Brand Bonds Beyond Profit: Exploring Brand Relationships in the Nonprofit Sector

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ABSTRACT

This study explores how brand relationships develop within nonprofit organisations (NPOs). While commercial and consumer-brand relationships (CBRs) have been widely studied, less attention has been given to how these relationships develop in nonprofit settings, particularly where multiple stakeholder groups are involved. This represents an important gap, as NPOs engage with diverse stakeholders who have different roles, motivations and forms of involvement with the organisation.

The study aims to extend the investigation of brand relationships (BRs) to the nonprofit sector by exploring the nature of stakeholder-nonprofit brand bonds, the process through which these relationships develop, and the factors that shape them. In doing so, it develops a deeper understanding of relational dynamics within mission-driven organisations. The study adopted a qualitative, interpretive approach. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 21 participants from three stakeholder groups: employees (EMPs), volunteers (VOLs), and direct beneficiaries (DBs). The data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis to explore participants' experiences and interpretations of their relationships with NPOs.

The findings indicate that nonprofit brand relationships (NBRs) can take different forms and are shaped by both stakeholder-related and organisational factors. The study identifies three distinct relationship forms: identity-based, instrumental-identification, and exchange-oriented relationships. These forms vary in the strength and nature of organisational identification (OID), ranging from stronger identification in identity-based relationships to weak or minimal identification in exchange-oriented relationships. Therefore, OID provides an important explanatory mechanism for understanding identity-relevant NBRs, while its role is more limited in predominantly exchange-oriented relationships. The findings also highlight the influence of cultural and religious meanings, with religion operating as a moral interpretive lens through which stakeholders may understand nonprofit causes, organisational conduct, and their own involvement. NBRs were also associated with behavioural and psychological outcomes, including loyalty, advocacy, continued engagement, belonging, gratitude, fulfilment, well-being, tolerance, and relationship maintenance.

This study offers several contributions to BR research. Theoretically, it extends understanding of BRs in a nonprofit and multi-stakeholder context and clarifies the explanatory role and limitations of OID across different relationship forms. In particular, it shows that NBRs vary not only in relational strength or emotional attachment, but also in the role and strength of OID within the relationship. Practically, the findings highlight the importance of recognising differences in stakeholders' motives, values and relationship forms when developing engagement strategies. Methodologically, the study demonstrates the value of a qualitative, interpretive, multi-stakeholder approach for examining NBRs within their social and cultural context. Overall, the study provides a contextually grounded and theoretically informed account of BRs within the nonprofit sector.

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DEDICATION

To my father, Abdullah Abdulrahman Aljuwaiser (RIP), who always believed in the value of knowledge, who was endlessly proud of his children, and who wanted this for me more than I did.

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

This study explores how brand relationships (BRs) function within the nonprofit sector, focusing on how stakeholders form and experience bonds with mission-driven organisations. Although extensive research has been conducted on BRs in the commercial sector, its application to the nonprofit context remains limited. Since nonprofits depend heavily on stakeholder engagement, trust, and value alignment, understanding how these relationships are created, developed, and maintained is both theoretically and practically important. Thus, this chapter establishes the conceptual and contextual foundations of the study by positioning nonprofit brand relationships (NBRs), highlighting key gaps, and outlining the research focus guiding this study.

1.1 Background and Context: Nonprofit Organisations and Brand Relationships

1.1.1 Brand Relationships (BRs)

"…They do not simply choose a brand, but they choose a life, their lives, their identity."

Fournier (1998)

In the late twentieth century, researchers grew increasingly interested in how consumers connect with brands. As academic focus on this subject expanded, a new concept emerged suggesting that consumers could form bonds with the brands they choose and use. Studies into consumers' relationships with brands led scholars to suggest that individuals may develop interpersonal-like bonds with consumed objects, retailers, and brands (Shimp and Madden, 1988; Blackstone, 1993), thereby treating brands as active relational partners. In this way, a brand encompasses emotional,

motivational, and cognitive elements that underpin relationships within a human-like framework. For instance, individuals might refer to certain brands, such as Apple, as “trusted companions” or “part of who they are,” indicating an enduring attachment. The brand, therefore, is perceived not only as a product provider but also as a symbolic extension of the self, reflecting aspects of individuals’ identity and social relationships.

While these early perspectives highlighted how bonds with brands may mirror interpersonal relationships, it was not until Fournier’s (1998) seminal study that the concept of a consumer-brand relationship (CBR) was fully conceptualised, and the characteristics that signify how individuals relate to brands were articulated. Fournier (1998) suggests that brand relationships are reciprocity-based, with brands acting as active partners; purpose-based, fulfilling functional, emotional, and symbolic roles; evolving bonds influenced by personality, life experiences, and sociocultural context; and exchange-based dyadic relationships. This influential investigation paved the way for scholars to explore consumers’ relationships with brands, demonstrating the depth and breadth of consumers’ bonds and highlighting their multidimensional, distinctive, and complex nature (Esch et al., 2006; Veloutsou, 2007; Fritz et al., 2014).

Research on the BR phenomena has subsequently evolved into a significant area within marketing and branding scholarship. Scholars increasingly recognise that brands function not only as market identifiers but also as relational entities that shape consumers’ emotional and symbolic experiences (Veloutsou and Guzmán, 2017). For example, certain BRs might resemble close friendships characterised by emotional attachment and trust, while others might be more functional or habitual, reflecting weaker or utilitarian bonds (Fournier, 1998; Veloutsou, 2007). These variations

demonstrate that BR can differ in strength, form, and meaning depending on individuals' experiences and expectations. Within this perspective, a brand might operate as a meaning-bearing symbol through which individuals interpret and express aspects of their identity (Escalas and Bettman, 2003). Consumers' relationships with brands therefore extend beyond functional evaluation and become embedded within broader identity projects, social interactions, and cultural meanings. As Fournier (1998) argues, a brand might serve as a relationship partner that individuals rely upon for emotional support, self-expression, and symbolic affiliation. This relational perspective has informed a growing body of research examining how BR influence consumer behaviours, loyalty, commitment, and advocacy (Stokburger-Sauer et al., 2012; Tuškej et al., 2013). Subsequent studies have further shown that the type and nature of brands, whether product or service brands, may shape the form of consumers' relational bonds (Morris and Martin, 2000; Fritz, 2014; Hashim et al., 2020; Kumar and Kaushik, 2020).

Furthermore, BR investigations have evolved from a predominantly dyadic perspective, centred on consumer–brand interactions, towards a more collective relational understanding. For instance, consumers may develop relationships not only with the focal brand but also with others associated with it, such as members of brand communities (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001; McAlexander et al., 2002). Despite the exponential growth and conceptual advances of BR research since Fournier's (1998) investigation, studies have largely remained situated within consumption contexts, focusing primarily on product and service brands in commercial settings, resulting in a limited understanding of how relational bonds may form in contexts where brands represent social missions rather than commercial offerings. This prompts an important

question about whether the relational dynamics observed in commercial environments are equally applicable in nonprofit contexts.

BR scholarship has also highlighted that relational bonds with brands are shaped by a variety of contextual influences, including sociocultural norms, individual experiences, and social interactions. Fournier (1998) emphasised that brand relationships evolve within broader cultural contexts that influence how individuals interpret brands and integrate them into their lives. Later studies further demonstrated that relational bonds with brands could be influenced by consumers' social identities, personal experiences, and cultural backgrounds (Escalas and Bettman, 2003; Park et al., 2013). These insights suggest that BR should be understood as socially embedded phenomena rather than purely market-driven interactions. Consequently, the contexts in which brands operate play a critical role in shaping how individuals form and experience relational bonds with them.

Although prior research has acknowledged the role of nonprofit brands in fostering trust, commitment, emotional bonds, and identification, nonprofit brands are grounded in social mission, moral purpose, and value congruence, which may intensify individuals' relationships with nonprofit organisations (NPOs) (Stride, 2006; Stride and Lee, 2007). In this respect, nonprofit brands act as symbolic representations of organisational causes, values, and missions, facilitating relational bonds between stakeholders and nonprofit entities (Ritchie et al., 1999; Liu et al., 2015). This highlights the relevance of extending BR research into the nonprofit sector. Moreover, scholars suggest that BR may develop wherever brands intersect with individuals' lives, becoming embedded within their identities, personal aspirations, and emotional

experiences (Fournier, 1998; Escalas and Bettman, 2003; Park et al., 2006; Park and John, 2018). Accordingly, this study seeks to extend the concept of BR beyond commercial settings by exploring nonprofit brand bonds.

1.1.2 Nonprofit Organisations (NPOs) as a Relational Context

It is widely recognised that NPOs are established for the benefit of society. These organisations are orientated towards addressing societal needs and are inherently benevolent in nature, as they are not primarily concerned with generating profit or financial gain (United Nations, 2003). NPOs occupy a distinctive position within society because they operate at the intersection of social, economic, and moral spheres. Unlike commercial organisations whose primary objective is profit generation, nonprofit entities are typically mission-driven entities established to address social needs, provide community services, and support vulnerable populations (Salamon and Anheier, 1992; United Nations, 2003).

As a result, NPOs often rely on public trust, stakeholder commitment, and voluntary engagement in order to sustain their operations. These attributes show that relationships between these organisations and their stakeholders are often grounded in shared values, moral beliefs, and collective purpose rather than purely transactional exchanges. For example, a person might choose to volunteer with a charity focused on child welfare, not merely as participation, but as an expression of their personal values and moral commitments, thus, forming a deeper, value-driven connection with the organisation.

Despite their philanthropic role and their significance in addressing societal challenges, NPOs face several structural and operational difficulties, including managing multiple causes, coping with limited or decreasing public or governmental funding, competing for financial resources, and relying heavily on individual donations and diverse stakeholder groups (Apaydin, 2011). Among these challenges, managing stakeholder relationships remains central to nonprofit sustainability and organisational progression (Sepulcri et al., 2020).

Therefore, the relational dynamics within NPOs are inherently complex. As NPOs engage with multiple stakeholder groups who often fulfil overlapping roles within the organisation. For instance, individuals could simultaneously act as volunteers, donors, advocates, or beneficiaries. This multiplicity of roles contributes to a relational environment in which stakeholders interact with the focal organisation and other members of the nonprofit community (Hassay and Peloza, 2009). Consequently, NBR may extend beyond simple dyadic interaction and instead involve a network of interconnected relationships that shape stakeholders' experiences and perceptions of the nonprofit entity. For instance, a volunteer might develop a relationship not only with the focal organisation but also with fellow volunteers, employees, and other stakeholders, collectively shaping their overall experience of the nonprofit brand.

Stakeholders within NPOs encompass both internal and external actors, including nonprofit entities, donors, volunteers, governmental bodies, employees, and beneficiaries (Arnett et al., 2003; Lee, 2013; Vallaster and von Wallpach, 2018). Consequently, the relational framework within the nonprofit sector differs from that of the commercial sector, where customers or target markets often occupy the central

relational position. In contrast, NPOs operate within a network of multiple relationships that extend beyond the dyadic relationships typically recognised in commercial contexts (Mitchell and Clark, 2019), reflecting a more collective relational structure (Hassay and Peloza, 2009). This complexity requires NPOs to cultivate diverse forms of relationships and to address the distinctive expectations and roles of different stakeholder groups in order to sustain and strengthen these relational ties.

Previous research has explored the benefits that NPOs may derive from cultivating relationships with multiple stakeholders, including enhanced financial stability and increased donations (Arnett et al., 2003; Waters, 2011; Vallaster and von Wallpach, 2018). However, much of this work has primarily focused on donor relationships and donation behaviours (Sepulcri et al., 2020), leaving other stakeholder groups and relational dynamics comparatively underexplored. Moreover, existing studies have rarely examined the underlying mechanisms that shape stakeholders' bonds with NPOs, as many investigations have adopted a relationship marketing perspective centred on strategic and long-term relationship management (Arnett et al., 2003; Waters, 2011; Vallaster and von Wallpach, 2018; Sepulcri et al., 2020). Despite the recognised importance of stakeholder relationships within NPOs, much of the existing research has focused primarily on organisational strategies for managing relationships rather than on stakeholders' lived relational experiences. Relationship marketing approaches, for example, have emphasised how organisations can cultivate trust, commitment, and long-term engagement through strategic communication and relationship-building initiatives (Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Sargeant and Lee, 2004). While these perspectives provide valuable managerial insights, they offer limited understanding of how stakeholders themselves interpret NPOs and develop relational

bonds with them. This emphasises the necessity for research that investigates the relational experiences of stakeholders and examines the psychological and social mechanisms through which these bonds develop.

Adopting a BR perspective offers an opportunity to explore individuals' bonds with nonprofit entities more thoroughly, enabling an investigation into why stakeholders develop relationships with NPOs and how these bonds are formed. In this way, the BR viewpoint helps to expand knowledge of the unique and complex nature of stakeholder relationships within nonprofit contexts. However, relatively little is known about how stakeholders themselves interpret nonprofit brands and the influence of these interpretations on their relational attachment to NPOs. Understanding these relational dynamics is particularly important given the mission-driven character of these entities and the diverse motivations that drive stakeholder engagement.

The relational characteristics of NPOs discussed above are also embedded within the sociocultural environment in which these organisations operate. This is particularly relevant to the present study because its empirical context, Saudi Arabia, provides a setting in which nonprofit engagement is closely intertwined with religious, moral and collective meanings.

1.1.3 Saudi Arabia as a Sociocultural Context for Nonprofit Brand Relationships (NBRs)

Saudi Arabia provides a theoretically relevant context for examining nonprofit brand relationships (NBRs), rather than serving solely as the geographical setting of the study. Much existing BR research has been developed within Western and

predominantly commercial settings (Fournier, 1998; Aggarwal, 2004; Patterson and O'Malley, 2006; Fritz et al., 2014; Confos and Davis, 2016; Kumar et al., 2021). Although BR research has expanded into non-Western settings, including India, China, Taiwan, and Malaysia (Sahay et al., 2012; Chang and Chieng, 2006; Hashim et al., 2020; Kumar and Kaushik, 2020), culturally diverse and non-commercial contexts remain comparatively under-represented. As Jafari et al. (2012) argue, greater attention to diverse cultural settings is important for broadening consumer and marketing theory beyond assumptions derived predominantly from Western contexts.

This is particularly relevant to the present study, given that BRs do not develop independently of their sociocultural environment. Existing research acknowledges that relationships with brands can be shaped by individuals' identities, social experiences, cultural meanings, and the symbolic resources associated with brands (Fournier, 1998; Escalas and Bettman, 2003; Park et al., 2013). Examining NBRs within Saudi Arabia therefore provides an opportunity to consider how relational processes may operate when engagement with an organisation is embedded within cultural, religious, and moral meanings rather than being primarily organised around commercial consumption. Religion, culture, and philanthropy are closely interconnected within the Saudi context. The Basic Law of Saudi Arabia is grounded in Sharia, which shapes national legislation and societal values (Al-Nahari and Mofawaz, 2023). Islamic philanthropic practises such as zakat, sadaqa, and waqf (see Table 1) also provide an important foundation for nonprofit and charitable activity (ICNL, 2023). These practises extend beyond financial giving and are associated with broader principles of social responsibility, solidarity, collective welfare, and religious obligation. In this context,

participation in nonprofit activity might carry meanings that differ from those associated with conventional consumer-brand relationships.

Of particular relevance is the Islamic concept of Ajer, referring to the spiritual reward from Allah associated with good deeds. Alongside values of religious obligation and collective responsibility, such culturally embedded meanings may shape why individuals engage with nonprofit organisations, how they interpret this engagement, and the significance they attach to their relationships with nonprofit brands. These meanings may not always be explicitly articulated but can nevertheless form part of the cultural and moral framework through which stakeholders understand nonprofit participation.

The theoretical relevance of the Saudi context therefore lies in its potential to shed light on the relational mechanisms and meanings that may be less visible within commercially oriented BR research. Whereas commercial brand relationships have largely been conceptualised through consumption, symbolic self-expression, emotional attachment, and exchange, relationships with nonprofit brands may additionally be embedded in moral commitment, religious meaning, collective responsibility, and identification with a social cause. Consequently, the Saudi setting provides an opportunity to examine whether established assumptions about BRs remain sufficient when the focal brand represents a social mission and when stakeholder engagement may carry moral and religious significance.

Accordingly, the present study treats context as an integral part of understanding how NBRs are constructed and experienced, rather than as a background variable.

Exploring NBRs in Saudi Arabia enables the study to consider how culturally and morally embedded meanings may shape stakeholders' bonds with nonprofit brands and, in doing so, contributes to extending theoretical understanding of BRs beyond predominantly Western and commercial settings.

Table 1: Islamic Philanthropic Practises in the Saudi Context

Practice	Definition	Key Features
Zakat (Almsgiving)	Obligatory almsgiving; the third pillar of the Five Pillars of Islam	• Generally calculated at 2.5% for certain forms of qualifying wealth, subject to applicable conditions • Distributed for specific religiously prescribed purposes • Subject to a formal regulatory and collection framework in Saudi Arabia
Sadaqa (Charity)	Voluntary charitable giving or acts beyond obligatory zakat	• Can include financial and non-financial acts of charity and generosity • Entirely discretionary. • Strongly encouraged in Islam as an expression of generosity

Waqf (Endowment)	An endowment in which an asset is dedicated, and its benefit or proceeds are directed towards specified purposes	• Asset generates ongoing benefits • Endower sets conditions for use • Administered in accordance with the endower's conditions

Source: *Researcher's synthesis based on ICNL (2023), ZATCA (2024), and General Authority for Awqaf (2026)*

1.2 Identification Perspective in Nonprofit Brand Relationships (NBRs)

BR has been acknowledged to emerge when brands become embedded within individuals' identity projects and self-concepts (Fournier,1998). Within marketing and organisational research, identification has been widely recognised as a powerful mechanism through which individuals develop connections with organisations and brands. Organisational identification (OID) refers to the extent to which individuals perceive a sense of oneness and belonging with an organisation and incorporate aspects of that organisation into their self-concept (Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Mael and Ashforth, 1992). When individuals identify with an organisation, they are more likely to interpret the organisation's success and failures as personally relevant and to engage in behaviours that support organisational goals (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003). Thus, identification represents one potential mechanism through which relational bonds between individuals and organisations could form and develop.

Within a nonprofit context, Bhattacharya et al. (1995) conceptualised identification in nonprofit membership settings as a perceived sense of oneness or belonging with an organisation; their findings indicate that members' identification is associated with supportive behaviours such as visiting and donating. Research in branding has similarly demonstrated that identification processes can influence individuals' relationships with brands. Consumers often favour brands that reflect their personal values or symbolically represent aspects of their identity (Escalas and Bettman, 2003). In nonprofit contexts, identification might be particularly salient because NPOs often represent social causes and moral values that resonate with stakeholders' personal beliefs. As a result, stakeholders could develop relational bonds with the nonprofit organisation, not only based on the services it provides but also based on the values the organisation reflects and identities that stakeholders wish to express or support.

Scholars further suggest that stakeholders may be more inclined towards NPOs whose brands embody personally endorsed values, enabling the brand to function as a symbolic extension of identity (Stride and Lee, 2007). In a similar vein, research demonstrates that stakeholders tend to favour organisations that are self-relevant and with which they can easily identify, potentially encouraging prosocial behaviours such as donation, volunteering, and advocacy (Liu et al., 2015; Chapleo, 2015; Millán et al., 2024).

Taken together, these insights suggest that identification with a nonprofit entity may play an important role in shaping stakeholders' relational bonds with NPOs. Building on this perspective, the present study adopts OID as a theoretical and analytical lens

to explore how identification processes may contribute to the development and nature of NBRs.

Importantly, however, NBRs are treated as conceptually distinct within this study. NBR represents the central relational phenomenon being investigated, referring to the bond that stakeholders form and experience with a nonprofit brand, whereas OID provides a theoretical lens through which the role of identification in the development of these relationships can be examined. Therefore, OID is not treated as synonymous with NBR, nor is identification assumed to be present in all nonprofit brand relationships. Rather, the study explores the extent to which identification helps explain how NBRs develop and vary across stakeholders and relational experiences.

1.3 Conceptual and Theoretical Positioning of Nonprofit Brand Relationships (NBRs)

The BR literature provides a significant conceptual foundation for understanding how individuals develop meaningful bonds with brands beyond functional or transactional exchanges. Existing research demonstrates that brands can acquire emotional, symbolic, social and identity-related meanings and may become incorporated into individuals' everyday lives and self-concepts (Fournier, 1998; Escalas and Bettman, 2003; Park et al., 2013). These insights provide a useful starting point for examining relationships with nonprofit brands, particularly because NPOs can represent values, causes, and meanings that extend beyond the services they provide.

However, much of the existing BR literature has developed within commercial and consumer contexts, where the focal relationship is typically conceptualised between a

consumer and a commercial brand (Fournier, 1998; Aggarwal, 2004; Patterson and O'Malley, 2006; Fritz et al., 2014; Kumar et al., 2021). Consequently, existing understanding of BRs has largely been shaped by consumption-based settings in which individuals engage with brands as consumers through purchase, use, and marketplace experiences. Although this literature provides important insights into emotional, symbolic and identity-related bonds, these relational conditions cannot necessarily be assumed to operate in the same way within nonprofit settings.

NPOs present different relational conditions, where stakeholders may engage with the organisation without occupying a conventional consumer role. Employees work within the organisation, volunteers contribute their time and effort, and direct beneficiaries receive or participate in its services. Their relationships may therefore develop through different forms of involvement and might be influenced by the organisation's mission, social cause, values, moral meanings, and stakeholders' own identities and motivations. In such settings, the nonprofit brand can represent not only an organisation or service provider but also a social cause and a set of values with which stakeholders may identify (Stride and Lee, 2007). These characteristics raise questions about whether existing BR conceptualisations sufficiently capture the nature and diversity of relationships that stakeholders might form with nonprofit brands.

A further limitation concerns the stakeholder perspective adopted within existing nonprofit relationship research. Previous research has examined the organisational benefits associated with cultivating stakeholder relationships, including financial stability, donations, loyalty and continued engagement (Arnett et al., 2003; Waters, 2011; Vallaster and von Wallpach, 2018). Considerable attention has also been given

to donor relationships and donation behaviours (Sepulcri et al., 2020). While these studies have provided valuable knowledge about nonprofit stakeholders, comparatively less attention has been given to how different stakeholders themselves understand and experience their relationships with nonprofit brands. This is particularly relevant as stakeholder groups do not occupy equivalent positions in relation to an NPO, and their relationship could be shaped by distinctive forms of involvement, expectations, motivations and experiences.

Accordingly, the present study focuses on three stakeholder groups: employees (EMPs), volunteers (VOLs), and direct beneficiaries (DBs). Donors were not included as a focal stakeholder group, not because their relationships with NPOs are unimportant, but because donor relationships and donation behaviour have received comparatively substantial attention within nonprofit research (Sepulcri et al., 2020). Instead, the study deliberately focuses on stakeholder groups whose relationships position them differently in relation to the organisation: employees as organisational members, volunteers as voluntary contributors, and direct beneficiaries as recipients or participants in nonprofit services. Examining these groups provides an opportunity to explore NBRs across different forms of direct organisational experience and to understand both shared and stakeholder-specific relational dynamics.

Therefore, the development of an NBR perspective is not based on an assumption that existing commercial BR knowledge is irrelevant to nonprofit settings. Rather, commercial BR research provides the conceptual starting point from which relationships with nonprofit brands can be explored. Nevertheless, uncritically adopting existing frameworks risks overlooking relational characteristics associated

with nonprofit contexts, including heterogeneous stakeholder roles, mission- and value-based engagement, social causes, and forms of participation that do not necessarily involve consumption or commercial exchange. An NBR perspective therefore allows these relationships to be examined in their own context while retaining relevant insights from established BR scholarship. In this sense, the study seeks to extend and refine understanding of BRs rather than simply replicate commercial BR assumptions within a nonprofit setting.

Within this conceptual positioning, OID provides a relevant theoretical and analytical lens for exploring the role that identification might play in NBR development. As established in section 1.2, OID is not treated as equivalent to NBR but as a theoretical and analytical lens through which the processes underpinning these relationships can be examined. This enables the present study to investigate whether and how stakeholders' sense of belonging, value alignment, and self-relevance contribute to different relational experiences while remaining open to forms of NBR that may involve weaker or limited identification.

1.4 Research Significance and Contributions

The academic significance of this study lies in extending the understanding of BRs beyond their predominantly commercial and consumer-focused context to examine relationships within the nonprofit sector. As established in Section 1.3, nonprofit stakeholders occupy different relational positions and may engage with NPOs through work, volunteering, or service participation rather than conventional consumption. Examining these relationships from the perspectives of employees, volunteers and direct beneficiaries therefore provides an opportunity to develop a more context-

sensitive and multi-stakeholder understanding of BRs. This study further contributes by examining the role of identification in these relationships through OID as a theoretical and analytical lens, while recognising that identification may not account for all forms of NBR.

The societal and practical significance of this study derives from the role NPOs play in addressing societal needs, supporting communities, and providing services to different groups within society (Salamon and Anheier, 1992; United Nations, 2003). Their ability to pursue these missions depends partly on sustained engagement with diverse stakeholder groups (Apaydin, 2011; Sepulcri et al., 2020), including those who work within the organisation, contribute voluntarily, and directly receive or participate in its services. However, these stakeholder groups occupy different positions and may develop, maintain, or disengage from relationships with NPOs for different reasons. Without a clearer understanding of these relational experiences, NPOs may have limited insights into what strengthens or weakens stakeholder relationships. Developing a better understanding of NBRs from stakeholders' perspectives can therefore provide NPOs with insights into how their organisational values, communication, identity, and stakeholder experiences contribute to the formation and maintenance of meaningful relationships. Such understanding may help nonprofit organisations develop more appropriate approaches to stakeholder engagement and, in turn, support their capacity to pursue their social missions.

Taken together, the study provides conceptual, theoretical, empirical, contextual and practical contributions. Conceptually, it develops an NBR perspective that examines BRs under the distinctive relational conditions of the nonprofit sector. Theoretically, it

employs OID to examine identification as one potential mechanism contributing to NBR development. Empirically, it provides a multi-stakeholder account by examining employees, volunteers, and direct beneficiaries rather than focusing mainly on donors. Contextually, the Saudi Arabian setting provides an opportunity to examine NBRs within a sociocultural environment in which nonprofit engagement may be shaped by religious, moral and collective meanings. Practically, the study provides insights that could assist NPOs in understanding how different stakeholders experience and develop bonds with nonprofit brands.

1.5 Research Aim and Questions

The aim of this study is to extend the understanding of BR to the nonprofit context in order to explore the distinctive nature of stakeholder bonds within a non-commercial environment. Specifically, the study investigates how stakeholders develop bonds with nonprofit brands, the factors that shape these bonds, the relational mechanisms through which they develop, and the outcomes that emerge from these relationships.

To address this aim, the study is guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: What is the nature of the bonds that stakeholders form with nonprofit brands?

RQ2: How do stakeholder-nonprofit brand bonds emerge?

RQ3: What factors shape stakeholders' relationships with nonprofit brands?

RQ4: What relational dimensions define and characterise stakeholders' NBRs?

RQ5: What outcomes emerge from stakeholders' relationships with nonprofit brands?

RQ6: How do these factors, mechanisms, relational dimensions, and outcomes collectively explain the development of NBRs?

1.6 Methodological Orientation

In order to gain an in-depth understanding of individuals' BRs within a nonprofit context, this study adopts an interpretivist and constructivist philosophical orientation. This perspective facilitates the exploration of BR phenomena through participants' viewpoints and supports an understanding of how brand relationships are shaped by environmental and social influences (Bryman, 2012; Ritchie et al., 2014). This philosophical position is especially fitting for examining relational phenomena such as BR, where meanings and interpretations are formed through social interactions and personal experiences.

In addition, this philosophical stance aligns with a qualitative research design, which is particularly suitable for investigating underexplored topics and generating rich, nuanced insights (Ritchie et al., 2014). Furthermore, quantitative inquiry has largely dominated the BR context (Ghani and Tuhin, 2018). Although quantitative approaches have advanced theoretical understanding, they can reduce the complexities of the social world to numerical metrics, potentially limiting the expression of individuals' subjective experiences (Morgan and Smircich, 1980; Creswell, 2007; Marshall and Rossman, 2016). Consequently, a qualitative research design was adopted to explore NBRs.

Given the complex and relational nature of BR, including multiple stakeholder groups can strengthen the depth of insights and enhance the credibility of findings (Crick, 2020). Purposive, convenience, and snowball sampling strategies were employed to capture diverse perspectives (Bryman, 2012; Ritchie et al., 2014). Accordingly, the study sample comprised employees (EMPs), volunteers (VOLs), and direct

beneficiaries (DBs). Semi-structured interviews were selected as the primary data collection method, and reflexive thematic analysis was employed for data analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006, 2021). Saudi Arabia was selected as the research setting to examine NBRs within a sociocultural context in which philanthropy is embedded within social, religious and legislative structures (Al-Nahari and Mofawaz, 2023).

1.7 Thesis Structure Overview

This section briefly outlines the structure of the present study, and the role of each chapter in addressing the research aim and research questions. Together, these chapters develop the conceptual, theoretical, methodological, and empirical foundations of the study in a structured and coherent manner.

Chapter One provides the background and context of the research. It establishes the rationale for examining BR within NPOs, identifies the research gap within the existing literature, and presents the research aim and questions guiding the investigation. Additionally, the chapter introduces the theoretical lens adopted in the study, highlights significance and contributions of the research, and provides an overview of the methodological orientation and thesis structure.

Chapter Two critically reviews the relevant literature on BR and NBR, tracing the conceptual development of the BR construct and examining its application in different contexts. This chapter also highlights the limitations of existing approaches when applied to NPOs. Further, the chapter reviews the literature on stakeholder relationships in nonprofit settings and introduces OID theory as the guiding theoretical

lens of the study. Building on this review, the chapter develops the conceptual framework and working definition of NBR that inform the empirical investigation.

Chapter Three outlines the methodological orientation of the study. It outlines the interpretivist and constructivist philosophical orientation underpinning the research, justifies the qualitative research design, and explains the sampling strategy, data collection methods, and analytical procedures employed. Additionally, the chapter discusses the cultural context of Saudi Arabia as the research setting, addresses issues of ethics and research trustworthiness, and explains the use of reflexive thematic analysis in interpreting participants' experiences and meanings.

Chapter Four focuses on the analytical process undertaken to interpret the qualitative data. In particular, the chapter outlines the coding process, theme development, and the researcher's interpretive engagement with the data. This provides transparency regarding how the findings were generated and demonstrates the analytical rigour underpinning the study.

Chapter Five presents the empirical findings derived from the qualitative analysis. Drawing on interview data collected from EMPs, VOLs, and DBs, the chapter identifies the main themes developed through the analysis in relation to stakeholders' experiences of NBRs. The findings address the nature and development of stakeholders' bonds with nonprofit brands, the factors and relational dimensions shaping these relationships, and the outcomes associated with them. Throughout the chapter, the analysis is supported by participants' quotations and interpretive insights.

Chapter Six discusses the findings in relation to the research questions, the literature reviewed in Chapter Two, and the theoretical lens of OID. It interprets the empirical findings by examining how NBRs develop and vary in form and intensity, how they are shaped by both stakeholder characteristics and organisational factors, and what outcomes arise from these relationships. The chapter also presents a refined conceptual framework of NBRs. Furthermore, the chapter outlines the contributions of the research, acknowledges the limitations of the study, identifies directions for future research, and discusses the practical implications for NPOs and the wider nonprofit sector.

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter reviews the literature on BR, examining how it has been conceptualised, interpreted, and developed within marketing scholarship, and considering how it may be extended to nonprofit contexts. The chapter begins by examining the conceptual foundations of brand relationships, focusing on how relational bonds between individuals and brands have been theorised. It then moves to explore how these relationships operate across different brand contexts, including product, service, and nonprofit settings. Next, the chapter introduces OID as a key mechanism for understanding stakeholder-NBR. Finally, the chapter concludes by introducing the developed conceptual framework guiding the present study.

2.1 Core Concept Definitions

The following sections introduce several concepts central to understanding BR in nonprofit contexts. However, because these concepts originate from different theoretical traditions, their relationships are not always immediately clear. To support conceptual clarity, this section outlines several key constructs that are essential for exploring NBRs (see Table 2).

This section briefly introduces and defines these concepts in accessible terms, highlighting their relevance to the study and clarifying their relationships. In addition, the section signals the role that each concept will play within the conceptual framework developed later in the chapter. The following terms represent different aspects of the relational phenomena examined in this research. Some concepts describe the nature

of BR, while others refer to processes through which relationships may develop or the expressions through which relationships might be observed.

The first construct is the key focus of this study: BR. This concept refers to the psychological and social bonds that individuals develop with brands over time (Fournier, 1998; Park et al., 2013). Importantly, BR should not be confused with behavioural expressions such as loyalty or advocacy, which are potential outcomes of these relationships rather than the relationships themselves.

OID is another construct presented in the current study. It refers to the psychological process through which individuals perceive a sense of belonging with an organisation and incorporate the organisation's values into their self-concept (Ashforth and Mael, 1989). In the context of NPOs, identification might strengthen stakeholders' connections with the organisation and influence how they interpret and experience nonprofit brands.

Brand attachment is part of the study's conceptual map, describing the emotional bond that individuals may develop with a brand (Thomson et al., 2005). While attachment may form part of the broader concept of BR, it represents only one aspect of the relational experience rather than the relationship itself.

Loyalty/ advocacy are behavioural expressions of a relationship with a brand. Loyalty typically refers to continued support or commitment towards a brand, while advocacy involves recommending or promoting the brand to others (Arnett et al., 2003). In this

study, such behaviours are considered potential expressions of NBRs rather than defining elements of the relationship itself.

Finally, the brand community construct is part of the study's conceptual map. A brand community refers to a group of individuals who share social relationships centred on a brand (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001). Within nonprofit contexts, brand communities could emerge through interactions among volunteers, staff members, beneficiaries, and other stakeholders who share a commitment to the organisation's mission.

Alongside these core concepts, the study highlights vital constructs that improve understanding of NBRs and the overall framework. These include stakeholder relationships, the links formed between the organisation and various stakeholder groups (such as employees, volunteers, and beneficiaries). Reputation/credibility are key constructs in the nonprofit sector, relating to stakeholders' perceptions of the organisation as trustworthy, legitimate, and reliable. Additionally, stakeholder engagement and participation refer to the extent to which individuals interact with and participate in organisational activities. Lastly, sociocultural factors, comprising personal identity, social environment, and cultural context, influence how individuals interpret brands (Fournier, 1998).

Collectively, these concepts lay the theoretical building blocks for understanding NBRs. The next section then applies these constructs to examine how relational bonds may form within a nonprofit setting and to establish the conceptual framework for this study.

Table 2: Key concepts and their role in the study framework

Concept	Definition	Role in the Study	Concept Boundary	Link to other concepts
Brand Relationship (BR)	Psychological and social bonds that individuals develop with a brand over time (Fournier, 1998; Park et al., 2013)	Core phenomenon examined in the study	Not simply loyalty, engagement, or advocacy behaviours	Emerges through organisational identification and is shaped by organisational experiences and stakeholder interactions
Stakeholder Relationships	The connections that different stakeholder groups (e.g., employees, volunteers, beneficiaries) develop with an organisation	Context through which NBRs are experienced	Not limited to customer or consumer relationships	Stakeholder experiences and interactions with the organisation influence identification and relational bonds with the nonprofit brand
Reputation/ Credibility	Stakeholders' perception that the organisation is trustworthy, legitimate, and reliable	Antecedent shaping stakeholders' perceptions of the nonprofit brand	Not an aspect of the relationship itself	Positive perceptions of credibility may encourage trust and facilitate identification with the organisation
Stakeholder Engagement/ Participation	The extent to which individuals interact with and participate in organisational activities	Antecedent that creates opportunities for relational experiences	Not necessarily a deep psychological bond	Participation and interaction may strengthen identification and contribute to the development of brand relationships
Organisational Identification (OID)	A psychological process through which individuals perceive a sense of belonging with an organisation and incorporate its values into their self-concept (Ashforth and Mael, 1989)	Relational mechanism explaining how brand relationships develop	Not the brand relationship itself	Identification strengthens stakeholders' relational bonds with the nonprofit brand and may lead to behavioural and emotional outcomes

Brand Attachment	Emotional connection and psychological closeness individuals feel towards an organisation or brand	Psychological outcome of strong relational bonds	Not the cause of the relationship	Could emerge when stakeholders strongly identify with the organisation and its mission
Advocacy/ Loyalty	Supportive behaviours such as recommending, promoting, or remaining involved with the organisation	Behavioural outcomes of strong brand relationships	Not the relationship itself	These behaviours reflect the presence of a strong relational bond between stakeholders and the nonprofit brand
Sociocultural Factors	Personal identity, social environment, and cultural context shaping how individuals interpret brands (Fournier, 1998)	Contextual influence affecting how relationships with brands are formed and experienced	Not a direct relational outcome	These factors shape stakeholders' perceptions of nonprofit brands and may affect identification and relational engagement

2.2 Brand Relationships: Conceptual Foundation

2.2.1 The Brand Relationship (BR) Concept

The concept of brand relationship (BR) emerged from a broader shift in marketing, whereby consumers were understood not merely as rational buyers of goods and services, but as individuals capable of forming psychological and meaningful bonds with the objects and symbols that are part of their lives. In this sense, the development of BR research reflects a move away from a purely transactional understanding of consumption towards more relational and meaning-based interpretations of consumer behaviours. This shift shows that consumers can connect with brands in ways that resemble aspects of human interactions and indicates that brands are not just objects but also carry symbolic meanings that individuals can relate to.

One of the earliest foundations for the notion of BR is represented in Shimp and Madden's (1988) conceptualisation of the consumer–object relationship (COR). Based on Sternberg's (1986) triangular theory of love, they argued that the emotional, motivational, and cognitive elements that underpin interpersonal relationships could also apply to interactions between individuals and the objects they consume. Their study conceptualised COR as an evolving psychological process and identified eight types of such relationships (see Table 3). According to their framework, consumers' bonds with objects are shaped by three key dimensions: liking, yearning, and decision/commitment. 'Liking' refers to the degree of positive feelings a consumer has towards an object, 'yearning' reflects the motivation to establish or maintain a bond with the object, and 'decision/commitment' represents the extent to which the consumer is willing to sustain that relationship over time.

By combining these three dimensions in different ways, Shimp and Madden (1988) identified eight possible forms of COR, ranging from the absence of a relationship to relationships characterised by different combinations of affective, motivational, and commitment-related elements (see Table 3). Thus, their conceptualisation proposed that relationships with consumption objects could take different forms and need not necessarily involve strong emotional attachment. For example, when consumers experience liking but lack desire and commitment, the relationship reflects simple affection towards the consumed object. When both liking and desire are present, but commitment is absent, the relationship takes the form of infatuation, characterised by strong positive feelings but limited long-term attachment. In contrast, some relationships may be driven primarily by functional necessity rather than emotional attachment. In such cases, consumers may demonstrate commitment to an object despite lacking liking or desire, reflecting a functional relationship driven by practical needs. Other relationship forms illustrate different combinations of relationships. For instance, utilitarian relationships occur when consumers like the object and remain committed to it due to its convenience or practicality, even though a strong desire may not be present. In other cases, consumers may feel motivated to maintain a relationship with an object despite lacking genuine liking, resulting in what Shimp and Madden (1988) describe as succumbed desire. At the highest level of relational development, when liking, desire, and commitment are all present, the relationship resembles loyalty, representing the strongest form of consumer-object bond.

Table 3: Consumer–object relationship forms based on Shimp and Madden (1988)

Relationship Type	Liking	Yearning	Decision /Commitment	Interpretation
Nonliking	No	No	No	No relationship with the object
Liking	Yes	No	No	Simple affection without commitment
Infatuation	Yes	Yes	No	Strong affection but short-term bond
Functionalism	No	No	Yes	Relationship based on necessity or obligation
Inhibited Desire	No	Yes	No	Desire exists but cannot develop into a relationship
Utilitarianism	Yes	No	Yes	Practical relationship driven by convenience
Succumbed Desire	No	Yes	Yes	Commitment exists despite lack of liking
Loyalty	Yes	Yes	Yes	Strong emotional and commitment relationships

These eight relationship forms represent an early conceptual development in relational consumer research, proposing that relational bonds could exist between individuals and non-human consumption objects and could vary in their emotional, motivational, and commitment-related characteristics. These early insights provided a basis for considering whether relational concepts could extend from consumption objects to brands themselves. Nevertheless, Shimp and Madden (1988) did not specifically conceptualise consumer-brand relationships; instead, their framework provided an early conceptual foundation for subsequent investigations of BR.

Building on Shimp and Madden's (1988) early insights, subsequent scholars expanded the idea of the consumer-object relationship by suggesting that brands can act as relational partners. From this viewpoint, consumers do not see brands merely as functional items for consumption but may instead view them as relational entities

associated with emotional connection and symbolic importance. Early research in branding argued that individuals might develop attitudes towards brands similar to those in personal relationships, where brands become part of consumers' emotional and social lives (Blackstone, 1993; de Chernatony and Dall'Olmo Riley, 1998). These viewpoints marked a crucial change in branding studies, moving beyond purely transactional ideas and recognising that consumers may interact with brands in ways that resemble relational dynamics seen in human interactions.

Despite these early developments, the BR perspective was substantially developed through Fournier's (1998) influential study, which explicitly articulated the consumer-brand relationship (CBR). Fournier's (1998) key investigation built on previous scholarly propositions and conceptualised consumer-brand relationships through an interpersonal relational perspective. Her seminal study demonstrated that consumers could forge meaningful and diverse bonds with brands. Additionally, the study highlighted that consumers' relationships with brands are not limited to loyalty-based bonds; rather, CBR was conceptualised as a richer relational phenomenon in which brands may serve functional, emotional, and symbolic purposes in consumers' lives (Fournier,1998). Further, she demonstrated that consumer relational bonds with brands are not simply uniform, by arguing that brands may be perceived as active relational partners, rather than passive objects, and reported that the CBR may be shaped by reciprocity, purpose, exchange and personal meanings. This conceptualisation of brand as an active partner represents a significant turning point in branding scholarship, as it shifts the focus from object-based interactions to meaning-based relational processes.

Further, these relationships were identified as dynamic and evolving over time, and influenced by consumers' identities, life experiences and sociocultural environments. In this sense, Fournier's (1998) conceptualisation extended the understanding of BR beyond consumer preference or satisfaction and provided an important conceptual foundation for subsequent BR research by demonstrating how brands can become embedded in consumers' emotional, symbolic, and social lives.

Subsequent research has developed the BR concept beyond Fournier's (1998) original conceptualisation by examining different relational structures, mechanisms, and forms. For instance, Aggarwal (2004) illustrated that consumers could interpret brand behaviour according to different relational norms, distinguishing between communal and exchange relationships. Other scholars sought to operationalise BR through more specific relational constructs. Esch et al. (2006), for example, examined BR through satisfaction, trust, and attachment, showing how these relational factors contribute to future purchase behaviour. Later research further challenged the assumption that BR necessarily involves strong emotional attachment; for example, Frtiz et al. (2014) identified different forms of consumer-brand relationships, including what they termed "unemotional purpose-based relationships" and "loose contacts", alongside stronger relational forms. These developments suggest that BR should not be perceived as a single or uniformly emotional form of consumer-brand bond, but rather as a broader relational phenomenon that can vary in structure, strength, and underlying basis.

However, the expansion of BR research has also generated debate regarding what should constitute a BR. Alba and Lutz (2013) caution against indiscriminate use of the relationship concept and stress the need to identify its distinctive contribution to theory

and practice. This critique becomes particularly relevant when extending BR beyond traditional consumer settings, as it raises questions about whether current commercial conceptualisations of BR adequately capture relationships formed in different organisational and social contexts.

As a result, the development of BR research has shifted from viewing brands primarily as functional objects of exchange to recognising a broader range of relational processes through which individuals connect with brands. Subsequent studies have also demonstrated that these relationships could vary in structure, intensity and underlying basis. However, despite this theoretical development, much of this theoretical development remains grounded in commercial consumption contexts, raising questions regarding their applicability to nonprofit settings, where individuals may engage with brands through different stakeholder roles and in relation to organisational missions, shared values and social causes. Thus, rather than simply applying existing commercial BR frameworks to a nonprofit setting, the current investigation explores whether and how understanding of BR may need to be extended or refined when relationships are experienced within a nonprofit context.

2.2.2 The Relational Focus of Brand Relationships

While the BR literature has established that consumers could form relationships with brands, an important conceptual question remains: what exactly is the relational focus of these relationships? In other words, when individuals form a bond with a brand, a key question arises regarding what the relationship is directed towards. Although early investigations conceptualised brands as relational partners, similar to human actors, later studies suggest that BR may also be directed towards symbolic meanings

associated with the brand or organisational actors who embody and represent the brand. Understanding this relational focus is therefore essential for clarifying the nature of BR.

2.2.2.1 Brand as Relational Partner

One dominant perspective in the literature conceptualises the brand as a relational partner. Building on interpersonal relationship theory, scholars have argued that people interact with brands in ways similar to human relationships. Early contributions proposed that individuals may attribute human-like characteristics to brands and relate to them as if they were social actors capable of reciprocity and emotional exchange (Blackstone, 1993). This perspective was articulated in Fournier's (1998) seminal work, which demonstrated that consumers could form relationships with brands that mirror interpersonal relational structures.

Within this perspective, brands are no longer treated merely as functional objects of consumption but as relational entities embedded in consumers' social and psychological worlds. Fournier (1998) argues that consumers integrate brands into their lives in ways that resemble friendships, partnerships, or even adversarial relationships. In this sense, brands become part of consumers' identity construction and emotional experiences, suggesting that BRs may fulfil roles similar to those played by human relationships.

This perspective was further explored by scholars such as Aggarwal (2004), who demonstrated that consumers perceive brands not only as relational partners but also use interpersonal norms to interpret brand behaviour. Based on Social Relationship Theory (Clark and Mills, 1993), the findings showed that brand evaluations depend

not only on a brand's actions but also on how those actions fit with relational norms. When a brand is viewed as communal (similar to a friend) and behaves according to care-based, non-calculative norms, consumers responded positively. Conversely, behaviours seen as transactional or self-interested, such as unexpected service fees, resulted in lower evaluations. Behaviours acceptable under exchange norms were judged more harshly if they broke communal expectations. These results support the idea that consumers interpret brand actions through socially embedded relational rules. It suggests that consumers may respond not only to functional outcomes but also evaluate brands based on perceived relational appropriateness. However, this perspective assumes that brands can genuinely take on relational roles, which may overlook that such relationships are primarily formed through consumer interpretation rather than genuine reciprocity.

Scholars continued to explore BR to understand the analogy between brands and interpersonal relationships. For instance, Sung and Campbell (2009) applied the Investment Model of Interdependence Theory to consumer–brand commitment, which was originally designed to explain human romantic and social bonds, and the model states that commitment depends on three key factors: satisfaction with the relationship, investments made within the relationship, and the perceived availability of alternatives. Their findings showed that consumers felt more committed to brands when they experienced higher satisfaction, had invested resources such as time or emotional energy, and perceived fewer attractive alternatives. In contrast, when consumers perceived more appealing alternatives, commitment towards the focal brand weakened. These observations position brand commitment within the relational structure that resembles human relationships, where psychological attachments develop through accumulated investments and positive relational experiences.

Evidence from Sung and Campbell (2009) suggests that structural dynamics governing interpersonal relationships may also underpin consumer-brand bonds. In this sense, BR is perceived as an ongoing exchange in which commitment develops through relational processes, similar to those experienced in the interpersonal relationship domain.

Similarly, a recent study by Jang and Arens (2023) extended this interpersonal foundation by examining how consumers' relational needs shape their relationships with brands. Rather than treating these as mere metaphorical parallels, their study examined whether brands could compensate for deficits in individuals' social relationships. They found that consumers vary in their need for relationship quality and quantity, which impacts their interactions with brands. Relationship quality reflects a desire for emotionally meaningful, close relationships, whereas relationship quantity reflects a need for more social connections. The results stated that consumers who prioritise quality tend to demonstrate stronger brand loyalty, showing that brands may serve as substitutes for emotionally meaningful relationships. Conversely, individuals with a stronger need for relationship quantity prefer brands that offer greater variety, enabling them to maintain multiple brand relationships rather than committing to a single brand. These findings reinforce the idea that BR may fulfil social and psychological needs similar to those satisfied through interpersonal relationships.

