Explaining customers’ relationship commitment in the non-profit sector

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Abstract

Purpose
The purpose of the study is to explain what affect customers’ relationship commitment to non-profits organizations.

Methodology
This study employs the quantitative approach with the help of web-based survey.

Findings
Relationship commitment has two direct antecedents, namely trust and relationship benefits. Communication between organization and customers has an indirect effect on relationship commitment which is partially mediated by trust. The relationships between constructs are controlled by the length of the membership in the organization.

Research limitations/implications
The study has several managerial implications. Thus, the established associations between relationships constructs adopted from for-profit industries do not fully explain the drivers of customers’ relationship commitment in the non-profit sector. The special attention should be payed to establishing the successful two-ways communication with the customers in order to facilitate commitment. Theoretically-wise, the study re-examines the earlier established model in the new context and by doing so introduces the new model which is relevant for the context of customers of non-profit organizations. The study however has some limitation such as an application of convenience sample, a limited availability of the survey, a possible language barrier.

Originality/value
The study proposes the new model which explains commitment and its antecedents in the context of customers’ relationship with non-profit organizations.

Keywords
Commitment, non-profit organizations, relationship marketing, quantitative study
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1 Introduction
1.1 Background
The non-profit sector is an expanding worldwide phenomenon and is one of the fastest developing segments of the society (Pressgrove & McKeever, 2016; Lewis, 2005). It is “an essential part of the social, political, and economic landscape of contemporary society” (Waters 2010; p. 1420). The non-profit sector sometimes referred to as a “third sector” (Lewis, 2005), consists of the mix of voluntary, private, non-profit associations and organizations (Anheier, 2006). It fulfills public purposes such as to deliver human services, prevent environmental catastrophes, protect civil rights and support an economic development (Lewis, 2005; Salamon, 1997). The term “non-profit” describes “the part of the economy which does not rely on profit for its existence” (Buttle, 1996; p. 176). Non-profit organizations (NPOs) are broadening the worldwide presence and demonstrating the contribution to world’s economy by for example significant numbers in an employment and revenue (Lewis, 2005; Pressgrove & McKeever, 2016). The non-profit sector has been even called the big innovation of the twentieth century with the absolutely striking growth (Salamon, 1997), which grants the increased importance of research in this field (Buttle, 1996; Michalski & Helmig, 2008; Mahmoud & Yusif, 2012).

There are millions of NPOs around the globe and only in the USA more than 1 500 000 non-profit organizations are registered according to National Center for Charitable Statistics (Overview of NCCS data files, 2016). Some of the organizations, for example, large associations and universities have assets of billions and dollars (Overview of NCCS data files, 2016). Other NPOs, such as for example UNICEF and Human Rights Watch, earn the leading positions among the best non-profits due to the large publicity and the attention of the audience through an engagement and modern marketing tools (Top 100 nonprofits on the Web, 2012).

The non-profit sector is very diverse, including the organizations of different size, origins, activities, which operate on different fields (Kenix, 2008; Anheier, 2006). Research in the non-profit sector from the marketing perspective has focused on different NPOs such as activist organizations, humanitarian organization, ethical and medical organizations (for example, Briones et al. 2011; Boenigk&Helmig, 2013; Schneider, 2003; Taylor et al. 2001). Due to the diversity of forms and the business fields, it is hard to generalize what NPOs are and what they do (Waters, 2010). Yet some similar experiences and business practices still can be traced such as an attraction of volunteers, raising funds, building strong relationship ties with all the stakeholders (Waters, 2010; Tonkiss & Passey, 1999).
Non-profit sector constantly faces a growing competition (Salamon, 2012) and organizational changes (Mahmoud & Yusif, 2012). NPOs are frequently adopting business principles and marketing practices to encounter changes in technological (Waters, 2010) and marketing environments (Weir & Hibbert, 2000) and to resist the competition for limited financial and labor resources (Bussell & Forbes, 2006). The adaptation of marketing orientation and application of marketing principles in the non-profit context have been the topic of a current interest due to the economic and social significance of non-profit organizations and their fast growth (Pressgrove & McKeever, 2016; Mahmoud & Yusif, 2012; Pope et al. 2009).

Besides explaining the necessity of the adoption of marketing principles by NPOs, previous studies also paid attention to the importance of building the relationships with non-profit organizations’ stakeholders (Waters, 2011). NPOs are developing the relationships with their members and clients viewing them as “customers” (Salamon, 2012). The relationship bonds with different partners including customers are especially important in the non-profit sector and therefore the sufficient attention has to be paid to establish, develop and maintain long term relationships with them (MacMilan et al. 2005; Arnett et al. 2003; Buttle, 1996).

1.2 Problem discussion

The non-profit sector is an exceptional phenomenon which has some crucial distinctions from for-profit sector (Goulet & Frank, 2002). NPOs are usually self-governing organizations which try to engage more people in the community for the benefit of the stakeholders while for-profit firms are pursuing a capitalization and own financial benefits (Spencer, 2002). In contrast to profit-driven companies, NPOs are rather a mission driven (Anheier, 2006) and are striving for the social changes (Knox & Gruar, 2007). Normally, NPOs also have multiple non-financial objectives (Dolnicar & Lazarevski, 2009) and do not have a strong transactional focus but commercial firms are concentrated on maximizing a profit (Knox & Gruar, 2007; Lewis et al. 2001; Brennan & Brady, 1999). Furthermore, NPOs have different sources of financing such as individual givings, corporate donations, grants, fees for services while for-profit organizations are generating income through selling their products or services (Anheier, 2006). Last, but not the least, a fundamental feature of the non-profit sector is, according to Drucker (1990), that non-profits have multiple relationships with different stakeholders who are of a high importance for the organization and the number of those contacts is much higher than that of for-profit firms.

Generally, NPOs are keeping the contacts with patrons (funders), donors, clients, volunteer workers, trustees, committee members, government and local government representatives, local community,
media, advocates and of course staff employees and board members (Bruce, 1995; Jha, 2008). Not only this, but the difficulty is that the stakeholder might belong to the several groups at the same time and each of those groups requires specific and distinct relationship approach (Buttle, 1996; Lewis, 2005). Moreover, building relationships with stakeholders are gaining more importance due to a decreasing confidence in the non-profit sector (Pressgrove & McKeever, 2016). Considering the specifics of the non-profit sector, the marketing of NPOs always should be manipulated and adapted to be an appropriate operational framework for non-profit organizations (Brennan & Brady, 1999). The managers of non-profit organizations are searching for the relevant marketing approaches, which can lead the organization to a success (Mahmoud & Yusif, 2012). The adoption of marketing is not only a crucial strategical condition of the organizational success, but also a challenging task considering the specific of the sector and constant changes in the business environment (Mahmoud & Yusif, 2012; Padanyi & Gainer, 2004).

Giving the nature of the non-profit sector, previous studies have suggested that the one marketing theory which is of a particular relevance for NPOs is the relationship marketing theory (RM) (Buttle, 1996; Weir & Hibbert, 2000; Brennan & Brady, 1999; Bussell & Forbes, 2006). The dominant function of RM is an interaction and therefore, RM is relevant in the non-profit sector as the key tasks of NPOs are based on a high degree of multiple personal interactions with stakeholders (Brennan & Brady, 1999) and on establishing relationships and cultivating partnerships with many of them (Pressgrove & McKeever, 2016). Moreover, every NPOs’ target group demands a personal approach (Buttle, 1996), which the RM principles can facilitate (Brennan & Brady, 1999, Bussell & Forbes, 2006). Maintaining the long-term relationships with stakeholders is an essential strategy in the modern competitive business environment (Arnett et al. 2003). Therefore, NPOs require more strategic planning with the focus on long-term relationships (Buttle, 1996). Thus, it has been acknowledged that relationship marketing has been the relevant and beneficial approach in the non-profit sector’s marketing (Buttle, 1996; Brennan & Brady, 1999; MacMilan et al. 2005; Arnett et al. 2003; Boenigk, 2014). However, in spite of the agreement on the relevance of RM for non-profits and the extensive attention to RM concept in general (Brennan & Brady, 1999; Bussell & Forbes, 2006), the relationships in the context of non-profit organizations have not been studied sufficiently (Michalski & Helmig, 2008).

