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Rethinking nonprofit brands through a volunteer lens: time for B2V

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Rethinking Nonprofit Brands through a Volunteer Lens: Time for B2V.

Authors: Sarah-Louise Mitchell[a] and Moira Clark[b]

Corresponding Author: [a] Dr. Sarah-Louise Mitchell

Affiliation: Oxford Brookes University,

Email: smitchell@brookes.ac.uk,

Address: Room CLC 2.34, Oxford Brookes Business School, Oxford Brookes University, Headington Road, Oxford, OX3 0BP, UK.

Tel: (+44) 1235 762384. **Fax:** (+44) 1865 485830

[b] Professor Moira Clark

Affiliation: Henley Business School, University of Reading.

Email: moira.clark@henley.ac.uk

Address: Marketing & Reputation Department, Henley Business School, Greenlands, Henley-on-Thames, RG93AU

Rethinking Nonprofit Brands through a Volunteer Lens: Time for B2V.

Abstract

Many nonprofit organisations (NPOs) deliver their services and mission through volunteers. Brand has been shown to be a powerful influence on the decision to volunteer. What was not known was the role brand plays in volunteer choice *between* NPOs. Understanding this enables NPOs to be more effective at attracting the volunteers they need, particularly given limited budgets. Using Framework Analysis with a large qualitative sample, this paper contributes to that gap in knowledge.

The research identifies three constructs driving volunteer choice of NPOs, sources of Brand Knowledge, level of Brand Engagement, and the behavioural process of choice, labelled Brand Discovery. Through exploring the relationship between these constructs, the study points to significant implications for NPOs for volunteer recruitment, importance of brand presence, and competitive set.

Summary statement of contribution. The study makes several contributions to theory and practice. It extends volunteer motivation theory to examine nonprofit brand choice. It builds on Symbolic Consumption Theory and Decision-Making Theory to define patterns of volunteer decision-making behaviour. It describes automatic, explicit, or considered decision-making despite high involvement behaviour. As a result, the research calls for a new perspective on nonprofit brands when seen through a volunteer lens, described as Business to Volunteer (B2V).

Key words: Not for profit marketing, brand equity, interviewing, volunteer, decision-making, marketing management.

Rethinking Nonprofit Brands through a Volunteer Lens: Time for B2V.

1. Introduction

Nonprofit organisations (NPOs) need to attract resources to survive. These are not simply financial but, for many organisations, also include attracting and retaining volunteer time to enable them to deliver their mission. In the UK, 22% of people volunteer formally at least once a month and 27% informally. The voluntary sector contributes £17.1 billion to the national economy and spans more than 160,000 organisations (NCVO, 2019). NPOs compete for these resources directly, with other NPOs with similar missions or roles, and indirectly, with other uses of people's time. Knowing how to appeal to potential new volunteers, often with minimal marketing communication and research investment, is fundamental to enabling the NPO to attract the resource they need. However, this is not just understanding why people volunteer, but particularly why they would volunteer for one brand rather than another.

Academic understanding of donor choice is well underway (Konrath & Handy, 2018; Rempel & Burris, 2015). In contrast, research into volunteer choice has been anchored in motivational literature, interrogating why people decide to volunteer generically (Dury et al., 2015; Hyde, Dunn, Bax, & Chambers, 2016) and the benefits they gain in return (Stukas, Hoye, Nicholson, Brown, & Aisbett, 2016). Volunteer choice of NPO is, of course, not just driven by brand – people are attracted to causes that mean something to them (Henke & Fontenot, 2009), to support roles that best meet their needs (Finkelstein, Penner, & Brannick, 2005), and to opportunities at convenient times and locations (Brodie et al., 2011). However, brand *has* been shown to be a strong driver to donate time in the nonprofit context (Michaelidou, Micevski, &

Cadogan, 2015; Michel & Rieunier, 2012). What is not yet understood is the role that brand plays in volunteer choice *between* NPOs.

For the first time, this paper contributes a deeper understanding of the way volunteers learn about nonprofit brands (NPB), and how that knowledge impacts their choice of organization. It extends our understanding of the role of brand in enabling and driving volunteer choice between organisations in the nonprofit context, so fundamental to NPOs to sustain service delivery and achieve their mission. The paper argues that given the importance of attracting volunteer resource, there is a strong case for considering NPBs through the lens of these volunteers. It identifies that, despite the increasingly blurred lines between nonprofit and for-profit, the sector remains distinctive due to its values, mission, and volunteer base. It therefore calls for an extension of the for-profit concepts of Business to Business (B2B) and Business to Customer (B2C), to a new concept of Business to Volunteer (B2V). Through a thematic literature review, it draws upon what is already known about decision-making, and the role of brand, within the nonprofit context. It identifies the need for exploratory research to better understand how volunteers choose between brands. It presents the findings from a large qualitative study, investigated through Framework Analysis. Finally, it concludes with implications of the results for theory and practice.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 Context Definition and Distinctiveness

Wide-spread variation in terminology adds complexity to the context, with labels including charity, voluntary organisation, social enterprise, not-for-profit, independent sector, and third sector. This paper identifies ‘nonprofit’ as a description that is widely adopted within the industry and agrees with the definition of NPBs as existing:

> "*to provide for the general betterment of society, through the marshalling of appropriate resources and/or the provision of physical goods and services.*" (Sargeant, 2009, p8)

This fundamental difference in purpose is at the heart of the distinctiveness of the sector, combined with an anchoring of NPBs in the values and beliefs of their stakeholders, both external and internal (Frumkin & Andre-Clark, 2000). Hankinson (2001) describes the NPB as 'organisation *plus'*, that is the functional attributes of the cause plus their symbolic values, their beliefs. NPBs that are founded upon, and consistent with, their values enable trust to be built with their stakeholders (Sargeant & Lee, 2004). There are three additional, clearly observable, differences between nonprofit and for-profit organisations. The first is the complexity of the multivalent stakeholder relationships (Mitchell & Clark, 2019), where the person directly paying for the service is rarely also the beneficiary of the service – purchase and consumption are detached. The second concerns a tension around competition, where NPBs with similar missions may practically compete for resources such as donations and volunteer time but also collaborate to achieve a wider societal impact, such as Breast Cancer Awareness Week or the Disaster Emergency Committee (DEC). Finally, many NPOs are characterised by a reliance on volunteer resource to deliver services. The extensive 'Pathways Through Participation Report' (Brodie et al., 2011) identified that while some people volunteer consistently, "*others have peaks and troughs in their participation that often mirror their life stage and critical moments or turning points in their lives*" (p8). The authors identify the people may stop volunteering due to practical factors, such as changing jobs, family responsibilities or moving home. This is also echoed in the study of Red Cross volunteers by Hustinx (2010), which identified that people quit due to time pressures of work, family, and leisure. They may also stop for experiential reasons, such as having a negative volunteering

experience (Ho & O'Donohoe, 2014). Given this turnover of volunteers, without effective volunteer recruitment and retention strategies, the very sustainability of the NPO is under threat (Hyde et al., 2016).

