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# Applying the Brand Community Concept in the Nonprofit Sector

*The Case of Junior Achievement Ireland*

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## **Abstract**

In this paper, we aim to investigate the benefits of the application of a brand community strategy into a nonprofit organization (NPO), as well as the strategies that the NPO could adopt in order to facilitate the creation of such a community.

We review the challenges and opportunities of using marketing strategies in the nonprofit sector. With increased competition in the “third” sector, it has become ever more important for nonprofit organizations to engage in branding and marketing activities, which traditionally has been reserved for for-profit enterprises.

We study the brand community concept presented in the paper by Muniz and O’Guinn (2001) and aim to see how a brand community can be beneficial for a volunteer based nonprofit organization. We extend the brand community concept to the nonprofit sector by using the charity brand community model introduced by Hassay and Pelozo (2009). We study the case of Junior Achievement Ireland, an educational volunteer-based NPO. By gathering data from in-depth interviews and attending brand events, we found promising traces of the brand community markers from our analysis.

Combining interviews with volunteers and theoretical research, we argue that a brand community will lead to an increase in brand awareness as well as assisting in volunteer recruitment and retention. Moreover, we believe that such a strategy will increase brand equity and will facilitate the creation and preservation of strategic partnerships. Finally, we provide practical suggestions in how volunteer based NPOs can facilitate brand community creation.

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# 1 Introduction

Non-profit organizations (or NPOs) are becoming increasingly confronted with market pressures that have traditionally been reserved for organizations in the for-profit sector. NPOs face competition for volunteers, donations and the funding needed to fulfil their mission and meet the expectation of their stakeholders (Andreasen & Kotler, 2003). They now have to differentiate themselves in terms of mission, service offered and practices in order to compete for scarce resources (Voeth & Herbst, 2008). For this reason, NPOs are increasingly looking into marketing strategies in order to withstand competition pressure and become more efficient from an organizational perspective (Kylander & Stone, 2012). Important factors such as brand awareness, relationship management and public relations have proven to be highly useful for this growing sector (Dolnicar & Lazarevski, 2009). Nevertheless, marketing and branding still have a marginal role in the for-profit sector, due to a general scepticism coming from nonprofit leaders. In fact, it is important to be aware of the differences in the application of marketing strategies in the nonprofit sector compared to a for-profit environment, for which most of the theoretical frameworks have been created for. Gaining knowledge on how to apply a marketing theory in the “third” sector is therefore imperative in order for the strategy to be effective.

A marketing and branding framework that has gained popularity in the for-profit sector in the last decades is the “Brand Community” notion. First introduced by Muniz and O’Guinn (2001) building on past research on consumption communities, the Brand Community is defined as “a specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand” (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001). The brand community concept has been largely researched for commercial brands but little research has been done on brand communities built around nonprofit brands. We argue that an adoption of this strategy can be highly beneficial for an NPO in overcoming major organizational challenges and building a sustainable organizational model.

The purpose of this paper is therefore to use the theory of the brand community, presented in the article by Muniz and O’Guinn (2001), and apply it to an organization in the nonprofit sector. We aim to investigate how such a branding strategy can be beneficial for a nonprofit organization, and we focus our research on volunteer-based organizations.

In particular, we study the case of a volunteer based NPO, Junior Achievement Ireland. JAI is a successful nonprofit organization that operates in the education sector in Ireland with a unique operational model based on partnership with large companies based in the country.

Understanding how the concept of brand community translates into the nonprofit sector as well as how such a strategy could be beneficial in achieving the organizational mission is crucial for the strategy to be successful. The outcome of this research will therefore act as recommendations for those organizations that understand the potential of a brand community strategy and want to engage in branding activities to be competitive and successful in today's market conditions.

## **1.1 Research Gap**

Brand Community as a branding and business strategy is a well-researched and understood concept for consumption brands. The model suggested by the well-known article by Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) has largely contributed to the academic research and endless managerial implications. Several other papers like the one by McAlexander & Shouten, (1998) have shown how communities that revolve around a brand can lead to strong loyalty, brand awareness and organizational efficiency.

However, we believe that the Brand Community concept applied to the nonprofit has been much less researched and probably understood to a lesser extent. However, the fact that such a popular and successful strategy did not get much attention from academics and experts in nonprofit management is not surprising. Many nonprofit leaders still perceive marketing as a "business activity", and are sceptic about putting in practice any branding strategy, afraid of forgetting their mission and their nonprofit values of cooperation and dedication (Kylander & Stone, 2012).

For the first time, Hassay and Pelozo (2009) introduced the concept of the Charity Brand Community, a conceptual model that expands the Brand Community notion to the charity sector. To our knowledge there are no existing research papers based on case studies that build on the framework proposed by Hassay and Pelozo (2009). Therefore, in this thesis we attempt to contribute to the limited research on the application of the Brand

Community notion to the nonprofit sector, providing a case-study research paper that investigate the application and the benefits of the strategy into a volunteer-based NPO.

## **1.2 Research Questions and Goals of the study**

Given the limited research on the concept in the nonprofit sector, we aim to determine how using brand community as a marketing strategy can be beneficial for a nonprofit organisation. By addressing this, we attempt to answer why a manager should be interested in actively facilitating brand community creation for their NPO. Our theoretical discussion therefore aims to give an overview of the challenges that organizations face when it comes to branding and marketing in the nonprofit sector. We then thoroughly analyze the concept of the brand community for commercial brands according to Muniz and O’Guinn (2001) and for nonprofit organizations according to Hassay and Peloza (2009). Our main research question is therefore:

***How can a volunteer-based Nonprofit Organization overcome organizational challenges by facilitating Brand Community creation?***

In order to address this question we study the case of Junior Achievement Ireland (JAI), a nonprofit organization in the education sector. For our analysis, we interview volunteers of JAI and determine if the mechanisms or “markers” of brand communities are present amongst volunteers. Moreover, we also investigate how these mechanisms can help JAI achieve its organisational mission. Since the brand community is an organizational strategy, we have to determine how it is beneficial by deciphering the organizational challenges that JAI and how the brand community can help overcome them. Even though brand communities cannot be “forced” upon brand users, research has shown that there are ways to encourage community creation around a brand. We therefore aim to provide strategies that non-profit organizations can use to facilitate brand community creation.



### **1.3 Structure**

The research paper is divided into eight chapters. In Chapter 1, we illustrated the background of our research topic as well as the purpose and the aim of this thesis. In Chapter 2, we will provide a theoretical overview of the existent research on branding challenges and opportunities in the nonprofit sector, together with a comprehensive picture of the brand community concept. This is followed by a more detailed description of our research question and our plan on how to address it. Chapter 3 focuses on the research design and the methodology used in the study, along with a detailed explanation of our case study and interview/brand events approach. In Chapter 4, we present our analysis of the data collected during the interviews using quotes from respondents and the brand community's markers as a framework. Chapter 5 discusses our findings and addresses the research question combining the literature review with the results from our study. In Chapter 6, we present our thoughts on managerial implications as suggestions for nonprofit organizations that want to adopt a brand community strategy. Finally, Chapter 7 concludes highlighting the key points of the thesis and illustrating the limitations to our study, providing also ideas for future research.

## 2 Literature Review

In this chapter, we provide an overview of the existing research on our topic, as well as listing and explaining all the relevant theoretical concepts and frameworks that the reader will find in the paper. Moreover, we are also going to point out *how* we are going to use the chosen theoretical notions in our work. This section is therefore a summary of different academic sources all retrieved from peer-reviewed journals, books and relevant websites. At the end of the chapter, we then proceed by introducing more specific research questions that will guide our analysis and discussion.

### 2.1 Brand Management in the NPO Sector: Challenges and Opportunities

The first field of research we are going to explain entails how marketing and more specifically branding is perceived and implemented in a nonprofit setting.

Because of the dramatic increase of nonprofit organizations in the past decades, nonprofit leaders and marketers are beginning to face to new challenges when it comes to achieving their mission (Andreasen & Kotler, 2003). In order to pursue the organizational mission, NPOs have to distinguish themselves from other organizations. This translates in being recognisable: differentiate goals and practices from other organization in the same category (Voeth & Herbst, 2008). The “brand” and “brand management” concepts have therefore acquired a new and crucial role for nonprofit organizations, as they could be very beneficial as a tool to solve organizational challenges.

Traditionally, a "brand" comes to existence whenever someone creates "a name, term, design, symbol, or any other feature that identifies one seller's good or service as distinct from those of other seller" (American Marketing Association, 2015), (Keller, 2003). The American Marketing Association defines brand as a "name, term, design, symbol, or any other feature that identifies one seller's good or service as distinct from those of other sellers" (American Marketing Association, 2015). However, most marketers nowadays agree that the brand concept is more than its “visual identity” and that the concept can be defined in broader terms, as a “psychological construct” that includes concepts of “brand identity” (Aaker, 1996), “brand associations” (Schmitt, 2012), and the “set of perceptions formed about an organisation, company or product, based on all communications, actions

and interactions with it” (Daw, Cone, Merenda, & Erhand, 2010). Taking this comprehensive definition into consideration, a particular NPO with a recognizable identity and offering a service with specific associations can definitely be said to have a “brand”, which is strongly connected with the organization’s reputation for all the stakeholders (Daw, Cone, Merenda, & Erhand, 2010).

In the for-profit world as well as in the nonprofit counterpart consumers (or supporters) identify themselves with the brand, engaging with in a “self-relevant” ways (Keller, 2003). Some argue that the concept of “brand” in the nonprofit sector is even more important than in a for-profit environment (Chiagouris, 2005), as an organisation’s corporate image provides potential supports with important “guarantees concerning the organisation’s efficiency, level of familiarity, and credibility” (do Paço, Rodrigues, & Rodrigues, 2014).

Therefore, in the NPO sector, brands acquire the role of “intangible assets” that becomes even more important when considering how the brand is perceived by the NPO’s audience. In the study conducted by Kylander and Stone (2012), several nonprofit leaders looked at the brand as a “time-saving device, providing a shortcut in the decision making” of the different stakeholders, meaning that if you are familiar and have strong associations with a brand, you are more likely to support it (Kylander & Stone, 2012). Moreover, Mulyanegara (2010) and Napoli (2006) found that the perceived brand orientation (i.e. supporter perception concerning the extent to which an NPO engages in brand activities) is positively associated with the NPO performance and its capacity to fulfil stakeholders’ expectations better than the competition. (Mulyanegara, 2010; Napoli, 2006). Therefore, individuals that perceived an organisation as market-oriented and brand-oriented are more likely to look at that organization as presenting unique and consistent characteristics (Mulyanegara, 2010)

Looking at the research in the field, is therefore easy to understand why many nonprofit brand managers are starting to think that brands do play distinctive role, especially when looking at the “multiplicity of audiences” that NPOs have to address. In fact, strengthening a nonprofit brand can drive long-term organizational goals while reinvigorating internal cohesion (Kylander & Stone, 2012).

## **2.2 Challenges in marketing application for NPOs**

Despite the benefits of having a targeted marketing strategy, NPOs face several challenges when adopting and applying marketing/branding strategies.

Understanding the differences and similarities between marketing in the nonprofit versus for-profit sectors is important for NPO to achieve effective brand management. It is also necessary to know why some NPOs do not actively engage in marketing strategies even if they have the capabilities to do so. “Marketing” is certainly a broad term and Kotler & Levy (1969) argued that all NPOs undertake marketing whether they are aware of it or not, so managers must possess some understanding of it (Dolnicar & Lazarevski, 2009).

The major obstacles that NPOs face when embracing marketing techniques are: (a) non-financial objectives, (b) mission driven, (c) multiple “customers” and (d) a competitive-cooperative relationship with its competitors (Gallagher & Weinberg, 1991). These characteristics, together with the misconception of marketing as a “business activity”, make it very hard to structure an ad-hoc strategy and could lead to refuse of any marketing technique (Dolnicar & Lazarevski, 2009).

While not having financial objectives makes it harder for NPOs to establish a measure of “success”, their “mission driven” nature is a limitation in the application of marketing practices. In fact, their mission (or cause) is defined in advance and cannot be changed depending on the variability of market needs (Dolnicar & Lazarevski, 2009). In the for-profit sector, the goal is to sell a product or service to customers depending on market demand and needs. On the other side, NPOs have a predetermined cause or a mission to achieve regardless of market needs. It is for this reason that one can argue that having a marketing strategy is more relevant in the for-profit sector since their goal depends on customer needs (Chiagouris, 2005). However, it is absolutely challenging to put in practice a marketing campaign just according to the temporary needs of the market, as any other for-profit would do.

Moreover, even counting just the nonprofit “end customers”, who are the main target of the organization; we have clients, donors, volunteers, trustees, committees’ members and the local community. Therefore, the number of stakeholders or “beneficiaries” and the complexity of the environment where NPOs work in are high. Usually, to deal with this

complexity, a NPO decides to focus on one group of stakeholders, depending on the focus and the mission/cause of the organization. However, sometimes the focus is hard to decide, and the organization ends up not having a specific target for its campaigns (Bruce, 1995).

Finally, it is in the nature of the NPO to be based on principles of collaboration and cooperation, instead of competitive forces (Dolnicar & Lazarevski, 2009). Despite the increase in competition due to the growing number of organisations operating in the sector and the limited amount of resources (Ewing & Napoli, 2005), a competitive mindset is still considered disruptive, even unethical (La Piana, 2005). This cooperative nature of the NPO makes it harder to relate to the “oppositional brand loyalty” concept. A loyal volunteer or donor of NPO “Alpha” is implicitly discouraged to compete with other volunteers/donors of the NPO “Beta”.

Another challenge NPOs face when adopting marketing and branding techniques is the lack of extensive knowledge on the topic, usually leading to the absence of a systematic approach. Kotler (1979) describes how NPOs were “rushing into marketing with more enthusiasm than understanding” (Kotler, 1979). Moreover, more than 60% of the respondents in another work by Kotler (1982) agreed that marketing in an NPO environment meant “a mix of selling, advertising and public relations”, revealing the lack of an understanding of marketing at a more strategic level (Kotler, 1982).

In their innovative study, Kylander and Stone (2012) give an original summary of all the challenges explained above, trying to explain the reasons behind common *scepticism* about the role of marketing, and more specifically branding in the NPO sector. Interviewing 73 nonprofit executives in the US, the researchers try to explain the reasons behind this reluctance.