The RM paradigm has been introduced by Berry (1983) and has attracted a lot of attention of academics and practitioners (Weir & Hibbert, 2000). Yet there is a lack of agreement on the definition of relationship marketing (Egan, 2008). One of the widely used by subsequent authors definition (for example, Buttle, 1996; Gummesson, 2008) states that the purpose of RM is “to identify and establish,
maintain and enhance, and when necessary terminate relationships with customers (and other parties) so that the objectives regarding economic and other variables of all parties are met” (Grönroos, 2007, p. 29). It also implies the need to find the specific way to communicate with stakeholders, including customers, depending on their relationship with an organization (Egan, 2008). Practically, the marketing of NPOs always has to be manipulated and adapted to be an appropriate operational framework for non-profit organizations (Brennan & Brady, 1999).

The highest extent of relationship bonding between partners is represented by relationship commitment, which implies partners’ interdependency and that “customer loyalty is achieved” (Dwyer et al. 1987, p. 19). Previous studies concluded that commitment is central for the relationship marketing paradigm and the key component of a successful long-term relationship (Garbarino & Johnson, 1999; Bansal et al. 2004; Neeru & Paul, 2000).

Various research models have conceptualized relationship commitment and its antecedents (Theron et al. 2008; Bansal et al. 2004; Garbarino & Johnson, 1999; Anderson & Weitz, 1992). One of the models, which is widely known and used in relationship marketing research, is the model of commitment and its antecedents and consequences by Morgan & Hunt (1994) which is also called “commitment-trust theory of relationship marketing” or “key mediating variable (KVM model)”. The Morgan & Hunt’s model (1994) is the common model of RM (Gruen et al. 2002) which has been extensively cited by the authors during the last two decades (Theron et al. 2008; Neeru & Paul, 2000; Bansal et al. 2004; De Ruyter & Wetzels, 1999; MacMilan et al. 2005).

The Morgan and Hunt’s (1994) model has been developed in the scope of B2B buyer and seller relationships, however, other studies have made a use of the framework through various contexts of the for-profit sector such as for example online retailing (Mukherjee & Nath, 2007), B2B e-market (Lancastre & Lages (2006), financial B2C service (De Ruyter & Wetzels, 1999), entertaining consumer service (Garbarino & Johnson, 1999), health care service (KalaFatis et al. 1997) etc. The model has been also applied in the scope of NPOs (MacMilan et al. 2005). It has indicated that commitment – trust theory can be successfully applied in the non-profit context; however, it demands several modifications in the initial model used in the B2B settings.

The Morgan & Hunt’s model consists of both, the antecedents and the consequences of relationship commitment and trust. The present study focuses only on antecedents and excludes consequences from the further consideration. The commitment-trust theory posits that relationship commitment can be predicted by relationship termination costs, relationship benefits and shared values, while the main
predictor of commitment is trust. Trust, in turn, is driven by shared values, communication and opportunistic behavior (Morgan & Hunt, 1994).

The positive causal relationship between trust and commitment has been mentioned through various research papers (for example, Garbarino & Johnson; 1999; Naskrent & Siebelt, 2011). The same applies to relationship benefits and shared values as their positive direct effect on relationship commitment has been previously supported by several studies (Mukherjee & Nath, 2007; Kalafatis et al. 1997). Relationship termination costs, another commitments’ antecedent identified by Morgan & Hunt (1994), is not applicable in the context of the customers of non-profits as the cost of finding and bonding with an alternative relationship partner does not lead to any material cost as in the B2B context.

Talking about the predictors of trust, which are shared values, communication, and opportunistic behavior, besides the direct predicting relationship with trust, they also have indirect effects on relationship commitment through trust (Morgan & Hunt, 1994, Mukherjee & Nath, 2007; Kalafatis et al. 1997). Indeed, even if communication and opportunistic behavior have not been theorized to be direct predictors of relationship commitment, the association between those two concepts and commitment is commonly mentioned in the previous papers (for example, Gundlach et al. 1995, Theron et al. 2008; Anderson & Weitz, 1992).

However, according to the results of the previous re-examinations of the commitment-trust theory, the model can be exposed to changes and not every previously established relationship between mentioned concepts is significant through different contexts. Thus, it is important to test the theory according to the specifics of the different contextual settings.

As it has been mentioned above, MacMilan et al. (2005) have made an attempt to adapt the commitment – trust theory to the non-profit context. However, the model suggested by MacMilan et al. (2005) has only been applied in the context of NPOs’ funders. Non-profit organizations have various communicational connections with different stakeholders including relationships with NPOs customers (Drucker, 1990). The majority of papers available in the area of NPOs focus on donors or funders, and the marketing tools aiming to establish and maintain relationships with them (Boenigk & Helmig, 2013, Pope et al. 2009; Waters et al. 2009; MacMilan et al. 2005; Naskrent & Siebelt, 2011). The previous research noted that a significance of fundraising activities and relationship with funders and donors is overemphasized (Buttle, 1996) and the fact that non-profit organizations also establish a communication with their clients or customers is often ignored (Weir & Hibbert, 2000). Indeed, a lack of research reflecting the customer perspective on relationships with NPOs has been previously detected (Bussell &
Forbes, 2006; Michalski & Helmig, 2008; Pope et al. 2009; Weir & Hibbert, 2000, Boenigk & Helmig, 2013). Therefore, following the MacMilan et al. (2005) recommendation to apply the commitment-trust theory’s model of Morgan & Hunt (1994) on the relationships between NPOs and other stakeholders, rather than funders, the present study suggests applying the model in the context of relationships between NPOs and its customers.

1.3 Research purpose
The purpose of the study is to explain what affects customers’ relationship commitment to non-profits organizations.

1.4 Delimitations
The author of the study has set several delimitations for the present thesis. Firstly, the study includes only the variables identified in the model by Morgan & Hunt (1994) and thus do not examine any other possible drivers of the dependent variable. This model has been chosen due to its relevance for the non-profit sector, its significance for marketing research and various previous re-applications through different contexts. Secondly, the paper focuses only on antecedents of relationship commitment and not consequences, which limits the explanation of customers’ relations with organizations.

1.5 Outline of the study
The thesis will be structured as follows. Firstly, in chapter 2 the literature review on the discussed original model and the core concepts of the study are presented. Next, in chapter 3, the conceptual framework is discussed and hypotheses are suggested. In chapter 4, the methodology of the research is overviewed. In chapter 5 the results of the analyses are brought up which follows by the discussion on the results in chapter 6. Chapter 7 contains the conclusions of this study, and chapter 8 the theoretical and managerial implications as well as limitations and guidance for future research.

The practitioners interested in the outcomes of this study can obtain valuable insights by paying attention to the discussion and conclusion chapters, as well as focusing on implications’ part.
2 Literature review

2.1 The commitment – trust theory model
The author of the current study based the research on Morgan & Hunt’s (1994) commitment-trust theory model, which explains the antecedents and consequences of relationship commitment and trust. Considering the purpose of the current study only the antecedents are in the scope of interest, thus Figure 1 below indicates what drives relationship commitment and trust according to Morgan & Hunt (1994).

As relationship termination costs are not relevant in the context of relationships of customers with NPOs, they are eliminated from the further consideration. Thus, only next concepts are discussed further: relationship commitment, trust, relationship benefits, shared values, communication and opportunistic behavior.

![Figure 1. The relevant part of commitment-trust theory model by Morgan & Hunt (1994)](image)

2.2 Relationship commitment
Relationship commitment has been seen as the central concept of relationship marketing (Dwyer et al. 1987; Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Bansal et al. 2004; Gruen et al. 2000). Despite being extensively studied, a little agreement is reached when it comes to defining and conceptualizing commitment (O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986; Gruen et al. 2000). According to Dwyer et al. (1987 p. 19), relationship commitment is defined as “implicit or explicit pledge of relational continuity between exchange partners”. Commitment is also viewed as the strength of the relationships among channel mediums and the “psychological attachment” (Gruen et al. 2000, p. 37). Commitment reflects the highest extent of partners’ interdependency (Dwyer et al. 1987).
Commitment has been extensively studied in an organization theory and organizational behavior, a theory of partnering and social exchange as well as in a relationship marketing context (Goulet & Frank, 2002). According to it, customers can be defined as committed if their values, self-image, and attitudes are connected with a specific choice (Bowden, 2009).