Together, these characteristics make the nonprofit sector distinct (Mitchell & Clark, 2019), despite increasing professionalism and adoption of 'business-like practices' (King, 2016; Maier, Meyer, & Steinbereithner, 2016; Silard, 2018), including the management of volunteers (Nichols, 2013; Ward & Greene, 2018). This market orientation has brought a growing recognition of the importance of developing brand differentiation and stakeholder engagement to attract resources within this increasingly competitive environment (Macedo & Carlos Pinho, 2006; Randle, Leisch, & Dolnicar, 2013).

2.2 Role of Brand within the Nonprofit Context

The importance of brand in driving choice of NPOs has been well documented. In particular, Michel and Rieunier (2012) identified four distinct components of nonprofit brand image as usefulness, efficiency, affect, and dynamism. Together, they exhibited a strong relationship with intention to give, accounting for 24 per cent of the intention to donate time and 31 per cent of money. Subsequently, Michaelidou et al. (2015) extended the nonprofit scale to include efficiency and ethicality, strengthening the explanatory power of brand image on nonprofit choice, now explaining 54 per cent of time donations and 51 per cent of money. However, neither study examined choice *between* NPOs. In particular, they did not consider the importance of brand in attracting volunteers or donors to one organisation rather than another.

Developing a strong brand generates trust in the 'invisible purchase' (Mort, Weerawardena, & Williamson, 2007). The brand enables stakeholders to make choices between NPOs with

similar missions (Hankinson, 2001, Mitchell & Clark, 2020). Randle and Dolnicar (2011) subsequently explored volunteer choice of NPBs in Australia. Their research explicitly defined choice of NPB by volunteers as a consumer behaviour decision. They identified that volunteers who preferred different NPBs varied significantly in their self-concept. This resonates with the work of Fournier (1998) who considered how the relationships people have with brands can "*reinforce their self-concept through mechanisms of self-worth and self-esteem*" (p345). Anchored in Self-Identity Theory (Fang, Jianyao, Mizerski, & Huangting, 2012; Schembri, Merrilees, & Kristiansen, 2010), the volunteer is saying something about themselves, their values and their personality, through their choice of brand with whom to volunteer. In addition, choice of brand reflects the groups to which they want to belong (Ekinci, Sirakaya-Turk, & Preciado, 2013; Wymer Jr & Samu, 2002). In the non-profit context, volunteering can strengthen their identification with a particular social tribe, for example role in the congregation, role in the community, or role as a parent (Arnett, German, & Hunt, 2003; Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Social ties like these also build trust, reducing the personal risk of the decision through volunteering for an organisation valued by the tribe such as the local parents' association or Christian Aid. Both social- and self-identity motivations drive the symbolic consumption of the brand; that choices about and between brands reflect what the person wants to say about themselves and the groups to which they wish to belong (Wilson & Musick, 1997; Wymer Jr & Samu, 2002). Hoyer et al. (2012) develop Symbolic Consumption Theory through identifying four constructs, all of which have direct relevance for the nonprofit context. The chosen brand gives the person a role, both specific and within society (role acquisition). It might indicate a personal link to brand or mission (connectedness). It says something about the 'tribe' they are identifying with, for

example as a member of a faith community (emblematic). Finally, it demonstrates what that person values as important (expressive).

An important driver of that symbolic consumption of NPB is the level of brand awareness. The relationship between brand saliency and brand choice has been well explored in literature (Ehrenberg, Barnard, Kennedy, & Bloom, 2002; Hoyer & Brown, 1990; Lambert-Pandraud, Laurent, & Gourvennec, 2018). However, for NPBs, brand awareness has been found to be "*the most significant predictor of an individual's level of confidence in the performance of nonprofit organizations*"(McDougle, 2014, p193). Familiarity is at the heart of nonprofit brand strength (Wymer et al., 2016) and has been shown to directly drive donations (Katz, 2018). Arnett's research (2003) into students revealed that the more prestigious the university, the more salient the 'university identity' and subsequent supportive behaviours such as donating. The university research (Arnett et al., 2003) also revealed that for the more prestigious universities the students were more likely to recommend them to other potential students. Given that word of mouth is the most common way for volunteers to find out about a NPOs (Brodie et al., 2011), the potential implication is one of virtuous circle for the more prestigious brands - finding it easier to recruit volunteers who in turn feel proud and want to recruit more supporters.

Clearly, not all NPBs are prestigious. The level of marketing investment and capability across the nonprofit sector covers a wide spectrum but there is increasing recognition of the need for a customer-centred approach to access resources such as volunteers and donors (Andreasen, 2012; Choi, 2014; Liu, Chapleo, Ko, & Ngugi, 2015). Even if the NPO lacks a culture of branding and marketing, it does not mean they lack a brand (Stride & Lee, 2007). The brand is the organisation and the overall experience of stakeholders with that brand is built across

touchpoints and over time (Blades, Macdonald, & Wilson, 2012). Interestingly, it is not simply the frequency of interaction with these touchpoints that strengthens the brand but also the positivity of that experience (Baxendale, Macdonald, & Wilson, 2015). In this way, the relationship with the brand is built upon a series of exchanges, not one-off transactions (Fournier, 1998) which help people understand the personality of the brands which, in turn, enables them to differentiate between organisations (Venable, Rose, Bush, & Gilbert, 2005). What is less well known is how brand touchpoints work in the nonprofit context, particularly where people find out about NPBs.

2.3 Decision-making Drivers of Nonprofit Organisational Choice

Stakeholder choice of specific NPBs is anchored in Social Exchange Theory (Venable et al., 2005); in return for donations of time, money, goods and public support, the personal needs and goals of the individual are met (Rempel & Burris, 2015). These personal characteristics influence *both* the decision-making process and the ultimate choice of NPB.

Given the minimal literature exploring the nonprofit choice process of volunteers, the wider body of decision-making research was explored to identify relevant insights. One important strand of theory considers the relationship between breadth of choice and decision-making process. On the face of it, the more choice there is, in this case the number of possible NPOs with whom to volunteer, the better. Certainly, having some choice has been found to be better for intrinsic motivation than not having a choice (Iyengar & Lepper, 2000). However, this also depends on the type of decision-maker the person is, whether they are maximisers or satisficers. Maximisers are described as searching through all the options available to identify the best fit for their needs, in this case proactively searching all available volunteering roles that meet their requirements of, for example, location, time commitment and role. In contrast,

satisficers search until they find an option is good enough and then decide (Iyengar & Lepper, 2000), in this case choosing the first available volunteering role they find that is a good fit with what they are looking for, including being convenient and the role itself. The implications for the competitive set of NPBs considered by the potential volunteer are considerable; maximisers are more likely to evaluate from a longer list, increasing the time and effort required to make a decision.

Even if the natural tendency of a person is that of maximising decision options, there is evidence that our ability to process that information is constrained by our limited cognitive capacity, known as the 'too much choice effect' (Iyengar & Lepper, 2000; Scheibehenne, Greifeneder, & Todd, 2009). Within the nonprofit context, the plethora of NPBs available creates its own challenges. Extensive search of NPBs can be problematic as potential volunteers not only defer the decision but also tend not to go back to deferred decisions so the opportunity for recruitment is lost (Carroll, 2014). Clustering different organisations, for example by cause, might be a way of helping the decision-maker navigate choices but that partly depends on whether they exhibit maximiser or satisfier behaviour (Mogilner, Rudnick, & Iyengar, 2008; Randle et al., 2013).

