Donation Nation: An Explorative Study into Perceptions of and Donation Behaviour to the Charity Sector among the Baby Boomer Generation in Ireland.

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment for the award of MSc Marketing.

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ABSTRACT

The charity sector in the republic of Ireland (ROI) remains an area largely understudied in research to-date. In light of recent scandals in the sector, and a reported uncharacteristic decline in donation behaviour per-capita, which is further accentuated by the growing economy in very recent years, there is a need for this topic to be explored now more than ever. While global trends could, in theory, be applied to the ever globalised society, academic knowledge specific to the Irish market and its long history of high donation behaviour remains sparse, with little emphasis on the most generous cohort of the population; the baby boomer generation (born between 1946 and 1964).

The present study seeks to explore perceptions of the charity sector among the baby boomer generation and the influence this has on the charity sector's ability to encourage donation behaviour in ROI. As the process of donating time and money to charity brands can be linked to consumer behaviour processes, a particular focus has been given to the various marketing techniques implemented by organisations within the sector and the subsequent influence this has on the group's perceptions and response patterns.

Seven in-depth interviews were completed with members of the general public of ROI, born between 1946 and 1964, using an inductive approach to explore participant perceptions of the charity sector based on their own relationships with these charity brands. Through thematic coding of the primary data, salient themes have been identified as relevant to the overall findings, which found participants to have strong and positive opinions on the importance of the work these organisations do, yet also demonstrated levels of cynicism towards the sector as a whole, and a fatigue towards how the brand message is communicated. Additionally, macroeconomic factors and a perceived sense of selfishness among affluent members of the general public have been suggested as driving forces behind the decline in donation behaviour in the growing economy, implying that further research in the area is warranted in the interest of improving donation into the future.

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1.1 Background to the Study

1.1.1 Increasing trend in charity donations globally

Research released by the Charities Aid Foundation (CAF) Index (2017) identifies that developed countries continue to be the most likely to engage in charitable activity through donating money. The report also indicates that there is a noteworthy growth in the world's middle class (CAF, 2017). These trends are consistent with the increased donation behaviour globally, with overall giving up by 1% in 2016, and online giving growing by 7.9% since 2015 (Blackbaud, 2016).

1.1.2 Reducing per-capita charity donations in wealthy nations

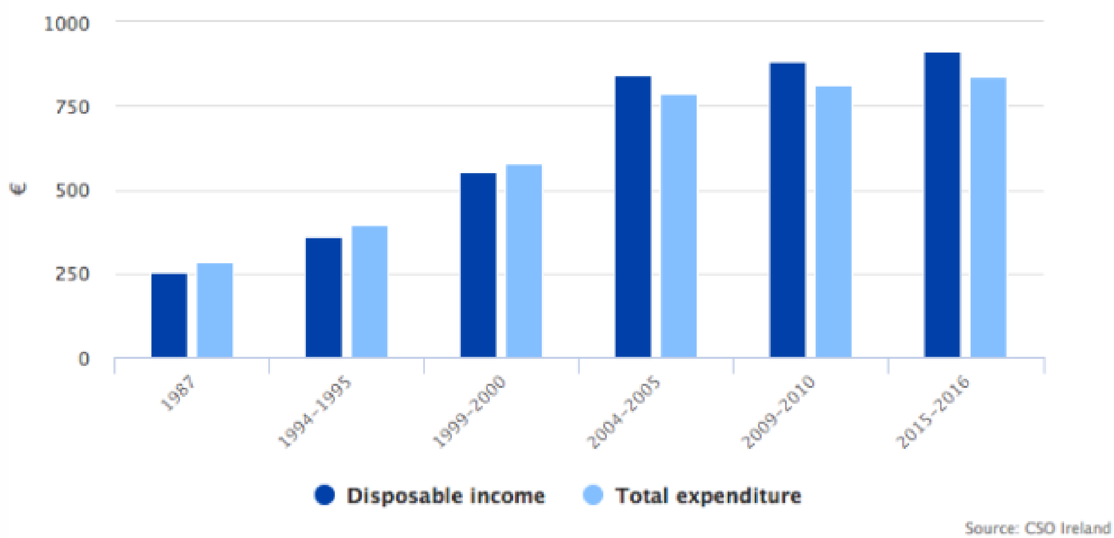
However, the CAF (2017) also reports that every western country appearing in the top 20 per-capita donors have experienced decreased per-capita donation behaviour by between one and five percent since 2015. Gaskin (1999) argues that as a result of charities adopting a more private sector approach, there has been a growth in mistrust among the general public. Consequently, Sargeant, Ford & West (2000) argue that the public now perceive these entities as both inefficient and unnecessary.

1.1.3 Charity scandals and growing mistrust of charities in Ireland

Recent scandals within the sector in the Republic of Ireland (ROI) in particular have caused the industry as a whole to lose trust among the general public, generating an increased cynicism regarding both malpractice and fraud within the sector, leading to scrutiny of the causes that donated money is raised for, and fundamentally, what funds raised are spent on (e.g., administration costs, management costs, advertising costs) (Charities Institute Ireland, 2016).

Edelman (2017) reports a 43% level of public distrust in charities in ROI, with the organisations themselves viewed as less trustworthy than their for-profit counterparts. Furthermore, a significant and uncharacterised decline in the donation behaviour in Ireland has been reported (Hilliard, 2014; CAF, 2017). Consequently, ROI has dropped out of the top ten countries for donating money for the first time since the index was launched in 2010 (CAF, 2017), despite disposable income being estimated at an all-time high (see Figure 1.1.3) and recent estimates of Q1 2018 versus Q1 2017 suggesting that GDP is up 9.1% (Central Statistics Office, 2016; 2018).

FIGURE 1.1.3:
AVERAGE WEEKLY HOUSEHOLD DISPOSABLE INCOME EXPENDITURE ESTIMATES 1987-2016



Source: (http://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-hbs/hbs20152016/hinc/)

1.2 Gaps in the Literature

1.2.1 The link between brand perceptions, trust and transparency in the charity sector

With this current economic affluence in mind (see Figure 1.1.3), coupled with Ireland’s historically high rates of donation behaviour (CAF, 2017), the falling donation rates appear surprising. Existing literature does not conclusively provide an explanation for this trend. Without attributing causality, existing research does, however, mention various highly publicised scandals (e.g. Console, Cancer Research UK) in the Irish charity sector in the early part of the 21st century (Birkwood, 2015;

Critical Fundraising Ireland, 2017). Possibly due to the recency of these events, there is very limited research into the implications of these scandals for the ROI charity sector, exploring (from a consumer's perspective) whether or not these scandals may be impacting willingness to donate and/or potential recent changes/damage to donor perceptions of the charity sector. The researcher aims to begin to fill this research gap, situating the present study within the brand marketing literature conversation.

Keller (1993) argues that branding is important across all sectors as it generates consumer awareness, and can result in brand equity and positive brand perceptions. Faircloth (2005) extends this argument to the charity sector, commenting that brand knowledge and familiarity have a positive impact on donation behaviour among target markets. Sargeant, Hudson & West (2008) agree that by raising charity brand awareness, public support and donation behaviour are also increased. Further literature on the charity sector posits that effective factors in influencing donation behaviour are the promotion of trust and knowledge among the target market (Doney & Cannon, 1997; Kennedy, Ferrell & LeClair, 2001; Arnett, German & Hunt, 2003; Sargeant & Jay, 2004; Bourassa & Stang, 2016), which is consistent with recent industry research that recommends non-profit organisations (NPOs) be managed in a fair, consistent and open way, ensuring transparency of their efforts, to encourage charitable giving among the public (CAF, 2017).

For charities to build this knowledge, trust, and ultimately positive public perceptions, transparency appears to be of increasing importance. Fundraising consultancy firm 2into3 (2017) report that in the interest of transparency and trust, there is a need to increase brand equity and understanding in the charity sector across ROI, to improve the incentive to give (the brand message), as well as the giving culture itself. Research into how this can be demonstrated remains largely uncovered to-date, and has therefore been identified as an area for further research by the author. Given recent scandals in the ROI charity sector, the potential damage to charity 'brand' equity or reputations/perceptions, and the concurrent reduction in donation behaviour (CAF, 2017), there is a need to examine the potential link between brand equity or brand perceptions, transparency, trust, and donation behaviour.

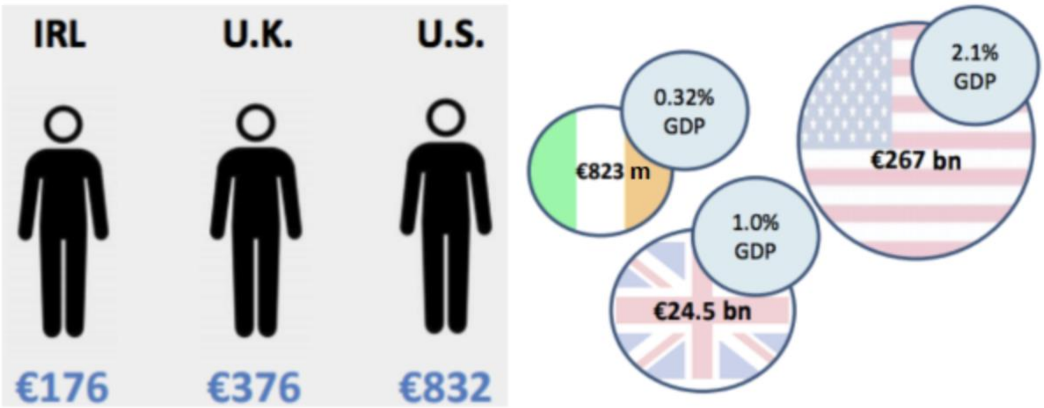
1.2.2 The link between consumer-brand relationships and forgiveness in the charity sector

Branding literature generally has increasingly referred to the effectiveness of relationship building as a strategic marketing imperative with benefits for both consumers and the brand in question, whether these relationships are between the consumer and the brand (Fournier, 1998) or between consumers of the brand (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). Similarly, research into the charity sector identifies brand-consumer relationships as potentially important to donation behaviour (2into3, 2017). However, the potential link between the two remains under-researched. General branding literature finds that much like in the social context, consumers who develop a strong relationship with a brand tend to display higher levels of forgiveness when said brand fails to satisfy them in some way (Aggarwal, 2004; Tsarenko & Tojib, 2015). Literature specific to the charity sector does not explore whether such forgiveness for charities exists among those who develop a relationship with a charity that fails to live up to their expectations in some way (CFI, 2017). Therefore, the present study explores the potential link between charity brand-consumer relationships and forgiveness, to begin to fill this research gap.

1.3 Research Justification and Rationale

While total fundraised income in ROI has been steadily increasing over the past number of years (to 2018), the giving rate per-capita has seen a continuous decrease since 2014. Meanwhile, the per-capita donation rate in the UK and US are recorded as being between two and five times higher than ROI respectively – see Figure 1.3 (2into3, 2017).

FIGURE 1.3: PER-CAPITA GIVING – ROI, UK & US



Source:
(http://www.2into3.com/_fileupload/Seventh%20Annual%20Fundraising%20Report%202017.pdf)

ROI government funding for NPOs increased by 4% across 2014 to 2015 to attempt to bridge the gap created by reduced per-capita donation behaviour to enable the sector to continue to effectively deliver necessary services to its citizens (2into3, 2017), such as the current (2018) and growing homelessness crisis (Focus Ireland, 2018). However, the source of this decreased per-capita giving in ROI remains a topic requiring investigation due to the lack of existing evidence pointing to the root of this issue.

While many charities are held in high regard, and public confidence in these cases is strong (O’Neil, 2009), there are also cases where levels of donor trust in the charity sector are notably low (Sargeant & Lee, 2002; Schlesinger, Mitchell & Gray, 2004) and lacking in public confidence (McDougle, 2014). Whether or not the publication of several high profile charity organisation scandals in the UK and ROI in recent years has impacted public perception or donation behaviour specifically has been the subject of very little research to-date.

In consulting statistics released on public opinion in the UK, support and commitment for the non-profit sector is dwindling – 68% of citizens over 55 years claim to hold a more negative perception of the charity sector due to the scandals (Birkwood, 2015). Interestingly, this same age demographic, known as baby boomers, is identified as most likely to make charitable donations globally (Blackbaud, 2016; CFI, 2017). However, Sudbury-Riley (2016) recommends for investigations of baby boomer generation behaviour be country-specific as each nation has experienced this boom in different ways. A review of research literature finds that ROI baby boomer charity donation behaviour has been under-researched to-date. Therefore, the present study will focus the primary data collection process on this cohort as the research sample. This is further explained in section 1.6.1 and in more detail in Chapter 3.

1.4 Overall Aim of the Study

Given the literature gaps regarding the charity marketing sector previously discussed, this study aims to begin to fill these gaps by achieving a more comprehensive understanding of the general public's perception of the charity sector in ROI, the resulting impact this has on donation behaviour, and the potential role that advertising and relationship marketing play. These issues have not been adequately addressed in literature to-date, with little research specific to ROI, despite being recognised worldwide as having a prolific history of charitable activity (2into3, 2017; CAF, 2017). This research aim will be achieved by answering the following research questions.

1.5 Research Questions

In response to the identified gaps in the literature outlined in section 1.2, the following relevant questions are posed in the interest of exploring the areas which are considered under-researched to-date:

1. What are consumer perceptions of charity organisations in ROI at present?
2. How do these perceptions impact the sector's ability to generate donation of volunteer time and money?
3. What impact does charity advertising have on donation behaviour?
4. Are charity-donor relationships a factor influencing donation behaviour?

To answer these research questions the following primary research methods are used.

1.6 Research Methods for the Present Study

Critical Fundraising Ireland (CFI) (2017) recently reported that there is little to no academic research available on Irish fundraising and giving. Research by 2into3 (2017) agrees that the quality of data available on the charity sector in ROI must be improved as it is largely understudied. A serious threat to the charity sector is the media's ongoing coverage of scandals having a potentially negative influence on public perceptions (CFI, 2017), however an insight into the day-to-day reality of the potential impact of these issues remains a topic for further discussion. Given that the research questions posed above in section 1.5 seek to understand the 'how' and implicitly the 'why' of individual perceptions, and the nature of experiences, literature to-date encourages a qualitative approach for the effective collection of such data (Brand, 2009; Davis, Golicic, Boerstler, Choi & Oh, 2013). Accordingly, this study will be of qualitative nature in the interest of exploring this complex and data poor research area. Limitations incurred by the time and dissertation length have restricted the research to discussions of certain themes identified by the researcher in primary and secondary research findings as most relevant to the topic at hand. In-depth detail on the research methods can be found in Chapter 3.

1.6.1 Primary research sample: baby boomers

Marketing research highlights the need for organisations in general to shift the focus of their business strategy from the standard 18-49 age range towards a largely untapped resource, the 50+ market, which is a growing proportion of global population and often holds significant spending power (Coleman, Hladikova & Savelyeva, 2006; Nielsen, 2012; Sudbury-Riley, 2016). Furthermore, baby boomers (born between 1946-1964) display the most significant donation habits across all generations according to extant research (Hassay & Peloza, 2009; Nielsen, 2012; Blackbaud, 2016). However, recent research is finding a unique uncharacterised decline in donation behaviour among this group in ROI (CAF, 2017), making the demographic of particular relevance to the present study, and therefore, the focus of the primary data collection.

1.6.2 Scope of the study

Through seven in-depth interviews with members of the general public of ROI, born between 1946 and 1964, the researcher has focused on gaining a reasonable understanding of their perceptions of the charity sector and their own donation behaviour in order to satisfy the research questions as outlined in section 1.5. The small sample size has allowed for comprehensive analysis of the primary data collected to produce informative and considered discussions in the present research study.

1.7 Overview and Structure of the Research Project

Chapter 1 – Introduction

This research project begins with a brief introduction into the chosen research topic with gaps in the literature on the charity sector and donation behaviour identified as supporting justification for the study. The overarching aim and structure of the study are also introduced.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

This chapter comprises of in-depth considerations on academic and industry literature relevant to the research topic. As the study seeks to explore public opinion of the charity sector, relevant literature on consumer behaviour and brand management will be addressed and intertwined throughout the literature review.