Relationship commitment has been treated as both unidimensional and multidimensional concept across the research (Gruen et al. 2000). Many differences exist in conceptualizing commitment but according to Bansal et al. (2004), the majority of studies have employed a unidimensional approach where it is most commonly addressed as affective commitment. Affective commitment is referred to a psychological or emotional attachment to the organization (Allen & Meyer 1990). This attachment has a desire-based nature and does not include obligations and needs to stay in the relationships with the organization (Bansal et al. 2004).

One of the widely-used conceptualization of affective commitment is one suggested by Meyer & Allen (1984) who argues that “strongly committed individual identifies with, is involved and is attached to the organization” (p. 375). Thus, affective commitment reflects the desire to hold the relationship due to a positive effect towards the partnering party and identification with the partner (Kumar et al. 1995a). That goes in line with Verhoef et al. (1995) who also argue that affectively committed clients or customers will be attached to the partner because of the positive feelings towards it. Gruen et al. (2000) as well suggest that affective commitment implies the focus on a positive emotional attachment and the extent to which the members or partners are psychologically connected to the organization grounded on favorable feelings towards the organization.

Many studies posit the dimensions of affective commitment and verify the measurement scales adapted from Allen & Meyer (1990) and Meyer & Allen (1984) reflecting identification with, attachment to (or enjoyment in) and involvement into organization (for example, Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Kumar et al. 1995a; Verhoef et al. 1995; Gruen et al. 2000). Notably, the authors label differently one of the components of affective commitment calling it either enjoyment (Allen & Meyer, 1990) or attachment (Meyer & Allen, 1984) but measuring it in a similar way. The measurement of affective commitment in the present study is based on scales developed by Meyer & Allen (1984) and Allen & Meyer (1990) and is adapted to the context of the study.

Thus, the attachment to the organization has been previously measured through questions reflecting “feelings of emotional attachment to organization” and the identification with organization through “the sense of belonging to the organization” (Verhoef et al. 1995; Bansal et al. 2004; Gruen et al. 2000;
Allen & Meyer, 1990; Meyer & Allen, 1984). Involvement in the work of the organization is suggested to be removed from the following analyses as it is conceptualized in the organizational theory context and is linked to the involvement of employees in organizations, which is not the case of the current study.

2.3 Trust
A lot of academic attention has been given to the concept of trust, especially in the context of relationship marketing (Sargeant & Lee, 2004; Dwyer et al. 1987). In the general context trust is "the belief that a party's word or promise is reliable and a party will fulfill his/her obligations in an exchange relationship" (Schurr & Ozanne, 1985, p. 940). Morgan & Hunt (1994) define that trust exists if the party is confident about the partner’s reliability and integrity. Moorman et al. (1993, p. 82) define that trust is “a willingness to rely on an exchange partner in whom one has confidence.”

Marketing research on trust focuses mostly on the scope of relationships with supplier firms and their salespeople (Doney & Cannon, 1997). However, trust and its antecedents have also been investigated through many different research contexts (for example, Bansal et al. 2004; Garbarino & Johnson; 1999; Moorman et al. 1992) including voluntary sector, where a few papers underlined its importance (Sargeant & Lee, 2002; Naskrent & Siebelt, 2011; Tonkiss & Passey, 1999). It has been theorized that different factors can predict trust, but according to the Morgan & Hunt (1994) shared values, communication and involvement into opportunistic behavior can antedate trust.

Trust in relationship exchange has been also called mutual trust, which reflects the two-way relationship bonding between partners (Black, 2008). Evidently, the concept of trust has been diversely interpreted and operationalized through different dimensions (Sargeant & Lee, 2004; Porter & Donthu, 2008). The previous discussion on trust has widely employed the two-dimensional approach where trust is measured as benevolence and reliability (Ganesan & Hess, 1997). Benevolence implies that relationship partner is interested in the another’s welfare (Doney & Cannon, 1997; Kumar et al. 1995a). It has been reflected through the belief of the partners' concerns of the interests of the organizations and the ability to keep its promises (Doney & Cannon, 1997; Verhoef et al. 1995).

Through various contexts, it has been agreed that the certain types of beliefs imply ones’ trustworthiness (Porter & Donthu, 2008). Indeed, the trustworthy party in exchange relationships can be relied on (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). The belief that partners’ words can be relied on constitutes one of the mutual trust dimension which has been differently called through studies, namely as reliability (Morgan &
Hunt, 1994; Verhoef et al. 1995; Garbarino & Johnson, 1999; MacMillan et al. 2005), credibility (Ganesan & Hess, 1997) or honesty (Kumar et al. 1995a, Kumar et al. 1995b). For the current study, the authors adopted the term “reliability” which reflect the willingness to rely on exchange partner (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). In the relationship based on trust, the party believes that the partner will perform reliably (credibly) and trustworthy and will function considering the partners’ interests (Doney & Cannon, 1997). In the context of NPO, trust also reflects the stakeholders’ expectations regarding the reliability of the organization (Naskrent & Siebelt, 2011).

2.4 Relationship benefits
Commitment to relationship goes beyond the evaluation of costs and benefits, it means turning down short-term results in order to focus on long-term benefits (Ganesan & Hess, 1997). The concept of relationship benefits is closely connected with the concept of a superior value to the customers as the organizations that bring out superior benefits are highly valued (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Benefits can be defined as advantages received through an interaction with an exchange partner, which contribute to the firm competitiveness (Sweeney & Webb, 2007). Both exchange partners must benefit from the relationship for its continuance (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2002). The fulfillment of relational benefits can contribute to the development of current relationships (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2002).

Previously relationship benefits have been mostly operationalized as the multidimensional concept and one of the widely used approaches is that they can be of three different types including psychological, social and special treatment benefits (Gwinner et al. 1998, Sweeney & Webb, 2007, Lee et al. 2014; Hennig-Thurau et al. 2002). Psychological and social factors have been posited to be the central points for fostering the relationships (Sweeney & Webb, 2007; Jüttner and Wehrli; 1995).

According to Gwinner et al. (1998), psychological benefits reflect comfort, reduced anxiety and risk and also can be called confidence benefits. Hennig-Thurau et al. (2002) and Dagger & O’Brien (2010) also define the psychological benefits in a similar way, suggesting as well that those benefits bring a feeling of knowing what to expect from the partner. That goes along with Kingshott (2002) who argues that the psychological aspect of relationship usually entails expectations.

Social benefits are connected to the development of personal contacts and a friendship with an organization, familiarity and personal recognition by its employees (Gwinner et al. 1998, Hennig-Thurau et al. 2002; Lee et al. 2014). It has been previously stated that for holding the relationships the social bonds cannot be isolated from consideration (Sweeney & Webb, 2007). Social benefits reflect an
emotional aspect of a relationship, which is characterized by recognition (Dagger & O'Brien, 2010). They describe mostly the process of the relationship itself and not the results of it (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2002).

The last previously defined type, special treatment benefits, is linked to customization of service offerings and special approach to certain customers (Gwinner et al., 1998). In the scope of the current study, the last type of benefits is not relevant as it is mostly referred to relationships between a service provider and a client or within B2B firms’ relationships.

Interestingly, previous studies mention that psychological benefits of confidence and trust are more important factors than social benefits and special treatments benefits (Gwinner et al. 1998; Garbarino & Johnson; 1999). The multidimensional concept proposed by Gwinner et al. (1998) and followed by Hennig-Thurau et al. (2002); Sweeney & Webb, (2007); Dagger & O’Brien, (2010) is adapted for the present study instead of unidimensional measurement suggested by Morgan & Hunt (1994) in order to obtain more insights into the nature of customers’ perception of advantages received from relationship bonding and exclude transaction-oriented approach. Therefore, two types of relationship benefits – psychological and social benefits and their measurements detected by Gwinner et al. (1998) is adopted in the current study.