In addition, the choice of NPB for volunteering is one made infrequently. Choice of NPB to donate money to is an example of a one-off low involvement decision: donating blood is seen as a one-off high involvement decision (Bagozzi, 1992). Following this logic, a commitment to volunteer formally and regularly would be a high involvement, one-time decision. As a result, the level of involvement can be expected to influence the choice process, for example time taken and number of attributes compared.

Two other areas of decision-making theory inform our understanding of brand choice in the nonprofit context. Firstly, social risk was found to increase decision-making complexity (Xiao, 2016), particularly interesting in the light of nonprofit research around socially risky causes (Body & Breeze, 2016), such as supporting asylum seekers (Hebbani & Angus, 2016). Where there was the element of social risk, people with low self-confidence relied more on external information, such as advertising. In contrast, people with high self-confidence tend to rely on memory and previous judgements, particularly with respect to brands with low social risk (Xiao, 2016).

Secondly, low self-confidence in the decision-making process may be due to the person being a 'novice' rather than an 'expert' on the sector (Mandel & Johnson, 2002; Mogilner et al., 2008). The effect on the decision-making process is considerable: novices have been found to collect and evaluate pieces of information about brands separately rather than the behaviour of experts who 'chunk' information together and compare important attributes with their ideal (Beattie, 1982). The subsequent impact on both competitive set needed and speed of decision-making has significant implications for how people learn about NPBs (Shocker, Ben-Akiva, Boccara, & Nedungadi, 1991).

Therefore, brand has been shown to be an important driver of the decision to volunteer within the sector, underpinned by Symbolic Consumption Theory, especially the impact on NPB choice on self and social identity. The volunteer choice process is also informed by Decision-Making Theory including how people build knowledge of brands over time from a range of touchpoints. However, what remains to be understood is *how* brand contributes to that decision process, specifically choice of one NPB rather than another, and particularly by volunteers, an important but under-researched stakeholder group. Therefore, this research

aims to explore the way volunteers learn about, and choose between, nonprofit brands and in doing so, extend our theoretical understanding of how brand works in the nonprofit context. It also presents a significant opportunity for practitioner impact, through supporting NPOs to better understand their interaction with this volunteer stakeholder group, so vital to their future sustainability. The paper identifies the following research questions to contribute to this important space:

RQ1: How do potential volunteers build knowledge of nonprofit brands?

RQ2: What is the decision-making process for potential volunteer choice of nonprofit brands?

3. Method

The research design considered the particular nonprofit sectors to be included in the sample, the size of organisation, the type of volunteer role, the choice of laddering depth interviews for data collection, and finally, the use of Framework Analysis to identify the findings.

3.1 Sample Selection

3.1.1 Competitive sectors. Two different cause sectors in the UK were chosen to strengthen the generalisability of the research and enable cross-sector comparison. A preliminary interview round with eight nonprofit sector research specialists was conducted to inform the choice of cause sectors. On their advice, 'health' sectors were excluded from the sample as the brand is often synonymous with the cause, such as Alzheimer's UK or Cancer Research UK, and motivation for support is often deeply personal. In addition, causes were chosen where the services were delivered through volunteering in the UK, which ruled out Overseas Development NPOs. The specialists recommended identifying causes where NPBs had to

work hard to build differentiation and support, consistent with research approaches taken by other studies into NPBs (Michel & Rieunier, 2012; Sargeant, Ford, & Hudson, 2008). The sectors selected for this research were 1) children and young people's charities and 2) advice and listening charities. 'Children and young people' is consistently once of the largest charity cause sectors in the UK, both for donations and volunteering. 'Advice and listening' charities were chosen as they are driven by, and well-known for, their volunteer roles. Both these causes depend on successfully attracting volunteers in order to be able to provide their services.

3.1.2 Big brands. Randle and Dolnicar (2011) highlighted an issue within nonprofit research; stakeholders, such as volunteers, could only reflect on a brand effectively if they knew about it, that is if they were above a threshold level of awareness of a particular NPO. Consequently, this research focused on well-known brands, as defined by classification within the top 100 brands of the UK's Charity Brand Index (Harris-Interactive, 2018). Five well-known, national NPBs were approached for the research and all agreed to take part. All the charities achieved their mission by delivering services through formal volunteering roles.

3.1.3 Recent and regular volunteers. The type of volunteer role chosen for the sample was regular, formal, service delivery volunteering. Regular, formal volunteering is defined as an activity taking place at least once a month through a charitable organisation or group (Cabinet-Office, 2013). The rationale for selecting service delivery volunteers was the implied sense of commitment behind the choice, implying a higher level of involvement than, for example, supporting an annual fundraising event (Boezeman & Ellemers, 2007; McNamee & Peterson, 2015). Therefore, it is anticipated that the decision is more likely to be actively considered, and therefore accurately recollected, rather than lower involvement decision-making which

may be more spontaneous. In addition, the criteria for selection of volunteers included only those who had made their choice of NPB less than 12 months prior to the interview, also to maximise accuracy of recall.

Once participation agreement had been gained at national NPB level, permission was sought to approach the area managers and local team leaders. The managers then publicised the project to their teams (with newsletter articles and information sheets produced by the researcher) and asked for volunteers to take part in the research, who then contacted the researcher personally. A summary of the research design is shown in Appendix 1 and profile of partipants shown in Appendix 2.

3.2 Data Collection

Laddering depth interviews were identified as best fit for answering the research questions for two reasons. Firstly, depth interviews enable exploration of the decision-making process of nonprofit brand choice undertaken by the volunteer, an area of theory development (Gephart, 2004). Secondly, through laddering, the researcher is aiming to uncover both explicit and implicit reasons for brand choice.

In total, 51 individual depth interviews were conducted with volunteers from 5 NPBs and across 16 locations. This enabled each cause sector to have at least 20 interviews, considered the minimum ‘cell’ size for Framework Analysis (Ritchie et al., 2014). The interviews were conducted face to face by the authors, recorded, transcribed, and manually coded. The interviews lasted between 40 and 60 minutes. The focus of the discussion was to recollect and reflect on the context and process of the choice of NPB, including reaction by friends and family, personal history of nonprofit support, and external triggers contributing to the decision. A semi-structured interview guide was developed, but also a range of probing

techniques were used including: evoking the situational context including lifestage and any nonprofit brackground, understanding the distinct but parallel behaviour of charitable donations, and using metaphor to describe organisational values (Reynolds & Olson, 2001). These prompts helped avoid the continuous use of the 'why?' question and also revealed the subconscious elements of the decision process, as well as the social context in which the decision was made.

The coding results were strengthened in two ways. Firstly, supporting interviews were conducted with brand and volunteer managers at each of the five participating organisations to facilitate accurate coding and intepretation of findings. Secondly, two independent secondary coders validated the coding, with match scores of 80% using open coding and 85% against the existing codebook.