Chapter 3 – Methodology

The methodology chapter provides a detailed insight into the research objectives for this project and the chosen methods for the collection of primary research data. Details of the sample, its selection process, and an in-depth review of how the primary research was conducted is provided with reference to the instruments employed.

Chapter 4 – Findings

The findings chapter presents the results of the primary research through thematic analysis, identifying overarching themes and salient points relevant to the research objectives outlined in Chapter 3.

Chapter 5 – Discussion

Chapter 5 comprises of critical reflection on the study by the researcher. This involves synthesising findings from the primary research with the secondary research consulted in Chapter 4, allowing for the development of a more theoretical understanding of the research to derive a compelling discussion from the project.

Chapter 6 – Conclusion and Recommendations

Finally, this chapter reflects on conclusions from the primary research and assesses whether the research aims and objectives as specified in Chapter 3 have been accomplished. Recommendations for further research and managerial practice are also presented.

CHAPTER 2:
LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Chapter Introduction

This chapter opens with a summary of existing research findings with regard to the charity sector and its marketing message. Through assessment of relevant literature and research to-date, the author aims to address the manner in which charities adopt certain marketing practices to reach the target market, communicate their message, and the resulting influence this may have on donation behaviour. This is examined firstly on a general basis, then narrowed to its context and relevance in ROI. In addition, the concept of relationship marketing will be introduced, focusing on its significance to marketing in general and to the charity sector. Existing research literature findings with regard to consumer behaviour, and the potential impact a relationship marketing approach has on donation behaviour will be explored, with the importance of reaching the target market also discussed.

2.2 Introduction to Charities and Marketing

Although charities are distinct from profit-driven corporate entities, they are increasingly engaging in marketing efforts in the interest of generating greater donations of money and volunteer-time (Long & Chiarelli 2011). Previous research on the sector implies that there has been reluctance on an internal level within charity organisations to the adoption of modern marketing techniques, as many NPO marketing managers report some stakeholders to be discouraging of the implementation of branding practices, claiming them to be too commercial and even immoral (Grounds & Harkness, 1998; Ritchie, Swami & Weinberg, 1998). Accordingly, later studies in the field demonstrate charities to have only begun to implement the same marketing techniques as for-profit organisations since the dawn of the 21st Century (Sargeant, 2001), with innovative global charities such as UNICEF shifting their focus towards educating themselves on modern marketing techniques to enlighten the consumer on their efforts and generate donations by observing, listening to and responding to trends (Long & Chiarelli, 2011).

2.2.1 Branding and communicating the NPO marketing message

Kotler (1979) has long recognised the need for charities to identify the organisation as a brand, adopting modern marketing techniques accordingly, to reach the target market. Keller (1993) agrees that branding is important across all sectors as it generates consumer awareness and can result in brand equity. Faircloth (2005) extends this argument further, commenting that brand knowledge and familiarity can have a positive impact on donation behaviour among target markets. As discussed in Chapter 1, Sargeant *et al.* (2008) agree that by raising charity brand awareness, public understanding and donations are similarly increased, with factors shown to be most effective in influencing donation behaviour being the promotion of trust and knowledge in the consumer-brand relationship among the target market (Doney & Cannon, 1997; Kennedy *et al.* 2001; Arnett *et al.* 2003; Sargeant & Jay, 2004; Bourassa & Stang, 2016).

2.2.2 Regulation and transparency of the NPO marketing message

Bourassa & Stang (2016) posit that the NPO message is coming under increased scrutiny from both the media and general public, highlighting the importance of increasing trust levels, transparency, and accountability in the relationship between the organisation and its existing/potential donor base, based on the logic that improving these perceptions has the ability to generate higher donation levels and volunteer-time. Consequently, fundraising consultants 2into3 (2017) report that in the interest of promoting trust, there is a need for transparency to be improved in ROI, to similarly improve incentive to give and the giving culture itself. Furthermore, CFI (2017) urges the charity sector in ROI to increase transparency among its organisations as they believe the lack of regulation has been a driving force behind many of the high profile scandals which have eroded public trust.

On a universal level, the CAF (2017) recommends that NPOs should be regulated in a fair, consistent and open way, ensuring transparency for the public regarding their efforts, to encourage strong relationships and charitable giving. Aoife Garvey, supporter marketing manager of Concern Worldwide asserts that a “constant flow of transparent messaging will reassure donors and help protect fundraising income” (CFI, 2017 p. 25). However, literature on advertising research suggests that consumers are exposed to such a vast quantity of advertising on a daily basis that many of these messages are being tuned out (Taylor, Frank & Bang, 2006). Research specific to the charity sector in ROI suggests that this market is becoming an increasingly saturated and competitive environment, creating fear among fundraising bodies that there is a growing sense of fatigue towards their messaging, which may be negatively impacting donation behaviour (CFI, 2017). Studies into how best to avoid the fatigue towards these communications remains largely uncovered to-date, and has therefore been identified as an area for further research by the author.

2.2.3 Trust as an influencer in donation behaviour

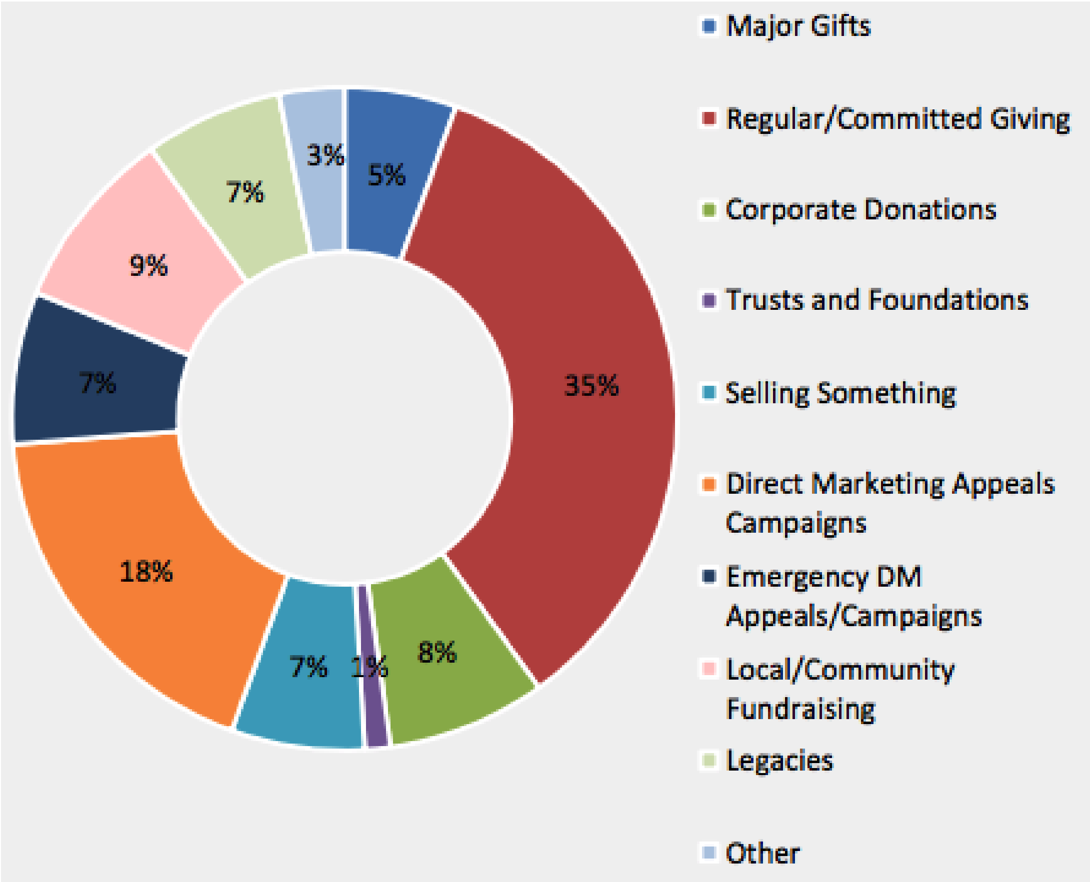
Trust is defined by Doney & Cannon (1997) as perceived credibility and benevolence. Applying this concept to a charity marketing context, Hart & Johnson (1999) believe that NPOs must therefore be fair, competent, reliable and ethical. The requirement of trust in the charity industry leads naturally to a high level of required transparency across the sector (Göttlichová & Soukalová, 2015). This has led to the creation of the regulatory body Charities Institute Ireland (CII), launched in 2016, in response to the damage caused to the sector from the scandals released during 2013/14 (CII, 2016). However, an ongoing issue in these industries is related to their inability to effectively communicate with the consumer due to financial restraints and a low level of core specialist employees (Göttlichová & Soukalová, 2015), often resulting in teams that are understaffed and overworked (CFI, 2017). Therefore, these organisations must focus their efforts on efficient and effective marketing communications to reach their target market, promoting trust and authenticity among this audience, in order to generate donations to fund their mission (Göttlichová & Soukalová, 2015).

2.3 Reaching the Target Market Through Relationship Marketing

Literature on marketing management indicates that consumers now play a more active role in the creation of products, services and brands through the co-creation of meaning and value, with value being created and embedded in personalised experience, giving rise to the concept of relationship marketing (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004; Füller, Jawecki & Mühlbacher, 2007; Payne, Storbacka, Frow & Knox, 2009; Grönroos, 2011). Emotion, cultural context and brand symbolism are highlighted in the literature as important factors in the consumer-brand relationship (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982; Zwick, Bonsu & Darmody, 2008; Payne *et al.* 2009) as consumers use brands as foundations for meaningful life and the extension of the self (Belk, 1988; Arnould & Thompson, 2007; Solomon, Bamossy, Askegaard & Hogg, 2010). This is consistent with research on the sector which implies that NPO marketing and communication efforts have focused on their ability to emotionally engage with their consumers (Basil, Ridgway & Basil, 2008). Sargeant *et al.* (2008) believe that for charities to generate a strong emotional response, their non-profit status must be emphasised.

In addition, Hassay & Peloza (2009, p. 46) state "for charities, the ability to gain supporter commitment is critical". Marketing studies into the charity sector specifically emphasise the implementation of relationship marketing to reach and retain the target market in the interest of building brand loyalty and donor commitment to generate lifetime value among the target audience (Hibbert & Horne, 1995; Peacock, 2000; Liao, Foreman & Sargeant, 2001; Williamson, 2003; Bennett, 2006). This is consistent with statistics released by 2into3 (2017), which demonstrate that the majority of fundraised income in ROI is raised through relationship methods; 35% of fundraised income comes through 'Regular/Committed Giving' (see Figure 2.3). Accordingly, charity organisations have become increasingly aware of the importance of communicating a credible and engaging message to the public ideally to promote initial donation and repeat donation behaviour (Marchand & Lavole, 1998; Peltier, Schibrowsky & Schultz, 2002).

FIGURE 2.3: FUNDRAISED INCOME BY METHOD



Source:
(http://www.2into3.com/_fileupload/Seventh%20Annual%20Fundraising%20Report%202017.pdf)

2.3.1 Consumer-brand relationships and forgiveness

In their recent study on brand management, Chang & Chieng (2006) suggest that firms are increasingly using their product brands as key drivers in developing meaningful, long-term consumer-brand relationships. Fournier (1998) asserts that through significant and meaningful interactions, these consumer-brand relationships may even be considered to be on a par with interpersonal relationships in some cases. Similarly, Aaker, Fournier & Brasel (2004) would equate these consumer-brand relationships to friendship models, implying that they can become stronger over time.

While these relationships are generally strong when managed effectively, they are in danger of being damaged by brand-related issues that may arise (Fediuk, Coombs & Botero, 2010). This research is particularly relevant to the charity sector at present, given the recorded falling public trust in charity organisations in the UK since the publication of many high profile scandals (Birkwood, 2016). Coombs, Frandsen, Holladay & Johansen (2010) assert that the mishandling of scandals can not only damage the firm's reputation, but challenge the legitimacy of the firm's overall structure, with the potential to cause permanent damage to brand relationships. As a result, appropriate communication and crisis management strategies are considered vital in the restoration of the consumer-brand relationship through eliciting forgiveness among these consumers (Coombs & Holladay, 2008; Wooten, 2009; Fehr & Gelfand, 2010). Forgiveness, which was previously confined to a person-to-person context (Aaker *et al.* 2004) has since been widely accepted as applicable to the consumer-brand domain (Fedorikhin, Park & Thomson, 2008; Beverland, Kates, Lindgreen & Chung, 2010; Tsarenko & Tojib, 2015).

2.3.2 Response to wrongdoing

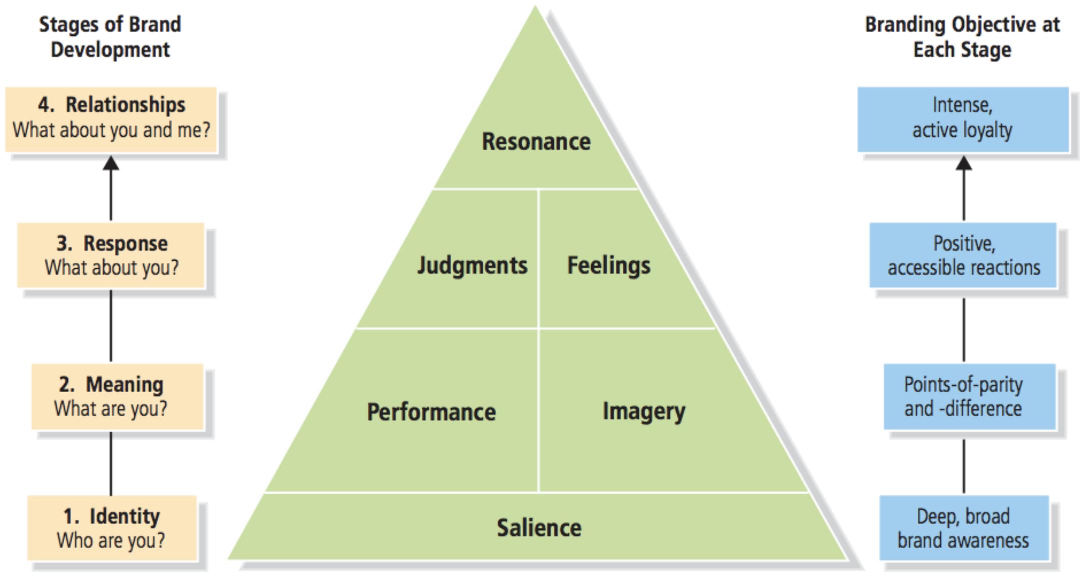
Research in the area of forgiveness suggests that the more severe the wrongdoing, the less likely it is to be forgiven (McCullough, Fincham & Tsang, 2003). Brand-related crises are separated into two types by Dutta & Pullig (2011); 'performance-related' which is the delivery of defective products or services, and 'values-related' which refer to social or ethical issues associated to the brand. Arguably both instances can be applied to various crises which have arisen with different organisations within the charity sector in ROI. More recent literature in the field would imply that there are cases where forgiveness is granted on a 'love the sinner, hate the sin' basis (Tsarenko & Tojib, 2015 p. 1855), suggesting a potential link in the relationships between parties and the subsequent judgments or responses to 'sins' that one or other party may make.

Although research into the concept of forgiveness in the consumer-brand context is becoming a growing trend, further research on the complexity of this issue is required to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. Furthermore, Tsarenko & Tojib (2015) suggest that eliciting forgiveness has a significant impact on repurchase intention. Combined with the need to promote trust and transparency in the consumer-brand relationship to influence donation behaviour (discussed in section 2.2.3), this implies that the topic is of particular relevance to the charity sector and consumer choice situations.

2.3.3 The role of relationships in brand equity

Paharia, Keinan, Avery & Schor (2011) explain that the level of a brand's equity has a subsequent long-term effect on consumer choice situations. Keller (2008) concentrates on the importance of appealing to consumers both emotionally and rationally on a number of different levels, developing brand equity through consistent brand identity, meaning, response, and relationships – see Figure 2.3.3.