It is important to state that the researchers declare this scepticism as partially legitimate, as it indicated that “nonprofit brands have to be managed differently from their for-profit counterparts” (Kylander & Stone, 2012). In line with this, we argue that despite the fact that an NPO should consider its “brand” as an asset, it is substantially wrong to assume that for-profit rules and frameworks will perfectly translate into the nonprofit environment. According to Guy and Patton (1988), NPOs have to convert marketing

techniques into their own environment, concentrating their efforts to satisfying the needs of their users and donors/volunteers (Guy & Patton, 1989). As mentioned above, the nonprofit sector still lacks of ad-hoc frameworks in management, marketing and branding fields.

Kylander and Stone (2012) identify several sources of scepticism, the first one being the association of branding with the commercial goal of financial gain. Many researchers also worry about the “over commercialization of the sector” (Stride, 2006) which comes back to the “mission-driven” challenge described by Gallagher and Weinberg (1991). Another source of scepticism is the danger of misalignment between branding and organizational values, where branding efforts are carried out as a symbol of “vanity of the organization’s leadership” (Kylander & Stone, 2012). Finally, many nonprofit leaders are reluctant to engage in branding activities because of tension that these actions create in competition with other organizations (Kylander & Stone, 2012). This is again in line with the competitive-cooperative approach outlined by Gallagher and Weinberg (1991).

### **2.3 Marketing as a tool to overcome organizational challenges**

Given the conditions within the nonprofit sector, it would almost be hypocritical to say that an NPO can survive without proactively recruiting volunteers or raising money from donors. As volunteers’ time and donors’ money are limited resources, NPOs must compete with other similar organisations. NPOs have the opportunity to remain loyal to their mission by applying an “ethical competition”, which is a competition “in pursuit of a social mission, never for self-aggrandizement, ego massage or empire building” (La Piana, 2005).

Moreover, it is now clear that engaging in branding activities could facilitate the resolution of many organizational challenges that NPOs face every day. Not only branding is positively associated with the organization performance in fulfilling stakeholders’ expectations, but also brand-oriented NPOs are more likely to be perceived as unique and consistent by their audiences (Mulyanegara, 2010).

The study from Kylander and Stone (2012) describes how, according to more brand-oriented nonprofit leaders, engaging in brand activities has several advantages: (1) increased internal cohesion and alignment on shared values (2) higher credibility and trust

externally (3) higher organizational capacity in attracting resources and social impact. The nonprofit brand plays therefore “different roles with different audiences” in the multitude of the NPO stakeholders.

Internally, the brand is a “manifesto” of the organization’s mission and shared values. Therefore, the brand express the identity of the organization, including its goal and those activities that differentiate it from other NPOs in the same sector (Kylander & Stone, 2012). When engaging in branding activities, the leadership of the NPO communicates to its employees what is the “core” of the organization, why it is relevant and “one-of-a-kind”. Consequently, internal stakeholders are aligned with the leadership’s vision in a “structural integrity”. Eventually, this reinforces shared values and a shared consciousness at an internal level (Kylander & Stone, 2012)

Once the brand identity is well defined, the brand reflects the perception of the several external stakeholders. When the external image (also known as “brand image”) and the internal “manifesto” are aligned with each other, the organization has a clearer brand positioning and can differentiate itself better. The result of this alignment process is that the organization starts to gain more and more trust externally, as their mission and identity appear more credible (Kylander & Stone, 2012). Therefore, it becomes easier for a brand-oriented nonprofit to establish relationships with external audiences and form long-lasting partnerships (Heller & Reitsema, 2010).

With high levels of cohesion and external trust/credibility, the organization is likely to become more efficient because focused on the effective use of the existing resources (Kylander & Stone, 2012) and more market-oriented (Gainer & Padanyi, 2005). In fact, a nonprofit organization is usually assessed on its ability to achieve its mission, but also on its efficiency in managing resources (Deshpande & Hitchon, 2002). Public opinion is truly important for an NPO, as the public (including governmental institutions) is the source of volunteers and financial contributions (Heller & Reitsema, 2010). Therefore, branding activities increase the NPO’s likeliness of attracting resources, especially volunteers (Kylander & Stone, 2012). As a result, the organization’s social impact increase in quantity and quality.

Focusing on volunteers, it's proven that marketing and branding activities can help NPOs not only in attracting new volunteers (Andreasen, Goodstein, & Wilson, 2005) but also better volunteers, or "high contributors" (Randle & Dolcinar, 2009). "High contributors" are volunteers that exhibit specific characteristics and a combination of motivation and involvement and help the organization achieve its mission better and more efficiently (Dolcinar & Randle, 2007). Given the funding challenges faced by charities, it is critical that they develop and maintain increased loyalty and commitment from them (Hassay & Pelosa, 2009).

There are several marketing strategies and tools that a NPO can implement without denying its nature and going against its mission. Four of the most basic and successful according to Dolcinar and Lazarevski (2009) are "market segmentation", "product positioning", "advertising" and "placement". Market segmentation allows the organization to identify the "beneficiaries" that are most interested in supporting a cause, together with a deep understanding of the motivations that drive them to, for example, volunteer or donate. Another crucial step is "product positioning", which translated into NPOs terms means to make the organizational "brand image" attractive for the targeted beneficiaries. Thirdly, the creation of communication messages that advertise the NPO's cause and catch the attention of the targeted beneficiaries persuading them to engage with the organization, is crucial. Finally, a NPO needs the right channels to interact with their targeted stakeholders regularly, both online and offline (Dolcinar & Lazarevski, 2009).

In this paper, we focus on a specific, user-centred strategy that goes beyond market segmentation and product positioning/placement: the brand-community strategy, outlined in the next section.

## **2.4 Brand Community**

The second theoretical framework we are going to use in this paper is the concept of "Brand Community", first introduced and described by Muniz and O'Guinn (2001).

The first section of the chapter outlines the definition and features of the concept of Brand Community as described in the article by Muniz and O'Guinn (2001). Brand communities, as demonstrated by popular case studies (for instance Apple, Saab and



Harley-Davidson) can provide significant and long-lasting benefits, like increased customer loyalty and advocacy (Fournier & Lee, 2009).

The second section of this chapter outlines the concept of Brand Community in the nonprofit sector, following the study by Hassay and Peloza (2009). The two researchers introduce the first theoretical framework that translates the brand community strategy into the nonprofit environment. In fact, even if the concept of brand community has been developed in a for-profit environment, around a commercial brand, we argue that it could be a winning strategy to adopt for some nonprofit organizations. However, it is important to understand that “brand community” is not a marketing strategy per-se, but more a business strategy, as the entire organization must identify and support the community. The brand community has therefore to be in line with organizational goals and values (Fournier & Lee, 2009). Finally, the third section concludes describing several strategies that an organization could follow in order to encourage and facilitate the creation of a brand community.

#### ***2.4.1 Brand Community in the For Profit Sector***

The idea of a “community” of people has a long history among social theorists, scientists and philosophers. In Hillery (1955) the author looked at 94 definitions of community found in literature and concluded that there were four essential elements of communities that a group of people must have in order to be classified as a community; self-sufficiency, common life, consciousness of kind, and possession of common ends, norms and means (Hillery, 1955). Traditionally the community concept was primarily applied to the geographically bound community but in the past decades, it has been expanded to communities attached to consumption-based brands (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001). Boorstin (1973) argued that advertisers have been responsible for the development of “consumption communities”, described as groups of people with feelings of shared well-being, shared risks, common interests and common concerns centred on the consumption of a common object (Boorstin, 1973). Consumption communities have also been referred to as consumption subcultures, such as the Harley Davidson subculture (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). These consumption communities have received considerable attention from marketing managers and academics who have recognized the benefits of

having a loyal customer base and in some cases possessing a devotion that borders fanaticism. Some notable examples include Jeep, Star Trek and Apple (Hassay & Pelozo, 2009).

Drawing from past research on consumption communities, Muniz & O'Guinn (2001) presented the idea of the "brand community", describing "a specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand". The authors identified three main characteristics, or *mechanisms*, that a group of customers for a certain brand must have in order for it to be defined as a brand community. They are (1) *shared rituals and traditions*, (2) *a consciousness of kind* and (3) *a sense of moral responsibility*. Below a more detailed description of each mechanism is presented.

#### *Consciousness of kind*

*A consciousness of kind* refers to the connection that members of a community feel not only to the brand but also towards each other. Members feel that they "know" each other to some extent, even though they have never met. The mechanism describes the perception that members possess some qualities that makes them similar to one another and sets them apart from others. It also refers to the sense of "us vs. them", which entails the factors of *legitimacy of community members* and *oppositional brand loyalty* (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001).

Legitimacy refers to the guidelines and boundaries of what constitutes as "us" (members of the community). Not all consumers of a brand are necessarily part of a brand community, and members of the community make sure to differentiate between "true" members of the community (those who appreciate the culture, traditions, history and symbols of the brand) and those who fail to do so. Oppositional brand loyalty is the social process where members actively take a stance against opposing brands and find a common enemy to define themselves from people outside the community. However, barriers to entry to these communities are low, meaning that anyone who has an active interest in the brand can join even if he or she is not a brand owner. In this sense, brand communities are quite democratic as opposed to consumption subcultures, which are more hierarchical (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001).

### *Rituals and traditions*

Brand communities also have *shared rituals and traditions*, meaning symbols, events, celebrations and activities that are unique to the brand and serve as reminders of what the brand stands for (Hassay & Peloza, 2009). For instance, Saab drivers would often flash their lights or honk if they saw other people drive a Saab car (“greeting rituals”). One form of rituals and traditions is celebrating the history of the brand. Appreciation of the brand history differentiates devoted members from opportunistic ones. It also demonstrates the expertise, membership status and commitment of and establishes a form of cultural capital. Sharing brand stories is also another form of creating and maintaining a community. It allows members to share common experiences, give the brand meaning and establish a link between the member and the community. Furthermore, they give members a secure and reinforcing feeling that they are surrounded by other like-minded individuals. Brand-storytelling also helps ensuring that the community culture and the legacy of the brand are preserved (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001).

### *Moral responsibility*

Moral responsibility can be viewed as a shared duty amongst the community and to individual members of the community. It is a set of norms, rules and obligations that helps to define and govern group behavior. The authors propose two ways through which the members can pursue moral responsibility: integrating and retaining members and assisting brand community members in the “proper use of the brand”. Integrating and retaining members refers to communal survival and recognition of behaviors that are right and wrong. Reasons for staying in the community are reinforced and social processes exist that deter members from leaving it. Assisting use of the brand refers to the sense of duty that members feel to show how the brand is used or to help if the product needs fixing for instance (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001).

#### **2.4.2 Brand Community in the Nonprofit Sector**

The research by Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) conceptualizes the community concept applied to consumption brands. Extending the model, in the article by Hassay and Pelozo (2009) the authors propose a model of the brand community in the nonprofit sector. To capture the community concept within the broader context of the nonprofit sector, the authors proposed a more generic model based on consumer behavior and literature on branding and relationship marketing.

There are many different kinds of organizations within the nonprofit sectors, with various aims and missions along with various methods of achieving their goals. Therefore, the authors proposed a generic model of brand community within the broader context of consumer behavior and existing literature on branding and relationship marketing. They present three surrogate mechanisms for the charity brand community, i.e. *identification*, *involvement*, and *perceived (or psychological) sense of community (PSC)*, used interchangeably with the three consumption brand community markers of consciousness of kind, rituals and traditions, and moral responsibility. A definition of each surrogate mechanism can be found in figure 1.

<i>Brand Community Marker</i>	<i>Definition (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001)</i>	<i>Surrogate Measurement Construct</i>	<i>Definition</i>
<i>Consciousness of Kind</i>	“The intrinsic collective sense that members feel toward one another and the collective sense of difference from others not in the community”	<i>Identification</i>	“Degree to which a person defines him or herself as having the same attributes that he or she believes define the organization”
<i>Shared rituals and traditions</i>	Social Processes that reproduce/reinforce the meaning of the community and transmit to others.	<i>Involvement</i>	“The active interest in, engagement with, and commitment to a [group, sport or product] exhibited by the [individual].”
<i>Moral Responsibility</i>	“A sense of duty to the community as a whole, and to individual members of the community”	<i>Perceived/ Psychological Sense of Community</i>	“A feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared a faith that members’ needs will be met through their commitment to be together

Figure 1 - Brand Community Mechanisms and Proposed Surrogate Measurement Constructs

Source: (Hassay & Pelozo, 2009)

### *Identification (Consciousness of Kind)*

This mechanism refers to members identifying with the cause, the organization and the people involved with it. Some customers enjoy relationships with brands that extend beyond the satisfaction of functional needs to strong emotional attachment. Not only can the customer have a strong relationship with the brand but also does he or she enhance his or her own self-identity. This social identity affects individual's perception and cognitions towards an event or a cause and impacts individual emotions and behaviors. Heightened identification marks the in-group and out-group boundaries and facilitates the categorization of "us vs. them" (Hassay & Peloza, 2009).

Individuals identify themselves with people and things, which they share similar attributes with. Therefore, if an organization has shared values and beliefs as a person, then that person is much likelier to identify with that organization. It is especially important in the nonprofit sector for organizations to communicate shared values, as most charities exist because of a single mission, such as a cure for a medical condition, completion of a building project or finding a solution to a social problem. Researchers have also shown that prosocial behaviour by an individual is likelier when the input for help is solicited by someone in the personal social network, or when those who are supporting the cause are like-minded. Not only are they likelier to help the actual person in need if he/she has similar attributes to them, but this effect expands to the charity intermediary (Hassay & Peloza, 2009).

Furthermore, researchers have found that a sense of "we-ness" is a motivation for caring behavior and charities have the potential to realize significantly higher levels of identification than clubs and organizations in the for-profit sector. Moreover, "dis-identification" has proven to be a powerful motivator for charitable giving, where people define themselves more in terms of what they are against rather than what they are for. For instance, PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) was able to benefit from people who both identified with the cause and from the dis-identification from people who were against the fur industry (Hassay & Peloza, 2009).

### *Behavioral Involvement (Shared Rituals and Traditions)*

Behavioral involvement refers to the active interest, engagement and commitment to a cause, group or organization exhibited by an individual. This can mean a number of behavioral attributes towards a brand such as behavioral loyalty, coproduction, customer advocacy, customer voluntary performance, group supportive behaviors and participation. Brandfests (events that celebrate brand ownership) are central to the involvement of supporters towards a brand participation in these brand events transformed customers as they were more likely to view themselves as being “in” the brand community after the event. These events become important means of preserving a collective identity (Hassay & Peloza, 2009). A more detailed description of brandfests and brand events can be found in sub-chapter 2.5.3.