3.3 Data Analysis

Framework Analysis ('Framework') was identified as the most appropriate analytical method; the matrix format within Framework is attractive as it enables within-case and cross-case comparison (Ritchie et al., 2014), widely used in applied social policy research (Srivastava & Thomson, 2009). The five stage analytical process followed best practice, as outlined by Ritchie et al. (2014): Familiarisation → Generating Thematic Framework → Indexing and sorting → Charting → Mapping and interpretation. In particular, this involves grouping the coded data texts into categories and themes.

4. Findings

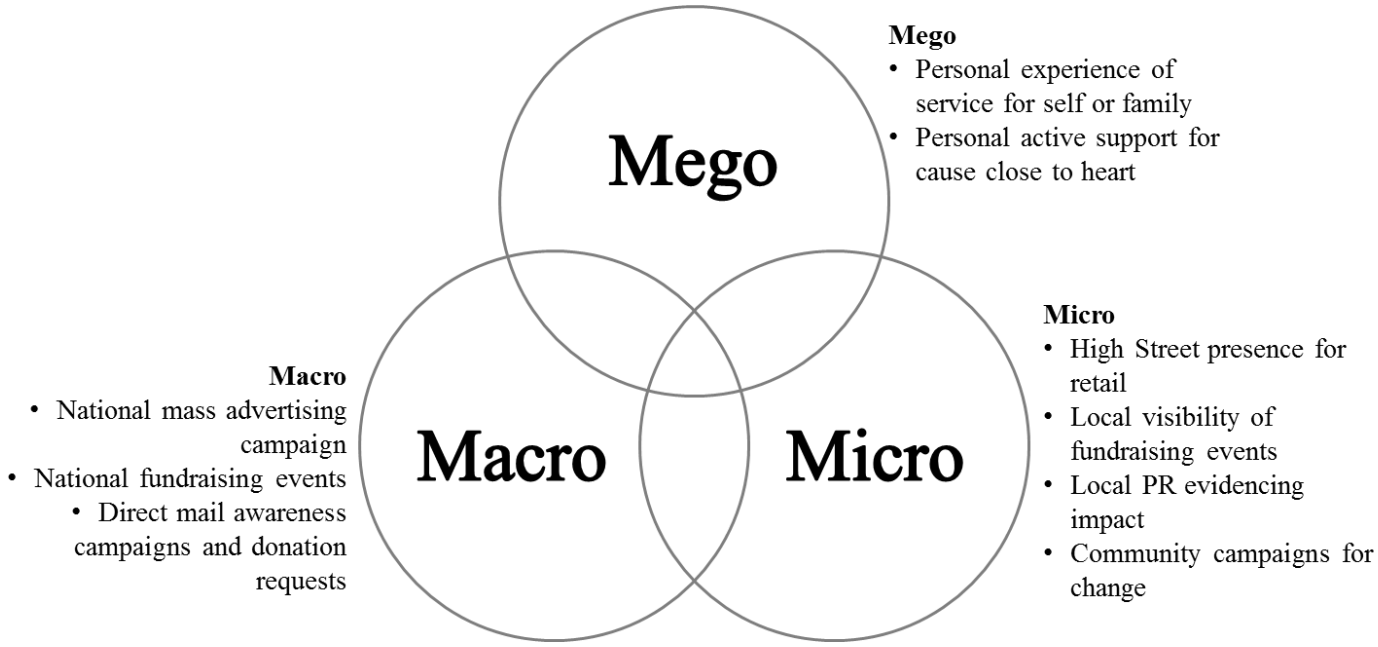
4.1 Emergent Themes

Three dominant inter-related themes, or constructs, emerged from the Framework Analysis: the source of the knowledge about the NPB, the level of knowledge about the NPB, and the way the volunteer makes a decision about the NPB based on that knowledge.

Theme 1 – source of 'Brand Knowledge'

Volunteers described the different ways they found out about NPBs. They recollected brand experiences such as visiting a charity shop, seeing local fundraisers, and/or hearing about the difference a NPB has made to a family member. Despite the significant size of these national brands within the sample, volunteers were as likely to offer local or personal examples as recall major advertising campaigns. These data sources were clustered, then categorised as national, labelled Macro, local community, labelled Micro and personal, labelled Mego. The Macro brand touchpoints include national advertising or fundraising campaigns, mass communication that tends not to be personalised. The Micro brand touchpoints are within local communities, the places where people live and work. There was no evidence of a Meso level, traditionally defined as in the 'middle' between macro and micro, so this has not been included. However, people do find out about NPBs through the personal experience of being supported by a NPB or a family member or close friend being helped. In this research, in the absence of existing terminology, this is labelled 'Mego'. Mego is defined as the individual level, with factors relevant to each person, and builds upon the etymological root of 'ego'. The sources of knowledge about NPBs within the data are visualised in Figure 1 as a Charity Brand Touchpoint Map.

Figure 1: Charity Brand Touchpoint Map



Theme 2 – level of existing 'Brand Engagement'

Given this wide range in potential brand touchpoints, the second dominant theme described the level of knowledge the volunteer had built up about the NPB over time; specifically, whether they knew about, and had engaged with, the NPB they ultimately selected. Three distinct levels were observed. At the point of decision-making, the volunteer either was unaware/minimally aware of the brand, had some knowledge of the brand, or was already well engaged with the brand. Table 1 defines and describes these three levels of Brand Engagement as Brand Ignorant, Brand Aware, and Brand Wise.

Table 1: 'Brand Engagement' levels

Brand Engagement	Definition	Data example	Label
Engagement Level 1	Potential volunteer has knowledge of charity brand beyond just the name, often from range of touchpoints.	*"I think it's because I knew a fair bit about it. My sister had done it and really enjoyed it, felt it was really fulfilling, things like that. I just felt that was a better use of my time than just fundraising for a random charity."* Ch2v2	BRAND WISE
Engagement Level 2	Potential volunteer has heard of the specific charity and generally knows what it does.	*"I think if you have been involved in children helping at school, you hear about it, you kind of pick up on it because it is the kind of thing I am interested it."* Ch1v8	BRAND AWARE
Engagement Level 3	Potential volunteer had not heard of the brand before volunteering there (or using their services prior to volunteering).	*"I didn't when I first came. She just said there was a baby group on, that was it. So obviously when I turned up I found out it was the* [Brand]*."* Ch3v2	BRAND IGNORANT

Theme 3 – the process of 'Brand Discovery'

The final theme concerned the behavioural process of brand choice for volunteering, subsequently labelled 'Brand Discovery'. The theme described whether the volunteer proactively identified a specific brand to support, whether someone at the NPO asked the potential volunteer if they would be interested, if the choice was made in reaction to an

external stimulus such as an advertisement, or if it emerged from a search shortlist. These categories of behaviour, within the Brand Discovery theme are defined and described in Table 2. Shorthand labels of Seek, Sought, See (and hear), and Search have been added to classify the four key behaviour types observed. For clarity, the 'See' discovery behaviour was sub-divided into passive, such as seeing promotional material, for example an advert on Facebook, or active, such as being recommended by a friend (word of mouth) (Buttle & Groeger, 2017).