These studies suggest that consumers may perceive brands as relational partners capable of fulfilling social and emotional needs similar to those satisfied through interpersonal relationships. However, conceptualising brands as relational partners has also been critiqued. Scholars have argued that BR is not genuinely reciprocal since brands are inanimate entities incapable of thought or emotional response

(Bengtsson, 2003) and highlighted the structural differences between interpersonal relationships and CBRs, as the latter is not limited to a single bond, where consumers simultaneously maintain multiple relationships with multiple brands (Swaminathan and Dommer, 2012). In this sense, the interpersonal analogy may be misleading, as the relationship often exists primarily in consumers' interpretations rather than through genuine mutual interaction, and brands themselves lack agency, mutuality, and intentionality (Bengtsson, 2003; Swaminathan and Dommer, 2012). Therefore, these differences challenge the assumption that BR can fully replicate the dynamics of interpersonal relationships.

These critiques emphasise the limited scope of viewing interpersonal perspectives as a lens for exploring and understanding consumers' bonds with brands that serve more as symbolic entities than relational partners, such as nonprofit brands. Therefore, conceptualising nonprofit brands as relational partners may oversimplify the nature of stakeholder bonds, which could involve identification, moral alignment, and collective or shared meanings rather than interpersonal analogy. Consequently, in such contexts, stakeholders' bonds may be interpreted less through interpersonal metaphors and more grounded in shared values and collective purpose. While the interpersonal perspective has significantly contributed to understanding BR in commercial settings, it remains unclear whether the relational partner conceptualisation adequately explains relationships formed with nonprofit brands.

2.2.2.2 Brand as Symbolic Meaning

Beyond viewing the brand as a relational partner, another perspective suggests that consumers' relationships may be directed towards the brand's symbolic meanings. In

this sense, brands function as carriers of values, identities, and cultural significance that consumers incorporate into their self-concept. Thus, individuals use the brand as a symbolic resource to express identity, values, and social belonging. This perspective aligns with research suggesting that brands act as symbolic identity markers through which individuals construct and communicate their self-concepts (Escalas and Bettman, 2003). This perception shifts BR's focus from interaction to interpretation, emphasising meaning alignment rather than relational exchange. Thus, through processes of identity signalling and self-expression, consumers may adopt brands that reflect who they are, who they aspire to be, or the social groups with which they wish to be associated and recognised.

Rather than relating to the brand as a partner-like entity, individuals may relate to what the brand represents in terms of symbolic meanings, values, and identity associations. Accordingly, the relationship is not necessarily interpersonal but symbolic and identity-based, emerging through the alignment between the meanings communicated and represented by the brand and the individual's self-concept. This interpretation suggests that BR may operate through the process of symbolic identification rather than through interpersonal-like interactions. As a result, brands serve as symbolic platforms where individuals negotiate personal meaning, social identity, and value alignment.

This symbolic interpretation is particularly evident in contexts where brands represent social or moral values. For instance, heritage brands often foster relationships through narratives of history, tradition, and cultural meaning rather than purely functional benefits (Pulh et al., 2019). Pulh et al. (2019) concluded that heritage brand

experiences, especially within brand museums, could strengthen consumers' bonds with brands by immersing them in the brand's historic and symbolic narratives. Their findings demonstrated that consumers' bond with the focal brand fostered different forms of brand intimacy, including intellectual intimacy, social, physical, and spiritual intimacy. Intellectual intimacy reflects cognitive engagement with the brand's history and narrative, while social intimacy emerges through shared experiences with others within the brand environment. Physical intimacy relates to sensory immersion within the brand's servicescape, and spiritual intimacy reflects alignment with deeper symbolic meanings or values linked to the heritage brand. This study further demonstrated that symbolic and experiential connections with the heritage brand lead to outcomes such as supportive behaviours, including advocacy, positive word of mouth, ambassadorship, volunteering, and collaboration with the brand. These findings showcase that BR may emerge through shared meanings and symbolic connections rather than solely through interpersonal-like relational structures. This perspective is particularly relevant to the current study, as nonprofit brands are often characterised by their symbolic representation of social causes and moral values. As a result, individuals are more inclined to form a connection with nonprofit brands through alignment with the meanings they convey rather than through personal interaction.

Scholars have continued to explore the symbolic perspective through brands associated with social identities or cultural representations that may evoke strong relational responses from consumers because they embody meanings that resonate with individuals' personal or collective identities. For instance, Mishra and Bakry (2021) showed that symbolic representations embedded in brands, such as culturally

meaningful product designs, might generate or lead to positive or negative relational responses or outcomes, depending on how consumers interpret these meanings. In such cases, the relational bond forms through identity alignment with the symbolic meaning of the brand, rather than through interpersonal interaction with the focal brand.

Studies have extended this line of enquiry to higher education services, with Hashim et al. (2020) demonstrating that students can develop a meaningful psychological bond with a higher education institution through the value perceptions associated with the university brand. Their study observed that students' bond with a university brand is based on three forms of values: utilitarian value, reflecting the functional benefits associated with academic quality and career opportunities; hedonic values, reflecting emotional satisfaction and enjoyment derived from the university experience; and relational value, reflecting social belonging and connections with peers and other members of the institutional community. These value perceptions reinforced students' psychological bond with the university brand, leading to outcomes such as loyalty, positive recommendations, and commitment. This suggests that BR in an institutional context may emerge through the symbolic and experiential meanings individuals associate with the brand, rather than through interpersonal relational dynamics. Accordingly, institutional brands, such as university brands, as part of the service context, operate as symbolic platforms that shape individuals' experiences, identities, and social connections.

Taken together, these studies suggest that BR may develop through symbolic alignment between individuals and the meanings brands communicate. Rather than

perceiving the brand as a relational partner, individuals may form bonds with the values, identities, and cultural meanings it embodies. However, although symbolic interpretations of BR emphasise the importance of identity and meaning in shaping brand bonds, most existing studies continue to explore symbolic bonds in commercial contexts, raising the question of whether BRs in nonprofit settings are primarily influenced by symbolic alignment with organisational missions and moral values.

2.2.2.3 Brand as Organisational/Community Entity

A third perspective emphasises that BR can extend beyond the focal brand itself to include organisational actors and social structures that embody the brand. In various contexts, consumers do not interact directly with an abstract brand but rather experience the brand through interactions with employees, service providers, or brand communities. As a result, the relationship may not be solely directed towards the brand as an entity, but rather towards the organisational actors and social environment through which the brand is experienced. In this way, brands function as socially embedded entities, where meanings and experiences are mediated through organisational actors and social interactions. Consequently, the relationship extends beyond the symbolic or interpersonal interpretation of the brand and is situated within the wider organisational and relational context.

Service brand research clearly highlights this dynamic; for example, Dall'Olmo Riley and de Chernatony (2000) suggest that relationships with the service brand often develop through interactions with employees who deliver the brand experience. In service settings, employees act as representatives and embodiments of the brand; consequently, consumers may interpret the brand through their interactions with

frontline staff. As a result, the relationship emerges not only with the brand itself but also with the individuals who enact the brand. This emphasis on the central role of service providers was reinforced by Sweeney and Chew (2002), who similarly argue that BR in service contexts rarely involves interaction with a single brand actor. Instead, they suggest that relationships emerge through engagement with multiple service actors, forming a network of interconnected relationships surrounding the brand. These findings demonstrate that BR within a service context is inherently mediated through organisational actors, highlighting that the relational focus may extend beyond the brand itself to include the individuals who deliver and represent it.

A similar perspective emerges from research on brand communities, which demonstrates that consumers may develop relationships not only with the brand but also with other brand users. Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) define brand communities as specialised, non-geographically bound communities, formed around a shared admiration for a brand. Within these communities, consumers develop relationships through shared experiences, values, and practices associated with the brand. McAlexander et al. (2002) extend this perspective by proposing that BR could be better understood within a customer-centric relational network, involving relationships between consumers and multiple actors, including the brand, other consumers and the organisation itself. From this perspective, BR is embedded within a broader system of interconnected relationships rather than existing solely as a dyadic consumer-brand bond. Nevertheless, this study does not adopt the brand community perspective as a theoretical framework; rather, it discusses it to show that BR may be socially embedded and extend beyond the individual-brand dyad.

Brands are therefore increasingly understood as social objects embedded within networks of relationships. Patterson and O'Malley (2006), for instance, argue that BR is rarely purely dyadic; instead, it often takes the form of triadic or collective interactions among consumers, brands, and other stakeholders. In this sense, the relationship may develop simultaneously at an individual level, between a consumer and a brand, and at a collective level, where consumers form relationships with others associated with the brand. Similarly, a recent study by Mafe et al. (2024) demonstrated that relational bonds with brands extend beyond the focal brand to the surrounding community, reinforcing the notion that BR could be socially constructed and collectively experienced.

While these investigations were situated in a commercial setting, Hassay and Peloza (2009) extend the brand community perspective to the charity sector, proposing that stakeholders engage with the organisation not only through the brand itself but also through interactions with other stakeholders who share similar values or social goals. In such contexts, relational bonds may form through participation in collective activities and shared identification with the charity or cause.

Taken together, these perspectives suggest that BR may be directed towards multiple relational units, including the brand as a relational partner, the symbolic meanings linked to the brand, and the organisational actors who represent the brand in practice. This suggests that BR may exist within broader relational networks embedded in social and organisational settings. As a result, the focus of BR may shift depending on the context in which the brand operates and the actors through whom the brand is experienced. However, most research on the relational aspect of BR has been

conducted in commercial contexts, primarily involving product or service brands. Therefore, the relational focus of BR in nonprofit settings remains less explored. This gap is significant as NPOs operate within a distinctive relational environment that differs considerably from commercial contexts. The absence of research exploring stakeholders' bonds with nonprofit brands, in terms of how these bonds are interpreted and experienced, suggests that current BR frameworks may require extension or refinement to account for relationships formed in nonprofit settings.

2.2.3 Brand Relationship Context: Product, Service and Nonprofit Brands

Researchers have examined relationships across a variety of tangible and intangible brands in a consumption context, illustrating that individuals can form relational bonds with numerous types of brands. Existing studies have explored relationships with products such as toys (Morris and Martin, 2000), food and beverage brands (Fritz et al., 2014), service organisations including banks, health clubs, and coffee shops (Aggarwal, 2004), and educational institutions (Hashim et al., 2020). These diverse empirical settings demonstrate that BR is not confined to a single industry or sector but may emerge wherever brands become embedded within individuals' consumption experiences and social environments.

In the early stages of BR research, scholarly attention predominantly focused on commercial product brands. Subsequent research examined relationships with other tangible product brands. For instance, Morris and Martin (2000) found that certain toys are "relationship-prone," meaning they possess symbolic and experiential characteristics that encourage sustained interaction and emotional involvement. Toys often serve as companions during childhood, which enables individuals to develop

attachment-like relationships with them. This illustrates that BR can develop not only through functional consumption but also through symbolic interaction and emotional engagement. In a similar vein, Mishra and Bakry (2021) investigated identity-expressive toys designed to express or reflect specific cultural identities, such as the hijab-wearing Barbie dolls created to represent Muslim American fencer Ibtihaj Muhammad. Their findings demonstrate that brands embedded with cultural symbolism can evoke strong relational responses among consumers. In some cases, such symbolic representations foster positive relationships by reinforcing identity alignment and social inclusion, whereas in others they may provoke negative reactions when consumers perceive the symbolism as conflicting with their values or beliefs. These findings reinforce the idea that cultural context plays a significant role in shaping BR formation.

While early research primarily focused on tangible product brands, scholars have increasingly recognised that BR can emerge within intangible service contexts. Dall'Olmo Riley and de Chernatony (2000) introduced the concept of the service brand relationship, arguing that consumers often interact with service brands through employees who represent and deliver the brand experience. Accordingly, in a service environment, the relationship is not formed solely with the brand as an abstract entity but also with the individuals who embody the brand in practice. Their research emphasises that service BR often originate within the organisation itself. Employees' relationships with the brand influence how they communicate brand values and deliver service experiences, which, in turn, shape consumers' perceptions and relational responses. This suggests that the BR in service settings could be strongly influenced by employee bonds with service brands and the quality of interpersonal interactions between consumers and service representatives, demonstrating that service providers

and the quality of interactions act as antecedents for individuals' bonds with service brands. Sweeney and Chew (2002) further reinforced this emphasis on the central role of service providers, stressing that BR in service contexts may involve multiple relational agents, making it more socially embedded than relationships formed with purely symbolic product brands.

Subsequent research has continued to demonstrate how service contexts shape the formation of BR. Aggarwal (2004), for instance, shows that consumers often apply communal and exchange relational norms when interacting with service brands such as banks and health clubs. In communal relationships, consumers expect care, trust, and fairness from the brand, much like in interpersonal relationships. In contrast, exchange relationships are guided by transactional expectations in which consumers evaluate the brand based on costs and benefits. This distinction highlights that the nature of the interaction between consumers and service brands may influence the type of relationship that develops.

Recent studies have broadened the investigation of BR in service contexts, such as higher education. Hashim et al. (2020) demonstrate that students can develop meaningful psychological bonds with a university brand when they perceive the institution as providing functional, emotional, and relational values. In this context, students' bonds with the university are influenced not only by academic services but also by the institution's broader social environment, including peer networks, campus culture, and shared experiences. These findings highlight the distinctive relational features that may characterise service settings.

Taken together, the previous investigations suggest that BR could emerge through different relational mechanisms depending on the characteristics of the brand environment. Product brands often build relationships through symbolic meanings and identity expression, whereas service brands frequently depend on interpersonal interaction and repeated service encounters.

In a nonprofit context, where social missions, moral values, and legitimacy-based objectives guide the operation of NPOs rather than focusing on profit generation (Stride and Lee, 2007; Chapleo, 2015; Liu et al., 2015), stakeholders' relationships within this context may be shaped not only by functional or symbolic consumption benefits but also by broader social and ethical considerations. For instance, stakeholders may engage with NPOs because they support the organisations' mission, identify with their values, or seek to contribute to a collective social cause.

Another distinctive feature of NPOs is multivalent stakeholder relationships, which refers to multiple, simultaneous, and interdependent relationships between an organisation and its diverse stakeholders (Mitchell and Clark, 2019). Unlike traditional dyadic relationships involving a single consumer and a brand, NPOs operate within a network of relationships that includes volunteers, donors, beneficiaries, employees, funders, and community members (Vallaster and von Wallpach, 2018; Mitchell and Clark, 2019). Each stakeholder may engage with the organisation in different ways and for different purposes, creating overlapping relational dynamics that extend beyond a single consumer-brand interaction. Accordingly, nonprofit relationships are not confined to a simple dyadic structure but instead represent complex relational systems, in which multiple actors participate in shaping and maintaining the

relationship with the organisation. Within the context of BR, this multivalent structure suggests that stakeholders' relationships with nonprofit brands may emerge through interactions with various organisational actors and stakeholder communities rather than solely through direct engagement with the brand itself. Accordingly, nonprofit relationships may share some similarities with service contexts, particularly in interactions with organisational representatives, such as volunteers or staff members. However, unlike many commercial service relationships, NBRs cannot be understood solely through conventional consumption or market-exchange assumptions, as stakeholders may also engage around organisational missions, social causes, values, and other non-commercial considerations. Consequently, understanding brand relationships within a nonprofit setting requires attention to the distinctive social and relational dynamics that characterise this sector.

While existing research has established that BR may vary across product and service contexts, the nature and structure of BR in nonprofit settings remain underexplored. Therefore, this study aims to explore stakeholders' NBR and whether existing understanding of BR requires extension or refinement in this context. In particular, the study seeks to explore the nature, dynamics, and elements that shape stakeholders' NBRs and to identify how these relationships may differ from those observed in commercial brand contexts.

Overall, research across product and service contexts demonstrates that BR is inherently context-dependent. The nature of the brand environment, the type of interaction between stakeholders and the brand, and the symbolic meanings associated with the brand all influence the development of relational bonds. At the same time, these studies indicate that although contexts differ, BR encompasses

certain fundamental characteristics that influence how individuals interact with brands. As a result, scholars have endeavoured to conceptualise the defining features of BR by pinpointing the characteristics and dimensions that support them. The following section therefore explores the characteristics and dimensions of BR in the existing literature before addressing the unique relational dynamics that may develop within a nonprofit context.

2.2.4 Characteristics and Dimensions of Brand Relationships (BRs)

One of the central contributions of Fournier's (1998) seminal work was demonstrating that consumers' relationships with brands are not limited to purely transactional exchanges characterised by strong, intense, committed, and long-term bonds. Instead, relationships with brands may take various forms and levels of closeness, reflecting the diverse roles brands play in consumers' everyday lives.

2.2.4.1 Relational Characteristics of Brand Relationships (BRs)

Fournier's (1998) investigation identified several key characteristics of BRs. First, BR is described as having a reciprocal nature, where benefits and contributions flow between the consumer and the brand. In this sense, the brand acts as an active relational partner rather than a passive object of consumption within consumers' lives. Second, brand bonds are characterised as exchange-based, meaning that interactions between consumers and brands involve perceived benefits, expectations, and contributions from both sides. These exchanges may include functional benefits, such as product performance; symbolic benefits related to identity expression; or emotional benefits, such as satisfaction and attachment. In this way, the relational

exchange between consumers and brands may extend beyond economic transactions to incorporate symbolic and emotional meanings embedded in the consumption experience. A further defining feature highlighted by Fournier (1998) is BR's purpose-driven nature. Consumers form relationships with brands because those brands fulfil particular roles within their lives, including functional, emotional, or symbolic purposes. For instance, some brands may support consumers' identity construction, while others may serve practical consumption needs. Consequently, the meaning and purpose of the brand within the consumer's life largely determine the type of relationships that develop. This perspective highlights that the nature of BR is closely linked to the meanings individuals attribute to brands and the roles these brands play within their personal and social contexts.

BR literature, as previously discussed (e.g., Fournier, 1998; Escalas and Bettman, 2003; Mishra and Bakry, 2021), highlights that identity, culture, and self-congruence can influence how individuals connect with and engage with brands. Religion, as part of individuals' cultural and identity context, has also been considered in branding research, particularly within Islamic literature (Alserhan, 2010; Wilson and Liu, 2011). These studies suggest that Islamic principles and religious considerations can shape the meanings, values, authenticity, and ethical expectations individuals associate with brands. Further, religiosity and religious commitment have been conceptually linked to trust, attachment, commitment, loyalty, and brand-faith bonds with brands (Borzooei and Asgari, 2014; Al Abdulrazak and Gbadamosi, 2017). Later empirical studies further illustrate the relevance of self-expression, self-congruence, moral self-identity, and self-brand connection in religious or halal branding contexts (Joshi and Garg, 2022; Aji and Muslichah, 2023; Ilicic and Brennan, 2026). Within Islamic and halal branding contexts, subsequent studies have also examined relational constructs and

outcomes, including brand love, sacredness, fidelity, relationship quality, resonance, tribalism, WOM, and loyalty (Joshi and Garg, 2022; Khan et al., 2022; Aji and Muslichah, 2023). Taken together, these studies suggest that religious meanings could become part of the identity and value alignment through which individuals interpret brands, potentially shaping the formation, strength, and maintenance of brand bonds. However, these relationships appear to be conditioned by factors such as individuals' level of religiosity, moral self-identity, the context, and the meaning attributed to the brand. Nevertheless, these previous investigations predominantly explored commercial brands, halal products or services, or religious brand cues, rather than NBRs and heterogeneous stakeholders. Whether and how religious identity and meaning shape the characteristics and development of NBRs therefore remain underexplored. This study addresses this gap by exploring the role of stakeholders' identities, including religious and moral identity, within stakeholder-nonprofit brand relationships.

Finally, Fournier (1998) conceptualised brand bonds as dynamic and evolving. Rather than remaining static, these relationships may develop, strengthen, weaken, or dissolve over time as consumers' identities, experiences, and social environments change. Subsequent BR research has further shown that relationships can vary considerably in form, strength, emotional intensity, and duration (Story and Hess, 2006; Veloutsou, 2007; Park et al., 2013; Fritz et al., 2014). Accordingly, BR can be understood not as fixed states but as relational processes whose nature and strength may vary according to individuals' experiences, identities, and changing social environments.

2.2.4.2 Nature and Intensity of Brand Relationships (BRs)

Building on these relational characteristics, subsequent research has explored how brand bonds differ in their emotional intensity and relational depth. Story and Hess (2006) contend that consumer-brand connections may differ in their relational basis, distinguishing between personal and functional connections. This suggests that not all BRs depend on strong emotional attachment, as some relationships may be based more on the brand's functional relevance and benefits. However, Alba and Lutz (2013) offer a more critical perspective on the BR concept, questioning whether all consumer-brand interactions should necessarily be considered relationships. They argue that applying the relationship metaphor broadly may offer limited explanatory value unless it captures aspects of consumer-brand interactions that existing constructs cannot sufficiently explain. Offering a different view on the nature and intensity of consumer-brand bonds, Park et al. (2013) conceptualised these bonds as varying in psychological prominence and emotional intensity. Accordingly, Park et al. (2013) developed the Attachment–Aversion (AA) model that provides a useful framework for understanding how individuals position brands within their psychological and emotional worlds. Through the AA model, the authors position BR along a continuum ranging from attachment, characterised by minimal brand-self distance and high psychological prominence, to aversion, where consumers maintain substantial brand-self distance, but the brand remains psychologically salient.

These perspectives collectively demonstrate that BR vary considerably in nature and intensity, ranging from deeply emotional attachment to relatively functional or distant bonds. As a result, the nature and strength of BR may differ significantly depending on the context in which the brand is experienced. However, as previously stressed,

most of these investigations have been conducted within commercial contexts, focusing primarily on individuals' relational bonds with products or service brands; as a result, understanding of the nature of BR within nonprofit contexts remains comparatively limited.

To address this gap, Gruber and Deschênes (2024) explore the dynamics of NBR and show that these relationships may follow different relational trajectories. Their qualitative study of volunteers at the Vienna Red Cross reveals that stakeholder relationships with nonprofit brands do not necessarily evolve in a progressive manner or decline. Instead, the authors introduce the concept of neither-growing-nor-fading (NGNF) relationships, characterised by episodic and intermittent engagement. This suggests that stakeholder relationships with nonprofit brands may not necessarily follow linear patterns of strengthening or decline. Within this framework, volunteers may maintain a stable connection with the nonprofit brand without necessarily developing a stronger attachment or fully disengaging from the organisation. This finding highlights that BR is a dynamic and context-dependent phenomenon whose nature and trajectory may vary across organisational settings.

Overall, the literature indicates that BR is a dynamic and multifaceted phenomenon that may vary in emotional intensity, relational strength, and developmental trajectory. Rather than representing a single form of bond, individuals may experience different types of relationships with brands depending on the meanings, experiences, and expectations associated with those brands. While these studies provide valuable insights into the nature and intensity of BR, further understanding requires examining the structural features that define these relationships. Accordingly, the following

section discusses the key dimensions through which the literature has conceptualised and measured BR.

2.2.4.3 Brand Relationship Dimensions

Building on those relational characteristics, Fournier (1998) proposed seven relational dimensions that illustrate how brand relationships could vary across different contexts and individuals. These dimensions provide a conceptual framework for understanding the structural variation within consumer-brand relationships.

Fournier's (1998) dimensions show that BR may vary by whether they are voluntary or imposed, positive or negative, intense or superficial, enduring or short-term, public or private, formal or informal, and symmetric or asymmetric. These dimensions demonstrate how BR may differ in emotional strength, relational structure, duration, and visibility, highlighting that individuals may engage with brands in diverse relational ways.

Drawing on these relational dimensions, Fournier's (1998) investigations yielded fifteen BR typologies, demonstrating the various ways consumers may relate to brands and illustrating that BRs are heterogeneous and can include strong, weak, functional, socially influenced, negative, and transitional forms. These typologies highlight that brand relationships differ greatly in their emotional depth, commitment, and social meaning. To clarify the conceptual patterns underlying Fournier's (1998) typologies, the relationship forms can be grouped into broader categories based on emotional intensity, relational structure, and level of commitment (see Table 4). These

groupings serve as an interpretive synthesis derived from the typology rather than categories explicitly proposed by Fournier (1998). Some relationships resemble deep, long-term bonds, such as commitments, partnerships, and best friends. Other relationships are more functional or socially influenced, such as marriages of convenience, arranged marriages, and kinship. Importantly, the typology also recognised negative and transitional BRs, such as enmities and courtships, showing that BRs are not necessarily positive, emotionally strong, or enduring. Table 4 provides a fuller conceptual grouping of Fournier's (1998) typologies, developed by the researcher.

Table 4: Conceptual grouping of Fournier's (1998) Brand Relationships Typologies (Researcher's Synthesis)

Conceptual Category	Example of CBR Typologies (Fournier, 1998)	Key Features
Deep and enduring relational bonds	Best Friendships; Committed partnerships	High emotional attachment, trust, reciprocity, and long-term commitment.
Socially influences or externally shaped relationships	Arranged Marriages; Kinships	Relationships shaped by social norms, family traditions, or external influences rather than individual choice.
Functional or pragmatic relationships	Marriage of Convenience; Compartmentalised Friendships	Relationships maintained for practical benefits, functional needs, or situational convenience.
Casual or low-commitment relationships	Casual Friends/Buddies; Flings	Limited emotional investment, infrequent interaction, and low expectations of long-term commitment.
Transitional or exploratory relationships	Courtships; Rebounds/Avoidance-Driven Relationships	Relationships that occur during periods of experimentation or transitions between brands.
Intense or dependent relationships	Dependencies; Secret Affairs	Highly emotional and psychologically intense relationships, sometimes involving obsession or secrecy.
Negative or conflictual relationships	Enmities; Enslavement	Relationships characterised by negative emotions, dissatisfaction, or feelings of constraint or obligation.

Nostalgic or memory-based relationships	Childhood Friendships	Relationships grounded in nostalgia, comfort and past consumption experiences.

While Fournier's (1998) typology provided a rich qualitative conceptualisation of BR, subsequent studies developed alternative approaches to conceptualising and empirically examining BR through more specific relational dimensions (see Table 5).

Esch et al. (2006) operationalised BR through specific relational constructs involving satisfaction, trust, and attachment. Building on earlier relationship marketing and BR literature, their study argued that strong BRs develop when consumers feel satisfied with the brand's performance, trust in the brand's reliability and credibility, and form emotional attachment. Within this framework, satisfaction reflects how consumers evaluate their experience with the brand, trust indicates confidence in the brand's ability to meet expectations, and attachment represents the emotional connection between the consumer and the brand. By combining these three dimensions, they viewed CBR as a form of relationship quality, where both emotional and cognitive assessments influence consumers' bonds with brands. Veloutsou (2007) offered an alternative perspective on BR dimensions by empirically identifying two dimensions: Two-way Communication and Emotional Exchange. Two-way communication reflects communication between the consumer and the brand, including consumers' willingness to receive information from and provide feedback to the brand, while Emotional Exchange reflects the psychological link, closeness and enjoyment consumers experience in relation to the brand. Veloutsou (2007) further suggests that BR may vary in strength from distant to close, while conceptualising BR as a multidimensional construct involving both communicational and emotional aspects. Expanding on the multidimensional nature of BR, Fritz et al. (2014) proposed a more

comprehensive framework comprising nine relational dimensions: interdependence, relationship duration, satisfaction, commitment, behavioural outcome, equity, trust, passion, and intimacy. They drew on interpersonal relationship theory and relationship marketing literature to argue that CBRs resemble interpersonal connections, characterised by their structural and emotional features. Within this framework, dimensions such as interdependence indicate mutual reliance between the consumer and the brand; relationship duration reflects the length of the relationship; and commitment signifies the consumer's intention to sustain the relationship over time. Dimensions such as trust, passion, and intimacy represent the emotional richness, while behavioural measures like purchasing and word of mouth indicate tangible signs of strong relational bonds.

Taken together, these studies demonstrate that BR encompasses multiple relational dimensions, including cognitive evaluations, emotional attachment, behavioural engagement, and interactions. While these studies show that BR can be understood from different analytical perspectives, they mainly focus on a consumption context. Therefore, limited attention has been given to BR in nonprofit contexts. As a result, this study aims to explore BR in a nonprofit setting to shed light on the aspects and dimensions of NBRs, highlighting their distinctive nature and investigating what makes them unique, especially in terms of morals, meanings, values, and social missions.
Given the exploratory nature of this research, the dimensions and features of NBRs will be explored through participants' experiences rather than pre-defined by existing BR frameworks. Accordingly, existing BR dimensions provide theoretical sensitisation to the possible characteristics of BR rather than predetermined analytical categories adopted to classify NBRS. Therefore, Fournier's (1998) relational dimensions,

alongside subsequent developments in BR literature, provide a conceptual reference point rather than a framework imposed on the analysis.

Table 5: Consumer-brand relationship dimensions

Author	Theoretical Foundation	Key CBR Dimensions	Core Argument
Esch et al. (2006)	Relationship marketing/ relationship quality	Satisfaction, Trust, Attachment	Strong CBR emerges through satisfaction with brand performance, trust in brand credibility, and emotional attachment to the brand.
Veloutsou (2007)	Relationship marketing and communication theory	Two-way communication, Emotional exchange	CBR is a multidimensional concept characterised by communicational and emotional aspects.
Fritz et al. (2014)	Interpersonal relationship theory	Interdependence, Relationship duration, Satisfaction, Brand commitment, Actual behaviour, Equity, Brand trust, Passion, Intimacy	CBR resembles interpersonal relationships and consists of emotional, cognitive and behavioural relational dimensions.

2.3 From Consumer-Brand Relationship (CBR) to Nonprofit Brand Relationship (NBR)

Given the nature of the nonprofit context and the diverse relational bonds that NPOs seek to establish with various stakeholders, nonprofit relationships may involve multiple relational actors rather than a single consumer-brand dyad. As Mitchel and Clark (2019) note, NPOs manage multivalent stakeholder relationships in which multiple actors interact with the organisation simultaneously and contribute different forms of value. Consequently, the term CBR may be too restrictive within the nonprofit context, as not all stakeholders who form bonds with nonprofit brands can be considered consumers. For instance, employees, volunteers, and direct beneficiaries

occupy different roles and may contribute to and experience their relationships with nonprofit brands in different ways. In light of the complexity and multiplicity of relationships within the nonprofit context, this study adopts the broader term BR rather than the more restrictive CBR. This enables the examination of BR beyond consumption-based contexts and accommodates the diverse stakeholders and multiple relational actors involved within nonprofit settings. This thesis uses NBR to denote the focal relational construct between stakeholders and a nonprofit brand. NBR therefore refers to the relationship phenomenon under investigation rather than to a specific theoretical mechanism through which such relationships are explained. The plural form, NBRs, is used only where reference is made to multiple relationship forms, types, or instances. This convention mirrors the broader branding literature, which commonly uses CBR as a singular construct label and CBRs in the plural.

2.4 Nonprofit Brand Relationship (NBR)

2.4.1 The Nonprofit Relational Context

NPOs are commonly understood as entities established to serve society and address social needs. The United Nations (2003) defines a nonprofit organisation as "a legal or social entity created to produce goods and services, and whose status does not permit them to be a source of income, profit, or other financial gains for the units that establish, control or finance them". In this sense, NPOs are non-commercial, with the purpose of creating social value rather than generating profit; thus, they operate within a distinctive relational environment. Unlike commercial entities, which often focus on customers or target markets as the central relational group, NPOs depend on a diverse set of internal and external stakeholders, including employees, volunteers, beneficiaries, donors, funders, communities, governments, and partner organisations

(Arnett et al., 2003; Lee, 2013; Vallaster and von Wallpach, 2018; Mitchell and Clark, 2019). This plurality of stakeholders means that these organisations must cultivate and maintain multiple relationships simultaneously to secure legitimacy, resources, and long-term sustainability. This multi-stakeholder structure distinguishes NPOs from commercial organisations not only operationally but also relationally, as stakeholders occupy different roles, contribute different forms of value, and engage with the organisation for various reasons. As a result, relationships within NPOs often extend beyond transactional exchange and involve broader social, moral, and value-based considerations.

Existing research consistently highlights the importance of stakeholder relationships with NPOs. Many studies have explored how different stakeholders interact with these organisations, the factors influencing these connections, and the outcomes they produce. However, the literature uses the term 'relationship' inconsistently. In some cases, it denotes trust, commitment, and satisfaction between donors and organisations, while in others, it includes stakeholder involvement, participation, communication, or ongoing support. This variation is significant because it suggests that, although stakeholder ties are broadly recognised as meaningful within the nonprofit sector, their specific form and meaning often depend on the stakeholder group and the theoretical framework applied. Previous research shows that stakeholder relationships with NPOs can lead to both various organisational and relational outcomes, such as financial stability, increased donations, resource retention, loyalty, and positive word-of-mouth (Arnett et al., 2003; Sargeant and Lee, 2004; Shabbir et al., 2007; Waters, 2011; Sanzo et al., 2015). Stakeholder engagement with nonprofit entities is also connected to personal benefits. For

example, participation such as donating time or money is associated with higher subjective well-being, defined as greater happiness (Tanskanen and Danielsbacka, 2016), while volunteering has been found to improve psychological well-being and self-growth (Yau, 2022).

Additional studies have identified behavioural outcomes associated with stakeholder ties, including commitment, loyalty, advocacy, and sustained contributions of time and money (Clary et al., 1998; Asah and Blahna, 2013; Johnson and Grimm, 2010; Mitchell and Clark, 2021). Research has identified several factors shaping stakeholder relationships. In the nonprofit sector, where organisations rely on public trust, legitimacy, and moral purpose, antecedents such as reputation, transparency, communication, shared values, staff interaction, service quality, trust, satisfaction, and commitment are recognised as key relational drivers (MacMillan et al., 2005; Shabbir et al., 2007; Schultz et al., 2019; Molinillo et al., 2022).

Reputation may contribute to stakeholder bonds by conveying credibility, building trust, and supporting positive perceptions and behavioural intentions. Transparency also functions as a relational signal, enabling stakeholders to assess an organisation's ethical intentions, dedication to its mission, and overall credibility (Loureiro et al., 2018; Dethier et al., 2021; Sansome et al., 2024; Osorio Arias et al., 2025).

Despite these insights, much research has approached nonprofit relationships through the lens of relationship marketing, donor behaviour, volunteer motivation, or stakeholder management. As a result, these studies often focus on relational outcomes and their antecedents rather than exploring the fundamental nature of the bond itself.

Although this body of literature underlines the importance of stakeholder ties in nonprofit contexts, it rarely conceptualises these ties as BR or explicitly examines the relational dimensions of the nonprofit brand. This distinction is significant because stakeholder relationships vary by stakeholder role: donor ties are primarily analysed in terms of trust, commitment, and giving behaviour; volunteer ties in terms of motivation, participation, and well-being; and broader stakeholder ties in terms of communication, legitimacy, and support. Therefore, while the literature confirms the importance of stakeholder ties for NPOs, it remains unclear how stakeholders relate to nonprofits as brands and what constitutes an NBR in psychological and symbolic terms.

2.4.2 The Nonprofit Brand and Stakeholder Bonds

Interest in the nonprofit brand grew as scholars challenged the assumption that branding was relevant only to commercial products and services. Kotler and Levy (1969) first argued that NPOs also require marketing, despite their unique missions and structures. Later work developed this argument by suggesting that nonprofit brands, like commercial brands, encompass tangible, intangible and philosophical elements, including values, vision, and service quality (Tapp, 1996). In this respect, nonprofit brands may help organisations communicate what they stand for, build trust, create awareness, and support the achievement of organisational goals (Tapp, 1996; Ritchie et al., 1999; Hankinson, 2000).

Subsequent research has reinforced the idea that nonprofit brands are not merely communication devices but relational and symbolic resources. Brand-oriented nonprofits are better able to maintain a coherent brand meaning and communicate it

consistently to stakeholders (Napoli, 2006). Moreover, nonprofit brands involve important emotional and symbolic elements (Stride and Lee, 2007), through which they can communicate values, social purposes, and collective identity to stakeholders and further strengthen stakeholders' sense of connection with the organisation. Ritchie et al. (1999), for instance, show that NPOs may cultivate emotional bonds with volunteers, clients, donors, corporate partners, and government bodies, while Liu et al. (2015) demonstrate that brand orientation can deepen employees' attachment to the organisation.

Collectively, these insights demonstrate that individuals may develop bonds within the nonprofit domain. However, unlike commercial brands, nonprofit brands are often tied to a social mission, collective values, and moral purpose. Therefore, in the nonprofit context, stakeholders may relate to nonprofit brands not only through functional exchange but also through identification with the organisation's social mission and values. As a result, models originally developed for product and service brands may not adequately capture the nature of the NBR. Therefore, despite growing interest in nonprofit stakeholder relationships, it remains unclear how brand relationships form across stakeholder groups and which dimensions best define NBRs. In particular, little is known about the relational mechanisms by which stakeholders interpret, experience, and maintain their bonds with nonprofit brands.

Overall, the nonprofit relational context involves complex interactions of antecedents, relational mechanisms, and outcomes. Factors such as reputation and organisational communication may shape stakeholders' initial perceptions and engagement with nonprofit brands, while relational bonds may subsequently generate behavioural and

psychological outcomes, including loyalty, advocacy, and well-being. Despite identifying these antecedents and outcomes, the literature offers limited understanding of the relational mechanisms through which these bonds form and are experienced. Addressing this limitation requires further investigation into the processes through which stakeholders relate to nonprofit brands.

2.4.3 Limitations of Current Approaches to Understanding Nonprofit Brand Relationship (NBR)

Several theoretical perspectives offer partial insights into how relationships with nonprofit brands may form, yet each remains limited when applied to the nonprofit context.

Relationship marketing has been the dominant perspective in nonprofit stakeholder research. It helps explain how organisations establish, manage, and sustain long-term relationships with donors and other stakeholders (Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Peterson, 1995; Waters, 2011; Sepulcri et al., 2020). However, relationship marketing primarily addresses relational management, exchange, and outcomes, and provides less direct explanation of the psychological and symbolic mechanisms through which stakeholders come to feel connected to nonprofit brands.

Social exchange theory, including communal and exchange-based distinctions, also helps clarify how reciprocity and perceived fairness shape relational behaviour. Johnson and Grimm (2010), for instance, show that communal relationships encourage intrinsically motivated donations, whereas exchange-based relationships encourage more instrumental giving. Similarly, Aggarwal (2004) demonstrated that

consumers interpret brand behaviour through communal and exchange norms borrowed from interpersonal relationships. Yet, while social exchange theory explains relational norms and expectations, it offers less direct explanation of mission-based identification, symbolic meaning, or the moral significance attached to nonprofit brands.

Interpersonal relationship theory has played a foundational role in the BR literature. Early research argued that consumers may form human-like bonds with brands, drawing on relational concepts such as reciprocity, commitment, and communal or exchange norms (Shimp and Madden, 1988; Fournier, 1998; Aggarwal, 2004; Sung and Campbell, 2009). More recent research suggests that a brand may compensate for deficiencies in individuals' interpersonal relationships (Jang and Arens, 2023). However, this perspective has been challenged on the grounds that brands are inanimate and lack agency, intentionality, and true reciprocity (Bengtsson, 2003; Swaminathan and Dommer, 2012). These criticisms are particularly relevant in nonprofit contexts, where stakeholders may engage not with the brand as a partner-like entity but with the cause, values, and mission it represents.

Attachment theory provides an affective perspective by explaining how consumers may develop emotional closeness to brands (Thomson et al., 2005; Park et al., 2013). This helps explain emotional attachment in BR. However, attachment theory alone may not fully account for the importance of collective identity, moral legitimacy, and community belonging that often influence engagement with nonprofit brands.

Parasocial relationship theory has also been proposed as an alternative lens, specifically because many BRs are one-sided and lack mutual exchange (Fetscherin,

2014). This perspective is helpful in contexts where consumers form unilateral bonds with brands. Nevertheless, its explanatory relevance may be more limited in nonprofit settings where relationships are often mediated through direct contact with employees, volunteers, organisational communities, and beneficiaries.

Collectively, these perspectives offer important insights into various relational aspects, including exchange norms, emotional closeness, one-sided attachment, and interpersonal analogies. However, individually, they provide only partial explanations of the distinctive nature of NBR, particularly its potential grounding in symbolic meaning, collective purpose, and identity alignment. Therefore, in nonprofit contexts, there remains limited clarity regarding which theoretical lens can explain how stakeholders develop BRs grounded in social mission, collective values, and moral significance.

2.5 Organisational Identification (OID) as a Theoretical Lens

The previous discussion in Section 2.4 provided an overview of several theoretical perspectives used to explore BR. While these perspectives have advanced understanding of BR, they provide partial explanations for investigating an underexplored phenomenon such as NBR, given the distinctive nature of the nonprofit context and the multivalent stakeholder relationships characteristic of the nonprofit context. In particular, previous branding research has highlighted the significance of value alignment and identity in the formation of bonds with brands. Given that values, moral purpose, and social mission are central to nonprofit brands, identity-based perspectives may offer additional explanatory value for understanding how stakeholders relate to nonprofit brands. Accordingly, this section considers relevant

identity-based theoretical perspectives that provide the closest theoretical alternatives to OID.

2.5.1 Identity-based Theories and Organisational Identification (OID)

Identity has been widely adopted across social psychology, organisational studies, and branding research to explain how individuals define themselves in relation to social groups, roles, organisations, and brands. However, identity-based perspectives conceptualise these relationships differently. For instance, social identity theory (SIT) concentrates on self-definition through membership, while identity theory emphasises identities associated with social roles. Organisational identity, by contrast, focuses on the organisation's defining attributes and meanings. These theoretical perspectives provide relevant but distinct explanations for exploring and understanding stakeholders' relationships with NPOs. Consequently, this section considers their relevance to NBR before demonstrating the role of OID as the primary theoretical lens adopted in this study.

Social identity theory (SIT) provides a significant foundation for understanding identification. Developed within social psychology, SIT proposes that individuals partly define themselves through membership of social groups (Tajfel and Turner, 1979; Tajfel and Turner, 1985). Ashforth and Mael (1989) later applied this perspective to the organisational context, conceptualising social identification as a perception of oneness with a group and illustrating its relevance to organisational processes. From this perspective, OID can therefore be understood as an organisational application of the broader social identity process, focusing particularly on how individuals define themselves in relation to an organisation. While SIT provides the broader theoretical

foundation for understanding group-based self-definition, OID offers a specific organisational referent that is particularly relevant to the current investigation, in which the focal relationships are formed between stakeholders and NPOs.

Organisational Identity (OI) offers another relevant identity-based perspective. Originating from the work of Albert and Whetten (1985), OI focuses on an organisation's defining characteristics and meanings and addresses what the organisation represents or understands itself to be. This perspective is relevant to NBRs, as nonprofit brands may communicate organisational values, mission, and distinctive meanings to their stakeholders. Nevertheless, OI primarily focuses on organisational identity, whereas the current study seeks to understand how stakeholders relate to the NPO and its brand, and how they define themselves in relation to nonprofit brands. Therefore, OID focuses on individuals' psychological relationships with NPOs rather than the organisation's identity. This distinction is particularly significant to the present study, as organisational values and meanings could form the basis of stakeholders' perceptions, while identification concerns the extent to which these meanings become relevant to stakeholders' self-definition.

Finally, **Identity Theory** offers an additional perspective on the relationship between identity and social behaviour. Rather than focusing primarily on group membership, Identity Theory considers identities associated with social positions and roles, and the processes through which individuals sustain or verify them (Stryker and Burke, 2000). While this perspective is relevant to the nonprofit context, in which individuals might occupy different stakeholder roles, such as employees, volunteers, or direct beneficiaries, the primary concern of the current investigation is how individuals

occupying these roles form relationships with nonprofit brands, rather than how individuals construct or sustain their stakeholder role identities. As a result, OID offers a more specific and direct theoretical focus on stakeholders' identification with the nonprofit organisation itself.

Overall, these identity-based perspectives offer an alternative explanation of how identity may influence stakeholders' organisational relationships. SIT provides a broader explanation of self-definition through social membership; Organisational Identity Theory focuses on the organisation's defining meanings and characteristics; while Identity Theory highlights role-based identities and self-verification. However, this investigation focuses on how stakeholders in different roles relate to nonprofit brands, and how organisational meanings, values, and purpose may become personally and relationally relevant to them. Therefore, OID is adopted as the main theoretical lens, as it helps to explore and understand the mechanisms by which stakeholders define themselves in relation to nonprofit organisations and their brand. Importantly, OID is not merely another term for NBR; instead, it is a theoretical mechanism that may help explain how specific NBRs are formed and experienced.

2.5.2 Organisational Identification (OID) as the Relational Mechanism

Throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, scholars emphasised the importance of studying OID at the micro level, particularly among employees and organisational members, showing that OID helps explain the distinctive ways people relate to organisations and develop a sense of belonging (Albert et al., 2000). Rather than treating identification as a simple and uniform attachment, this body of work shows that OID is a more complex, multidimensional process through which individuals

cognitively and affectively connect to an organisation. Research has identified OID as comprising both cognitive and affective dimensions (Albert et al., 2000; Foreman and Whetten, 2002; Berger et al., 2006), while Van Dick et al. (2004) extend this understanding by incorporating evaluative and behavioural aspects. In this respect, identification is not limited to perceiving a sense of oneness with the organisation; it may also involve emotional attachment, evaluative judgment, and behavioural orientation towards the organisation. This is particularly important for the present study because it suggests that identification may be expressed through more than one type of relational signal, including how stakeholders think about, feel about, evaluate, and behave towards the NPO. This multidimensional view is especially valuable in qualitative inquiry, as it allows the researcher to observe identification through a range of indicators rather than reducing it to a single attitudinal state. In nonprofit contexts, such indicators may include expressions of belonging, value congruence, advocacy, emotional attachment, commitment, or even distance and ambivalence.

Studies have also highlighted the diverse ways in which individuals relate to organisations, moving beyond early conceptualisations of OID as a simple sense of oneness (Ashforth and Mael, 1989). Kreiner and Ashforth (2004), for example, identify several distinct forms of identification, thereby demonstrating that identification is not always wholly positive or straightforward. These include disidentification, in which individuals define themselves in opposition to the organisation; ambivalent identification, in which individuals simultaneously hold both positive and negative ties; and neutral identification, where individuals maintain distance without clearly aligning with or opposing the organisation. These distinctions are particularly useful for the present study, as they show that stakeholders' connections with NPOs may not always

be strong, harmonious, or emotionally positive. Instead, the relationship may be mixed, distant, hesitant, or even oppositional, depending on how individuals interpret the organisation, its values, and their own role in relation to it. In addition, Van Dick et al. (2004) demonstrate that identification can encompass multiple targets, including the work team, the profession, the organisation, or combinations of these, all of which may coexist within the same individual. This insight is highly relevant in the nonprofit context, where stakeholders may identify not only with the organisation as a whole but also with its mission, staff, beneficiaries, volunteer community, or specific organisational units. Accordingly, identification should not be assumed to operate as a single, fixed attachment to one organisational entity; rather, it may be layered, relationally distributed, and directed towards multiple aspects of the nonprofit organisation.

Research has also identified various antecedents of OID, such as perceived organisational distinctiveness, interpersonal relationships or social networks (Jones and Volpe, 2011). Such factors may strengthen individuals' sense of belonging by making the organisation appear distinctive, meaningful, and personally relevant. In nonprofit settings, these antecedents are likely to be particularly significant, given that stakeholders often engage with organisations whose values, social mission, and collective history resonate with their own beliefs and self-concepts. Accordingly, OID offers a useful mechanism for understanding how NBRs may emerge through perceived alignment between stakeholders' values and the organisation's identity, rather than through purely transactional or exchange-based processes.

Research has also shown how OID and alignment with an organisation can lead to various positive outcomes for both individuals and organisations, including affective commitment, organisational satisfaction, job involvement, loyalty, and a stronger desire to belong (Jones and Volpe, 2011; Nunes et al., 2024). Furthermore, Volle et al. (2009) show that identifying with a company can increase empathy and attachment, and that these outcomes vary depending on the strength of identification. This is particularly relevant to the current investigation because it suggests that identification is not only a cognitive state but also a mechanism that may influence emotional and behavioural orientations towards the organisation. However, much of this work has centred on internal stakeholders and remained largely within organisational behaviour research. In marketing, scholars have extended the investigation of identification to explore how consumers relate to different types of entities and different brand contexts. The following section discusses this in detail.

2.5.3 Organisational Identification (OID) and Brand Relationships (BRs) in Nonprofit Contexts

The relevance of OID to BR is not entirely new. Bhattacharya et al. (1995) were among the first to demonstrate that external stakeholders in a nonprofit context, in their case museum members, may identify with an organisation and that this identification is associated with supportive beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours. Building on this, Bhattacharya and Sen (2003) proposed the Customer-Company Identification framework, defining identification as the process through which customers' beliefs about a company become self-defining. Their work shows that when an organisation satisfies consumers' self-definitional needs, identification can lead to psychological attachment, loyalty, advocacy, and retention. These insights are highly relevant to the

present study. If nonprofit stakeholders relate to brands through shared values, moral meanings, and collective purpose, then their bonds with nonprofit brands might be better understood through identification processes rather than solely through exchange-based or interpersonal frameworks.