2.5 Shares values
Values are the basics of an organizational culture (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Because of their diversity shared values have been labelled as one of the most difficult concepts to study and measure (Hunt et al. 1989). Morgan & Hunt (1994) identify shared values as the extent to which the partners of relationship have common beliefs about the behaviors, goals, and policies. Shared values are also sometimes referred to as shared beliefs (Sargeant & Woodliffe, 2007) or norms (Heide & John’s, 1992). When the relationship partners have mutual values, they will be more committed to the relationship (Morgan & Hunt, 1994).

Considering the organization theory, even if not all the members of the group follow the same values, the majority of the active members of the organization would support the given value (Chatman, 1989). Although, shared values have been extensively studied in the organizational studies in the context of fitting a new employment environment, its importance for marketing research especially in the context of RM have been widely recognized (Morgan & Hunt, 1994).
Relationships may be affected by different sorts of norms and values such as ethics, profitability, and values pertaining to quality (De Ruyter & Wetzels, 1999; Theron et al. 2008). However, according to De Ruyter & Wetzels (1999), it has been evidenced that ethical shared values are most significant in the relational exchange. Besides, Morgan & Hunt (1994) also posit that ethical values are foundational in relationship exchange and, according to Hunt et al. (1989, p. 86) they are "a significant and substantive predictor of organizational commitment". Hunt et al. (1989) argue that if ethical values are shared among the members of the organization, the success of the organization can be accomplished.

Previous studies have often measured the broad principles of ethical values reflecting an organizational interest in ethical issues and acting in an ethical manner instead of content or product specific factors (Hunt et al. 1989). It has been also suggested that shared values can be considered as a match between personal values and the value system adopted by the organization (Goodman & Syvantek, 1999; Maxham & Netemeyer, 2003). However, the majority of the studies did not conceptualize the ethical values deeper than that and several employed the scale developed by Hunt et al. (1989) which reflects the global measures of the ethical values construct (for example, Valentine & Barnett, 2003; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). The context-free measurement approach has been also adapted by MacMilan et al. (2005) to capture the extent to which NPOs donors share the same values as the organization.

2.6 Communication
Communication is the key in the beginning of any relationship (Theron et al. 2008). Communication is defined as “the formal as well as informal sharing of meaningful and timely information between firms” (Anderson & Narus 1990, p. 44). According to Morgan & Hunt (1994), a partners’ perception of successful communication that has been of a high-quality, frequent, relevant and on time can significantly contribute to the relationships.

Communication is the concept that has been theorized differently through different research occasions. Even through relationship marketing research the concept has been named and operationalized differently. For example, Sargeant & Lee (2004) reflect it as communication acceptance, Torres-Moraga et al. (2010) as perceived communication effectiveness, Sharma & Patterson, (1999) as communication effectiveness. However, most of the authors refer to communication as timely information sharing between exchange partners (Morgan & Hunt, 1994).

The quality of information that the organization communicates to its stakeholders can even reflect the organization reputation (Torres-Moraga et al. 2010). Therefore, the communication function is an
important aspect of organizational routine. If the previous information delivered to partners has been truthful, the receiver of the message would be more likely to rely on this source in the future (Moorman et al. 1992; Sharma & Patterson, 1999). Therefore, communication is argued to predict trust (Morgan & Hunt, 1994).

According to Morgan & Hunt (1994), relevance, timeliness, and frequency are the most significant aspects of communication that contribute to the greater trust. That goes along with Moorman et al. (1993) who posit that timely communication can significantly cultivate the relationships. Furthermore, Anderson et al. (1987) also state that frequency and quality of information is important for parties to understand each other. Several researches, such as for example Lancastre & Lages (2006) and Theron et al. (2008) also follow the approach which underlines the significance of frequency, timeliness, and relevancy of information for a communication exchange.

MacMilan et al. (2005) and Mukherjee & Nath (2007) argue that communication is a two-way process that involves not only informing but also listening to partners. Listening implies reaching the opinions about the organizations and recognition of partners’ wants and needs (MacMilan et al. 2005). According to Anderson et al. (1987) participation of both parties in a communication exchange and the opportunity to receive a feedback is contributing to the relationships. Indeed, the relationship building is a dialogue and each side of the communication has to be considered as valuable and meaningful (Uzunoğlu & Kip, 2014). Therefore, the measurement of communication includes two subconcepts, such as informing the customers which includes delivering relevant information frequently and timely, and listening to customers’ feedback message (MacMilan et al. 2005). MacMilan et al. (2005) also adopted the more personal approach grounded on the assumption that in the context of fundraising the personal contacts with organizations’ employees gain an increased importance. However, as in the present study staff interaction is discussed more in social benefits of a relationship, as suggested by Gwinner et al. (1998), this aspect of communication will be disregarded.

2.7 Opportunistic behavior
From the point of transactional cost analysis literature, individuals will have opportunistic behavior whenever it is possible when one can profit from this kind of behavior and is not stopped from doing so (John, 1984). In this sense, opportunism is a demonstration of egoism and self-interest (Torres-Moraga et al. 2010). Widely referred to the explanation of opportunism is posed by Williamson as “self-interest seeking with guile” (1975. p. 6). Opportunism is linked to deceptive behaviors, for example, hiding, distorting facts, giving out only incomplete informational messages, inciting others to make mistakes,
shirking to fulfill promises or duties (John, 1984; Torres-Moraga et al. 2010). Opportunism often does not exist in the very beginning of relationships but rather can be developed with time through opportunities for self-interest seeking at partners’ expense (Rokkan et al. 2003). Morgan & Hunt (1994) argue that if one party believes that its exchange partner is involved in opportunistic behavior, it might result in decreased trust and commitment. On the contrary, the positive experience with the organization is likely to enhance trust towards it (Morgan & Hunt, 1994).

Opportunism implies taking advantages and disregarding the interest of others (Williamson, 1981; Torres-Moraga et al. 2010). The organization becomes opportunistic when it is trying to take advantage of its stakeholders (Torres-Moraga et al. 2010). According to MacMilan et al. (2005), opportunism is conceptualized as a perception that the NPO has taken advantage of the stakeholders in the past. Opportunism in RM has been theorized as a unidimensional general concept reflecting the possible disregard of stakeholders’ interest and taking advantage of them (Gundlach et al. 1995). The measurements for it are adapted from Morgan & Hunt (1994) and MacMilan et al. (2005).

3 Conceptual framework

According to many previous studies, the main antecedent of commitment is trust (for example, Morgan & Hunt, 1994, Dwyer et al. 1987; Garbarino & Johnson; 1999; Sharma & Patterson, 1999). The positive relationship between trust and commitment has been examined in many different contexts, including the funders in voluntary sector where fostering the trust would lead to the increase of commitment (Sargeant & Woodliffe, 2007; Sargeant & Lee, 2004, MacMilan et al. 2005). Voluntarily associations are often referred to as examples of trust-based organizations (Tonkiss & Passey, 1999). Trust is linked to the core values and objectives of many NPOs (Tonkiss & Passey, 1999). Sargeant & Lee (2002) and Stride & Lee (2007) also argues that trust has a special importance in the voluntary sector, and moreover, trust is a foundation which voluntary organizations are built upon. According to Sargeant & Lee (2004), an increase in trust leads to an increase in relationship commitment in the context of donors and NPOs relationships. However, the positive effect of trust on commitment has been previously explored only in the context of funders while the customers’ perspective is also of a high importance (Weir & Hibbert, 2000 Bussell & Forbes, 2006). Therefore, it is hypothesized:

**H1: Trust positively affects customers’ relationship commitment to non-profit organizations**

The subject of relationship benefits has not been properly investigated in the non-profit context yet, rather than by MacMilan et al. (2005), who argued that perception of material and non-material benefits
have a positive effect on commitment. In the current study, benefits are operationalized in a sense of psychological and social dimensions, rather than following transaction approach of the economic division of relationship benefits.