Table 2: Description of 'Brand Discovery' behaviour types

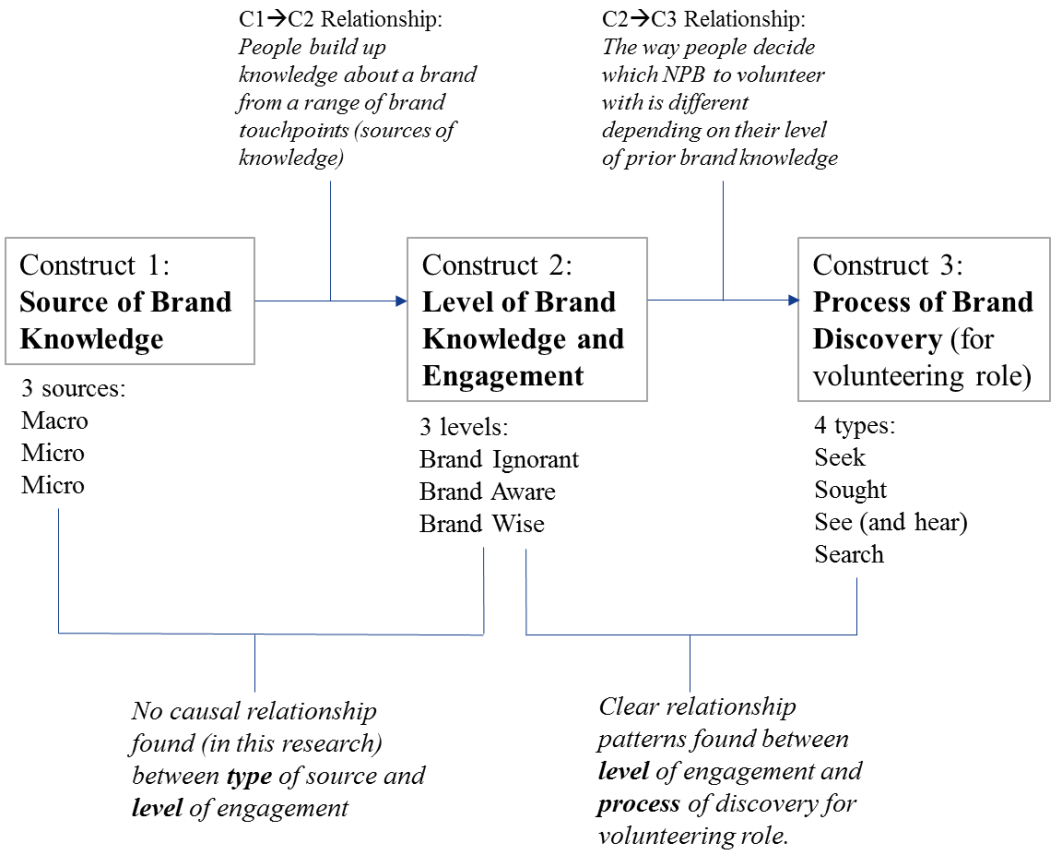
Brand Discovery	**Definition**	**Data example**	**Label**
Behaviour 1	The volunteer seeks out a specific charity brand to find out how to volunteer with them.	*"Then I decided well, you know, if I can do that, if I can become a counsellor maybe I should think about doing* [Charity]." Ch4v1	SEEK
Behaviour 2	The volunteer is asked by someone within the charity if they would be interested in volunteering for them.	*"We had come to open play day in the summer holidays and they was just saying like if anybody would like to volunteer, then come and see and I did straight away."* Ch3v1	SOUGHT
Behaviour 3	Volunteer learns about the specific charity through seeing some marketing material (passive) or hearing through word of mouth (active).	***"****It's more about gut feeling for me. And through my son's school attached to a newsletter one day was a support for parent's leaflet. And it just jumped out at me and I thought, oh, yeah, that sounds interesting."* Ch1v4	SEE (AND HEAR)

Behaviour 4	Charity search is self-generated, proactive, and wide ranging. It is often on-line either through search engine or volunteering portals such as 'Do It'.	*"So I was looking on the internet for just mentoring roles and I couldn't really find any, and I came across this role, and I read something about it and … straight away I knew that it was something that I believed in."* Ch2v8	SEARCH

4.2 Emergent Relationships

Framework methodology protocol, as clarified by Ritchie et al. (2014), then requires intra-thematic mapping to understand interactions and relationships between themes. Figure 2 illustrates the three constructs and the relationship between them. People build up levels of knowledge and engagement about NPBs (construct 2) from a range of sources, brand touchpoints (construct 1). Based on that brand engagement (construct 2), they have different ways of discovering and deciding (construct 3) one NPB with whom to volunteer.

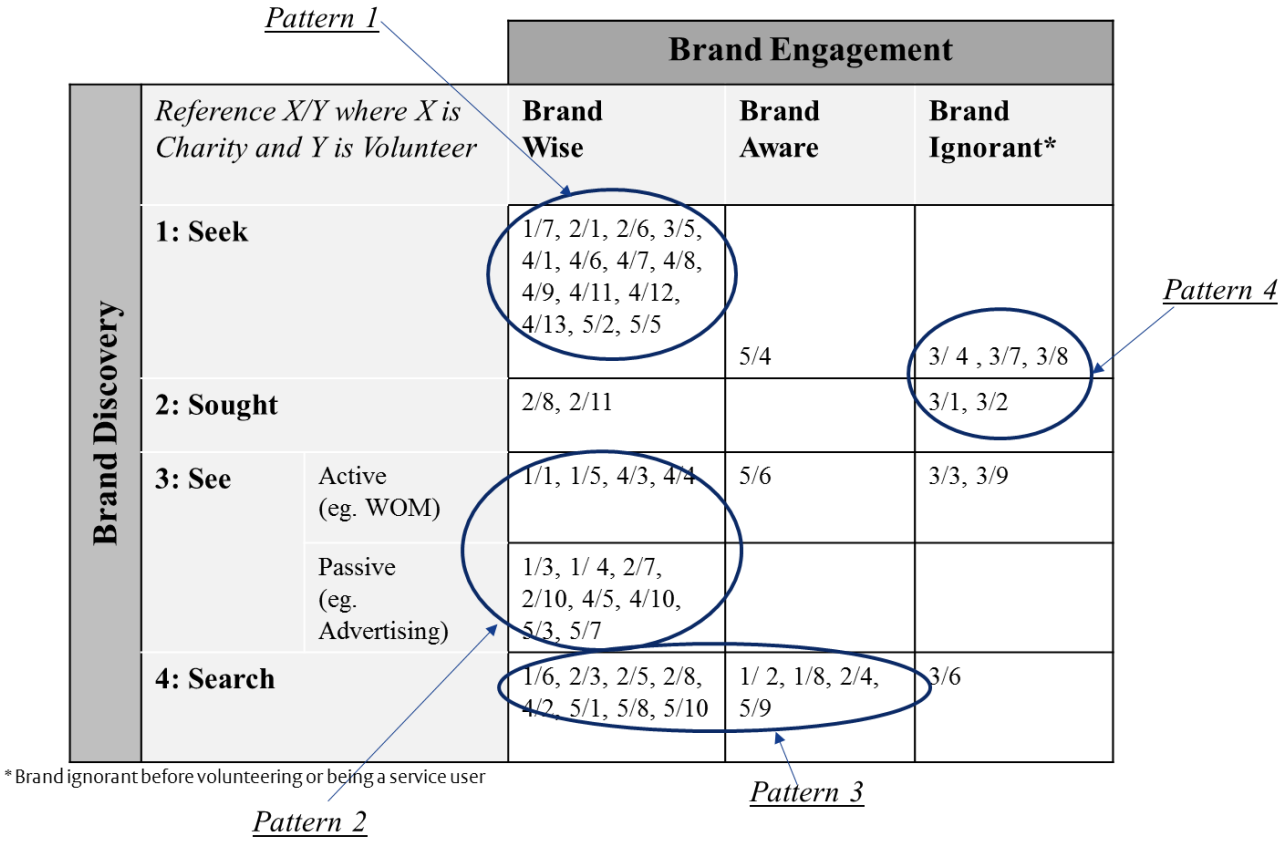
Figure 2: Construct relationships underpinning volunteer choice of NPB.