In this study, OID is therefore not the relationship itself but the mechanism through which NBRs may form, be experienced, and be sustained. This positioning also aligns with broader BR scholarship. Fournier (1998) emphasises that brands become embedded in consumers' lives and identities, while Bhattacharya and Sen (2003) argue that the strongest customer-company relationships are grounded in identification. This identification perspective was subsequently extended to the brand level. Stokburger-Sauer et al. (2012) investigated consumer-brand identification and demonstrated how consumers' identification with brands is associated with relational outcomes, such as brand loyalty and advocacy. Similarly, Tuškej et al. (2013) examined the role of consumer-brand identification in building brand relationships, illustrating how consumer-brand value congruity was positively related to brand identification, which was eventually associated with brand commitment and positive WOM. These investigations demonstrate that identification has moved beyond the employee-organisation relationship to explain how consumers could develop relationships with companies and brands.

Taken together, these insights suggest that OID provides a theoretically coherent and contextually appropriate lens for exploring NBRs. As existing research shows, identification can explain relational bonds with companies and brands, and it can also occur among external stakeholders in a nonprofit organisation. However, much of the

branding literature has focused on consumers within commercial contexts, while nonprofit identification research remains underdeveloped in relation to NBRs across heterogeneous stakeholder groups, such as employees, volunteers and direct beneficiaries. Therefore, OID provides a mechanism for exploring how organisational and brand meaning may become self-relevant to stakeholders and contribute to their bonds with nonprofit brands through processes of self-definition and organisational identification. Nevertheless, OID does not necessarily account for all NBRs; its explanatory relevance may vary depending on the nature and strength of stakeholders' identification with nonprofit brands.

2.6 Developing the Study Framework and Working Definition

Building on the preceding discussion of the BR concept, its relational focus, and its contextual manifestation across commercial and nonprofit settings, this section develops the conceptual foundation guiding the present study. In particular, it proposes a working definition of the NBR and outlines how this research conceptualises and observes relational bonds with nonprofit brands. Establishing this working definition is important, given that the existing literature has not yet reached consensus on how BR operate within nonprofit contexts.

As previously noted, BR is recognised as a multidisciplinary, multidimensional, and multi-concept construct. Scholars have drawn on theories from psychology, social psychology, anthropology, sociology, and neuroscience to broaden and deepen the understanding of BR (Fetscherin and Heinrich, 2014; Ghani and Tuhin, 2018). This multidisciplinary foundation reflects the complex nature of relational bonds with brands, which might encompass psychological attachment, symbolic meaning

construction, social interaction, and identification processes (Fournier, 1998; Escalas and Bettman, 2003; Thomson et al., 2005; Park et al., 2013).

In this study, an NBR is conceptualised as psychological and social bonds formed between stakeholders and nonprofit brands. The nonprofit brand may function as a symbolic carrier of mission, moral meaning, values, and identity appeals, or as a relational gateway to the organisation and its various stakeholders. These bonds may therefore emerge through stakeholders' interactions with the organisation itself, through engagement with internal members such as staff, or through identification with the organisation or interactions with other organisational stakeholders. The nature of these bonds may vary depending on the role and type of stakeholders, as well as the purpose the nonprofit brand fulfils within their lives. This conceptualisation draws on established literature on psychological brand bonds (Fournier, 1998; Park et al., 2013), the construction of symbolic brand meanings (Escalas and Bettman, 2003), and organisational identification processes that connect individuals to organisations and their communities (Ashforth and Mael, 1989).

Given the exploratory nature of this research, the relationship is not measured directly but observed through stakeholders' relational experiences with nonprofit brands. Potential manifestations of these bonds may include expressions of identification, perceived value congruence, sense of belonging, advocacy, prolonged involvement, and statements indicating how the nonprofit brand becomes relevant to stakeholders' self-concepts.

The stakeholder groups in this study comprise three principal groups that are actively involved with nonprofit brands: EMPs, DBs, and VOLs, reflecting diverse relational structures of NPOs (Arnett et al., 2003; Sargeant and Lee, 2004). These groups represent different relational positions within the nonprofit context. Consequently, each group engages with the nonprofit brand through distinctive relational experiences and organisational roles. Employees experience the brand through organisational participation and mission delivery; beneficiaries encounter the brand through service provision and support; and volunteers engage through philanthropic participation and the contribution of time and effort (Vallaster and von Wallpach, 2018; Mitchell and Clark, 2019).

Much of the existing nonprofit literature has prioritised donors as the primary relational stakeholder group (Sepulcri et al., 2020), largely because of their central role in ensuring NPOs' financial sustainability and survival. As a result, other stakeholders whose relationships with NPOs are embedded in participation, service delivery, or lived experiences have received comparatively limited scholarly attention. This study therefore extends the group of stakeholders to include EMPs, VOLs, and DBs to investigate forms of involvement beyond donors. While donor relationships necessarily involve financial contributions, the relationships of EMPs, VOLs and DBs are not primarily based on monetary exchange. Instead, their engagement is grounded in participation, service, shared values, lived experience, and contributions of time and effort. Through these forms of involvement, these stakeholder groups contribute significantly to achieving organisational missions and to the broader social impact of nonprofit brands. Therefore, examining these stakeholder groups enables a deeper

understanding of how NBRs form, are experienced, and are sustained within mission-driven contexts.

Based on this working definition and relational dynamic identified throughout the literature, the following section presents the conceptual framework guiding this study and clarifies how the key constructs are positioned within the research model.

2.6.1 Conceptual Framework of the Study

Building on the preceding discussions of brand relationships and the distinctive relational structure of NPOs, this study develops a conceptual framework to guide the empirical investigation.

In the nonprofit context, several organisational and relational factors have been identified as influencing the shape of stakeholders' bonds with NPOs. These include reputation, transparency, shared values, communication practices, and interactions with organisational members (MacMillan et al., 2005; Shabbir et al., 2007; Schultz, 2019; Molinillo et al., 2022). These elements may signal credibility, trustworthiness, and moral legitimacy, which are particularly important in nonprofit contexts, where organisations rely on stakeholder confidence and alignment with social missions.

These antecedents influence how stakeholders interpret and experience nonprofit brands, potentially fostering psychological and social bonds with the organisation. In particular, stakeholders may develop relational bonds when they perceive alignment between their personal values and the nonprofit organisation's mission or identity. Stakeholders may develop stronger bonds when they perceive alignment between

their personal values and the nonprofit organisation's mission or identity. Such alignment may contribute to identification processes through which organisational membership or meaning becomes relevant to individuals' self-definition (Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Tuškej et al., 2013). Within the context of nonprofit brands, these identification processes could play a central role in shaping stakeholders' relational bonds with the organisation. Accordingly, this study proposes that OID acts as a potential relational mechanism through which stakeholders develop deeper bonds with nonprofit brands.

Through these identification processes, stakeholders may develop relational outcomes that reflect the presence of brand relationships. Prior nonprofit research has reported that stakeholder relationships can result in various behavioural and psychological outcomes, including commitment, loyalty, advocacy, and prolonged involvement with NPOs (Arnett et al., 2003; Asah and Blahna, 2013; Mitchell and Clark, 2021). Further, engagement with NPOs has been associated with positive personal outcomes such as enhanced subjective well-being and psychological fulfilment (Tanskanen and Danielsbacka, 2016; Yau, 2022).

In the context of the current study, such outcomes represent manifestations of stakeholders' brand relationships with NPOs. These relational outcomes may include expressions of advocacy, prolonged engagement with organisations, emotional attachment to the nonprofit brand, and a sense of organisational belonging. Together, these outcomes represent how NBRs could influence both stakeholder behaviour and personal experiences.

Drawing together these insights, the conceptual framework positions antecedent relational factors as influences on stakeholders' relationships with nonprofit brands, with OID as a potential explanatory mechanism and behavioural and psychological consequences as relational outcomes. Therefore, the framework conceptualises NBR as a dynamic relational phenomenon shaped by organisational factors, stakeholder experiences, and identification processes (see Figure 1).

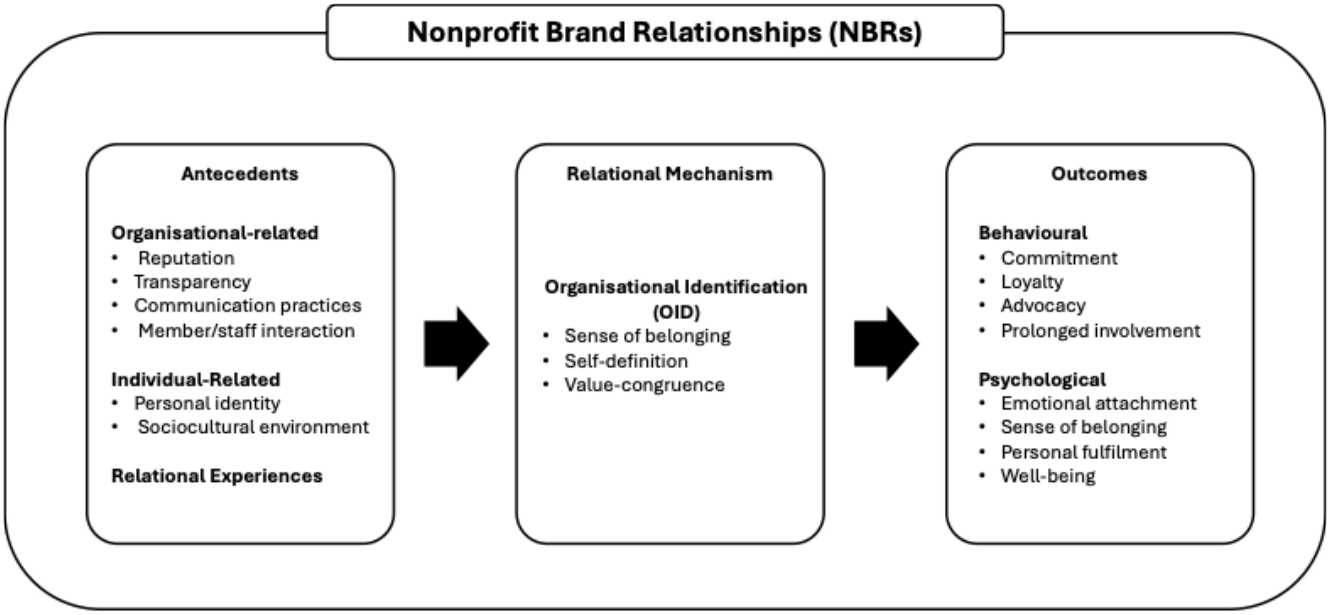


Figure 1: Conceptual framework of the study

2.6.2 Relational Dimensions Used to Observe NBRs

Building on the framework proposed in this study, it is essential to clarify how NBRs will be observed and interpreted within the empirical data. While the framework identified antecedents, relational mechanisms, and outcomes linked to brand relationships, understanding the relationship itself requires specific analytical dimensions to examine its nature and dynamics.

This study draws on Fournier's (1998) influential work, which suggested that brand relationships can differ across several characteristics. Fournier's framework showed that CBRs vary in emotional tone, relational strength, duration, and the conditions

under which they develop. Importantly, Fournier's qualitative approach aimed to explore the diverse forms these relationships can take. This approach aligns with the exploratory nature of the current study, which seeks to understand stakeholder experiences and describe their relationships with nonprofit brands.

Given the qualitative nature of this research, the study does not utilise measurement-based dimensions from later quantitative studies. Instead, it focuses on key relational characteristics from Fournier's framework that are particularly relevant to the exploratory context of the present study. Four relational characteristics were used as sensitising concepts to support the interpretation of NBRs, rather than as predetermined analytical categories. These characteristics were not used to prescribe themes or NBR forms identified in the empirical analysis.

The first dimension considers whether relationships are voluntary or imposed. In NPOs, stakeholder involvement may be voluntary, particularly in volunteering contexts, while other forms of involvement may be partially constrained by employment, educational, professional, service, or personal circumstances. Exploring whether relationships are voluntary or constrained offers insights into stakeholders' motivations and circumstances.

The second dimension relates to the relationship's emotional valence, which can range from positive to negative. Stakeholders' emotional evaluations of NPOs may vary from positive to negative and may include admiration, gratitude, frustration, disappointment or ambivalence.

The third dimension concerns relationship intensity, from strong emotional bonds to more superficial ones. Some stakeholders may develop deep emotional or psychological attachment, especially when personal values align with organisational goals. Others may have a more limited or functional connection, with occasional engagement and minimal emotion. Assessing relationship intensity clarifies the scope of stakeholder bonds.

Finally, the temporal aspect considers whether relationships are long-term or episodic. Nonprofit research well documents long-term relationships, such as continuous volunteering or sustained involvement. Relationships may also be intermittent or situational, influenced by changing circumstances. Examining relationship duration offers insights into how NBRs develop over time.

Together, these characteristics serve as lenses for analysing NBRs, helping to capture variations in relationship quality, strength, and dynamics across different stakeholder groups and contexts. Using these dimensions enables a more detailed understanding of how NBRs are experienced and manifested, including stakeholders' accounts of changes in their relationships over time.

2.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter critically examined the concept of BR and how the existing literature defines, understands, and applies bonds between individuals and brands. The review revealed a shift from transactional views toward relational and meaning-based perspectives on consumption, in which brands are seen as entities embedded within individuals' emotional, symbolic, and social lives. The literature indicates that BR is

complex and multifaceted, with connections to brands as symbolic entities, organisational actors, or socially embedded relational entities. These relationships are highly context-dependent, shaped by brand type, the interaction, and the meanings ascribed to the brand. However, the review also found that most research on BR focuses on commercial and consumer environments, while relatively little has addressed NPOs. This represents a notable gap, as NPOs operate within distinct relational contexts defined by social missions, moral objectives, and diverse stakeholder groups.

The review addressed this gap by providing an overview of nonprofit studies, highlighting relational bonds within the nonprofit sector, and identifying specific antecedents and outcomes that influence stakeholders' bonds with nonprofit brands. Furthermore, the chapter introduced OID theory as a theoretical mechanism that may help explain the identity-related dimensions of NBRs. OID explains how individuals may define themselves in relation to NPOs and develop a sense of organisational oneness or belonging. Building on this literature, a conceptual framework was developed positioning organisational and stakeholder-related factors as potential antecedents of NBRs, OID as a potential explanatory mechanism, and behavioural and psychological consequences as possible relational outcomes. Therefore, NBRs are defined here as psychological and social bonds linking stakeholders to brands that represent organisational missions, values, and collective identity. The next chapter details the methodological approach used to study stakeholders’ relationships with nonprofit brands.

CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter details the methodological approach employed to accomplish the study's objectives and address the research questions. It begins by explaining the philosophical stance underpinning the study, then discusses the research design and reasons for selecting a qualitative approach. The chapter then details the sampling strategy and data collection methods, followed by an overview of data analysis procedures. It concludes with a discussion of trustworthiness and ethical considerations.

3.1 Philosophical Orientation

3.1.1 Ontological Position: Constructivism

This study is grounded in a constructivist ontological position. Constructivism assumes that social reality is not objective, fixed, or independent of human perception but rather is socially constructed through interaction, interpretation, and context (Bryman, 2012; Creswell, 2014). From this perspective, phenomena such as BR and OID are not treated as stable entities awaiting measurement. Instead, they are understood through stakeholders' lived experiences, cultural positioning, and ongoing meaning-making processes.

In the context of BR, this ontological stance recognises that bonds with brands are constituted through subjective interpretation of brand meaning, mission alignment, and value congruence. This is particularly true within NPOs, where moral purpose, cultural context, and identity alignment may shape individuals' involvement and bonds with

brands. Thus, the 'relationship' is less likely to be assumed to be universal or objectively measurable. Rather, it is constructed differently by stakeholders, influenced by personal identity, motives, and social contexts. This position is therefore consistent with the study's focus on how NBRs are experienced and interpreted, rather than treated as externally verifiable constructs.

This ontological position also departs from positivist assumptions that conceptualise reality as objective, stable, and independent of social actors (Bryman, 2012; Creswell, 2014). These assumptions are less appropriate for the current investigation, which focuses on subjective experiences, identity alignment, and meaning-making associated with NBRs. Thus, reality is understood as multiple and context-dependent, constructed through stakeholders' interactions with NPOs rather than existing as a single observable truth (Ritchie et al., 2014).

3.1.2 Epistemological Position: Interpretivism

Epistemologically, this study adopts an interpretivist position, which emphasises understanding social phenomena through the meanings that individuals assign to them (Saunders et al., 2016; Ritchie et al., 2014). Interpretivism rejects the assumption that knowledge can be detached from the knower. Instead, it recognises that understanding emerges through interaction between the researcher and participant and that knowledge is contextually situated.

This epistemological stance aligns closely with both BR scholarship and organisational OID theory. BRs have been conceptualised as meaning-based bonds that may connect to consumers' identities and lived experiences (Fournier, 1998), while OID

concerns the processes through which individuals may define themselves in relation to an organisational entity (Ashforth and Mael, 1989). Both perspectives highlight the importance of perception, meaning and interpretation in understanding relational phenomena. Therefore, an interpretivist epistemology provides an appropriate foundation for examining how stakeholders construct and narrate their relationship with nonprofit brands.

Within this interpretivist framework, knowledge is co-produced through interaction between the researcher and participants (Ritchie et al., 2014; Saunders et al., 2016). This implies that the researcher is not a detached observer but an active participant in the research process, shaping data through the framing of questions, interpretation of responses, and analytical decisions. Such a position is particularly relevant in the current study, where understanding stakeholders' relationships with nonprofit brands requires engagement with their subjective interpretations, emotions, and socially constructed experiences.

3.1.3 Inductive Logic of Inquiry

Consistent with its interpretive orientation, this study follows an inductive logic of inquiry (Bryman, 2012; Creswell, 2014). Rather than testing predefined hypotheses derived from commercial brand relationship models, the research seeks to explore how stakeholders construct and articulate NBRs within their own contexts. Participants' accounts are analysed iteratively to derive patterns and themes, allowing theoretical insights to develop through engagement with the data.

Induction in this study does not imply the absence of prior knowledge, but rather the avoidance of imposing predefined theoretical categories on the data (Bryman, 2012). While the research draws on existing literature on BRs and OID, these perspectives were not used as strict analytical templates or predetermined coding categories. Instead, they provided a sensitising background that informed interpretation while allowing the analysis to remain primarily grounded in participants' accounts (Ritchie et al., 2014). Therefore, the analysis adopted a primarily inductive orientation, with patterns and themes developed through engagement with participants' narratives rather than being prescribed by the existing theoretical framework.

Given that much of the existing BR literature has developed within commercial contexts, an inductive approach enables the identification of potentially distinctive features of NBRs without constraining the analysis within established commercial BR framework. This approach supports conceptual refinement and theoretical extension within an underexplored domain (Crick, 2020).

3.1.4 Alignment Between Philosophical Position and Theoretical Framework

The constructivist-interpretivist-inductive alignment is particularly suitable for exploring NBRs. First, BR scholarship conceptualises relationships as meaning-based bonds, rather than purely behavioural exchanges. Second, OID provides a theoretical account of how individuals may define themselves in relation to an organisational entity. Third, nonprofit contexts are characterised by mission-driven engagement, moral purpose, and identity alignment, all of which stakeholders may experience and interpret differently. Therefore, a philosophical stance that privileges stakeholder meaning-

making processes is essential for understanding how NBRs are formed and experienced.

This alignment among ontology, epistemology, and methodology provides coherence within the research design. The constructivist recognition of multiple realities, combined with an interpretivist focus on meaning-making, supports an inductive approach that highlights participants' perspectives. Such coherence is widely regarded as important in qualitative research, as it helps ensure that methodological choices are philosophically grounded and consistent (Creswell, 2014; Saunders et al., 2016). In this study, this alignment enables a context-sensitive exploration of NBRs that recognises their complexity and socially constructed nature.

3.2 Research Design

Given this philosophical stance, the study employs a qualitative research design. A qualitative approach is particularly appropriate for exploring under-researched topics and developing theoretical insights (Ritchie et al., 2014). Rather than focusing on measurement, prediction or generalisability, qualitative research seeks to understand how participants perceive, interpret, and construct social phenomena (Bryman, 2012; Creswell, 2014).

Qualitative research is particularly applicable to the nonprofit sector, where stakeholder engagement may be shaped by values, identity, and social meaning and organisational purpose alongside more instrumental forms of exchange (Arnett et al., 2003; Laurett and Ferreira, 2018). In such contexts, relationships between stakeholders and organisations may be complex, multidimensional, and affected by

broader cultural and social factors. Thus, understanding these relationships requires attention to stakeholders' meanings, experiences, and interpretations.

Quantitative approaches have significantly advanced construct development and measurement within BR research, including through the development and validation of relational dimensions and scales (e.g. Morris and Martin, 2000; Aggarwal, 2004; Chang and Chieng, 2006; Reimann et al., 2012; Park et al., 2013; Fritz et al., 2014; Park and John, 2018; Kumar and Kaushik, 2020). However, the current investigation is concerned less with measuring predetermined relational dimensions than with understanding how stakeholders interpret and experience relationships with nonprofit brands. Therefore, a qualitative design enables greater attention to the contextual and experiential aspects of these relationships, including the influence of values, identity, cultural context, and organisational experiences.

In emerging domains such as NBRs, where theoretical boundaries remain underdeveloped, qualitative inquiry can support conceptual elaboration by investigating groups and issues that have received limited scholarly attention (McMullin, 2023). It can also deepen understanding of stakeholder meaning-making processes (Crick, 2020) and provide rich accounts of stakeholders' experiences of relationships with nonprofit brands.

This is especially relevant to the current investigation, which does not assume that NBRs follow the same patterns identified in commercial settings. Instead, it explores how different stakeholder groups experience relationships with nonprofit brands and how values, identity, and social context may shape them. Thus, the present study remains open to context-specific meanings and variations in how relationships form and are understood. Although participants were recruited from different NPOs, the

research was not designed as a case study, as NPOs themselves were not treated as bounded cases or units of analysis. Instead, this investigation focused on stakeholders' relational experiences across different nonprofit contexts. This design is consistent with the study's aim of developing a broader understanding of NBR rather than producing detailed organisational case accounts or comparisons.

Accordingly, the qualitative design adopted in this study provides an interpretive, in-depth approach to examining brand relationships within NPOs. Consistent with the constructivist-interpretivist position outlined above, knowledge is understood as co-produced through interaction between the researcher and participants and interpreted in relation to their experiences, perspectives, and social contexts (Creswell, 2014; Saunders et al., 2016). This approach supports the study's aim of capturing diverse stakeholder perspectives and contributing to the contextual extension and refinement of BR understanding within the nonprofit sector (Ritchie et al., 2014).

Furthermore, the qualitative design selected provides flexibility throughout the research process. It enables the researcher to adjust questions, pursue relevant issues raised by participants, and respond flexibly to participants' accounts (Ritchie et al., 2014). This adaptability is crucial in exploratory studies, where the boundaries of the phenomenon are not firmly defined in advance. In the current study, such flexibility supported deeper engagement with participants' experiences and helped develop a more detailed understanding of NBRs.

3.3 Sampling Strategy

Qualitative research commonly employs non-probability sampling, in which participants are selected based on their relevance to the research study rather than to achieve statistical representativeness (Ritchie et al., 2014). Common approaches include purposive, convenience, and snowball sampling. In the present study, these strategies were combined to facilitate access to the three stakeholder groups, EMPs, VOLs, and DBs, and to balance the intentional selection of relevant participants with the practical requirement (Bryman, 2012; Ritchie et al., 2014). Multiple recruitment strategies were particularly appropriate, given that access varied across stakeholder groups. As a result, the primary concern was to recruit participants with relevant experience who could provide sufficiently rich and detailed accounts to address the research questions.

The first strategy employed was purposive sampling was initially employed to recruit participants with experience relevant to the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell, 2007; Bryman, 2012; Ritchie et al., 2014). Participants were selected based on their direct engagement with organisational services (e.g., programmes, workshops, and training courses), their involvement with the NPO as either EMPs or VOLs, and the requirement that the NPOs be located in Saudi Arabia. In qualitative studies, purposive sampling is usually employed to gain an in-depth understanding by selecting information-rich cases that offer detailed insights into the examined phenomenon (Ritchie et al., 2014). Here, the focus is on the relevance and depth of participants' experiences rather than statistical representativeness. Therefore, the study concentrated on participants who could provide reflective, experience-based accounts of their engagement with NPOs.

Including three stakeholder groups was theoretically significant because NBRs were not assumed to be experienced uniformly across different forms of involvement. EMPOs, VOLs, and DBs occupy distinct relational positions in relation to NPOs; as a result, they were expected to provide different perspectives on how relationships with the nonprofit brand are formed and experienced. Their inclusion enabled the study to examine both shared and distinctive patterns across stakeholder groups and to capture variation in organisational roles, proximity, and forms of involvement. This multi-stakeholder perspective was particularly relevant to the research aim, which sought to develop a broader understanding of NBR beyond a single stakeholder group.

Participants were required to have direct experience with a nonprofit organisation operating in Saudi Arabia and to fall within one of the three stakeholder categories relevant to the study. This criterion-based approach ensured participants could provide experiential, contextually grounded accounts relevant to the research questions. In this sense, the aim was not statistical representativeness but information-rich accounts that could contribute conceptual depth to the investigation.

Recruitment during this initial stage proved challenging, and the strategy was revised to facilitate participation. The initial phase also served as a pilot study, allowing the research design and interview process to be refined before the main data collection phase.

The pilot phase clarified the research problem and questions, refined participant-selection criteria, and helped identify the most relevant data to collect. Conducting a pilot study is often recommended because it allows researchers to test the feasibility of the research design within a particular cultural context and to identify necessary adjustments (Kim, 2011). It also provides experience in managing recruitment,

interacting with participants, and trialling data collection techniques (Sampson, 2004). Although typically considered a preparatory step, pilot studies can also produce data that inform the main study and enhance its validity (Kim, 2011). Furthermore, the pilot phase helped refine the interview questions by identifying areas where participants needed clarification, particularly around branding terminology. This was especially important given the diverse stakeholder groups involved, as not all participants were equally familiar with marketing concepts. As a result, the pilot study enhanced both the clarity and accessibility of the data collection process. At this stage, three participants were recruited, all of whom held dual roles within NPOs, combining employment or part-time work with volunteering. These three participants were retained in the final sample of 21, as the pilot interviews generated relevant data addressing the research questions and the subsequent refinements to the interview guide did not substantially alter the interview focus. Their experience of involvement ranged from three to fourteen years across one or more Saudi NPOs. This pilot phase was conducted between April and May 2023, both face-to-face and online (via Telegram). It successfully familiarised the researcher with interview procedures, supported refinement of the interview schedule, and provided preliminary insights into NBRs and relationships from internal stakeholders.

Following the pilot phase, the researcher adopted convenience sampling as a second strategy, recruiting participants based on their availability and willingness to participate (Ritchie et al., 2014). To support this, the researcher designed a recruitment advertisement in Arabic and later translated it into English (see Figure 2) to reach non-Saudi and non-Arabic-speaking participants. This strategy significantly broadened access and also led to collaboration with Ithra (The King Abdulaziz Center for World

Culture), which acted as a gatekeeper and facilitated access to potential participants across different organisational roles.



Figure 2: Advertisement to recruit participants (Arabic and English versions)

Finally, snowball sampling was used to broaden the participant pool by asking interviewees to suggest other individuals who met the study's inclusion criteria (Ritchie et al., 2014). This was particularly useful for reaching stakeholders who may not have been accessible through direct recruitment.

The initial recruitment target was 20-25 participants, and the final sample comprised 21 participants distributed across EMPs, VOLs, and DBs (see Table 6). Although

practical constraints affected recruitment, including delays in obtaining consent and the available fieldwork period (September–December 2023), sample adequacy was not determined solely by reaching a predetermined numerical target.

It is widely acknowledged that no single criterion determines sample adequacy in qualitative research, since adequacy depends on the richness, relevance, and diversity of the data collected. In the present study, sample adequacy was assessed in terms of information power rather than representativeness or a claim of thematic saturation. Malterud et al. (2016) propose that the more relevant information a sample provides, the fewer participants may be required. They suggest that information power should be considered in relation to the study aim, sample specificity, use of established theory, quality of interview dialogue, and analysis strategy. These factors were relevant to the present study, since the research had a focused aim centred on NBRs; participants were specifically recruited because of their direct experience as EMPs, VOLs, or DBs within Saudi NPOs; and the study was informed by an established body of BR and OID literature without using this literature as a predetermined analytical framework. Furthermore, the semi-structured interviews generated detailed accounts, lasting between 30 minutes and two hours, while reflexive thematic analysis enabled in-depth interpretation across and within stakeholder accounts. Together, these characteristics increased the dataset's information richness and conceptual depth and supported the adequacy of the 21 participant sample for addressing the research questions.

As data collection progressed, the interviews provided increasingly detailed insights relevant to the research questions. The researcher also maintained notes following each interview, recording the interview duration and identifying any significant,

unexpected, or particularly relevant issues. In addition, engagement with interviews during the transcription process enabled the researcher to review the accumulated data closely and assess its relevance and depth. Although the number of participants within each stakeholder group was unequal, the interviews provided sufficiently rich accounts across EMPs, VOLs, and DBs to address the research questions. Some participants also had experience of more than one stakeholder role within NPOs, which contributed further depth to their accounts, although participants were categorised according to their primary role for analytical purposes. Based on the information richness, relevance, and conceptual depth of the accumulated data, the dataset was considered sufficient to address the research questions. Accordingly, the final sample of 21 participants was considered adequate to support in-depth analysis across the three stakeholder groups and to address the research questions.

Table 6: Interviewee codes, nature of involvement and NPO type

Participant		Nature of Involvement	Type of NPO	Size of NPO
1	**DB-1**	Direct Beneficiary	Women and family development (Al-Mawaddah and Al-Shaqaiq)	Small
2	**EMP-1**	Employee (tutor)	Religious (Khairokom)	Small
3	**EMP-2**	Employee (Manager)	Women development (Al-shaqaiq)	Small
4	**EMP-3**	Employee (Manager)	Women development (Al-shaqaiq)	Small
5	**DB-2**	Direct Beneficiary	Women development (Al-shaqaiq)	Small
6	**EMP-4**	Employee (Manager)	Women development (Al-shaqaiq)	Small
7	**VOL-1**	Volunteer	Health and medical, charity for the less advantaged	Large and small
8	**VOL-2**	Volunteer	Health, charity, women, and family development	Large and Small

9	**VOL-3**	Volunteer	Charity for orphans, women, and family development	Small
10	**EMP-5**	Employee (Manager)	Health and Medical (Zamzam)	Small
11	**EMP-6**	Employee (Manager)	Health and medical (First Autism Centre)	Small
12	**EMP-7**	Employee (Manager)	Health and medical (First Autism Centre)	Small
13	**DB-3**	Direct Beneficiary	Cultural (Ithra)	Large
14	**VOL-4**	Volunteer	Cultural (Ithra)	Large
15	**VOL-5**	Volunteer	Cultural (Ithra)	Large
16	**VOL-6**	Volunteer	Cultural (Ithra)	Large
17	**VOL-7**	Volunteer	Cultural (Ithra)	Large
18	**VOL-8**	Volunteer	Cultural (Ithra)	Large
19	**EMP-8**	Employee (Manager)	Cultural (Ithra)	Large
20	**DB-4**	Direct Beneficiary	Cultural (Ithra)	Large
21	**VOL-9**	Volunteer	Cultural (Ithra)	Large

DBs= Direct Beneficiaries, EMPs=Employees, VOLs= Volunteers

3.4 Data Collection Strategy

The main phase of data collection took place between September and December 2023. Prior to this, a pilot study, as mentioned earlier, served as a preparatory exercise, enabling refinement of the interview guide, assessment of participants' responses, and adjustment of the study's focus.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, a method well-established in qualitative research (Bryman, 2012; Ritchie et al., 2014). Semi-structured interviews balance structure with flexibility, enabling researchers to pursue relevant themes while allowing participants to speak freely. Semi-structured interviews were particularly appropriate for the current study, given that the research sought to explore how participants themselves understood and narrated their relationships with NPOs, rather than to impose a predetermined conceptual vocabulary. Concepts such as attachment, belonging, identification, and loyalty are often expressed in nuanced and

tacit ways. Therefore, the semi-structured format enabled participants to articulate these meanings in their own terms, while also allowing the researcher to probe ambiguity, request examples, and clarify culturally specific expressions. This approach is especially suitable for exploratory research in under-investigated areas such as NPOs' brand relationships (Creswell, 2014; Ritchie et al., 2014). Furthermore, semi-structured interviews are particularly suitable for interpretivist research because they enable the co-creation of meaning between the researcher and participants (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). Moreover, this method views participants as active rather than passive contributors to the research process, allowing for the exploration of subjective meanings, personal interpretations, and experiences grounded in context. This was significant in the present study, where nonprofit brand relationships were regarded as socially constructed and grounded in lived experience.

The interviews varied in length, from 30 to 120 minutes, depending on the depth of participants' engagement with the topic and their level of involvement with nonprofit organisations. For example, the longest interviews were with employees, whose experience often encompassed more than one nonprofit organisation. This was followed by VOLs, especially those with extensive volunteering backgrounds and involvement with multiple nonprofit organisations. The semi-structured interview format allowed participants to elaborate on their experiences while maintaining sufficient depth. In qualitative research, such variations in interview length are typical and reflect differences in participants' experiences, communication styles, and familiarity with the topic (Ritchie et al., 2014).

Nineteen interviews were conducted in Arabic and two in English, reflecting participants' preferences and comfort levels. This linguistic flexibility was crucial for

building rapport and ensuring inclusivity. The decision to let participants choose their interview language was methodologically important, not merely practical. Moreover, this approach aligns with cross-language qualitative research practices, which emphasise that enabling participants to communicate in their preferred language enriches the richness and authenticity of the data (Temple and Young, 2004). Conducting interviews in participants' native languages, except for the two conducted in English, reduces the risk of misinterpreting meaning and captures culturally specific expressions that may be challenging to convey in a second language.

As the study aimed to understand participants' meanings and interpretations, it was necessary to create conditions in which they could speak with confidence, fluency, and nuance. Accordingly, conducting interviews primarily in Arabic enhanced inclusivity and reduced the risk that participants would oversimplify or constrain their responses due to language limitations. This was particularly important for DBs and VOLs who were less familiar with branding terminology.

Interviews were carried out both face-to-face (14) and online (7 via Zoom or Telegram). While face-to-face interviews enable observation of non-verbal cues and can strengthen rapport (Ritchie et al., 2014), online interviews offered greater accessibility and efficiency, particularly for participants in different cities, and were consistent with budgetary and logistical constraints (Archibald et al., 2019; Gray et al., 2020).

Interviews were conducted in convenient and comfortable locations for participants, such as organisational premises, quiet public areas, and online platforms. Using familiar and non-threatening settings was particularly important to foster openness and minimise potential power imbalances between the researcher and interviewees. In

qualitative interviews, the environment can influence the depth and quality of participants' responses (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009).

An interview guide was developed to ensure consistency across interviews while allowing for adaptation to each participant group (see Table 7). The guide included a range of question types, from introductory and probing to vignette-based scenarios (see Table 8). Ritchie et al. (2014) emphasise the importance of phrasing questions in neutral, culturally appropriate language, and the guide was adjusted accordingly, with simplified Arabic terminology for DBs and VOLs less familiar with marketing concepts. Additionally, employing an interview guide helped ensure that key topics related to the research questions were consistently covered in all interviews, while still allowing for the exploration of new or unexpected subjects. This balance between consistency and flexibility is essential in qualitative interviewing, as it enables comparison across participants without limiting the depth and richness of their responses.

Although the interview method varies, efforts were made to maintain consistency across different settings. The same interview guide was used in both face-to-face and online interviews, with flexibility to probe where appropriate. While face-to-face interviews facilitated observation of non-verbal cues and building rapport, online interviews improved accessibility and enabled participation from different geographical locations. In both formats, emphasis was placed on rapport, clarity, and participant comfort.

Throughout the interview process, the researcher maintained reflective awareness of their role in shaping the interaction. As an insider to the cultural context, the researcher

was attentive to how shared language, norms, and assumptions might influence the conversation and participants' responses. Consequently, the researcher kept questions open-ended, avoided leading questions, and encouraged interviewees to describe their experiences in their own words.

All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent, using an iPhone for in-person interviews and Zoom for online sessions. Recordings were securely stored in OneDrive, as approved by the ethics committee. Audio recording enhanced transcription accuracy and allowed the researcher to focus on building rapport during the interviews (Nikander, 2008). Alongside audio recordings, brief field notes were taken after each interview to document contextual observations, initial reflections, and emerging analytical insights. These notes supported the analytical process by adding an extra layer of interpretation and providing context to participants' responses.

Table 7: Types of interview questions used in this study (adopted from Arksey and Knight, 1999; Ritchie et al., 2014; Roberts, 2020)

Type of Question	Purpose / Example
Introductory	Build rapport, encourage openness. E.g., 'Why did you choose to get involved with [name of the NPO]?'
Follow-up	Encourage elaboration. E.g., 'What do you mean by…?'
Probing	Explore issues in greater depth. E.g., 'You mentioned earlier that… could you expand on that?'
Specifying	Clarify details of experiences. E.g., 'How did this benefit you?'
Direct	Obtain straightforward answers. E.g., 'Do you enjoy volunteering?'
Indirect	Capture perspectives without leading. E.g., 'How do you think others perceive the role of volunteers?'
Structuring	Manage the flow of the interview. E.g., 'I would like to move on to the next topic…'
Silence	Provide space for reflection and deeper responses.
Interpreting	Summarise and verify. E.g., 'So, are you saying that…?'
Vignette	Present scenarios to stimulate discussion. E.g., 'Imagine an NPO introduces a new programme — how might beneficiaries respond?'

Table 8: Interview Guide

	Topic (1) Conceptualisation of NBRs	Topic (2) Types of BR in an NPO context	Topic (3) Factors Influencing NBRs
Interviewee	**Interview Questions**		
Employees	• Could you talk about your experience with the nonprofit sector, and how became involved in it? • How would you define the nonprofit sector? • How would define the word 'Brand'? • Would you say the [name of the NPO] is a 'Brand'? Why? Why not?	• How do you communicate with the NPO's different audiences? • How would you describe the audiences' relationship with the NPO? • How can you describe your relationship with the NPO? • Are you attached to the place or the people? Could you elaborate?	• In your opinion, why do beneficiaries, volunteers and employees choose [name of the NPO] instead of others in the field? • Why did you choose [name of the NPO] in particular? • How does society perceive the nonprofit sector and NPOs?
Volunteers **Direct Beneficiaries**	• Could you talk about your experience with [name of NPO]? • How did you become aware of it? • How long have you been involved with [name of the NPO]? • What distinguishes [name of the NPO] from others? • Have you heard of the word 'Brand'/ 'Trademark', if so, what do you think it means?	• How did you approach [name of NPO]? • What are their communication methods? • How did you benefit from volunteering with/ the services provided by [name of the NPO]? • Would you say that you developed a relationship with [name of the NPO]? • How would you describe your	• Are there factors that might have influenced your choice to get involved with [name of NPO]? • What might make you avoid a certain NPO? • How would you define an NPO? • How do you perceive the nonprofit sector?

	• Would you say that [name of the NPO] is a 'Brand'? why / why not?	relationship with [name of the NPO]?	

3.4.1 Research Setting

Data were collected in Saudi Arabia, the researcher's home country. This location was chosen for reasons of accessibility, cultural familiarity, and practicality. Previous experience conducting qualitative research in Saudi Arabia, including both a Master's dissertation (2016) and a later study on online branding strategies (Aljuwaiser and Alevizou, 2023), provided prior familiarity with the research context and with participant engagement in Saudi Arabia.

Studying phenomena in familiar settings allows researchers to gain deeper cultural insights (Creswell, 2007), and shared cultural backgrounds can improve access and build rapport, as participants are often more open with researchers seen as "insiders" (Kanuha, 2000; Marshall and Rossman, 2016). However, while insider research can facilitate access and enrich data, it also raises important methodological considerations. Researchers sharing cultural or social proximity with participants may risk overlooking obvious assumptions or failing to challenge familiar practices (Brannick and Coghlan, 2007). Consequently, conducting the study in the researcher's home country necessitated ongoing reflexive awareness to balance familiarity with critical distance. Reflexive awareness involved critically reflecting on how prior knowledge, assumptions, and experiences within the Saudi nonprofit sector might influence both data collection and interpretation. This involved recognising and critically reflecting on pre-existing expectations while remaining attentive to participants' own accounts and meanings (Finlay, 2002).

The researcher's insider position also required reflexive consideration throughout data collection and analysis. Following each interview, reflective notes were maintained to record observations, issues considered significant or unexpected, and initial interpretations. These notes helped the researcher reflect on how prior assumptions and familiarity with the context may influence the interview process and subsequent interpretations. During transcription and analysis, continued engagement with participants' accounts also provided opportunities to reconsider initial impressions rather than treating them as fixed interpretations. Thus, reflexivity was maintained throughout the research process, including data collection, interpretation, and theme development.

3.4.2 Development of The Nonprofit Sector in Saudi Arabia

Although philanthropy has deep cultural and religious roots, the formal nonprofit sector in Saudi Arabia developed more recently. The first organisation, the National Emergency Medical Organisation, was established in the 1930s, followed by expansion in the late 1950s and 1960s across key locations in Saudi Arabia, including Riyadh, Jeddah and the Eastern Province (Al-Nahari and Mofawaz, 2023; King Khalid Foundation, 2018). In 1961, the Ministry of Social Affairs was founded to regulate and support NPOs (King Khalid Foundation, 2018). Today, Saudi NPOs are highly diverse, spanning civil associations, professional societies, educational institutions, health organisations, chambers of commerce, and literary clubs (King Khalid Foundation, 2018, 2021). This diversity provided an appropriate context for examining stakeholder relationships across different types of NPOs.

3.4.3 Access and Gatekeepers

Gatekeepers were not merely administrative; they also shaped access boundaries and, potentially, the sample's composition. In qualitative research, gatekeepers play a vital role in controlling access to participants and can affect both the scope and the type of data collected (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). In this context, access is not neutral; it is negotiated within existing organisational structures and power dynamics. These challenges highlight the practical realities of qualitative fieldwork, where access is often dependent on trust, institutional approval, and the perceived legitimacy of the research. Rather than limitations, these issues are integral to the research process and can offer insight into organisational and cultural dynamics within the field (Creswell, 2007).

In the current study, uneven organisational responses highlighted the practical realities of conducting fieldwork in a nonprofit setting and required flexibility in recruitment. To reduce reliance on any single organisation, recruitment drew on multiple strategies, including gatekeepers, snowball sampling, and personal networks, which shaped the sample's composition. While this approach improved access and diversity, it necessitated careful consideration to ensure that the sample remained aligned with the research aim and questions. This exemplifies a broader feature of qualitative research, where sampling is iterative and responsive rather than fixed beforehand (Ritchie et al., 2014).

The original plan focused data collection on Riyadh, which comprises 28.5% of NPOs, and on Makkah province (16.2%), as both represent the highest concentrations of NPOs (King Khalid Foundation, 2021; GASTAT, 2018). However, difficulties with

gatekeepers in these locations necessitated expanding the research to Dhahran in the Eastern Province. Such adjustments are common in qualitative research, as Creswell (2007) notes, and reflect the need to adapt to access challenges and cultural sensitivities.

Gaining entry into organisations required extended negotiations from October 2022 to November 2023, both before and after ethical approval. Some organisations initially agreed to participate but insisted on formal proof of ethical approval. Out of 23 organisations contacted, only two formally acted as gatekeepers. The first, a family development organisation, provided access to its participant database, though none ultimately participated due to personal constraints. The second, Ithra (King Abdulaziz World Cultural Centre), played a pivotal role in facilitating access to DBs, EMPs, and VOLs. Additional participants were recruited through snowball sampling and personal networks. In one case, the First Autism Centre in Jeddah permitted access to staff, though not directly to beneficiaries, as parents were considered the primary recipients of services. Ultimately, the study secured a diverse range of participants across Jeddah, Riyadh, and Dhahran.

3.5 Data Analysis

In interpretive qualitative research, analysis is an analytical and reflexive process through which meaning is actively constructed (Braun and Clarke, 2021). Thus, the aim of analysis in the current investigation was to develop an interpretive understanding of how stakeholders construct and experience relationships with nonprofit brands.

Qualitative data analysis aims to organise and interpret a large body of textual material to identify and interpret patterns of meaning within qualitative data without being tied to a single theoretical framework.

The analysis was conducted in two stages: first, following the pilot study with three participants, and second, after the full dataset had been transcribed and translated. While formal analysis took place between June and November 2024, the process was continuous and iterative, beginning during interviews, continuing through notetaking, and continuing during transcription and translation.

Since the analytical process was a crucial part of the study, a dedicated chapter describes the stages of coding, theme development, and analytical refinement. The current section therefore introduces the analytical approach and its rationale, while Chapter Four provides a more detailed account of how the data were analysed.

3.5.1 Transcription and Translation

Decisions regarding transcription were guided by the research objectives and the nature of the data. Qualitative research does not prescribe a single transcription method; instead, transcription choices should align with the research questions and analytical focus. In this study, emphasis was placed on participants' meanings and interpretations rather than detailed linguistic features. Consequently, a denaturalised transcription approach was adopted, omitting non-essential repetitions, fillers, and utterances that did not contribute to meaning, while preserving the meaning and context of participants' accounts.

Opting for a denaturalised transcription method reflects the study's epistemological stance. Because the research focuses on participants' meanings and interpretations rather than the linguistic structure of their speech, transcription was treated as a process of representation rather than replication (Oliver et al., 2005). This enabled the creation of transcripts that were both analytically useful and accessible, while adhering to the essence of participants' accounts. Although full verbatim transcription was initially trialled, it was deemed less suitable for the aims of this research. As the focus was not on participants' discourse or linguistic form, but rather on their perceptions and interpretations of BRs, denaturalised transcription was better suited, producing a clearer representation of meaning without distorting participants' voices (McMullin, 2023).

The researcher transcribed and translated all interviews between February and May 2024. The researcher conducted 19 interviews in Arabic, which required translation into English, and 2 in English. Undertaking transcription and translation personally enabled the researcher to remain closely engaged with the dataset and to attend to culturally embedded expressions, idioms, and emotionally nuanced language (Temple and Young, 2004). Translation was therefore treated as an interpretive rather than a purely technical process involving the negotiation of meaning across linguistic and cultural contexts.

Rather than adopting a literal, word-for-word approach, translation prioritised the conceptual and intended meaning of participants' accounts. Where direct linguistic equivalence was not possible, particularly for culturally embedded expressions, idioms, and proverbs, the researcher used culturally appropriate English equivalents

or explanations (Abfalter et al., 2021). The researcher also paid attention to tone, connotation, and contextual meaning to avoid altering participants' intended interpretations. As a native Arabic speaker and insider to the cultural context, the researcher was able to recognise linguistic and cultural nuances that might not be apparent through literal translation alone.

To support translation accuracy, the translated texts were repeatedly cross-checked against the original Arabic transcripts and audio recordings. Where meanings or expressions required further consideration, translations were revisited and refined to ensure that the English version remained consistent with the participant's intended meaning. Selected translated excerpts were also discussed with a bilingual academic to check clarity and linguistic accuracy. In addition, the researcher completed two specialist courses in translation theory and practice in 2024, which increased awareness of linguistic equivalence and translation decisions. Final responsibility for interpretation and translation remained with the researcher.

To ensure quality and validity, the translated texts were repeatedly cross-checked against the original Arabic transcripts. This iterative process enabled the researcher to refine the interpretation while remaining faithful to participants' intended meaning. Although tools such as Microsoft Word and, occasionally, AI-assisted translation were used to support the process, final responsibility for interpretation rested with the researcher, in accordance with the ethical approval granted by the University of East Anglia.

3.5.2 Reflexive Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis employed Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2021) reflexive approach. This method involves systematic phases but prioritises interpretation and reflexivity over a fixed coding scheme, recognising that meaning is co-created through researcher-data interaction. Reflexive thematic analysis was chosen for this study because it provides a flexible yet rigorous method for identifying and interpreting patterns in qualitative data.

The analysis adopted a primarily inductive orientation, with coding and theme development grounded in close engagement with participants' accounts rather than in predefined theoretical categories (Braun and Clark, 2006; Thomas, 2006). Existing BR and OID literature provided theoretical sensitisation rather than determining the coding framework. Theoretical insights were considered during later interpretation to support conceptual development.

In line with the reflexive nature of thematic analysis, the researcher actively interpreted the data and developed themes. This process involved making analytical decisions about meaningful patterns and critically reflecting on how the researcher's background, prior knowledge, assumptions, and analytical decisions shaped interpretation and theme development. Therefore, reflexivity was vital to the analysis, ensuring themes were seen not as objective facts but as interpretive constructs grounded in the data (Braun and Clarke, 2021).

