volunteer for well-known brands to ensure time will be used effectively. P2b: People volunteer for well-known brands due to the perceived impact on their self and social identity.	Is there a threshold of brand saliency above which an NPO is considered by volunteers to be well-known? To what extent does the size and scale of organization contribute to an NPO being well-known? Can a relationship be determined between media spend and being perceived as well-known by volunteers? In the nonprofit context, what attributes contribute to an organisation being well-known? In what way does volunteering for a well-known organisation impact self-identity? In what way does volunteering for a well-known organisation impact social identity?
P3a: People select a role to support nonprofits depending on which personal needs and values they want to meet. P3b: The decision about choice of role, such as volunteering, comes before brand or cause.	How do the personal needs and values met by volunteering roles differ, such as service-delivery, fundraising, retail, and governance? How much consistency is there amongst volunteers in their perception of personal needs and values met by a specific type of volunteering role? To what extent do the personas of volunteers who make an automatic choice of NPO compared to those consider a range of options differ? How likely is it that alternative volunteering roles are considered before choosing service-delivery roles? Does the choice of a specific role come before brand or cause when the volunteer is open to a range of volunteering role types? Are there any situations when volunteers considered alternative ways to support a specific NPO, such as donating, prior to their decision to become a volunteer?
P4: Emotional engagement with the NPO is most closely linked to cause.	Does the strength of emotional engagement by current volunteers vary by cause? Are there specific characteristics of current volunteers who are strongly emotionally engaged with their NPO? What are the characteristics of the four stages of the emotional engagement spectrum?

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	Is there any evidence of organisations being able to move current volunteers further down the spectrum of emotional engagement? Are there particular triggers or events that move volunteers from one level of the emotional engagement spectrum to another?
P5: Local availability and convenience of volunteering roles acts as a constraint on, not a driver of, NPO choice	What underpins the definition of convenience from a volunteer perspective? What is the relationship between proximity and flexibility of time/day on definitions of convenient roles for volunteering? What is the relationship between perceived local availability of volunteering roles and the type of decision-maker the person is, for example maximiser or satisficer? Which type of roles lead to a volunteer not wanting to 'live on the patch' and what is the subsequent implication for volunteer recruitment strategies?
Overall framework	To what extent does the volunteer decision-making journey vary by cause sector? To what extent does the volunteer decision-making journey vary by size of organisation? To what extent does the decision-making journey vary for other stakeholders, such as donors or advocates? To what extent does the decision-making journey vary by type of volunteering role, such as retail or fundraising? How much of an impact does prior level of engagement with an NPO have on the decision-making journey? Are there distinct characteristics of the competitive set of choices considered by the volunteer at each stage of the decision-making journey? What are the drivers of an NPO being synonymously known for brand and cause? To what extent are NPO brands that are synonymously associated with cause more likely to be sector leaders? When a volunteer identifies a cause and then brand, what is the advantage for an NPO in being the sector leader? For volunteers that choose brand and then cause, how likely is it they had an existing relationship with that brand? How stable is the relationship between brand saliency and sector typicality in volunteer perceptions of large NPOs? For volunteers that choose brand and then cause, how likely is it that the NPO is the sector leader? To what extent does being unsuccessful in gaining the volunteering role of choice alter perceptions of that NPO? How likely is it for people who were unsuccessful in gaining their first-choice volunteering role go on to successfully gain a volunteering role with another NPO? Of the people that were unsuccessful in gaining the volunteering role in the NPO of their choice, how likely is it they then did not apply for other volunteering roles? In what ways should traditional methods of surveying volunteers be adapted in the light of these findings on the less salient, more personal motivations for volunteering revealed through the laddering technique?

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