Furthermore, many charity brandfests facilitate the introduction and mingling of supporters to and beneficiaries of a charity. For example, charities helping people affected by sicknesses, will also host support groups that allow the affected individuals to gather and share their experiences and to help those who are dealing with emotional, spiritual or medical issues. Many charities rely heavily on events for marketing activities, showing also many traces of rituals and traditions.

Another form of traditions that charities foster is recognising distinguished supporters, such as long-term donors and volunteers. In a way, they have a “higher status” within the community and often their efforts will be formally recognized in the form of a ritual, such as naming ceremonies, published donor lists receiving gifts etc. (Hassay & Peloza, 2009).

### *Perceived Sense of Community (Moral Responsibility)*

Finally, the perceived sense of community (also, psychological sense of community - PSC) captures the interpersonal type of attachment that goes beyond identification or attraction. It captures the notion of a normative set of beliefs or a responsibility that members of a group have towards one another and the community. The authors argue that a volunteer or donor must first be aware of and identify with a cause of an organization before getting involved with it. Development of a sense of responsibility and social

norms within the community are then especially important since there are relatively few or no switching costs among most charity organizations. The sense of responsibility can especially be seen in religious charities, and many of them put considerable amount of social pressure for donations by reminding members of their obligation to the church's mission. Some publications of charities prohibits advertising from other “competing” religious charities. Similarly for volunteers, proper “induction” into the organization (i.e. acculturation of the organization’s mission, values, etc.) can lead to increased commitment (Hassay & Pelosa, 2009).

### ***2.4.3 Facilitating a Brand Community Creation***

Having explained what the brand community phenomenon is and the benefits it can deliver, what is also important is knowing how brand managers can create a community around a brand. In this chapter, we will give an overview of some of the methods and strategies used for facilitating brand community creation.

#### *Brandfest and Brand events*

In their research on the Jeep brand, McAlexander et al. (2002) suggest that hosting “brand events” or “brandfests” will lead to significant increases in feelings of integration into the brand community (McAlexander, Shouten, & Koenig, 2002). Brand events are events sponsored by the brand itself and primarily for current customers of the brand (McAlexander & Schouten, 1998); they are used by a company as a marketing tool to increase customer loyalty to a specific brand. Such events are meant to celebrate “brand ownership” and they usually target proud customers. Moreover, brand events can take different forms depending on the nature of the product or service offered by the brand (McAlexander & Schouten, 1998).

According to the findings of McAlexander and Shouten (1998), the simple participation in brand-fests is in itself a positive and “memorable experience” for the customer. Therefore, the power of brand events lays in the “extraordinary experience” that the customers will remember as “emotionally intense” and “personally significant”. The individual can clearly associate that unforgettable memory with the brand, with positive effects on brand loyalty (McAlexander & Shouten, 1998). Moreover, the customer has



the opportunity to build and strengthen relationships with other like-minded customers. The presence of other customers with whom an individual can relate to gives the participants a sense of “community” that shares the same experiences as well as similar values (McAlexander & Schouten, 1998).

Looking at the characteristics of brand-events, applying the same concept to the not-for-profit environment is definitely viable. In a not-for-profit and volunteer-based setting, brand events would still be centered on the organization, which would also sponsor them. The events would take a particular form depending on the type of organization, and they would be targeted for a specific group of beneficiaries of the NPO, (i.e. volunteers). Moreover, the targeted beneficiaries would participate to celebrate their pride to belong to that specific community. We are therefore assuming that the mechanisms described by McAlexander and Shouten (1998) are applicable to any brand, NPOs’ brands included.

*Brand Community in the NPO Sector*

In the model presented by Hassay and Pelozo (2009) proposes both the identity and the involvement mechanisms can lead to a development of a perceived sense of community and thus a greater commitment towards the cause. The authors present two methods in which the brand community can be established; through cognitive learning (identity mechanism) and through experiential learning (behavioral learning).

<i>Mechanism</i>	<i>Proposed Model Paths</i>
<i>Cognitive - Learning</i>	Identification → Involvement → Perceived Sense of Community
<i>Behavioral - Learning</i>	Involvement → Perceived Sense of Community → Identification

Figure 2 - Methods of Brand Community Development

Source: (Hassay & Pelozo, 2009)

*Cognitive learning* proposes that the brand community develops only after consumers, linked by a common bond of brand passion (identification), increase their participation (behavioral involvement) in brand-supportive activities. Charities could for instance engage in these paths by targeting people with philanthropic tendencies and personality types that are especially likely to identify with a certain cause. An increase in “group identity” would lead to more involvement. In the same way, positive attitudes towards the brand and negative opinions about other brands will increase, leading to a greater moral responsibility towards the aforementioned brand.

*Experiential learning* proposes individual’s identity with a charity develops as a result of participation in events and rituals hosted by the charity. Brand events would be key for establishing the brand community as they would facilitate new members’ socialization and enforce group identity of existing ones. McAlexander et al. (2002) illustrated a good example of this mechanism in the research on the Jeep community, where many participants who did not own a Jeep beforehand, became brand enthusiasts after partaking in the events. Thus, community development was established through an experiential path of attitude formation.

#### ***2.4.4 Summary of the Literature and Research specifications:***

In this chapter, we have given an overview of the challenges and opportunities of marketing in the nonprofit sector and argued that using marketing strategies can be very useful for NPOs in achieving their mission. Furthermore, we have given a thorough description of the brand community concept for commercial brands according to Muniz and O’Guinn (2001) but also the brand community concept for nonprofit brands introduced by Hassay and Peloza (2009).

As outlined in the literature review, most of the existing research on Brand Communities focuses on describing already existing communities around brands in the for-profit sector. Building on the model proposed by Hassay and Peloza (2009), we aim to expand the reach of the framework suggested by Muniz and O’Guinn (2001) for commercial brand communities, illustrating how it can be adapted to a nonprofit setting. However, one must be aware of the differences in the application of such a marketing strategy in the nonprofit sector. In order to understand the specific needs and challenges of a nonprofit

organization, we use several studies in the field of Brand Management for NPOs. We aim to contribute to the academic research, especially to the Brand Community and nonprofit Branding literature, with a detailed analysis of the application of the Brand Community concept to a nonprofit organization, exemplified with a case study.

Based on our literature review, we suggest that not only the Brand Community concept can be translated into a nonprofit environment, but also that by doing so the organization would be more successful in solving major organizational challenges. We use in-depth interviews and participation in Brand Events to gain rich data on the impressions, comments and experiences of respondents. By doing so we seek to identify both the Brand Community mechanisms (“markers”) and the potential benefits of such a strategy.

Accordingly, the literature review and the existing research on the topic by Hassay and Peloza (2009), function as a guiding framework, both for our analysis and discussion.

Based on our literature overview, we can expand our research question into sub-questions as follows:

*How can a volunteer-based Nonprofit Organization overcome organizational challenges by facilitating Brand Community creation?*

1. Can the three Brand Community mechanisms be detected in a volunteer-based nonprofit organization?
2. How can a volunteer-based NPO benefit from the adoption of a Brand Community Strategy?
3. How can a brand community be facilitated in the nonprofit sector?

### **3 Methodology of the Study**

In this chapter, we will explain the reasons behind our choice of methodology adopted in the paper, as well as describe in details the research methods used in the empirical part of the thesis. The methodology chosen is a combination between a case study, in-depth interviews and participation to brand events.

The chapter is divided into three sections; the first section explains the choice of methodology and describes the distinctive features and the relevance of the case study of Junior Achievement Ireland (JAI). The second section goes into the in-depth interviewing method outlined by McCracken (1988), specifying information about our respondents. Finally, the third section concludes describing our participation at “brand events” (McAlexander & Shouten, 1998) and the importance of them in our study.

#### **3.1 Choice of Methodology**

Our goal in this study is to understand how a nonprofit-based brand community can be beneficial in achieving loyalty through identification and involvement of volunteers. We also want to understand how an NPO can facilitate the creation of its own brand community. To achieve these goals we choose to adopt a combination of qualitative research methods.

First, while the research on brand community for for-profit organizations is already well explored, the research on “brand” community for non-for-profit organization is still very limited and a qualitative research method will help us collecting information that may extend the existing theory on “brand community” for NPOs. Secondly, since our research questions are both exploratory, qualitative research is necessary to analyze the abstract concepts of brand community; therefore a qualitative approach guarantees that the nature of the information needed will be rich and deep (Corbetta, 2003). Qualitative research will help us to get a better understanding of volunteers’ feelings and perceptions about JAI’s community, giving also the opportunity to generate ideas for managerial implications.

We use an exploratory single case study approach as highlighted by Yin (2009) to get a better understanding on the brand community concept in a volunteer-based organization

(Yin, 2009). We couple the case study with interviews to volunteers, already existing volunteers' surveys and participation to "brand events" (McAlexander & Schouten, 1998).

The case study methodology allows us to observe and explore individuals and organizations, and provides in-depth analysis of various phenomena (Baxter & Jack, 2008). It is primarily a method that allows a variety of data sources for the exploration of a phenomenon within its context; it ensures to have a greater understanding through multiple perspectives. Yin (2009) recommends four conditions for a case study approach to be chosen. He suggests that the case study approach is the optimal choice when: a) the research study primarily aims at addressing 'how' and 'why' questions; b) the researchers cannot influence the behaviour of those involved in the research; c) the researchers want to observe contextual conditions since they believe that these are relevant to the phenomenon; or d) there is no clear separation between the phenomenon and the context (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

The 'how and what' nature of our research questions led our choice of an exploratory single-case case study design, which is used to explore those situations where the intervention being evaluated has no clear, single set of outcomes (Yin, 2003). Furthermore, Yin (2009) suggests that a single-case design should be preferred over multiple-case design when the case under consideration is a typical case or a unique circumstance. In our case, Junior Achievement Ireland represents a critical case in testing the theory explained by Hassay and Pelozza (2009) and in confirming the beneficial effects of a brand community around a non-for-profit organization. Finally, Yin (2009) recommends using a single case study approach when the researcher has a unique opportunity for "unusual research access", which fits perfectly our case (Yin, 2009).

### **3.2 Case Study of Junior Achievement Ireland**

Junior Achievement (also JA) is a nonprofit youth organization that was founded in the United States in 1919 by Horace A. Moses, Theodore Vail, and Winthrop M. Crane. It is a youth organization with the goal to "inspire and prepare young people to succeed in a global economy". Initially JA was known for its after-school programs where teens

formed student companies, sold stocks, produced products and sold in their communities. In 1975, it introduced in-school programs where volunteers from the local business community would come to classrooms and teach about business and personal finance (Indiana University , 2011)

Since the 1960's JA has expanded to 121 countries and in 2013, they had over 435 thousand volunteers and reached over 10.2 million students worldwide. JA Worldwide is headquartered in the United States and is responsible for six regional operating centers around the world; i.e. JA Africa, JA Americas, JA Asia Pacific, JA-YE Europe, INJAZ Al-Arab in the Middle East and North Africa region, and Junior Achievement USA. These regional operating centers share best practices among country operations, but in practice the country operations are autonomous and their organizational model can vary depending on factors such culture, economic conditions, licensee etc. However, they always stick to the values of encouraging work readiness, financial literacy and entrepreneurship to young people around the world (JAI Worlwide, 2013).

Junior Achievement Ireland (JAI) was established in 1995 and has enjoyed great success in the country. Their operational model revolves around establishing partnerships with companies situated in Ireland and establish programs where employees of those companies go to local schools and host educational programs. The partnerships program with companies, who pay an annual membership fee to take part in these volunteering programs, is the primary source of funding for JAI. The partnership between companies and JAI is beneficial on both sides. While JAI can recruit highly skilled volunteers, companies can engage with JAI as a CSR initiative that allows them to “give back” to the community. Employees can also take part in meaningful volunteer experiences, often during time when they would otherwise be working, which is valuable to many employees with busy work schedules. Participating in volunteering programs is also a way of upskilling employees. According to a recent survey of member organizations, 96% of participants believe JA programs contribute to staff training and development by improving presentation and soft skills among others. Business volunteers are the backbone of JAI projects, making up 78% of the supporters of them (Junior Achievement Ireland, 2015).

Today JAI have partnered with over 183 organizations, including many high-profile companies such as Microsoft, LinkedIn, eBay and Marine Harvest (Junior Achievement Ireland, 2015). According their website, the mission of JA Ireland is “to inspire and motivate young people to realize their potential by valuing education and understanding how to succeed in the world of work“. Whereas the focus of JA in the USA is to teach youth about financial literature, Junior Achievement in Ireland positions itself as a supplementary education provider, an NPO to spark interest in education and encourage youth to finish secondary education. Not only does JAI teach students about finance and entrepreneurship but they also have workshops about science, math, diversity and the workplace. Junior Achievement is in essence making a link between education and employment by having students engaging and interacting with professionals from various firms. Students also make trips to companies where they get to see how their education is applied and what they can achieve by staying in school. Thanks to special collaborations with specific companies, selected students also participate in internship summer programs (Junior Achievement Ireland, 2015).

<b>Subject Area</b>	<b>Students</b>
<i>Financial Literacy and Company Programmes</i>	8.692
<i>Third Level Visits</i>	3.004
<i>‘Workshops in the Workplace’</i>	6.149
<i>Science and Maths Programmes and Events</i>	12.637
<i>Diversity Projects</i>	2.817
<i>Enterprise and Life Skills Programmes</i>	37.035

*Figure 3 - Number of Participating Students by JAI Activity Subject area 2014-2015*

*Source – (Junior Achievement Ireland, 2015)*

### **3.2.1 Organisational Challenges of Junior Achievement Ireland**

For the organisational model of JAI, one of the challenges they face is that need to establish partnerships with companies, which are their main source of funding and volunteers. They also need to establish partnerships with schools so that there will be

enough programs to volunteer for. Just like any brand, they are more likely to succeed if people are aware of the mission of the organization and what the brand stands for. JAI must also make sure that they are recruiting the “right volunteers” which have the skills and passion to teach children something relevant and useful to them. They must also want to make sure that they are retaining skilled volunteers.

### ***3.2.2 Relevance of the case***

We chose to conduct our analysis using Junior Achievement Ireland as a case study since it represent an excellent case of a NPO with high potential for a brand community to be built around it. More specifically, we believe that Junior Achievement Ireland represents an outstanding case for our study because of its unique organizational and operational model.