Morgan & Hunt (1994) suggested that if a relationship partner receives superior benefits from another party, then this organization would be more committed to the relationship. That goes in line with other studies, for example, the paper by Hennig-Thurau et al. (2002) also supports the theorized positive relationship between relationship benefits and relationship commitment. In the context of NPOs as in other organizations, if the customers are unaware of the benefits of a partnership with the organization, they are indifferent to it (Brennan & Brad, 1999). The customers should benefit from long-term relationship bonding in order to be willing to maintain the relationship with the organization and stay committed (Gwinner et al. 1998).

**H2: Relationship benefits positively affect customers’ relationship commitment to non-profit organizations**

Morgan & Hunt (1994) identified shared values as the antecedent of both relationship commitment and trust. As the purpose of the study is to explain commitment, the direct effect of shared values on trust is eliminated from the research model. It has been empirically confirmed through several studies that if relationship partners have same or similar values, that affects positively the mutual level of commitment (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; MacMillan et al. 2005; Mukherjee & Nath, 2007; Gundlach et al. 1995).

The previous studies suggest that voluntary organizations are significantly identified in terms of core values (Tonkiss & Passey, 1999). Indeed, Stride & Lee (2007) also highlight the importance of values for non-profit organizations and even claim that the values are what differentiate NPOs and commercial firms. That goes in line with Sargeant & Lee (2004) who argue that values are the heart of the non-profit organization. They should be shared across the organization and its stakeholders, including customers, which are highly significant for the organization (Stride & Lee, 2007). Indeed, MacMillan et al. (2005) and Naskrent & Siebelt (2011), found the positive significant relationships between shared values and relationship commitment and shared values and trust in the context of NPOs and its donors. NPOs engage people on the basis of shared values which facilitate their trust and commitment (Waters, 2010). Stride & Lee (2007) suggested that values shared through non-profit organizations should be studied more in the context of different organizational stakeholders including the customers of the organization. Therefore, the author hypothesizes:
**H3: Shared values positively affect customers’ relationship commitment to non-profit organizations**

Previously channel communication has been extensively studied in the context of a channel members’ interaction (Mohr & Sohi, 1996). The members of an exchange relationship, including customers or clients, achieve coordination through sharing information by two-ways communications (Anderson & Weitz, 1992). Most of the NPOs can be named as the organizations where the communication with stakeholders is a sensitive and essential matter as their communicative response is an important measure of an organizational success (Lewis et al. 2001). Customers should be well informed and the quality of communication should be high in order to avoid possible misunderstanding and foster the relationships (Theron et al., 2008).

Meaningful communication between partners is an essential antecedent of trust (Anderson & Narus, 1990). Moreover, according to Morgan & Hunt’s (1994) model, communication has an indirect influence on relationship commitment through trust. That is in line with other studies, which mention the relationship between communication and relationship commitment (for example, Theron et al. 2008; Anderson & Weitz, 1992). The re-examination of the commitment – trust theory by Lancastre & Lages (2006) as well discovered the significant indirect effect of communication on relationship commitment through trust. The indirect effect of communication on relationship commitment through the mediation by trust is therefore hypothesized:

**H4: Trust mediates the positive effect of communication on customers’ relationship commitment to non-profit organizations**

According to Morgan & Hunt (1994), opportunistic behavior has the highest influence both directly and indirectly on trust. Moreover, there are evidences in favor of the existence of the link between opportunistic behavior and commitment (Gundlach et al. 1995). Brown et al. (2000) suggest the reversed approach, stating that if the partners are committed, then there are fewer chances that one party will behave opportunistically.

Non-profit organizations become opportunistic when they are trying to take advantage of the stakeholders and disregard their interests (Torres-Moraga et al. 2010). Opportunism has been often mentioned in the research of relationships with donors and is assumed to be an important factor for the partners’ relation connection (Sargeant & Lee, 2002; Torres-Moraga et al. 2010). MacMillan et al. (2005) have found that in the context of NPOs an engagement in opportunistic behavior is the most important antecedent of trust, which explains the highest proportion of variances. Talking about
relationship commitment, Morgan & Hunt (1994) followed by Lancastre & Lages (2006) as well supports the idea of a significance of opportunism in the relationships by stating that opportunistic behavior has the largest effect on relationship commitment, both directly and indirectly. That goes along with Gundlach et al. (1995) who posit that commitment and opportunistic behavior by a relationship partner are negatively related. Thus, in consistency with Morgan & Hunt (1994) it is hypothesized:

**H5: Trust mediates the negative effect of opportunistic behavior on customers’ relationship commitment to non-profit organizations**

As it was previously mentioned, the antecedents of the commitment are in the focus of the study, the initial model of Morgan & Hunt (1994) has been modified accordingly. Thus, as the focus of the study lies in commitment and not trust, the direct paths from shared values, communication and opportunistic behavior on trust are excluded. Instead, the indirect relationships of mentioned variables are drawn towards relationship commitment, which have been also suggested by Morgan & Hunt (1994) and the other authors mentioned above. The research model of this study is demonstrated below (Figure 2).

![Figure 2. The research model](image-url)
4 Methodology

4.1 Research approach and design

The current research is based on deduction as the conclusions are made through logical reasoning by applying previous research as theoretical foundation (Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2005). Therefore, the study applies a deductive approach.

Considering a research design, according to Malhotra (2010) a research design is a framework for carrying out a research project. It defines the necessary procedures to gather the required information and specifies the details of the chosen research approach (Malhotra, 2010). Research designs are classified on exploratory, descriptive and causal based on the problem structure (Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2005).

The current study is of a causal type. Causal research is employed to show that one variable causes or defines the values of others (Aaker et al. 2010). The studies have “cause-and-effect” problems and the objective of such studies is to isolate cause(s) and to evidence how much cause(s) results in effect(s) (Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2005). The study normally involves manipulations of one or more independent variables and measurement of the effect on dependent variables (Malhotra, 2010). To go beyond of only establishing the evidence of a relationship, the researcher has to obtain the reasonable proof that one variable antecedent the other and there are no effects of other causal factors (Aaker et al. 2010).

Causal studies demand the structured and planned design (Malhotra, 2010). The research hypotheses should be very specific as the requirement of proof of causality is high (Aaker et al. 2010). Ghauri & Grønhaug (2005) highlights the importance of a theory in causal research which is necessary to identify relevant relationships and factors.

The current study has a causal nature as it aims to determine the evidence of a cause-and-effect relationship. The study aims to explain the causal effect of several variables on other dependent variables by testing the conceptual model in a new context. For that, the author applies quantitative research approach.

The quantitative approach is used for testing the theories through an examination of the relationship among variables (Creswell, 2014). It employs measurement and the collection of numerical data for testing the relationship between variables (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Quantitative research is result oriented and is built on logical and critical approach (Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2005). It focuses on hypotheses testing and allows generalizing results on population (Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2005).
Therefore, the application of this approach is relevant for the purpose of the current study which aims to explain relationships between variables.

4.2 Data sources
Data collection is an essential step of all research projects (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Two types of data are typically classified in the literature, which is primary and secondary data (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2005; Malhotra, 2010). The current study involves a foremost gathering of primary data but also the use of secondary data.

Primary data are the data which were collected for the particular study (Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2005). Primary data are gathered for a specific research purpose of tackling the research problem (Aaker et al. 2010). The gathered data are relevant for the context of the study and less likely being lacking accuracy in comparison with secondary data (Aaker et al. 2010). It, however, can be expensive and time-consuming (Aaker et al. 2010).

Secondary data have been gathered by other researcher or by other organizations (Bryman & Bell, 2015). It is convenient, time and money – saving and often reliable and of a high – quality if it has been collected by competent experts (Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2005). But the drawbacks are that the data which have been previously collected will not completely fit the purpose of the study (Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2005). Therefore the usefulness of it in addressing the particular problem might be limited (Bryman & Bell, 2015). It is also hard to ensure if the data are reliable, accurate and dependable (Bryman & Bell, 2015).