While Braun and Clarke (2006) outline six phases of thematic analysis, they stress that these stages should not be viewed as separate or sequential but as a recursive, iterative process. In this study, reflexive thematic analysis provided a detailed, interpretative understanding of participants' experiences and views regarding brand

relationships in the nonprofit sector. The analysis included the following phases, which will be elaborated upon in Chapter Four:

1. **Familiarisation with the data**: The process began with transcription and translation, followed by repeated readings of transcripts. This immersion enabled the researcher to take reflective notes, highlight early impressions, and identify potential patterns.
2. **Generating initial codes**: Interesting extracts were coded at both semantic (participants' own words) and latent (interpretative) levels. Coding was conducted using two tools: Microsoft Word (Comment function) and NVivo software, which facilitated systematic organisation of codes and supported the development of broader patterns.
3. **Developing initial themes**: Codes were reviewed and grouped into potential themes. This stage involved examining relationships between codes and considering how they might combine to capture patterns of meaning relevant to the research questions
4. **Reviewing themes**: Themes were refined at two levels. First, coded extracts were reviewed to ensure coherence and relevance; the second level involved reviewing the entire dataset to confirm that themes reflected the data as a whole. This process was iterative, involving repeated re-coding and theme refinement.
5. **Defining and naming themes**: Themes were defined in detail, their boundaries clarified, and narratives developed to capture their essence. The process also involved considering how themes related to one another and to the broader research objectives.

6. **Producing the report**: The final phase is presented in the Findings chapter, where themes are discussed in relation to the research questions and existing literature, supported by illustrative data extracts.

Overall, the researcher undertook transcription, translation, and reflexive thematic analysis to ensure deep engagement with the dataset and preserve cultural and linguistic integrity. Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2021) reflexive approach provided a flexible yet systematic framework that facilitated the generation of meaningful themes. By combining methodological rigour with reflexivity, the analysis produced insights that are both contextually grounded and theoretically informative.

3.6 Trustworthiness of The Study

Within interpretive qualitative research, trustworthiness concerns the credibility, transparency, and coherence of the research process and its findings (Shenton, 2004). This study follows Lincoln and Guba's (1985) framework of trustworthiness, which comprises four interrelated dimensions: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. A combination of strategies was employed to address these dimensions, recognising that no single technique is sufficient to ensure rigour in qualitative inquiry.

3.6.1 Credibility

Credibility was supported through multiple strategies to confirm that the findings genuinely reflect participants' experiences and perspectives (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). In qualitative research, credibility concerns the extent to which interpretations

are meaningfully grounded in participants' accounts and supported by a transparent research process (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Tracy, 2010). In this study, credibility was seen as an ongoing process rather than a single stage, and it was maintained throughout data collection, analysis, and interpretation. The study used multiple stakeholder perspectives, member checking, peer debriefing, and ongoing reflexive engagement to support credibility.

Collecting accounts from three stakeholder groups (EMP, VOL, and DB) enabled the inclusion of multiple stakeholder perspectives, each with distinct experiences of nonprofit brands. This approach facilitated comparisons across relational positions and helped identify both commonalities and differences in stakeholders' experiences of NBR. It enriched the analysis by providing greater depth and variation in the data and contributed to a more comprehensive understanding of brand relationships within the nonprofit sector.

Member checking was used to support transcript accuracy rather than to validate the researcher's subsequent analytical interpretations. Participants were invited to review their interview transcripts via WhatsApp or email, according to their preferred communication channel. Engagement was limited; most participants who responded accepted their transcripts without modification or suggested minor clarifications. For example, VOL-2 requested removal of a sensitive section unrelated to the study, while VOL-4 corrected a factual detail. Consistent with reflexive thematic analysis, participant feedback was not treated as definitive validation of the analysis, as the researcher developed interpretations and themes through analytical engagement with the dataset (Braun and Clarke, 2021).

Finally, peer debriefing further strengthened credibility, as the researcher discussed findings and analytic interpretations with supervisors and postgraduate colleagues (Creswell, 2014). Supervisors' feedback helped refine the coding and thematic structure, while colleagues, although working in different substantive areas, offered fresh perspectives on methodological aspects such as interviewing and coding. Peer debriefing also strengthened analytical rigour by subjecting emerging interpretations to critical discussion. This process encouraged critical reflection on coding decisions and theme development, helping to ensure that interpretations were not solely influenced by the researchers' initial assumptions.

3.6.2 Transferability

The study addressed transferability by providing a detailed description of the Saudi nonprofit context, participant groups, data collection process, and the study's linguistic and cultural dimensions. In qualitative research, transferability does not imply statistical generalisability but enables the assessment of the extent to which findings may be relevant to other settings (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Detailed contextual information, together with participants' accounts and illustrative extracts presented in the findings, therefore provides sufficient information to consider the potential relevance of the findings to comparable contexts.

3.6.3 Dependability

Dependability was ensured by thoroughly documenting all research stages, such as recruitment strategies, transcription and translation processes, and coding methods (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The iterative analysis approach, which involves revisiting transcripts, notes, and codes, provides an "audit trail" of decision-making (Creswell,

2014), thereby enhancing methodological transparency by illustrating the study's progression and how conclusions were reached (Nowell et al., 2017).

The use of software (NVivo) supported the systematic organisation and management of data and codes and facilitated the traceability of analytical decisions. NVivo also supported systematic data organisation, transparent coding procedures, and traceability of analytical decisions. However, the software supported analysis rather than determining it, with interpretive decisions remaining the researcher's responsibility. A clear record was also maintained of research decisions, including changes to recruitment strategies, adjustments to the interview guide, and documentation of transcription, translation, and analytical procedures.

3.6.4 Confirmability

In interpretive qualitative research, confirmability does not mean removing subjectivity but involves openly recognising and critically reflecting on the researcher's influence. In this study, reflexive practices, documenting analytical decisions, and discussing interpretations with supervisors and colleagues helped ensure that findings were rooted in participants' accounts rather than solely on the researchers' assumptions. Confirmability was supported through reflexive practice, documentation of analytical decisions, transparent transcription and translation procedures, and critical discussion of interpretations with supervisors and colleagues.

Reflexivity was practised throughout the research process, with ongoing consideration of the researcher's position as both a cultural insider and a researcher with prior familiarity with the Saudi nonprofit sector. This involved ongoing reflection on how prior

knowledge, assumptions, cultural familiarity, and expectations might influence interactions with participants, data interpretation, and analytical focus (Creswell, 2014). Reflective notes recorded during and following interviews, together with continued engagement with the transcripts during transcription and analysis, provided opportunities to identify and reconsider initial impressions and assumptions. Therefore, reflexivity informed not only data collection but also analytical decisions and the development and refinement of themes.

Translation and transcription practices also supported confirmability through repeated cross-checks of translated texts against the original Arabic transcripts and recordings. Selected translated excerpts were also discussed with a bilingual academic to ensure clarity and preserve conceptual meaning, as detailed in Section 3.5.1. Finally, discussions with supervisors and colleagues provided further opportunities to challenge and refine analytical interpretations and to reflect critically on theme development.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are integral to qualitative research, particularly when engaging directly with individuals and their lived experiences. This study followed Silverman's (2016) suggestions to address three core ethical principles: informed consent, confidentiality, and trust. These were embedded throughout this study, in line with the University of East Anglia's ethical approval procedures and established qualitative research guidelines. The University's ethics committee granted approval to conduct the research in January 2023, and it remained valid until March 2024, covering the period of participant recruitment and primary data collection.

First, informed consent involved providing participants with a comprehensive briefing on the study's nature and purpose before they agreed to take part. An information sheet detailing the research, the interview process, and sample questions was provided in both Arabic and English. Written consent was obtained prior to the interview, and the content of the consent form was discussed where necessary to ensure understanding. Particular attention was paid to ensuring that consent was meaningfully informed rather than merely formal, given participants' varying levels of familiarity with research processes. Thus, the study was explained using accessible language, and participants were given opportunities to ask questions prior to participation. Consent was treated as an ongoing process, with participants reminded that they could pause the interview, decline to answer particular questions, or withdraw without consequence (Silverman, 2016).

Second, confidentiality was a key ethical obligation. All interviewees used pseudonyms, and identifying details were removed from transcripts. Data were securely stored on the University's OneDrive, accessible only to the researcher and the supervisory team. This ensured adherence to ethical standards that emphasise protecting sensitive information and respecting participants' privacy (Ritchie et al., 2014). Additionally, data management complied with ethical expectations: all recordings, transcripts, and translations were securely stored. Consistent with the University's data policy, no material was shared outside the supervisory team. This approach not only met institutional requirements but also fostered trust with participants, who were assured that their information would remain confidential.

Building trust was especially crucial throughout data collection. Participants could choose their preferred interview mode (face-to-face, Zoom, or Telegram) to support comfort and accessibility. Rapport-building involved adapting language where appropriate, demonstrating cultural awareness, and ensuring that participants felt comfortable and respected throughout the research process.

Given that some participants discussed organisations with which they remained affiliated, ethical sensitivity extended beyond confidentiality to include managing reputational and relational risks. Consequently, care was taken to avoid pressuring participants into disclosing information they considered sensitive, and they were reminded that they could decline any question without consequence.

Alongside the three core ethical principles, reflexivity was recognised as an ethical research practice, extending beyond procedural compliance to include consideration of the researcher's positionality and influence on the research process. As an insider researcher familiar with the Saudi nonprofit context, the researcher remained attentive to cultural, social, and relational dynamics during fieldwork. This involved adapting language to participants' levels of understanding and maintaining awareness of how the researcher's position could influence interactions with participants. The broader role of reflexivity in the research process is discussed in Section 3.6.4.

Overall, ethical considerations were embedded throughout the research process rather than treated solely as procedural requirements. Informed consent, confidentiality, participant trust, sensitivity to potential relational risks, and reflexive

awareness supported respectful and responsible engagement with participants in accordance with institutional requirements and qualitative research principles.

3.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter has outlined the methodological framework guiding the present study. A qualitative research design grounded in a constructivist and interpretivist orientation enabled an in-depth exploration of how brand relationships are experienced, constructed, and understood within Saudi NPOs from the perspectives of EMPs, VOLs, and DBs. This approach emphasised stakeholder meanings, experiences, and interpretations as central to the investigation.

The chapter described the sampling strategies and the consideration of sample adequacy through information richness and conceptual depth; the data collection through semi-structured interviews; and the transcription and translation procedures used to preserve participants' meanings across Arabic and English. It also introduced Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2021) reflexive thematic analysis as the analytical approach, with the detailed analytical process presented in Chapter Four. The chapter also addressed the study's trustworthiness through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, and outlined the ethical procedures followed throughout the research.

Overall, these methodological choices establish a coherent, transparent, and contextually grounded framework through which the research aims and questions can be examined, while remaining consistent with the study's interpretive and primarily inductive orientation. Building on this methodological foundation, the next chapter

presents the analytical process and the development of the key themes, providing an interpretive account of NBRs as experienced by stakeholders.

CHAPTER 4 DATA ANALYSIS

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the process by which the qualitative data were analysed, and the final thematic structure was developed. Building on the methodological approach outlined in Chapter Three, the analysis followed Braun and Clarke's reflexive thematic analysis (RTA), involving an iterative process of engagement with the interview data, coding, theme development, review and refinement. Rather than following a linear sequence, the analytical process involved repeated movement between the interview transcripts, codes, developing themes and interpretations as the analysis progressed.

The chapter provides an account of how the coding and thematic structure developed over time, including refinement, merging, separation and reconsideration of earlier analytical categories and interpretations. It also explains how engagement with the literature and the developing theoretical lens informed the later stages of interpretation, while remaining attentive to patterns and relationships within participants' accounts. The chapter concludes by presenting the final thematic structure that forms the basis of the findings in Chapter Five.

4.1 Overview of the data set

The analysis was based on 21 semi-structured interviews conducted with participants representing three stakeholder groups across nonprofit organisations: EMPs, VOLs and DBs. The final dataset consisted of 8 EMPs, 9 VOLs, and 4 DBs (see Table 6 in Chapter 3). Initial coding was conducted using NVivo, which supported the organisation and management of the interview data during the early stages of analysis.

Once preliminary coding patterns began to develop, the analytical process continued manually using a combination of Microsoft Word, visual mapping software (Draw.io), handwritten notes, and a reflexive research diary. This combination of digital and manual analytical tools enabled a more iterative engagement with the data and facilitated the development of thematic patterns.

The coding process consisted of four stages (see Table 9). The initial coding stage generated 186 descriptive codes, which captured diverse aspects of participants' experiences with NPOs and their perceptions of NBRs. Through iterative review and comparison across transcripts, these codes were progressively refined and consolidated. The second stage of coding reduced the number of codes to 150, which were further refined to 98 conceptual codes. During the subsequent stage of thematic mapping, these conceptual codes were organised into 44 analytical codes, representing the most salient patterns identified across the dataset. These analytical codes formed the basis for developing categories and candidate themes. The thematic maps presented in this chapter illustrate how these codes were organised during the theme review stage of the analysis.

Table 9: Coding process summary

Stage	Description	Number of Codes
Stage 1	Initial NVivo coding	186
Stage 2	Code refinement	150
Stage 3	Conceptual coding	98
Stage 4	Code grouping	44

4.1.1. Coding Progression and Analytical Refinement

To improve transparency in the analytical process, this section describes how the coding structure developed from an initial set of 186 descriptive codes to a refined set of 44 analytical codes. This development should not be viewed as a simple reduction in volume; rather, it signifies a systematic process of conceptual refinement, where codes were iteratively reviewed, compared, and refined to identify increasingly abstract and analytically significant patterns within the data.

In the initial stage, 186 codes were generated through detailed, line-by-line coding of the translated interview transcripts using NVivo. At this point, the coding process was primarily descriptive, aiming to capture participants' explicit expressions and immediate meanings. Consequently, some overlap and redundancy were both expected and appropriate, as similar ideas were coded multiple times across different interviews and stakeholder groups. This approach helped to preserve the richness of participants' accounts and ensured that no potentially relevant aspect of the data was prematurely discarded.

The second stage focused on refining these descriptive codes, reducing their number to 150. This was achieved through ongoing comparison across transcripts, where similar or overlapping codes were identified and combined. Codes that were overlapping, insufficiently distinct, or no longer analytically useful were consolidated or removed. For example, codes such as "emotional attachment," "emotional attachment to the community," "emotional involvement with beneficiaries," "intense and emotional BR," and "sentimental" were reviewed and consolidated as appropriate.

Although emotional concepts initially received strong analytical prominence, repeated comparisons across participants showed that emotional attachment did not consistently distinguish one form of NBR from another. Participants could express emotional connection while simultaneously describing their relationships in terms of value, benefits, or exchange. Emotional concepts were therefore retained where relevant to participants' experiences but were gradually reconsidered as characteristics of relational bonds rather than as a sufficient basis for defining separate relationship forms. This phase marked the shift from simple descriptive coding to a more organised depiction of common patterns within the dataset.

Building on this refinement, the third stage concentrated on conceptual coding, resulting in 98 codes. At this point, the analytical focus shifted from describing the data to interpreting it. Codes were revisited in relation to their underlying meanings, and more abstract labels were devised to emphasise broader conceptual patterns. For example, several descriptive codes related to interpersonal interactions, organisational support, and communication practices were grouped under higher-order concepts such as "internal community" and "behaviours of the internal community." This stage was particularly significant in progressing the analysis from surface-level description to a more interpretive understanding of the data.

The final stage involved grouping the conceptual codes into 44 analytical codes. This process required identifying relationships between codes and organising them into higher-order analytical categories that reflected coherent patterns across the dataset. Rather than focusing on isolated instances, this stage aimed to capture the most salient and analytically meaningful aspects of NBRs. Visual mapping techniques were

used to explore connections between codes and to assess whether each analytical code represented a sufficiently distinct and conceptually coherent pattern.

Together, this four-stage coding process shows a systematic, iterative progression from detailed description to conceptual abstraction. It shows how the analysis moved beyond an initial broad, general portrayal of participants' accounts toward a more focused, conceptually developed understanding of NBRs.

4.2 Braun and Clarke's Six-Phase Analysis Process

Braun and Clarke (2006) outline six phases of thematic analysis but emphasise that the process is neither rigid nor strictly linear. Thematic analysis is recursive and iterative, requiring ongoing movement between the dataset, codes, and interpretations. In practice, these phases often overlap as researchers respond to new insights. Following the reflexive approach, the study engaged with the six phases described below.

The process began with familiarisation with the data. This phase involved immersing in the dataset. It began with transcribing and translating the interviews, followed by repeated readings of the transcripts to develop a deep understanding of participants' accounts. During this stage, preliminary observations were recorded and reflective notes were documented in a research diary. These notes captured early impressions, recurring ideas, and developing patterns in the data. Familiarisation therefore went beyond reading the transcripts; it involved active engagement with the data, laying the groundwork for identifying meaningful aspects of stakeholders' experiences with NPOs.

The next step involved generating initial codes. This phase focused on systematically coding the dataset at both the semantic and latent levels. Semantic coding captured participants' explicit statements, while latent coding involved interpreting underlying meanings. Two analytical tools supported the coding process: NVivo software for managing coded extracts and Microsoft Word's comment function for manual annotation and reflection during later analysis. Through this process, 186 initial codes were generated; these were subsequently reviewed, compared, merged, and refined through ongoing engagement with transcripts, reducing the coding structure to 150 codes and subsequently to 98 conceptual codes (see Appendix 2).

Following coding, the process moved to developing initial themes. At this stage, the focus transitioned from individual codes toward broader patterns of meaning within the data. Codes were examined in relation to one another to identify potential thematic groupings. This involved exploring conceptual relationships between codes and considering how clusters of codes could collectively represent patterns relevant to the research questions. Visual mapping techniques were used to organise codes and analyse potential connections, leading to preliminary thematic groupings that informed the development of candidate themes.

The subsequent phase entailed reviewing themes. This phase involved assessing and refining the candidate themes, as Braun and Clarke (2006) recommend reviewing themes on two levels. First, coded data extracts for each theme were checked for coherence and meaning. Second, themes were reviewed against the entire dataset to assess their coherence and relevance to participants' accounts and the broader analytical narrative. This stage required revisiting transcripts, reorganising codes, and

adjusting thematic boundaries as needed, resulting in conceptually clear, coherent themes. This process was recursive rather than sequential, with some candidate themes and categories being merged, separated, renamed, or reconsidered as their conceptual boundaries became clearer. Specific examples of these analytical decisions are discussed in Sections 4.3 and 4.4.

The next stage focused on defining and naming themes. At this stage, the scope and meaning of each theme were defined. The core concepts of each theme were examined to clarify their roles in understanding NBRs, and theme boundaries were carefully reviewed to assess whether each captured a sufficiently distinct analytical pattern. Descriptive labels were assigned to reflect each theme's focus, and preliminary narratives were developed to explain how themes related both to each other and to the research objectives.

The final phase focused on producing the report. This stage involved integrating the themes into a coherent narrative. In this study, the themes developed through analysis are presented in the Findings chapter, where they are examined in relation to the research questions and interpreted in relation to the relevant literature. Illustrative extracts from participants' interviews demonstrate how the developed themes were grounded in participants' accounts and support the analytical interpretations.

4.3 Code Development and Theme Construction

At this stage, the coding process involved reviewing and comparing codes across the three stakeholder groups. Each group was initially examined separately to identify patterns in the data and explore how different participants described NBRs. During

this stage, repeated or overlapping codes were consolidated, and conceptually related codes were grouped together through ongoing comparison of transcripts. This process facilitated the identification of patterns that contributed to the development of initial themes. This stage was not limited to organising codes; it also involved active and reflexive interpretation of the data. Specifically, comparing stakeholder groups helped identify both convergent and divergent patterns in how NBRs were formed and experienced (see Table 10).

Iterative code comparison supported the development of more nuanced distinctions between conceptually similar ideas. Instead of viewing codes as separate units, they were examined in relation to one another, enabling the detection of subtle differences in meaning. This was crucial for distinguishing among various forms of relational bonds, which later helped shape the types of NBRs discussed in the findings chapter. Consequently, this stage served as an important analytical bridge, moving from fragmented coded data to more coherent, interpretable thematic patterns.

One example of this iterative development concerned the initial interpretation of NBR forms. In the early stages of analysis, relational patterns were provisionally considered in terms of attachment-based, value-based, benefit-based, and exchange-based relationships. However, continued comparison across participants indicated overlap between these categories, particularly between value- and benefit-based relationships, while some participants' accounts contained characteristics associated with more than one provisional relationship form. For example, a participant could express emotional attachment while also describing the relationship in terms of perceived value or benefits. This led to reconsideration of whether attachment, value

or benefit represented distinct relationship types or characteristics through which NBRs were experienced. These early classifications were therefore treated as provisional and were subsequently refined as the analysis and theoretical interpretation developed.

Table 10: Code development

Initial Code		Category	Candidate Theme	Stakeholder Distinctiveness
C1	Reputation	Organisational attributes	Antecedents of NBRs	All
C2	Credibility	Organisational integrity	Antecedents	All
C3	Transparency	Organisational integrity	Antecedents	All
C4	Adapting to societal needs	Organisational mission	Antecedents	All
C5	Fulfilling the social gap	Organisational mission	Antecedents	All
C6	Service quality	Brand characteristics	Antecedents	All
C7	Aura of the organisation	Brand perception	Antecedents	All
C8	Visual identity	Brand characteristics	Antecedents	All
C9	Internal community	Organisational environment	Antecedents	EMPs
C10	Support and encouragement	Organisational culture	Antecedents	EMPs
C11	Open communication	Organisational culture	Antecedents	EMPs
C12	Faith and belief in NPO	Value alignment	Antecedents	EMPs
C13	Servicescape facilities	Physical environment	Antecedents	DBs
C14	Servicescape design and atmosphere	Physical environment	Antecedents	DBs
C15	Marketing communication	Communication channels	Antecedents	All
C16	Social media platforms	Communication channels	Antecedents	All
C17	Word-of-mouth	Communication channels	Antecedents	All

C18	Reference groups	Social influence	Antecedents	DBs
C19	Educational background	Demographic characteristics	Antecedents	DBs
C20	Interests and passion	Psychological factors	Antecedents	VOLs
C21	Religious upbringing	Sociocultural factors	Antecedents	VOLs
C22	Personality characteristics	Individual characteristics	Antecedents	All
C23	Knowledge of the sector	Cognitive factors	Antecedents	EMPs
C24	Qualification	Cognitive factors	Antecedents	EMPs
C25	Affiliation with strong organisation	Brand association	Antecedents	VOLs
C26	Form of volunteering	Participation type	Antecedents	VOLs
C27	Duration of volunteering	Participation type	Antecedents	VOLs
C28	Perceived value from NPO	Personal benefits	Antecedents	DBs
C29	Strong relationship	Relational intensity	Features of NBRs	EMPs
C30	Emotional attachment	Emotional bond	Features	VOLs
C31	Attachment	Emotional bond	Features	All
C32	Sentimental feelings	Emotional bond	Features	All
C33	Sense of belonging	Identity connection	Features	All
C34	Collective identity	Community connection	Features	VOLs
C35	Close relationship	Relational proximity	Features	DBs
C36	Loyalty	Behavioural outcome	Outcomes of NBRs	All
C37	Advocacy	Behavioural outcome	Outcomes	All
C38	Pride	Emotional outcome	Outcomes	EMPs
C39	Gratitude	Emotional outcome	Outcomes	All
C40	Trust and confidence	Psychological outcome	Outcomes	All
C41	Tolerance	Relationship maintenance	Outcomes	All

C42	Voice of the NPO	Advocacy behaviour	Outcomes	All
C43	Relationship maintained	Relationship continuity	Outcomes	VOLs
C44	Relationship termination	Relationship discontinuity	Outcomes	DBs

As Table 10 illustrates, the coding structure at this stage remained provisional. For example, the broad candidate theme of 'Antecedents of NBRs' initially incorporated both stakeholder-related factors, such as religious upbringing, interests, personality and knowledge, and organisation-related factors, such as reputation, credibility, communication and the physical environment. Through subsequent review, these factors were reconsidered because they represented analytically different sources of influence on stakeholder-NBRs. This broad candidate theme was therefore later separated and refined into stakeholder-related and organisation-related themes. Similarly, the provisional 'Features of NBRs' theme was further reconsidered as the nature and forms of the relationships became more conceptually developed. These subsequent decisions are discussed in the following section.

4.4 Initial Themes Development

At this stage, the analysis shifted focus from individual codes to broader patterns of meaning within the dataset. Grouping analytical codes helped reveal preliminary thematic clusters that showed recurring patterns across stakeholder groups. These initial themes were developed primarily inductively through ongoing engagement with the data, rather than being predetermined.

To preserve the data's contextual richness, each stakeholder group was initially analysed separately, enabling a nuanced understanding of how NBRs are experienced within different roles. As the analysis progressed, cross-group comparisons were made to identify shared patterns and key differences among EMPs, VOLs, and DBs (see Figures 3- 5).

The preliminary analysis suggested that NBRs were shaped by interactions among organisational cues, stakeholder-specific characteristics, and relational experiences. While some patterns were identified across stakeholder groups, others were more context-dependent, reflecting the different positions and expectations associated with each stakeholder role. These themes were provisional at this stage. The goal was to develop an initial analytical framework for further refinement and further interpretation in later phases of the analysis, rather than to establish final thematic structures.

4.4.1 Refinement of the Initial Themes

The initial thematic structure underwent several revisions as patterns were compared within and across the three stakeholder groups. In the earlier stages of analysis, the nature of NBRs was provisionally interpreted through attachment-based, value-based, benefit-based and exchange-based relationships. These classifications were useful in organising initial patterns. In particular, value- and benefit- based relationships showed areas of overlap, while some participants' accounts reflected characteristics associated with more than one provisional relationship form. This led to a reconsideration of whether attachment, values and benefit represented distinct types of NBRs or characteristics and bases through which these relationships were experienced.

Emotional concepts were also reconsidered during this iterative process. Emotional attachment and related codes initially had greater prominence in interpreting the nature and intensity of NBRs. However, continued analysis indicated that emotionality alone was an insufficient basis for classifying the relationships. Emotionality could co-exist with value, benefit, identity-related, or exchange characteristics. Rather than being discarded from the analysis, emotional concepts were eventually retained as significant characteristics of how some NBRs were experienced, while their role as the primary basis for defining relationship forms was reconsidered.

The theoretical interpretation of these patterns developed later in the analysis. The initial coding and preliminary thematic development were not structured around OID as a predetermined coding framework. Following the initial analysis, and in response to the need for a theoretical lens through which the developing NBR patterns could be interpreted, a range of concepts and theoretical perspectives used in brand relationship research were reviewed. OID was subsequently adopted as the principal theoretical lens, as it provided a means of interpreting differences in stakeholders' identification and connection with nonprofit brands. The data were then revisited in light of this theoretical perspective, contributing to the later refinement of the provisional relationship forms into identity-based, instrumental-identification and exchange-oriented bonds.

The potential for the later theoretical lens unduly shaping interpretation was managed through continued comparison with the full transcripts, reflexive notes, and patterns across stakeholder groups, rather than recoding the data solely according to OID concepts. Importantly, patterns not strongly characterised by identification were

retained in the analysis, including exchange-oriented relationships in which identification was weak or absent, rather than being excluded or forced into an identification-based interpretation.

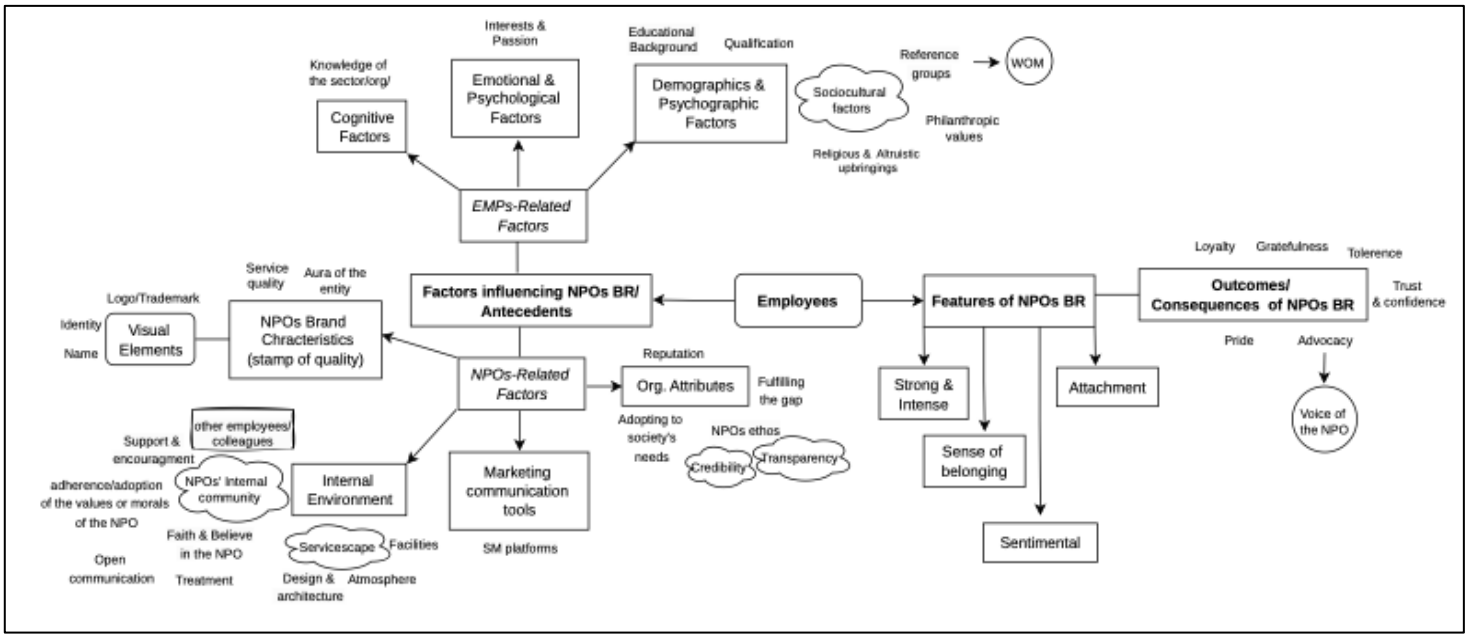


Figure 4: Initial themes for EMPs

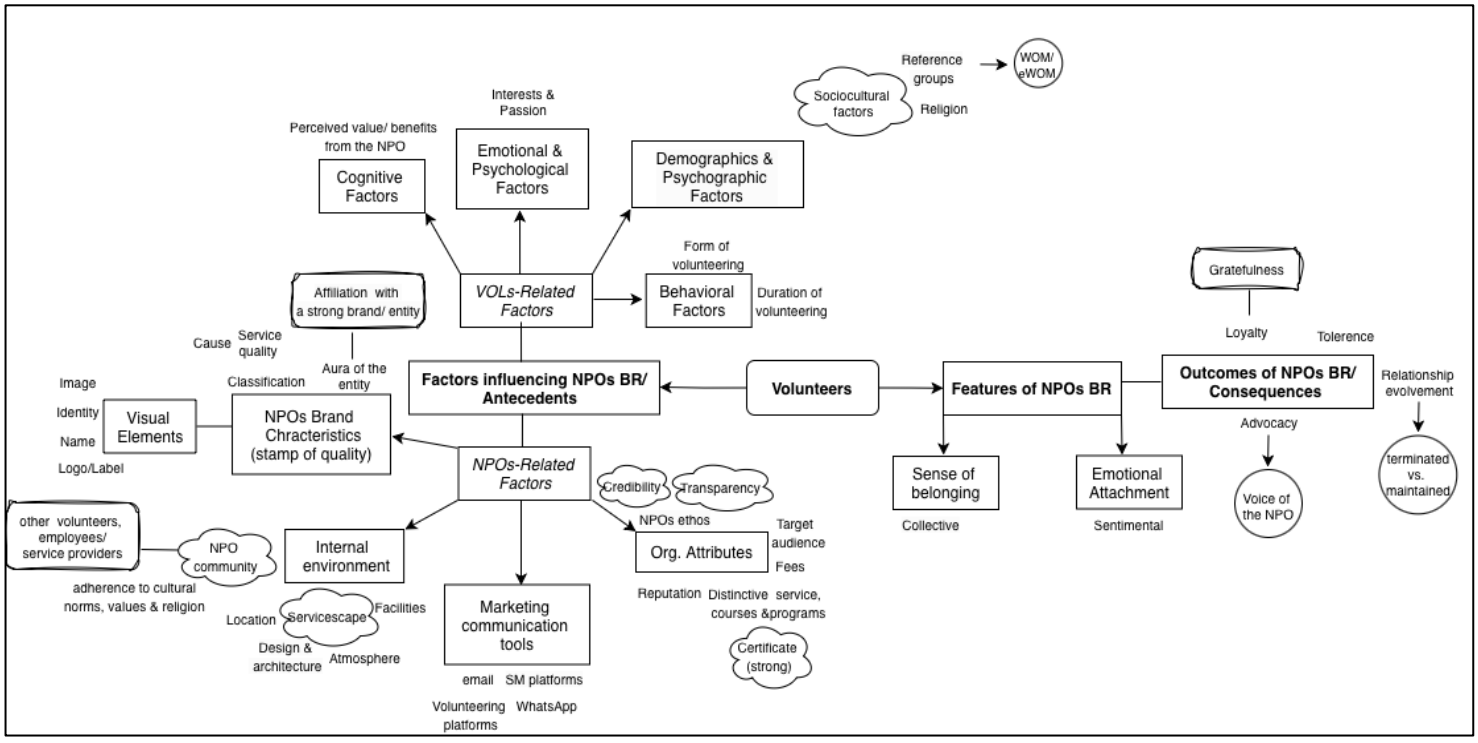


Figure 3: Initial themes for VOLs

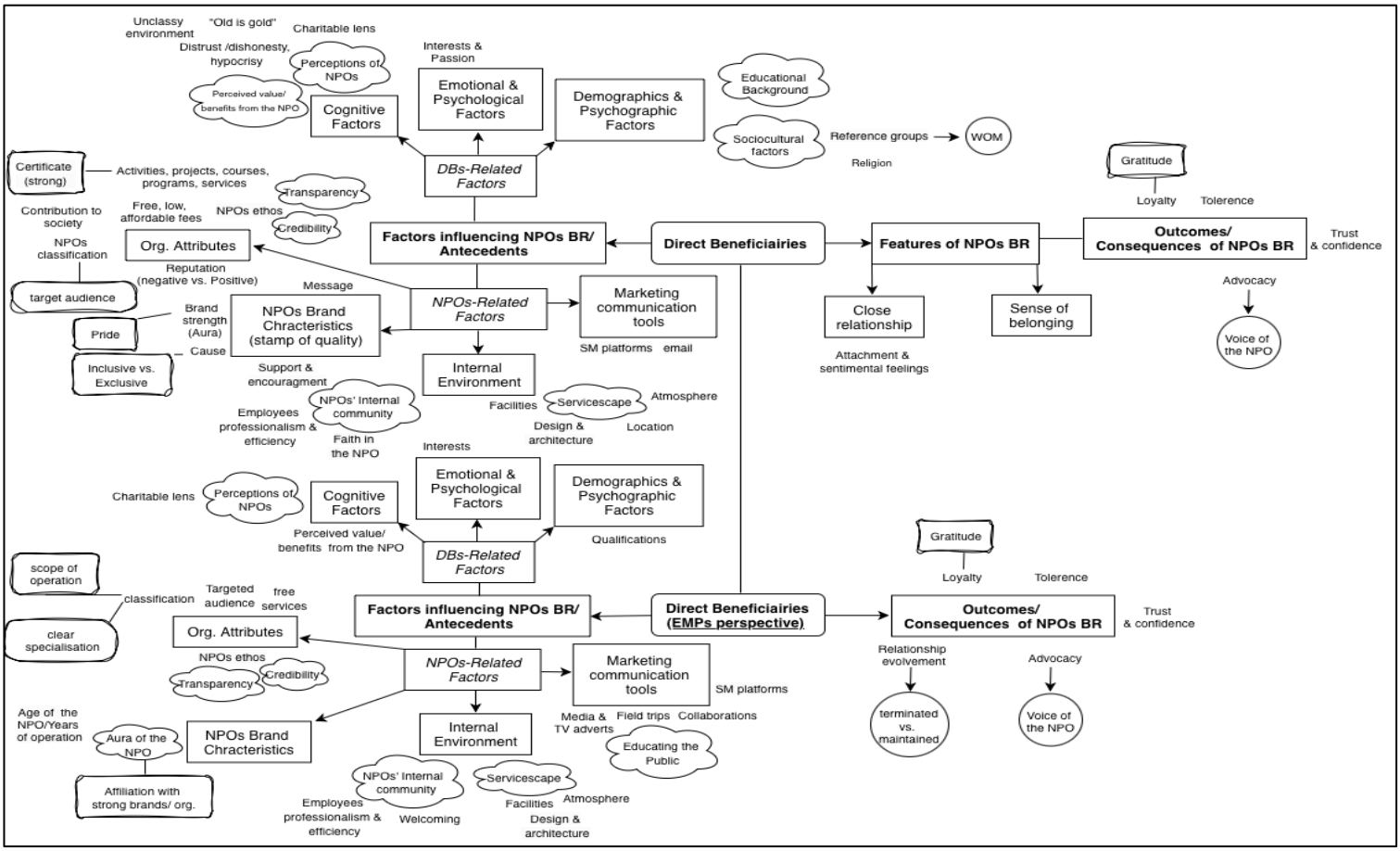


Figure 5: Initial themes for DBs

4.5 Final Thematic Structure

Following the review and refinement of the candidate themes, the final thematic structure was developed to enhance conceptual clarity, internal consistency, and distinction between themes. This involved revising coded extracts, exploring the connections among themes, and adjusting thematic boundaries to reduce overlap. Through this iterative process, four main themes were developed, each reflecting a distinct aspect of NBRs. These themes offer a structured view of the nature of NBRs, the factors shaping them, and their manifestations and outcomes across stakeholder groups. Within the first theme, the three relationship forms are analytically distinct but can be positioned along a continuum according to the strength and nature of

organisational identification. This ranges from stronger identification in identity-based relationships, through more instrumental forms of identification in instrumental-identification relationships, to weak or minimal identification in exchange-oriented relationships. Therefore, the continuum represents variation in organisational identification across the three relational bonds, rather than suggesting that the forms are indistinguishable.

Overall, these themes reflect the multidimensional nature of NBRs by considering the nature of the relational bonds, stakeholder characteristics, organisational cues, and relationship manifestations and outcomes. Table 11 details the themes and sub-themes, which will be explored further in the next chapter.

Table 11: Final Themes

Theme		Subthemes
(1)	**The Nature of NBRs**	• Identity-based relationships • Instrumental-identification relationships • Exchange-oriented relationships
(2)	**Stakeholder Characteristics Shaping NBRs**	• Personal and Professional Identity Alignment • Personal motives for engagement • Religious identity and worldview
(3)	**Organisational Cues Shaping NBRs**	• Communication-based relationship building • Experiential and environmental drivers • Servicescape • Staff-stakeholder interaction • NPO brand identity • NPO brand cause • Visual identity and brand recognition • NPO brand credibility and reputation
(4)	**Manifestations and Outcomes of NBRs**	• Behavioural outcomes • Psychological belonging • Relationship resilience and tolerance

4.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter has outlined the analytical procedures used to examine the interview data collected for this study. Following Braun and Clarke's reflexive thematic analysis approach, the analysis involved an iterative process of familiarisation, coding, pattern identification, and theme development. Through continuous stages of coding and refinement, the data were organised into analytical codes that supported the development of broader thematic patterns. The following chapter presents the findings of the study. It explores the themes developed through the analytical process and examines how stakeholders experience and interpret their relationships with nonprofit brands.

CHAPTER 5 FINDINGS

5.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the empirical findings of the study, structured according to the research questions that guide this thesis. These questions are examined through a systematic exploration of: (1) the nature of bonds stakeholders establish with nonprofit brands, (2) the processes through which these bonds emerge, (3) the determinants shaping these relationships, (4) the relational dimensions underlying them, (5) the outcomes resulting from such relationships, and (6) the ways in which these elements collectively clarify the development of nonprofit brand relationships (NBRs).

The findings are organised into four overarching themes identified through reflexive thematic analysis: (1) the nature of nonprofit brand relationships (NBRs), (2) stakeholder characteristics that shape bonds with nonprofit brands, (3) organisational attributes influencing NBRs, and (4) the expression and outcomes of stakeholder bonds with nonprofit brands.

Each theme addresses a specific aspect of the research questions and, collectively, provides a structured account of how NBRs form, are experienced, and manifest within a nonprofit context. Table 12 illustrates how the six research questions are addressed across the four themes generated through the analysis. As some research questions address interconnected aspects of NBRs, individual themes might contribute to more than one research question. This chapter presents the findings reported by participants, while the subsequent chapter interprets these findings in relation to the study's conceptual framework.

Table 12: Mapping of Research Questions to Themes

Research question	Theme(s) addressing the RQ
RQ1: What is the nature of the bonds that stakeholders form with nonprofit brands?	**Theme (1): The Nature of Nonprofit Brand Bonds**
RQ2: How do stakeholder-nonprofit brand bonds emerge?	**Theme (1): The Nature of Nonprofit Brand Bonds,** supported by **Theme (2) and (3),** which identify stakeholder- and organisation-related factors associated with their formation.
RQ3: What factors shape stakeholders' relationships with nonprofit brands?	**Theme (2): Stakeholder Characteristics Shaping NBRs** and **Theme (3): Organisational Cues Shaping NBRs**
RQ4: What relational dimensions define and characterise stakeholders' NBRs?	**Theme (1): The Nature of Nonprofit Brand Bonds**
RQ5: What outcomes emerge from stakeholders' relationships with nonprofit brands?	**Theme (4): Manifestation and Outcomes of NBRs**
RQ6: How do these factors, mechanisms, relational dimensions, and outcomes collectively explain the development of NBRs?	**Integrates Theme (1-4)** : Theme (1) identifies the relational forms and variation in identification; Theme (2) and (3) identify stakeholder- and organisation-related factors shaping NBRs; and Theme (4) identifies their manifestations and outcomes

5.1 THEME (1): The Nature of Nonprofit Brand Bonds

Analysis of the interview data revealed a central pattern relating to the nature of stakeholders' relational bonds with nonprofit brands. Across three stakeholder groups, EMPs, VOLs and DBs, participants described varying degrees of psychological and emotional connections with NPOs, suggesting that these relationships differ in their intensity, emotional tone, and underlying motivation. More specifically, participants' narratives indicated that stakeholders form different types of bonds with NPOs depending on the extent to which they identified with the organisations' mission, values, and community. In many cases, participants articulated strong identification

with the organisation, describing a deep sense of belonging and emotional attachment. In other cases, relational bonds appeared more functional or instrumental, where involvement was motivated primarily by personal benefits or practical considerations. Finally, a small group of participants described their engagement with a nonprofit organisation in largely transactional terms, with limited emotional attachment.

These patterns suggest that NBRs are influenced by different levels of organisational identification, which shape how stakeholders interpret their engagement with the nonprofit organisation. Three relational patterns emerged from the data: identity-based relationships, instrumental-identification relationships, and exchange-oriented relationships. These patterns reflect differences in stakeholders' emotional attachment, perceived value alignment, and degree of relational commitment to nonprofit brands. These relationship types are analytically distinct but can be positioned along a continuum according to the strength and nature of organisational identification, ranging from stronger identification in identity-based relationships, through more limited and instrumental identification in instrumental-identification relationships, to weak or minimal identification in exchange-oriented relationships. Thus, the continuum reflects variation in organisational identification across the three relational forms rather than suggesting the forms are indistinguishable.

5.1.1 Identity-Based Relationships

This form of bond was evident across stakeholder groups; however, it was most pronounced among EMPs. The nature of EMPs' bonds with NPOs appeared to be characterised by a strong level of identification with the organisation's cause, mission,

values, and internal community. EMPs frequently discussed strong emotional attachment to the NPO and described their relationships as intense. They emphasised a deep sense of belonging and articulated how the organisations they work for have become integrated into their self-concept. This was evident in the language used by participants to describe their bond with the NPO, including collective pronouns such as “we” and “us”, as well as familial and home-related metaphors. For example, one employee stated, “*I feel that I am their daughter” (EMP-6),* while a volunteer described the organisation as *“our second home*” *(VOL-8)*. The findings suggest that this form of NBR is shaped by the alignment between individuals’ identities and the nonprofit brand, including shared beliefs, values, and moral principles. Most participants described their decision to engage with a particular NPO as being informed by this alignment. In several cases, participants selected NPOs whose missions, services, or programmes aligned closely with their qualifications or areas of expertise. This pattern was illustrated by EMP-7, who expressed a clear preference for working within charitable organisations that address social needs: *“Personally I always loved charitable and volunteer work, since I was in university I used to engage in volunteering opportunities…I used to try choosing entities that benefit the community”*. Her interests in the charitable sector guided her to work for the First Autism Centre, and her involvement with the nonprofit brand has strengthened her bond and attachment to the organisation:

“I cried for the first two months I worked there… at first it was very heartbreaking, I was emotional all the time, and questioning myself… but things have changed today, I ask myself “what do I do for them?” “What do I work on for them?” (EMP-7)

This account illustrates the emotional intensity associated with working in mission-driven organisations. This suggests that emotional exposure to beneficiaries' lived experiences could act as a catalyst that transforms role-based engagement into identity-based attachment, a dynamic that appears particularly pronounced in nonprofit contexts where moral purpose is central.

Such experiences suggest that emotional engagement may play an important role in transforming professional involvement into a deeper relational bond with a nonprofit organisation. Participants frequently described their involvement with NPOs as emerging from perceived alignment between their personal values and the organisation's social mission. Such alignment appeared to foster a deeper emotional connection with the organisation, suggesting that identification with the nonprofit brand's cause may function as a key mechanism through which strong relational bonds form. These accounts illustrate the emotional intensity of working in mission-driven organisations. EMPs frequently described their roles as emotionally demanding yet meaningful, particularly with nonprofit brands that address sensitive medical issues, such as Zamzam and The First Autism Centre, suggesting that the emotional labour associated with nonprofit work may reinforce identification with the organisations' social mission. In addition, participants used words such as "love" and "attached" to describe their emotional bond with NPOs. For instance, VOL-4 illustrated her emotional bond with Ithra as follows:

"For example we would work from 4 to 12, actually until 11:30, you can finish at 11 if you want to, but the idea that you are attached to the place would make stay until 12, I mean I don't usually do it, especially that it's volunteering" (VOL-4)

This extract recognises the affective nature of individuals' identity-based NBR. This was also observed in EMPs, such as EMP- 6, who described the nature of her bond with the First Autism centre:

"I can't express how I feel about them, I mean I live very far from the centre, and I face a lot of problems in terms of transportation…but honestly I feel that I am part of this place…year after year I feel attached to the place.." (EMP- 6)

Participants often described the organisation using familial metaphors such as "home" or "family", indicating that the relationships extended beyond instrumental engagement and reflected a deeper sense of identity alignment with the organisation.

While identity-based relationships were particularly prominent among EMPs, similar patterns were also observed among VOLs, to a lesser extent, and DBs. EMPs often described their connections with the organisation as part of their professional identity, whereas VOLs tended to frame their relationships in terms of belonging to a supportive community. In contrast, DBs were more likely to demonstrate identification with the organisation through the value or impact of the services and/or programmes they experience. In addition to identification with the organisation's mission, participants also emphasised their connection with the organisation's internal community. The internal community, comprising employees/service providers and VOLs, appeared to strengthen the relationship with the organisation, as VOL-8 stated: *"I have belonging, like any person who belongs to his homeland…of course everyone belongs to the thing they love"*, this shows the significance of the internal community in enhancing NBRs, although this appeared across stakeholders' groups, but was a recurring pattern with Ithra's VOLs, which was confirmed by EMP-8, a former employee at Ithra, who shared that Ithra *"provides a community for volunteers"*, an environment that had

a significant impact on their identification with the organisation, as it created a deep sense of belonging to the administration of the volunteering department, as well as other VOLs they work with. These accounts suggest that identification might extend beyond the organisational mission itself to include the internal community of staff and volunteers. In such cases, stakeholders' relationships with nonprofit brands appear to be reinforced through interpersonal connections and shared experiences within the organisational environment.

Similarly, a subset of EMPs described a strong connection with the NPO's internal community, particularly their work group or department. This was clear in the EMP-1 interview, where she expressed her close bond with the colleagues she works with:

"They were like a family to me...I was introduced to a different society, the society of Quran, of course it is different from any other society you know, I mean you are with your companions, the companions of the Qur'an…there won't be any conflict and hatred…" (EMP-1)

This quote illustrates that identification with the organisation's internal community may be as important as identification with its mission and values. Nevertheless, the data revealed that these two forms of identification could either be linked, or one form of identification would dominate the identity-based NBRs, such as in the case of EMP-1, who reported that her NBRs is shaped by her identification with the community she works with, due to the negative actions and behaviours of the nonprofit brand, which did not adhere to the moral teachings of the Quran, as this is the core aim of the organisation: *"They say they are the people of Qur'an…There were situations in which I didn't feel that I was treated with the morals of the Qur'an to be honest".* These expressions of belonging suggest that nonprofit brands may become integrated into

stakeholders' self-concept. This case also illustrated that identification with one aspect of the organisation does not necessarily imply an entirely positive relationship with the nonprofit brand, as strong identification with the internal community may coexist with disappointment or negative evaluations of the organisation itself.