In particular, within construct 1, the individual *sources* of Brand Knowledge, were not found to be causally related to construct 2, the level of Brand Engagement. That is, the volunteers in this sample did not make a direct connection between *where* they found out about the NPB and *how much* they knew as a result, or their subsequent behaviour of choice.

However, a relationship was identified between construct 2, the level of Brand Engagement and construct 3, the process of Brand Discovery for volunteering. The patterns within this relationship are illustrated in Figure 3. The volunteers are identified as x/y where 'x' is reference for the NPB and 'y' is the reference for the individual volunteer.

Figure 3: Mapping 'Brand Discovery' behaviour type with 'Brand Engagement' level.



The mapping process revealed four decision-making patterns within the data.

Pattern 1: Brand Wise/Seek

The dominant pattern was for volunteers to seek out a brand they already knew well. This was not behaviour stimulated by a trigger; it was based on prior brand knowledge. The brand choice was specific and automatic. There was little evidence of alternatives considered or choice within a competitive set. Brand saliency and reputation at that moment of decision-making were paramount.

> *"*[They] *would always... have ticked up first given the choice because I knew what they did ... so it's something that I didn't have to go and research."* Ch5v10

Their brand knowledge had been built over time, from a variety of touchpoints (Beattie, 1982). At the point of decision-making, that knowledge becomes relevant and the volunteer seeks out the charity they believe will meet their needs.

Pattern 2 - Brand Wise/See

The second pattern was the role of brand to trigger action when prompted, either through word of mouth (active) or through seeing a leaflet or advert (passive). A decision is then enabled by the subsequent fact-finding route taken, usually contacting the charity to assess the role against their needs. Volunteers spoke of a moment of serendipity.

> *"I just saw the ad and then talked to my counsellor who strongly encouraged me. I strongly believe I saw it for a reason. That it was fate."* Ch2v7

> *"It was something that straight away I knew … I believed in."* Ch2v8

This pattern reveals two behavioural effects. Not only did it stimulate them into making the volunteering decision but also, they did *not* consider alternative brands. Their existing brand knowledge provided a shortcut, effectively reducing information processing through representing a recognised bundle of functional and emotional attributes. In addition, the familiar brand acted as a risk reducer, the volunteer believes their time will not be wasted.

Pattern 3- Brand Wise & Aware/Search

The third observed pattern relates to the role of brand to enable differentiation between choices, whether within or across categories.

> *"I got on the computer …* [they] *just sort of standout … I knew of them and they've got their shops and everything."* Ch1v6

> *"The fact that it's* [brand] *stuck at the top of the search list as well probably made me think that's certainly something worth pursuing."* Ch1v7

This is supported by marketing theory that argues brands are more likely to be selected from a cluttered choice environment if they have strong brand awareness (Smith, 2011).

Pattern 4 - Brand Ignorant/Sought & Seek

Although the identification of these three relationships is new, the findings strongly resonate with theory. However, the fourth appears anomalous but can be explained; where the volunteer has not heard of the brand but still seeks them out for volunteering or responds positively to being asked. All the responses within this pattern came from one organisation, Charity 3. This major national children's charity did, like the other four participating organisations, have national communication campaigns, a high street retail presence, and delivered local services. However, it also suffered from a lower level of brand saliency. The Head Office (HO) interviews revealed the organisational policies supporting this pattern. The first HO policy was to encourage and accept volunteers who needed to complete a set number of volunteering hours for a further education course.

> *"Why I joined* [charity] *was because I had to complete 150 hours volunteering work in order to apply for the midwifery course. That is how I came to finding about the children's centre."* Ch3v9

In the case of children's centres, it is the cause and role, rather than the specific brand, which are drivers for them, particularly as external signage branding is often deliberately low and

charity ownership frequently changes which restricts their ability to build local brand awareness. They are known for what they do rather than who they are. Engagement is at a local level, rather than with the national organisation.

Another, smaller, volunteer cluster was existing service users. For NPOs that offer children's services, such as playgroups, or adult services, such as domestic violence courses, people are experiencing the brand from within. Across the sample of 51 volunteers interviewed, five had previously been service users (within charity 3 and also charity 1). Even if they had no brand knowledge prior to being a service user, the perception of the organisation is built through their experience, particularly interaction with the staff and volunteering team who personify the NPB,

> *"Because I was a regular visitor here, I feel part of my life is in the children's centre. I feel comfortable here. I know the staff well, so I thought this is the best place to volunteer because I know them."* Ch3v4

This is facilitated by a second HO policy: one where improving the lives of their volunteers is part of their charitable mission. This is operationalised through encouraging service users to become volunteers, and therefore gain work experience but also helping with job references and access to higher education courses. It also demonstrates the importance of harnessing service users as potential volunteers.

5. Discussion

Brand is clearly not the only driver of nonprofit organisational choice; it contributes to the decision with personal needs and values, role, cause, and local availability (Mitchell & Clark, 2020). However, brand has been proven to be important (Michaelidou et al., 2015; Michel &

Rieunier, 2012). What remained to be understood was *how* the decision about brands and between brands is made when seen through a volunteer lens. Therefore, this research builds upon the body of literature on volunteering generically, to examine the second stage of the decision – choice of specific NPB with whom to volunteer. The large qualitative sample, use of clear laddering technique and rigorous coding process, including secondary coders, give confidence in this contribution to knowledge.

Research question 1: How do potential volunteers build knowledge of nonprofit brands?

This research contributes a new conceptualisation of brand touchpoints for the nonprofit context. Volunteers build knowledge of NPBs through a combination of three sources: national labelled Macro, local community labelled Micro, and personal labelled Mego. Despite brand touchpoint research in other contexts (Baxendale et al., 2015), this was under-explored for NPBs.

Brands with strong above the line budgets and professionally integrated marketing campaigns obviously have a greatly enhanced ability to communicate at the Macro level. Likewise, for NPBs with a significant retail component, their visibility on the high street acts as a constant Micro reminder. However, each potential volunteer will experience the brand differently and over time, their unique implicit knowledge built from these sources (Merrilees, 2016). For example, someone with a strong personal connection to a particular brand will be anchored in the Mego section but that knowledge may be reinforced by national advertising and local events.