We think that JAI’s distinctive operational model, based on partnerships with medium-large companies and recruiting of highly skilled volunteers, makes JAI a good candidate for a potential community around their “brand”. Actually, an individual can get involved with JAI’s activities only if (a) his employer is already a partner of the organization (b) he has already acquired a considerable amount of experience (c) he goes through several trainings and self-study and he is passionate about the organizational cause. Therefore, JAI’s volunteering opportunity is positioned as a “one-of a kind” experience, and the three requirements could function as “entry barriers” to a potential community.

Moreover, thanks to contacts in our network, we managed to establish a very effective relationship with the top-leadership of the organization based in Dublin. The JAI’s CEO and Program Manager accepted to share with us most of their confidential data, allowed us to interview volunteers, and participate in brand events.

## **3.3 Interviews and Brand Events**

Interviews offered us an in-depth information regarding participants’ experiences and perspectives of our specific topic. Our interview design was shaped following a “General Interview Approach” (Gall et al, 2003), the four-step method explained in “The long interview” (McCracken, 1988) and useful suggestions found in “Conducting Research Interviews” (Rowley, 2012).



Interviews were considered the most suitable choice for the study for several reasons, following the rationale of Rowley (2012). When compared to surveys and other qualitative research methods, interviews have a low statistical significance and it can be harder to generalize the findings (Rowley, 2012). However, if the interview is properly designed and the respondents carefully selected, the interview approach has the potential to generate more useful insights and ideas than surveys (Rowley, 2012).

A semi-structured approach was chosen as the most suitable for the research, as this particular design provides a solid structure together with a high level of flexibility (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003). When adopting a semi-structured approach, the researcher is able to ensure that the same broad and pre-determined “areas of information” are covered for each respondent; nevertheless the interviewer is allowed to adapt the structure to a specific interviewee (McNamara, 2006) and use a personal approach (Turner, 2010). According to Piercy (2004), using this design “respondents’ answers provide rich, in-depth information that helps us to understand the unique as well as shared circumstances in which they live, and meanings attributed to their experiences” (Piercy, 2004).

Semi-structured interviews offer three types of questions that the researcher can use: open questions, probing questions and closed questions (Saunders et al., 2007). While open questions give the interviewees the opportunity to explore and explain a phenomenon by providing extensive and personal answers, closed questions are mainly used to gather specific information. Probing questions are intended to provoke responses on the research topic, or can be used to follow up on a previous answer (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2007). For this research, we decided to use mainly open and probing questions, in order to gather rich data and genuine reactions.

As it is suggested by several authors (for example McCracken, 1988; Saunders, Lewis, & Thornill, 2007) we prepared a set of questions to be used in the interview as a reference point. However, since we chose to use a semi-structured approach, the set of questions served as a guide, and the interviewer was allowed to adapt the questions to the specific interviewee, following the conversation path. Moreover, we followed the recommendations of Rowley (2012) for a semi-structured interview based on 6-12 questions, with two-four sub questions when necessary. The latter can be used by the

interviewer to make sure that a specific area of information is covered or just to gain more insight on a particular topic (Rowley, 2012).

To summarize, our interview questions follow McCracken (1988) and Rowley (2012) recommendations about maintaining an “open-end” style, neutrality and clarity, and Creswell (2007) suggestions on preparing follow-up questions in order to maintain flexibility and gather optimal responses. The questions were not addressing specific topics, but they were shaped to test the presence of the three Brand community mechanisms mentioned above. The list of interview questions can be found in Table A1 in Appendix.

There are different opinions on how many interviewees a single case study approach should have (Marshall, et al., 2013) so we chose to have a representative and insightful group of interviewees, chosen in collaboration with JAI. In order to have the richest and most credible information for the study we followed McCracken (1988) recommendations to have a fairly homogenous sample of interviewees, who shared critical similarities. The process seeks to maximise the depth and richness of the data, with the end goal of addressing the research question (Kuzel, 1999). Specifically, we decided to choose what Silverman (2010) calls “purposive sampling”, where respondents are selected on the basis of the goal of the research and on the researcher’s judgment of which ones will be more representative. We came to the conclusion that the most representative groups of volunteers were “young business volunteers”, volunteers aged 18-24 and 25-34, that volunteered for JAI during 2014-2015 and who are working for a medium/large company in Dublin. A total of eight interviews were taken in the time period between the 1st of October 2015 to 8th of November 2015.

This choice can be explained by the fact that we can definitely relate to the focus group and therefore our understanding of their answers is richer and more meaningful than with other age groups. More detailed information about the informants can be found in the table below (Figure 4).

<b>Informants</b>	<b>Age range</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Working experience (years)</b>	<b>Education Level</b>	<b>Company's Employees range</b>
<b>Informant 1</b>	25-34	M	>7	Master Degree	5000-10000
<b>Informant 2</b>	25-34	M	>10	Bachelor Degree	5000-10000
<b>Informant 3</b>	18-24	F	>4	Master Degree	5000-10000
<b>Informant 4</b>	18-24	F	>4	Master Degree	5000-10000
<b>Informant 5</b>	25-34	M	>8	Bachelor Degree	5000-10000
<b>Informant 6</b>	25-34	M	>10	Master Degree	5000-10000
<b>Informant 7</b>	18-24	M	>3	Master Degree	5000-10000
<b>Informant 8</b>	25-34	F	>8	Master Degree	1001-5000

*Figure 4: Informants Specifics: Age, Gender, Working Experience, Education Level and Company's Employees range*

Furthermore, respondents' sensitive information were kept anonymous, including the company they were currently working for. In addition, with the approval of the respondents, all the interviews were audio-recorded for analysis purposes. The interviews were conducted through the online conferencing tool GoToMeeting (powered by Citrix Systems). There were two main reasons for the interviews being taken online. Firstly, all interviewees were busy during working hours in weekdays so we wanted to make the scheduling process as convenient as possible. Secondly, the software used allowed us to easily and safely record the interviews.

Finally, the interviews were transcribed and analysed following McCracken's five-step analysis (1988). In the first step, we read the transcripts carefully, making notes and already thinking about possible connections between statements and recurring concepts. In the second step, the primary observations are developed into more complex and interpretative categories and issues, based on our literature review. We decided not to use a software to identify links between concepts, so in the third step we developed our own connection between different themes. Step 4 and 5 entailed the analysis of clusters of comments made by respondents, notes by the researchers and categories previously

identified in the chosen theoretical framework. The basic themes were identified because of their high frequency in the transcriptions and backed up with power quotations. Finally, we connected the themes with the theoretical categories previously identified, presenting the results of the analysis.

### ***3.3.1 Participation in Brand Events***

The participation at brand events completed our research with a well-rounded collection of information for analysis. As brand events can be used to observe a community in its natural setting (McAlexander, Shouten, & Koenig, 2002), we participated in different events organized by JAI in order to get a better understanding of the antecedents of brand community for the organization.

We participated in several events, organized by JAI in partnership with one of the companies they are collaborating with. We decided to participate as “observers”, in order to study volunteers in their own “environment” and to analyze other participants’ behaviours during the event. We also asked some informal questions to volunteers before and after the event, with the approval of the organisations. Comments and observations were transcribed and used as an additional checkpoint for the themes identified in the analysis of interviews’ transcriptions. Informants from Brand Events will appear in the analysis as “Respondent BE”.

During the events, in order to record behaviours, activities and chats with the participants were recorded using *field notes*, which are a useful tool for the researcher to put down thoughts and annotations while observing a setting or a social situation (Burgess, 1991). Our field notes contained date, time and location, together with details of the main informants we talked or listened to. A preliminary analysis of the notes was performed while still in the field; at a later stage, the annotations were transcribed and used as an additional data source during the analysis. A summary of the methodology and data sources used in this paper can be found below in Figure 5.

<b>Methodology</b>	<b>Details</b>
<b>Case Study</b>	Single case study, Junior Achievement Ireland
<b>Interviews</b>	Method: In-depth Interview Informants: 8 JAI Volunteers aged 18-30
<b>Participation in Events</b>	Field Notes: observations and short talks with participants

*Figure 5: Summary of methodology and data sources used in the paper*

## 4 Analysis

For this chapter we provide an analysis of the data we obtained from interviews with JAI volunteers we conducted and the brand events we attended. The aim is to determine if the three mechanisms that characterize the brand community are present amongst volunteers. From the collected data, we also aim to discover how the mechanisms can contribute to helping JAI overcome its organizational challenges and benefit the NPO as a whole. We will categorize our data into categories based on the mechanisms; i.e. identification (consciousness of kind), involvement (shared rituals and traditions) and perceived sense of community (moral responsibility). For each mechanism, we first introduce the concept and proceed with elaborating on some “power quotes” from interviews’ respondents. The parts of text between quotation marks and in italic represent quotations. More examples of supporting quotes can be found in Table 2A in the Appendix of this paper.

### 4.1 1st Mechanism: Identification and Consciousness of kind

The first community mechanism that was addressed was the identification and consciousness of kind concepts. The mechanism describes the degree to which a member identify himself with the same attributes that he/she thinks belonging to the organisation (Hassay & Pelosa, 2009) but also the perceived difference between members of the community and outsiders (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001).

Furthermore, members of the community have a common set of values and behaviours (Casaló, Flavián, & Guinalú, 2008). In the case of JAI, many of the same traits were found in the interviewees’ responses.

Consciousness of kind is ranked as the “most important element in the community” (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2011); therefore, the fact that several traits of this mechanism (in both definitions) were found in respondents’ answers could represent a strong predictor of a potential brand community around JAI.

#### 4.1.1 *Identification with JAI’s cause*

First, there was, among volunteers, a strong *consciousness of kind* exhibited through the *identification with the organisation and its cause*. According to Hassay and Pelosa

(2009), in order to identify with any brand community, an individual has firstly to identify with the brand's values and beliefs. In a nonprofit environment, this typically means that supporters have to identify themselves with the "mission" or "cause" of the organization (Hassay & Peloza, 2009), as well as with other supporters. This is in line with Muniz and O'Guinn (2001), that describe this mechanism talking about how members of the community have to feel "part of something bigger than themselves" (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001), manifesting a "shared knowing of belonging" (Weber, 1978).

As explained in the study by McAlexander et al. (2002), in a for-profit setting, an individual purchases a product as they feel that somehow that specific product *express* and *define* themselves. We argue that similarly, in a nonprofit setting, an individual chooses to devote their time or money to an organisation or cause that allows them to express values they believe in. Actually, nonprofit organizations have the potential to realize high levels of identification thanks to the greater feeling of affiliation and reciprocity if compared with the for profit sector (Bhattacharya, 1998).

In the case of JAI, the "mission" was promoting education and being a role model for children in the local (geographically speaking) community, and it was a cause all the respondents were strongly relating with. Many volunteers expressed their belief in the power of the education as a means to future success for young people, and their pride to be part of this "mission".

*"It is definitely something I love contributing for, bringing education to the children was important for me. I worked with schools where kids' parents basically tell the children that school is not valuable. Volunteers can actually make a difference. They actually feel like they're doing something. They're contributing. Because with a lot of organizations you just volunteer, but you know, feel like one of many, many and your value is a tiny bit." (Respondent 5)*

Respondent 5, as other interviewees, expresses how JAI's cause (bringing education to children) was something very meaningful for him, especially when dealing with students that usually don't receive the right support from their families. He also felt that while volunteering for JAI, he was making an actual difference in his students' life, teaching them the value of education. He felt valued and recognized, not like "one of many".

Furthermore, many volunteers reported that not only did they identified with the cause, but also they were also able to identify themselves with their students. Respondent 1 (quoted below), thinking back to his teaching experience, remembered how during high school he did not have clear goals set for his future. Being there made him feeling as if he could help students thinking ahead about their future, taking him as an example.

*“Because when I was their age, I hadn't the blindest bit of clue what I wanted to do and I didn't know how to go about figuring it out either. So I felt I could tell them, you know, how I did it” (Respondent 1)*

The nostalgic feeling that many respondents described, allowed them to come back in time when they were still in school. Unsurprisingly many volunteers considered their experience meaningful and unforgettable because of the emotional impact it had on them. Teaching became more than “just” a volunteering experience: it became “*magic*” as Respondent 6 said, explaining how the fact that he was able to imagine himself exactly where his students were sitting. The emotional impact of the volunteering experience increased his enthusiasm and commitment.

*“I felt nostalgic, like coming back when I was sitting on those small chairs...I think I was even happier to do it because of that. It became magic” (Respondent 6)*

This finding represents an additional channel of personal identification with the organisation, the cause and other volunteers. As all of the respondents had the opportunity to complete a third-level education, it is reasonable to believe that they are aware of the importance of getting a good education in today’s competitive job market. The educational mission was probably one of the main drivers that led the respondents to choose JAI over other organizations that their company was sponsoring.

#### **4.1.2 Perception of other volunteers**

Secondly, there was, among volunteers, a *strong consciousness of kind* exhibited in the manifested perception of other volunteers having the same mind set and recurring characteristics. Despite being a volunteer-based organisation, where the concept of



competition is usually seen as “not appropriate”, the concept of “us” versus “them” (Underwood, Bond, & Baer, 2001) was found among JAI’s volunteers.

Respondents demonstrated a strong “social identity”, as defined by Underwood et al (2001); not only did volunteers identified themselves with JAI, but also with the other volunteers supporting the organisation. Volunteers seem to have already developed a sense of “we-ness” (Bender, 1978), recognizing the group of JAI volunteers as “*different*” and “*not like other volunteers for other organizations*”. Muniz and O’Guinn (2001) were describing for-profit brand communities in a very similar way, saying that consumers felt “different or special in comparison to users of other brands”. In a brand community framework, “social identity” becomes important as it affects greatly “individuals’ perceptions and attributions about issues and events, impacting emotions as well as behaviors. Heightened group identification marks in-group and out-group boundaries, facilitating the categorization of people into “us” versus “them” and “we” versus “they” (Underwood, Bond, & Baer, 2001).

All the respondents talked about a perception of other volunteers as likeminded, having a common attitude towards JAI’s cause and volunteering in general.

*“JAI’s volunteers have to be like minded, there is no other way. If you are not committed for example, you are not going to succeed when teaching your classes” (Respondent 5)*

As Respondent 5 stated, we noticed a series of common traits within JAI volunteers, starting with the high amount of commitment and motivation about getting involved in JAI programs. Respondent 3 talked about how she “*definitely saw a motivation, an enthusiasm about the program in other volunteers*”, and that she felt like “*either you want to do it or you don’t, you can’t be talked around it*”. When trying to recruit people for JAI, she noticed how the interest in the organization and the cause was something immediate and natural; the common attributes founded in the JAI volunteer group are therefore innate, deeply ingrained in each volunteer’s set of values.