These findings indicate that identification with the internal community of NPOs, the organisation's brand cause, and its overall value system are analytically distinct forms of identification, but either or both could determine identity-based NBRs. Importantly, the findings indicate that identification is not a singular construct. Rather, stakeholders might identify with the organisation's mission, its internal community, or both. This distinction suggests that NBRs may be sustained through multiple identification pathways, extending beyond traditional conceptualisations of the emphasised brand-individual alignment. However, not all stakeholders demonstrated such strong identification with nonprofit organisations. The data also revealed relationships characterised by weaker emotional attachment and more conditional engagement.

5.1.2 Instrumental-Identification Relationships

In contrast to identity-based relationships, the data also revealed a second form of stakeholder-nonprofit brand bond characterised by lower levels of emotional attachment and weaker identification with the organisation. This study conceptualises this form as instrumental-identification relationships, where stakeholders maintain a degree of identification with the NPO, but their engagement is mainly driven by the perceived benefits or utility derived from participation or engagement. In this sense, identification is present, yet limited, and thus it does not constitute the primary basis of the relationship.

This form of NBRs was most evident among DBs and VOLs, where the level of identification with the organisation appeared to be lower than in identity-based relationships. Instrumental-identification relationships are primarily based on the tangible value stakeholders expect to receive from the NPO and the benefits associated with their involvement. As a result, identification with the NPO is less rooted in alignment with the organisation's cause or value system. This was illustrated by DB-4, who focused primarily on the benefits she expected to gain from Ithra's Creative Solutions programme, a year-long residency designed to enhance Saudi Arabia's creative economy by encouraging participants to develop innovative products using immersive technologies. Her involvement was driven largely by these instrumental benefits, reflecting a comparatively lower emotional and psychological bond: *"I wouldn't say it's loyalty, it's more of like I'm grateful… I'm a value-for-value person".* This indicates that, within nonprofit contexts, relational bonds could emerge even in the absence of strong value alignment, suggesting that perceived utility and experiential values act as alternative foundations for relationship formation.

This partial alignment with the nonprofit brand was stressed by VOL-1: "*I visit the organisation, and offer my service as a volunteer, I mean if I want the experience or I want to help in a certain field"*. While this extract stresses that acquiring benefits from an NPO can guide stakeholders' NBRs, individuals choose NPOs that are aligned with their field of expertise. Nevertheless, the data suggests that stakeholders' emotional bonds with nonprofit brands are weaker than their counterparts in identity-based NBRs, suggesting a comparatively lower level of commitment. As a result of the weak bond with the NPO, individuals are likely to seek other organisations when alternative options exist that provide greater benefits. Therefore, commitment to a single NPO may be limited. Despite this weak emotional bond, the data show that prolonged

involvement with an NPO, such as participation in multi-month programmes or extended volunteering periods, may strengthen individuals' alignment with the NPO's cause and foster a stronger emotional bond. This was emphasised by VOL-4, who noted that continued engagement with an NPO led to a deeper sense of connection with the organisation: *"I've been a volunteer since, when was it? 2019, so there's a belonging, there's a strong bond with them…without any reason"*.

Taken together, these findings suggest that instrumental-identification NBRs prioritise perceived benefits over strong alignment with and identification with the nonprofit brand. Participants' accounts also indicate that prolonged involvement and repeated positive experiences may be associated with stronger identification over time, suggesting a possible shift toward an identity-based relationship. Nevertheless, because this study was not longitudinal, such movement should be understood as a theoretical possibility indicated by participants' accounts rather than an empirically established developmental sequence. Accordingly, the three relationship forms should not necessarily be understood as permanently fixed categories; changes in stakeholders' experiences, perceived benefits, value alignment and identification may theoretically alter the nature of the relationship over time.

While instrumental-identification relationships reflect a balance between limited identification and benefit-driven engagement, a subset of participants demonstrated relationships with weak or minimal identification.

5.1.3 Exchange-Oriented Relationships

Unlike instrumental-identification relationships, where some level of identification is evident, exchange-oriented relationships are characterised by weak or minimal

identification and are predominantly driven by transactional considerations. The findings indicate that individuals exhibiting exchange-oriented NBRs tend to operate within a transactional or “quid pro quo” framework. Their engagement with the nonprofit was episodic and driven by practical considerations, such as fulfilling mandatory volunteering requirements for university credit, enhancing their CV, or obtaining financial incentives, which shaped their initial bond with NPOs. As a result, participants did not express commitment or loyalty as behavioural outcomes of their involvement with the NPO. This was evident in the account of VOL-5, who explicitly expressed a preference for an exchange-based relationship with the NPO and emphasised the importance of receiving monetary compensation for her volunteering efforts:

“How should loyalty be to a particular place? When the return you get from them, other than the return that you’ll get for yourself, they give you things to try to make you stay, for example … “if you volunteer with us, (you’ll get) free meals” I mean, I will not volunteer and lose money every time I pay for my lunch, and I volunteer for long hours” (VOL-5)

These findings suggest that NBRs may exist even where organisational identification is minimal, with the relationship operating predominantly through transactional exchange. This challenges the dominant BR literature, which often assumes that relational bonds include emotional or symbolic attachment and self-alignment as part of the relationship mechanism that influences individuals’ bonds with brands. Participants describing such relationships tended to frame their involvement in terms of reciprocal benefits, in which volunteering or participation was expected to yield tangible returns, such as experience, networking, opportunities, or financial

compensation. The transactional nature of the exchange-oriented NBRs suggests that the bond with the nonprofit is limited in emotional depth.

5.1.4 Conclusion

This theme shows how stakeholders' relationships with nonprofit brands vary greatly in emotional intensity and underlying motives, and it highlights the role of identification as a mechanism through which NBRs emerge. This theme, therefore, addresses the first and second research questions: (1) What is the nature of stakeholder bonds with nonprofit brands? and (2) How do stakeholder-nonprofit brand bonds emerge? The data reveal that while some stakeholders form strong, identity-based bonds grounded in shared values and a sense of belonging, others maintain more instrumental relationships driven by personal benefits or practical considerations. These differences suggest that NBRs cannot be viewed as a single relational form; instead, the findings identify three analytically distinct relationship forms that can be positioned along a continuum according to the strength and nature of organisational identification. Understanding these differences offers valuable insights into how stakeholders experience nonprofit brands and how organisational identification processes shape these bonds.

5.2 Theme (2): Stakeholder Characteristics Shaping NBRs

This theme captures how stakeholders' personal characteristics shape NBRs. Across interviews, participants' educational and professional backgrounds, personal interests and passions, motives for involvement and broader cultural and religious worldviews

were identified as influential in shaping the strength, depth, and nature of their relationships with nonprofit brands.

5.2.1 Personal and Professional Identity Alignment

A recurring pattern in the interviews was the importance of alignment between stakeholders' personal or professional identities and the NPO's cause. Educational and professional background frequently influenced not only the choice of the organisation, but also the strength of the relationship that later developed. This was evident across the stakeholder groups, who had different qualifications in varied sectors, such as arts, architecture, Quran recitation, social services, special needs, and laboratory science. Participants were often drawn to NPOs whose causes, programmes, or services closely aligned with their educational or professional background, and this alignment appeared to shape their involvement and their sense of closeness to the organisation. For instance, DB-4 discussed how being an architect led her to be involved with Ithra's creative solution programme for digital product designs: *"the cool thing about this is that I was entering an area that I know about that I teach about that I with my architecture background"*. This pattern has also been found with a group of VOLs, such as VOL-1, a social service graduate, who had various volunteering experiences with multiple NPOs, but focused on organisations that offered roles that match her qualification: *"although we were passionate, we wanted the reward (Ajer), and we wanted the social service experience as well"*. This account indicates that educational alignment can shape both stakeholders' choice of organisation and the depth of their subsequent bond with it. Further, VOL-1's involvement with the organisation of her choice, which was a nonprofit medical entity, has shaped the nature of her bond with the NPO, and led to the formation of a close

emotional bond with the organisation, as VOL-1 reported: *"I became attached when I volunteered in the hospital"*. In a similar vein, DB-3, who holds a bachelor's degree in fine arts, described her involvement with Ithra's Creative Solutions programmes as closely linked to her artistic background:

"I always wanted to be part of Ithra…as an artist I felt like you know, I could be a part of it…because you know as an artist, art is always, not always but a lot of times they seek appreciation, that's important, to be inspired" (DB-3)

This close association with the nonprofit brand's cause was evident across EMP groups, as EMP-6 explained how her specialisation in autism led her to work with the First Autism Centre NPO in Jeddah: "*Since I was in the university, studied special education and I specialised in the field of autism, and frankly it was my passion to get to deal with this category"*. This extract suggests that professional specialisation matters not only for stakeholders' entry into the organisation, but also for the strength and emotional depth of their relationship with it.

Alongside alignment of educational backgrounds, personal interests and passions were key drivers of many participants' involvement with the nonprofit brand. For EMPs, their passion for the causes championed by their NPOs often shaped their emotional bond with the organisation. This was evident in EMP-7, who was more inclined towards charitable organisations and stated her preference for a career in the nonprofit sector, specifically an organisation with a strong social cause that fills a societal gap, such as the First Autism Centre in Jeddah, where she became involved as an employee and subsequently strengthened her bond and attachment to the organisation:

“I cried for the first two months I worked there… at first it was very heartbreaking, I was emotional all the time, and questioning myself… but things have changed today, I ask myself “ what do I do for them?” “What do I work on for them? “(EMP-7)

This account further indicates that personal passion for the cause may sustain longer-term involvement with the organisation and deepen the stakeholder’s connections with the nonprofit brand. VOLs were also influenced by their passions and interests when choosing NPOs. Many sought opportunities that allowed them to explore their hobbies or develop new skills, such as in the case of VOL-9, who chose Ithra, which aligned with his interests:

“My choice of nonprofit organisation is mostly… will mostly depend on the goal of this organisation, and what they are working on, what they are trying to enhance in the society, so the entity that I share a common interest (with)” (VOL-9)

This alignment strengthened the bond with Ithra, which was observed in the way he described his relationship with the nonprofit brand, and how sentimental he was towards this particular NPO, such as being grateful, loyal and returning the favour to Ithra (VOL-9): *“If Ithra needed me, I will be there, I have this loyalty”*. These accounts illustrate how emotional connection was linked to expressions of loyalty and gratitude toward the nonprofit brand.

Alignment at the level of personal identity was also evident among DBs, such as DB-4, who stated that her interest in heritage and her cultural background guided her bond with Ithra: *“I've always been interested in culture since I was a kid, also, because of my background, I come from the south of Saudi Arabia, so we have a very high like, very rich heritage”*. DB-4's close bond with Ithra shows how the identity of individuals, encompassing their personal characteristics, plays a pivotal role in developing and

maintaining NBRs. Interestingly, this evidence also recognises the strength of Ithra's brand, and its well-defined brand cause, image and identity, as being a world cultural centre, and thus succeeded in involving individuals who can identify themselves with the Nonprofit brand, which will be further discussed later in the chapter as part of the organisational factors shaping the NBRs.

Overall, these findings suggest that identity alignment can play an important role in NBRs, as stakeholders often engaged with organisations that reflected aspects of who they are or aspired to be. In this sense, identity alignment seems to foster favourable conditions for deeper emotional attachment and sustained involvement with NPOs. Although identity alignment was evident across the three stakeholder groups, it was expressed differently. For EMPs, alignment was often connected to professional identity and commitment to the organisation's social cause; for VOLs, it was frequently associated with personal interests, professional development and opportunities to contribute; while for DBs, alignment was more closely linked to the relevance of the organisation's programmes or services to their existing interests and backgrounds.

While identity alignment explains how stakeholders relate to NPOs based on who they are, the data also indicate that the reasons why they engage are equally important in shaping the nature of the bond. The following section, therefore, explores how stakeholders' personal motives for engagement influence NBRs.

5.2.2 Personal Motives for Engagement

Another pattern emerging from the data concerned the motives through which stakeholders initially engaged with NPOs. Participants' accounts suggested these motives shaped the nature of the bond that later developed with the nonprofit brand. Across interviews, participants described motives related to self-fulfilment, religious reward, personal development, and professional or practical gain. The data showed that religious and self-fulfilment motives shape both identity-based and instrumental-identification relationships with nonprofit brands. For example, DB-4 described her decision to join Ithra's creative solutions programme as driven by self-fulfilment and a way to enhance her well-being.

> *"… I was going through a very tough time in my life…There was a phase when I couldn't draw, I couldn't hold the pencil, so when I was participating in creative solutions, and writing my application, it was my last call for hope, So, with every single bit of passion that I had left, I just wrote the idea and I applied, that's how I got involved"* (DB-4)

While this account suggests that Ithra played a positive role in DB-4's well-being, her relationship with the organisation appeared to remain conditional upon the value she derived from participation. This indicates a more instrumental form of identification, in which emotional connection exists but is less deeply rooted in the nonprofit brand's mission or values. A further motive repeatedly mentioned by participants was the desire to gain Ajer, that is, spiritual reward for doing good, which was evident mostly with VOLs and EMP groups. VOL-3 stressed the motive behind her involvement with NPOs: *"…we want to do good, and we search for places to do that, wherever it might be, I mean this is my own opinion, we came to volunteer for the people"*. This illustrates a strong religious identity which drives individuals' bond with NPOs; this will be further

discussed in the following theme. Acquiring Ajer was recognised among a subset of VOLs, and while religious motives were a primary driver for their involvement with NPOs, their NBRs were less emotional, revealing that VOLs' NBRs were more of an instrumental-identification bond; thus, when alternatives appeared, they would not hesitate to fulfil these religious motives in another organisation, which was similarly identified with DBs. Nevertheless, religious motives yielded a strong emotional bond with NPOs, and formed identity-based bonds, which were specifically evident with EMPs. This will be further discussed in the religious identity and worldview theme.

Motives related to personal and practical development were also evident across the interviews, although they appeared particularly strongly among DBs, as one DB-2 discussed how she became involved with Al- Shaqaiq NPO as a way to improve her artistic skills: *"I am an interior designer, I wanted to make things for my home, and I've always leaned towards decoupage stuff, and I got really excited to learn it"*. This account illustrates how practical development motives could provide an initial basis for engagement with a nonprofit brand. In such cases, the bond with the NPO tended to be weaker or more conditional, resembling either instrumental-identification or, where identification was minimal, exchange-oriented bonds. This was also a pattern observed with a subset of VOLs, such as VOL-6, who reported the deriving motives for his involvement with Ithra: *"Volunteering is beneficial in terms of social relations… I volunteer to develop my skills and knowledge and meet new people"*. Here, the participant emphasises practical motives as a reason for their bond with Ithra, and this clearly indicates the critical role of these motives as driving forces for stakeholders' NBRs.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that stakeholders' relationships with NPOs are closely connected to the motives that drive their engagement. These motives not only influenced initial involvement with nonprofit brands but also appeared to shape the nature and strength of the relationship that subsequently developed, contributing to differences between identity-based, instrumental-identification and exchange-oriented bonds.

Beyond these individual motives, participants' broader cultural and religious worldviews also shaped how nonprofit brands were interpreted and experienced. The following section examines how religious identity and worldview influenced stakeholders' relationships with NPOs.

5.2.3 Religious Identity and Worldview

A further pattern emerging from the data concerned the influence of religion and worldview on stakeholders' relationships with NPOs. Participants' accounts suggested that, in the Saudi context, religious identity often shaped both motives for involvement and how nonprofit brands were interpreted and evaluated. For many participants, being raised in an Islamic context fostered a deep sense of religiosity and altruistic values, where charitable giving and serving the disadvantaged were seen as fulfilling religious obligations. Participants frequently associated their involvement with NPOs with the concept of Ajer, a reward from Allah for good deeds, which was a recurring theme across the interviews. This was evident with EMP-6, an employee at the First Autism Centre in Jeddah, who had witnessed a change, which she associates with a reward from Allah, for her work with Autistic children: *"I felt that my life is more blessed*

to be honest, there are a lot of things that …. I do them so that Allah would help me like I helped such and such, so I honestly feel that it changed my life". This account suggests that religious belief functions as a moral framework through which some stakeholders interpret their involvement with NPOs. Similarly, VOLs have equated their involvement with NPOs to receiving Ajer, which was reported by VOL-8, who was keen to volunteer with Ithra: *"I wanted to be part of that no matter what, and it is one of the best things to do, because you'll get Ajer"*. However, for some EMPs, religious identity also created tension. Participants described an internal struggle between understanding their work as service to Allah and recognising it as paid employment: *"I had a feeling that the money was diminishing my good intentions" (EMP-4)*. This religious conflict was also expressed by EMP-2, who stressed that EMPs are fighting an internal battle between concentrating on either receiving a reward from Allah or a financial return for doing their job:

> *"Are you doing this for Allah or for yourself!... this is the dilemma that NPOs employees are facing between getting the reward from Allah and serving people, doing an actual job, and getting a financial return" (EMP-2)*

These findings indicate that religion appears to function not only as a motive but as a structuring logic that shapes how relationships are understood, justified, and sustained within the nonprofit context.

Religious beliefs not only influenced stakeholders' own attitudes; they also shaped how the wider society perceived NPOs and judged the legitimacy of their causes. For example, EMP-4 shared an incident where a businessman refused to donate to their NPO, stressing that the NPO's cause and its target market are not part of groups Islam encouraged Muslims to donate for (see Table 13):

“ …I asked him to donate to Al-shaqaiq, he said “why would I do that for children who play” (laughs), I told him no, we instil values (laughter)...what he said was that he distribute zakat for certain organisations for patients, orphans, less advantaged, so all of them (the society) thinks the same way … “ (EMP-4)

This extract shows that religion is deeply ingrained in Saudi society and can strongly influence perceptions of NPOs, as well as shaping opinions around NPOs' efforts and practices. This quote also highlights the fixed notion that NPOs' causes are charitable, mainly focusing on causes that provide aid, support the disadvantaged, and distribute monetary donations. While this view was common, specifically among VOLs and DBs, a minority of participants dismissed this perception and stressed that while NPOs’ main role is to help, they can achieve that through entertainment and education, as DB-2 illustrates: *“I would expect that the nonprofit would contribute to the community, educate the community and entertain”.* This demonstrates an evolving perception of the nonprofit brand that extends beyond goodwill or aid/charity and could eventually expand nonprofit brand bonds to different stakeholder groups. However, the “charitable lens” dominates how most stakeholders perceive, judge and evaluate NPOs’ actions, specifically their promotional methods. This was expressed by VOL-3, who expressed her frustration with using religious figures, such as 'Sheikhs,' in TV advertisements for an NPO that sought donations for distributing water in rural areas, which, in her opinion, tarnishes the respectful image of these religious figures: *“… don't use the sheikh…you don’t have to demolish the respectful image of the sheikh and make him do a promotion! personally a sheikh isn’t a promotional tool”*. This extract suggests that overtly commercial or promotional practices may be perceived as inappropriate within nonprofit contexts, particularly when they involve religious symbols or figures. Although this argument was distinctive in VOL-3 and not prominent

across stakeholder groups, it recognises how nonprofit brand actions and behaviours shape perceptions and can ultimately threaten their bond with NPOs. This case demonstrates that stakeholder bonds with nonprofit brands are not necessarily strengthened by organisational communication; where communication practices conflict with stakeholders' values or expectations, they may instead generate dissatisfaction and weaken the relational bond.

The influence of religion also varied across stakeholder groups. Among EMPs, religious beliefs were often intertwined with the meaning attributed to their work and, in some cases, created tension between spiritual reward and financial compensation. Among VOLs, the pursuit of Ajer frequently motivated participation, although this did not necessarily translate into strong identification with a particular nonprofit brand. The role of religion was less prominent in DBs' accounts presented in this theme, whose relationships were more commonly discussed in relation to the value and relevance of the services or programmes they experienced.

Taken together, the data indicate that religion operates not only as a personal motive for engagement but also as a broader interpretive lens through which NPOs are understood, judged, and experienced. In this sense, religious identity appears to shape both the nature of stakeholders' bonds with nonprofit brands and the expectations they hold of NPOs within society.

Table 13: Monetary charity is encouraged to be distributed for specific groups (Abba and Ngah, 2020)

Group	Criteria
The Poor	Those who are in need and live below the poverty level
The Needy	Those who face financial obstacles but are not considered poor
Zakat Collectors	Those who are responsible for collecting and distributing Zakat
Those whose hearts are to be reconciled	New Muslims, or those considering Islam, need support to strengthen their faith
Captives	is not relevant nowadays, but alms were given to free them
Those in Debt	Those who are unable to pay their debts
Those who fight in the cause of Allah	Those involved in religious or charitable causes for the sake of Allah
Wayfarers	Travelers who are deserted and in need of financial help to return to their countries or continue their travels

5.2.4 Conclusion

The findings presented in this theme address the third research question regarding the factors that shape stakeholders' relationships with nonprofit brands. The findings revealed that participants repeatedly referred to aspects of their personal identity, motivations, and cultural background when explaining how and why they developed connections with NPOs. These characteristics appeared to influence both the initial decision to engage with NPOs and the nature of the relational bonds that subsequently emerged. In particular, the analysis demonstrates that alignment between stakeholders' identities and the mission or activities of NPOs plays a central role in shaping NBRs. Participants whose educational background, professional expertise, or personal interests aligned closely with the organisation's cause often reported stronger emotional attachment and a deeper sense of belonging. In contrast,

stakeholders whose involvement was driven primarily by instrumental motives, such as skill development or personal benefit, tended to describe weaker or more conditional forms of engagement.

Stakeholder motives for engagement have also been identified as an important factor influencing NBRs. Motives such as self-fulfilment, personal development, and the pursuit of spiritual reward appeared to guide individuals' involvement with NPOs and influence the depth of their relational bonds. These motives often shaped whether stakeholders developed identity-based relationships, instrumental-identification, or more exchange-oriented bonds with NPOs.

Finally, the data illustrate the significance of religion and worldview in shaping how NPOs are interpreted and experienced within the Saudi context. Religious beliefs not only influence participants' personal motives for engaging with NPOs but also shape broader societal expectations regarding the role and legitimacy of NPOs. In this sense, religion appears to function as a cultural lens through which stakeholders understand NPOs and evaluate their activities.

Taken together, the findings suggest that NBRs are shaped not only by organisational factors but also by stakeholders' personal characteristics, motivations, and cultural identities.

5.3 Theme (3): Organisational Cues Shaping NBRs

Analysis revealed a theme concerned with the organisational cues that shape NBRs. Throughout the interview, participants repeatedly referred to features of the organisation itself, explaining how their bonds with nonprofit brands were formed,

strengthened, or weakened. These cues included communication practices, the organisation's physical and experiential environment, staff-stakeholder interactions, and the broader identity and credibility of the nonprofit brand. Taken together, these organisational attributes appeared to influence how stakeholders perceived NPOs and whether they developed positive, meaningful, or enduring relationships with them.

5.3.1 Communication-Based Relationship Building

Marketing communication tools emerged as a key factor in establishing and maintaining relationships with NPO stakeholders. Participants emphasised the importance of tools such as social media platforms (SMPs), email, and dedicated volunteering portals. SMPs such as Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), WhatsApp, and Facebook were repeatedly identified by DBs and VOLs as important for raising awareness of NPOs and facilitating initial engagement. For example, DB-3 mentioned her preference for WhatsApp as a communication channel for inquiries, especially among DBs involved in long-term programmes like Ithra's creative solutions initiative, which strengthened her bond with the NPO and its administration team: *"… WhatsApp is very personal, very, you have a close relationship. So, from the Creative Solutions Programme, I prefer WhatsApp, because we instantly, we communicate"*. This quote indicates that the organisation's communication form can influence the quality and perceived closeness of the relationship. In this sense, communication was not merely an informational tool but a relational one. Participants appeared to associate faster and more personal forms of communication with closeness, responsiveness, and care. This suggests that communication practices may influence not only awareness of NPOs but also the emotional quality of stakeholders' interactions with them.

For VOLs, SMPs played an equally important role in promoting opportunities and connecting them with NPOs. For instance, VOL-7 demonstrated how she became involved with an NPO via Instagram:

"… one of the girls … I follow her on Instagram, and she posted that she was a participant, a beneficiary, and when they opened the registration, she posted the link and I applied" (VOL-7)

This account illustrates how social media may function as an initial gateway through which stakeholders become aware of NPOs and begin to engage with them. This quote also indicates that stakeholders' reference groups can enhance NBRs and awareness via SMPs, showing that NBRs could be affected by factors outside the scope of NPOs.

EMPs have also emphasised the value of SMPs for NPOs, highlighting their ability to educate the public about the NPO's services and engage with their stakeholders in an affordable and efficient way, as EMP-4 stated: *"…Social media made our lives so much easier, in terms of the reduction in costs, we don't print anymore, we don't pay for publishing"*. While online communication was central to participants' accounts, the data also showed that NPOs relied on offline communication practices to maintain visibility and engagement. This was mainly observed with NPOs involved in health-related causes, such as The First Autism Centre and Zamzam, which offers medical services (e.g., distributing medicine, surgical needs). For example, EMP-5, the manager of Zamzam, discussed their offline methods, which included home visits and medical care caravans:

"We have what we call health awareness and health education, whether for the beneficiaries or for the community, because if you educate or enhance the awareness of health, the number of beneficiaries will increase" (EMP-5)

In the same vein, The First Autism Centre discussed how cause awareness efforts can educate society and enhance their awareness of Autism:

"We always try to spread awareness in places that are mostly visited by people… for example the airport, we used to have our promotions displayed on the screens of the plane… before the plane takes off, there is an introductory clip about autism which educates people about this" (EMP-6)

These quotes illustrate the benefits NPOs could gain from offline awareness approaches, which can bring them closer to the organisation's stakeholders and eventually strengthen their bond with NPOs.

Alongside SMPs, volunteering platforms have emerged as an approach NPOs adopt to engage with VOLs and promote volunteering opportunities. Three volunteering platforms were primarily mentioned by VOLs: the National Volunteer Work Platform, the Health Volunteering Platform, both developed by the Saudi government, and Ithra's "Be a Volunteer" (see Appendix 7), a platform exclusively developed by Ithra for their VOLs. However, only two of these platforms—the Health Volunteering Platform and Ithra's "Be a Volunteer"—were praised for their efficiency and streamlined processes. Regarding the National Volunteer Work Platform, participants highlighted challenges, including delayed responses and communication difficulties. VOL-1 shared her experience: "*The volunteering platform has a long process, which makes people want to avoid it and find another way… so this would lead you to take a personal approach between you and the organisation".* This suggests that inefficient

digital systems may weaken stakeholders' willingness to engage and may hinder the development of a positive relationship with the nonprofit organisation.

While SMPs and volunteering platforms dominated as online communication tools, email was often used for more formal interactions, though only slightly mentioned by Ithra's VOLs, for solving issues and answering enquiries, as VOL-4 reported:

"If you faced any issues, or anything related to volunteering… you can contact them through the volunteers' email, they would always reply, you'll get a reply within a maximum of 5 minutes…so yea their response rate is very fast" (VOL-4)

Across stakeholder groups, communication appeared to serve different relational roles depending on the nature of stakeholders' involvement with the nonprofit brand. For DBs, responsive and personal communication could create a sense of closeness during their participation in programmes, while for VOLs, communication channels facilitated access to opportunities and ongoing interaction with the organisation. EMPs, by contrast, more frequently discussed communication in terms of organisational outreach and engagement with wider stakeholder groups. These findings indicate that communication influences NBRs by shaping how we perceive the organisation and by facilitating access, responsiveness, interaction, and, in some cases, fostering a sense of relational closeness.

Overall, the findings indicate that communication practices play an important role in establishing and maintaining NBRs. Whether through social media, email, volunteering portals, or offline awareness campaigns, communication appeared to enhance organisational visibility, facilitate access, and create a sense of

responsiveness and closeness. Thus, communication functioned not only as a promotional tool but also as a relational cue shaping how stakeholders approached, interacted with, and developed relationships with nonprofit brands.

While communication practices shaped stakeholders' first encounters and interactions with NPOs, the data further suggests that the organisational environment itself played a crucial role in shaping how these organisations were experienced. The following section, therefore, examines how physical and interpersonal aspects of the nonprofit environment influence stakeholders' relationships with nonprofit brands.

5.3.2 Experiential and Environmental Drivers

A further pattern emerging from the data illustrated the experiential and environmental conditions through which stakeholders encountered NPOs. Participants' discussions suggested that the organisational environment, including the servicescape, atmosphere, facilities, and interactions with staff members, played a vital role in shaping perceptions of the nonprofit and influencing relationship bonds.

5.3.2.1 Servicescape

The servicescape of NPOs emerged as a recurring issue among stakeholder groups, with participants often linking the organisation's physical environment to their perceptions of it and their initial willingness to engage. The physical appearance of an NPO often reflects its status and can influence how it is perceived by the public, as DB-2 noted:

"We have this idea in mind, that the word organisation means an ordinary place, because an organisation would possibly rely on an amount of money, or donations for example…so it won't be an exceptional place" (DB-2)

This excerpt highlights a fixed perception among Saudi society about the nonprofit sector as a whole, where they tend to see NPOs as modest or under-resourced entities. Such perceptions may discourage individuals from approaching or engaging with NPOs, particularly organisations labelled as "charities", as this term is often associated with ordinary places, limited facilities, small spaces, and underserved communities. Such stereotypes seem to constrain how stakeholders approach NPOs and, in some cases, may limit the development of positive relational bonds. This perception was further reinforced by VOL-1, who is based in Riyadh, and shared her experience volunteering at a charitable organisation office, describing it as underwhelming:

"The obstacles that we faced, the place wasn't equipped, there were no cameras, and men would enter the place, although it was for females only… organisations are mostly located in rented houses, it's not welcoming, and doesn't encourage people to work there, it's not spacious" (VOL-1)

This quote emphasises the importance of organisational design in shaping participation and suggests that poor physical conditions may weaken stakeholders' relationships with NPOs. This was particularly significant because participants did not seem to interpret the physical environment as neutral. Rather, the state of the space was often seen as reflecting the organisation's resources, care, and professionalism. In this way, servicescape appeared to function as a visible sign of organisational quality and legitimacy. This discussion was also evident with VOL-3, who described

NPOs' place as the image of the organisation, and stakeholders' perception relies on that to evaluate and judge NPOs:

" … the place is your image, if your place is sophisticated …so when you enter and find them clarifying everything, and who they are, this makes a difference, so when people enter, they will recognise what's going on" (VOL-3)

Here, the participant emphasised the need to enhance the design and architecture of NPOs, which could improve their appeal to a wider audience and challenge the negative perceptions surrounding NPOs. This view was also exemplified by DB-4, an architect, who discussed how the design of entities can significantly influence visitors' feelings and perceptions, as seen with Ithra's building:

"…you have this big area that has that adaptive reuse, this is a term that we use in architecture so that when you design an area to make it reused again and again, again, but in the case I'm using it here is that people are adaptively adapting themselves to the space, and they are making memories" (DB-4)

The extract emphasises that NPOs' buildings and their aesthetic appeal, including interior design, can strongly influence visitors' attitudes towards the organisation and ultimately affect their involvement and bond with NPOs. Participants also highlighted the importance of NPOs' facilities and their role in meeting stakeholders' needs, as EMP-8 noted: *"…you enter and you'll find different facilities, different places where you can sit, you have cafes, you have many places to choose from, any place that suits you".* This shows that comprehensive, accessible facilities were highly valued, especially those that accommodate diverse needs. Although this perspective was common, only one organisation was frequently recognised as an exemplary NPO and praised for offering a broad range of amenities, including a library, café, entertainment spaces, and areas for social interaction. This environment helped attract and

strengthen stakeholders' bond with Ithra, thereby enhancing their overall BR with the NPO.

Overall, the findings suggest that NPOs' physical environment plays a significant role in shaping stakeholders' perceptions and experiences. A well-designed servicescape appears to strengthen organisational appeal, communicate professionalism, and create positive memories, whereas poorly equipped or unwelcoming environments could weaken trust and reduce stakeholders' willingness to engage. In this sense, servicescape, within a nonprofit context, operates as a symbolic indicator of organisational legitimacy, influencing whether stakeholders perceive the organisation as credible, professional, and worthy of engagement.

5.3.2.2 Staff-Stakeholder Interaction

A further shared pattern concerned stakeholders' interactions with nonprofit service providers and organisational staff. Although this pattern appeared across all stakeholder groups, it was specifically pronounced among EMPs and VOLs, whose involvement placed them in closer contact with organisational staff and administration. Participants consistently linked staff behaviour to the quality of their experiences with the organisation and, consequently, to the strength of their relationships with nonprofit brands. A common feature across accounts was EMPs' qualifications, professionalism, and characteristics. Since EMPs are often the first point of contact, they can either reinforce or hinder the NPO's brand relationship, as VOL-7 reported: *" …. when I entered those organisations, I said that this is my place, and I felt happy the minute I entered them, the way they welcome you…it makes a huge difference"*.

First encounters with organisational staff appeared to carry particularly weight in participants' narratives. Being welcomed warmly was not described as good service; rather, it was associated with feeling recognised, accepted, and emotionally comfortable within the organisation. Thus, these early experiences seem to set the tone for the relationships that later developed. This shows that the attitudes and behaviours of staff can enhance individuals' bond with NPOs. The word "welcomed" was repeated by participants, which was associated with being attached to the NPO and feeling a sense of belonging. This was illustrated by EMP-8, who is a former employee at Ithra, which still holds a special place in his heart: *"….I mean the idea that you will be welcomed by everyone from the minute you step foot in this place, whether they were people who you know, or you don't know, in the end people are welcoming you"*. This quote demonstrates the significance of staff-stakeholder interaction and emphasises the critical role of service providers in shaping stakeholders' NBRs. Participants have also discussed the support and encouragement from service providers, which could come from either the higher or lower administration. These behaviours in particular were critical to stakeholders' NBRs. DB-3 described her bond with Ithra's year-long Creative Solutions Program, and emphasised how such support reinforced her commitment to the NPO:

"…they also supported (me)…to attend the festival or give me support from the Creative Solutions team to go, go with me, because I'm completely new in this field, so I don't have enough knowledge, and they also want me to just have mental support" (DB-3)

This extract illustrates how stakeholders value the support of service providers, and its positive impact on individuals' bond with the organisation, showing that staff attitudes are critical to NPOs' relationship with their stakeholders. In this sense,

support from staff was interpreted as more than practical assistance. It also conveyed care, validation, and investment in the individual, all of which appeared to deepen the stakeholder's sense of connection to the organisation. Ithra's VOLs shared similar feelings, and reported how motivation from the volunteer department enhanced her appreciation for the NPO:

"…they make you feel that you did something exceptional, their attitude motivates you to give more, I mean, like for example the first day I volunteered one of the employees told me that " I needed many volunteers, but you actually covered for 10 people"…it felt nice" (VOL-4)

This demonstrates how stakeholders value encouragement and moral support from the service provider, which would deepen their bond with NPOs. In contrast, other participants indicated their frustration with the treatment of NPOs administration, which threatened their relationship with the NPO, as EMP-1 reported on the change in her employment status from a full time to a part-time tutor, due to incidents she faced with the NPOs staff members: *"I have resigned, I am a part time tutor (now)…I resigned for several reasons, and one of the reasons was, what I told you, moral support…"*. This quote illustrates how EMPs were more likely to reconsider their commitment to the NPO if they felt unsupported by upper management, whether through a lack of recognition or encouragement. Along with the behaviours and attitudes of service providers, the alignment of EMPs' values with those of the NPO was another key point discussed by participants, particularly in religious and charitable NPOs. EMPs' passion for the NPO's mission was seen as a crucial factor in establishing strong, meaningful connections. VOL-2 discussed how witnessing the EMPs' commitment to the NPO's values led to her initial involvement with Nafa'a, which is a charitable

organisation dedicated to helping certain disadvantaged groups, such as orphan children:

"…I told you what made me stay with Nafa'a and made me go to them, I saw how the whole organisation from the senior official to the junior official are devoted to those orphan children, so this is what made me stay with them" (VOL-2)

Alignment between staff behaviour and the organisation's mission appeared to foster trust and reinforce positive relational bonds. Conversely, when staff behaviour contradicted the values the organisation promoted, participants were more likely to question their involvement and, in some cases, withdraw from the relationships altogether. While VOL-2 described a positive experience with an NPO, other participants reported the negative side of service providers' behaviours. For instance, EMP-1 mentioned her experience with a religious NPO that did not adhere to the moral teachings of the Quran.

"They say they are the people of Qur'an, so you must support us more, whether monetarily or morally…There were situations in which I didn't feel that I was treated with the morals of the Qur'an to be honest" (EMP-1)

When EMPs fail to uphold the values they promote, it can harm the relationship between individuals and NPOs. This extract stressed the critical role of service providers' alignment with the nonprofit brand's cause and overall values system, which can tarnish nonprofit brands' image and affect their ties with EMPs and other stakeholders. This was also echoed by VOL-1, who shared her involvement with a "female-only" NPO where the behaviours of the EMPs contradicted the morals of Islam, prompting her to end her volunteer work with them:

"…they consider religion an appearance and not values, the Prophet taught us values and morals before he taught us the religious appearance… they (staff) take what they want from religion and leave the rest, and they treat you like you are coming from another planet, a non-Islamic one, because they have their own criteria"

(VOL-1)

In spite of her involvement with many NPOs, VOL-1's bond with most organisations ended shortly, based on the actions and behaviours of the administration and the community of EMPs, which contradicted the nonprofit brand's cause, morals and values, such as lack of credibility and transparency around the distribution of donations, and the use of religion as a curtain to benefit personally from the NPO. This shows that NPOs' service providers and internal volunteer community can jeopardise the strong emotional bond stakeholders may form with nonprofit brands.

Overall, the findings indicate that staff behaviour serves as a critical interface through which stakeholders experience the nonprofit brand, translating abstract organisational values into lived interactions. Warmth, encouragement, support, and visible commitment to the organisation's values appear to enhance stakeholders' attachment to the nonprofit, while inconsistency, lack of moral support, or behaviour perceived as contradictory to the organisation's mission could therefore weaken or even terminate those bonds.

Beyond communication, servicescape, and staff interaction, participants also discussed broader attributes of the nonprofit brand itself. The following section, therefore, turns to the role of brand identity, including the organisation's cause, visual identity, and credibility, in shaping stakeholders' relationships with NPOs.

5.3.3 NPO Brand Identity

A further organisational cue emerging from the data concerned the nonprofit brand's identity. Participants repeatedly referred to the organisation's cause, visual identity, and perceived credibility when explaining how they formed impressions of NPOs and whether they felt able to trust, recognise, or relate to them. These elements appeared to shape the organisation's symbolic and reputational image and, in turn, influenced the development of NBRs.

5.3.3.1 NPO Brand Cause

The clarity and perceived significance of an organisation's cause emerged as central to the strength of NBRs. Participants identified most strongly with NPOs that had a clear, visible, and specialised mission. For instance, DB-4, discussed the strength of Ithra's brand and how they define their mission and clearly state their specialisation:

"What defines a brand is how far are you able to carry out also the message that shows them, the people they have chosen, the project to choose and the activities that you're running, if people can understand this intuitively, then I think that makes the brand successful" (DB-4)

This quote highlights the importance of a clearly articulated cause in enabling stakeholders to understand the organisation and, consequently, to engage with it.

During the interviews, participants were able to articulate certain NPOs' causes with ease, suggesting that these brands were perceived as well-defined and distinctive. This ability to articulate the organisation's contribution appeared to support the development of both identity-based and instrumental-identification relationships with nonprofit brands. This was evident with Ithra's stakeholders, who discussed the

prominence of the brand due to its clear depiction of societal contribution and its role in enhancing societal knowledge about art, given that Ithra is a world cultural centre, as DB-3 notes:

“ It's a very important issue that public will be educated … by an art piece, because sometimes art piece is kind of like, impacts you unknowingly…so, It's kind of saying nonprofit organisations are kind of bringing it to the community, so this is a big contribution, so that's what I would expect that the nonprofit would contribute to the community, educate the community” (DB-3)

This quote illustrates that when NPOs actively address their societal contribution, participants are better able to articulate those organisations’ societal contribution. In this sense, a clearly communicated cause seems to provide stakeholders with a meaningful basis for understanding, evaluating, and relating to the nonprofit brand. In addition to mission clarity, the data suggest that organisational longevity may also reinforce the perceived strength of a nonprofit cause. For some participants, older, well-established NPOs were regarded as more trustworthy and socially embedded, making their causes appear more credible and easier to recognise. In this sense, heritage did not emerge as a separate organisational attribute detached from the cause itself; rather, it seems to strengthen stakeholders’ confidence that the organisation had a longstanding and meaningful contribution to society. This was evident in participants’ reference to well-known NPOs whose cause became familiar through repeated public presence over time. DB-2 captured this clearly when reflecting on older organisations: *“Why old organisations? This is the nature of people, if they know something from a long time ago, they will feel that this is the right place”.* Similarly, VOL-2 explained that long-established organisations had become ingrained

in public memory precisely because they had occupied a visible position in the nonprofit sector for many years:

"We have organisations from a long time ago that we have known, maybe what made them ingrained with us is that we have heard about them since our childhood, so when you have, for example, a house, what is it called? Al-Bir organisation, that's it, it's attached to you….I mean since they've been the only one there, and everyone knew them, so when people want to sponsor an orphan or this or that they would have Al-Bir organisation, but there were not many competitors in the market back then, so they were well-known" (VOL-2)

These accounts suggest that longevity may enhance the recognisability of an NPO's cause and strengthen the perception that it occupies a legitimate and trusted place within society. Heritage, therefore, appears to function as a cue of stability, continuity, and familiarity, enabling stakeholders to relate more easily to organisations whose causes are already socially recognised. At the same time, the data also indicate that heritage alone is not sufficient. Longstanding organisations were valued not merely because they were old, but because their continued existence was associated with an enduring and visible societal contribution.

At the same time, participants made clear that longevity and familiarity were not enough to sustain strong relationships if an organisation was no longer perceived as making a meaningful social contribution. Stakeholders' perspectives on the NPO cause and their contribution to society also involve addressing the burdensome nature of certain NPOs, with participants such as DB-2 criticising the inactive role of some NPOs in society: *"If an organisation cannot provide services to society as it used to, for some reason, then yes, it may close; otherwise, it could become a burden on*

society". This view was echoed by EMP-2, who expressed her concerns that NPOs need to reassess their role in society to avoid becoming irrelevant: *"This is what organisations are facing right now, the organisation would become a burden on society…a powerful society needs powerful organisations"*. These perspectives suggest that organisations perceived as failing to address meaningful social needs may struggle to build strong relationships with stakeholders and society as a whole. Therefore, clear and distinctive nonprofit causes that address meaningful societal needs appear central to the formation of NBRs.

Taken together, the findings indicate that the clarity and perceived societal relevance of an organisation's cause are vital in shaping nonprofit brand bonds. Participants appeared more inclined to engage with organisations whose missions were clearly articulated and whose contributions to society were easily understood. As a result, stakeholders were able to explain the organisation's purpose, recognise its role within the community, and relate their own organisation's purpose to its broader social contribution. The findings also suggest that organisational heritage may reinforce this process, as long-standing organisations often benefit from familiarity and accumulated public recognition that strengthens trust in their cause. Nevertheless, participants emphasised that longevity alone is insufficient; NPOs must continue to demonstrate meaningful societal contribution in order to sustain relationships with stakeholders. Thus, the perceived clarity, relevance and continuity of the organisational cause appear to provide an important foundation upon which NBRs can develop.

While the cause of the organisation enables stakeholders to understand what the nonprofit stands for, participants also referred to more visible elements through which

organisations communicate their identity to the public. The following section therefore examines the role of visual identity and brand recognition in shaping stakeholders' bond with NPOs.

5.3.3.2 Visual Identity and Brand Recognition

Visual identity, particularly the organisation's name and logo, emerged as an important cue shaping participants' mental image of NPOs and influencing the development of NBRs. For instance, VOL-2 notes: *"…Al-Mawaddah organisation, they chose a name that suits the issue that they are providing I mean that they try to reconcile between those who are divorced, for the sake of these children"*. This shows that aligning an NPO's name with its cause is an important factor in building a recognisable brand. EMP-7 has also emphasised that a unique visual identity is essential for fostering trust in the organisation:

> *"…how can they [NPOs] build people's trust? First of all, they must establish their mental image, … building identity and building the image starts from the logo…the logo must symbolise the entity, its orientations, its significance, which must be linked to the organisation itself…"*(EMP-7)

Participants' discussion suggests that visual identity functions as more than just a decorative element. Rather, it appears to communicate the organisation's purpose, seriousness, and legitimacy, thereby helping stakeholders recognise, remember, and trust the nonprofit brand. The discussion on NPOs' visual identity has also extended to the impact of NPOs' brand names on shaping stakeholders' perceptions of organisations. For example, DBs often associate the word "charitable", which appears alongside the name of the NPO, with free services, creating challenges for

organisations that charge for certain programmes, as EMP-4 illustrates: *"…the use of the word charity makes the beneficiary feel that it's for good, and everything they offer is charitable, they won't pay a penny"*. EMP-3 confirms this: *"Why are you asking for fees, if you are a charitable organisation!... Charitable, so it's supposed to offer everything for free (laughter)"*. These extracts show that NPO names can set fixed expectations about what an organisation should provide and how it should operate, which may challenge NPOs when developing services and programmes. This suggests that NPOs' visual identity, particularly their name and how they label themselves as "charitable," can limit nonprofit brands and, in turn, affect their bond with stakeholders.

Overall, these findings suggest that visual identity plays a role in NBRs by helping stakeholders recognise the organisation, understand its mission, and form expectations about what the nonprofit stands for. When visual cues such as the name and logo aligned with the organisation's cause, they seemed to enhance recognition and foster trust, giving stakeholders a basis to relate to the nonprofit brand. Conversely, labels such as "charitable" might set expectations that did not align with stakeholders' subsequent experiences, potentially creating tension in the relationship. Therefore, visual identity appears to operate as a relational cue than merely a means of visual recognition.

5.3.3.3 Nonprofit Brand Credibility and Reputation

Credibility and reputation emerged as common concerns among all stakeholder groups. Stakeholders held strong opinions about NPOs' credibility, particularly regarding donation distribution, and many emphasised the importance of transparency

in NPOs' actions, especially those involved in charitable causes such as aiding the disadvantaged. As VOL-2 highlighted:

"I feel that we want to see how the money that we donated developed things, helped in achieving something, I mean, this has helped them, so we keep helping them more and more, or until they are sufficient! So, if we don't see we won't know"

(VOL-2)

This extract shows that transparency is key to judging NPOs' actions and building credibility among stakeholders. Perceived lack of transparency appeared to threaten stakeholders' willingness to trust and engage with NPOs. For instance, VOL-3 expressed her refusal to donate via NPOs: *"… I feel that they are fraudulent people, I don't know why, I mean, you see, even when I decide to donate, I don't donate for an organisation, I wouldn't do it, over my dead body"*. This strong stance appeared to stem from accumulated negative experiences and perceptions surrounding NPOs, resulting from her extensive volunteering for many NPOs, which has been recognised by many VOLs. This may stem from exposure to behind-the-scenes operations and witnessing unethical actions and behaviours by certain NPOs. EMPs discussed these perspectives on transparency and NPO credibility. EMPs acknowledged the challenges of combating societal scepticism about the nonprofit sector and regarded the negative perceptions surrounding the sector, specifically related to the actions of certain entities, as impacting the entire nonprofit landscape. As EMP-5 noted: *"… because it [nonprofit sector] involves money, donations, zakat, and we are trusted with it, so any … simple defect won't only affect me, it will affect everyone"*. While this quote addresses the impact of negative actions on the entire nonprofit sector, it indicates that society's doubt and condemnation of NPOs stem from the benevolence and pure

nature of these organisations. Although the negative perception of NPOs was widespread, EMPs dismissed its prevalence and highlighted a positive shift in the public's view of the nonprofit sector, as EMP-7 noted:

"…until around 2016, 2017, people doubted charities, and there were speculations around its credibility, unfortunately due to previous bad experiences of some entities, … but this is all in the past, when the vision came out (Saudi 2030 vision), the work of the nonprofit sector became more organised, so it became more credible"

(EMP-7)

These accounts suggest that credibility is not built solely at the organisational level but may also be influenced by wider institutional and regulatory changes. Participants appeared to associate improved governance and state oversight with increased trust in the nonprofit sector, indicating that broader structural developments may indirectly strengthen stakeholders' relationships with NPOs. EMP-7 has also shared the reason behind the gradual shift in the public's perception of NPOs: *"…today our donations are through the Ihsan platform…these are all government platforms, it has high control, so it has become in governance, organisations are monitored thoroughly"*. This discussion illustrates how Saudi government regulation and monitoring of the nonprofit sector have strengthened participants' perceptions of sector credibility and trust, which may positively influence stakeholders' relationships with nonprofit brands.