As mentioned above for the purpose of the current study mostly primarily data are gathered. However, secondary data have been also employed in the form of statistical data from USA National Center for Charitable Statistics (Overview of NCCS data files, 2016) and Top Nonprofits organizations rankings (Top 100 nonprofits on the Web, 2012), as well as the empirical data from the academic articles which have been accessed through Google Scholar, OneSearch, and Business Source Premier. Primary data have been collected by utilizing survey method.

4.3 Data collection method
Survey method let the researcher describe numerically the trends and opinions of a population by conducting a study on the sample of that population (Creswell, 2014). It is based on the collecting the answers of responses on a variety of questions (Malhotra, 2010). Usually, the questionnaires have a certain structure with questions asked in prearranged order which is also the case for the current study
(Malhotra, 2010). The intent of the survey study is to generalize the results obtained through examining the sample to the whole population (Creswell, 2014).

The survey method has several advantages, such as the questionnaire is easy to administrate, the data gathered is reliable, and the interpretation of it is comparably simple (Malhotra, 2010). Moreover, if the survey is Web-based then the interviewer error and bias are eliminated, and the logic checks can be implemented to the survey to reduce the data cleaning procedures (Aaker et al. 2010).

However, surveys also have some disadvantages such as the respondents might be unable to provide the desired information or will be unaware of certain factors, for example, personal motives to a certain behavior (Malhotra, 2010). They might be also unwilling to answer certain questions especially regarding the personal or sensitive matters (Malhotra, 2010). Thus, the researcher is very dependent on the ability and willingness of respondents to answer the survey (Ghauri and Grønhaug, 2005). Often the survey, including online questionnaires, might result in loss of validity due to, for example, the sample selection and the survey design (Malhotra, 2010; Creswell, 2014).

In the current study, the data have been collected through a survey method because the survey properly serves the purpose which is to test the causal relationship. Moreover, it gives an opportunity to obtain relatively reliable and unbiased results in a case of the accurate survey design.

The survey has been composed in English. It has been created in Google Forms and distributed online. The link to the survey has been sent out in emails to the sample and also published on the Facebook page of the organization. Several reminders to fill in the survey have been posted during one week. The respondents were encouraged to share the survey with their friends.

The survey consists of 35 questions of which 28 questions are Likert scale questions, one of which was reversed, 2 dichotomous, 3 multiple choices and 2 open questions. 4 questions, including 2 Likert scales and 2 open questions have been included in the survey due to the general interest in terms of the practical importance and have not been used for the analysis.

The survey started with the two filter questions which eliminated those respondents who did not belong to the sample. Thus, respondents who are not members of the organization and who no longer live in Växjö have been excluded from further analysis. In the end of the survey the personal factual questions about gender, a level of education and length of the membership in the organization have been asked.
4.4 Sample and sample size
Sampling is very important especially for quantitative studies (Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2005). Sample is “the segment of the population that is selected for investigation” (Bryman & Bell, 2015, p. 187). The population of the current study is the consumers of NPOs.

As it has been previously mentioned, the types of non-profit organizations vary incredibly. One of a kind of NPOs is non-profit organizations oriented on students. One of such student organization, Erasmus Student Network is the key volunteer student organization in Europe (Erasmus Student Network, 2015). The organization operationalizes on international, national and local levels and has 520 sections in 40 countries. Every year around 200 000 international students are participating in activities organized by ESN sections with the help of 15 000 volunteers (Erasmus Student Network, 2015). One of the local sections of this organization has been selected for the current study due to the significance, widespread presence and the contribution to the development of non-profit services and student life. The local section of ESN located in Växjö, Sweden is called Växjö International Students (VIS).

In this study, the sample has been limited to the customers of the particular non-profit organization — Växjö International Students. In the context of this organization customers are the members of this organization and are referred to as such both internally and externally. Therefore, the term “members” would be used further instead of customers. It goes in line with Bruce (1995) who suggests that customers of NPOs can be called differently, depending on the type of organization. In the discussion and conclusion parts of the paper, the term “customers” will be used to keep the consistency of the theoretical and practical parts.

The sample frame for the particular study consists of the members of Växjö International students (VIS) which is a student non-profit organization. The number of members VIS has annually varies from 200 up to 700 students. The organization strives for improvement of the student life by helping students, organizing different activities, events, and trips. At the time of the research, the number of VIS members is 468 students from which besides the regular members 13 are the board members, 40 are involved in voluntarily work with VIS as committee members and 52 are the honorary members who have been previously involved in the work of the board. Those three categories (105 members) have been excluded from the sample as they are or have been involved in the work with VIS as volunteers, which is out of the scope of the current study. Therefore the number of members who is relevant for the current study is 363. All of the members have reported their email addresses when obtaining the membership, therefore the sample frame consists of the list of email addresses of the members of the organization.
The sample is limited to only suitable members of the organization, which are 363 students. The emails with the survey have been sent out to all the members and the survey has been also published on the VIS Facebook page and shared on the private pages of some of the board members. Therefore, nonprobability convenience sample has been applied as not everybody had equal chances to answer the survey. This sample is often employed by researchers due to its simplicity and accessibility of this sampling method (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Aaker et al. (2010) also state that even though the application of the nonprobability sample can lead to hidden biases, it still can be used effectively and legitimately.

The decision about sample size depends on different factors and there is no universal answer to it (Bryman & Bell, 2015). However, some matters have to be considered when making a decision about sample size. Thus, an increase of a sample size raises the likely precision of a sample and decreases the sampling error (Bryman & Bell, 2015). The nature of the research has to be also taken into consideration as quantitative studies generally require larger sample (Malhotra, 2010). The research constraints have to be considered as well as the time and money that researcher possesses is limited (Malhotra, 2010). However, the bigger sample is beneficial as “the bigger the sample, the more representative it is likely to be” (Bryman & Bell, 2015, p. 198). The approaches to determine the desirable sample size varies (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Pallant, 2010; Malhotra, 2010). One of the approaches which are relevant for defining the sample size suitable for statistical analysis, especially regression, is based on the number of independent variables utilized in the study (Pallant, 2010; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007).

\[ N > 50 + 8m \]

where \( N \) - number of cases,

\( m \) - number of independent variables used in a study.

As the current study includes five independents variables, then according to the formula 90 answers is the minimum required for conducting statistical analysis. The survey was started by 129 people but 9 of them did not belong to the sample and therefore have been eliminated. Thus 120 responses have been obtained which is higher than the minimum required number.

According to response rate is important and sometimes even crucial for evaluating the findings of a study (Baruch & Holtom, 2008). The response rate for the current study is 33 %, based on the formula proposed by Bryman & Bell (2015):
The number of usable questionnaires was 120 and the sample with suitable and contactable members was 363 members, the respondents rate has been 33%.

The sample consists as it was mentioned earlier from the students, the youngest of whom is 18 years old and the oldest is 33. The majority of students have been born between 1991-1995 and therefore are 22-26 years old. The students have different background and come from different countries but they are all currently studying in Växjö, Sweden at Linnaeus University. Swedish students are normally full-time students; international students are exchange students or full-time free-moving students. The students are enrolled in different courses of bachelor, master/magister or even doctoral levels or free-standing courses.

4.5 Development of data collection instruments
An operationalization can be utilized as a data collection instrument which is a framework for collecting and analyzing data (Bryman and Bell, 2011). In the current study the variables are operationalized according to theories adapted from the combination of different academic literature. Measurement scales have been adapted from the works of different authors foremost researching within relationship marketing.