The required engagement was probably the most common comment in interviewees’ answers; a volunteer said that commitment was a prerequisite that differentiated JAI from other organizations. Respondents described their volunteering experience as out of the

norm and especially rewarding; something that “*not many people would do*” (Respondent 5). JAI Volunteers perceived themselves (they often talk with a second plural person) as “*different from other volunteers*” in different organizations, also because they looked at JAI’s mission as something that “*makes a difference*”. In the next quotes we can clearly see what Muniz and O’Guinn (2001) call “Oppositional Brand Loyalty”.

*“JAI is something that... if you weren't passionate about you would get frustrated very quickly, [...] and either you have a passion of working with kids and a passion to give back to underprivileged communities or ..don't do it. It is different from other organisations, when we volunteer we are actually making a difference. It's not for everybody”*  
(Respondent 7)

In the quote above, Respondent 7 states his opinion about how JAI is different from other nonprofit organizations. Passion for children and willingness to “give back” are essential for a JAI volunteer to actually enjoy the experience without getting frustrated. The higher level of commitment of JAI volunteers compared to other organizations increased enhances the fact that that kind of volunteering is not suitable for everybody. A consequence of the higher commitment is certainly the feeling of “actually making a difference”, which was a recurrent theme in our interviews. Actually variations of the sentence “make a difference” were present in 7 out of 8 interviews’ transcripts; the rewarding feeling of contributing towards something “bigger than self” , doing good while at the same time learning and upskilling, could be a “differentiator” (or “competitive advantage”) for JAI in recruiting and retaining its volunteers.

Another essential trait of the “consciousness of kind” mechanism is that members of the specific group differentiate themselves from the “outsiders”, those that do not belong there. Even if in an NPO environment it is infrequent to find a statement of “*us versus them*” ((Dolnicar & Lazarevski, 2009), JAI volunteers’ “pride” was easy to recognize. Volunteers felt that “*volunteers were like-minded, having common features*” (Respondent 3), giving a hint of the first Brand Community marker of “Consciousness of kind” (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001).

When asked to whom they would recommend such an experience, they were clear in asserting that they “*would recommend it to specific people*”, those that were “*fitting a profile*”. What it is interesting to see is that volunteers had a detailed image of the “right profile” in order to become a JAI volunteer.

*“I wouldn’t recommend it to everyone. I guess you have to have a certain level of education, experience or several years of expertise and high commitment. You also have to have good planning and organizational skills and be good in relationships” (Respondent 2)*

Respondent 2 is one of the volunteers that offered us a comprehensive “profile” of the average JAI volunteer. Looking at other answers, the common characteristic of a JAI volunteer were “*coming from a business environment*” and having “*commitment*”, “*high level education*”, “*several years of expertise*”, “*good planning and organization skills*”, relationship skills, and preferably a background in training or recruiting. Many volunteers pointed out that these characteristics are usually present in many employees of the companies JAI is collaborating with. On the other hand, having just those characteristics does not make you a JAI volunteer: commitment is also a very important feature to have. As a result, the fact that only a certain kind of people gets involved in JAI’s program was for many something to be proud of, especially in comparison with other organizations.

*“In other organisations... they would have a much broader spectrum of people that are volunteering, in JA they are mainly business volunteers, they are specific people, they know they will do a good job” (Respondent 8)*

Respondent 8 highlights the difference between JAI volunteers and other organizations’ volunteers. The fact that JAI recruits only “*specific people [that] will do a good job*” is implicitly one of the reasons why he was happy to join the organization.

Moreover, the fact that an employee can volunteer only if his/her employer is already involved with JAI as a partner, is undoubtedly an “entry barrier”, which facilitates the feeling of “consciousness of kind” and the identification with a specific group of people, as Respondent 4 explained:

*“[JAI] works with companies, they work with big companies, [...] their employees are already very qualified. So I don’t think there are ways to get in otherwise, you have to work for this kind of companies and be in a certain position” (Respondent 4)*

Following Respondent 4 comment, we believe that JAI could leverage on the “exclusivity perception” manifested by its volunteers to retain them and attract new ones, becoming more competitive in the market place.

Furthermore, having participated to JAI’s programs made employees feeling more connected and with “*something in common*”. Their involvement in the unique volunteering experience built a connection between co-workers; they start sharing experiences, and they socialize more within the company. A shared experience made employees who had volunteered for JAI closer, more related to each other, consequently increasing the perception of “*consciousness of kind*”. When becoming aware of the fact that a colleague had also supported JAI were able to recognize him/her has having something in common with them.

*“I got to know all the others guys here at [employer name] that volunteered as well, and I have to say that I wouldn’t have really got to know them otherwise. I feel we have something in common you know, how we feel about things, our interests. It’s different” (Respondent 6)*

Respondent 6 describes how his colleagues had been the main channel to first become aware of the volunteering opportunity with JAI. Moreover, he felt that the common volunteering experience had created a connection between colleagues, in terms of interests and values. Following Respondent 6’s comment, and Heller and Reitsema (2010), we believe that engaging in branding activities and making senior volunteers “brand ambassadors”, will help JAI establishing relationships with volunteers and form long-lasting partnerships with well-known companies.

Finally, we argue that the feeling of “*consciousness of kind*” was also supported by JAI, even if just indirectly. Despite the fact that JAI never intentionally encouraged the perception of other volunteers as “different” from other organisations’ supporters, several volunteers reported that they felt JAI promoted the experience as something “exclusive”

for them. More than 60% of the respondents described how through the provided support from the organization and the uniqueness of the experience made them feeling as if they were “*the main characters*”, the “*centre of attention*”. In JAI they were not “just another volunteer”, they had a lot of attention and responsibility to deal with. The peculiar role of the volunteer was highlighted by the fact that young students were looking up to them. Being a role model for their students led to a feeling of self-worth and self-realization; consequently, volunteers identified themselves with the cause and with other volunteers even more.

*“I was the center; I was the person leading it, doing it, facilitating it. I don’t think any of that magic exists in other opportunities that I’ve come across. I think you need to be prepared for that. Some people wouldn’t like it” (Respondent 3)*

Respondent 3 is an example of the concept just explained; she describes how she felt she was “leading” the class, and it was thanks to her that that specific class was taught. She also compares JAI with other organizations she had contributed for in the past, saying how she had never felt a protagonist during her past volunteering experiences. Once more, she mentions the word “magic”, highlighting the unforgettable time she had teaching. She also explains how not everybody would be ready for such an experience “on stage”; again, it is easy to notice how she perceives JAI, and consequently herself, as different.

#### **4.1.3 Shared set of values**

As having a social identity affects individuals’ perceptions and values (Underwood, Bond, & Baer, 2001), brand communities in the for-profit sector often present a common collection of values. The concept of “shared values” is defined as the extent to which members have beliefs in common about the importance of some goals and behaviors (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). We were able to identify a set of values that recurred several times in JAI volunteers’ interviews.

*“First of all you have to be committed, otherwise you won’t be successful. Then I think from there, once you are involved, you also have to be responsible because those classes need you to take place , that day at that time. So you have to be there you know... [...] Also I think you need to be into this kind of volunteering itself, because here you have this direct contact with the kids, you have to have this ..this willingness to help them.” (Respondent 6)*

The above quote from Respondent 6 is a good example of how the respondents perceived other fellow volunteers as like-minded and sharing recurring values. The common traits found in the interviewees’ answers were “commitment”, “responsibility”, “integrity”, “willingness to do the right thing”, together with a passion for education and children.

Finally, it’s interesting to see that Respondent 3 (quoted below) implicitly explained that the shared set of values of JAI’s volunteers is in fact similar to the one adopted by her company, focused on integrity and relationships.

*“Being employees at (name of the company) does mean that we have got a set of common-ish characteristics, even purely from a cultural point of view. [name of employer] is really specific about the type of people that they employ. They are looking for people that value relationships, who are very responsible, always looking for integrity. You have to have a specific mindset, we are pushed to “do the right thing” (Respondent 3)*

The fact that JAI establish partnerships with big, international recognized companies that invest money on CSR activities and that share with JAI a set of values is therefore something to take in consideration when encouraging the creation of a brand community. As in the for-profit world brand partnerships have to consider the “fit” of their brand with the brand they are going to collaborate with, the same happens in the NPO sector. NPOs managers have to carefully check if the “organizational identity” collides with the for-profit partner’s (Liston-Heyes & Liu, 2013). We can assume that when JAI establish partnerships with suitable companies with which share a similar “organizational identity”, volunteers joining JAI from that company will be more likely to join the JAI community as involved members.

## **4.2 2nd Mechanism: Shared Ritual and Traditions**

The second community mechanism that was found interviewing JAI's volunteers was what Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) called "*shared rituals and traditions*". The concept describes the social practices that "reinforce the meaning of a community" and communicate the meaning to others (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001), also outside the group. In the article by Hassay and Pelozo (2009) the surrogate for the concept is "*involvement*", the active interest and commitment showed to a group by an individual (Hassay & Pelozo, 2009).

Shared rituals and traditions can be classified as "group supportive behaviours" (Fullerton, 2003) meaning behaviours created by the brand and/or by the members of the community in order to reinforce identification and consciousness of kind, strengthening the essence of the community. JAI volunteers presented a form of shared ritual when committing to the organisation, but also in simple but effective in-company rituals.

Showing engagement and communicate the meaning of the community to "outsiders" is also way for volunteers to create their own meaning of the "brand experience" (McAlexander, Shouten, & Koenig, 2002)). By being "brand advocates" for JAI, volunteers reinforce and transmit the "spirit" of the community "within and beyond the community" (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001).

Moreover, Muniz and O'Guinn talked also about "brand events" as a celebration of the organization and the brand, together with the exchange of brand-related stories. (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). Participating in JAI's events we were able to identify some traits of this mechanism.

### **4.2.1 *Involvement and Commitment***

In this paper, we follow the definition for "involvement" by Capella (2002) and Hassay and Pelozo (2009), who described the concept in the sport sector as "the active interest, engagement with and commitment to a sport team". Involvement is therefore something more than pure "interest"; the concept describes a strong commitment and an active participation to the cause.

During the interviews, JAI volunteers talked extensively about their willingness to show commitment and involvement with the cause and the organization; they even elected “commitment” as one of the main requirements to join JAI, as the following quotes explain.

*“It’s also quite a lot of commitment; you have to be on top of it, not like other kinds of volunteering. [...] If you are not committed, I would say don’t start. It’s a requirement you know, I suppose it’s something you should think about before you start” (Respondent 6)*

Respondent 6 “warns” potential JAI volunteers of the amount of commitment and involvement required from the organization compared to other similar ones. He implicitly points out an “entry barrier” for newcomers. In fact, commitment was for many something “obvious” when choosing to volunteer for JAI. Several respondents drew a line between active involvement and the success of the cause, explaining how with JAI a volunteer can feel that with their commitment and participation the community’s meaning is reinforced. The quote below well represents the general feeling about this.

*“We have other kinds of volunteering offered by the company. You can go raise money for dogs... and this kind of things, you know I would just leave 10 euro and spend the weekend with my friends.... but here you are actually working with children and the community, there you are actually making a difference in somebody else’s life..I mean, other organisations ask volunteers for less time and commitment, but they also end up not “making the difference” for the people they are trying to help.” (Respondent 3)*

Respondent 3 describes how he was aware of the amount of involvement that JAI would have required, but still went for it because he found it more meaningful. Being a busy employee of a large company, he values his time as a precious and scarce resource, and he is willing to dedicate it only to something where is “*actually making a difference*”. Once more, the respondent compares himself and JAI with other organizations that if one hand don’t ask for much effort, they also don’t achieve their mission. Because of their busy schedule at work, many volunteers explained how they wanted to make sure that the time they were devoting to volunteering was dedicated to something meaningful and well



suiting for them. In the quote below the reader can see the link between *identification* (Mechanism 1 explained above) and *involvement*.

*"I'm not going to volunteer to do something for the sake of just saying "okay at least I'm volunteering, I'm helping". If I was going to do it and spend a lot of time, well not a lot of time, but gonna invest my time into doing something. I was going to make sure that I was adding value if you will.... And I was helping people genuinely so I guess the reason I volunteered was that I sat down with them and had a look at the different programs you could run at JAI, and I felt it was something for me. I think we have to be into that as volunteers" (Respondent 6)*

Respondent 6 remarks how the main reason why he decided to invest his time into contributing towards JAI's cause was the fact that he felt "*it was something for [him]*", an experience through which he could feel he was truly getting involved into JAI's activities.

Moreover, commitment and involvement were for many something to be proud of. High level of commitment appeared as a sort of requirement, an entry barrier to be included in the community, as Respondent 8 describes in the quote below. Respondent 8 explains how she felt "special" because of the required involvement in time and effort. Therefore, a strong link between *involvement* and *consciousness of kind* was identified.

*"I definitely recommended it but I suppose some people wouldn't be that interested in it. But I got one or two people to sign up this year. The second one came with me. [...] I suppose what turned people off was just the time required away from the office to get to the schools. And also dealing with kids. Some people would like to do it as well but time and high involvement were probably the biggest issues. You have to want it and get involved in it, otherwise it won't work for you. I guess it's what makes it special you see" (Respondent 8)*

Moreover, the volunteers' involvement was shown by their loyalty to the organisation: 100% of respondents said that they would definitely like to volunteer again. Some respondents had already planned their next class with JAI when we conducted interviews. The experience was "*such a huge success*" that many volunteers felt that they wanted to

do it again. This trend is strongly reflected in the survey conducted by JAI at the end of the academic year 2014-2015, where 98.55% of respondents answered positively when asked if they would like to volunteer again. (Junior Achievement Ireland, 2015)

*“If I want to do it again? Oh yes, I’d love to do it! There is no doubt about it. You see how much difference you made for those children and you think you could come back and do more. It’s unforgettable...and it’s a rewarding experience, that’s why I wanted to do it again.”*  
(Respondent 5)

The quote above from Respondent 5 is a good example of the average feeling about why volunteers would like to repeat their experience with JAI. The main reason for volunteering once more was the “*unforgettable and rewarding experience*”, but also the support they received throughout the whole “volunteer journey”. Moreover, the fact that JAI works in partnership with their employers made volunteers feeling that JAI experience was accessible and easy to repeat.