FIGURE 2.3.3: THE BRAND EQUITY MODEL



Source: Keller (2008, p. 80)

Aaker's (1996 p. 15) definition of brand equity focuses on the creation of value for the customer, describing it as "a set of brand assets (and liabilities) linked to a brand, its name and symbol, that add to (or subtract) from the value provided by a product or service to a firm and/or its customers". Cravens & Piercy (2013) assert that value is perceived by the buyer, with true customer value being created when the perceived benefits outweigh any perceived risks or sacrifices resulting from a choice (Fahy & Jobber, 2015). For consumers to perceive value, they require knowledge or information to be used in their decision-making processes.

2.3.4 The role of knowledge in consumer-brand relationships

Research by McDougle & Lam (2014) shows consumers with a high level of knowledge and understanding of the marketing efforts and processes of the nonprofit sector have a greater level of confidence in the efforts of these organisations. Bourassa & Stang (2016) specifically focus on consumer knowledge as a moderator of the relationship that exists between trust, perceived transparency and accountability, and donation amount. It is also identified as a moderator between trust and volunteer status. Therefore, trust, transparency and accountability are not enough to predict overall support; knowledge must also be considered as a key factor. Fournier (1998) refers to the existence of intimacy as a central component of effective consumer-brand relationships, suggesting that mutual knowledge and some degree of transparency through information sharing is beneficial to relationship marketing and ultimately to building strong consumer-brand relationships.

Considering recent scandals in the charity sector in the UK and Ireland (Birkwood, 2015; CFI, 2017), it may be the case that exposing internal practices has increased the public's knowledge of charity management practices. Existing literature appears to indicate that higher levels of transparency and consumer knowledge of organisational practices should potentially improve brand equity and consumer-brand relationships. However, recent reports on the charity sector have uncovered what many may perceive as malpractice. Therefore, in these cases, it would appear that increased knowledge has in effect damaged brand equity and potentially damaged consumer-brand relationships. Similarly, studies on economic theory would suggest that when consumers perceive their donation to have little potential for significant impact, the donation amount decreases as a result (Krawczyk & Lec, 2010; Brock, Lange & Ozbay, 2013). Existing research findings indicate that baby boomers in the UK are showing a record low in terms of trust towards NPOs (Birkwood, 2015). This same demographic in ROI is showing similarly decreased donation behaviour (CAF, 2017).

There is little research specifically exploring the potential links between charity scandals and the damage they do to brand reputations in the eyes of the consumer. The potential for brand knowledge or consumer-brand relationships to be a factor in the influence these scandals have on donation behaviour is similarly understudied, making these issues a focus of the present study. Another important topic in marketing research literature is the link between identity-appeals in marketing and consumer-brand relationships, which is explored in the next section.

2.4 Consumer Identification and the Extended Self

In their research on the field of marketing, Gilmore & Pine (2007) recognise the importance of communicating authentic marketing messages that appeal to the consumer's actual self. This is claimed to promote customer value by creating a self-brand connection with the consumer (Paharia, Keinan, Avery & Schor, 2011), which Escalas & Bettman (2003) agree is linked to the formation of brand equity. Marketing researchers find that consumers define themselves using possessions as key symbols and indicators of personality traits and interests (O'Cass & McEwen 2004; Solomon *et al.* 2010). Both Sirgy (1982) and Belk (1988) recognise that consumers are driven towards brands that are in keeping with their actual or ideal selves. Belk (1988) further develops this theory into the concept of the *extended self*, which maintains that the products and services consumers choose can become part of their identity.

Furthermore, Wattanasuwan (2005) affirms that consumers use material possessions in search of happiness, reminding themselves of their own personal accomplishments and experiences, while simultaneously forming group identities. Therefore consumer self-esteem has a key role to play in the kinds of brands they identify with, implying that consumers' impulse to identify themselves through objects or possessions is unavoidable (ibid). This is also reflected in findings by Kapferer (2012), which show identification to be a crucial function of a brand for the consumer.

2.4.1 Appealing to the consumer's actual self: brand-consumer self-congruence

In the interest of authenticity, Paharia *et al.* (2011) consider the shift towards appealing to the consumer's actual self to be a step towards the theory of self-congruence, in which Sirgy (1982) argues that consumers tend to avoid brands that are inconsistent with their ideal or actual self-concept. Malär, Krohmer, Hoyer & Nyffenegger (2011) acknowledge consumers as achieving self-congruence through consumption of brands that they identify with on a personal level. Park, MacInnis, Priester, Eisingerich & Iacobucci (2010) recognise that companies have evolved with the ongoing trend of connecting with the consumer's actual self, which has been found to create higher levels of consumer brand loyalty, and consequently, to improve the company's financial performance. Gilmore & Pine (2007) report a corresponding growth in the importance of the actual self, as consumers are now searching for reality and authenticity in marketing messages.

2.4.2 Appealing to the moral self

Recent research suggests that moral identity factors such as kindness, compassion and fairness are fundamental to the self-concept (Aquino & Reed, 2002; Aquino, Freeman, Reed, Lim & Felps, 2009). This is of particular relevance to the charity sector as donation behaviour is considered to be the alignment of the moral act of charitable giving and an individual's own moral identity (Aquino & Reed, 2002). Lee, Winterich & Ross (2012) develop this discussion further, proposing that consumers with moral identities central to their self-concept are less likely to engage in charitable donations if they believe the recipients to have some level of responsibility for their adverse circumstances, as they no longer consider it a moral act. This can be linked to the negative relationship between moral identity and unethical behaviour (Sage, Kavussanu & Duda, 2006) believed to be emphasised by actions which breach moral principles (Lee *et al.* 2012). However, how consumer perceptions and donation behaviour are altered when the charity itself demonstrates unethical behaviour remains a topic for further discussion.

2.4.3 The ethical 21st century consumer

Ethics has become a prevalent topic in business strategy over the past three decades (Winkler & Coombs, 1993; Martin & Johnson, 2008; Brunk, 2012). Research implies a link between company ethics and consumer response patterns (Brunk, 2012) as studies suggest that the 21st century consumer has become more socially conscious, ethically motivated and likely to be impacted by societal rather than personal reasons during the consumer decision-making process (Shaw, Grehan, Shiu, Hassan & Thomson, 2005; Auger & Devinney, 2007). This seems to contradict the recorded decrease in per-capita charity donation behaviour in Ireland in recent years (CFI, 2017). A potential explanation may be located in the theory of the attitude-behaviour gap.

2.4.4 The attitude-behaviour gap

Studies on consumer behaviour suggest an existing gap between behaviour and attitudes, implying that consumer's ethical purchase intentions do not always match their actual purchase behaviour, referred to as the 'attitude-behaviour' gap (Carrigan & Attalle, 2001; Auger & Devinney, 2007; Carrington, Neville & Whitewell, 2010). Attempts to understand this gap and why it continues to prevent ethical consumption have been key topics for discussion in research in the field to-date (Creyer, 1997; Boulstridge & Carrigan, 2000; Shaw, Shiu & Clarke, 2000; White, MacDonnell & Ellard, 2012). Cherrier (2007) proposes that this may be a result of consumers forming ethical values based on collective identity and not solely from an internal perspective, which implies a sense of unity and external influence among the consumers who value ethical practices. Hassay & Peloza (2009) extend this sense of unity to the context of the charity sector, implying that a sense of community among the donor base promotes loyalty to the charity brand.

2.5 An Insight to Advertising, Marketing and Consumer Behaviour in the Charity Sector

2.5.1 Negative framing in charity advertising

Prospect theory addresses the concept of an individual's perception of gain or loss during the decision-making process and choice behaviour (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979; Tversky & Kahneman, 1981). This has unearthed the process of framing, which presents decision-makers with two equal value outcomes, one positive and one negative, in the interest of influencing their opinions and emotions on a given issue (Chang & Lee, 2010). In the charity sector context, marketing appeals similarly use goal framing to promote either the positive outcomes of the charitable donation or the negative outcomes based on the absence of donation (ibid).

Research suggests that negative framing is more effective and persuasive as losses have a greater impact due to individuals feeling them more strongly than a gain (Maheswaran & Meyers-Levy, 1990; Homer & Yoon, 1992; Rothman, Martino, Bedell, Detweiler & Salovey, 1999), bringing forward Martin's (1995) concept of negativity bias. Similarly, Chang & Lee (2010) posit that negative framing in charity advertising appeals to consumers emotionally through presenting the unfavourable repercussions if they do not donate, invoking their own self-relevance and consciousness in connection with the cause, proposing that negative framing has higher persuasion ability than positive framing in charity sector appeals and should be applied in an effort to increase donation behaviour (ibid).

2.5.2 Consumer response to and identification with charity messaging

Continuing on the theme of emotional appeal, Lee *et al.* (2012) recommend that charities focus on the promotion of empathy and benevolence as the moral values behind their marketing efforts and the organisation itself, as consumers with high moral identity are more susceptible to the situational stimulation of empathy, which is estimated to increase donation behaviour as a result. However, it is also advised that marketers in the charity sector exercise caution in cause-related advertising campaigns, given the conflicting behavioural patterns of consumers who may consider the recipients somewhat guilty for their plight, as discussed in section 2.4.2 (ibid). These conflicting behavioural patterns have seemingly led to contrasting recommendations on how marketers in the charity sector should communicate their message, creating a lack of conclusive evidence on the topic.

Studies on economic theory highlight the importance of brands communicating their message as Dana, Weber and Kuang (2007) suggest that when individuals can avoid information on how their decisions impact others, they are more inclined to act selfishly. In the charity marketing context, Chang & Lee (2010) assert that using vivid, congruent stories as part of a charity advertising campaign will make the message more relatable, increasing public awareness and donation behaviour as a result. Furthermore, Smith and Berger (1996) propose that using narratives to frame statistics is more effective, which is consistent with social psychology research on dual-process models – this theory suggests that people engage more mentally and emotionally when processing messages about specific individuals than with abstract concepts (Sherman, Beike & Ryall, 1999).

Fournier (1998) agrees that consumers personify brands in this way to make them more relatable, implying that a more humane approach to communicating the brand message is likely to resonate with the target market. This links back to the concept of relationship marketing and the self-concept previously discussed in this chapter, as these processes enable consumers to identify with the brand on an emotional level. However, it is pertinent to note that in order for these narratives to be effective, they must be perceived by consumers as authentic as Chiu, Hsieh & Kuo (2012) note that authenticity is key to the creation of a successful brand story. Otherwise, consumers are likely to feel that they have been deceived, having a subsequent negative impact on buyer behaviour (Paharia *et al.* 2011).

2.5.3 Educating the donor base

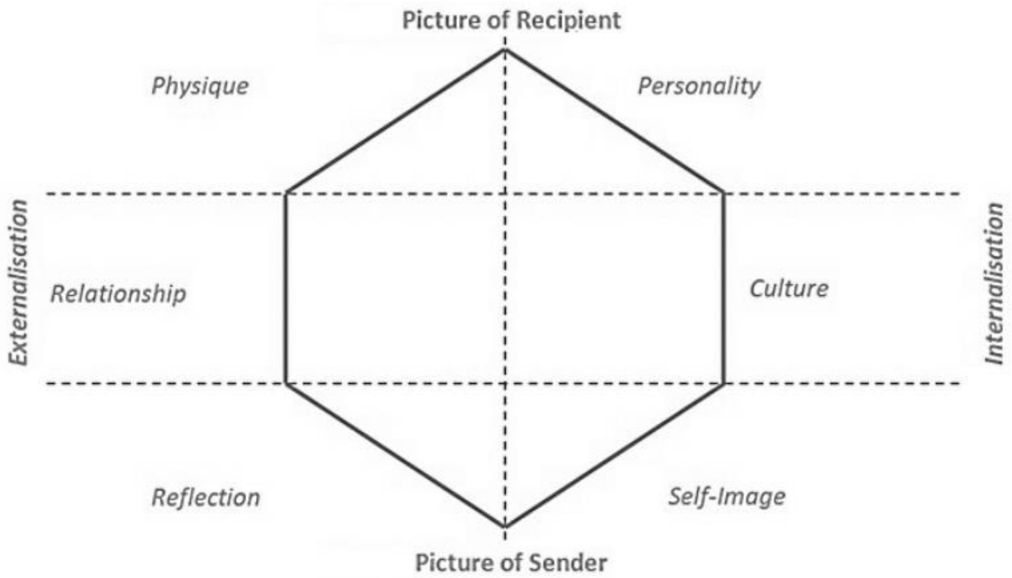
The importance of educating the consumer in the interest of generating donation behaviour within the charity sector is highlighted by Bourassa & Stang (2016), with previous research agreeing that the more knowledge the target market has of the NPOs inner and sectorial workings, the more likely they are to donate and support (Schlesinger *et al.* 2004; Faircloth, 2005; Sargeant *et al.* 2008; Sisco & McCorkindale, 2013). Furthermore, Bourassa & Stang (2016) note the ongoing themes of trust and perceived transparency and accountability to be essential components of the NPO message, with a variety of sources asserting that establishing trust among the general public is essential to the sector as a whole, particularly in relation to effectiveness of the message and generating support (Gaskin, 1999; Herrington, 2007; Sargeant & Woodliffe, 2007).

With the charity sector in ROI enduring ongoing scrutiny following various scandals from the media and public alike (CFI, 2017), the present study identifies the current situation as a basis for further research on the topic of authenticity and public perception of the charity sector in ROI at present. Sargeant & Lee (2002) state that one charity alone can do very little to educate the public in order to alter overall attitudes towards the sector. Which poses the question, how can the target audience be effectively reached?

2.5.4 Segmenting the target market

Fahy & Jobber (2015) suggest that to effectively reach the target audience, brands should segment the market into different groups based on factors such as self-image (or concept) and culture. This is consistent with research by Kapferer (2012) as indicated in the brand identity prism, which highlights culture as a fundamental element of the framework – see Figure 2.5.4.

FIGURE 2.5.4: THE BRAND IDENTITY PRISM



Source: Kapferer (2012 p. 44)

2.5.5 The culture of the baby boomer demographic

Baby boomers, born between approximately 1946 and 1964, are recognised as having noteworthy size and spending power in leading global markets (Nielsen, 2012). From a cultural perspective, they are considered unique from the generations preceding them. Having grown up in an era which emphasised the importance of choice, autonomy, self-expression and pleasure (Whitbourne & Willis, 2006; Jones, Hyde, Victor, Wiggins, Gilleard & Higgs, 2008), baby boomers have been defined as "pioneers and agents of change throughout their lifetimes" (Coleman, Hladikova. & Savelyev, 2006 p. 192). Research by Laslett (1989) recognises this group within the UK as experiencing a period in life referred to as 'the third age' – a term used to describe the years between middle and old age, comprising of personal realisation and self-fulfilment due to increased life expectancy among the human race. Garfein & Herzog (1995) refer to this group as 'the young-old' based on their ability to bridge the gap between the views of older generations and the altogether distinct views of the generation after them (Sudbury-Riley, 2016).

2.5.6 Baby boomers and the charity sector

Sudbury-Riley's (2016) recent study on the baby boomer demographic found the concept of respect to be highly valued among this group. Similarly, chief marketing officer at online marketing specialists Boombox Networks, Anne-Marie Kovacs, notes that if the baby boomer generation is not treated with respect and authenticity, they are more likely to switch brands (Klie, 2016), bringing the conversation back to the importance of charity organisations communicating authenticity in the messaging (Göttlichová & Soukalová, 2015). Green (2005) urges marketers to pay attention to the ageing population and they will in turn reap the financial rewards, as he believes retiring baby boomers to hold the key to a marketing revolution.