The discussion of NPOs' brand credibility was also linked to their affiliations with reputable, well-known entities. Brand affiliation also appeared to strengthen participants' trust and perceptions of an NPO's credibility. This was particularly evident in the case of Ithra, a community initiative launched in the Eastern region by the globally recognised ARAMCO oil company. The association with ARAMCO created a

strong "aura" around Ithra, fostering increased confidence and trust within the local community, as DB-4 illustrated:

" …Aramco really shaped the history of Al- Sharqiyah, very much it shaped the lives of the people the history, also the economic growth… So when you have, again, a profile that's powerful, it acts as a good measure for people to trust that company even more" (DB-4)

Ithra's affiliation was particularly influential in the Eastern region, where ARAMCO's reputation enhanced the NPO's credibility. This was evident in EMP-8, who discussed his initial involvement with Ithra, owing to the importance and credibility: *"For me personally, anything that is based under the Aramco's [management], I mean as they say, when the top is good, the rest is good"*. Similarly, the Saudi Ministry of Health was also recognised as a key factor in enhancing the credibility of medical NPOs monetised under this ministry. VOL-2 addressed this by volunteering at a medical NPO because of its affiliation with the Ministry of Health: *"It's credible because of its affiliation with the Ministry of Health, not a company that serves the Ministry of Health…yes, this is what made me trust them".*

5.3.4 Conclusion

The findings presented in this theme address the third research question regarding the factors shaping stakeholders' NBRs. While the second theme focused on stakeholder-related factors influencing NBRs, this theme illustrates the organisation-related elements that shape and affect stakeholders' bonds with nonprofit brands. Thus, NBRs are shaped not only by stakeholders' personal characteristics but also by organisational cues that influence how NPOs are perceived and experienced.

Across the interviews, participants repeatedly referred to communication practices, physical and interpersonal environment, brand identity, and organisational credibility when explaining why they developed, maintained, or withdrew from relationships with NPOs. The findings suggest that communication functions as an important relational cue by increasing awareness, facilitating access, and creating a sense of responsiveness and closeness. Likewise, NPOs' experiential environment, including the servicescape and interactions with staff members, appeared to influence stakeholders' impressions of organisational quality, care, and legitimacy. Positive environments and supportive staff interactions often strengthened participants' emotional connection with NPOs, whereas poor facilities, lack of support, or behaviour perceived as inconsistent with organisational values could weaken the relationships.

In addition, the data show that the broader identity of the nonprofit brand plays a significant role in relationship formation. Participants appeared more likely to relate to NPOs when their causes were clear, meaningful, and socially relevant, and when their visual identities were recognisable and coherent with their organisational cause, thereby supporting recognition, trust, and stakeholders' ability to relate to the nonprofit brand. In contrast, ambiguity around the organisation's purpose or doubts about transparency and integrity seem to create barriers to engagement.

Overall, this theme indicates that organisational cues strongly shape how stakeholders encounter and interpret NPOs. In this sense, nonprofit brands are not experienced merely through mission statements or formal objectives, but through communication, environment, people, and visible signs of credibility that together shape the conditions under which relational bonds emerge.

5.4 Theme (4): Manifestations and Outcomes of NBRs

Analysis revealed that stakeholders' relationships with the nonprofit brand were reflected not only in the nature of the relational bond itself (Theme 1) and the factors shaping these bonds (Themes 2 and 3) but also in a range of psychological and behavioural outcomes. Participants described several ways in which their relationships with NPOs influenced their attitudes, behaviours, and personal experiences.

Across stakeholder groups, these outcomes included behavioural expressions such as loyalty, advocacy, and continued engagement with the organisation, as well as psychological outcomes such as a sense of belonging, gratitude, personal fulfilment, and enhanced well-being. Importantly, these outcomes appeared to emerge particularly when stakeholders developed strong identification with the nonprofit organisation and perceived alignment with its mission and values. In this sense, the data suggest that organisational identification is associated with the nature of the relational bonds and with the behavioural and psychological consequences reported by participants. More specifically, participants described how strong relational bonds with NPOs encouraged them to support the organisation beyond their formal roles, promote the organisation within their social networks, and maintain long-term engagement with its activities. At the same time, several participants highlighted the personal benefits derived from their involvement, including feelings of fulfilment, gratitude, and belonging within the nonprofit community. These findings therefore suggest that NBRs may generate both organisational benefits and individual outcomes for stakeholders.

5.4.1 Behavioural outcomes

The findings indicate that strong nonprofit brand bonds frequently translated into behavioural expressions of support towards the organisation. In particular, participants described loyalty, advocacy, and continued engagement as key behavioural manifestations of their relationships with nonprofit brands. These behaviours were most evident among stakeholders who strongly identified with the organisation and perceived alignment between their personal values and the organisation's mission.

Loyalty emerged as a prominent behavioural outcome across several interviews. Participants often described a sense of commitment towards the organisation and expressed willingness to support it even beyond their formal involvement. In several cases, stakeholders articulated a desire to "give back" to the organisation in recognition of the opportunities, support, or experiences they had received. For instance, VOL-9 described his continued commitment to Ithra: *"If Ithra needed me, I will be there, I have this loyalty…those guys always went above and beyond with me, and if I have the ability to help them, I mustn't hesitate to help"*.

Advocacy also emerged as an important behavioural outcome of NBRs. Participants often described promoting the organisation within their social networks, defending the organisation in public conversations, and encouraging others to support its activities. For instance, EMP-2 reflected on her continued support for her former employer, Nama'a NPO: "*I am very loyal to Nama 'a…I defend them…I used to be an employee back then, but now I am a supporter, I would support them, donate to them"*. This quote illustrates how strong relational bonds can transform stakeholders into active advocates for the organisation. Rather than disengaging after leaving their formal roles, participants continued to promote the organisation and defend its reputation

within their communities. This account also shows that an NBR may persist even when an individual's formal stakeholder role changes, since their relationship with the organisation continued after employment ended through advocacy and financial support.

Prolonged engagement was another recurring behavioural outcome. Certain participants described maintaining long-term relationships with the nonprofit organisation even when their formal involvement changed. This continued engagement often involved attending events, participating in programmes, or maintaining connections with organisational networks. DB-4 reported how her relationship with Ithra expanded her social connections: *"One thing I recently experienced is that if it weren't for Ithra I wouldn't be connected with people who there was no chance of them of me meeting them"*. This indicates that NBRs might extend beyond organisational participation to influence stakeholders' broader social networks and community interactions. These behaviours suggest that NBRs extend beyond participation, positioning stakeholders as active contributors to the organisation's continuity and visibility.

Although behavioural outcomes were visible across all stakeholder groups, they took different forms. EMPs' accounts included ongoing advocacy and support even after their formal employment ended. VOLs expressed loyalty and a willingness to continue contributing to the organisation. Meanwhile, DBs highlighted ongoing engagement and extended relational bonds through social and community connections.

5.4.2 Psychological Outcomes

Alongside behavioural outcomes, participants also described several psychological outcomes associated with their bond with NPOs. These outcomes included feelings of

gratitude, a sense of belonging, personal fulfilment, and enhanced well-being. Such experiences appeared particularly prominent among stakeholders who had developed strong identification with the organisation and perceived their involvement as meaningful or transformative.

Gratitude emerged as a recurring sentiment among several participants. Stakeholders often expressed appreciation for the opportunities, learning experiences, and personal development they gained through their involvement with nonprofit organisations. For example, one employee reflected on the role Ithra played in his personal and professional development:

"Why do I consider myself grateful for Ithra? Because Ithra embraced me even as a student, I mean I left that place, and I joined here as a normal employee, and I left as team leader of the biggest or I mean one of the biggest departments, I mean crowd management is considered as one of the biggest departments, I learned how to manage, I learned many things, and at the same time I graduated with Honors, I mean I think this is an added value for Ithra to be honest" (EMP-8)

This quote illustrates how NBRs may generate appreciation for the organisation, especially when stakeholders perceive that the organisation has contributed positively to their personal growth.

A sense of belonging also emerged as a significant psychological outcome of NBRs. Participants frequently described feeling part of a community associated with the organisation, particularly in contexts where stakeholders interacted regularly with staff members, volunteers, or other beneficiaries. This was illustrated by VOL-8, who demonstrated his attachment to the community of volunteers and the overall nonprofit brand, where he volunteers:

"The relationship of a young man and his home, I mean our second home to be honest, we feel sentimental about it when we are a way for a long time, sometimes if I don't have the time to be a volunteer, I would just come to say hi to the guys, and see the place, a quick visit, an a hour or so and then leave"(VOL-8)

Such experiences seemed to strengthen stakeholders' emotional attachment to the organisation and reinforced their desire to remain engaged with it. These psychological outcomes indicate that NBRs may fulfil socioemotional needs, reinforcing stakeholders' sense of identity, purpose and community belonging.

5.4.3 Relationship Tolerance and Maintenance

Interestingly, the findings also suggest that a strong nonprofit brand might generate a degree of tolerance towards negative experiences with the organisation. Participants who reported strong identification with the organisation often distinguished between isolated negative incidents and their overall relationship with the nonprofit brand. Rather than disengaging completely, they tended to maintain their broader relationship with the organisation while selectively avoiding specific activities or programmes, or those behind them. This was evident in DB-4's account:

"…if I have a negative experience or let's say I felt my time was wasted for example… I don't get angry, I send the feedback on what could have been developed, if they don't develop it, I try to avoid the place that, that gave me the workshop, but it doesn't mean that I avoid Ithra, I still come to Ithra" (DB-4)

This response reflects a degree of relationship tolerance, with the stakeholder remaining connected to the organisation despite dissatisfaction with a specific experience. Rather than terminating the broader NBR, the participant distinguished

between the negative incident and her relationship with the nonprofit brand as a whole. Such tolerance could contribute to the maintenance of NBRs and suggests a degree of relational resilience, although the evidence here more directly demonstrates tolerance and continued engagement.

5.4.4 Conclusion

The final theme addresses the fifth research question, regarding the outcomes associated with stakeholders' relationships with nonprofit brands. The findings suggest that NBRs manifest through a range of behavioural and psychological outcomes experienced by stakeholders. Behaviourally, these relationships are reflected in loyalty, advocacy, and continued engagement with the nonprofit organisation. Psychologically, stakeholders described feelings of belonging, gratitude, and personal fulfilment resulting from their involvement with the organisation. Importantly, these consequences appeared particularly pronounced among stakeholders who developed a strong identification with the organisation and perceived alignment between their personal values and the nonprofit's mission. Thus, the findings demonstrate that NBRs extend beyond simple participation or service interaction, shaping how individuals behave towards organisations and how they experience their involvement with them.

5.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the findings in line with the study's research questions. The chapter examined stakeholders' experiences and their interpretations of their relational bonds with nonprofit brands. The analysis generated four main themes that

collectively illuminate the nature of NBRs, the factors shaping these bonds, and the outcomes that emerge from them. The first theme concerned the nature of nonprofit brand relationship bonds, revealing that stakeholders develop various forms of relational bonds with NPOs. The findings identified three analytically distinct relationship forms: identity-based relationships, instrumental-identification relationships, and exchange-oriented relationships. These relational forms can be positioned along a continuum according to the strength and nature of organisational identification, ranging from stronger identification in identity-based bonds to weak or minimal identification in exchange-oriented relationships. Furthermore, the data indicated that these relationships are not necessarily fixed, as changes in involvement and relational experiences may be associated with shifts in the strength and nature of identification over time. However, the study did not track changes in individual stakeholder relationships over time; therefore, movement between the three NBR forms should be understood as a theoretical possibility suggested by participants' accounts rather than as an empirically established developmental sequence. The second theme highlighted stakeholder characteristics that shape NBRs, namely individuals' personal and professional identities, motivations for engagement, and cultural or religious worldviews. The third theme centres on organisational cues shaping NBRs. The analysis demonstrated that organisational attributes such as communication practices, servicescape, staff-stakeholder interactions, and nonprofit brand identity shaped stakeholders' relational experiences with NPOs. Finally, the fourth theme examined how NBRs manifest and their outcomes. The findings revealed that strong relational bonds with a nonprofit brand may translate into behavioural and psychological outcomes. Behaviourally, stakeholders expressed loyalty, advocacy, and continued engagement with NPOs. Psychologically, participants reported feelings

of belonging, gratitude, personal fulfilment, and enhanced well-being resulting from their involvement with the organisation. Furthermore, The findings suggest that strong relational bonds may foster tolerance of occasional negative experiences, allowing stakeholders to maintain their broader relationship with the nonprofit brand, despite dissatisfaction with particular incidents or activities. The following chapter builds upon these findings by interpreting them in relation to the existing literature and the conceptual framework developed in Chapter Two.

CHAPTER 6 DISCUSSION, CONTRIBUTIONS AND CONCLUSION

6.0 Introduction

This chapter examines the study's findings in relation to existing literature on brand relationships, nonprofit branding, and organisational identification. It highlights that brand relationships exist within a nonprofit context, but they take on distinct forms shaped by identification processes, stakeholder characteristics, and organisational cues. Rather than treating these factors separately, the chapter integrates them to explain how NBRs develop, are experienced, and are sustained.

The discussion begins by revisiting and refining the conceptual framework in light of empirical findings. It then interprets the main relational types identified in the study and explores the stakeholder and organisational factors influencing these connections. Next, the chapter considers the behavioural and psychological effects of strong NBRs. Finally, it highlights the study’s theoretical, practical, and methodological contributions, along with its limitations and suggestions for future research.

6.1 Refined Conceptual Framework

The findings provide empirical support for, and help to refine, the framework outlined in Chapter Two. While the initial framework identified stakeholder traits, organisational cues, identification processes, and relational outcomes as core aspects of NBRs, the analysis provided further understanding of how these components relate within NBRs. The results show that organisational identification is a significant explanatory mechanism for understanding variation in how stakeholders relate to nonprofit brands. This role of identification was especially clear in identity-based and instrumental-

identification relationships. However, for exchange-oriented relationships, NBRs may still occur even when organisational identification is weak or minimal.

The refined framework (see Figure 6) categorises three distinct forms of NBR: identity-based, instrumental-identification, and exchange-oriented relationships. These are positioned along a continuum reflecting variation in the strength and nature of OID, from stronger identification in identity-based NBRs to weak or minimal identification in exchange-oriented relationships. This refinement not only affirms the relevance of the original components but also clarifies the different forms that NBRs may take and the varying explanatory role of OID across these relationships. Therefore, the refined framework provides an empirically grounded representation of the different forms of NBR and the varying role of OID within these relational bonds.

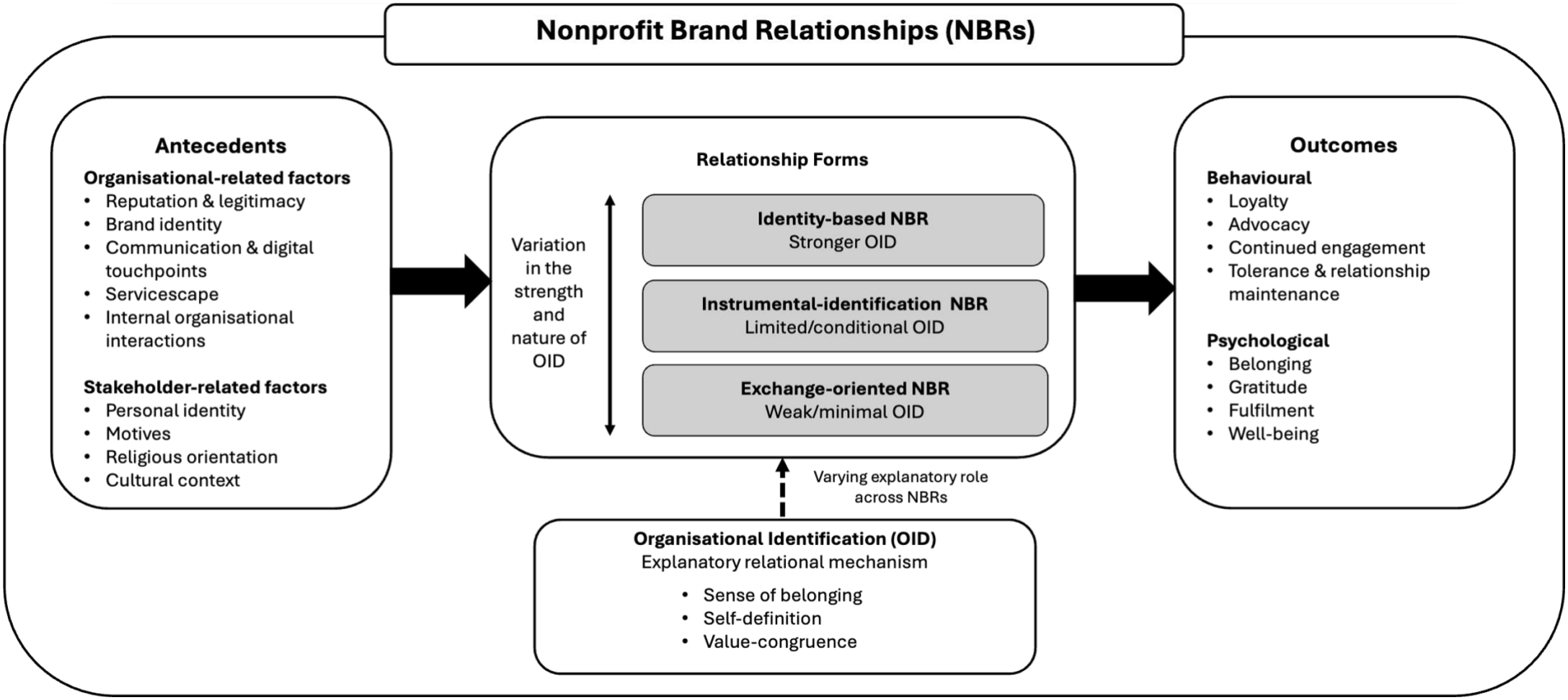


Figure 6: Refined conceptual framework of the study

6.2 Revisiting The Research Questions

This section revisits the research questions that guided the study and clarifies how the findings contribute to the understanding of NBRs.

Addressing **RQ1: What is the nature of the bonds that stakeholders form with nonprofit brands?** The analysis shows that stakeholders' bonds with nonprofit brands are diverse, reflecting different ways of relating to NPOs. These bonds are influenced by how individuals position the organisation in relation to their identity. This suggests that NBRs should not be conceptualised as a uniform relational state. Rather, the nonprofit context accommodates analytically distinct forms of relationship that vary by the basis of the bond and the strength and nature of organisational identification.

For RQ2: How do stakeholder–nonprofit brand bonds emerge?, the findings reveal that these bonds develop through interpretive processes rather than passive exposure or simple interaction. The findings indicate that NBRs develop through stakeholders' interpretations of organisational meanings and experiences, rather than solely through exposure or interaction. OID provides an important mechanism for understanding the formation of relationships marked by stronger identity alignment, while exchange-oriented relationships show that relational bonds could also develop where identification remains weak or minimal.

Regarding RQ3: What factors shape stakeholders' relationships with nonprofit brands?, the study finds that NBRs are co-shaped by stakeholder dispositions and organisational cues. Relationship development depends on how individuals gauge alignment between their values and the organisation's perceived characteristics,

emphasising stakeholders' active role in shaping outcomes. Additionally, organisational cues are crucial in enabling, sustaining, or weakening these relationships, indicating that organisational factors can contribute to whether NBRs emerge, strengthen, weaken, or are maintained.

In relation to **RQ4: What relational dimensions define and characterise stakeholders' nonprofit brand relationships?** The results indicate that stakeholder bonds with nonprofit brands vary in strength and in their nature. Identity-based, instrumental-identification, and exchange-oriented relationships are analytically distinct forms, each associated with different degrees and forms of identification. The findings further show that relational strength is not immune to negative experiences, as stakeholders may maintain a broader relationship with a nonprofit brand despite dissatisfaction with particular interactions or activities.

In addressing **RQ5: What outcomes emerge from stakeholders' relationships with nonprofit brands?** Stronger NBRs were associated with meaning-oriented and psychological outcomes beyond behavioural expressions, including experiences of purpose, belonging, and personal significance, as well as loyalty, advocacy, and continued engagement.

In response to **RQ6: How do these factors, mechanisms, relational dimensions, and outcomes collectively explain the development of NBRs?** The findings demonstrate that NBR development can be understood through the interaction of stakeholder characteristics, organisational cues, the nature and strength of identification, and the relational outcomes linked to these bonds. These components help explain variation in how they are formed, experienced, reinforced, maintained, or diminished. Additionally, participants' accounts suggest that relationship forms are not

fixed; movement between the three forms is a theoretical possibility rather than an empirically established developmental sequence.

Collectively, these findings position NBRs as heterogeneous relational phenomena, in which development cannot be explained by identification alone but requires consideration of interactions between stakeholder-related and organisational factors and the different bases on which nonprofit bonds form.

6.3 Interpreting The Core Findings

6.3.1 Organisational Identification as the Relational Anchor

A key contribution of the study lies in demonstrating the explanatory role of organisational identification in understanding variation in stakeholders' relational bonds with nonprofit brands. Across EMPs, VOLs and DBs, participants described different degrees of personal alignment, belonging and psychological proximity to NPOs. OID was particularly useful in explaining stronger identity-based and instrumental-identification relationships; however, the presence of exchange-oriented bonds indicates that NBRs may also exist where identification is weak or minimal. These findings support Ashforth and Mael's (1989) claim that identification involves defining oneself in relation to an organisation, and they also broaden this understanding to nonprofit brands. In addition, the study showed that identification manifests in different ways, and this variation is reflected across the three NBR forms identified. These three forms are analytically distinct but can be positioned along a continuum according to the strength and nature of organisational identification.

Examining these relationships across EMPs, VOLs, and DBs shows that differences in identification are not limited to a single stakeholder role, which emphasises the importance of OID in understanding multiple stakeholders' bonds with nonprofit brands. Thus, in nonprofit contexts, organisations may serve as identity-relevant social entities, through which stakeholders express moral values, social responsibility, and collective purpose. This also aligns with Bhattacharya et al. (1995), who argued that identification with an organisation is 'self-defining' and closely connected to individuals' beliefs and attitudes. Consequently, stakeholders' bonds with NPOs may be rooted in deeper psychological processes through which individuals align their identities with socially meaningful causes. The NBR forms identified in this study illustrate variation in the depth, strength, and emotional quality of individuals' bonds with NPOs. Importantly, these findings reinforce existing brand relationships research suggesting that individuals may form bonds with brands that contribute to the construction and expression of their identities (Escalas and Bettman, 2003; Park et al., 2013). However, in the nonprofit context examined in the present study, identity processes were closely intertwined with the moral and social meanings associated with nonprofit causes. This extends identity-based explanations in commercial brand relationship research by showing that self-brand connections in nonprofit settings may involve alignment with symbolic brand meanings and with a socially or morally significant organisational purpose. Thus, stakeholders may engage with nonprofit brands not only as symbolic entities but also as organisations whose missions reflect values they perceive as socially meaningful or legitimate. Consequently, organisational identification provides an important mechanism for explaining how identity-relevant NBRs form and are sustained, while its more limited role in exchange-oriented relationships also indicates the boundaries of its explanatory reach.

6.3.1.1 Identity-Based Brand Relationships: Attachment, Belonging and Moral Alignment

Identity-based NBRs were evident among a subset of participants, particularly EMPs. This relationship was characterised as emotionally grounded and relationally intense, closely linked to strong alignment with nonprofit brands, especially around mission, cause, value systems, and moral legitimacy (Nunes et al., 2024). The identity-based relationships identified in this study demonstrate that NBRs can go beyond functional engagements and involve deep emotional and moral alignment with organisational missions. This indicates that stakeholders perceive organisations as reflecting aspects of their own identity, leading to stronger relational commitment and sustained engagement. This supports prior research suggesting that the identification process strengthens psychological attachment to organisations and encourages supportive behaviours such as advocacy, volunteering, and long-term loyalty (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003; Stokburger-Sauer et al., 2012). Compared with the predominantly consumption-oriented relationships emphasised in much commercial BR literature, the identity-based NBRs identified here highlight moral alignment with organisational purpose and symbolic self-expression. In the nonprofit sector examined in the current study, attachment to the brand was also closely linked to attachment to the organisational cause itself. It suggests that these relationships are sustained through a mix of emotional bonds, shared values, and perceived moral legitimacy.

The findings also demonstrated the significance of the internal organisational community, including employees, service providers, volunteers, and colleagues, as an important relational context for strong NBRs (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003). Identification with the internal organisational community emerged as a salient pattern

across stakeholder groups, particularly among EMPs and VOLs who developed identity-based NBRs. These participants reported a strong sense of belonging to the internal group of the organisations with which they were involved. This observation supports organisational identification theory, which suggests that OID may coexist with identification with subgroups or internal organisational communities (Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Van Dick et al., 2004).

The importance of internal organisational dynamics in shaping identity-based NBRs may be understood through the socially embedded nature of stakeholders' relationships with nonprofit organisations. This dynamic was particularly evident within Ithra, where interactions among volunteers appeared to strengthen relational bonds and support sustained engagement and continuity of volunteering (Jones and Volpe, 2011; Mitchell, 2023). Although previous research on brand communities has demonstrated that social interaction around brands can strengthen commitment, advocacy and engagement (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001; McAlexander et al., 2002; Hassay and Peloza, 2009; Marzocchi et al., 2013; Coelho et al., 2019), the present findings do not require internal organisational groups to be conceptualised as brand communities. Instead, they indicate that stakeholders' relationships with nonprofit brands can be socially embedded in their bonds with employees, volunteers and other organisational members.

Identification with the NPO's internal organisational groups was also closely anchored to organisational mission and moral values. Participants indicated that they sought consistency between the values and behaviours of internal group members and the nonprofit brand's moral positioning. Where participants perceived moral inconsistency,

negative conduct, or value violations among internal members, they reported distancing themselves from the nonprofit brand or disengaging entirely. This underscores NBRs vulnerability to internal behavioural dynamics and highlights the importance of moral congruence in sustaining identity-based bonds.

These findings further illustrate the central role of service providers in shaping stakeholders' bonds with NPOs. Participants reported that service providers' professionalism, competence, interpersonal behaviour, and alignment with organisational mission and values influenced whether their bonds with NPOs strengthened or deteriorated. Given the frequent interaction between stakeholders and service providers, particularly in service-oriented nonprofit contexts, service providers may function as salient brand representatives, capable of reinforcing or undermining stakeholder relationships (Dall'Olmo Riley and de Chernatony, 2000; Sweeney and Chew, 2002; MacMillan et al., 2005).

Participants also identified the welcoming organisational environment as an important element in forming initial bonds with nonprofit brands and supporting the development of brand relationships (Bahia and Babay, 2022). Collectively, these findings suggest that NBRs may be intertwined with stakeholders' relationships with internal organisational groups, indicating that identification can operate at more than one organisational referent. Stakeholders may identify with the focal nonprofit brand while also developing distinct attachments to the people and groups through which they experience the nonprofit brand (Bagozzi et al., 2012).

The significance of this distinction lies in showing that identification within NBRs is not solely directed towards the organisation as a formal entity, as stakeholders may also develop identification or attachment towards the internal groups through which the organisation is experienced. This extends understanding of NBRs by showing that the relational experience surrounding the nonprofit brand can contribute to how the focal NBR is understood and maintained.

A nuanced pattern emerged regarding identity-based NBRs, with some participants reporting a stronger emotional attachment to internal groups than to the nonprofit brand itself. This pattern arose when negative organisational experiences led participants to distance themselves from the brand while maintaining bonds with colleagues or internal peers. This pattern demonstrates that identification may operate across organisational referents: stakeholders may maintain positive identification with an internal group while simultaneously distancing themselves from the broader organisation. Relatedly, these findings may be interpreted through the lens of brand disidentification, in which perceived self–brand incongruence contributes to relational distancing (Wolter et al., 2016). However, this study found that relational distancing from the nonprofit brand did not necessarily eliminate participants' ties to internal organisational groups, indicating that these relational targets may remain psychologically distinct.

Overall, the findings indicate that identity-based NBRs may be shaped not only by identification with the organisational brand but also by stakeholders' relationships with the internal organisational groups through which they experience that brand. This highlights the significance of distinguishing between identification with the organisation

and identification with particular internal referents, while recognising that the two may interact in shaping the broader NBR. Additionally, strong identity-based NBRs were associated with emotional attachment and behavioural expressions, including advocacy, commitment and loyalty (Bhattacharya et al., 1995; Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003; Tidwell, 2005; Monnot et al., 2009; Stokburger-Sauer et al., 2012; Tuškej et al., 2013).

6.3.1.2 Instrumental-Identification Bonds: Value, Utility and Limited Affect

Additional forms of NBR identified across stakeholder groups were instrumental-identification relationships. This relationship form was less emotionally intense than identity-based bonds. The findings suggest that individuals may maintain relationships with brands that are either relatively close or more distant in nature (Park et al., 2013).

Stakeholders identified as having instrumental-identification NBR tended to prioritise tangible value, functional benefits, and practical outcomes associated with organisational involvement. Although they selected nonprofit brands that aligned with their values and self-defining attributes, their relationships with these organisations were primarily cognitive and purpose-driven rather than emotionally grounded. In contrast to prior studies that closely associate brand identification with emotional bonds (Bhattacharya et al., 1995; Dall'Olmo Riley and De Chernatony, 2000; Sweeney and Chew, 2002; Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003; Monnot et al., 2009; Bagozzi et al., 2012; Kumar and Kaushik, 2020), these findings indicate that identification may also underpin cognitively oriented brand relationships. This supports Sen et al.'s (2015) assertion that brand relationships are not necessarily emotionally driven.

Accordingly, NBRs may be benefit-driven, with nonprofit brands fulfilling functional, symbolic or personal roles in stakeholders' lives (Fournier, 1998). While Gruber and Deschênes (2024) suggest that volunteers' NBRs may remain stable over time, participants' accounts in the current study suggest that relational forms are not necessarily fixed, as changes in involvement and relational experiences may be associated with changes in the bond's strength or nature. However, because the study did not track changes in individual stakeholder bonds over time, movement between relational forms remains a theoretical possibility rather than an empirically established developmental process. This possibility also highlights stakeholder agency, as individuals may actively shape their relationships with brands by enabling, adjusting, restoring, or disengaging from relational ties (Alvarez et al., 2021).

NBRs may also be shaped by practical considerations rather than purely by emotional attachment. Stakeholders who develop instrumental-identification with the organisation can still perceive value in engaging with it, though their involvement is more strongly guided by functional benefits, opportunities for learning, or personal development. This supports Fournier's (1998) argument that brand relationships may fulfil multiple roles in individuals' lives, including utilitarian, symbolic, and experiential functions. Within the nonprofit context, these relationships may therefore be sensitive to stakeholders' accumulated experiences with the organisation, particularly where continued involvement depends on the perceived value or relevance of that engagement.

Taken together, identity-based and instrumental-identification bonds suggest that NBRs are underpinned by two related but analytically distinct processes: identification

and attachment. In identity-based relationships, strong identification was accompanied by pronounced emotional attachment. Meanwhile, in instrumental-identification relationships, some degree of alignment with the organisation remains, but emotional attachment is comparatively weaker and less central to the nonprofit brand bond. This distinction matters because it shows that organisational identification does not necessarily lead to emotionally intense bonds. In the nonprofit context, identification may also underpin cognitive, benefit-oriented, and conditionally sustained forms of brand relationships. This extends the explanatory use of OID within brand relationship research by separating identification from emotional attachment and demonstrating that identification may remain relationally significant even when affective attachment is comparatively limited.

6.3.1.3 Exchange-Oriented Bonds: Transactional Engagement and Minimal Identification

An additional bond type identified in the data was exchange-oriented, in which individuals, particularly VOLs, formed predominantly transactional relationships characterised by weak or minimal emotional connections. In these cases, alignment with the nonprofit brand's mission, values, or moral stance appeared comparatively weak or peripheral to the relationship, while involvement was primarily instrumental and focused on practical benefits such as fulfilling mandatory volunteering requirements, enhancing CVs, or securing financial incentives.

These findings suggest that NBRs can sometimes be predominantly functional and relatively superficial, supporting Kreiner and Ashforth's (2004) use of organisational identification theory, which indicates that individuals can remain engaged with

organisations while maintaining psychological distance. Previous brand relationship research documents relationships characterised by limited emotional connection or relatively superficial bonds (Hess and Story, 2005; Story and Hess, 2006; Alba and Lutz, 2013), while other studies recognise that BRs may also be episodic or transient (Sweeney and Chew, 2002; Fournier, 1998).

The presence of exchange-oriented bonds is theoretically significant, as it reveals the lower boundary of identification within NBRs. This suggests that stakeholder bonds with nonprofit brands can exist even where organisational identification and emotional connection are weak or minimal. These findings therefore broaden the conceptualisation of NBRs by demonstrating that nonprofit brand bonds may encompass both deeply identity-based bonds and predominantly transactional forms of engagement. Significantly, the exchange-oriented form also marks a boundary to OID's explanatory reach. While OID provides a useful mechanism for explaining stronger, more identity-relevant NBRs, it does not fully account for relationships sustained primarily through transactional exchange. Thus, identification should be understood as an important mechanism within NBRs rather than a necessary condition for all nonprofit brand relationships.

6.3.2 Stakeholder-Related Drivers of NBRs

The findings show that stakeholder-related factors influence NBRs, shaping how these organisations are perceived, valued, and engaged with. Specifically, participants' identities, motivations, cultural backgrounds, and religious beliefs influenced their sense of alignment with nonprofit brands and their development of relational ties with them. This suggests that brand relationships are shaped not only by organisational

actions but also by stakeholders' personal values, motives, experiences, and identities.

6.3.2.1 Identity, Motives and Self-Relevance

Across interviews, participants attributed their bonds with NPOs to multiple factors, including psychological needs such as enhanced well-being and self-fulfilment, as well as fulfilling religious obligations by helping others through time and monetary donations. Participants also described seeking spiritual rewards for good deeds through engagement with philanthropic or charitable causes, and these religiously informed motives were particularly evident in accounts characterised by stronger alignment with nonprofit brands and identity-based bonds.

Furthermore, stakeholders reported additional factors shaping their relationships with nonprofit brands, including personal and practical development goals such as CV enhancement, fulfilling mandatory volunteering requirements, and skills acquisition. These motives were associated with weaker, less emotionally intensive bonds, such as instrumental-identification and exchange-oriented relationships. This indicates that individuals' involvement with NPOs is driven by multiple motives, including practical, altruistic, and career-related motives, which is consistent with prior research on motivations for nonprofit participation and associated behavioural outcomes, including commitment, loyalty, advocacy, and donations of time and money (Clary et al., 1998; Asah and Blahna, 2013; Johnson and Grimm, 2010; Mitchell and Clark, 2021).

While Johnson and Grimm (2010) demonstrated that the nature and intensity of relationships with nonprofit brands are shaped by personal motives, prior research has

not explicitly examined how stakeholder-related factors operate alongside OID in shaping NBRs. Accordingly, the current study extends this literature by demonstrating a bottom-up dimension to NBR development, whereby stakeholders actively shape their relationships with nonprofit brands through their identities, motives and interpretations rather than merely responding to organisational branding activities. These findings therefore highlight the interconnection between stakeholder identity, organisational identification and the nature of the resulting brand relationships.

A key aspect of these findings is that stakeholder motives not only initiate participation but also shape the nature of the relationships that develop. This suggests that NBRs are shaped not only by what the organisation offers or communicates but also by what stakeholders seek from their involvement. This positions stakeholder agency and self-relevance as significant components in explaining variation across NBRs.

6.3.2.2 Religion, Culture and Moral Interpretation

Cultural context emerged as a significant factor influencing stakeholders' nonprofit brand bonds. The findings revealed the critical role of individuals' cultural backgrounds, particularly Saudi identity, in shaping behaviours, attitudes, and perceptions towards NPOs and the nonprofit sector more broadly. Brand relationship research has long acknowledged the alignment between cultural context and individuals' relationships with brands, beginning with Fournier's (1998) seminal work, which identified sociocultural context as a key influence on brand relationships. Subsequent studies have reported cross-cultural variation in brand relationships, showing that cultural dimensions such as individualism versus collectivism influence consumers' brand relationships (Chang and Chieng, 2006; Zhou, 2009).

Within the nonprofit sector, previous studies have similarly recognised how individual and cultural characteristics influence engagement with NPOs, concluding that philanthropic participation and volunteering are associated with cultural orientation (Bryant et al., 2003; Randle and Dolnicar, 2009). However, a distinctive element of Saudi culture and religion appeared to exert a particularly strong influence on stakeholders' bonds with NPOs. The data indicated that Islam is deeply embedded in Saudi cultural identity, shaping individuals' worldviews, behaviours, and perceptions across various areas of life. This finding highlights the importance of recognising religion as a significant factor in brand relationships within specific cultural contexts. While brand relationship scholarship has acknowledged the influence of sociocultural context (Fournier, 1998), Islamic branding research has more explicitly demonstrated how religious meanings, religiosity and perceived alignment with Islamic values can shape consumers' interpretations and evaluations of brands (Alserhan, 2010; Wilson and Liu, 2011; Borzooei and Asgari, 2014; Al Abdulrazak and Gbadamosi, 2017). However, this literature has predominantly examined Islamic or halal branding in consumer and commercial settings, leaving less understood how religious identity operates within stakeholders' relational bonds with nonprofit brands. The present findings therefore extend existing research by demonstrating how religious identity might influence stakeholders' motivations for engaging with nonprofit brands, their expectations of organisational conduct, and the moral meanings they associate with nonprofit brands.

Operating within an Islamic context such as Saudi Arabia influenced stakeholders' ideologies, identities, and perspectives, and became a key factor shaping NBRs and evaluations of the nonprofit sector. Causes aligned with religious principles and those

that enable individuals to fulfil religious obligations were preferred over those perceived as less religiously or morally grounded. This preference appeared to shape organisational relationships, with participants expressing stronger bonds with faith-based organisations. These findings underscore religion as a central driver of stakeholders' organisational bonds. Moreover, participants, particularly VOLs and EMPs, described how their relationships with nonprofit brands were informed by Islamic morals and principles. EMPs often framed their work in the nonprofit sector as righteous action undertaken in pursuit of Ajer (reward from Allah), while VOLs similarly characterised their engagement as religiously encouraged helping behaviour. These accounts indicate that, for participants in this study, involvement with nonprofit organisations was often interpreted through Islamic identity, religious values and the pursuit of religiously meaningful action. This is consistent with Lam (2002) and Wiepking et al. (2014), who found that religion influences participation in nonprofit activities, including volunteering and monetary donations. Although these studies did not specify religion in their investigations, studies in an Islamic context revealed similar outcomes, stressing that Islam influences individuals' involvement with NPOs (Kochuyt, 2009; Opoku, 2013; Kasri, 2013; Diop et al., 2018). Thus, Islamic principles and practices shape individuals' religious identity and influence their nonprofit activity and charitable behaviours (Bortolazzi, 2020).

These findings connect NBR with insights from Islamic branding literature. Existing Islamic branding research demonstrates that religious meanings and value congruence can shape consumers' evaluations of brands and relational responses such as trust, attachment and commitment (Alserhan, 2010; Borzooei and Asgari, 2014; Al Abdulrazak and Gbadamosi, 2017). The present investigation extends this

perspective beyond predominantly commercial and consumption settings by showing that Islamic identity may also shape relationships with nonprofit brands, where religious meaning is attached not only to the brand itself but also to the organisation's cause, conduct and perceived social purpose.

Religion therefore operated not merely as part of the broader cultural context but as a moral interpretive lens through which participants evaluated nonprofit causes, organisational legitimacy, and their own obligations towards NPOs. In this context, Islamic identity shaped how participants interpreted their interactions with nonprofit brands and what they regarded as an appropriate, credible and meaningful nonprofit cause.

Collectively, stakeholders' NBRs are shaped by a constellation of individual-level characteristics, including personal identity, motives, educational background, cultural context, and religious identity. These characteristics inform how stakeholders interpret, evaluate, and emotionally connect with nonprofit brands, thereby contributing to variation in the depth and form of their relational bonds. Taken together, the findings reinforce the proposition that NBRs are not passively received but actively constructed through stakeholders' identities, values, and lived experiences, underscoring the bottom-up, stakeholder-driven dimension of brand relationships in the nonprofit context.

6.3.3 Organisational Drivers of NBRs

Organisation-related factors also influenced stakeholders' bonds with NPOs. The data showed that communication tools, NPOs' offline and online presence, reputation,

physical environment, and brand features, along with visual identity, emerged as key elements shaping the nature and strength of individuals' connections with NPOs. Beyond shaping NBRs, these organisational factors also operated as organisational cues through which stakeholders interpreted the nonprofit brand and assessed its alignment with their values and expectations.

In mission-driven contexts such as NPOs, these signals can carry symbolic and moral meanings. Stakeholders often interpret organisational actions, communication practices, and service environments as indicators of organisational integrity, authenticity, and moral credibility. Consequently, organisational attributes not only influence functional evaluations but also shape stakeholders' perceptions of whether the organisation genuinely embodies the values it claims to represent.

The findings suggest that organisational cues function as relational signals through which stakeholders interpret the credibility, legitimacy, and moral positioning of NPOs. While commercial brand relationships may also involve symbolic, ethical and identity-related evaluations, the nonprofit context examined in this study places particular emphasis on organisational mission and perceived moral conduct. Stakeholders evaluated not only what the organisation provided but also whether its actions appeared consistent with the social and moral values it claimed to represent. Organisational cues such as communication practices, transparency and the physical environment may therefore carry relational meaning by shaping stakeholders' perceptions of credibility, legitimacy and value alignment.

6.3.3.1 Communication and Transparency as Trust Signals

Organisational and communicative factors shaped stakeholders' bonds with nonprofit brands by influencing how they interpreted, evaluated, and related to nonprofit brands. Consistent with Bhattacharya et al.'s (1995) argument that identification is driven by both internal organisational characteristics and external stakeholder cues, the findings indicate that communication channels serve as an important organisational cue, enabling stakeholders to recognise, evaluate, and connect with nonprofit brands that reflect their values and self-concept.

Communication aided NBR development by enhancing stakeholders' awareness and understanding of the nonprofit brand's mission, activities, and social contribution. This was especially important for external stakeholders like VOLs and DBs, who accessed organisational information and engagement opportunities through communication channels. These findings support McDougle (2014), indicating that communication not only raises awareness of nonprofit brands but also shapes how stakeholders interpret and approach NPOs.

In line with Mato-Santiso et al. (2021), the findings suggest that online and offline communication channels serve complementary relational roles. Digital channels enhance organisational visibility and access, whereas face-to-face interactions offer more direct experiences of the NPO and its cause. Thus, the significance of communication presence lies not simply in channel availability, but in the relational experiences they facilitate.

These findings are consistent with research emphasising the relational significance of brand touchpoints (Baxendale et al., 2015; Labbafi, 2025). Therefore, communication channels can serve not only as awareness tools but also as relational touchpoints through which stakeholders form cognitive evaluations and emotional responses toward nonprofit brands.

Beyond awareness, communication channels also played a central role in shaping perceptions of credibility, transparency, and integrity. Participants across stakeholder groups emphasised the importance of visible transparency, particularly regarding how donations are distributed, how programmes deliver impact, and how organisations demonstrate accountability. This supports prior research arguing that transparency functions as a relational signal through which stakeholders infer credibility, mission commitment, and ethical intent (Dethier et al., 2021; Sansome et al., 2024). In this sense, communication can build trust by enabling stakeholders to assess whether nonprofit brands appear credible, accountable, and worthy of continued engagement. Conversely, participants' accounts and observations during data collection indicated that ineffective communication practices, such as limited responsiveness and weak interactive engagement, could limit awareness and undermine relationship-building opportunities. This aligns with Mato-Santiso et al.'s (2021) observation that adopting multiple communication channels does not, in itself, guarantee their effective relational use.

Notably, stakeholders, particularly VOLs and DBs, expressed scepticism towards nonprofit brands' credibility, frequently linking doubts to perceived opacity, limited disclosure, and unclear articulation of mission and impact. Participants' avoidance of

NPOs associated with perceived opacity suggests that insufficient transparency may weaken credibility and trust, which in turn limits stakeholders' willingness to initiate or maintain relationships with those organisations. This finding aligns with Morgan and Hunt's (1994) commitment–trust theory and nonprofit-specific evidence showing that trust is foundational to relationship commitment and sustained engagement (Sargeant and Lee, 2004).

Taken together, the findings indicate that transparency, credibility and trust are closely interconnected in stakeholders' evaluation of nonprofit brands. Transparent communication can provide cues through which stakeholders assess organisational credibility and trustworthiness, while perceived opacity may undermine willingness to engage. These processes are particularly salient in the nonprofit context examined in the present study, where participants evaluated NPOs not only on service provision but also against expectations of accountability and moral conduct (Dethier et al., 2021). Consistent with prior research, clear communication regarding organisational activities, financial practices and social impact may therefore support stakeholder trust, perceived legitimacy and the maintenance of relational bonds (Loureiro et al., 2018; Osorio Arias et al., 2025).

Collectively, these findings position communication as more than a means for organisational visibility. Within NBRs, communication operates as a relational cue through which stakeholders interpret organisational values, credibility, transparency, and alignment with their expectations. Its relational significance therefore lies not simply in how often or through how many channels communication occurs, but in whether these interactions offer stakeholders credible and meaningful experiences of

the nonprofit brand. This broadens the typical view of nonprofit communication by highlighting its role in shaping the conditions that can initiate, strengthen, or weaken stakeholder-brand relationships.

6.3.3.2 Reputation and Legitimacy as Relational Resources

Stakeholders widely discussed the reputation of NPOs. Although communication and transparency influence initial perceptions of trustworthiness, reputation reflects a broader, cumulative assessment of an organisation's conduct, consistency, and perceived integrity. As a result, reputation may inform stakeholders' judgments of organisational legitimacy and influence whether they approach an organisation with confidence or scepticism.

Participants' accounts concerned both individual organisations and the nonprofit sector more broadly. Perceptions of limited credibility, transparency, and trustworthiness were often linked to the reputation of particular NPOs, but these concerns could also extend to the wider sector. EMPs similarly recognised reputation as a significant influence on how stakeholders approached and evaluated NPOs.

Across stakeholder groups, particularly VOLs and DBs, reputation was often linked to negative perceptions of the nonprofit sector. Some participants described avoiding certain NPOs due to their reputations, which contributed to the formation of negative mental images of the sector as a whole. One possible explanation is that NPOs operate in environments characterised by strong moral expectations, while stakeholders may have limited capacity to evaluate organisational performance directly. Reputation can therefore provide an informational cue through which

stakeholders assess organisational trustworthiness and legitimacy (Schultz et al., 2019). This indicates that reputation may function as a relational resource that informs stakeholders' judgements of organisational legitimacy and shapes their perceptions of individual NPOs and the nonprofit sector more broadly (Bennett and Gabriel, 2003).

The findings showed that reputation influenced stakeholders' decision-making and trust (Bennett and Gabriel, 2003; Schultz et al., 2019), ultimately shaping their initial bonds with nonprofit brands. In addition, participants described avoiding direct donations to NPOs and requesting greater transparency about how donations are distributed and organisations' societal contributions. For some stakeholders, such avoidance may also be interpreted through an OID lens, where reputational concerns signal perceived inconsistency between personal values and the organisation's attributes. In such cases, stakeholders may resist identification or distance themselves from organisations perceived as ethically questionable. This aligns with Kreiner and Ashforth's (2004) findings that negative organisational reputation and cynicism can prompt disassociation and identity-based distancing.

The findings further indicate a connection between reputation and identity-relevant evaluations of nonprofit brands. Existing research demonstrates that favourable organisational reputation can support identification where association with the organisation affirms individuals' self-image or personal values (Molinillo et al., 2022). Within the present study, reputation similarly appeared relevant to stakeholders' assessment of whether an NPO was credible, value-consistent and worthy of association. Consequently, reputation may contribute to conditions that support organisational identification and relational attachment, rather than functioning solely

as an external evaluation of organisational performance (Kreiner and Ashforth, 2004; Veloutsou and Moutinho, 2009; Ahmadi and Ataei, 2022). Additionally, it may also support perceptions of brand credibility by reinforcing confidence in an NPO's ability to fulfil its commitments (Molinillo et al., 2022).