The second construct identified in the research was the level of brand knowledge and engagement built up from these touchpoints over time. The implications of strengthening this understanding are considerable. According to the familiarity heuristic, brands that are more

familiar are chosen more quickly and easily even from a wide range of options (Beattie, 1982; Sundaram & Webster, 1999). Prior to the decision to volunteer, the dominant pattern from this research was for people to be 'Brand Wise', that is they already had an understanding of the organisation, beyond simple brand awareness. This degree of familiarity eases their decision-making process rather than having to compare and contrast different options. In effect, the effort of processing information about the brand, the behavioural cost, has been reduced. Therefore, this research contributes to a more holistic understanding of nonprofit brand touchpoints. It sheds light on the importance of local brand visibility and personal brand experience, in addition to the much-researched effects of national advertising on brand choice.

Research question 2: What is the decision-making process for potential volunteer choice of nonprofit brands?

For the first time, this research identifies the existence of different patterns of decision-making behaviour by volunteers in the choice of NPB. Two key constructs, Brand Engagement and Brand Discovery are identified as driving choice. Through understanding the interaction between these constructs, patterns of volunteer decision-making behaviour were observed. Three levels of prior brand knowledge were identified, and described as Brand Wise, Brand Aware, and Brand Ignorant. People who did know about the brands (Brand Wise and Brand Aware) had accumulated knowledge over time and from different sources. This builds upon theory on how people make decisions, based on implicit brand knowledge, built up from a range of sensory signals and touchpoints. However, with the exception of Hankinson (2001), there has been little academic insight into the application of this implicit, brand sense theory to NPBs.

The third construct, Brand Discovery, considers the process of choice for volunteering. From theory, it could be anticipated that the commitment to volunteer would follow the pattern of a high involvement decision, particularly given the significant time involved in regular and service-delivery roles explored in this sample. High involvement implies both the presence of alternatives, a competitive set from which to evaluate best fit, and also a measured decision-making process. For the volunteers who exhibited explicit 'Search' behaviour, the alternatives either emerged from an internet search or specific volunteering website such as 'www.doit.org.uk' or proactive search of individual charities of interest. 'Search' involved a more considered and time-consuming process.

Two types of volunteers within this sample did follow a pattern that was consistent with Involvement Decision Theory (Kapferer & Laurent, 1993). These were *novices*, with minimal previous exposure to the category, who therefore need to actively seek out information, and *role seeking* volunteers needing to fulfil volunteer hours required for a college course or to enhance their career through work experience. These volunteers could not make an automatic choice of organisation as they lacked awareness and understanding of NPBs. Instead, both groups used a more explicit and rational decision-making process developing a conscious competitive choice set, potentially driven by cause and moderated by local availability and awareness.

However, what is more interesting was the greater number of volunteers whose decision-making behaviour was one of *automatic choice*. For the volunteers exhibiting the three behaviours labelled 'Seek', 'Sought', and 'See' there was no evidence of a competitive set at the point of decision-making, shown in Figure 4. Despite the significant time commitment

involved in regular service-delivery volunteering, the process of choice for these three behaviours was surprisingly quick and easy.

Figure 4: Brand choice in relation to competitive set

			Brand Engagement		
			Brand Wise	**Brand Aware**	**Brand Ignorant**
Brand Discovery	**Seek**		Automatic choice Pattern 1	Some evidence of pre-consideration	No consideration set Pattern 4
	Sought		Automatic choice Pattern 2	Not present	
	See	Active (eg. WOM)			
		Passive (eg. Advertising)			Not present
	Search		Evidence of consideration set Pattern 3		No consideration set

This research contributes two potential explanations for this behaviour, typicality and connectivity. Strong charity brands leading their sector become an automatic choice, underpinned by First Choice Brand Effect Theory (Hubert & Kenning, 2008). For these brands, awareness and understanding has built up over time generating credibility and embodiment of the generic category goal, for example, supporting underprivileged people overseas or protecting wildlife from extinction. Michel and Rieunier (2012) refer to this as typicality. High typicality means the organisation is perceived as representative of the sector and the more representative the perception, the higher the intention to donate time or money. For charities synonymous with a particular type of work the implied effect is one of automatic choice (Le Roux, Thébault, Roy, & Bobrie, 2016). Thought provoking support for this thesis comes from a different field; Barwise and Meehan (2004) argue brands win consumers

through being ‘simply better’ at delivering the generic category benefits. This effect is further strengthened through the positive reputational benefits of high awareness. The more the volunteer has heard of the charity, the more important they perceive it (McQuail, 1985; Zajonc, 1968). The volunteers are, in effect, ‘leader-lovers’. Therefore, despite the personal cost in terms of time commitment, for some decision-makers the choice of brand is automatic. Given the importance of brand saliency in consumer choice, there is a significant prize for being category leader; being top of mind when the category is being considered, enabling an automatic choice rather than a considered choice amongst alternatives.

Secondly, for brands framed by a specific cause, the brand and/or cause may exhibit close personal connectivity to the decision-maker (Mogilner & Aaker, 2009). Stakeholder time is freely given in return for help received in the past, either directly to themselves or their wider family and friendship group, or as a ‘down-payment’ for help anticipated in the future. This finding resonates with the connectedness function within Symbolic Consumption Theory (Hoyer et al., 2012). In this case the decision-making behaviour is also automatic, made without consideration amongst a competitive set.

Therefore, two patterns of decision-making have been identified through this research – the *automatic choice* of cause leaders and personally relevant brands as well as the *explicit search* by skill acquisition seekers and novices. In addition, within the nonprofit sector there are a plethora of charity brands that fall outside these two cases. The type of *considered choice* these volunteers make will depend on whether they are maximisers or satisfiers (Iyengar & Lepper, 2000), particularly to avoid the negative effects of having too much choice (Carroll, 2014). The decision-making process is complex but illustrated through patterns two and three (shown in Figure 3). Considered choice builds on personal exposure and experience of the

brand across a combination of touchpoints. Therefore, one implication of identifying the Brand Discovery construct is to enable nonprofit organisations to be re-classified from a volunteer perspective. Traditionally, NPBs have been categorised at cause level, for example 'health', or sub-category level, for example 'cancer', with the implication that they compete for resource with other nonprofits within that cause. There has also been research on classification at 'cluster level', for example church or leisure (Randle et al., 2013), with implications for brand consideration. However, building on the work of Mogilner et al. (2008), there is an argument now for NPBs to be re-categorised by volunteer decision-making process. Building on the three volunteer behavioural segments (automatic, explicit search and considered) identified through this research, and drawing on decision-making theory (Iyengar & Lepper, 2000; Mogilner et al., 2008), six volunteer typologies can be developed, shown in Table 3. Volunteers who choose the sector leader (leader-lover) or have a personal connection will make an automatic choice. Volunteers who are novices to the nonprofit context, or looking for a particular role/number of volunteering hours, make a choice after an explicit search of options. The remaining volunteers make a considered choice from a competitive set list, the length of which varies depending on whether they are maximisers or satisficers in their decision-making style.