Despite baby boomers having the most significant percentage of donation habits across the generations, it is reported that 77% of non-profits do not have a contingency plan to keep this target audience actively engaging in charitable donation behaviour (Hassay & Peloza, 2009; AFP, 2016; Blackbaud, 2016). Although an estimated 33% of this group are heavy internet users and reported to make up 33% of overall online presence (including on social media), apparently less than 5% of advertising is targeted towards those outside of the 18-49 cohort (Sudbury-Riley, 2016). Also to be considered is that members of the baby boomer generation are increasingly entering into retirement age on a daily basis (AFP, 2016), causing a shift in demographics and economies, which is in turn impacting business plans and marketing activities (Coleman *et al.* 2006). It can therefore be argued that now is the time to dedicate further research into this generation to forecast its development and realise the potential opportunities (ibid, 2006).

2.6 Chapter Summary

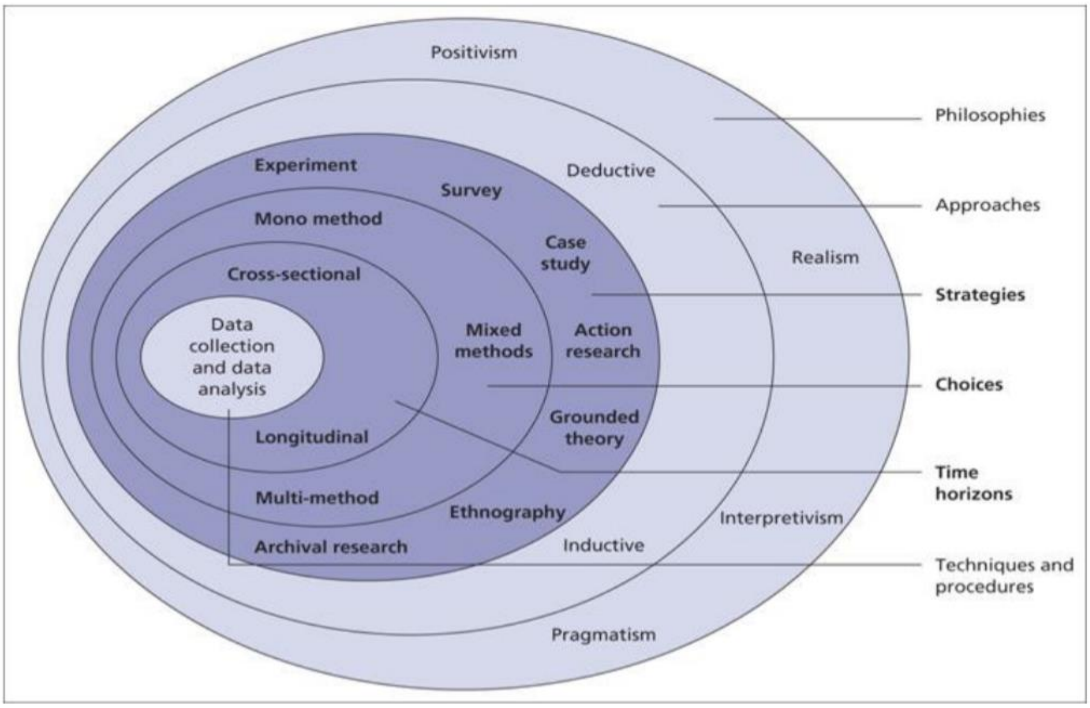
Based on analysis of existing research on the charity sector, combined with marketing literature the author considers relevant to this context, an introduction to charities and marketing has been presented, and the importance of communicating the NPO message to encourage donation behaviour through transparency and trust through have also been discussed. Complexities surrounding consumer-brand relationships, such as consumer identification and the self-concept, which have been extended to the charity sector context with regard to morality and forgiveness, have been addressed. Traditional charity advertising activities and their potential influence on the consumer have been explored, with an emphasis on the importance of identifying and targeting the audience based on a combination of the academic and empirical literature reviewed. These secondary research findings have led to the identification of gaps in the literature which the researcher considers to be topics for further research, and are presented as the research objectives of the present study in Chapter 3, with the various research methods and approaches deemed most appropriate to achieve these objectives also be detailed.

CHAPTER 3:
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Chapter Introduction

Based on the identification of specific gaps in the literature discussed in Chapter 1 and 2, this chapter provides a description of the various primary research methods used in the study to further explore these topics. The methods chosen have been selected in line with the various methodological elements which motivate the research process as presented by Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill (2015) in the research 'onion' – see Figure 3.1, with an aim to answer the research questions proposed in Chapter 1, which are further detailed in this chapter. The philosophical reasoning behind each consulted research method, the research instrument, and an overview of the chosen sample will be discussed. Although various alternative methods could be used to achieve the study's research objectives, the methods applied are selected through a critical appraisal of the potential techniques, and their respective benefits and drawbacks, as described throughout this chapter. The chapter concludes with reference to the limitations and ethical considerations of the research study, as well as the method of data analysis.

FIGURE 3.1: THE RESEARCH 'ONION'



Source: Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill (2015 p. 108)

3.2 Research Aims and Objectives

The research methodology aims to guide the research by identifying the data collection techniques deemed most suited to the proposed research topic (Fisher & Buglear, 2010). This research study seeks to provide insight to consumer perception of the charity sector in ROI in the interest of gathering relevant and meaningful data in an area that remains largely under-researched to date (2into3, 2017; CFI, 2017).

Building on the assumption that consumers identify with brands as part of the consumer-brand relationship, this study investigates the impact these relationships have on donation behaviour with a specific emphasis on the historically generous cohort of baby boomer consumers (Sudbury-Riley, 2016; CAF, 2017). The following research objectives have been set to fulfil this aim – see Table 3.2.

TABLE 3.2: RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Research Objective 1	To examine current perceptions of charity organisations among consumers in ROI
Research Objective 2	To explore the impact these perceptions have on the sector's ability to generate donation of volunteer time and money
Research Objective 3	To investigate the impact charity advertising has on donation behaviour
Research Objective 4	To assess charity-donor relationships as a factor in influencing donation behaviour

3.3 Research Philosophy and Design

Research is described by Saunders *et al.* (2015) as the systematic action of finding things out in order to increase knowledge on a given topic. Blumberg, Cooper & Schindler (2011) note that a clear methodological framework is key to successful research, as it provides the necessary tools, models and ideas for researchers to gather both the knowledge and skills that will enable them to answer the research question at hand.

The peripheral layer of the research 'onion' (see Figure 3.1) identifies the role of philosophy as part of the research process. Quinlan (2011) suggests that all research is influenced or underpinned by the presence of a philosophical framework, shaping the research based on the worldview in which it exists. Collis & Hussey (2009) equate this philosophical framework to a research paradigm, which acts as a guide behind any scientific research being conducted. Research by Quinlan (2011) focuses on the role of the researcher in the methodology, asserting that the philosophical framework is determined by the researcher's own epistemological and ontological considerations.

Ontology is concerned with the nature of reality (Saunders *et al.* 2015). Bryman (2011) summarises two broad categorical alternatives as objectivism or subjectivism. Epistemology refers to the nature of knowledge (ibid). In broad terms, the two alternative epistemological orientations are positivism or interpretivism (Bryman, 2011). This is summarised in Table 3.3. Interpretivism and positivism are described in detail in the next section.

TABLE 3.3:
FUNDAMENTAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE RESEARCH STRATEGIES

	Quantitative	Qualitative
Principal orientation to the role of theory in relation to research	Deductive; testing of theory	Induction; generation of theory
Epistemological Orientation	Natural science model; in particular positivism	Interpretivism
Ontological Orientation	Objectivism	Constructionism/ Subjectivism

Source: Bryman (2011 p. 75)

3.3.1 Interpretivist and positivist approaches

Epistemology is described by Bryman and Bell (2011, p. 15) as "the question of what is (or should be) regarded as acceptable knowledge in a discipline". In sociological research, this is most commonly divided into interpretivism and positivism. A positivistic approach focuses more on the generation of accurate information from the physical reality through scientific method, aligning more so with objectivism, which would argue that reality is not influenced by social actors (Bryman, 2011). In contrast, interpretivism believes human information to offer meaning (Saunders *et al.* 2015), therefore making the approach most suited to the research objectives in 3.2.

An interpretivist-based epistemology maintains that all understandings of reality are social constructions, with meaning being created through social experiences that are not entirely experimentally examinable or measurable on the basis of quantity, amount, intensity or frequency (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Collis & Hussey (2011) explain that a subjectivist or interpretivist position assumes that there exists no singular right answer to the questions being explored as each individual has their own sense or opinion of reality, within multiple realities. As the main objective of this research project is to explore public opinion in ROI on the charity sector, the research philosophy identified is that of interpretivism. By putting an emphasis on conducting research with people as opposed to objects, the research will aim to gain an understanding of this topic through the differences between humans' perceptions and understandings of their roles as 'social actors' (Saunders *et al.* 2015).

3.3.2 Qualitative versus quantitative research strategies

Given the recency of the emerging reports relating to scandals in the charity sector in the ROI, there is very little research into the topic. Therefore, this research is an exploratory study into consumer perception of, and relationships with, the charity sector to explore the potential impact of these scandals on the sector. Exploratory studies are considered to be valuable in exploring new phenomena, asking new research questions, and assessing phenomena in a new light (Robson, 2002).

Maylor & Blackmon (2005) posit that it is essential for the chosen research approach to be consistent with the research question proposed. Quantitative methods are generally argued to be more time efficient than their qualitative counterparts, and claimed to remove bias from the research process (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Kapoulas & Mitic (2012) consider quantitative approaches to encourage truthfulness of the observations and assumptions of the participants, with a goal towards generalisability of the research findings, usually attempting to explain reality statistically using large sample sizes and data sets in order to ensure reliability and validity of conclusions. This makes quantitative methods ideally suited to describing *what is happening* in a setting. However, qualitative approaches can be more useful if the research aims to explore *why it is happening*. Existing literature already identifies falling per-capita donation rates, but fails to fully explain why. Therefore, this indicates the potential efficacy of using qualitative methods in the present study.

The charity sector in the ROI is currently operating in a very specific context; that of the recent scandals. Scriven, Cook, Coryn and Evergreen (2010) argue that a statistical approach is not suited to research based in a situational context. Consequently, the statistical nature of quantitative research is ultimately deemed inappropriate to the exploration of the proposed research topic. Instead, a qualitative approach has been applied in the present study in the interest of collecting rich data on people's understandings of, perceptions of, and experiences with the charity sector, to explore why donation rates are falling (Boodhoo & Purmesser, 2009). Kahlke (2014) explains that qualitative researchers seek to understand the way people interpret experiences and the meaning they associate with these experiences, making the reliability on human experience and exploration of human perceptions a key feature of a qualitative approach (Silverman, 2013). Qualitative research is therefore suitably applicable to the proposed research objectives.

3.3.3 Inductive versus deductive research

Of the two approaches to theory development identified in the next layer of the research 'onion', namely inductive and deductive research approaches, an inductive approach is most commonly associated with qualitative research (Lin, 1998). Inductive research allows for conclusions to be drawn from primary data thematically, ideally suited to exploring a new phenomenon or under-studied research topic in order to build new understandings, without the use of a detailed pre-existing theoretical framework to test, as is the case with the present inquiry (Bryman, 2011; Creswell, 2014). As this study aims to explore time and context-bound consumer perceptions as opposed to drawing or testing a hypothesis, an inductive approach is most appropriate. In contrast, a deductive approach focuses on the statistical gathering of data from large samples to draw generalisable, non-time-bound, non-context-bound, and objective conclusions to prove or disprove theory, matching the approach to more quantitative based research (Lin, 1998).

3.4 Data Collection Method: Semi-structured Interviews

An interpretivist methodology usually entails a qualitative research strategy (Hiller, 2010). Quinlan (2011) defines qualitative data as representing non-numeric data such as thoughts, ideas, feelings and understanding. Qualitative studies often involve methods such as interviewing for the collection of rich data from a subjective standpoint (Lin, 1998; Bryman, 2014; Saunders *et al.* 2015). There are various benefits of the interview approach. Research suggests that qualitative interviews are potentially more effective in obtaining authentic accounts of the participants' experiences over other data collection methods, reducing the likelihood of social desirability bias arising (Hiller, 2010).

While quantitative interviews primarily take a structured approach, qualitative interviews can be differentiated into two categories; semi-structured and unstructured (Bryman and Bell, 2011). The semi-structured approach allows the researcher and participant to loosely cover a general list of questions and themes which can be added to as the interview develops, whereas unstructured interviews have a more conversational tone, covering a range of topics through prompts from the researcher (Bryman & Bell, 2011). In order to gain significant insight into any given topic, it is recommended to develop relevant questions and consider potential probing of answers during the interview. Therefore, semi-structured interviews have been selected to satisfy the research aims listed in 3.2 to allow for both consistency and flexibility in data collection across participants with the intention of developing a data-set that is readily suited to analytical comparison across the interviews (Saunders, 2009). The resulting findings and conclusions from this primary data collection and analysis will be thematically discussed in Chapters 4, 5 and 6.

3.4.1 Enabling the semi-structured interviews

The interviews were carried out with a previously designed questions list, with questions designed to be open-ended and discursive, allowing the interviewer to deviate from the questions list to allow for discussions about unanticipated matters in a relaxed manner. This provides the interviewee with the opportunity to respond to questions in a way best suited to their own experiences and perceptions (Fisher, 2007), with an aim to create a safe and comfortable environment to enable the collection of rich and in-depth data. Kvale (1996) believes this form of in-depth interview to aid in the exploration of informant-determined or ‘emic’ angles and perspectives.

Consistency across the interviews was supported by the interview topic list, which was drawn up to ensure that the relevant points were covered, and can be found in appendix 2. The interview format was then divided into three sections: section one discussed the participants past involvement and perceptions of the charity sector in ROI; section two involved participants current involvement and opinions regarding the recent scandals in various charity organisations; and section three discussed future considerations for involvement in the sector and potential improvements to be implemented in the interest of improving donation behaviour in ROI. This sectioned design follows the framework of a qualitative study carried out by Hiller (2010) in researching consumer ethics.

Prior to the interviews, an informal pilot study was executed on a smaller sample group to ensure validity and reliability of the questions, as well as to establish the expected timeframe of each session. Participants were then approached and briefed on the interview topic guide and the rationale of the study. The ethical obligation to their anonymity was also addressed, in the interest of generating accurate and genuine responses. The interviews took place face-to-face on a one-to-one basis to support the interpretative nature of the study (King, 2004), which allowed the interviewer to probe for further information where appropriate, creating more significant insight than in quantitative methods such as surveys. The interview locations were all quiet settings to avoid interruptions, chosen based on convenience for the participant. The interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes and were audio recorded for post-interview analysis, without note taking during the course of the interview process which allowed for a more conversational and natural flow. A sample of the informed consent sheet can be found in appendix 1, samples of the interview transcripts are in appendix 3.

3.5 Sample Selection Technique and Justification

Robinson (2014) considers sampling to be a guiding principle of qualitative research. In order to obtain the information most relevant to this study, the researcher has considered a variety of factors in the sample selection process.

Based on secondary data consulted, research on the charity sector identifies Ireland as a nation with a long history of high levels of donating volunteer time and money to charity organisations (CAF, 2017). However, studies specific to the charity sector in ROI remains sparse to-date, even though there has been a significant, uncharacteristic decrease in donation behaviour among the baby boomer generation in ROI, a demographic widely regarded to have the most donation power (Hassay & Peloza, 2009; 2into3, 2017). As a result, organisations in the charity sector recognise this sample as an area for future academic consideration and discussion (Benefacts, 2017; CFI, 2017).

Furthermore, existing research on the charity sector in ROI is generally of quantitative nature based on large sample sizes (CII, 2016; 2into3, 2017; Benefacts, 2017; CAF, 2017; CFI, 2017), measuring quantity and frequency of donation behaviour, as opposed to assessing the motivation behind the uncharacteristic decline in donation behaviour since 2014/2015 (CAF, 2017). While larger sample sizes help to provide generalisable information on the overall population, they do not provide in-depth insight to situations within a specific context, which is considered essential to exploratory qualitative studies of an inductive nature (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Hogan, Dolan & Donnelly (2009) emphasise the benefit of smaller sample sizes in yielding more accurate results as the data obtained is richer due to the extra attention the researcher can give to each participant. Similarly, Saunders *et al.* (2015) believe that focusing on a smaller sample aids in obtaining information-rich data for analysis to provide significant insights.