Conversely, negative reputation may weaken stakeholders' willingness to establish or maintain relational bonds with nonprofit brands. Participants' hesitation and suspicion towards certain NPOs are consistent with Ren et al.'s (2024) finding that reputational damage may generate negative emotional responses and withdrawal behaviours.

Overall, reputation acts as an important relational resource within NBRs by informing stakeholders' assessments of credibility, trustworthiness, legitimacy and value alignment (Schultz et al., 2019; Molinillo et al., 2022). Its significance in the nonprofit context extends beyond general organisational evaluation, as reputational judgements may also reflect whether a nonprofit brand is perceived as acting consistently with its social and moral purpose. Consequently, reputation shapes the conditions under which stakeholders approach, identify with, distance themselves from, or maintain relationships with nonprofit brands.

6.3.3.3 Servicescape and the Material Experience of the Nonprofit Brand

The physical environment of NPOs was identified as an organisational factor shaping stakeholders' perceptions and relational experiences of nonprofit brands. Participants reported that atmosphere, servicescape, architecture, design, and facilities influenced their perceptions of NPOs and were associated with both positive and negative evaluations of their relational experiences with nonprofit brands.

Conversely, environments perceived as functional, appropriate and responsive to stakeholders' needs were associated with more favourable evaluations of NPOs. This indicates that servicescape contributes not only to stakeholders' functional experiences of nonprofit services but also to the NPO's image through which the nonprofit brand is interpreted.

Prior research has established the influence of servicescape characteristics, including spatial layout, environmental flexibility, opportunities for social interaction, aesthetics and atmosphere, on stakeholder evaluations and behavioural responses (Bitner, 1992; Harris and Ezeh, 2008; Johnstone, 2012). The current investigation extends the relevance of servicescape to the NBR context by showing that material environments can shape how stakeholders interpret and experience the organisation behind the nonprofit brand.

Participants also associated the servicescape with perceptions of organisational status. In this sense, the physical environment can operate as a visual and material representation of the organisation and its services, making otherwise intangible organisational qualities more observable to stakeholders (Bitner, 1992; Harris and Ezeh, 2008).

Beyond environmental attributes, participants described a sense of belonging and attachment associated with certain NPOs' servicescape. This finding aligns with Johnstone (2012), who argues that opportunities for interaction and relationship-building within physical environments foster place attachment and positive brand attitudes. Pulh et al. (2019) further show that servicescape may support more intimate

brand relationships and encourage supportive behaviours. In the present study, the significance of servicescape extends beyond attachment to the physical place itself, as the environment also shaped how stakeholders experienced the NPO and its internal social relationships.

Therefore, servicescape may also provide a material setting through which stakeholders experience both the NPO and its internal social bonds. Environments that foster comfort, inclusion and interaction can support feelings of belonging towards the organisation and the people through whom it is experienced. Consequently, the findings position servicescape as more than a functional background to nonprofit service delivery, as it can serve as a tangible representation of the nonprofit brand through which otherwise intangible organisational qualities, including professionalism, care and inclusion, are materially observable to stakeholders. This extends the role of servicescape within NBRs from a service-delivery attribute to a relational cue through which stakeholders interpret the NPO's values and qualities.

6.3.3.4 The Nonprofit Brand as a Relational and Symbolic Signal

The findings highlighted the nonprofit brand's role in shaping how stakeholders recognise, interpret, and relate to NPOs. Across interviews, participants identified several elements perceived to distinguish NPOs, including cause, mission, values, and visual aspects such as name and logo. Prior research suggests that nonprofit brands are strongly associated with moral purpose, social mission and value alignment (Stride, 2006; Stride and Lee, 2007). Consistent with this perspective,

participants used brand-related cues to recognise NPOs' societal contributions and interpret what they represented and how they differed from other NPOs.

Beyond enhancing recognition and knowledge, nonprofit brands also informed participants' judgements of credibility, trustworthiness and legitimacy. Where stakeholders have limited ability to evaluate organisational impact directly, the brand may provide a signal through which they interpret organisational qualities and reduce perceived uncertainty (Laidler-Kylander et al., 2007; Ritchie et al., 1999). This suggests that effective use of brand elements may therefore support credibility, stakeholder confidence and relationship formation (Hankinson, 2000; Keller et al., 2010). In this sense, the nonprofit brand operates as a relational gateway by providing stakeholders with an initial basis for recognising and evaluating the organisation.

The analysis also revealed that appealing visual identity, distinctive logos, and clear naming conventions shaped participants' mental images of NPOs and enhanced recognition of organisational causes and missions. This was evident in organisations such as Ithra and Al-Mawaddah, where participants associated brand names with social impact and societal contributions. Conversely, including the term "charitable" in some nonprofit brand names generated negative connotations, with participants associating it with low-status organisations, donation-dependent models, or limited service scope. This created fixed public perceptions and challenged NPOs seeking to charge fees for services such as workshops or programmes. These findings indicate that visual and verbal brand elements can shape how stakeholders interpret the organisation and assess its distinctiveness, relevance and alignment with their expectations. Consequently, visual identity may contribute to how an NPO

communicates its social mission, organisational direction and values to stakeholders (Voeth and Herbst, 2008).

Another salient element discussed across interviews concerned NPO services and programmes. Participants considered these services and programmes when evaluating particular NPOs, suggesting that the nonprofit brand is experienced not only through symbolic or visual elements but also through the organisation's substantive activities and offerings. In this sense, nonprofit brands may also operate as decision-making signals, consistent with Mitchell and Clark's (2021) conclusion that nonprofit brands can influence volunteer involvement. Prior research further indicates that brand distinctiveness supports identification and fosters loyalty, advocacy, and emotional attachment (Stokburger-Sauer et al., 2012).

Previous research suggests that organisational brand can support identification by communicating meanings, missions and values with which stakeholders may align their self-concepts (Sargeant et al., 2000; Stride, 2006). As a result, nonprofit brands that are perceived to reflect personally endorsed values may provide a symbolic basis for stakeholder alignment and identity expression (Stride and Lee, 2007). In this sense, the nonprofit brand can provide a symbolic frame through which stakeholders interpret the organisational mission, values and social purpose. These interpretations may, in turn, inform judgements of organisational credibility and legitimacy, particularly in contexts where organisations are evaluated against strong moral expectations (Stride, 2006; Nunes et al., 2024).

Taken together, the findings suggest that nonprofit brands operate as more than a marker of recognition. They function as symbolic and relational signals through which stakeholders infer organisational qualities such as credibility and assess whether the organisation reflects values with which they can align. Their relational significance, therefore, lies not simply in differentiating the organisation, but in providing meanings through which stakeholders interpret the organisation and its relevance to their own values and identities.

6.3.4 Outcomes of Stakeholders' Nonprofit Brand Bonds

The findings indicate that NBRs are associated with a range of behavioural and psychological outcomes for stakeholders. These outcomes were particularly evident in accounts characterised by stronger organisational identification and perceived alignment between stakeholders' values and the nonprofit brand's mission, cause, activities or services. While previous brand relationship research has linked strong relational bonds to outcomes such as loyalty, advocacy, commitment, and continued engagement, the present study suggests that, within the nonprofit context, relational outcomes may also include belonging, gratitude, personal fulfilment, and well-being.

6.3.4.1 Loyalty, Advocacy and Prolonged Engagement

The findings suggest that relationships with nonprofit brands were associated with various behavioural expressions through which stakeholders supported, advocated for, and remained connected to NPOs. Fournier (1998), for instance, associates strong brand bonds with enduring commitment and relationship maintenance, while later studies link brand or organisational identification with advocacy, loyalty and

supportive behaviours (Bhattacharya et al., 1995; Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003; Monnot et al., 2009; Stokburger-Sauer et al., 2012; Tuškej et al., 2013). Similarly, Pulh et al. (2019) found that symbolic and experiential bonds with heritage brands can lead to advocacy, ambassadorship, volunteering, and collaborations. Although these studies were not situated within a nonprofit context, they suggest that a strong relational bond can be associated with supportive actions towards the focal brand.

Within the nonprofit context examined here, these behavioural outcomes took the form of support that extends beyond the purchase and consumption-related behaviours commonly emphasised in commercial branding research. Advocacy was particularly evident in participants' accounts of recommending nonprofit brands to others, promoting them within personal networks, defending their reputations and continuing to support them after formal involvement had ended. These behaviours align with nonprofit relationship research linking stronger organisational relationships to positive recommendations, continued affiliation, and stakeholder commitment (Arnett et al., 2003; Waters, 2011; Sanzo et al., 2015). In the present study, these behaviours were particularly evident in stronger relationships characterised by identification and value congruence, suggesting that advocacy may reflect stakeholders' relational connection to the nonprofit brand.

Loyalty also emerged as a prominent behavioural outcome. In BR research, loyalty has often been conceptualised as one manifestation of strong relational attachment (Fournier, 1998; Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003). Nonprofit scholarship has similarly identified loyalty as an outcome associated with positive stakeholder relationships, often alongside trust, commitment and satisfaction (Sargeant and Lee, 2004; Shabbir

et al., 2007). This study extends this understanding by showing that loyalty in a nonprofit context may be expressed not only through continued participation but also through a willingness to remain psychologically connected to the organisation, return when opportunities arise, and continue supporting it across different forms of involvement.

The findings also highlight that continued engagement could represent a significant behavioural outcome within a nonprofit context. Stakeholders have described sustained involvement over time, including remaining connected to the organisation even after programme completion, volunteering repeatedly, or maintaining informal ties with organisational actors and communities. This aligns with Mitchell and Clark's (2021) argument that stakeholders' relational bonds with nonprofit brands can be associated with enduring patterns of support and involvement. The present findings similarly indicate that stronger NBRs may involve relational continuity extending beyond a single episode of participation.

Collectively, these findings indicate that stronger NBRs are associated with behavioural expressions, including loyalty, advocacy and continued engagement. While existing brand relationship research recognises these outcomes, their expression in the nonprofit context reflects the forms of participation available to nonprofit stakeholders, including volunteering, continued programme involvement, recommendation, reputational advocacy, and ongoing informal support. These findings, therefore, extend understanding of relational outcomes by showing how established BR outcomes are expressed through forms of stakeholder support that can continue beyond formal participation in the NPO.

6.3.4.2 Belonging, Gratitude, and Personal Fulfilment

Along with behavioural outcomes, the findings also highlight several psychological outcomes associated with NBRs. Participants frequently described feelings of belonging, gratitude and personal fulfilment in connection with their involvement and relationships with nonprofit brands. These experiences appeared particularly prominent among stakeholders whose accounts reflected identity-based relational bonds. One significant outcome identified in the current study was a sense of belonging. Participants often described this as feeling part of a community, particularly when they interacted regularly with EMPs, VOLs, DBs, or programme participants. This sense of belonging was closely associated with emotional attachment to the organisation and its internal social environment. These findings are consistent with OID theory, which stresses that identification fosters a sense of oneness with, or belonging to, the organisation (Ashforth and Mael, 1989). They also align with Bhattacharya et al. (1995) and Bhattacharya and Sen (2003), who argued that identification with an organisation could lead to psychological attachment and supportive orientation towards the organisation.

The significance of belonging in the current study suggests that NBRs may involve more than emotional closeness to the nonprofit brand as a symbolic entity; they may also be socially embedded in stakeholders' relationships with the people and internal groups through which the organisation is experienced. This aligns with the broader insight from brand community research that BRs can be socially embedded and reinforced through interpersonal connections (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001; McAlexander et al., 2002). However, the present study does not require these internal organisational groups to be conceptualised as brand communities. Rather, it shows that belonging

within NBRs can involve both identification with the focal nonprofit brand and connection to its internal social environment. Within the nonprofit context examined in this study, this form of belonging was associated not only with connection to the organisation and its members but also with participation in a shared social purpose or cause.

Gratitude was another psychological outcome evident across stakeholder accounts. Participants frequently expressed appreciation for the opportunities, support, skills, and personal development gained through their relationships with NPOs. Gratitude was particularly evident where stakeholders perceived that the organisation had contributed positively to their lives or enabled meaningful experiences. Rather than treating gratitude as evidence of identification itself, the finding suggests that stakeholders may also evaluate NBRs in terms of personal and relational values. This aligns with relationship-based perspectives suggesting that perceived relational value can strengthen psychological connections with organisations (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003; Monnot et al., 2009).

Personal fulfilment was also evident and significant across stakeholder groups, as a psychological consequence associated with NBRs. Participants often framed their engagement with NPOs as meaningful, worthwhile, or socially valuable, particularly where their activities and involvement contributed to helping others or addressing social needs. This finding supports prior nonprofit research, which stresses that engagement with NPOs could yield personal benefits alongside organisational outcomes. For instance, Tanskanen and Danielsbacka (2016) reported that participation in prosocial activities such as donating time or money is associated with

higher subjective well-being, while Yau (2022) stated that volunteering may improve psychological well-being and support self-growth. This study extends the literature by suggesting that psychological benefits, such as fulfilment and well-being, may also be understood through the meanings stakeholders attach to their relationships with a nonprofit brand, not only as outcomes of volunteering or prosocial participation. This distinction is theoretically significant because much nonprofit research has linked psychological outcomes to activities such as volunteering, donating, and stakeholder participation. The findings suggest that participation alone may not fully explain these experiences; the meaning people attach to their involvement with the organisation may also be important. For participants who viewed their involvement as meaningful and relevant to their identity, personal fulfilment was intertwined with their relationship with the NPO and its social purpose. This highlights the importance of examining nonprofit involvement not merely as a pattern of participation but also as a relational and psychological experience.

Overall, the findings indicate that stronger NBRs can be associated with psychological experiences, including belonging, gratitude and personal fulfilment, particularly where relationships are characterised by identification, shared values and relational meaning. While commercial BR research has established psychological outcomes associated with self-expression, identity and emotional attachment, this study foregrounds additional meanings linked to collective social purpose, contribution and nonprofit involvement. Therefore, the findings extend existing BR understanding by demonstrating how psychological outcomes within NBRs may be intertwined with stakeholders' experiences of social contribution, organisational belonging and personally meaningful involvement.

6.3.4.3 Well-Being and Meaning-Making

An additional outcome associated with NBRs concerned stakeholders' experiences of well-being and meaning. Several participants described their involvement with NPOs as contributing positively to their emotional well-being and sense of purpose, particularly when they experienced engagement as meaningful, socially valuable, or personally transformative. These accounts can be interpreted through the concept of eudaimonic well-being, which emphasises meaning, personal growth, and self-realisation rather than pleasure alone (Ryff and Keyes, 1995; Lee et al., 2020; Dodds et al., 2021). Participants' descriptions of their involvement as meaningful, fulfilling, and connected to broader values or life purpose suggest that their experiences involved not only positive emotions or enjoyment (Diener et al., 1999; Gallagher et al., 2009; Lee et al., 2020), but also growth, contribution, and personal significance. These outcomes are consistent with eudaimonic accounts of well-being, which emphasise meaning and self-realisation rather than pleasure alone (Ryff and Keyes, 1995; Lee et al., 2020; Dodds et al., 2021).

This interpretation aligns with prior nonprofit research, which identified that participation in activities within an NPO context can enhance subjective well-being (Tanskanen and Danielsbacka, 2016), while other investigations reported that volunteering supports psychological well-being and self-growth (Yau, 2022). The current study extends this literature by suggesting that these psychological experiences may also be understood in relation to the strength and meaning of stakeholders' relationships with NPOs, rather than solely to participation itself. This suggests that the well-being associated with involvement in NPOs may relate not only to the activity undertaken but also to the relational meaning stakeholders attach to their involvement with the organisation.

The findings also demonstrate that OID provides a useful theoretical perspective for interpreting the association between stronger identity-based NBRs and stakeholders' accounts of well-being. Accounts characterised by stronger organisational identification also frequently included feelings of fulfilment, gratitude and belonging. This aligns with identification research emphasising self-definition and belonging, while also linking identification to relational consequences such as empathy and attachment (Monnot et al., 2009). Where stakeholders perceived alignment between their values and the nonprofit brand's mission, involvement with the NPO could be experienced as consistent with their self-concept and personally meaningful. This offers one possible explanation for why stronger identity-relevant NBRs were associated with accounts of fulfilment and well-being.

This discussion is particularly relevant in the nonprofit context examined in the present study, where participants frequently understood their involvement in terms of social contribution, moral purpose and helping others. Thus, well-being may be associated not only with participation itself but also with stakeholders' perception that their involvement is meaningful, socially valuable and consistent with personally important values.

Collectively, the findings suggest an association between stronger NBRs and stakeholders' accounts of well-being and meaning. These accounts encompassed positive emotional experiences as well as meaning-oriented experiences involving fulfilment, personal growth, contribution and a sense of purpose. Thus, the findings extend understanding of NBR outcomes by suggesting that the relational significance of nonprofit involvement may include stakeholders' experiences of meaning and

personal well-being, in addition to the behavioural outcomes typically associated with strong BRs.

6.3.4.4 Tolerance and Relationship Maintenance

Another outcome associated with stronger NBRs concerns stakeholders' tolerance of occasional disappointment, frustration or dissatisfaction, and their willingness to maintain the relationship despite these experiences. The findings demonstrate that participants with stronger relational bonds sometimes remained connected to the nonprofit brand despite service shortcomings, programme limitations or negative interactions. In commercial BR research, stronger bonds may persist despite episodes of dissatisfaction or relational strain (Fournier, 1998). The current study suggests a comparable capacity for relationship maintenance within nonprofit settings, particularly in stronger identity-based relationships.

These findings could be explained in terms of alignment and self-concept, with stakeholders perceiving the nonprofit brand as aligned with their values or as part of their self-concept. When stakeholders perceived the nonprofit brand as aligned with important personal values or aspects of self-concept, isolated negative experiences did not necessarily invalidate the broader organisational bond. Some participants appeared able to maintain the focal organisational bond while distancing themselves from a particular service, event or organisational actor. This interpretation is consistent with OID scholarship demonstrating that individuals may hold complex or differentiated orientations towards an organisation rather than uniformly positive identification (Kreiner and Ashforth, 2004).

In the current study, these accounts are more directly interpreted as evidence of relational tolerance and maintenance than of resilience in a stronger sense. Stakeholders with stronger bonds were not necessarily uncritical of the organisation; rather, some maintained the broader relationship despite particular negative experiences. Such tolerance could represent one condition through which relationship resilience could develop, but the present findings did not examine relational recovery over time and therefore cannot establish resilience as a longitudinal process. Nevertheless, the findings extend understanding of NBR outcomes by showing that stronger relational bonds may coexist with criticism and dissatisfaction, and that negative experiences do not necessarily lead to the termination of stakeholder-nonprofit brand bonds.

Taken together, the findings suggest that NBRs can take different forms and are shaped by both stakeholder-related and organisational factors. OID provided a significant mechanism for understanding these relational bonds, particularly where stakeholders develop identity-based or instrumental-identification bonds with nonprofit brands. However, the presence of exchange-oriented relationships indicates that OID does not fully explain all forms of NBR, as some relationships may exist where identification is weak or minimal. Therefore, the three relational forms identified in the present study differ not only in relationship strength, but also in the role and strength of OID within these relationships. These findings provide the basis for discussing the study's theoretical contributions in the following section.

6.4 Contributions and Implications

6.4.1 Theoretical and Methodological Contributions

The study offers several important contributions to understanding brand relationships. It broadens the concept of brand relationships beyond predominantly commercial and consumer-brand interactions by showing how relational bonds can also develop between multiple stakeholders and nonprofit brands. This indicates that NBRs are shaped within a context characterised by social mission, moral values and multiple stakeholder relationships. The study therefore extends BR scholarship by examining relational processes beyond predominantly consumption-based settings and showing how organisational mission, shared values and social purpose can become relevant to stakeholder-brand relationships.

Additionally, the present study advances understanding of OID by showing its explanatory value within NBRs. OID was particularly useful for interpreting identity-based and instrumental-identification relationships, where stakeholders described different degrees of alignment, belonging and connection between their own values and those associated with the nonprofit brand. However, OID also has a limitation when applied to the full range of NBRs identified in the current study. As OID primarily explains relationships involving some degree of self-definition, belonging or value alignment with an organisation, it is less able to explain exchange-oriented bonds in which identification is weak or minimal. The present study addresses this limitation by positioning OID as an important explanatory mechanism within NBRs rather than as a necessary condition for all NBRs. Identifying exchange-oriented bonds extends the framework beyond relationships explained primarily through identification and shows

that relational involvement with a nonprofit brand may also exist where the relationship is predominantly transactional.

The study also contributes to the conceptualisation of NBRs by identifying three analytically distinct relational forms: identity-based, instrumental-identification, and exchange-oriented relationships. These forms demonstrate that NBRs vary not only in emotional intensity or relational strength but also in the role and strength of organisational identification within the bond. Identity-based bonds involve stronger identification and emotional attachment, whereas instrumental-identification relationships show that some degree of identification coexists with more conditional, benefit-oriented involvement and comparatively limited emotional attachment. Exchange-oriented relationships further establish the lower boundary of identification within NBRs, demonstrating that a relational bond with a nonprofit brand may exist even when organisational identification is weak or minimal. Thus, branding scholars can understand NBR variation not simply in terms of stronger or weaker bonds, but also by the different role identification plays in constituting these bonds.

The study also extends assumptions developed predominantly within commercial BR research. While commercial BR scholarship has established that brands can carry symbolic and identity-related meanings, this research shows that, in the nonprofit context, these meanings can also connect to a nonprofit brand's mission, social purpose, and perceived moral values. Furthermore, the findings show that relational outcomes such as loyalty, advocacy, and continued engagement can be expressed through forms of participation that extend beyond purchasing or consumption, including volunteering, continued programme involvement, recommendation, and

ongoing support. In addition, stakeholders' relationships with nonprofit brands were not experienced only as dyadic stakeholder-brand bonds but could also be shaped by interactions with internal organisational groups and the wider social environment through which the NPO was experienced. Consequently, the study does not reject the conceptualisation of commercial BR but extends its application by showing how established relational concepts take different forms within a mission-driven, multi-stakeholder organisational context.

The study also contextualises NBRs within the Saudi setting and highlights the role of religious and cultural meanings in shaping stakeholders' interpretations of nonprofit brands. In particular, religious identity operated as a moral interpretive lens through which some participants understood nonprofit brands' causes, evaluated organisational conduct and legitimacy, and interpreted the meaning of their own involvement. This contributes to BR research by showing that religious identity may play a relational role beyond general cultural context, shaping the moral meanings through which stakeholders interpret their bonds with nonprofit brands. It also extends insights from Islamic branding beyond predominantly commercial and consumption contexts by demonstrating the relevance of religious meaning within stakeholder-nonprofit brand bonds.

Methodologically, the study shows the value of a qualitative, interpretive and multi-stakeholder approach for examining NBRs. Semi-structured interviews enabled stakeholders to describe the meanings, experiences, and interpretations associated with their relational bonds with nonprofit brands, while including EMPs, VOLs, and DBs enabled comparison across different stakeholder positions. This approach

supported the identification of variation in relationship forms, motivations and relational outcomes that might be challenging to capture through an approach focused on a single stakeholder group. As a result, the study contributed methodologically by demonstrating the value of exploring NBRs through multiple stakeholder perspectives within a qualitative and context-sensitive research design.

6.4.2 Implications

The findings of this study carry several implications for NPOs, policymakers, and practitioners operating within the nonprofit sector, while some implications may also be relevant to commercial organisations seeking to develop stakeholder relationships. The findings indicate that NBRs are shaped by stakeholder-related factors, organisational cues and different degrees of organisational identification. This suggests that relationship-building approaches should recognise differences in stakeholders' motives, values and forms of engagement rather than assuming that all stakeholders develop similar relationships with an organisation. Some of these implications are particularly relevant to NPOs because of their social missions and moral positioning, while others have broader relevance to organisations operating in commercial contexts.

First, the study highlights that religious identity may operate as a moral interpretive lens through which stakeholders evaluate nonprofit brands' causes, organisational conduct and legitimacy, and the meaning of their own engagement. NPOs operating in contexts where religious values are relevant to stakeholders may therefore benefit from ensuring that communication, programme design and stakeholder engagement are sensitive to these values and consistent with the organisation's actual mission and

practices. This implication is particularly relevant to mission-driven NPOs operating in religiously salient contexts, although sensitivity to stakeholders' religious and moral values may also matter for commercial organisations serving such communities.

Second, the findings show that stakeholders may form identity-based, instrumental-identification, or exchange-oriented bonds. This suggests that NPOs should not assume all stakeholder relationships rely on strong emotional attachment or identification. Instead, they may benefit from engagement approaches that respond to different stakeholder motives, offering opportunities for value-based involvement alongside practical benefits such as skill development, experience, or access to services. Recognising the diversity of stakeholder motives is also relevant to commercial organisations, but is especially important for NPOs, where participation may take the form of volunteering, service receipt, employment, or cause-related involvement, not just a conventional customer relationship.

Third, the study underscores the strategic significance of the nonprofit brand, including its visual, symbolic, and narrative elements. As a result, NPOs should ensure that visual and verbal brand elements, including organisational names, logos, and other identity cues, clearly and consistently communicate the organisation's mission and social purpose. This may be particularly significant for NPOs where stakeholders use brand-related cues to assess organisational credibility, legitimacy, and alignment with social or moral expectations. The importance of a coherent and distinctive brand identity is not unique to the nonprofit sector and is also relevant to commercial organisations. Nevertheless, for NPOs, brand identity may carry additional

significance, as it communicates the organisation's differentiation as well as its social mission and perceived moral positioning.

Fourth, digital platforms, including social media and volunteering platforms, provided important touchpoints through which participants encountered NPOs, accessed information, and engaged with organisational activities. Thus, NPOs may benefit from maintaining accessible and responsive digital communication, using these channels to increase visibility and to communicate organisational activities, social impact, and opportunities for involvement transparently. Furthermore, effective digital communication is equally significant and relevant to commercial organisations; however, its nonprofit significance lies in communicating social impact, facilitating volunteering or participation, and supporting stakeholder confidence where organisational outcomes may be difficult to evaluate directly.

Fifth, the findings also highlight the importance of organisational reputation in stakeholders' assessments of credibility, trustworthiness and legitimacy. Therefore, NPOs may benefit from transparent communication about organisational activities and impact, together with opportunities for stakeholder dialogue and feedback. At a sector level, regulatory and sectoral bodies may also have a role in supporting standards of transparency, accountability and ethical conduct. Additionally, reputation, transparency and accountability are relevant to commercial organisations, but they may carry particular significance for NPOs, given that stakeholders evaluate these organisations in relation to their stated social purposes and expectations concerning the responsible use of resources.

Sixth, as employees and service providers may represent the organisation through stakeholders' everyday experiences, consistency in staff conduct, professional standards, internal communication and stated brand values may help build trust and reinforce perceived organisational authenticity. NPOs may therefore benefit from cultivating inclusive internal environments that encourage positive interactions among EMPs, VOLs and other stakeholders, while strengthening stakeholders' sense of belonging. Employee behaviour and organisational culture also apply to commercial service organisations too, but may be especially significant for NPOs: employees and volunteers work together around a shared social mission, and their interpersonal interactions can become closely connected to how stakeholders perceive the organisation.

Finally, the findings also highlight the practical importance of the servicescape. NPOs that offer services or volunteering opportunities in physical settings should consider whether their facilities convey professionalism, care, and inclusion, and whether they provide suitable spaces for stakeholder interaction and participation. Attention to functional and welcoming environments may foster positive stakeholder experiences and perceptions of NPOs. However, the physical environment may also hold particular symbolic significance for NPOs, serving as a tangible representation of organisational care, social purpose, and professionalism.

Taken together, some of these implications reflect characteristics that are especially important in nonprofit contexts, including social mission, religious and moral meaning, multiple stakeholder roles, and expectations of organisational legitimacy. Other implications, such as effective communication, a coherent brand identity, reputation

management, servicescape, and positive stakeholder interactions, also apply to commercial organisations. In NPOs, however, stakeholders shape their significance through the social and moral purposes through which they interpret and evaluate these organisations.

6.5 Study Limitations and Future Research

This study focused on three stakeholder groups, EMPs, VOLs, and DBs, and the findings may not apply to other nonprofit stakeholders, particularly donors. DBs were also less represented in the sample and were mainly involved in educational programmes or courses. As a result, the findings may not fully capture the experiences of beneficiaries receiving other forms of support, such as financial or material assistance. Future research could include a broader range of DBs and other stakeholder groups, especially donors, to determine whether the relationship forms and relational processes identified in this study are also evident across different types of nonprofit involvement.

The study was conducted within the specific cultural and institutional context of Saudi Arabia, which may limit the transferability of the findings to settings that are culturally, religiously or institutionally different. This is particularly relevant to the role of religious identity in this study, as the significance and expression of religious and moral meaning may vary across cultural contexts. As a result, cross-cultural research could examine whether religion operates similarly within NBRs in other cultural and religious settings, and whether the three relationship forms identified in this study are evident across different nonprofit environments.

As an interpretive qualitative study, the research prioritised depth and information richness rather than statistical representativeness. Accordingly, the findings offer contextual and theoretical understanding rather than population-level generalisations. Future research could build on the findings using quantitative or mixed-methods designs, by developing and validating measures to examine NBR forms and related relational factors in larger, more diverse samples.

A further limitation concerns changes in individuals' stakeholder relationships over time. Although participants' accounts suggested that NBRs may shift as stakeholder involvement and relational experiences evolve, the study cannot establish whether stakeholders move between identity-based, instrumental-identification and exchange-oriented relationships, or whether such movement follows any particular direction. Therefore, longitudinal research could examine how individual NBRs develop, strengthen, weaken or end across different stages of stakeholder involvement.

An additional limitation concerns OID's explanatory scope. Although OID provided a valuable theoretical lens for interpreting identity-based and instrumental-identification bonds, it was less able to explain exchange-oriented NBRs where identification was weak or minimal. OID should therefore be understood as a significant but not comprehensive explanation of all forms of NBR identified in the present study. Future research could examine additional theoretical perspectives that may better explain predominantly transactional or exchange-oriented NBRs and investigate how these perspectives interact with OID across different relationship forms.

Future research could also examine the relationship between organisational identification and nonprofit brand identity to better understand how stakeholders interpret and incorporate organisational brand meanings into their relationships with nonprofit brands.

Finally, the study relied primarily on participants' self-reported accounts of their bonds with nonprofit brands and related experiences. Although these accounts offer valuable insight into stakeholders' interpretations and meanings, they may not fully reflect how relational behaviours unfold in practice. Future research could therefore combine interviews with observational, behavioural, or organisational data to examine how reported NBRs align with stakeholders' actual engagement patterns.

6.6 Reflections on The Research Journey

My prior professional and voluntary engagement with NPOs provided an initial insider perspective on the structural and operational challenges faced by the sector. Working as an employee in marketing and public relations following the completion of my bachelor's degree enabled me to gain a nuanced understanding of the internal environment of NPOs, including organisational processes, interdepartmental dynamics, and the practical constraints shaping everyday operations. In particular, I became aware of the limited budgets allocated to marketing functions, the complexities arising from cross-departmental coordination, and the persistent perception of marketing as a purely promotional activity rather than a strategic organisational function. I also observed a tendency among some NPOs to attempt to "be everything to everyone", which often resulted in strategic instability and less clearly defined organisational positioning.

These professional experiences were further shaped by the broader societal context in which NPOs operate in Saudi Arabia. I witnessed how societal perceptions, particularly those informed by Islamic identity, shaped attitudes towards nonprofit causes, influencing how religious and non-religious initiatives were evaluated and supported. This context appeared to affect not only public engagement but also the ability of NPOs to secure support from donors and institutional funding bodies. These observations prompted a growing curiosity about how the nonprofit sector is perceived by society and how such perceptions shape relationships between stakeholders and NPOs. This interest intensified after I volunteered with an NPO following the completion of my master's degree in marketing. At this stage, I began to engage with the sector through a more explicitly academic lens, which ultimately motivated my doctoral research. This progression marked a shift from practitioner-based curiosity to a theoretically informed inquiry into NPOs, branding, and stakeholder relationships, and laid the foundation for my PhD focus on brand relationships in the nonprofit context.

My positionality as a Saudi researcher, born and raised within an Islamic cultural context, inevitably influenced how I approached and interpreted the data. This positionality became particularly salient during interviews, where participants, especially external stakeholders such as VOLs and DBs, frequently framed their evaluations of NPOs through a religious lens. Religion became particularly prominent in participants' accounts as an interpretive lens through which NPOs were evaluated, trusted or questioned. Through these interactions, I became increasingly aware of a gap between some participants' understandings of the nonprofit sector and the broader range of activities and objectives undertaken by NPOs. In particular,

organisations labelled as “charitable” were often automatically associated with religious causes, reinforcing narrow perceptions of the sector. My cultural familiarity enabled me to contextualise these narratives, interpret their underlying meanings, and engage more sensitively with participants. It also facilitated access and rapport, allowing participants to feel more comfortable and open during interviews. At the same time, this familiarity required continued reflexivity to avoid treating culturally familiar meanings as self-evident or assuming participants interpreted them the same way I did.

The decision to focus on NPOs in Saudi Arabia was also informed by my sustained, albeit intermittent, involvement in the sector between 2012 and 2018, both as a volunteer and as an employee. Despite periods of disengagement during this time, this prolonged exposure allowed me to develop a contextual understanding of the sector’s norms, challenges, and evolving institutional landscape. This familiarity enhanced my ability to interpret participants’ accounts while remaining attentive to the need for critical distance.

Reflexivity was central throughout the research process. As a qualitative researcher, I engaged in continuous reflection over the four years of conducting this study. For instance, during the data collection phase, particularly after each interview, I reflected on how participants’ roles shaped their relationships with NPOs, why particular metaphors were used to describe these bonds, and how interview questions could be refined or tailored to different stakeholder groups. Reflexivity also extended to the transcription and translation processes, which were time-intensive but analytically

valuable. Engaging deeply with the data during these stages strengthened my interpretive sensitivity and sharpened my analytical insights.

Throughout the research journey, I became increasingly aware of the conceptual complexity of the brand relationship phenomenon. Despite extensive scholarly efforts, brand relationships remain theoretically fragmented, encompassing multiple constructs and being positioned variably across studies as either a core relational phenomenon or as a consequential outcome. This diversity offers opportunities for theoretical development, yet it also presents challenges due to the absence of a unified definition, an agreed theoretical framework, or standardised dimensions. These challenges were further compounded by the complexity of the nonprofit sector itself, where stakeholder relationships vary according to role, personal characteristics, and organisational practices. This reinforced the importance of adopting an interpretive and flexible analytical approach.

The data also challenged some of my initial assumptions, particularly regarding the role of religious identity. While I entered the research aware of the importance of the Saudi context, I had not anticipated the extent to which religious meanings would shape participants' interpretations of nonprofit organisations and their own involvement. This encouraged me to consider religion more explicitly as a moral interpretive lens rather than treating it simply as part of the broader cultural context. At the same time, participants' accounts of value alignment, belonging, and self-relevance led me to engage more deeply with OID as a theoretical lens for interpreting identity-relevant NBRs.

The analytical process also changed my understanding of OID's explanatory role. While OID helped me interpret many of the stronger identity-relevant NBRs described by participants, the exchange-oriented relationships showed that not every NBR involved meaningful organisational identification. This requires me to recognise OID's limitations and treat it as an important explanatory mechanism within NBRs, rather than an explanation for every form of stakeholders' bonds with nonprofit brands.

Data collection presented notable challenges, particularly in securing organisational cooperation. Of the 23 NPOs approached to act as gatekeepers, only two agreed, and despite support from one organisation, this route did not ultimately result in participant recruitment. This necessitated alternative recruitment strategies and required flexibility in adapting the data collection plan. These challenges reinforced the importance of adaptability in qualitative research.

Overall, this study reinforced my understanding of qualitative interpretive research as a co-constructed process between researcher and participants. While participants provide the foundation of the research, the researcher is responsible for ethically representing these narratives and situating them within a coherent theoretical framework. This journey enhanced my methodological flexibility, analytical skills, and professional development, equipping me with competencies in qualitative analysis, project management, and scholarly dissemination. It also shaped my aspiration to contribute to both academic research and the nonprofit sector, bridging theory and practice.

6.7 Conclusion

This study explored how BRs develop and are understood within the nonprofit context. In doing so, the study extends the investigation of BR beyond its predominantly commercial focus and highlights its relevance to relationships between nonprofit brands and their stakeholders.

The findings show that NBRs are not uniform and can take different forms. The study identified three analytically distinct forms: identity-based, instrumental-identification, and exchange-oriented relationships. These bonds vary in strength and in the nature of OID, from stronger identification and emotional attachment in identity-based NBRs to weak or minimal identification in exchange-oriented bonds. This indicates that relationships with nonprofit brands do not necessarily depend on strong emotional attachment or identification; they may also be conditional, instrumental, or primarily transactional.

The study also showed OID's explanatory value in understanding NBRs, particularly when relationships involve value alignment, belonging, and identity relevance. However, the findings also reveal a limit to its explanatory role. While OID offers a significant way to understand identity-based and instrumental-identification relationships, exchange-oriented relational bonds show that NBRs can also exist when OID is weak or minimal. OID should therefore be viewed as an important explanatory mechanism within NBRs, rather than a necessary condition for all stakeholders' NBRs.

More broadly, the study extends predominantly commercial perspectives on BR by showing how established relational processes can operate within a mission-driven, multi-stakeholder context. In NBRs, stakeholders may relate to the nonprofit brand through its mission, values, social purpose, and the internal organisational groups

through which the brand is experienced. Relational outcomes such as loyalty, advocacy, and continued engagement may also be expressed through volunteering, programme involvement, recommendations, and other forms of support that extend beyond purchasing or consumption. The Saudi context further shows that cultural and religious meanings can shape how stakeholders interpret the nonprofit brand and their relationships with it. In particular, religious identity can serve as a moral interpretive lens through which stakeholders understand nonprofit brands' causes, organisational conduct, and the meaning of their own involvement.

Overall, this study contributes to BR scholarship by showing that NBRs differ not only in relational strength and emotional intensity, but also in the role and strength of OID within the relationship. By identifying identity-based, instrumental-identification, and exchange-oriented relationships, the study offers a more distinct understanding of how stakeholders relate to nonprofit brands and clarifies both the explanatory value and the limitations of OID in these relationships. In doing so, the research extends understanding of BR in a nonprofit, multi-stakeholder, and culturally embedded context, while providing a foundation for future research across diverse nonprofit and cultural settings.

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APPENDIX 1: STAGE 1 OF CODING

Name	Description
1. Adapt and adhere to society's culture and religion	
2. Adhere to the society's need	
3. Idea	
4. Advocacy	
5. Care about the NPO	
6. voice of the organization	
7. Antecedents of the NPO BR	
8. Aura of the entity	maybe because it's affiliated with Aramco a strong, well-known, and trusted corporate brand, and maybe because it's something that fulfilled the need of the society, or maybe because it's distinctive and there's nothing like it "it places", " a very happening place".
9. Awareness of NPOs	
10. Advertisements	
11. Affiliation	
12. Age of the NPO	
13. Co-creation	
14. Collaborations	
15. Communication	
a. Communication obstacles	
16. Events	
17. Founders of NPOs	
18. Media	

Name	Description
19. Message of the NPO	
20. Obstacles of Awareness of NPOs	
a. Lack of awareness or education about the sector	
b. Lack of Knowledge of NPOs or the sector	
21. Reputation	
22. Social media	
a. Influencers	
23. Numerous ways of Awareness	
24. Visibility	
25. Visitations	
26. Voice for the NPO in the society	
27. WOM and reference groups	
28. benefit based relationship	
29. BR based on mutual benefit	
30. BR with indirect beneficiaries	
31. Brand perception	
32. Brands are not for NPOs	
33. Brand is a commercial thing	
34. The perception of brand effects the NPO BR	
35. Care about their beneficiaries	
36. Appreciate their beneficiaries	

Name	Description
37. Care about their employees	
38. Care about their volunteers	
39. characteristics of the NBRs	
40. Classification of NPOs	which classification is dominant?
41. Community	
42. Attachment to community= Attachment to NPO	Attachment to the NPO stems from the attachment to the community
43. Constant interaction	
44. Development of NPOs	
45. Different level of BR intensity with the same NPO based on the internal community	
46. Different strong brands	
47. Direct beneficiaries form of NBRs	
48. Distinctive features of the NPO	
49. Value to the society	
50. Donations	
51. Donation distribution	
52. Evidence of donations	
53. Educate the society	
54. emotional attachment	Psychological attachment
55. Emotional attachment to the community	
56. Emotional involvement with beneficiaries	

Name	Description
57. Evaluation of employees from beneficiaries	
58. Evidence of change	
59. Evolvement of NPOs in SA	
60. Evolvement of the NPO BR-less to more intense	
61. Exclusivity of cause	
62. exclusivity vs. inclusivity of NPOs	
63. Faith in the cause	
64. Form of NBRs	I need something from you, a one-time favour, so not a long-term relationship
65. Foundational vlues	
66. Credibility	
67. Integrity	
68. Transparency	
69. Trust	
70. fulfills the need of the society	It doesn't always have to be to help the needy or the disadvantaged, it's not only about helping it might be to educate or entertain or let people have fun
71. Contribution to the society	
72. Government & the third sector	
73. Monetization and supervision	
74. Human-like relationship	
75. Identity of the NPO	
76. Identity reflects the NPO	

Name	Description
77. Image of the NPO	
78. Indirect beneficiary-direct beneficiary- NPO BR	
79. Intense and emotional BR	
80. Internal community	
81. Cause is more important than the internal community	
82. Dedication to their work	
83. effect of internal community	
84. Founders of NPOs	
85. internal community mirror the values and morals of the NPO	Actions and behaviours of the internal community should mirror the values of the NPO
86. Internal community and the sustainability of NPOs	
87. Internal community the image of NPOs	
88. Internal environment	
89. NPO community of religious org. and religious views effect	
90. Involvement with the NPO	
91. Listening to beneficiaries	
92. loyalty to the NPO	
93. Giving back	
94. Gratefulness	NPO helped me
95. Length of the relationship	
96. Owing to the NPO	
97. Mutliple or multi-way NBRs	

Name	Description
98. Negative actions affect the whole sector	
99. NPO brand	
100. Name or brand mirrors the service of NPOs	
101. NPO identification (beyond logo)	
102. NPOs name	
103. Visuals	
104. NPO chosen for certain benefits	
105. NPO chosen for convenience	
106. NPO perception	
107. Conflict in NPOs perception	between the internal and external parties
108. Different views on NPOs	What it should and shouldn't be
109. Hypocrisy	
110. NPOs and the effect of the society's perception	
111. NPOs are sacred	
112. NPOs cause	
113. passionate about the cause	
114. NPOs need to evolve and develop	
115. NPOs promotional activities	

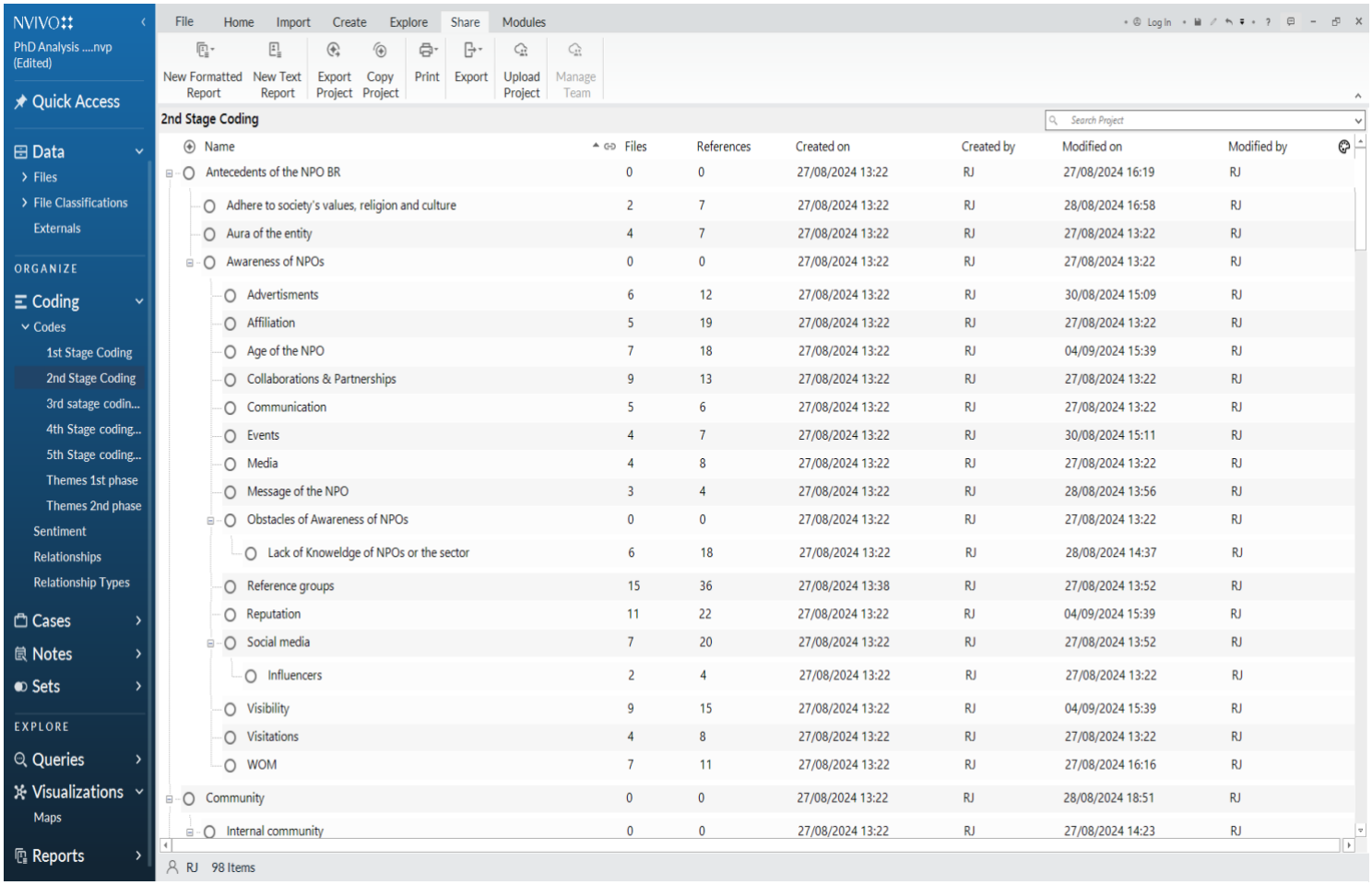
Name	Description
116. NPOs target groups	
117. Obstacles dealing with direct beneficiaries	
118. obstacles faced by NPOs	
119. Financial Obstacles	
120. Obstacles for NPOs development	
121. Obstacles of the establishment of the NPO BR	
122. Obstacles to create the NPO Brand	
123. One-sided relationship	
124. Outcome of involvement with the NPO	
125. outcome of volunteering	
126. Perception of NPOs or the sector	
127. For-profits vs. nonprofits	
128. NPOs across countries	
129. Perception of NPOs and the donations received	
130. SA NPOs Vs Western NPOs	
131. Personality and characteristics of beneficiaries	
132. NPOs choice based on their interests	

Name	Description
133. NPOs choice based on their qualification	
134. Proud society	
135. Qualification of the internal community	
136. Qualification of internal community	
137. Quality of service	
138. Professionalism of NPOs	
139. Relationship termination	
140. Relationship benefits	
141. Relationship maintenance	
142. Relationship Strength	
143. Relationship sustainability	
144. Relationship with the NPO	The cause or what they do
145. Sentimental	
146. Religious views	
147. Against commercialisation of NPOs	
148. NPOs perception affected by religious views or religion	
149. Philanthropy or benevolence	