Summarizing, volunteers showed high levels of *involvement* and active participation, resembling a for-profit brand community as described by Muniz and O’Guinn (2001).

The quote above is from a volunteer that participated in the “Irish Design Year” event, and answered our question at the end of it. It is a good example of how volunteers enjoyed sharing “brand stories” (in this case “JAI stories”) especially with people in the same environment/sector/company. It’s interesting to see how the ritual of sharing stories “encouraged” her to renew her commitment to the community. Therefore, sharing brand stories reinforces *consciousness of kind* between members and contributes to the *perception of “community”*, exactly like Muniz and O’Guinn (2001) describes for commercial brands.

When participating in the second event, one of our most interesting observations was that students and teachers that took part in JAI programs thanked publicly the volunteers, highlighting their mentoring role. In fact, brand-celebrating events can be classified as a shared tradition that serve to reinforce the meaning of the community and the recognition of some particularly engaged volunteers. In the for-profit world brand communities often present a hierarchy of involvement, with some consumers having a higher “status” than

others (Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001). Even if in a nonprofit environment the feeling of “inclusion” is still very important, public recognition can reinforce the feeling of consciousness of kind as well as the level of involvement, like described by Muniz and O’Guinn (2001).

#### **4.2.2 Brand Events**

Brand events are by definition “brand-centered events” (McAlexander & Shouten, 1998) that can function as “identification building activities” (Underwood, Bond, & Baer, 2001)). The main function of brand events in a for-profit environment is to celebrate the brand itself sharing stories and experiences (McAlexander & Schouten, 1998). Despite the fact that JAI still has to fully recognize the potential of brand community, the organisation is already organising regular events where the organisation, the cause and the achievements of the volunteers are celebrated. From two of the events we took part in, a high level of involvement emerged.

In both events, many volunteers participated showing the same kind of commitment that they showed during their teaching period. Coming to such events, sharing their experiences with a broader audience, volunteers wanted to demonstrate their involvement towards the cause and the community. Their contribution was always strongly related to the “giving back to the community” and “being a role model” concepts.

The first brand event was a presentation of a short movie created pro-bono by an international committee of designers with the aim to communicate and conceive the notion of design to primary and secondary school students. The event was hosted in a very famous art gallery in Dublin city centre, sponsored by Dublin municipality to celebrate the “Irish Design Year”. Volunteers that participated to the event were implicitly showing how they used their skills to support the community; the audience was composed of JAI volunteers as well as “outsiders”.

The second brand event was a “graduation ceremony” for students that took part in a series of mentorships and internships (“Career Academy” program) with many multinational companies. This event was particularly interesting for us as JAI volunteers had had a “mentor” role for students participating in the program. The event was hosted and sponsored by a big multinational investment bank in Dublin. During the ceremony,

students, teachers and representatives from the Irish Government and Dublin City gave speeches about the importance of the program for the future of the students as well as the wealth of the community.

From our field notes, the involvement of the volunteers towards the group was evident, as well as their commitment towards the cause and the organization.

*“I got to meet other people within my sector [Design] who took part in it and they all seemed quite like minded, everybody was talking about schools they went to, how much they enjoyed...it’s huge, the stuff that you hear back from the people, it’s really encouraging as well, so yeah, it was nice to hear other people’s stories , they are in the same situation.” (Respondent BE)*

The quote above is from a volunteer that participated in the “Irish Design Year” event, and answered our question at the end of it. It is a good example of how volunteers enjoyed sharing “brand stories” (in this case “JAI stories”) especially with people in the same environment/sector/company. It is interesting to see how the ritual of sharing stories “encouraged” her to renew her commitment to the community. Therefore, sharing brand stories reinforces *consciousness of kind* between members and contributes to the *perception of “community”*, exactly like Muniz and O’Guinn (2001) describes for commercial brands.

When participating in the second event, one of our most interesting observations was that students and teachers that took part in JAI programs thanked publicly the volunteers, highlighting their mentoring role. In fact, brand-celebrating events can be classified as a shared tradition that serve to reinforce the meaning of the community and the recognition of some particularly engaged volunteers. In the for-profit world brand communities often present a hierarchy of involvement, with some consumers having a higher “status” than others (Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001). Even if in a non-profit environment the feeling of “inclusion” is still very important, *public recognition* can reinforce the feeling of *consciousness of kind* as well as the level of *involvement*, like described by Muniz and O’Guinn (2001).

### **4.2.3 Greeting Rituals**

In their paper, Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) talk about ritual and traditions that "maintain the culture of the community"; these rituals are usually simple and implicit, and include "waving and asking them about their brand model" (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). Such rituals can be easily translated in the nonprofit world, if instead of "brand model" volunteers use "program" or "experience" when greeting other volunteers. Every time that such a simple ritual is performed, members reinforce their consciousness of kind (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001).

In our case, JAI volunteers talked about some sort of greeting ritual within the company they work for, as is the case with this volunteer:

*"[...] Now I know who in the company volunteered for JAI, and we kind of know each other, but not so well. But we have something to talk about when we meet in the office, Or even just to say "Hi" or wave, I mean, I feel I know something about them. I felt valued." (Respondent 8)*

When recognizing that a colleague had also volunteered for JAI, a respondent felt closer to him/her and they started "*waving and say hi*" to each other. The volunteer explained how he felt closer to those colleagues that volunteer for JAI, even if he didn't know them "*so well*". Moreover, he also described how, being that a *public recognition* from another volunteer, he felt "*valued*". This is perfectly in line with the description of shared rituals in commercial brand communities given by Muniz and O'Guinn (2001), and it is definitely something that JAI could use to encourage the participation in the activities of the community.

### **4.2.4 Advocacy**

In a "standard" Brand Community in a for-profit environment, shared rituals and traditions are typically centred on "shared consumption experiences with the brand" (Heding, Knudtzen, & Mogens, 2009). In an NPO environment, this mechanism is translated in the activity of sharing volunteering experiences with the organization, in a joint "storytelling". As explained above, storytelling is a key means of creation and maintenance of the brand community (Heding, Knudtzen, & Mogens, 2009). Sharing

brand stories with community insiders reinforce the meaning of the community, while doing the same with "outsiders" expands it. This mechanism appears to be very similar to the concept of "customer advocacy" described by Fullerton (2003) in the for-profit world.

Despite the fact that no brand community is currently in place around JAI, one of the recurring themes that was identified during the analysis of the interviews was the manifested *advocacy* coming from the most enthusiastic respondents.

Firstly, we noticed that when sharing their experience with us during the interviews, volunteers were definitely creating their "own meaning of the brand experience" (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001), adding details to memories and reinforcing their commitment to the cause and the organization.

Secondly, when asked if they would recommend the experience, 100% of the respondents answered positively. This result again matches with the survey conducted by JAI in the last academic year, where 100% of surveyed volunteers said they would recommend the programme to colleagues. The main reasons why they would do so were exactly the same why they would like to volunteer again themselves.

Volunteers felt a "*need to share, to tell people*" about their experience. The trend that emerged from the data is that at present, volunteers are in fact natural and unofficial "brand advocates" for JAI, as the quote below explains:

*"I've spent the last 9 months talking about what I did, and saying how great it was. I needed to tell my friends and parents for example. My parents were also wondering how they could participate, and some of my friends too. It's contagious...like when you find something so good you want to tell others. ..and you want to get everybody else to do it because you got so much from it" (Respondent 3)*

It is interesting to notice how Respondent 3 was so enthusiastic about sharing their JAI experience with her peers; she describes as "contagious", more than worth to be spread. As Respondent 3, other volunteers told us that they "needed" to tell other people about it. They describe this need as something natural as word of mouth, something "*like when you find something so good you want to tell others*".

It is interesting to point out that most of the respondents reported that they got to know JAI through word of mouth in the office and thanks to the involvement that his company already had with JAI.

*“I probably went for JAI because it was something that my company was involved and I knew my friend had done it and she had a lot of good things to say about it. And you can see it in the passion in the people that were working for them or volunteering for them in the past. I have a lot of people who worked with JAI here, and [they] were like “oh you have to check this out”. (Respondent 4)*

The quote above from Respondent 4 is a perfect example of the concept of word of mouth. Respondent 4 told us how, since he got to know about JAI through their colleagues, he was keen to tell other their peers *“that otherwise would [n]ever know about it”*. We can therefore assume that one of the reasons why the “need to share” is so noticeable among JAI volunteers is because they experienced the importance of other volunteers as “channel”. This is a perfect parallelism with commercial brand communities as described by McAlexander et al (2002) in their Jeep study.

Another recurring theme was that not only volunteers wanted to “spread the word”, but that they clearly wanted to share their experience only with specific people, like-minded to them. When asked if they would recommend this experience to everyone, a volunteer answered:

*“No I wouldn't say it was for everybody. It depends on what your interests are I suppose. I think the majority of people can see definitely the benefits of doing it and helping out local children in the area but I suppose some people's attitude are kind of like “why are you bothering? “. Like “what difference is it going to make overall”. You know? Some people definitely have that kind of reaction when I told them I was doing it. I would recommend it only to people that in my opinion may be interested, some colleagues” (Respondent 7)*

Respondent 7 categorically explains how he looks at JAI volunteering as something exclusive for a category of people, with the same interests and attitudes. These people would be *“people that in [his] opinion might be interested”*, with a preference for

colleagues, because of the entry barrier of the partnership with JAI. This is in line with the first mechanism of *consciousness of kind*.

Finally, another interesting trend that was found in the data showed us how a brand community could really be beneficial for JAI. Several of the respondents proposed themselves as the reference point or the “JAI ambassador” in the company they are working for, as the quotes below illustrate.

*“[...] I mean if you had kind of some representatives within the company, kind of like the go-to people. That could help. Probably already I see myself in that kind of a role already. Just in terms of dealing with [JAI representatives], I would be the main representative from [employer].” (Respondent 8)*

Respondent 8 thought it was a good idea to have a point of reference in each company, a “go-to person” supported by JAI with marketing material and success stories from the schools around Dublin. The representative would be a “senior volunteer” that would make sure people get involved in the “community”.

Summarizing, we were certainly able to identify the community marker of *Shared rituals and traditions* in JAI volunteers’ answers. Their involvement, their greeting rituals and shared set of values, combined with the need to “spread the word” as brand advocates, are all common traits with commercial brand communities. We were also able to pinpoint some of the benefits JAI could experience when encouraging involvement and the creation of shared rituals and traditions.

### **4.3 3rd Mechanism: Moral Responsibility - Perceived Sense of Community (PSC)**

According to Hassay and Pelozza (2009), the surrogate mechanisms for moral responsibility is “Perceived Sense of Community” (PSC) defined as “a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and shared faith that members’ needs will be met through their commitment to be together”. Moreover, the authors state that a sense of responsibility and social norms within a charity community are especially important since there are relatively few or no switching costs among most charity brands (Hassay & Pelozza, 2009). In order to develop



a sense of community with a cause or an organization it is necessary for members to first be attracted to and then “acculturated” to the organization (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001). PSC is defined as shared sense of involvement with others in a group captures a type of attachment that extends beyond identification or attraction (Hassay & Pelozo, 2009). In this sense, PSC captures the notion of a normative set of beliefs or a responsibility to other members of the group. Furthermore, there are two ways through which the authors suggest members to achieve moral responsibility: (1) integrating and retaining members and (2) assisting brand community members in the proper use of the brand.

Translated into the case of JAI, this would mean that there would be a sense of duty of volunteers to teach them about the cause of JAI and how the volunteer work can help achieve that cause. Respondent 8 (quoted below) felt that she had become an unofficial ambassador for the brand at her company. Any questions that employees of her company might have for JAI was often directed to her, or her supervisor. She was also interested in getting advice from volunteers at other companies how they got more volunteers to join JAI. By answering the questions of colleagues who want to volunteer for JAI, she was in a sense assisting them on “how to use JAI brand”:

*“...if somebody was going to [JAI employee] or something, with questions, she would definitely direct them probably to myself or [name], my boss is involved in it as well and one or two other people that have done it kind of twice like. So that kind of definitely happened twice already. Just, probably unofficially.” (Respondent 8)*

However, this sense of duty was not very evident amongst other volunteers. What it seemed to be lacking was the “sense of interconnectedness” with other volunteers and shared faith that they as a group would achieve their needs (be it personal needs or towards the cause itself). As we explained above for the involvement mechanism, we did see there was a strong advocacy factor, meaning that volunteers were willing to talk about JAI to people within their network. However, with current volunteers the above-mentioned factors were missing:

*“...like I got connected to some colleagues that I didn't know. I wouldn't say that now we're like this tight knit community. I do see like people that actually went with me in the first year. I do see them in the second year too so I do see that it sticks with other people too and they come back and do a second year and do maybe a third year. So there are like a few people that I see now that are kind of like "regulars" (Respondent 2)*

Respondent 2 describes how he was aware of colleagues that were recurring volunteers like himself and he got to know them better, which he might not have otherwise. However, there was no feeling that volunteers mattered to one another or a feeling that together they could achieve the mission of JAI. The sense of community was therefore missing in this case.

However, this is not to say that there was a lack of willingness to create this sense of community. For instance, some volunteers were very interested in engaging with other volunteers by sharing stories of their teaching experience. This was especially apparent when we asked what JAI could do in order to maintain a relationship with volunteers. The most common answer was suggesting having some sort of platform or event where volunteers could share stories with one another and engage with volunteers. It was easy to observe how the opportunity of connecting with other volunteers was definitely missing, especially after the volunteering experience:

*“I would like to participate in JAI Alumni events, I think the idea is great. An event would bring those connections together.[...] Here at [name of employer] there are many JAI volunteers, and if they met every quarter, you could just have a coffee session, and discuss who is doing what. It would encourage people to participate more and it would make the experience more enjoyable and meaningful” (Respondent 6)*

Respondent 6 states how he would like to participate in JAI events, especially if having the opportunity to meet people that have already volunteered. In his opinion, such an event will bring volunteers closer, establishing or strengthening a connection between them. Moreover, he states that an event would make the whole experience more meaningful, probably increasing the likelihood for people to volunteer again.

We thus concluded from our data that there was not enough evidence to support that the Perceived Sense of Community mechanism was present amongst volunteers. Because not all Brand Community markers were strongly present amongst volunteers, the necessary characteristics that make a brand community were lacking. However, we believe that there is definitely a high potential for those mechanisms to be developed. A further discussion of our analysis can be found in chapter 4.4.