Resulting from these combined considerations, the sample selection consulted comprises of seven members of general public in ROI born between 1946 and 1964, as defined by Nielsen (2012) to be within the baby boomer age range, as the researcher believes this group to hold information pertinent to the fulfilment of the research objectives as listed earlier in this chapter in section 3.2. These participants have been recruited through convenience sampling, namely based on their accessibility and availability, in the interest of quick and efficient data collection (Cameron & Price, 2009), given the timeframe of the study allowed. Information on each participant can be seen in Table 3.5.

TABLE 3.5: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION

Participant 1 Female Born: 1956	**Participant 2** Female Born: 1953
Participant 3 Female Born: 1963	**Participant 4** Female Born: 1956
Participant 5 Male Born: 1953	**Participant 6** Male Born: 1954
Participant 7 Female Born: 1955	

3.6 Ethical Considerations

3.6.1 Ethical approval

From an ethical point of view, Blumberg *et al.* (2011) consider that potential issues may occur in any research process, therefore the appropriate considerations must be adhered to. In order to ensure that all participants of the study are treated in an ethical manner, an *Ethical Review Application Form* has been completed and submitted to the National College of Ireland by the author, to outline and ensure that participants will be treated in an ethical manner.

3.6.2 Gaining access and informed consent

When undertaking research, Robson (2002) considers gaining access and cooperation to be based on developing relationships. Accordingly, an introductory email was sent to all participants ahead of the in-depth interview. This outlined the purpose of the study and their personal involvement. From an ethical standpoint, participants took part on an entirely voluntary basis, with the option to withdraw at any time. In the interest of anonymity, an informed consent form was included in the email and signed by the participant, which also granted their full access to the audio recording, findings, conclusions and recommendations of the study. The anonymity of the data collected was further ensured by storing all files in a password protected folder, which will be permanently deleted when the research study results have been released.

3.6.3 Anonymisation of the charities

A significant ethical considered was the reference to several named, real world charity organisations during the primary research data collection, and the decision of whether or not to identify these charities in the study. It has been observed by the researcher that participants are sharing opinions, and therefore may not be based on hard evidence, but on emotion and personal experience. Given that the research topic is not concerned with exploring public perceptions of a particular charity, but instead the wider sector in ROI, naming of the charities has been deemed unnecessary and potentially inappropriate from both a legal and ethical standpoint. Accordingly, the charities have each been given pseudonyms ranging from 'Charity 1' to 'Charity 22' throughout each relevant chapter, transcript and appendices to ensure anonymity of all charities referenced during the data collection process.

3.7 Data Analysis Method: Thematic Qualitative Data Analysis

Saunders *et al.* (2015) define data analysis as the process of giving meaning to the data collected with reference to the research questions and objectives identified. Each interview was audio recorded and later transcribed for post-analysis of the data. The transcripts were then analysed and recurring themes were identified based on various significant statements from each participant, which is a widely accepted method of qualitative data analysis (Bendassolli, 2013; Namey, Guest, McKenna & Chen, 2016). It is recommended for an interpretivist approach to process the data inductively, through the identification of themes within the data, and cross referencing this data with existing research in the field in order to draw conclusions or theories (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Accordingly, statements from the participants were thematically organised into a table format for effective identification of both major and minor themes. These themes were then correlated with the research objectives of the study and further interpreted with reference to the secondary data consulted.

3.8 Limitations

Given that this research is based on a small sample size, further specified to the baby boomer population in ROI, the data analysed cannot be generalised. Further to the sample size, a significant limitation to the study is the presence of bias throughout the interview process, which undoubtedly influences participant response in any given case. Although the interview questions were carefully planned and conducted, the answers cannot be guaranteed as entirely authentic or reliable as a result.

Research by Hiller (2010) incorporated follow up interviews to consider similarities and differences in participant responses since the first meeting weeks prior. Given a longer time frame, the researcher would organise follow up interviews with each participant to reassess their observations, if they had altered in any way subsequent to the initial appointment, and why, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of public opinion in ROI with regard to the research topic at hand. However, the present study has been limited by time constraints imposed on the researcher. As the data collection process took place over several weeks, the researcher carried out in-depth interviews with each participant only once.

3.9 Chapter Summary

The methodology chapter is believed to provide justification for the chosen research methods (Saunders *et al.* 2015). To achieve this, the research aims and objectives have been outlined and the philosophical reasoning behind each research method chosen to fulfil these aims and objectives has been identified. The qualitative research approach selected has been deemed most suited to the exploratory nature of the study given its inductive, interpretivist and subjective orientation. The data collection method of semi-structured interviews, its role in the collection of rich in-depth data, and the subsequent thematic approach to processing of this data has also been discussed, and is presented in the next chapter. Rationale behind the research sample of seven members of the baby boomer generation in ROI, their significance to satisfying the research objectives outlined, and the ethical considerations in connection to the data collection process and their personal participation have also been explained. Finally, the limitations resulting from the chosen research methodology, as well as those imposed on the researcher, have been acknowledged.

CHAPTER 4:
FINDINGS

4.1 Chapter Introduction

This chapter will present findings from the seven in-depth interviews carried out during June 2018. The data analysis follows the methodology as explained in Chapter 3, which resulted in the identification of various themes relevant to the research objectives as shown on Table 4.1. These themes are used to form the overall structure of the findings chapter, beginning with a detailed exploration of the major and minor themes significant to each research objective and reference to the relevant quotes from each interview participant.

TABLE 4.1: THEMES EMERGING BASED ON RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Research Objectives	Major Themes	Minor Themes
1. To examine current perceptions of the charity organisations among consumers in ROI	Scepticism	Tolerance
	Need for professionalism/regulation	
2. To explore the impact these perceptions have on the sector's ability to generate donation of volunteer time and money	Preference to volunteering time	Need for the work
	Macroeconomics	Selfishness
3. To investigate the impact charity advertising has on donation behaviour	Indifference to the message	Positive response to human interaction
	Inefficient use of funds	
4. To assess charity-donor relationships as a factor in influencing donation behaviour	Loyalty	Complete Confidence
	Religious Connotations	

4.2 Research Objective 1

To examine current perceptions of charity organisations among consumers in ROI

Interview Themes

- Scepticism
- Tolerance
- Need for professionalism/regulation

The themes relevant to the initial research objective were explored during the first section of the interviews. Participants were encouraged to discuss their historical perceptions of the charity sector to give more background and consideration to their current perceptions, in order to investigate whether or not these perceptions are changing.

4.2.1 Scepticism

A major recurring theme in the interviews is the sense of scepticism participants have towards the charity sector, based on various scandals which have emerged over the years. One participant expresses his reservations on how effectively fundraised donations have been invested in the past, as well as into the future:

"I wondered how they got their funding. Later on it turned out that funding was being used for various things that wasn't a charity...I think that charities have been given some time to get the house in order. And maybe they are in order - until the next scandal breaks." (Interviewee 5, male)

Another participant reflects on her own personal involvement with a charity organisation. While there was no misappropriation of funds during her time there, there had been in the past. This is a source of major disillusionment for the participant, causing her to draw comparisons with other charities where scandals have already broken, and speculating towards cases which remain uncovered to date:

"I was quite disturbed to hear that before I became involved there had been misappropriation of funds that had then stopped. That was very disconcerting to hear that someone running a charity could be that, yeah...it's out and out stealing. Charity 3? I would have a very very low opinion, very, extremely low. And I would be very concerned with other charities that it hasn't come to light." (Interviewee 3, female)

Similarly, another participant associates her scepticism towards the charity industry to the lack of culpability, particularly among larger charity organisations, to report their spending:

"I had one [direct debit] for a long time with Charity 5 but I feel then that maybe that organisation is too big...I mean Charity 4, what would their fundraising budget be? Things get too big and then there's an issue of accountability." (Interviewee 4, female)

4.2.2 Tolerance

As the interviews delve further, many of the participants feel that the reported scandals should not cause the sector as a whole to be labelled as corrupt. This leads to the identification of tolerance as a theme in reaction to the aforementioned scepticism. One participant, who had specifically expressed her own concerns regarding past and present activities of different organisations within the sector (see section 4.2.1), asserts that the charity sector is doing beneficial work and should not be viewed in a negative light:

"I think that there are fantastic charities out there, and there are charities who have rotten apples in them - you shouldn't write off the whole system." (Interviewee 3, female)

Other participants echo this tolerance, implying that support for these organisations remains strong, and that there is an understanding of past mismanagement:

"I don't think people my age have been discouraged by the scandals. I think that people would investigate more and be more careful, but discouraged? No." (Interviewee 1, female)

4.2.3 Need for professionalism and regulation

A subsequent major theme emerging on public perception is that the charity sector has become more professional and well-regulated in recent years. This has seemingly aided in combating scepticism discussed in 4.2.1, promoting a general consensus among participants that through transparency, professionalism, and regulation, their cynicism may be eased, resulting in tolerance, outlined in section 4.2.2. One participant suggests that the scandals have therefore been a contributing factor in improving transparency and regulation, which is of benefit to the sector as a whole:

"Some recent scandals have caused the sector to sort out governance issues, and to operate with greater transparency, and that is to be welcomed." (Interviewee 2, female)

Another participant acknowledges that while there have been scandals in the sector, as long as these organisations are well regulated to ensure transparency, he feels that it is important for their efforts to continue:

"They're providing a benefit. And if they're doing a good job on that, and the people are happy with the service they're getting, well then let them continue. But make sure that they're regulated. The other thing about it is that they're open to the public scrutiny so that every year the results are published. More transparency." (Interviewee 5, male)

One participant recommends that the application process for roles within the charity sector be more stringently managed to ensure this transparency and professionalism from the top down and the difficulties this poses:

"I think leadership in charities should go through the same rigorous system. The application system should be as rigorous as it is for every other profession. I think [charity] boards have such a responsibility to have the right people on them. Obviously Garda clearance isn't going to cover it, and character references, yes a bit, but really the actual screening process and looking and the peoples' past and actions would have at such a high level to ensure the transparency." (Interviewee 3, female)

In contrast, one participant feels that a more professional and commercialised approach within the charity sector could be having a negative impact on perceptions among baby boomers and younger demographics:

"It's [charity] a business - with all the negative connotations and implications that has...I think that a lot of people of my age group, and other younger age groups, the perception would be that there is a certain kind of a, what's the word I'm looking for here? A tiredness, fatigue. But I think that there is a sense that charities are getting a

bit too polished and a bit too slick for their own good, which sounds awful, but I would feel that anyway." (Interviewee 7, female)

4.3 Research Objective 2

To explore the impact these perceptions have on the sector's ability to generate donation of volunteer time and money

Interview Themes

- Preference to volunteering time
- Need for the work
- Macroeconomics
- Selfishness

4.3.1 Preference to volunteering time

Analysis of the data suggests that while participants show a certain degree of scepticism and tolerance towards the charity sector at present, the actual impact of the work by charity organisations on those it helps is a key driver behind participant involvement with these bodies. As a result, a major theme emerging is that of the preference to volunteering time. Participants identify this as a popular trend, and is considered more effective and rewarding than donating money as the impact of the work can be seen first-hand. One participant, with a long history of donating time and money to particular charities within the sector, remarks that there has been an increase in willingness to volunteer among the general public in ROI:

"In comparison to years ago I think that people are more willing to volunteer. People are much more aware of giving back now - people of all ages. Everyone I know that I worked with is doing something [since retiring] and the majority have had some involvement over the years." (Interviewee 1, female)

Interestingly, another participant associates his scepticisms towards the charity sector with his donation behaviour, admitting he prefers to help charities through volunteer work to ease these concerns:

"When someone waves something in front of my face and says 'Help the homeless', I don't say it, but I think, 'OK, who are you? And who are the homeless? What's the cost involved? What cut are you getting?', you know, I'm suspicious. So then on the other side I feel it imperative to help charities in another way by volunteering, so I feel I'm less of a hypocrite then." (Interviewee 6, male)

4.3.2 Need for the work

A subsequent topic among participants who at present frequently volunteer time to particular charitable causes, is the benefit of volunteering based on the significant impact they see in the work they do:

"I do it two mornings a week and it's extremely beneficial to the kids. It's very measurable what I'm doing." (Interviewee 1, female)

"I got involved after I finished my degree when I was retired. I didn't like the idea of people walking around without being able to read or write, especially in the computer age. I could see that there was a need for that." (Interviewee 5, male)

4.3.3 Macroeconomic factors

A recurring major theme in the primary data analysis is based on macroeconomics. Several of the participants speculate that a combination of the after effects of the economic downturn in 2008, together with the prevailing housing crisis in Dublin could be contributing factors to the decreased donation behaviour in ROI. On the topic of donation behaviour, one participant reflects on the high income levels lost and financial pressures gained during the recession:

"Could it be that donations come out of surplus? That surplus disappeared during the crash. People are nervous since then. There are people that when they get their fingers burnt it makes you more cautious...I've had a number of conversations with my peers who said, 'I look forward to my retirement because I won't have any financial pressures - sure I won't?' Then they discovered that when they got there, they do have financial pressure...there is certainly an element of saving for the next one [economic crash]." (Interviewee 6, male)

Another participant agrees that their family has been more impacted by the crash since the economy has started to recover, as wages have not been restored to the same level as before. Consequently, they now focus more on their own personal recovery, as well as preparing for the potential of another crash:

"By 2015 I know personally that we were more affected by the recession then. Everyone is saying that the boom is happening and things are getting really good again but, wages have gone down substantially. So, the recession also impacted Irish people post-recession in that you have to look out for yourself. I hope that there won't be a recession as bad as the last one but you kind of half expect it now." (Interviewee 3, female)

Furthermore, both participants note that it is a reality for many parents within the baby boomer cohort that they will have to contribute significant investment towards their children buying property in the near future, suggesting that parents will want to donate money towards helping their children as a form of charitable donation, as opposed to a more abstract cause:

"In spite of the fact that they [baby boomers] spent an enormous amount of money on their children, despite their best efforts, can't get the money together to buy a house so any money they have left over is being directed towards that - maybe that's something to do with it? If you're going to give anyone a leg up it's going to be your children." (Interviewee 6, male)

4.3.4 Selfishness

As participants expand on their opinions on charitable giving in Ireland, the theme of selfishness emerges. One participant believes that as the Irish economy increases, their charitable donations decrease due to a lack of identification between those with surplus and those in need:

"The richer a country is the less it is inclined to give to charity. People like the status quo. If people are starving and sitting on the side of the road, they wouldn't identify with them. In the past there wasn't such a big gap between the rich and the poor. People spend a lot of time trying to emulate the rich and are inclined to spend

money on themselves more than on charities. I think if we've fallen out of the top 10 [for charitable giving] well, that shows that we're getting more affluent." (Interviewee 5, male)

Two other participants further reflect on the perceived selfishness and the potential impact this has on charitable behaviour:

"Often people who have less, give more. The standard of living might be higher now but we had more stability. I wonder if in general people have gotten more selfish. They say the gap between the rich and poor is widening." (Interviewee 4, female)

"The more we get, the more we want. If people have nothing, they'll give you everything - and that doesn't happen when you get rich. The statistics [on donation behaviour] would indicate a selfishness and that's a very common attitude." (Interviewee 6, male)

4.4 Research Objective 3

To investigate the impact charity advertising has on donation behaviour

Interview Themes

- Indifference to the message
- Inefficient use of funds
- Positive response to human interaction

4.4.1 Indifference to the message

Another emerging trend is the apparent indifference some participants demonstrate towards charity advertising and marketing efforts. One participant comments on her immunity to the direct mails she frequently receives online:

"There are charities that I have given to online and I have found that the deluge of emails I get as a result, combined with all my other emails, I don't read them - they're completely ineffective as a result. You become immune, good and all as the cause can be. Over-exposure, absolutely." (Interviewee 7, female)