Thus, the scales measuring commitments have been designed through adaptation of the items from Meyer & Allen, (1984), Allen & Meyer, (1990), Verhoef et al. (1995), Bansal et al. (2004), Gruen et al. (2000). The measurements of trust have derived from Doney & Cannon, (1997), Kumar et al. (1995a), Kumar et al. (1995b), Naskrent & Siebelt, (2011), MacMillan et al. (2005). The scales measuring relationship benefits have been based on work of Gwinner et al. (1998) and further application of their scale by Dagger & O’Brien, (2010), Lee et al. (2014), Sweeney & Webb, (2007), Hennig-Thurau et al. (2002). Shared values have been measured according to Hunt et al. (1989) and MacMillan et al. (2005). Communication has been operationalised through measurements suggested by MacMillan et al. (2005), Morgan & Hunt, (1994), Anderson et al. (1987), Theron et al. (2008), Lancastre & Lages (2006). The last variable, opportunistic behavior, has been operationalised based on MacMillan et al. (2005), Morgan & Hunt, (1994) and Lancastre & Lages (2006). The representation of operationalization is reflected in the Table 1. The operationalization table consists of the concepts/variables and their definitions, components of those concepts, subcomponents and the single items which correspond with the authors from whose studies the measurements had been adapted.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subcomponent</th>
<th>Components</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Concept</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Identification with the organization</td>
<td>&quot;Implicit or explicit pledge of relational continuity between exchange partners&quot; (Dwyer et al., 1987, p. 19).</td>
<td>Relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Attachment to the organization</td>
<td>The belief that a partner or promise is reliable and will fulfill obligations in an exchange relationship (Schorr &amp; Ozanne, 1985, p.).</td>
<td>Commitment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reliability</td>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>Trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Benevolence</td>
<td>Relationship benefits</td>
<td>Relationship benefits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Psychological</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Operationalization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Components</th>
<th>Items/questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identification with the organization</td>
<td>C1 I feel a sense of belonging to organization X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attachment to the organization</td>
<td>C2 I feel like &quot;part of the family&quot; with organization X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliability</td>
<td>C3 I feel strong attachment to organization X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benevolence</td>
<td>C4 I feel that I am emotionally attached to organization X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological</td>
<td>T1 Organization X is trustworthy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>T2 Organization X is reliable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship benefits</td>
<td>T3 I believe the organization X keeps my interests in mind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>T4 If organization X makes any promises, it will keep them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PB1 I know what to expect when I visit events of organization X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PB2 I feel that organization X will perform correctly their activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PB3 I am not anxious that something will go wrong when I participate in organization X activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SB1 I am familiar with the staff who organize organization X activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SB2 I have developed friendship with some members of organization X staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SB3 I am recognized by certain members of organization X staff</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

References:
- Verhoef et al., 1995
- Bansal et al., 2004
- Green et al., 1995
- Allen & Meyer, 1990
- Bansal et al., 2004
- Green et al., 1995
- Allen & Meyer, 1990
- Doney & Cannon, 1997
- Naskrent & Siebelt, 2011
- Doney & Cannon, 1997
- Porter & Donthu, 2008
- Naskrent & Siebelt, 2011
- MacMillan et al., 2005
- Doney & Cannon, 1997
- Kumar et al., 1995a, 1995b
- Naskrent & Siebelt, 2011
- Gwinner et al., 1998
- Sweeney & Webb, 2007
- Hennig-Thurau et al., 2002
- Lee et al., 2014
- Dagger & O'Brien, 2010
- Sweeney & Webb, 2007
- Lee et al., 2014
- Dagger & O'Brien, 2010
- Dwyer, 1987
- Schurr & Ozanne, 1985
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shared values</th>
<th>Ethical values</th>
<th>SV1 Organization X’s ethical values are a lot like mine</th>
<th>MacMillan et al. 2005</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>L1 Organization X does its best to listen to my feedback</td>
<td>MacMillan et al. 2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>L2 If I have any suggestions to organization X, it would listen to me</td>
<td>MacMillan et al. 2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Informing</td>
<td>L3 I think organization X listens to me and my wants</td>
<td>MacMillan et al. 2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunistic behavior</td>
<td>Disregard the interest</td>
<td>O1 Organization X seems to seek its own interests instead of benefiting me</td>
<td>Morgan &amp; Hunt, 1994</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Take advantage</td>
<td>O2 Previously organization X has been taking advantage of me in some way</td>
<td>MacMillan et al. 2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>O3 Organization X has succeeded partly because it is taking advantage of its members</td>
<td>MacMillan et al. 2005</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.6 Control questions
The function of control questions in this study is carried out through three personal factual questions. The common practice of social science research implies the adoption of several control questions, where questions measuring respondents’ gender and education are regularly met (for example, Boenigk&Helmig, 2013, Chang et al. 2013, Sirdeshmukh et al. 2002). Moreover, besides age and gender respondents of this study were asked to state their length of the membership in the organization. In the studied organization the moment of acquiring the membership in the organization corresponds with the beginning of the relationship with the organization and therefore further the terms “length of the membership” and “age of relationship/relationship’s age” are used synonymously.

Previous studies have mixed views regarding the role of age of relationship with an organization on relational constructs often claiming that it is a significant factor (Verhoef et al, 2002). Thus Dwyer et al. (1987) suggested that commitment becomes the more important the longer partners have been in a relationship. In theory, according to Verhoef et al. (2002), as longer relationships essentially differ in a qualitative manner from shorter one, it is valuable to research those differences. That goes in line with other studies where the length of the membership is also considered to be significant when talking about the relationship between parties (Mortimer et al. 2016, Coulter & Coulter, 2002). Verhoef et al. (2002) found that relationships’ age enhances the positive effect of affective commitment. Therefore, the respondents have been asked to state their gender, education, and length of the membership through answering the multiple choice questions.

4.7 Pretest
According to several authors, there is a little consensus on the conceptualization of relationship marketing pillars (O’Reilly & Chatman, 1986; Gruen et al. 2000; Porter & Donthu, 2008) and therefore the choice of the approaches to the operationalization of constructs is crucial. All the constructs and, as a result, items, measuring them should be consistent and understandable for respondents. It is necessary that the survey is reliable and valid.

For the current study, the pretest has been abstractly divided into three steps. To ensure contextual validity the survey has been shown to two professional researchers and university lectures from Linnaeus University within the marketing field as a first step. Considering the feedback some changes regarding the formulation of the questions and the structure of the survey have been made. After that, the survey has been sent to 12 respondents who belonged to the sample. The respondents commented that the questions are clear and easy for understanding, have a logical flow and are relevant and
applicable to the context of the organization. Therefore, as all the questions were clear, no further changes to the survey have been done. As a last step of the pretest, 22 more respondents have filled the survey for the purpose of examining the reliability of scales. All 34 answers have been analyzed with the usage of Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The analysis showed the significant level of internal reliability higher than 0.7 (Pallant, 2010; DeVellis, 2003). Therefore, the author proceeded with the further distribution of the survey. Despite being a part of the pretest, 34 analyzed responses have been kept and included in a final data set as no changes in the survey have been done during the second and third steps of the pretest.

4.8 Data analysis method
The data have been analyzed with the help of IBM SPSS Statistics version 22.0 software. The analysis has been conducted through the four steps. Firstly, the descriptive statistic has been obtained. This allowed having a better idea about the characteristics of the respondents and providing information about their gender, a level of education and the duration of the membership in the organization and also mean, median standard deviation and minimum and maximum of all the constructs used in the study. Secondly, reliability analysis with the help of the Chronbach’s alpha coefficient has been calculated for all the variables separately. On the third step to ensure the construct validity Pearson correlation analysis has been conducted. Lastly, the hypotheses testing have been performed through regression analysis. It has been done in order to examine the relationships between independent and dependent variables with the help of multiple linear regressions. Moreover, in this step, the mediation analysis with the help of several multiple regressions has been performed.

4.9 Regression analysis
To perform hypotheses testing regression analyses has been utilized. Regression analysis is a technique used for analyzing associative relationships between one dependent variable and one or several independent variables (Malhotra, 2010). The purpose of regression analysis is to “build a regression model or a prediction equation relating the dependent variable to one or more independent variables (Aaker et al. 2010, p. 440).

Linear regression is the appropriate method of the statistical analysis in the present study as both dependent and independent variables are metric and interval. Oppositely, logistic regression is used when the dependent variable is dichotomous and therefore is not applicable in the context of this study (O'Connell, 2006). Therefore, in the current study several tests of multiple linear regression are run in order to relate the variables.
Multiple regression analysis is a statistical procedure used to analyze the relationship between a single dependent variable and several independent variables (Hair et al. 2010; Malhotra, 2010).

\[ Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \ldots + \beta_k X_k + e_i. \]

where \( Y \) - dependent variable,
\( X_1, X_2, X_3, X_k \) - independent variables,
\( \beta_0 \) - intercept of the line,
\( \beta_1, \beta_2, \beta_3, \beta_k \) - regression coefficients,
\( e_i \) - the error term.