#### **4.4 Conclusion of Analysis**

In this chapter, we have presented the data analysis of our research. We determined that volunteers identified with the cause, organization and other volunteers of JAI. There was also a sense of behavioral involvement, meaning that there was active interest, engagement and commitment to the organization and the cause. However, what was missing was a sense of community and a sense of responsibility and duty to other volunteers that their needs would be met. The brand community concept was thus incomplete since not all markers were apparent.

Nonetheless, by identifying two of the three mechanisms, we argue that the brand community is indeed feasible and applicable to our case study. However, we were able to see that each marker can be beneficial for various reasons. Identifying with the organization, cause and people involved can strengthen a supporter's relationship with the brand and can additionally enhance his or her own self-identity. Behavioral involvement describes the actions taken by the supporter in order to achieve the organization's mission. A perceived sense of community gives supporters a sense of belonging. However, according to Hassay and Peloza (2009), the three markers are "self-reinforcing" and "a product of the iterative nature". Therefore, all three markers must be present in order for the community to be created and brand loyalty established.

In the next chapter, we identify some of the organizational challenges that the brand community can help overcome according to our theoretical research. Moreover, we suggest ways by which JAI could facilitate the creation of a brand community.

## 5 Discussion

In this chapter, we address the three sub-research questions of this paper based on the findings of our analysis of the JAI volunteer-base, linking back to the literature overview.

In this paper, we have presented a theoretical discussion about branding in the nonprofit sector, including the relevance and the unique characteristics of the “nonprofit brand” and its relevance for organizations that are looking to be recognisable, different from other organizations in the same category (Voeth & Herbst, 2008). In fact, non-profits are looking into marketing strategies in order to survive into the increasingly competitive resource market and become more efficient (Kylander & Stone, 2012). However, there is still a spread scepticism around engaging in any branding activity, mainly because of the distinctive features of nonprofit organizations: non-financial objectives, importance of the organizational mission, multiple stakeholders and a cooperative mind set (Gallagher & Weinberg, 1991). For this reason, we have decided to emphasize the substantial differences of the nonprofit sector concerning the application of branding strategies when compared with the for-profit sector, especially for volunteer-based NPOs.

Moreover, we have proposed the Brand Community strategy as an innovative approach to branding for nonprofit organizations. The concept was first introduced by Muniz and O’Guinn (2001), and is defined as “a specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand” (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001). The strategy has received a lot of attention by academics in the for-profit sector, but little research has been done for nonprofit brands. Only Hassay and Peloza (2009) proposed an original model of Brand Community for charities; we based our analysis and discussion on their framework. Considering a volunteer-based NPO, we believe that the adoption of a brand community strategy can be highly beneficial for an NPO in overcoming major organizational challenges like recruiting and retaining volunteers, as well as establishing long-lasting partnerships.

In particular, we studied the case of Junior Achievement Ireland (JAI), a volunteer-based nonprofit organization that runs educational programs in local schools in partnership with large companies located in the country. Because of the unique operational model based on high-profile business volunteers, JAI represents a relevant case study to investigate the application of the Brand Community concept in a nonprofit environment. Therefore, firstly we attempted to discover if the brand community markers could be detected amongst JAI volunteers conducting a panel of interviews and participating in brand events.

#### *Identifying Brand Community's markers*

In our analysis, we were able to see that volunteers identified with the cause of JAI and other volunteers in the sense that they perceived the organization and the involved people as having the same attributes that defined them. Moreover, they felt that they had similar attributes to other volunteers (were like-minded), sharing with them a set of values and beliefs. Finally, they also identified with the children that they were teaching to, giving the experience a very emotional meaning. Volunteers also described the “average JAI volunteer”, typically a skilled and educated professional who knows the importance of pursuing an academic career. This explains why they could easily identify with the members of an educational NPO such as JAI. Respondents also stated that there are some “requirements” to be met in order to become a JAI volunteer: specific skills, a particular mind set and a high level of commitment. Therefore, we believe that the community marker of “consciousness of kind” was definitely detected, as volunteers had already established a sense of “we-ness” (Bender, 1978). Respondents showed a proud “sense of belonging” to an exclusive group of selected volunteers. Finally, they also *dis-identified* with those people who did not possess these attributes, presenting what Muniz and O’Guinn (2001) call “oppositional brand loyalty”.

There was also a high sense of involvement amongst the volunteers in the form of active interest, engagement and commitment towards the cause. Despite the fact that many volunteers had little or no knowledge of JAI before volunteering, the after-experience level of involvement was very high. Respondents were obviously very interested and engaged with the cause and wanted to volunteer again with JAI. There was also a strong

advocacy factor, as they were definitely willing to share their experience with people in their social network. However, when asked to who they would have recommended the JAI experience, the majority of the respondents reported once more a strong sense of “consciousness of kind” and social identity, saying that they would use word of mouth only with like-minded people. Many of the volunteers had also heard of JAI first through colleagues who had volunteered before with JAI, showing the role of other volunteers as a channel for brand awareness. The high level of active engagement was also revealed during the Brand Events we participate in, where volunteers received public recognition for their efforts and the success of JAI was celebrated. The ritual of sharing stories encouraged volunteers to renew their commitment to JAI, perfectly in line with Hassay and Pelosa (2009). Therefore, we can definitely state that the Brand Community marker of “shared rituals and traditions” (in Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001) or “involvement” (in Hassay and Pelosa, 2009) was detected among JAI volunteers.

However, we did not find strong proofs of the presence of a “perceived sense of community” and “moral responsibility” among JAI volunteers. In fact, there was a lack of a sense of duty towards other volunteers and of an interconnectedness between them. Volunteers did not feel a “shared faith their needs will be met through their commitment to be together”. We believe that the last Brand Community marker is the last and most difficult one to develop in any community. For this reason, the mechanism must be facilitated by the NPO in order for a brand community strategy to be successful. Hassay and Pelosa (2009) argue that this mechanism is the “dominant influence” of supporter loyalty. We therefore hypothesize that if JAI would be able to generate a perceived sense of community among volunteers, a brand community will be created, which will lead to greater success for the brand and therefore for the entire organization.

#### *Benefits of a Brand Community Strategy for volunteer-based NPOs*

Moving to the next research question, we investigated how a brand community can be beneficial for a volunteer-based NPO in overcoming its major challenges.

To determine how a brand community strategy could be beneficial for an NPO, one must first decipher the organizational challenges that NPOs face, as well as what kind of

problems can the brand community help overcoming. In the case of JAI, the biggest challenges they face are: (1) recruiting and retaining volunteers, (2) raising brand awareness, and (3) establishing strategic partnerships (with companies). In Figure 6 below, we present a visual depiction of on how the brand community can help Junior Achievement Ireland overcome organizational challenges.

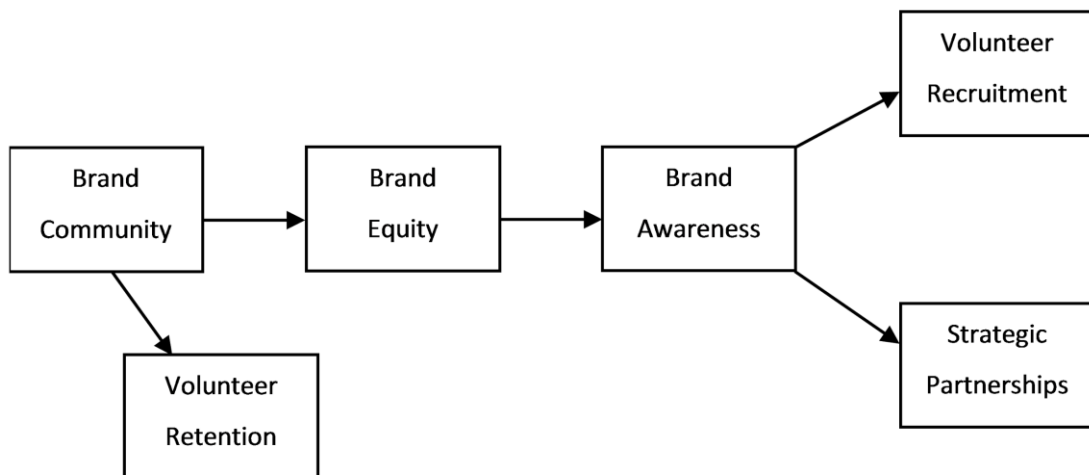


Figure 6 - Visual Depiction of how a Brand Community can help JAI overcome organizational challenges

According to model presented in Hassay and Pelozo (2009), the three mechanisms of the brand community are “components of an iterative, reinforcing process that help to establish and maintain *brand commitment*”. Brand commitment in this sense refers to factors such as intent to stay and “acquiescence” (Hassay & Pelozo, 2009). Brand commitment has also a positive impact on *behavioral loyalty* such as advocacy intentions, willingness to pay more, switching intentions etc. When applying this concept to our case study, we must consider the fact that most companies offer several volunteering opportunities to their employees. Encouraging the creation of a brand community would therefore increase loyalty and maintain brand commitment, ensuring a recurring stream

of volunteers coming back to JAI. Therefore, it is safe to assume that a brand community will lead to an increase of volunteer retention rates.

Furthermore, Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) state in their article that the brand community directly affects *brand equity*. According to Aaker (1991), the four main components of brand equity are; perceived quality of the brand, brand loyalty, brand awareness and brand associations. An increase in brand equity thanks to the adoption of a brand community strategy has also been demonstrated in later research (e.g. (Brogi, et al., 2013) , (Cova, Pace, & Park, 2007) and (Schau, Muñiz, & Arnould, 2009)).

If the brand community leads to an increase in brand equity then we can assume that it will indirectly lead to higher brand awareness. Furthermore the brand community would also directly affect brand awareness, for instance due to advocacy for the brand being more prominent (Hassay & Peloza, 2009).

Given that one has to be *aware* of a mission of an NPO before identifying with it, brand awareness is an important first step in establishing a consciousness of kind amongst potential volunteers with JAI. This being said we can assume that if more employees of companies that already have a partnership with JAI are aware of the organization, it is likelier that they will identify with the mission and will want to get involved in it. As mentioned before, one of the “entry barriers” of volunteering for JAI is that in order to volunteer, one must be an employee of a company that has a partnership with JAI. Therefore, if employees of companies that do not have a partnership with JAI are made aware of JAI's mission and consequently wish to get involved in it, they will likely put pressure on their managers to establish such a partnership in order to get the opportunity to volunteer for the organization.

From all of the factors shown in figure 4, we can see that the brand community is not a one-dimensional solution and can actually lead to multiple organizational challenges being tackled. This highlights how beneficial and crucial having a branding strategy can be in order to establish a sustainable and successful organizational model.



### *Facilitating a brand community building at Junior Achievement Ireland*

According to Hassay and Peloza (2009), there are two ways in which to facilitate brand community building in the nonprofit sector: through *cognitive learning* (identity mechanism) and through *experiential learning* (behavioral involvement). In our view, these methods are not mutually exclusive and both can be integrated into a branding strategy in order to build a brand community. Below we will present practical ways in which JAI can use these mechanisms to facilitate brand community creation.

In order to develop the brand community through cognitive learning, JAI must invest enough time defining their target market and make sure that they are communicating a customized message towards it. The fact that JAI establish partnerships with big, international recognized companies that invest money on CSR activities and that share with JAI a set of values is therefore something to take in consideration when encouraging the creation of a brand community. As in the for-profit world brand partnerships have to consider the “fit” of their brand with the brand they are going to collaborate with, the same happens in the NPO sector. NPOs have to carefully check if their “organizational identity” collides with the for-profit partner’s (Liston-Heyes & Liu, 2013). We can assume that when JAI establish partnerships with suitable companies with which share a similar “organizational identity”, volunteers joining JAI from that company will be more likely to join the JAI community as involved members. Therefore, it would be ideal to establish partnerships with companies that have a similar set of values to JAI, companies that have strong culture of social responsibility and even actively recruit employees who share those values

Not only is it important to target the right companies, but also the right employees as volunteers. We argue that JAI must refrain from recruiting those who volunteer just for opportunistic reasons, but only “high contributors” (Randle & Dolcinar, 2009). In order to do so, they must establish barriers of entry. For instance, this could be achieved by communicating that JAI volunteering requires high commitment (in time and effort) as well as a particular set of skills.

Furthermore, they must encourage volunteers to advocate the JAI brand, “spreading the word”, as prosocial behavior is shown to increase when the help is solicited by someone within an individual’s social network. Employees of Junior Achievement also play a

crucial role in promoting the mission so the organization, for instance when they host presentations about their programs at partner companies. Therefore, in order to increase the identity factor JAI must be sure to hire employees with similar attributes to target market (in terms of skills and personality types for example). They should also emphasize the fact that volunteering with JAI would entail helping children in their local communities. Volunteers have the opportunity to be "role models", giving them a stronger sense of identification with the cause.

The ideal way to increase experiential learning through behavioral involvement of volunteers is to host "brand events", as described by McAlexander & Shouten (1998) and McAlexander et al. (2002). During these events, the success of JAI would be celebrated by sharing stories of volunteer experiences and the impact that the organization is having on the local community. Volunteers, students, teachers and other categories of people involved in the JAI's activities could gather at events where both parties would share their stories and thoughts about JAI. This could be highly influential in giving volunteers a sense of belonging to "something bigger than self" (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001) and establishing a connection with other volunteers. The fact that many volunteers come from high-profile, large companies would give the event an atmosphere of exclusivity and would boost the excitement to join in. Volunteers could also bring a guest to the events so more people could get a glimpse into the JAI experience and likely increase the chances of them wanting to volunteer as well.

One way of establishing *rituals and traditions* and to increase involvement is to award volunteers when they have volunteered a set a number of times, establishing a sense of *hierarchy* within the community, as suggested by Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) . Moreover, as suggested by some of the interviewees, JAI could have high-contributing volunteers as "Brand ambassadors" within partner companies. These JAI advocates would be the reference point for potential JAI volunteers. Another suggestion based on other Brand Community success stories, would be creating a specific language that would define and reinforce the sense of community. For example, volunteers could have different names depending on their "seniority" in the organization, contributing to the creation of a "hierarchy".

Finally, we also believe that having a stronger online presence could strengthen JAI's perceived sense of community. Having an online platform where volunteers can share their stories may serve as a mean to connect volunteers with each other. JAI could post pictures and share stories of classes that were taught by volunteers so that content would also be relevant to specific volunteers.