One participant, who feels that charity messages tend to be too repetitive and abstract to have an impact, states that she needs to feel something more authentic in their messages:

"In the modern world I suppose you have to advertise. But you get a bit jaded, I mean, another distant baby in poverty. It's the same thing over and over…it's important not to feel like your emotions are being manipulated by ads. Other charity ads, they're not as much a victim. It's something that, that could be you, or your mother. Well done, not sensational. Quietly effective, authentic." (Interviewee 4, female)

Another participant comments that charities should no longer focus on the negative connotations associated with the cause. Instead, she considers advertising to be an opportunity to promote the positive productive nature of their work, and the transparency of the organisation:

"Not soppy violin music in the background - real work and impacts that people have from the charity. Honesty and complete transparency. And showing what they do, that is so important." (Interviewee 3, female)

4.4.2 Inefficient use of funds

Given that participants are demonstrating indifference to the marketing efforts of some charity organisations, many confirm that they believe these budgets would be better invested elsewhere. One participant comments that the brochures she receives are short-lived and therefore undeserving of the money and effort required:

"I would nearly prefer that they just spend the money on whatever deserving cause happens to be in the headlines...I rarely look at them in any detail - they usually go almost straight into the bin. Booklets and letters with lots of documentation, they take a long time to put together I'm sure, and I often get the sense that I would prefer them to spend the money on whatever cause is more deserving." (Interviewee 7, female)

Another participant expresses that while she appreciates that charities have to communicate their message, she is cynical of them spending money on expensive media like out-of-home (OOH) advertising and would prefer a more cost effective approach:

"I wouldn't be putting posters up but certainly through the media. For example, in England on Radio 4 they would have their regular appeal slot where they would have a designated charity and make a pitch for that. If I was looking at Charity 4 putting up posters I would be wondering 'how much is that costing?' but if I was listening to Marion Finucane on a Saturday morning I would think, well, that's Marion giving her time." (Interviewee 1, female)

4.4.3 Positive response to human interaction

When asked what kind of marketing or advertising activities they do find effective, one participant reflects on her experience with an employee of a charity organisation, and the potential for more varied methods to reach her demographic:

"He was so good I think he could have sold me anything! He was just really very good at what he was doing and he really sold me on Charity 16, which I hadn't really known anything about, but it seemed to be very good...I don't know how much it's tapped into, that resource, people retiring and looking for something to fulfil them. So, maybe they should look into that, in more diverse ways with not such traditional things." (Interviewee 4, female)

This theme emerges with another participant who speaks of her experience meeting the CEO of a particular charity and how the interaction has resonated with her:

"Once on Dame Street I met the head of Charity 5 out collecting, and that was much more engaging! Enlightening to see the actual top people collecting. I was already a contributor so I told him that in the beginning and then he spoke about the work that they were doing, so that was very impressive. That has stuck with me." (Interviewee 3, female)

4.5 Research Objective 4

To assess charity-donor relationships as a factor in influencing donation behaviour

Themes

- Loyalty
- Complete Confidence
- Religious connotations

4.5.1 Loyalty

Several of the participants maintain long-standing relationships with certain charities. As a result, many of them demonstrate a strong degree of loyalty towards the act of charitable donation, and in many cases, to particular charity organisations. For example, one participant, recalls that after joining the board of one charity, she increased her monetary donations, and having left the charity, continues to donate regularly:

"In the late 90s when I was invited to join the board of Charity 7, I served on the board until July 2017, having been chairperson for five years. After starting the work I increased my contributions at the time and still donate monthly."
(Interviewee 2, female)

In contrast to the tolerance shown by many participants in section 4.2.2, one participant exhibits a lack of tolerance to individual organisations but loyalty towards the sector as a whole:

"A charity is a service that is run professionally and if it isn't - zero tolerance. Otherwise I would find another home for it, 100%. I give my money to Charity 2. I'm loyal to them because I'm satisfied that the paper trail is as it should be. I'm much more discerning now in who I give my money to and I think I'm not alone in that."
(Interviewee 6, male)

In reflecting on his own donation behaviour, another participant believes that it is important to stay loyal to the choices you make and for charities to maintain these relationships:

"I think you have to stay loyal to your original choice, people are sticky. They'll continue to give until there's a reason not to. Once they're off the ladder it's very hard to get them back on again. We got letters in the post not so long ago saying that it was going to be...yes, 13 years, I've been donating to Charity 2, and we donate to Charity 6 the past long time." (Interviewee 5, male)

4.5.2 Complete confidence

The participants present generally with a high level of confidence in certain charity organisations within the sector as a subsequent theme to their loyalty to that charity. One participant admits that she does not read communications she receives from the charity as she is confident in how the money is invested:

"I don't know where [my donation money] goes. Charity 2 may have [sent information out] but I haven't read anything about that. I may be naive but I think that they are good and I think that they are using it well. (Interviewee 1, female)

Another participant agrees that once a charity organisation has his loyalty, he has complete confidence in how money is invested and is willing to stand by them in the face of any scandal:

"Once I'm convinced I'll stick with them through thick and thin in the hope that the financial irregularities will be sorted out. I'm not sure how the money is being used in Charity 6 but they are a reputable organisation - I just haven't followed up." (Interviewee 5, male)

4.5.3 Religious connotations

A final major emerging theme from the interviews is the association some participants make between the scandals of both the Church and the charity sector in ROI, which they believe may be damaging to public perception of, and involvement with, the sector. One participant suggests that even though charity organisations are doing valuable work, the public want to keep their distance:

"There is a correlation with the Church [and charity organisations]. Charity 1 and other charities are doing work on the ground, honest charitable work and people don't want to associate themselves with it." (Interviewee 6, male)

Furthermore, another participant comments on how many charities are associated with the Church, which is a contributing factor to the scepticisms exhibited in section 4.2.1:

"The Church probably was associated with a lot of charities and there was a huge trust of the Church. That was a different kind of misuse of power and authority. In an ideal society people would be contributing without advertising but that's the way you communicate that now. So yes, it has made people much more questioning of things." (Interviewee 4, female)

Interestingly, one participant reflects on her past involvement with the charity sector at a time when scandals associated with the Church remained uncovered. She admits that she chose one particular charity over another on the basis that it was not associated with religion:

"At that time there weren't that many other charities so people thought that Charity 1 was the thing. People probably liked that it was religious, it was a different Ireland then. I wouldn't criticise all religious organisations but I probably liked about Charity 9 that they weren't religious." (Interviewee 1, female)

4.6 Summary of Key Findings

Based on the analysis of the primary research data conducted, it seems that the baby boomer interviewees present with long-standing and therefore complicated relationships with the charity sector in ROI. By delving into these relationships throughout the interview process, interviewee perceptions of the charity sector have been explored, highlighting common themes among the participants such as their scepticisms towards the sector, and the need for professionalism and regulation to ease these suspicions. Interestingly, these cynicisms do not seem to have had a lasting impact on donation behaviour among the sample group as all participants continue to donate time, money, or both in many cases, possibly due to their apparent tolerance and understanding towards wrongdoings of the past and their awareness of the need for the work being done. However, the majority of participants do allude to various macroeconomic factors which may be having a more significant impact on donation behaviour among their demographic in ROI at present.

The topic of charity advertising has led to a more critical tone during the interviews as participants discuss their indifference to the traditional negative framing of charity messaging. They demonstrate irritation and cynicism towards different advertising efforts such as direct mail and larger more expensive broadcast media, even by charities with which they have a long-standing relationship. The majority of participants consider these methods to be an inefficient use of funds by charity organisations that would be better spent on useful resources for those in need. This may be due to the strength of the already existing charity-donor relationship. There is a common theme of loyalty to the sector among all participants, which seemingly generates a sense of confidence based on their own experiences and human interactions with their preferred charities, even though several participants speculate that the historic relationship between the Church and the charity sector in ROI may be damaging to charity-donor relationships in some cases.

Many of these topics thematically identified throughout the interview process in this chapter draw comparisons with secondary research consulted in Chapter 2. There is also a presence of topics which do not appear to correlate with the previous research examined. The significance of each of these factors in relation to the research objectives outlined in Chapter 3 will be further discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5:
DISCUSSION

5.1 Chapter Introduction

This chapter will build on key findings from the primary research in Chapter 4 through comparison of the results with the secondary research findings detailed in Chapter 2, to address the most prominent topics identified in the data analysis process previously shown in Table 4.1.

5.2 The Link Between Public Perception and Fundraising Performance

As discussed in Chapter 3, the initial research objective for the present study is to examine current perceptions of charity organisations among consumers in ROI. The 2016 AFP report states "fundraising is predicated on public trust and confidence, and any incident involving a charity can have a spiralling effect on other non-profits and even the entire sector" (AFP, 2016 p. 19). According to findings in both the primary and secondary research consulted, public perceptions of the charity sector at present are characterised by increased scepticism, and the erosion of trust and confidence among donors, factors which may be contributing to the decreased per-capita donation behaviour. Both sets of findings appear to point towards the communication of increased transparency as a potential solution.

5.2.1 Easing scepticisms through transparency, authenticity and regulation

It is a significant theme of the primary research findings in section 4.2.1 that there has been a growing scepticism of the charity sector among the participants due to media reports on the misappropriation of funds in the sector. This is consistent with secondary research consulted in Chapter 1 and 2, which summarises that the NPO marketing message is coming under increased scrutiny from both the media and general public in light of recent scandals (Bourassa & Stang, 2016; CII 2016; CFI, 2017). Primary research findings show that in discussing their perceptions of the charity sector, participants refer to the importance of these organisations being 'authentic' in their charitable efforts to remove what some perceive to be a 'slick' exterior, and is consistent with research by Gaskin (1999) that a more private sector approach is causing mistrust towards the sector.

A point of consensus among interviewees is that these perceptions of the charity sector highlight the need for professionalism and appropriate regulation within the sector to promote transparency and rebuild trust between the sector and its potential/existing donor base to combat this scepticism and scrutiny. This requires openness from charities through their messaging strategy with regard to their operations and objectives. However, such transparency must exist alongside authenticity in the match between charity practices and messaging patterns. One participant with over 50 years' involvement across various charity initiatives clearly clarifies his feelings towards the need for authenticity, transparency and regulation within the sector given the scandals of the past:

"We the public have been burnt by sloppy practice, so good intentions have to be matched by thoughtful planning and professional application, even though they're amateurs. Everybody must remember that we are always subject to recognition, whether they're doing something for nothing or otherwise, is subject to common sense regulation. If you can't accept that, then don't get involved...I admire initiatives that are smart, tailored and accountable. We must be able to hold up a magnifying glass at any charity, And if anyone has a problem with that then don't do it." (Interviewee 6, male)

Following interviewee 6, authentic charity activities must match what is promised in their messaging, effectively demonstrating their transparency as interviewees express scepticisms on charity funds raised being maximally used to solve the problems they are raised for. Such authenticity is also found to be important in the broader marketing literature context. Chiu *et al.* (2012) note authenticity as a fundamental component of an effective brand narrative; otherwise buyer behaviour can be negatively impacted as the consumer is likely to feel deceived, as discussed in section 2.5.2. This is consistent with empirical research referenced in Chapter 2 which agrees that charities today must constantly reinforce their transparent message to reassure donors and generate fundraised income, with an emphasis on improving regulation across the sector as a whole (CII, 2016; CFI, 2017).

5.2.2 Tolerance towards human nature

Although the theme of scepticism is prominent at various stages throughout the interviews, the findings suggest that the majority of participants demonstrate a tolerance towards past mismanagement of resources within the charity sector in general. One participant who claims he has a ‘zero tolerance’ policy towards donating to any organisations that are not managed in a transparent and ethical fashion, conflictingly expresses his understanding towards the role of human nature and the ‘difficulties and temptations’ that it causes in the process of services being exchanged for money in any circumstance. Another participant with a less extensive connection to the charity sector mirrors this statement, defining these wrongdoings as ‘empty human greed at the end of the day’, by contrast maintains that she would continue to donate despite scandals within the sector.

As discussed in section 2.5.2, extant literature shows that consumers tend to apply a set of human characteristics to brands, essentially giving the brand a personality, which in turn makes it more accessible (Aaker, 1997). While the actual role of human nature and greed within charity organisations are offered as topics for discussion by the interviewees themselves, neither appear as major themes in the literature to-date. Among interviewees, the personality of the charity organisation brand and the personalities of misbehaving individuals within these organisations seem to be somewhat divorceable from one another. Belief in the goals and personality of charity brands among interviewees appears to allow for possible outlier individuals’ misbehaviour to be tolerated as an inevitable outcome of human greed, even if it is not the ideal scenario. This can be further linked to the themes of selfishness and forgiveness, further developed in sections 5.3.1 and 5.5.2 respectively.

5.3 The Impact of Public Perception on Donation Behaviour

The second research objective of the present study, discussed in section 3.2, is to explore the impact of consumer perceptions on the charity sector's ability to generate donation of volunteer time and money in ROI. With reference to the relevant primary and secondary research data consulted, the following discussion points aim to explore this objective further.

5.3.1 Selfishness and the self-concept

Resulting from the sceptical standpoints some participants demonstrate towards the charity sector, the primary data suggests that there is a potential link between the uncharacteristic decline in donation behaviour and the concept of the extended self. As discussed in Chapter 2, Belk (1988) and Sirgy (1982) imply that consumers are drawn to brands that are in keeping with their actual and ideal selves to achieve self-congruence, and Park *et al.* (2010) consider it to increase financial performance. Given that overall participants agree that general perceptions of the charity sector in ROI are, as one participant commented 'not too good at the moment', it can be assumed that consumers do not identify with these brands in the same way they did in the past, in light of the negative connotations with the sector resulting from past and recent scandals. Similarly, the topic of greed as a fundamental concept of human nature, mentioned previously in section 5.2.2, would again suggest negative undertones with which consumers are unlikely to identify with in the attempt to achieve self-congruence (Malar *et al.* 2011).

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the CSO (2016) reports disposable income in Ireland to be at an all-time high. This may lead to an expectation of concurrently rising charity donations. Participants agree that monetary donation behaviour generally comes out of 'surplus', however, in ROI per-capita donation behaviour is decreasing (CAF, 2017). This secondary research finding may be explained by selfishness according to interviewees. They opine that increased wealth may lead to increased 'selfishness' among the general public as many of the participants concur that 'the richer the country, the less inclined it is to give to charity' and 'often people who have less give more'. One participant links the perceived rise in selfishness to the apparent widening gap between the social classes in ROI, leading to a lack of identification between those with a surplus who have the means to donate, and those in need, who are without. Therefore, this selfishness may relate to having too much money, and arguably, this more 'affluent' general public of ROI does not exhibit the same moral identity factors, namely; kindness, compassion and fairness mentioned in section 2.4.2, which are considered key drivers behind the moral act of charity giving, requiring the alignment of an individual's moral identity (Aquino & Reed, 2002; Aquino *et al.* 2009).

Furthermore, the findings demonstrate that consumers of the baby boomer cohort recognise the historical relationship between religion and the charity sector, referring to the Catholic Church's 'misuse of power and authority'. The participants imply that consumers may be more questioning and distrustful of the activities of both organisations and disassociating themselves as a result. One participant admits that she chose one charity over another in the past because they 'weren't religious' (associated with the Church), which she viewed as a positive attribute, and therefore more compatible with her own extended self. This is consistent with research by Kapferer (2012), discussed in Chapter 2, which suggests that identification is a crucial function of a brand for the consumer. Another participant opines that in place of religion, and the charity behaviour generated from this relationship with the public in the past, there has been a shift to a more possession driven society in ROI, a factor he believes the general public do not want to admit to, nor have an interest in replacing:

"The Catholic Church has done an awful lot of damage, but also an awful lot of good, but no one is explaining who is going to replace it. It [religion] is being replaced by materialism and no one is prepared to say that." (Interviewee 6, male)

The combined factors of this apparent selfishness, lack of identification with charity organisations due to the perceived widening gap and historical association with the Church, and finally the suggested growth in materialism among the general public in ROI is in contrast to studies referenced in Chapter 2 which suggest that the 21st century consumer has become more socially conscious and ethically motivated, as well as impacted by societal over personal reasons during the consumer decision making process (Shaw *et al.* 2005; Auger & Devinney, 2007).