Table 3: Re-categorising nonprofit brands through volunteer decision-making process

Volunteer decision-making process	Description	Volunteer Typology
Automatic choice	Despite significant personal time cost of regular volunteering, choice of organisation is made quickly and easily based on prior knowledge or personal connection.	Leader lover Personally connected
Explicit search	Conscious search of NPB options available due to lack of prior knowledge.	Novice Role seeker
Considered choice	Implicit brand knowledge and of alternatives evoked at point of decision making and compared to personal need and local availability.	Maximiser Satisficer

The ultimate goal for NPBs is for potential new volunteers to select their brand automatically. Strengthening the pathways to enable that automatic choice includes through demonstrating typicality and category leadership or framing through personal connections.

Therefore, this research extends beyond traditional theories of rational choice, based on evaluation within a competitive set, to contribute six typologies of volunteers categorised by decision-making behaviour, with the subsequent implications for reclassification of NPBs.

6. Implications for Practice

This research contributes to practice through considering NPBs through a volunteer lens. The deployment of marketing theory and practice from the commercial sector to the nonprofit context is increasingly prevalent (Modi & Mishra, 2010) as the competition grows for

resources such as volunteer time, financial donations, service users, and high calibre staff (Randle et al., 2013). However, there are distinctive characteristics of the sector, such as volunteer resource and the non-economic mission, which require a different mind-set. There has been a tendency for practitioner insight to be geared towards understanding donor decision-making behaviour, due to the tangible payback on measuring campaign effectiveness (Bennett, 2007; Faulkner, Truong, & Romaniuk, 2015; Rempel & Burris, 2015; Sargeant & Shang, 2016). Volunteers are an oft overlooked resource for nonprofit organisations but they are vital for future sustainability. For the NPB constantly needing to recruit new volunteers, the challenge is not to understand why people volunteer but why they would choose their brand instead of another.

Therefore, this research calls for practitioner focus to move away from application of the for-profit models of 'Business to Business' and 'Business to Consumer' towards a context-relevant 'Business to Volunteer' (B2V) approach: to understand how and why volunteers make choices *between* nonprofit businesses. Through adopting a B2V mind-set internally, the NPB not only recognizes the importance of volunteers as a fundamental enabler to achieving the mission, but also considers the distinct characteristics of the nonprofit sector within which they operate.

The specific contributions of the research to practice are driven by, and distinctive due to, that volunteer lens. They explore the source and level of brand knowledge at the point of decision-making and map this against the behaviour of decision-making. Four dominant patterns of behaviour for volunteer choice of NPB were identified. Only one involved search and choice from amongst a competitive set ('Search'). NPB knowledge has been found to build over time to enable instinctive and automatic decision-making behaviour at the moment of volunteer

choice. Automatic decision-making in response to a charity specific trigger is exhibited where there is strong brand knowledge and/or emotional connection to the cause or brand. For a sector where discussion about brand still sits uneasily for some, the research also contributes to theory though identifying the role of brand in NPB decision-making. The brand acts as shorthand for the bundle of tangible and intangible attributes, enabling cut through at the point of decision-making.

The data identified that the decision-makers had gathered brand knowledge from a variety of touchpoints over time. At the moment of choice, the volunteer either sought out the charity with strong personal meaning for them or responded to a charity specific trigger such as seeing a poster or hearing about them. The final behaviour type identified was decision-making based on simply being asked. The novices and role seeker lack knowledge about the brand so have to explicitly search for it. For the others, despite the significant commitment being made, a rapid decision can be made as it accesses a body of brand knowledge already stored in their subconscious. At the point of decision-making about the charity with which to volunteer, that knowledge becomes relevant.

The brand behaviour segments (Table 2) and volunteer typologies (Table 3) identified through this research present practitioners with an alternative to the life-stage approach to recruitment. It enables them to consider their current brand strength against their volunteer recruitment needs. In particular, it demonstrates the importance of building brand awareness over time through a variety of touchpoints.

> *"The fact that it's a well-known name is very important, because people have confidence in it"* Ch4v5

Considering the B2V approach and framing the marketing challenge of recruitment through the lens of the individual volunteer, carries significant implications for the communication frame around the brand. The research presents a simple segmentation mapping level of Brand Engagement onto the behaviour of making the volunteering choice. The segmentation can be used directly to understand current and potential volunteer behaviour, identifying where future opportunities lie. For example, if current volunteers talk about the moment of serendipity, as several in this sample did, then low cost communication techniques such as local posters and leaflets can be just the trigger the potential volunteer is looking for. Likewise, understanding the different way people found out about the charity brand, over time, and then plotting the information onto the Charity Brand Touchpoint Map will support charities in identifying where their marketing budgets are visible and effective.

7. Limitations and Future Research

The research focuses on, and is therefore limited by, the nonprofit context. Specifically, it focuses on volunteer choice of NPB and does not explore volunteer retention strategies. However, these limitations present a rich seam for future research. The research identifies two key constructs of stakeholder decision-making behaviour, Brand Engagement and Brand Discovery and offers significant opportunity for replication with small and medium sized charities, different volunteering roles, and other nonprofit sectors such as health.

In addition, the research develops a new model for understanding the sources of nonprofit brand knowledge, labelled the Charity Touchpoint Map, which lends itself to future studies to understand how and where stakeholders discover NPBs - and how well that correlates with marketing investment. The paper argues for the need to develop the concept of ‘Business to Volunteer’ (B2V), to provide both greater theoretical insight and practitioner benefit into the

behaviour of choice by this important stakeholder group. Opportunities to extend this B2V concept include the theoretical development of volunteer typologies and development of accessible ‘know-how’ guides for NPBs. In addition, this paper calls for further research to extend the understanding of automatic brand choice at the moment of decision-making, based on prior brand knowledge, into the broader domain of business support for social causes.

Appendix 1: Research Design Summary

Research Characteristic	Research Design	Research Reality
Sample size	20 volunteers for each "cluster" recommended for Means-End Chain (Reynolds, 1985; Valette-Florence & Rapacchi, 1991)	Achieved – 51 volunteers, cluster size 20+
Contrasting clusters	Two	Achieved – 1) Children & Young People 2) Advice & Listening
Face to face interviews	All (to build trust)	Achieved
Critical mass of brand awareness	All five within top 100 UK Charity Brand Index (Harris-Interactive, 2018)	Achieved
Service delivery volunteers	All volunteers in sample to be delivering services rather than fundraising or retail	Achieved
Regular, formal volunteers	Defined as volunteering at least once a month through an organisation or group	Achieved (majority volunteered weekly)
Personal voluntary decision to volunteer	Volunteering as community service, learning disability work programmes or employer placement schemes excluded.	Achieved
Recent volunteers	Volunteers joined in last 12 months	Achieved but re-defined as 12 months since accepted/ started training due to long lead times on training and recruitment.

Appendix 2: Sample Profile

Fieldwork Classification	**Category 1: Children & Young People**			**Category 2: Advice & Listening**		**Total NPOs**
	Charity 1	**Charity 2**	**Charity 3**	**Charity 4**	**Charity 5**	**5**
Number of interviews completed	8	11	9	13	10	51
Number of women	8	7	9	10	8	42
Number of different towns/cities	2	3	3	3	5	16
Youngest volunteer	26	18	23	25	25	n/a
Oldest volunteer	68	63	70	54	65	n/a
Number 55 years old +	4	1	2	0	7	14
Average age of volunteer	51.9	40.3	40.0	37.5	54.2	44.1

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