Regarding the perceived sense of community, it will be established in both cases, through cognitive learning and experiential learning mechanisms. However, JAI can take measures to increase this mechanism even further. The organization could encourage this by reminding volunteers of the organizational mission and emphasizing their impact on the local community. It would also be useful to remind the more tenured volunteers that they were once new to the process and that they should do what they can to help newcomers. JAI could also ask those who have volunteered before to help with introductory sessions to volunteering or even have trainings, which would just be run by former volunteers.

Concluding, we were able to see the benefits of engaging in a Brand Community strategy, as well as suggesting several paths an NPO can follow in order to facilitate the creation of the community. We believe that such a strategy will help NPOs being more recognizable, differentiating themselves from other organizations in the same sector. High-contributing volunteers are more and more looking for organization that provide them an opportunity with which they can identify with. NPOs must therefore engage in branding activities in order to make volunteers aware of their mission, values and unique features. As explained above, increasing brand awareness and communicating the right message will increase efficiency and credibility (do Paço, Rodrigues, & Rodrigues, 2014). A strong brand will act like a "time-saving device", as volunteers and supporters will perceive the organization as more credible (Kylander & Stone, 2012). Moreover, we believe that engaging in a branding activity such as brand community will also increase internal cohesion, consequently aligning external brand image with the internal one. The result of this alignment process is that the organization starts to gain more and more trust externally, as their mission and identity will appear more credible (Kylander & Stone, 2012). Consequently, it will be easier for a brand-oriented nonprofit to establish relationships with external audiences and form long-lasting partnerships (Heller &

Reitsema, 2010). Moreover, branding activities will increase the NPO's likeliness of attracting resources, especially volunteers (Kylander & Stone, 2012).

In this chapter, we have addressed two sub questions of our main research question: i.e. how can a volunteer based NPO benefit from adaption of a brand community strategy and how can the brand community be facilitated for non-profit organizations. Based on theoretical research, we have proposed how a brand community can help a volunteer based NPO overcome organizational challenges but also provided suggestion on how to implement a brand community strategy. In the next chapter, we will provide our thoughts on managerial implications.

## **6 Managerial Implications**

In this research, we highlight the importance and challenges of branding in the nonprofit sector. With increased competition in the third sector, it has become ever more important to engage in branding and marketing strategies. In fact, such strategies could be crucial in establishing a sustainable organizational model and supporting the NPO into achieving its mission. Branding strategies are valuable not only because the greater level of competition that NPOs are facing in the last decades, but also to raise brand awareness. We believe that one of the main problems NPOs are facing is the inability of communicating their mission to people who want to get involved with their activities but simply aren't aware of them.

We suggest that using the brand community concept may be an ideal way of overcoming some of the organizational challenges that NPOs face when developing a sustainable and successful approach to achieve the organization's mission. We studied the case of Junior Achievement Ireland, a volunteer-based nonprofit organization that provides educational programs to young people. Our analysis was based on in-depth interviews with volunteers, through which we investigated whether the markers of the charity brand community were present. We found that not all mechanisms were present so we made suggestions for JAI on how to encourage the establishment of a brand community.

When adopting a Brand Community strategy, nonprofit organizations must have in mind that it is not only a marketing strategy, but also a business strategy, meaning that it must be integrated and supported by all parts of the organization. As stated in the discussion, the brand community strategy is a multidimensional approach that helps solving several challenges within nonprofit organisations. Therefore, all parts of the organisation must be on board and advocate the strategy for the process to be more effective and the results positive.

Secondly, NPOs should acknowledge that they are not "just" achieving their mission living out of volunteers' time and donors' money. Nowadays, non-profits are providing a "service" to people that are looking for an activity that gives them meaning and fulfilment in life. Following this perspective, NPOs are giving individuals the opportunity

to contribute towards a common cause, achieving a sense of belonging and self-realization.

Traditionally, people were able to fulfil their self-realization and social needs in their own local community, meaning a geographically bounded community (for example a neighbourhood) or a religious community (for example the members of a Church). Today, especially in the western countries, the framework has changed; we live in globalized and secular societies, where religious and geographic boundaries are getting weaker. Nonetheless, people are still looking for “meaning” and “belonging”, just in new ways: being a member of a Brand Community is one of them. Admirers and high users of brands gather in Brand Communities to not only share commitment, but also an emotional bond. Members of brand communities commonly develop a sense of belonging and the belief that they are sharing the same goal (Constantin & Stonescu, 2014).

In the same way, brand communities around “nonprofit brands” could therefore become a new way of fulfilling self-realization needs. Actually, developing a feeling of belonging might be even more relevant for a nonprofit organization. In fact, an NPO offers volunteers and donors an opportunity to “do good”, while get to know like-minded people and develop a feeling of self-worth. Brand Community would therefore help an organization fostering social interaction, sense of self-realization and belonging among supporters.

Therefore we believe that engaging in branding activities, especially adopting a brand community strategy, could help NPOs to recruit and retain volunteers by encouraging feelings of belonging and self-realization.

## **7 Conclusion**

In this research, we conduct exploratory research into how using a brand community as a marketing strategy can help nonprofit organizations achieve their mission by overcoming organizational challenges and develop a sustainable organizational model for greater success. We study the case of Junior Achievement Ireland, a volunteer based NPO. After analysing data from interviewing volunteers and attending JAI events, we discovered that two of three mechanisms that define brand community were apparent amongst volunteers of JAI. We then propose that having a brand community as a marketing strategy will not only lead to increase in volunteer recruitment and retention, but it will also raise brand awareness, help establish strategic partnerships and enhance brand equity. Moreover we propose two methods in which JAI could facilitate brand community creation (cognitive learning and experiential learning) as well as suggesting practical ways by which JAI could encourage the establishment of such a community.

### **7.1 Limitations**

Despite being a valuable resource for nonprofit organizations looking to engage in branding activities, our study presents several limitations, mainly in terms of methodology. Even though adopting a single case study as a research method allowed us to explore JAI context from a variety of perspectives (Yin, 2009), this approach presents some disadvantages. The most difficult challenge to face is of course the fact that we are drawing our conclusions based on one single case, and the researcher can never be fully confident of the validity of the study when generalized. Therefore, it is crucial to articulate the results of the research in the most extensive way possible, in order to help readers to have a clear understanding of the relevancy of the findings for other contexts.

Secondly, if we compare in-depth interviews with other research methods such as surveys, it allows researchers to gather richer data about respondents' experience and impressions, "making sense of a phenomenon" (Knox & Burkard, 2009). In-depth interviews provide the researcher with new insights and unforeseen perspectives on the topic, giving the opportunity to explore topics in depth (McCracken, 1988). Moreover,

using semi-structured interviews we had a high level of flexibility that allowed us to explain or help clarify questions during the interviews. Consequently, the likelihood of useful and relevant responses increased, especially when compared with surveys. However, in-depth interviews are also very time-consuming, so in our study, it was possible to interview only eight volunteers, which is a quite small sample and it makes more difficult to generalize our results. Furthermore, because of the semi-structured approach we took, and the interpretive nature of the analysis, it is possible that our analysis was influenced by our personal values and beliefs.

Additionally, we have to consider that those volunteers that accepted to be interviewed were likely to be enthusiastic high-contributors volunteers. Consequently, their responses could have been distorted in favour of a higher engagement with JAI and more likeliness to get involved in a future “JAI Community”.

Finally, in our interviews we asked some open-ended hypothetical questions, with the aim to explore the benefits of a brand community strategy according to volunteers. Despite being very useful in determining the advantages and the challenges of the branding strategy proposed in this paper, the exploratory approach of these questions makes the generalization of our results problematic. Because of all these limitations, a reader should exercise prudence when transferring the results of this study besides JAI. Not the less, the results of this paper contribute to the academic research providing additional knowledge on NPO branding management and Brand Community literature, especially regarding new insights on how engaging in a Brand Community strategy could help an organization solving crucial organizational challenges.



## **7.2 Future Research**

Our research could be the basis of more complex and in-depth studies. Our paper is focused on the identification and study of the three markers of a commercial Brand Community in a non-profit organization that had not yet engaged in such branding strategy. Future research could be carried out on the study of an NPO that has adopted and facilitated the creation of “Brand Community”. Even using a single case study methodology, a researcher could expand academic knowledge on the topic by investigating the opportunities as well as obstacles that the organization faced when encouraging the creation of the community.

In particular, future research could be carried out on the specific challenges an NPO has to take into consideration when dealing with scepticism, especially within the organization’s leadership regarding applying traditionally for-profit strategies to a non-profit setting.

Moreover, since our study was focused on the branding challenges of a volunteer-based NPO, it would be interesting to see the results of a similar study dedicated to understand how a brand community strategy would be beneficial for different types of NPO, for example donations-based organizations or NGOs.

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## Appendix

Question #	Questions and sub-questions
1	Tell me about your experience with JAI
2	Why did you choose JAI over other charity or nonprofit organizations? a. How is JAI different from other organizations?
3	What do you think about JAI's cause? a. Why do you think is a good cause to contribute to? b. Do you feel more connected to JAI and JAI's cause after volunteering?
4	How did you hear about the organization? a. Were other JAI volunteers instrumental in your choice of volunteering?
5	What you think was your motivation for volunteering at first? Is it changed now?
6	How did you feel engaged in JAI activities? a. Do you have an example to share with us?
7	How did you find other volunteers?
8	Would you like to volunteer again?
9	Would you recommend this experience to someone else? a. Would you recommend it to anyone or someone in particular?
10	Have you ever thought about networking opportunities with other JAIers?
11	What do you think JAI could do to maintain the relationships between the organization and the volunteers? a. What do you think about a "JAI Alumni" group? b. Would you like to be invited to a "JAI Alumni" activities and events? c. Would you be willing to get involved with other JAIers online?
12	If I would ask you...what does JAI means for you, what would you answer?

*Table 1A: Interview questions used for the research*



Mechanisms	Themes	Quotes
<p><b>Mechanisms 1 – Consciousness of Kind and Identification</b></p>	<p>Identification with JAI's cause</p>	<p><i>“It’s a great cause to contribute for, education is very important, especially when it comes to entrepreneurship and business. [...] They can be more aware, especially the less fortunate, as adults they will make better decisions.”</i> Respondent 3</p> <p><i>“I suppose it’s that I like helping in the local area where I work and it’s a good thing I think”</i> Respondent 7</p> <p><i>“I am happy to do this, I guess it just gives me comfort knowing that you’ve at least done something small in the grand scheme of things”</i> Respondent 8</p> <p><i>“You see how much of a difference that made to those children”</i> Respondent 2</p> <p><i>I think I like the idea that I'm doing something that's rooted in this community. So I'm not growing up in Ireland, I'm not Irish. I've been here now for 10 years now and I live in the community and the area that I live in now for three years. And you know. I know some of the neighbours and I feel that I'm kind of like I'm using the community but I'm not sure of how much I give back to</i></p>

		<p><i>them...I feel that this is like diamonds in the sky.. In a meaningful way. That is related to what I'm good at. I guess. I think that goes back to...I think that relates to why I was looking for a school that is like around here. Right? And is not close to my work. Because there are like loads of schools. I mean like in the city centre there are like tons of schools. I mean there are few schools here as well. I think that was important to me.” Respondent 5</i></p>
	<p>Perception of other volunteers</p>	<p><i>“It was definitely customized, well suited for a specific kind of people” Respondent 1</i></p> <p><i>“JAI works with companies, with business people that are used to work, plan, do their job very well. However, that’s not enough.... you have also to be really committed towards JAI’s mission” Respondent 4</i></p> <p><i>“I felt like other volunteers were like minded, I assume this group of people is composed of people that have many common features. I think you have to be prepared and ready for it” Respondent 3</i></p> <p><i>“It’s good for the organisation as well, with the other volunteers...now we have more to talk about since then. So it does build</i></p>

		<p><i>relationships as well, which is a good thing, you get closer to people inside your own company”</i> Respondent 1</p> <p><i>“I know other volunteers, my boss volunteered as well. There is a connection. It’s something different that you have, that you have in common. I suppose we chose something that makes us closer to each other.”</i> Respondent 7</p> <p><i>“You can always contribute in other ways but this was really significant and rewarding because without you that classroom wouldn’t have been taught. So without me those children wouldn’t have had the same opportunity”</i> Respondent 7</p> <p><i>“I’ve volunteered before, and yes, it’s different. In JAI I was a teacher, the focus was on me, I wasn’t another guy in a team of volunteers. You can’t hide in the crowd, you have a lot of attention, kids are looking at you. You feel you are the main character.”</i> Respondent 2</p> <p><i>“I definitely felt supported by the organisation, [...] they are always in touch with as again and again. I felt valued by the trainers, by the organisation”</i> Respondent 4</p>
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	Shared set of values	<i>“I felt like other volunteers were like minded, I assume this group of people is composed of people that have many common features.” Respondent 4</i>
<b>Mechanisms 2 – Involvement and Shared Rituals and Traditions</b>	Involvement and Commitment	<p><i>“I love when I get an email from JAI. Is there something new, or is there anything I can do? I don’t think this happens with other organisations. Why? Well because I gained so much from it, and it was easy” Respondent 2</i></p> <p><i>“I think I’ll do it again. Because it was really good set up as well. They have a really good support for you if you ever need anything, it’s a really good organisation. they made me say “ok, I can do this!” So yeah, that’s why, it’s perfect for me” Respondent 1</i></p>
	Greeting Rituals	<i>“It’s good for the organisation as well, with the other volunteers...now we have more to talk about since then. So it does build relationships as well, which is a good thing, you get closer to people” Respondent 1</i>

	Advocacy	<p><i>“I am the biggest advocate for [JAI]. I am always talking about it. I can tell you.. I was happy, I got out of the class, I called my wife “ah this is the best thing I did in a while”. I am always happy to tell other people about it.” Respondent 4</i></p> <p><i>“[...] I’ve heard about it thanks to other volunteers in the company, I probably wouldn’t have heard about it otherwise. That’s why I think it’s perfect when I tell my colleagues about it...I don’t think that otherwise they would ever know about it” Respondent 4</i></p> <p><i>“The entire company was just amazing, I’d probably love to go and work for JAI” Respondent 3</i></p>
<b>3<sup>rd</sup> Mechanism – Moral Responsibility and Perceived Sense of Community</b>		<p><i>“You could meet nice people, but I didn’t get the chance” Respondent 2</i></p> <p><i>“I suppose a lot of it you go out there volunteer and then, you don’t really speak to anyone else about how they’re getting on unless you know the people who are volunteering so it’s kind of you’re out there on your own doing it.” Respondent 3</i></p>

*Table 2A: Examples of supporting quotes for the three Brand Community Mechanisms*