5.3.2 Actual donation behaviour

The interview sample have expressed their strong ethical and moral connections to charities, with many demonstrating strong charitable behaviour characteristics through donating their time and/or money frequently over the years and at present, in addition to their loyalty to certain charities. All participants conclusively state that they have an ongoing direct debit with one or more organisations within the charity sector, with one participant admitting that he found this the most effective way to 'satisfy his conscious' when donating money. Another participant expressed her opinion that there is an 'awareness' among Irish people of 'giving back'. However, the reported decrease in per-capita donation behaviour among the baby boomer generation in particular (CAF, 2017) would suggest the presence of the attitude-behaviour gap, mentioned in section 2.4.4. This concept proposes that there is a gap between consumer behaviour and their attitudes, implying that their ethical purchase decisions are not always reflected in their actual purchase behaviour.

However, through analysis of the findings relating to the apparent gap between attitudes and, in this case, consumer donation behaviour, the perceived scepticism towards the investment of money in the sector (discussed in sections 4.2.1 and 5.2.1) may be a factor. Some participants admit that they have become more 'discerning' and 'suspicious' towards charities collecting money on the street, whereas most participants attend frequent volunteer appointments with several charities. This may indicate that the attitude-behaviour gap is not present in this case, but instead that donations have become more volunteer-based rather than financially driven among this particular generation. Furthermore, one participant suggests that people of this age range tend to look towards donating their free time to charity as a means for fulfilment in their retired years, making this means of charitable behaviour a mutually beneficial relationship between baby boomers and their chosen charity organisation:

"I know a lot of people that when they retire, if they don't go the golf or bridge route they go the charity route. And reaching the age we are, they're looking for

something, but they're looking for something for themselves as well in that." (Interviewee 4, female)

As suggested by Basil *et al.* (2008) in section 2.3, NPO bodies should focus their efforts on emotionally engaging with their target audience improve perceptions and to influence actual donation behaviour. The majority of the participants in the interview process seem to be personally invested in various charities as they can see the need for the work being done, and respond accordingly by donating their time and money. Relating this marketing literature, Keller's (2008) brand equity model discussed in Chapter 2, suggests brand equity is created by appealing to the consumer both emotionally and rationally. Furthermore, it is assumed that value is perceived by the buyer (Cravens & Piercy, 2013), when the benefits outweigh the sacrifices (Fahy & Jobber, 2015). This is consistent with statements from all participants interviewed who prefer to donate or 'sacrifice' their time as opposed to money to charity efforts as they can not only see the rational need for the work being done first hand, but are also provided them with a sense of fulfilment on an emotional level, creating value through experience for them as a result.

5.3.3 The impact of the Irish economy and housing crisis

A topic undiscussed in the secondary research consulted are the macroeconomic factors which became apparent during the interview process, particularly among participants with families of their own. Although CSO (2017) data discussed in Chapter 1 estimates that GDP in Ireland has grown by 9.1% based on recent analysis of Q1 2018 versus Q1 2017, the present study's primary research findings suggest that participants have become more cautious with their spending, describing themselves as 'nervous' given the experience of having their 'fingers burnt' by the economic downturn of 2008. Some participants further reflect on the unexpected 'financial pressures' they now face given that their pensions have depleted since the recession, and their children now face a housing crisis in which they may require financial assistance from their parents in many cases. One participant admits that she would consider the financial aid she has given to her children as a 'form of charity in itself', speculating that other parents have had to invest their surplus in the same way, and may be detracting from donation behaviour among her generation in ROI.

5.4 The Impact of Charity Advertising on Donation Behaviour

The third research objective, as identified in Chapter 3, is to investigate the impact charity advertising has on donation behaviour. Based on the primary research findings combined with secondary research consulted on charity advertising and marketing techniques, the following discussion points have been incorporated to further examine this objective specific to the context of the baby boomer generation in ROI.

5.4.1 The inefficiency of charity campaigns and communications

According to Breeze (2009), charities are recommended to use a targeted strategy in their donation appeal efforts instead of expensive, blanket approaches, which may potentially have a negative impact on donation behaviour. By contrast, Göttlichová & Soukalová (2015) encourage charity organisations to deliver efficient and effective marketing communications to promote trust and authenticity among the target market, improving donation behaviour as a result. Based on the interview data collected, many charities in ROI at present are not implementing this successfully as participants seem to demonstrate an indifference and negativity towards the different marketing and advertising approaches of the sector. Many of the participants express a lack of interest in the emails and direct post received from charities, even those they are directly involved in. One participant notes that the brochures ‘usually almost go straight in the bin’ and considers the ‘deluge of emails’ she receives from certain charities to be ‘completely ineffective’ as she never reads them. Interestingly, another participant loyal to the charity sector admits that even she does not read the communications she receives as she has complete confidence in the running of that particular charity, making the whole process redundant.

One participant is cynical of charities spending money on advertising campaigns in general, particularly large broadcast media such as OOH, because of the high cost that goes into the production of these formats, whereas more cost effective processes, such as a free slot during a radio show targeted to her age demographic, is more appealing. There is an agreement among participants that money spent on the advertising activities mentioned throughout the interviews would be better invested elsewhere, for example into more practical resources, implying that this approach overall has been ineffective in soliciting monetary donations from this cohort. Furthermore, another participant expresses her cynicisms towards the current saturation point in the charity sector. This is consistent with research consulted in section 2.2.2 by CII (2017) which notes that fundraising bodies fear there is a compassion fatigue among the general public towards the sheer volume of charity organisations and their messaging:

"There are so many more charities than there were in the past, and I think that that can be counterproductive for all of them, because you are completely bamboozled for choice because, you know, you don't know who you should be giving it to so you don't give it to anybody. I know that I've been in that situation at times, that you actually get nearly paralysed or too lazy, whereas if you have only three places that you can give money to, it's much more easy to say well I've give it to X, Y, Z…" (Interviewee 7, female)

Following Interviewee 7, this concept of being faced with a growing quantity of new brands and products leading to reduction in consumer choice can be linked to literature on consumer behaviour which refers to the consumer hyperchoice context (Mick, Broniarczyk & Haidt, 2004), which did not appear as part of the secondary research consulted in Chapter 2. Research on hyperchoice, which is considered a form of 'information overload', can ultimately cause consumers to feel confusion, cognitive tension and overall dissatisfaction, ultimately dissuading purchase behaviour (ibid). Applying the concept to more moral behaviours, this may potentially lead to fatigue and an increased self-focus in place of actual purchase behaviour (ibid), making it particularly relevant to the above participant statement and the charity sector overall. Furthermore, prior research on the topic suggests that a growth in certain societal factors, such as materialism, impact the fundamental human characteristics, such as morality (Tofler, 1970; Linder, 1971; Scitovsky, 1976), which links back to section 5.3.1 in which one participant speculates that there currently is a growing sense of materialism in ROI in replace of the religious loyalties of the public in the past.

5.4.2 A negative response to negative framing

Empirical data from the end of the 20th century consulted in section 2.5.1 suggests that consumers do respond to charity appeals that implement negative framing in their advertising campaigns as the proposed sense of loss in the messaging is believed to resonate more than a gain (Maheswaran & Meyers-Levy, 1990; Homer & Yoon, 1992; Rothman *et al.* 1999) by appealing to their self-relevance and consciousness, which is more likely to increase donation behaviours (Chang & Lee, 2010). However, the present study's primary research findings propose that similar to the emails and post received, there is a fatigue among the participants towards the 'soppy violin music' of this technique as they believe their 'emotions are being manipulated by ads'. Instead, there is a positive response towards campaigns listed by certain charities where those in need are 'not as much the victim' and the messaging of the campaign is 'quietly effective', 'authentic' with a focus on 'honesty and complete transparency'.

One participant notably mentions how well she responds to reading updates from her chosen charity on their Facebook page; she considers this type of communication to be 'a huge thing' in encouraging her to donate and increasing her knowledge surrounding the charity. This kind of positive response is consistent with studies consulted in Chapter 2 which recommend that charities focus their marketing strategy on educating themselves on modern marketing techniques to enlighten consumers on their efforts (Long & Chiarelli, 2011), and that baby boomers are an active and untapped resource which marketers should be paying attention to (Green, 2005) due to their significant size, spending power (Nielsen, 2016), online presence (Sudbury-Riley, 2016) and donation behaviour (Hassay & Peloza, 2009; AFP, 2016; Blackbaud, 2016).

On another positive note, some participants reflected on real life interactions with staff from different charity organisations as these experiences seemed to resonate with them more and elicit more constructive responses among the target market. A number of interviewees reflected on positive experiences they had as a result of one meaningful conversation with a member of staff in these situations. This can be connected to the importance of creating a relationship between the charity brand and the donor pool in order to influence donation behaviour, further discussed in the next section.

5.5 The Charity-donor Relationship

The final research objective listed in section 3.2 is to assess charity-donor relationships as a factor in influencing donation behaviour. Based on the previous discussion points in this chapter, combined with subsequent findings presented in Chapter 4 the research proposes the following discussion points to address this research objective.

5.5.1 The significance of loyalty in the charity-donor relationship

Secondary research findings in section 2.3 highlight the importance of the charity sector's ability to gain supporter commitment to achieve their mission (Hassay & Peloza, 2009). As previously discussed in this chapter, there is a predominant feeling of fatigue among the participants who claim they are unaffected by the traditional advertising and marketing efforts of charity organisations, implying that these methods are generally ineffective in gaining supporter commitment, influencing donation behaviour, or maintaining the charity-donor connection. The findings in Chapter 4 suggest that participants who display the strongest sense of loyalty to single charities are usually people who also have a willingness to donate time or money to one or more charities, while maintaining their main charity relationship partnership throughout. The vast majority of participants have sustained over 40 years' involvement with some sort of charity initiative, and exhibit with continued donation behaviour and loyalty towards these charities as a result. This is consistent with secondary research also discussed in section 2.3, which identifies relationships as a key marketing function of the charity sector, owing their ability to build brand loyalty and create lifetime donor commitment among that target market (Hibbert & Horne, 1995; Peacock, 2000; Liao *et al.* 2001; Williamson, 2003; Bennett, 2006).

The findings propose that these relationships are cultivated through participants' own personal experience with these charities, creating a meaningful relationship between the participant and the organisation, which is maintained by participants' belief in the work. Interviewees frequently referred to the ‘need’ for the work being done by the charities, and the value created as a result of their involvement in the process. The role and importance of knowledge in the charity is identified by many participants speaking of their own personal involvement with particular charities and their resulting knowledge on the work of the organisation as a result. This contradicts secondary research consulted in Chapter 2 which speculated that increased knowledge on the charity sector may be damaging consumer-brand relationships in the context of the charity sector (Krawczyk & Lec, 2010; Brock, Lang & Ozbay, 2013), instead drawing comparisons to the findings of Fournier (1998) who claims that strong brand-consumer relationships are characterised by shared intimacy, or mutual knowledge between the relationship partners.

Participants also comment on the significance of the personal interactions they have had with charity employees and how this has initiated or reinforced their connection with the organisation, mentioned previously in section 5.4.2. In many cases, this has resulted in a higher level of trust, perceived transparency and accountability, and donation behaviour, as is consistent with research by Bourassa & Stang (2016) discussed in Chapter 2 that highlights knowledge as a moderator of the consumer-brand relationship within the charity sector. Furthermore, participants generally feel complete confidence in how the money is invested in charities with which they have a long-standing relationship, and are likely to show tolerance and even forgiveness towards these charities if a scandal were to break, which is further discussed in the next section.

5.5.2 Forgiveness and understanding

Many participants maintain long-standing relationships with certain charity organisations and express their likelihood to forgive the charity if a scandal were to break, stating that it might give them ‘pause for thought’ or prompt to them ‘investigate further’ as opposed to stopping donations to their chosen charity. This is consistent with the secondary data consulted in section 2.3.2, in which Tsarenko and Tojib (2015 p. 1855) imply that forgiveness is granted to brands on a ‘love the sinner, hate the sin’ basis. One participant expresses her level of forgiveness and understanding towards one particular charity, insisting that she would continue to support them despite a recently publicised scandal:

"There are other charities who I think their integrity has been put up for question. I know that Charity 4 had some trouble. They are such a huge organisation and I think it's hard to keep on top of everything. I also think that when the media gets holds of something they do their own thing to it and that wouldn't make me stop donating or not support Charity 4." (Interviewee 1, female)

As mentioned in Chapter 2, if managed effectively, consumer-brand relationships often become stronger over time (Aaker *et al.* 2004; Fediuk *et al.* 2010), and appropriate communication and implementation of crisis management strategies can result in consumers demonstrating forgiveness when faced with a scandal (Coombs & Holladay, 2008; Wooten, 2009; Fehr & Gelfand, 2010). This is consistent with findings in Chapter 4, as many participants with long-term donation behaviour to a particular charity claim to be inclined to forgive them if a scandal were to break. Several studies on the concept of forgiveness in the consumer-brand relationship suggest that through implementing effective and appropriate communication and crisis management strategies, brands have the potential to elicit forgiveness among consumers in light of any wrongdoings (Coombs & Holladay, 2008; Wooten, 2009; Fehr & Gelfand, 2010). Although hypothetical, the findings suggest participants agree with this literature, as one participant reflects that she would expect her chosen charity to reconcile their wrongdoings appropriately due to her confidence in them:

"If there was something [a scandal] I would expect that there would be a good explanation. And I would also expect that there would be a very thorough investigation. That's not something I would spend time thinking about - I have confidence in them [Charity 2]." (Interviewee 1, female)

On further hypothetical terms, the findings make reference to the level within the organisation where any wrongdoing may occur. One participant speculates that for her, 'it would depend on the scandal', implying that the worse it was, the less likely she would be to forgive. This is consistent with the research by McCullough *et al.* (2003) discussed in section 2.3.2, which suggests that as the severity of the wrongdoing increases, the likelihood of forgiveness decreases. Similarly, another participant believes his forgiveness to be based on 'the level in the organisation where it was taking place and where the money was actually going' and if these issues directly contradict the overall goal of the charity initiative. However, one participant with a strong connection to the charity sector asserts that he would reject any organisation proven to be corrupt in any way, continuously insisting on his 'zero tolerance' policy towards this behaviour. This is consistent with research by Feduik *et al.* (2010) that even when consumer-brand relationships are strong and well managed, they remain vulnerable to damage from any brand-related issues. Given that Fournier (1998) considers consumer-brand relationships to potentially be on a par with interpersonal relationships and Aaker *et al.* (2004) equate them to friendship models, believing them to become stronger over time, the various reactions in the primary research findings suggest that there are challenges secondary data consulted. This would imply that consumer-brand relationships are complex and volatile entities that are still not fully understood, at least specific to this context.

5.6 Chapter Summary

Through building on key findings from the primary research in Chapter 4 and comparing these results with secondary research literature consulted in Chapter 2, a number of key discussion points have been identified and presented throughout this chapter in line with the various research objectives as previously detailed in Chapter 3. This has led to the exploration of various themes relating to public perception of the charity sector, and the role these themes may have on donation behaviour. Similarly, participant opinion on the effectiveness of charity advertising efforts and their potential to motivate or demotivate donation behaviour have been discussed, with reference to how participants believe improvements may be made. Finally, the complexity of the charity-donor relationship has been considered, at least specific to this particular context.

While many of the findings in Chapter 4 inherently drew comparisons with the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, and the topic guide to the interview process mentioned in Chapter 3 aimed to guide the interview process on certain themes, there were also issues which were unanticipated by the researcher, such as the role of macroeconomic factors, hyperchoice and religious connotations in donation behaviour in ROI. Given that different participants raised these issues themselves, unprompted by the research, they have been considered of relevance to the present research study and therefore included for discussion.