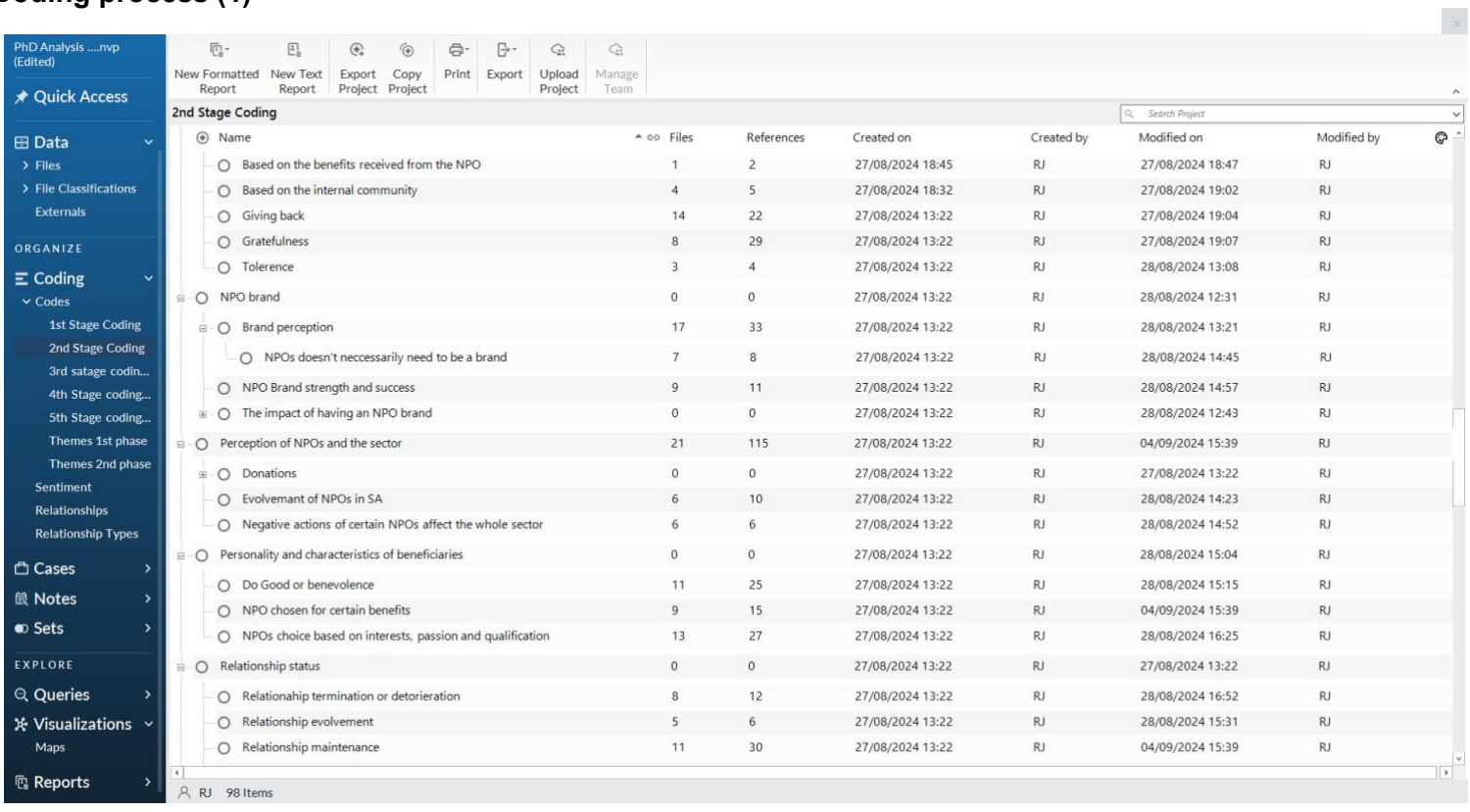
Name	Description
150. Pro using religious figure	
151. Spirituality and reward from Allah	
152. Scope of operation	
153. Self-brand identification	
154. Sense of belonging	
155. Sense of responsibility	
156. Service	
157. Dely in help or service	
158. Fees of NPOs	
159. Free services	
160. Programs of NPOs	
161. satisfaction	
162. Service matches the brand name or identity	
163. Service quality	
164. Servicescape	
165. A place is the image of the NPO	
166. Location	
167. Social identity	
168. Specialization of NPOs	It makes it easy for people to recognize them and understand their goal and orientation
169. Support from NPOs	
170. Monetary	

Name	Description
171. Moral or non-monetary	
172. Sustainability of NPOs	
173. Sustainable services	
174. System	
175. Tolerance	Deep involvement with the NPO overcomes challenges
176. Types of NPOs beneficiaries	
177. Typology of the BR	
178. Uncontrolled circumstances affected NBRs	
179. volunteering	
180. Exploitation of volunteers	
181. Perception of volunteering	
182. Reasons for volunteering	

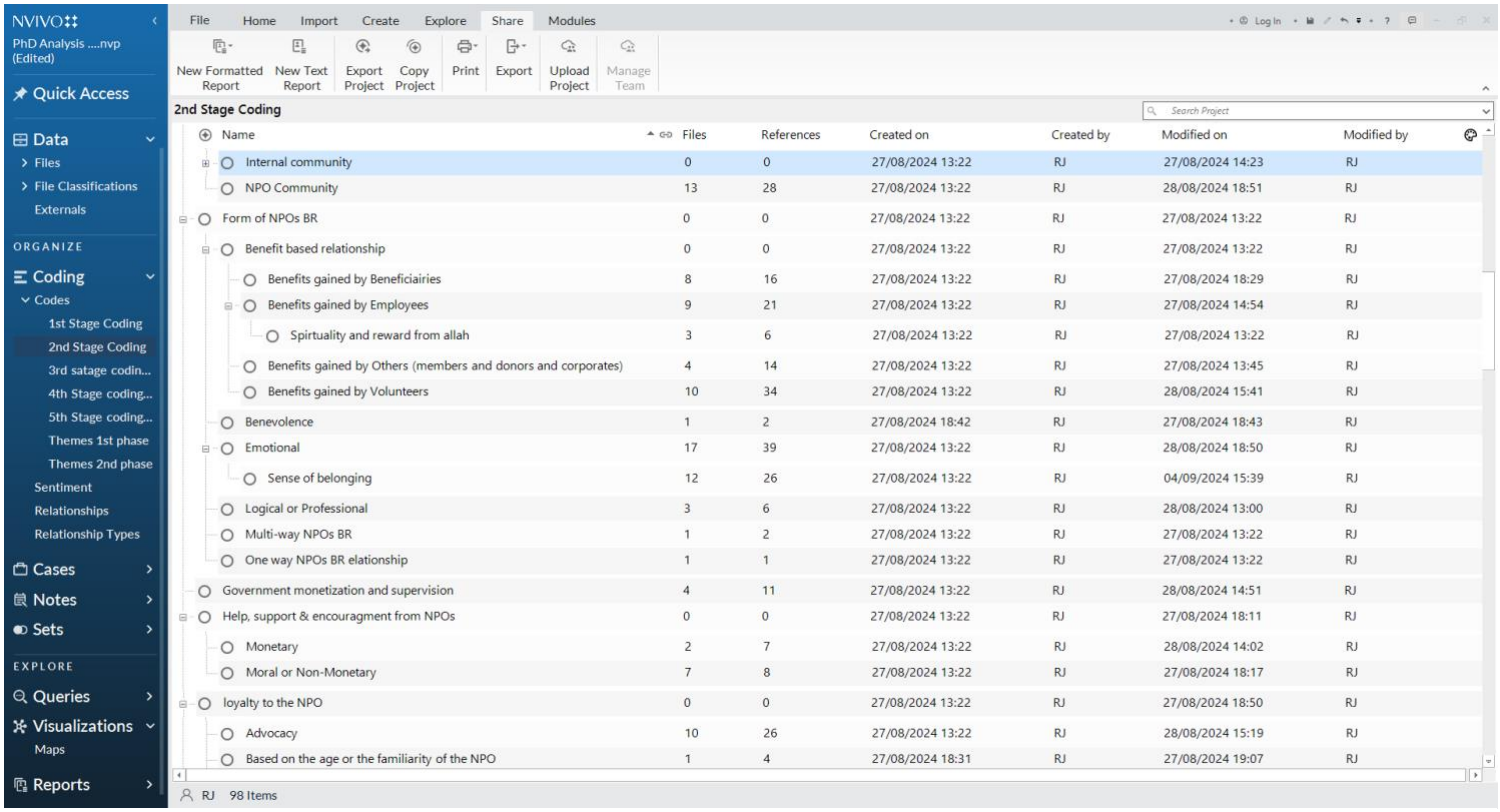
APPENDIX 2: CODING PROCESS (1-4)



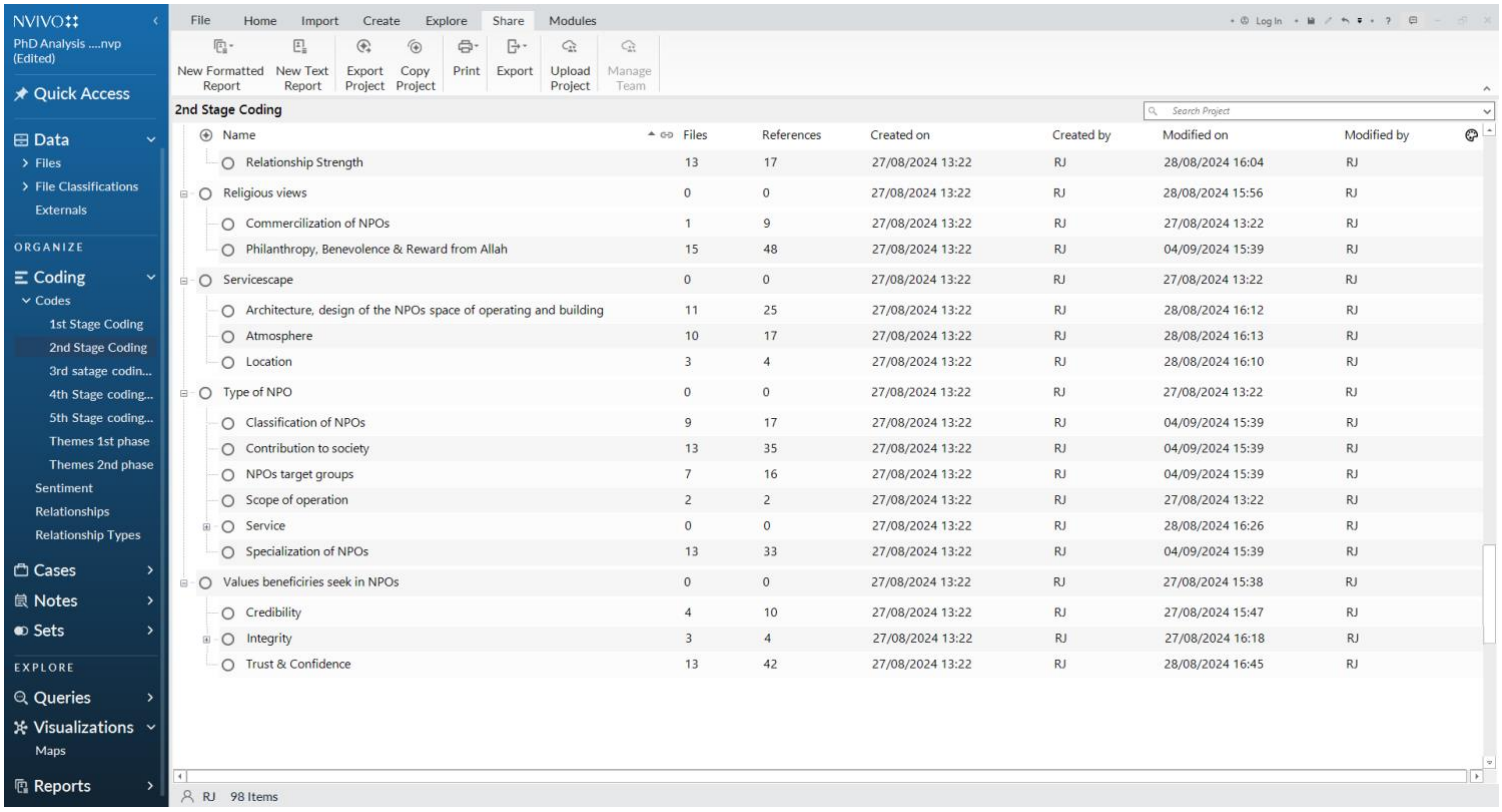
Coding process (1)



Coding Process (2)

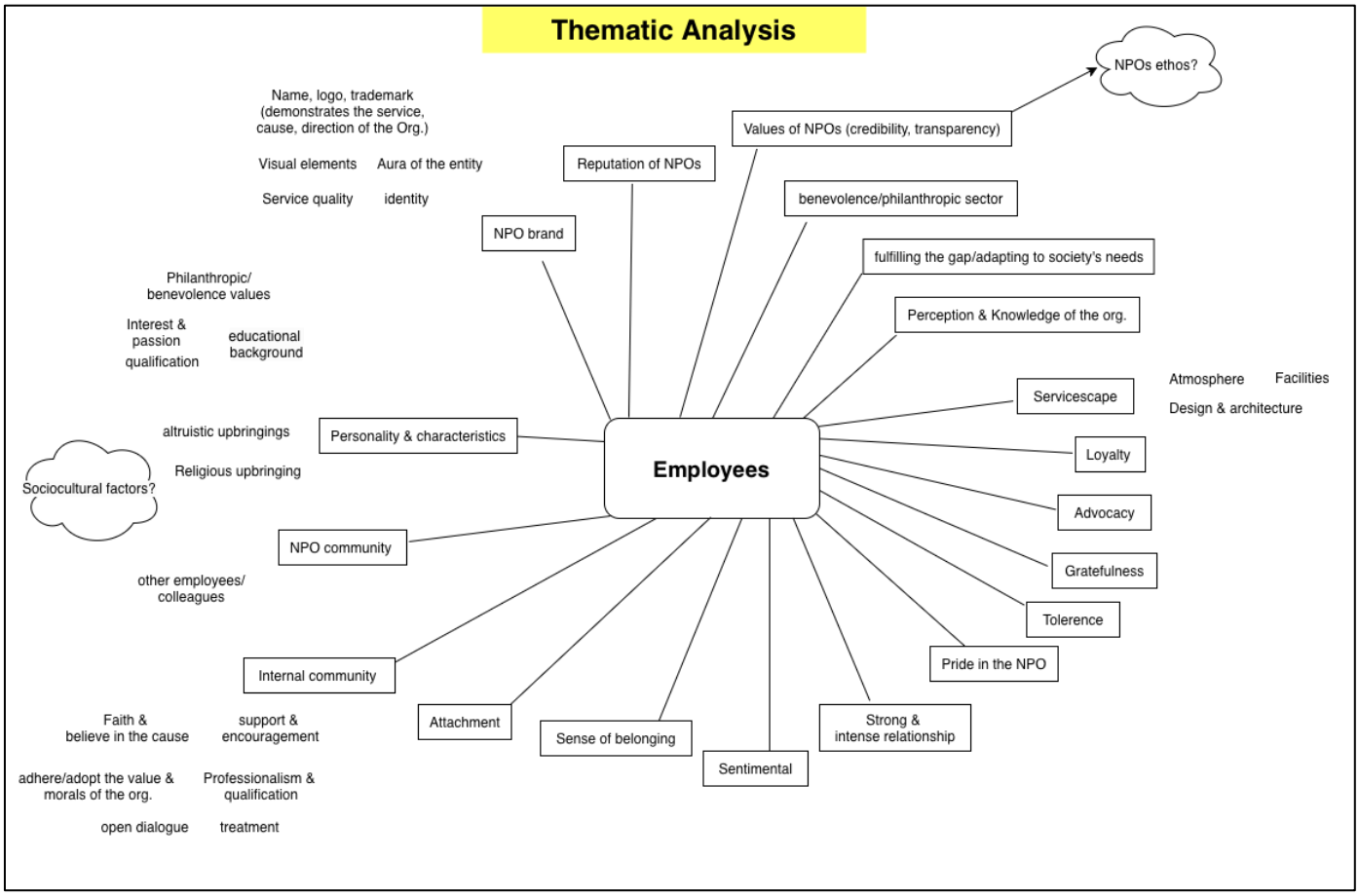


Coding Process (3)

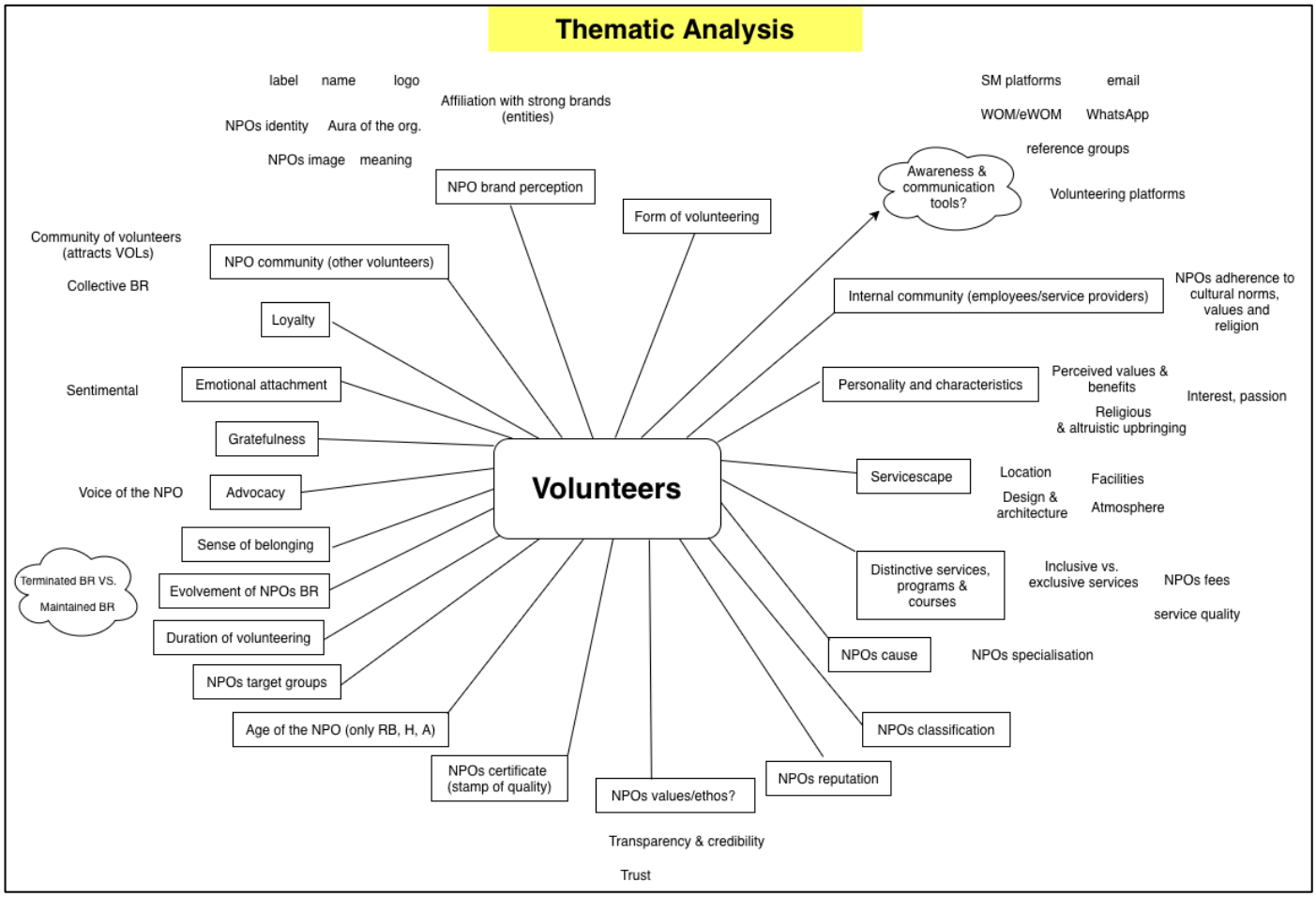


Coding Process (4)

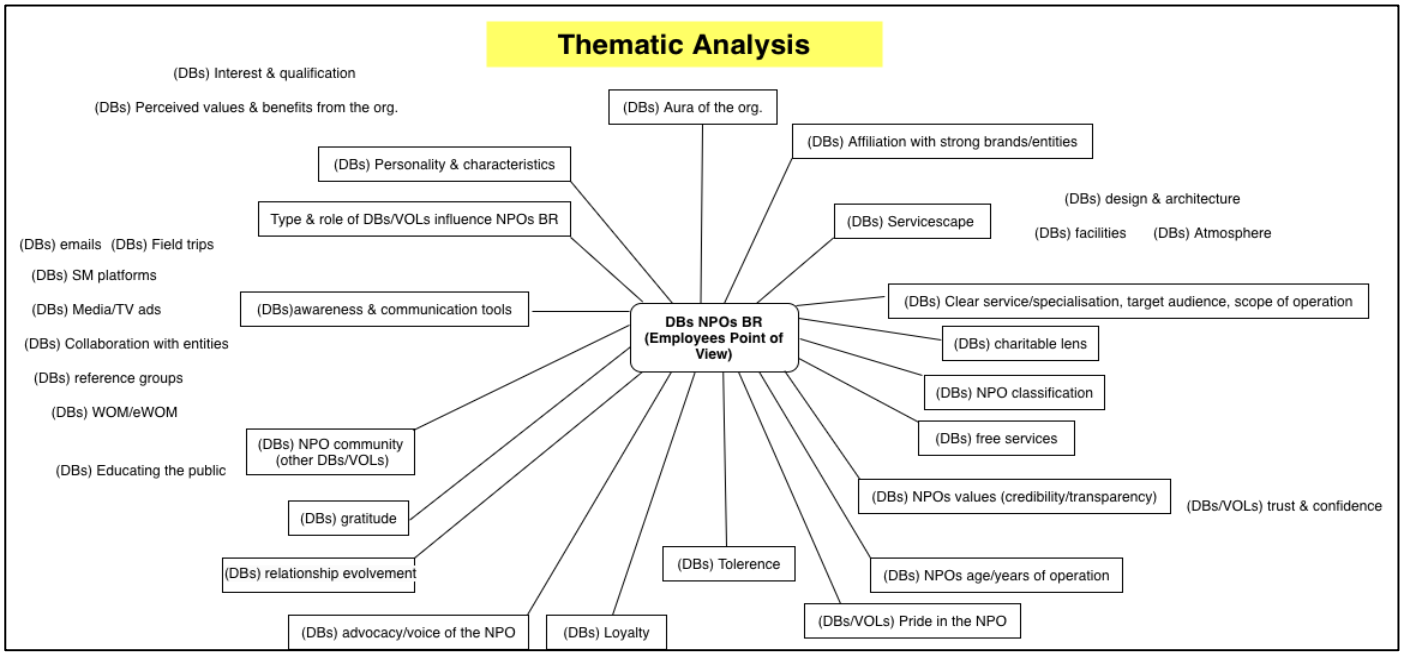
APPENDIX 3: VISUAL CODING PROCESS FOR EMPS, DBS AND VOLS



Visual coding process for EMPs



Visual coding process for VOLs



Visual coding process for DBs

APPENDIX 4: ETHICAL APPROVAL LETTER

From: **Ethics Monitor** no-reply@ethicsreview.uea.ac.uk
Subject: Decision - Ethics ETH2223-0123 : Miss Raghdah Aljuwaiser
Date: 3 January 2023 at 14:25
To: Raghdah Aljuwaiser rxv21rxu@uea.ac.uk

EM

University of East Anglia

Study title: NPO brand relationships: An exploratory study of how non-profit organisations' brand relationships influence beneficiaries' psychological wellbeing

Application ID: ETH2223-0123

Dear Raghdah,

Your application was considered on 3rd January 2023 by the NBS S-REC (Norwich Business School Research Ethics Subcommittee).

The decision is: **approved**.

You are therefore able to start your project subject to any other necessary approvals being given.

This approval will expire on **1st March 2024**.

Please note that your project is granted ethics approval only for the length of time identified above. Any extension to a project must obtain ethics approval by the NBS S-REC (Norwich Business School Research Ethics Subcommittee) before continuing.

It is a requirement of this ethics approval that you should report any adverse events which occur during your project to the NBS S-REC (Norwich Business School Research Ethics Subcommittee) as soon as possible. An adverse event is one which was not anticipated in the research design, and which could potentially cause risk or harm to the participants or the researcher, or which reveals potential risks in the treatment under evaluation. For research involving animals, it may be the unintended death of an animal after trapping or carrying out a procedure.

Any amendments to your submitted project in terms of design, sample, data collection, focus etc. should be notified to the NBS S-REC (Norwich Business School Research Ethics Subcommittee) in advance to ensure ethical compliance. If the amendments are substantial a new application may be required.

Approval by the NBS S-REC (Norwich Business School Research Ethics Subcommittee) should not be taken as evidence that your study is compliant with the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018. If you need guidance on how to make your study UK GDPR compliant, please contact the UEA Data Protection Officer (dataprotection@uea.ac.uk).

I would like to wish you every success with your project.

On behalf of the NBS S-REC (Norwich Business School Research Ethics Subcommittee)

Yours sincerely,

Roberta Fida

Ethics ETH2223-0123 : Miss Raghdah Aljuwaiser

APPENDIX 5: PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM IN ARABIC

الباحثة رغدة الجويسر (باحثة دكتوراه)

البريد الإلكتروني R.aljuwaiser@uea.ac.uk

رقم الجوال ٠٥٠٥٦١٥٤٤٣

٢٩ نوفمبر ٢٠٢٢

كلية العلوم الإنسانية

كلية نوريتش للأعمال

University of East Anglia
Norwich Research Park
Norwich NR4 7TJ
United Kingdom

العلاقة مع العلامة التجارية (الجمعيات غير الربحية) و تأثيرها على حياة المستفيدين

مستند معلومات البحث للمشاركين

(1) معلومات عن البحث.

يهدف هذا البحث إلى التعرف على ماهية علاقة الأفراد بالعلامة التجارية (المنظمات غير الربحية) و كيف يؤثر ذلك على حياة المستفيدين.

لقد تمت دعوتك للمشاركة في هذه الدراسة لأنك شاركت في أحد برامج المنظمات أو استفدت من خدماتها. هذا المستند يحتوي على معلومات شاملة عن البحث، حيث ستساعدك هذه المعلومات على أخذ القرار في المشاركة أو عدم المشاركة في هذه الدراسة. يرجى قراءة هذه المستند بعناية، و إذا كانت لديك أسئلة أو استفسارات من أي نوع لا تتردد بالتواصل معي لمعرفة المزيد عن الدراسة.

المشاركة في هذه الدراسة البحثية تطوعية. و من خلال موافقتك على هذه الدراسة ، فإنك تتعهد بما يلي :

- أوافق على المشاركة في الدراسة البحثية على النحو المبين أدناه.
- أوافق على استخدام معلوماتي الشخصية كما هو موضح.
- تم تزويدي بنسخة من هذا المستند للاحتفاظ به.

(2) من سيقوم بعمل هذا البحث؟

تتولى الدراسة الباحثة التالية: الآنسة رغدة الجويسر. و سيتم ذلك تحت إشراف الدكتور نيك ييب Dr Nick Yip (n.yip@uea.ac.uk)

(3)ما هو دوري في هذه الدراسة؟

أنت مدعو لإجراء مقابلة مع الباحث، حيث ستكون وجها لوجه أو عبر الهاتف أو إحدى برامج مكالمات الفيديو. ستكون مدة المقابلة ما بين ٤٥- ٦٠ دقيقة، و سيتم تسجيلها صوتيا باستخدام جهاز تسجيل صوتي. .

ستتضمن المقابلة موضوعات تتعلق بالدراسة، وأسئلة تساعد الباحث في جمع البيانات و المعلومات عن موضوع الدراسة. من الموضوعات والأسئلة التي سيتم مناقشتها:

1- علاقة المستفيد بالمنظمة غير الربحية (متى بدأت؟، نوعها؟، صفتها؟)
2- أنواع العلاقات مع المنظمة غير الربحية (من وجهة نظر المستفيد؟، كيف يعرفها المستفيد؟)
3- تأثير العلاقة و الارتباط بالمنظمة غير الربحية (من خلال معرفة البرامج و ورش العمل التي شارك بها المستفيد، و تجربته بشكل عام، تأثير التجربة ككل على حياة الفرد).

سيتم تسجيل المقابلة صوتيا، و ستتاح الفرصة للمشاركين بمراجعة نص المحادثة قبل استخدامها في البحث.

(4) ما هي مدة إجراء المقابلات ؟
ستستغرق المقابلات حوالي 45-60 دقيقة.

(5)هل أنا ملزم بالمشاركة في هذا البحث ؟ هل يمكنني الانسحاب من المشاركة في هذا البحث؟
المشاركة في هذا البحث تطوعية، و قرارك بالمشاركة من عدمه لن يؤثر بأي شكل من الأشكال على علاقتك الحالية أو المستقبلية مع الباحث أو أي فرد في جامعة إيست أنجليا (University of East Anglia).
لك مطلق الحرية في الانسحاب من هذه الدراسة في أي وقت، وذلك من خلال إبلاغ الباحث بقرارك من خلال البريد الإلكتروني أو الرسائل النصية.

(6)ما هي عواقب انسحابي من الدراسة؟
لا توجد أي عواقب من انسحابك من المشاركة في البحث، و لديك الحرية في الانسحاب في أي وقت، و عند حدوث ذلك، سيتم مسح أي تسجيلات تم الحصول عليها من قبلك، و لن يتم إدخالها من ضمن نتائج الدراسة.
يمكنك كذلك الامتناع عن الإجابة عن بعض الأسئلة وقت المقابلة.

(7)هل هناك أي مخاطر عند المشاركة في هذا البحث؟ و هل هناك تكاليف مترتبة على ذلك؟
لا توجد أي مخاطر أو تكاليف مرتبطة بالمشاركة في هذه الدراسة.

(8)ما هي فائدة المشاركة في هذه الدراسة؟
المعلومات المقدمة من قبلك، ستساعد الباحثة في معرفة المزيد عن موضوع البحث، و جمع بيانات قيمة من شأنها أن تساعد الباحثة في إنهاء أطروحة الدكتوراه و الحصول على الدرجة العلمية. البحث يكون له فائدة للقطاع غير الربحي في المملة العربية السعودية، و سيساهم في مساعدة المنظمات غير الربحية في تطوير الخدمات المقدمة للمجتمع، و تعزيز علاقاتهم مع المستفيدين الحاليين و المستقبليين.

(9)ماذا سيحدث للمعلومات التي قدمتها والبيانات التي تم جمعها أثناء الدراسة؟
1- يتم تسجيل البيانات التي يتم جمعها من خلال المقابلات باستخدام جهاز تسجيل صوتي ، وسيتم تفريغ المعلومات المسجلة كتابة (نص) و ترجمتها من العربية إلى الإنجليزية لغرض الدراسة.
2- سيتم استخدام البيانات في أطروحة الدكتوراه والنشر المستقبلي و المؤتمرات الأكاديمية.
3- لن يتم الاطلاع على النص المترجم إلا من قبل الباحثة وفريقها الإشرافي.
4- ستبقى معلوماتك الشخصية سرية ، وسيتم استخدام أسماء مستعارة للإشارة إليك في الدراسة البحثية وأي بحوث أو دراسات مستقبلية.
5- يتم تخزين البيانات في قرص صلب وجهاز تسجيل وحفظها في مكان آمن ، كما سيتم حفظها في مجلدات سحابية مشفرة (One Drive) ، والتي لا يمكن الوصول إليها إلا من قبل الباحثة وفريقها الإشرافي.
6- يتم الاحتفاظ بالبيانات طالما احتاجها الباحث في مكان آمن ومحفوظ، و إذا لم تعد هناك حاجة للبيانات ، فسيتم حذفها من النظام السحابي (One Drive) ، وسيتم التخلص من الأجهزة الصلبة و التسجيلات.

لن يتم استخدام بياناتك ومعلوماتك الشخصية إلا على النحو الموضح في هذا المستند ، ما لم يتم الاتفاق على خلاف ذلك. إدارة البيانات ستتم من خلال إتباع قانون حماية البيانات لعام 2018 (DPA 2018) واللائحة العامة لحماية البيانات في المملكة المتحدة (UK GDPR) ، وسياسة إدارة بيانات البحوث بجامعة إيست أنجليا (University of East Anglia)

سيتم تخزين المعلومات التي تقدمها بشكل آمن وسيتم الاحتفاظ بهويتك في سرية تامة ، باستثناء ما يقتضيه القانون، و عند نشر نتائج الدراسة ، لن يتم تحديد هويتك بأي شكل من الأشكال. سيقوم الباحث بالاحتفاظ ببيانات الدراسة للأغراض العلمية و الأكاديمية. و سيتم الاحتفاظ بها لمدة 10 سنوات على الأقل، من تاريخ تسجيل البيانات، و على الرغم من ذلك سيتم التحفظ طوال هذه السنين على هويتك بسرية تامة و أي معلومات تعريفية عنك. بعد آخر تاريخ تم الوصول إلى البيانات. لن تتضمن البيانات المودعة اسمك أو أي معلومات تعريفية عنك.

(10)ماذا لو كنت أرغب في الحصول على مزيد من المعلومات حول الدراسة؟

يرجى التواصل مع الباحثة رغدة الجويسر عبر البريد الإلكتروني (R.aljuwaiser@uea.ac.uk) أو الجوال على الرقم (٠٥٠٥٦١٥٤٤٣)

(11)هل سيتم إبلاغي بنتائج الدراسة؟

للأسف لن يتم ذلك.

(12)ماذا لو كان لدي شكوى أو أي مخاوف بشأن الدراسة؟

إذا كانت هناك مشكلة يرجى إبلاغي بذلك. و يمكنك الاتصال بي عبر البريد الإلكتروني (R.aljuwaiser@uea.ac.uk) أو الجوال على الرقم (٠٥٠٥٦١٥٤٤٣) أو من خلال العنوان التالي:

Miss Raghdah Aljuwaiser
Norwich Business School
University of East Anglia
NORWICH NR4 7TJ

إذا كنت قلقًا بشأن الطريقة التي يتم بها إجراء هذه الدراسة أو كنت ترغب في تقديم شكوى إلى شخص مستقل عن الدراسة، فيرجى التواصل مع مدير كلية نوريتش للأعمال Norwich Business School (O.Tregaskis@uea.ac.uk)

(13)كيف أعرف أن هذه الدراسة قد تمت الموافقة عليها؟

لحماية سلامتك وحقوقك ورفاهيتك وكرامتك ، تتم مراجعة جميع الأبحاث في جامعة إيست أنجليا من قبل هيئة أخلاقيات البحث. تمت الموافقة على هذا البحث من قبل (NBS S-REC) اللجنة الفرعية لأخلاقيات البحث في كلية نورويتش للأعمال.

(14)ما هي معلومات حماية البيانات العامة التي أحتاج إلى معرفتها؟

وفقًا لتشريعات حماية البيانات ، نحن مطالبون بإبلاغك بأن الأساس القانوني لمعالجة بياناتك على النحو الوارد في المادة 6 (1) من اللائحة العامة لحماية البيانات في المملكة المتحدة يسمح لنا بمعالجة البيانات الشخصية عندما يكون ذلك ضروريًا لأداء مهامنا العامة كجامعة في حالات خاصة فقط.

بالإضافة إلى المعلومات الواردة في هذا المستند ، هناك أيضًا بعض المعلومات العامة التي يجب تزويدك بها:

- المتحكم و المسؤول عن البيانات هو جامعة إيست أنجليا University of East Anglia
- لمزيد من المعلومات ، يمكنك التواصل مع مسؤول حماية البيانات بالجامعة من خلال البريد الإلكتروني dataprotection@uea.ac.uk
- يمكنك أيضًا معرفة المزيد حول حقوق حماية البيانات الخاصة بك عبر التواصل مع مكتب مفوض المعلومات.(ICO)

•إذا لم تكن راضيًا عن كيفية استخدام بياناتك الشخصية ، فيرجى التواصل مع مسؤول حماية البيانات بالجامعة على البريد الإلكتروني dataprotection@uea.ac.uk.

(15) إذا وافقت على المشاركة في هذه الدراسة، ما هي الإجراءات المتبعة؟

تحتاج إلى تعبئة نسخة واحدة من نموذج الموافقة وتوقيعه وإعادته إلى الباحث. يرجى الاحتفاظ بالخطاب ومستند المعلومات والنسخة الثانية من نموذج الموافقة.

(16) معلومات إضافية للمشاركين.

تم آخر تحديث لهذه المعلومات في 29 نوفمبر 2022.

إذا كانت هناك تغييرات على المعلومات المقدمة، فسيتم إخطارك عبر البريد إلكتروني أو الرسائل النصية.

هذا المستند خاص بالمشاركين للاحتفاظ به

نموذج الموافقة على المشاركة في الدراسة (نسخة الباحث)

أنا، .... [الاسم] ، أنا على استعداد للمشاركة في هذه الدراسة البحثية.

و أوافق على ما يلي:

- أنا على دراية بغرض الدراسة ، وما الذي سيطلب مني، وأي مخاطر/فوائد تنطوي عليها.
- قرأت مستند معلومات البحث و المخصص للمشاركين، و الذي سأقوم بالاحتفاظ به، وتمكنت من مناقشة ما الذي سينطوي على مشاركتي في الدراسة مع الباحث إذ كانت لدي الرغبة في المناقشة .
- تمت الإجابة على أسئلتي المتعلقة بالدراسة من قبل الباحث.
- أنا على دراسة بأن مشاركتي بهذا البحث تطوعية بحتة، و أن قراري بالمشاركة من عدمه لن يؤثر حاليا أو مستقبلا على علاقتي بالباحث أو أي فرد في جامعة إيست أنجليا University of East Anglia.
- أنا على دراية بأن لدي الحرية في إيقاف المقابلة في أي وقت و الانسحاب من المشاركة، و سيترتب على ذلك التخلص من التسجيلات و عدم إضافة المعلومات و البيانات التي قدمتها ضمن نتائج الدراسة.
- أنا على دراسة بأن لدي الحرية في رفض الإجابة عن أي سؤال لا أرغب بالإجابة عليه.
- أنا على علم بأن نتائج الدراسة سيتم نشرها، و لكن لن تحتوي على أي معلومات تحدد هويتي.
- أنا على علم بأن المعلومات الشخصية التي تم جمعها خلال الدراسة سيتم تخزينها في مكان آمن و سري، و سيتم استخدامها فقط لما تم الاتفاق عليه مسبقا مع الباحث. وأتفهم بأن أي معلومات تخصني لن يتم استخدامها بدون الحصول على إذن مني، باستثناء ما إذا تم طلبها بموجب القانون.

أوافق على:

تسجيل المقابلة صوتيا	**مراجعة نص المقابلة**
☐ **نعم** ☐ **لا**	☐ **نعم** ☐ **لا**

.....	.....	.....
الاسم	**التوقيع**	**التاريخ**

نموذج الموافقة على المشاركة في الدراسة (نسخة المشارك)

أنا، ..... [الاسم] ، أنا على استعداد للمشاركة في هذه الدراسة البحثية.

و أوافق على ما يلي:

- أنا على دراية بغرض الدراسة ، وما الذي سيطلب مني، وأي مخاطر/فوائد تنطوي عليها.
- قرأت مستند معلومات البحث و المخصص للمشاركين، و الذي سأقوم بالاحتفاظ به، وتمكنت من مناقشة ما الذي سينطوي على مشاركتي في الدراسة مع الباحث إذ كانت لدي الرغبة في المناقشة .
- تمت الإجابة على أسئلتي المتعلقة بالدراسة من قبل الباحث.
- أنا على دراسة بأن مشاركتي بهذا البحث تطوعية بحتة، و أن قراري بالمشاركة من عدمه لن يؤثر حاليا أو مستقبلا على علاقتي بالباحث أو أي فرد في جامعة إيست أنجليا University of East Anglia.
- أنا على دراية بأن لدي الحرية في إيقاف المقابلة في أي وقت و الانسحاب من المشاركة، و سيترتب على ذلك التخلص من التسجيلات و عدم إضافة المعلومات و البيانات التي قدمتها ضمن نتائج الدراسة.
- أنا على دراسة بأن لدي الحرية في رفض الإجابة عن أي سؤال لا أرغب بالإجابة عليه.
- أنا على علم بأن نتائج الدراسة سيتم نشرها، و لكن لن تحتوي على أي معلومات تحدد هويتي.
- أنا على علم بأن المعلومات الشخصية التي تم جمعها خلال الدراسة سيتم تخزينها في مكان آمن و سري، و سيتم استخدامها فقط لما تم الاتفاق عليه مسبقا مع الباحث. وأتفهم بأن أي معلومات تخصني لن يتم استخدامها بدون الحصول على إذن مني، باستثناء ما إذا تم طلبها بموجب القانون.

أوافق على:

تسجيل المقابلة صوتيا	**مراجعة نص المقابلة**
☐ **نعم** ☐ **لا**	☐ **نعم** ☐ **لا**

.....	.....	.....
الاسم	**التوقيع**	**التاريخ**

APPENDIX 6: PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM IN ENGLISH

Miss Raghdah Aljuwaiser
PhD researcher

29 November 2022

Faculty of Social Sciences
Norwich Business School

University of East Anglia
Norwich Research Park
Norwich NR4 7TJ
United Kingdom

Email: R.Aljuwaiser@uea.ac.uk
Tel: 00966505615443
Web: www.uea.ac.uk

Non-profit organisations' brand relationships & Wellbeing

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

(1) What is this study about?
This research aims to explore the influence of non-profit organisations' brand relationship on beneficence's wellbeing. You have been invited to participate in this study because you took part in one of the organisations' programmes or benefited from their services. This Participant Information Sheet tells you about the research study. Knowing what is involved will help you decide if you want to take part in the study. Please read this sheet carefully and ask questions about anything that you don't understand or want to know more about.

Participation in this research study is voluntary. By giving consent to take part in this study you are telling us that you:

- ✓ Understand what you have read.
- ✓ Agree to take part in the research study as outlined below.
- ✓ Agree to the use of your personal information as described.
- ✓ You have received a copy of this Participant Information Sheet to keep.

(2) Who is running the study?
The study is being carried out by the following researcher(s): Miss Raghdah Aljuwaiser.
This will take place under the supervision of Dr Nick Yip (n.yip@uea.ac.uk).

(3) What will the study involve for me?
You will be invited for an interview with the researcher, the interview will be face to face or via a video call program, or via telephone. The interview would be around 45-60 minutes, and it will be audio recorded using an audio recording device.
The interview will include topics related to the research study, and semi- structured questions that can help the researcher to gather information and data on the topic being studied.
Topics & questions that will be discussed:
1- Brand relationship with the nonprofit organisation:
A: History of the relationship.
B: Description of the relationship.
2- Brand relationship types with the non-profit:
A: Perception of the relationship.
B: Definition the relationship.

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3- Brand relationship impact:
A: The experience of programmes, workshops, sessions you participated in.
B: Feedback of the experience.
C: The influence of the experience on your life.

An audio/video recording will be taken.

You will have the opportunity to review information generated about you prior to publication.

(4) How much of my time will the study take?
The interviews would take around 45-60 minutes.

(5) Do I have to be in the study? Can I withdraw from the study once I have started?
Being in this study is completely voluntary and you do not have to take part.
Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relationship with the researchers or anyone else at the University of East Anglia now or in the future.

If you decide to take part in the study, you can withdraw your consent at any point. You can do this by stating your decision to withdraw through: email or a text message.

(6) What are the consequences if I withdraw from the study?
You are free to stop the interview at any time. Unless you say that you want us to keep them, any recordings will be erased and the information you have provided will not be included in the study results. You may also refuse to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer during the interview. If you decide at a later time to withdraw from the study your information will be removed from our records and will not be included in any results, up to the point we have analysed and published the results.

(7) Are there any risks or costs associated with being in the study?
Aside from giving up your time, we do not expect that there will be any risks or costs associated with taking part in this study.

(8) Are there any benefits associated with being in the study?
Your insights would help the researcher to learn more about the research topic, and gather valuable data that would help her to go forward with her PhD degree.
The research will benefit the non-profit sector in terms of developing their services to establish and enhance brand relationships with their beneficiaries, and contribute to the wellbeing of the society they operate in.

(9) What will happen to information provided by me and data collected during the study?
1- The data collected through interviews will be recorded using an audio recording device, and they will be transcribed from Arabic to English for the purpose of the research study.
2- The data collected will be used for a PhD thesis, future publication, and conferences presentations.
3- The transcripts will only be accessed by the researcher and her supervisory team.
4- Your personal information will kept confidential, and pseudonyms will be used to refer to you in the research study and any future publications.
5- The data will be stored in a hard drive and a recording device and kept in a safe and secured place, it will also be saved in an encrypted cloud folders (One Drive), which will only be accessed by the researcher and her supervisory team.

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6- The data will be kept as long as the researcher need it, in a secure and save place. However, if the data is no longer needed, they will be deleted from the cloud system (One Drive), and hard devices will be destroyed.

Your personal data and information will only be used as outlined in this Participant Information Sheet, unless you consent otherwise. Data management will follow the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA 2018) and UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR), and the University of East Anglia's Research Data Management Policy.

The information you provide will be stored securely and your identity will be kept strictly confidential, except as required by law. Study findings may be published, but you will not be identified in these publications if you decide to participate in this study.
Study data may also be deposited with a repository to allow it to be made available for scholarly and educational purposes. The data will be kept for at least 10 years beyond the last date the data were accessed. The deposited data will not include your name or any identifiable information about you.

(10) What if I would like further information about the study?
When you have read this information, Miss Raghdah Aljuwaiser (R.Aljuwaiser@uea.ac.uk, 00966505615443) will be available to discuss it with you further and answer any questions you may have.

(11) Will I be told the results of the study?
You are not able to receive feedback about the overall results.

(12) What if I have a complaint or any concerns about the study?
If there is a problem please let me know. You can contact me via the University of East Anglia at the following address:

Miss Raghdah Aljuwaiser
Norwich Business School
University of East Anglia
NORWICH NR4 7TJ
R.Aljuwaiser@uea.ac.uk
00966505615443

If you are concerned about the way this study is being conducted or you wish to make a complaint to someone independent from the study, please contact the Head of Norwich Business School: (O.Tregaskis@uea.ac.uk).

(13) How do I know that this study has been approved to take place?
To protect your safety, rights, wellbeing and dignity, all research in the University of East Anglia is reviewed by a Research Ethics Body. This research was approved by the NBS S-REC (Norwich Business School Research Ethics Subcommittee).

(14) What is the general data protection information I need to be informed about?
According to data protection legislation, we are required to inform you that the legal basis for processing your data as listed in Article 6(1) of the UK GDPR is because this allows us to process personal data when it is necessary to perform our public tasks as a University.

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In addition to the specific information provided above about why your personal data is required and how it will be used, there is also some general information which needs to be provided for you:

- The data controller is the University of East Anglia.
- For further information, you can contact the University's Data Protection Officer at dataprotection@uea.ac.uk
- You can also find out more about your data protection rights at the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO).
- If you are unhappy with how your personal data has been used, please contact the University's Data Protection Officer at dataprotection@uea.ac.uk in the first instance.

(15) OK, I want to take part – what do I do next?
You need to fill in one copy of the consent form and sign it, and return it to the researcher. Please keep the letter, information sheet and the second copy of the consent form for your information.

(16) Further information
This information was last updated on 29 November 2022.

If there are changes to the information provided, you will be notified by An email or a text message.

This information sheet is for you to keep

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PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM (First Copy to Researcher)

I, …… [PRINT NAME], **am** willing to participate in this research study.

In giving my consent I state that:

- I understand the purpose of the study, what I will be asked to do, and any risks/benefits involved.
- I have read the Participant Information Sheet, which I may keep, for my records, and have been able to discuss my involvement in the study with the researchers if I wished to do so.
- The researchers have answered any questions that I had about the study and I am happy with the answers.
- I understand that being in this study is completely voluntary and I do not have to take part. My decision whether to be in the study will not affect my relationship with the researchers or anyone else at the University of East Anglia now or in the future.
- I understand that I may stop the interview at any time if I do not wish to continue, and that unless I indicate otherwise any recordings will then be erased and the information provided will not be included in the study results. I also understand that I may refuse to answer any questions I don't wish to answer.
- I understand that the results of this study may be published but that any publications will not contain my name or any identifiable information about me.
- I understand that personal information about me that is collected over the course of this project will be stored securely and will only be used for purposes that I have agreed to. I understand that information about me will only be told to others with my permission, except as required by law.

I consent to:

Audio-recording	YES	☐	NO	☐
Reviewing transcripts	YES	☐	NO	☐

……
Signature

……
PRINT name

……
Date

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PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM (Second Copy to Participant)

I, ... [PRINT NAME], **am** willing to participate in this research study.

In giving my consent I state that:

- I understand the purpose of the study, what I will be asked to do, and any risks/benefits involved.
- I have read the Participant Information Sheet, which I may keep, for my records, and have been able to discuss my involvement in the study with the researchers if I wished to do so.
- The researchers have answered any questions that I had about the study and I am happy with the answers.
- I understand that being in this study is completely voluntary and I do not have to take part. My decision whether to be in the study will not affect my relationship with the researchers or anyone else at the University of East Anglia now or in the future.
- I understand that I may stop the interview at any time if I do not wish to continue, and that unless I indicate otherwise any recordings will then be erased and the information provided will not be included in the study results. I also understand that I may refuse to answer any questions I don't wish to answer.
- I understand that the results of this study may be published but that any publications will not contain my name or any identifiable information about me.
- I understand that personal information about me that is collected over the course of this project will be stored securely and will only be used for purposes that I have agreed to. I understand that information about me will only be told to others with my permission, except as required by law.

I consent to:

Audio-recording	YES	☐	NO	☐
Reviewing transcripts	YES	☐	NO	☐

.....
Signature

.....
PRINT name

.....
Date

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APPENDIX 7: ITHRA'S VOLUNTEERING PLATFORM APPLICATION