CHAPTER 6:
CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Conclusion to the Study

The overall aim of this research project was to explore public perception of the charity sector among baby boomers in Ireland, and the subsequent impact this has on their donation behaviour. In responding to the research objectives outlined in Chapter 3, and presented in Chapters 4 and 5, it is believed that a more comprehensive understanding of the topic has been obtained and the research aims adequately satisfied as a result. Through the qualitative and inductive nature of the primary data, which was then thematically and thoughtfully analysed, the researcher believes to have gained a more in-depth understanding of the relationship between the baby boomer generation and the charity sector in ROI by delving into the demographic's unique experiences and perceptions of the sector and their own charity donation behaviour patterns.

The interview process has enabled the researcher to ascertain that the baby boomer demographic in ROI is indeed a very active group within the charity sector, as demonstrated by their regular donations, both past and present, of time and money. Based on the analysis of the primary research data conducted, it seems that the baby boomer interviewees present with long-standing and therefore complicated relationships with the charity sector in ROI. This has made their perceptions of the sector of particular interest to the present research study.

The majority of participants exhibited strong connections to both the charity sector and particular organisations with which they have significant relationships based on their belief in the impact of the work being done to help those in need. Although there was a high degree of understanding regarding the difficulties charity organisations face in terms of management within a sector which the CFI (2017) report to be largely under-regulated in ROI, scepticisms towards the sector as a whole did arise. There was a common consensus among participants that there is a need for improved transparency and regulation in the charity sector in the interest of

easing these scepticisms, with the importance of the authenticity of the organisations themselves being mentioned time and time again during the interview process.
By initially focusing on the perceptions of the charity sector among this cohort, the researcher was then in a position to consider the influence these perceptions have on the charity sector’s relationship with the sample group. Given that the majority of participants perceive the charity sector to be poorly regulated, lacking professionalism, and unfortunately victim to human greed in some cases. Nevertheless, members of the sample group all engage frequently in charitable donation activities despite these issues.

A factor recognised by the participants more so than the literature to-date is the changing landscape of the Irish economy over the past number of years and the influence this may be having on donation behaviour at present. Prior to the economic downturn of 2008, the baby boomer demographic were enjoying the affluent era of the Celtic Tiger, which ultimately crashed ten years ago. While the economy is undoubtedly recovering at a high rate (CSO, 2017), participants suggest that there is an increased sense of selfishness and materialism in ROI growing alongside it. Furthermore, participants alluded to factors such as reduced pensions, increased retirement age, the current housing situation, and fear of another economic crash as potential causes for decreased donation behaviour in Ireland.

On the topic of advertising, participants demonstrate a fatigue towards the advertising efforts of charity organisations based on factors such as market saturation (CFI, 2017), and the technique of negative framing, going against previous literature in charity marketing research by Chang & Lee (2010) which believes negative or goal framing to resonate more strongly with the target audience and encourage donation behaviour as a result. Instead, participants exhibit cynicism towards charities investing fundraised income into different media such as OOH advertising and direct mail, as they feel this money would be better invested into useful resources for those in need. Some participants further reflect on efforts such as human interaction as a more constructive means of communication for charity organisations as these experiences have had a long-lasting effect on their donation behaviour and opinion of particular charities in some cases.

Notably, a number of participants independently made reference to the long-standing relationship between the charity sector and the Church in ROI having its own scandals, causing members of the public to disassociate themselves from the both parties, potentially decreasing donation behaviour in comparison to the past. Nevertheless, the majority of participants maintain loyal relationships with, and absolute confidence in, particular charity organisations, and the sector as a whole. However some participants are more conflicted in their values versus their actions. The majority of interviewees exhibit staunch loyalty to certain charity bodies, seemingly on a 'love the sinner hate the sin' basis (Tsarenko & Tojib, 2015 p. 1855), while others would not show such a forgiving nature towards their chosen charity if a scandal were to break, once again highlighting the complexities of the charity-donor relationship, and furthermore, consumer-brand relationships in the marketing landscape in general.

6.2 Managerial Implications

Based on the various discussions presented in Chapter 5, combined primary and secondary findings from Chapter 2 and 4, the author suggests the following recommendations to marketers to potentially improve public perceptions of the charity sector and encourage actual donation behaviour among the general public in ROI.

6.2.1 Improved professionalism and regulation across the charity sector in ROI

This study has revealed that certain members of the general public in ROI, namely the sample group of baby boomers, feel that there is an ongoing lack of professionalism and regulation in the Irish charity sector. A common consensus among participants is that there is a responsibility among these organisations to hire and vet the right people to combat issues such as human greed, which have led to a number of scandals both recently and in the past. It is their feeling that through more stringent regulation a more transparent and authentic culture could be cultivated. Similarly, empirical research on charity sector marketing to-date encourages organisations within the sector to improve transparency through increased professionalism, which is reported to increase donation behaviour and public support (CAF, 2017). As one charity alone can do very little to improve perceptions of the sector overall (Sargeant & Lee, 2002), it is therefore recommended that charity organisations in ROI work together to improve both professionalism and regulation within the sector to ensure transparency to the general public and potentially increase donation behaviour as a result.

6.2.2 Improved advertising efforts by the charity sector in ROI

To eradicate the cynicisms and irritations the sample group have shown towards investments in different charity advertising efforts such as direct mail and OOH in an already saturated marketing environment, charity marketers should focus on methods which resonate more among the participants. In contrast to academic literature consulted which recommends charity organisations use negative or goal framing to reach the target audience (Chang & Lee, 2010), participants overall demonstrate a negative response to these techniques. Accordingly, it is recommended that marketers in these organisations shift their focus towards more effective, authentic and relatable messaging, which has elicited more positive responses among the sample group, for example, the Facebook updates one participant specifically mentioned as encouraging her donation behaviour on a regular basis. Given that global industry research suggests that 77% of non-profit do not have a contingency plan in place to target the baby boomer demographic despite their high donation behaviour (AFP, 2016; Blackbaud, 2016), it is recommended that this cohort be considered in future advertising efforts as the present study suggests that they are an active and engaged audience to the charity sector that require improved communications.

6.3 Recommendations for Future Research

The current study has identified several topics for discussion which warrant future research. Although the nature of the present study has contributed to qualitative data specific to the charity sector in ROI to-date, it has merely scratched the surface on a number of the complexities existing in the relationship between the sector and the general public, which require future study. The concept of forgiveness between the sample group and their chosen organisations was broached but purely in a hypothetical sense, actual response patterns to this scenario have not been adequately explored and further research is recommended on the basis of its potential impact to donation behaviour among the group. Similarly, the group’s high engagement in and preference to volunteering time to charity organisations due to the fulfilment it provides them may be a contributing factor to the decrease in monetary per-capita donation behaviour in ROI, which requires future consideration.

Furthermore, the sample group has been narrowed to the baby boomer demographic in ROI. Future qualitative research on younger demographics to explore their relationships with the charity sector remains largely uncovered to-date and should be examined based on the importance of their donation behaviour into the future. Finally, the macroeconomic factors which were mentioned by the majority of members of the sample group are of relevance not only to the baby boomer demographic, but to younger generations and potentially to other wealthy nations worldwide, which the author therefore recommends be researched further in order to assess the possible impact of these economic circumstances on donation behaviour.

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Appendix 1 - Informed Consent Sheet

INFORMED CONSENT SHEET

I hereby agree to give my consent for my responses to interview questions to be used and quoted anonymously in this student project at the National College of Ireland.

Interviewer

Name _______________ Year _______________

Module ______________ Programme __________

Interviewee

Print Name ___________

Signature ___________

Date _______________

MSc Marketing

Appendix 2 - Interview Topic Guide

- What year were you born?
- How and when did you first get involved with the charity sector?
- Why did you get involved in the charity sector?
- What was your opinion of the sector at that time?
- What keywords would you use to describe the sector before you got involved?
- How did you initially assume money donated was invested or used?
- Did you think that charity workers were volunteers or paid staff?
- Did you have any other perceptions/assumptions related to the sector before getting involved?
- Were these altered in any way after you started working for a charity sector organisation?
- Were you a charity donor before working in the sector?
- Did working in the sector impact your donation behaviour?
- How would you have compared the sector to other more commercial entities?
- What is your current involvement in the charity sector in ROI?
- What is your current opinion on the sector?
- What keywords would you use to describe it?
- How do you think the sector is perceived in general in ROI?
- Do you think that these perceptions have an impact on donation behaviour in any way?
- How would you compare the sector to for-profit industries at the moment?
- Given the opportunity, are there any changes you would implement in the sector?
- Could public perception of the charity sector in Ireland be improved in any way?
- Do you feel that you will continue to be involved in the sector? Why?
- Have you got any general comments to add about the Irish charity sector?

Appendix 3 - Excerpt of Interview Transcript

R: What year were you born?

I: 1953

R: Do you have any past involvement with the charity sector?

I: I did do some with Charity 9 alright in the 70s/80s. I was in the kitchen in the city centre, volunteering. A friend of mine got me involved. And soup running.

R: What was your opinion of how Charity 9 was run in the past?

I: I didn't think about it, the only thing I thought about was getting out alive! There was kind of like a manager of the hostel and helpers. I don't think he was earning a fortune, he certainly didn't look like it. But everybody was passionate about it. Charity 9 was always highly regarded, I don't think that there were any problems with Charity 9. And they're still going strong.

R: What were your opinions of the sector back then?

I: I wondered from time to time how they got their funding, then later on it turned out that that funding was being used for various things that wasn't a charity. People setting up charities but making a very good living out of it. Charity 3 for example. It turned out that they were earning very good wages and how did they get into those positions to earn that money? I'm sure that they were doing good work, especially the Charity 3 and other charities, Charity 9. And I don't know what the situation with Charity 9 was but...yeah.

R: What is your current involvement in the charity sector?

I: I got involved with adult literacy because I had always wanted to do it and this opportunity came along and I took it. So I'm working in Charity 19 on a volunteer basis. I didn't like the idea of people walking around without being able to read or write, especially in the computer age, if you're not literate computer-wise you're in an awful lot of trouble, I could see that there was a need for that.I got involved after I finished my degree when i was retired. I went down to an open day I think it was and then they explained how they do things and I bought into it and did a course with them and there was assigned work. They're a professional organisation. And there is too much paperwork now! There is an awful lot of paperwork to be done to show that people are benefitting from the service, to show improvements, and there is a lot of forms to be filled it. Grading, how they're doing, what grade you gave them when they came in or what level you gave them and then what level they end up at the end of the year. They have to keep folders so the work can be monitored. It's a tight ship.

R: How would you describe the charity sector at the moment?
I: How would I describe the charity sector? In need of repair. When all those scandals came out, they need some reengineering of the sector. And the corporate governance of the sector needs to be...well it's probably well run now but I don't know. I just know that there has been scandals and that the Government know about them. I know that there's a regulator and every charity has to has its own registration and all that kind of stuff.

R: Do you think that there is a lack of trust in them?
I: It's possible that people have lost confidence in the management, but the work is on the ground, and they're still doing a good job. But if the management are feathering their own nests that's a problem that needs to be addressed, if it isn't already being addressed. But I thought that the charities regulator, every charity has to have a registration, has to have trustees, has to run like a company and all these things have to be monitored and it all has to link in with the revenue. So they have to operate as if it was a normal company.The other thing about it is that they're open to the public scrutiny so that every year the results are published. More transparency.

R: In your experience would you say people have lost confidence in the sector as a whole or just in cases with scandals?
I: Well I think that charities have been giving some time to get the house in order. And maybe they are in order. Until the next scandal breaks. They're becoming legal entities now so their boards and trustees are becoming responsible for the proper appropriation of funds so from that point of view they could end up having a criminal record if they don't comply with the regulations. And the charity regulator is there to ensure compliance. You'll always get groups of charities flying below the radar that they haven't been found yet, we don't know yet though. In general, I'm not sceptical of the sector. They're providing a benefit. And if they're providing a

benefit and they're doing a good job on that benefit and the people are happy with the service they're getting well then let them continue but make sure that they're regulated. I can see the need for adult literacy, upwards of 40% of the population have some amount of problems with literacy. It's absolutely huge. So that kind of work has to continue. Funnily enough the dawn of the smartphone age seems to be improving adult literacy. Everybody has to be able to send a text. And they might not always have their spelling right but they can send a text. Because otherwise they're in a lot of trouble.

R: What do you think of the staff where you are now?
I: Efficient. All the forms have to be filled in by a certain time and submitted. The journals have to be monitored and samples taken and filed away for next year. These are paid staff. I would say that most of them are there passionately working but one or two of them, it's just a job. But the majority are passionate and the decisions they make go to help, not to hinder. If charities become more professional they will become more professional in the marketing of the services they provide and they'll be out front and upfront with how the charity is run. Say in the case of Charity 2 we have CEO Charity 2 publishing his wages and setting down the markers and running that as a business. Getting a good reputation for doing a very good job. That's very important. I don't have much experience with Charity 2 but my wife works in there and we talk about it a lot. And they appear to really like the work they're doing up there in Finglas.

R: Would you recommend Charity 2 to any of your peers entering into retirement age?
I: Oh yeah, very much so.

R: Who do you donate money to?
I: To Charity 2.

R: Do you know where the money you donate goes?
I: It goes to the literacy of children. And it's administered by a group which is acknowledged by CEO Charity 2 and he ensures that every penny is accounted for. I have a lot of confidence in him. Very strong figure head and very well know and has

been able to market himself as the acceptable face of charities in Ireland. Marketing is very important to charities because you need to understand the reason for donation. And if you've got good reasons people will respond. And if you're addressing them, these difficulties, well then people will respond and row in. And that's where Charity 2 is ticking all the boxes.

R: How long have you been donating to Charity 2?

I: We got letters in the post not so long ago saying that it was going to be...13 years I've been donating. We donate to Charity 6 as well. It's again that they send out literature and follow up and phone call. I mean, you don't go out running out looking to donate money to charities. They come knocking. And sometimes the case is good. Sometimes it's at the door, and we said that we wouldn't do it at the door anymore, it would be a phone call. We just weren't sure about the credentials. Some people had fake credentials. And that would be a major issue if they were using the name of a charity with a good standing. If they were going around with falsified documents blackening their names. I'm not sure how the money is being used in Charity 6 but they are a reputable organisation. I just haven't followed up. They're helping people that are oppressed. I couldn't be sure how the funding is used, I have confidence in them. They haven't got a bad reputation and they communicate with me through the mail.

R: What if a scandal broke with Charity 6?

I: Well, it depends. It depends on the level in the organisation where it was taking place and where the money was actually going. Was it with an organisation that had no interest in human rights either? I would see Charity 6 as looking out for civil rights no matter what your political persuasion was. That those people are being helped, that's the main thing. I have to be convinced in the first instance, but once I'm convinced I'll stick with them through thick and thin in the hope that the financial irregularities will be sorted out. And then I would be happy enough to continue on. I think you have to stay loyal to your original choice.

R: What kind of communication do you think is effective?

I: Well advertising, good advertising. And then follow up. With a door campaign I think. Sometimes with a follow up with cold calling. If they're going door to door with the proper credentials, the proper permit, on these particular streets on these particular days. That would improve the possibility of me giving at the door. I would say that the demographic is people that can afford to pay. That could be over a certain age group but in general it's appealing to people with surplus. Disposable income. I think that charities could target that 50+ age group more but a lot of that group are already aware. And if they will donate they already are.

R: How do you think that the sector could be improved?

I: I think that the regulator should do more. They should explain their reason for being and generate confidence in the sector. And that's across all the charities. That way they can show that there's a sector for you to donate. With a good information campaign. Show that there is a broad spectrum of charities that are doing good work. They could target different sectors of the economy for different charitable donations. You don't have to name the companies or the charities but show that there are broad areas where donations could take place. In each group you have maybe 10 charities and you explain what each of them is for. And that would be government regulated, a government publication. There has to be a campaign to let people know that there are charities suited to them, that can meet their requirements, that they're not in trouble, that their wages are shown, that it's a good idea to participate.