(Malhotra, 2010).

The regression analysis of the current study is divided into 2 parts. On the first step of the analysis 5 multiple linear regressions are run to test the hypotheses regarding the direct relationships between relationship commitment and trust, relationship benefits and shared values and the possible effects of the control questions on those relationships (H1, H2, H3). According to the findings, some additional tests with multiple regressions have been run.

On the second part of the analysis two hypotheses (H4, H5) is done. The hypotheses posit the indirect relationship between communication and relationship commitment and between opportunistic behavior and relationship commitment respectively.

4.10 Mediation analysis

As it has been mentioned earlier, the trust’s antecedents, namely communication and opportunistic behavior have an indirect effect on relationship commitment (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). In order to evaluate the effect of proposed cause on an outcome, the mediation analysis is often applied (Preacher & Hayes, 2004). In fact, the mediation analysis itself implies the assessment of the indirect effect of the predictor on a consequent variable via intervening a mediator (Preacher & Kelley, 2011). According to Fritz et al. (2012) mediation happens if the effect of a first variable, a predictor, on a second variable, which is the outcome variable, is carried out through a third mediating variable. According to Preacher & Hayes (2004), a mediation analysis is most often adapted from the guidance by Baron & Kenny (1986).

Considering what has been mentioned above, the analysis of the indirect effects of direct predictors of trust’ on relationship commitment has to be done following the mediation analysis guidance by Baron
& Kenny (1986) which includes four steps schematically shown in Figure 3 below. As a result of this analysis, full, partial or no mediation of the relationship can be found. The analysis helps to understand how causal variable affects the outcome (Baron & Kenny, 1986; Kenny, 2016)

\[
\begin{align*}
X & \rightarrow M \\
M & \rightarrow Y \\
\rightarrow & c' \\
\rightarrow & a \\
\rightarrow & b
\end{align*}
\]

*Figure 3. Mediation analysis (retrieved from Kenny, 2016)*

The analysis includes four steps; each of them consists of multiple regression tests. On every step control, questions are also included in the regression model. If one of the first three steps gives insignificant regression, then no mediation exists and analysis does not continue. If every step has significant regression equation, then the next step can be taken up to step 4. Firstly, the linear regression is run between causal (independent) variable and dependent variables to see if there is an effect that might be mediated (path c’). Secondly, the multiple regression is run to check if the cause is related to a mediator (path a). After, the results of the multiple regression tests between a mediator and dependent variable are tested (path b). In this study, it is recalled from the first part of regression analysis. Lastly, the multiple regression is run between the three variables (with causal variable and mediator predicting dependent variable). According to a guidance of Baron & Kenny (1986) and the further application of the model (for example, Bansal et al 2004), the full mediation takes place if the direct part from the antecedent to control variable is no more significant (path c’). If both relationships are still significant, then only partial mediation takes place.

4.11 Data clean up and outliers
The data file had no missing values as all the questions in the survey have been marked as obligatory. After the outliers check has been performed. The outliers threatened to affect empirical analysis and skew the results (Hair et al. 2010). The analysis with the help of boxplot graph has indicated three outliers for the construct communication, namely ID 74, 48 and 54 (Appendix A). After the outliers have been identify the decision on whether to retain or eliminate the outliers and the whole respondent’s answers line should be taken (Hair et al. 2010). Hair et al. (2010) suggest that the outliers often should be kept unless they are abnormal and do not reflect any observations of the population. It was decided to
keep the values in the dataset as the number of cases lies under 10% of all the observations and the values are representing the population therefore they should be retained to ensure the generalizability.

4.12 Quality criteria
In order to conduct a high-quality research and receive adequate and realistic results, it is important to ensure reliability and validity of the data. Validity and reliability check are the basic tests that ensure the high quality of the research (Bryman and Bell 2011).

Reliability is a central concept which implies that reliable instrument is the one that has a consistent and predictable performance (DeVellis, 2003). One of the main issues when constructing a scale is a matter of internal consistency (Pallant, 2012). To calculate internal consistency Cronbach's alpha for scale items can be used (Cronbach, 1970). The discussion on the value of Cronbach's alpha is actual in the current research as there are different perspectives on the level, which is accepted for proceeding with a further analysis. Thus, Bryman and Bell (2011) suggest that items scoring over 0.8 can be named internally consistent. Malhotra (2010) considers the level over 0.6 as acceptable. Pallant (2012) and DeVellis (2003) advocate for values over 0.7 as desirable internal consistency. In the current study a coefficient over 0.7 is considered as an acceptable level of internal consistency and thus the variable which items reach this level are regarded as reliable.

Regarding validity, there are several basic approaches to its evaluation (Aaker et al. 2010; DeVellis, 2003). Face validity of the current study has been secured by the pretest which showed that measurements reflect the concepts that they had been meant to cover (Aaker et al. 2010). Criterion-related validity is present if the scale is associated with some “gold standard” which can derive from previous theory (DeVellis, 2003), which is reached in the current study. Construct validity is ensured when the research empirically tests the correlation between two variables which has been previously determined in a literature (DeVellis, 2003). As the hypothesized relationships in the current study are based on the previous academic works, the construct validity is accomplished as well. Discriminant validity test is necessary to ensure that different constructs are not measuring the same concept (Aaker et al. 2010). Validity reflects if the variable is the main reason of item covariation (DeVellis, 2003). It aims to explain how strongly two variables are related and direction of this relationship (Pallant, 2012). To assess discriminant validity Pearson correlation coefficient has been calculated for the relationships between all the variables. Pearson correlation coefficient measures “a linear association between two variables” (Aaker et al. 2010, p. 445). The coefficient can vary from -1 till +1 where the sign indicates positive (or negative) correlation (Pallant, 2012). The closer coefficient is to 1, the stronger one variable
can be predicted by the value of another, and oppositely, the closer coefficient is to 0, the less relationship between variables exist (Pallant, 2012).

4.13 Ethical considerations
Ethics are the moral principle and values which have an impact on the way the researcher carries out the study (Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2005). Ethical issues in marketing research arise when the interests of the research stakeholders, including the researcher, the client (if any), the respondent and the public, are in conflict (Malhotra, 2010). The research has the responsibility to hold high ethical standards (Aaker et al. 2010). The researcher should conduct the study honestly and accurately (Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2005).

Violation of ethical norms can have different forms such as for example, misinterpretation of the data collection, employment of inadequate sampling procedures, and violation of respondents’ right (Aaker et al. 2010). It is important that the researcher follows the established marketing research procedures and interpret the findings correctly to avoid violation of ethical norms (Malhotra, 2010).

In the current study the ethical norms have been taken into consideration form the very beginning of the research process. The topic chosen for the study does not touch private delicate matters which could have hurt respondents’ feelings. The data was collected from the sample which was aware that their responses would be used for the research purpose and notified about the details and the approach of the study. Respondents have not been exposed to mental stress neither coercion nor any pressure as the survey has been distributed online. The data was anonymous and no private information has been made publicly accessible.
5 Results

5.1 Descriptive statistic
The survey was answered by 120 respondents who belong to the sample. 56% of them were males and 44% females. The majority of the respondents were bachelor students (60%), 40% were students enrolled in masters’ programs. The respondents were also asked to state the length of their membership in VIS. 28.5% were the members during the one semester, 43% during the one year and 28.5% were members of VIS longer than one year.

Table 2. Descriptive statistic

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Level of education</th>
<th>Length of the membership.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>44% Bachelor students</td>
<td>60% 1 semester</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>56% Master students</td>
<td>40% 2 semesters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&gt; 2 semesters</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(n=120\)

Table 3 presents the results of descriptive statistics tests regarding the means, standard deviations and minimum and maximum scores of each variable. All the means lies between 2.36 and 5.52, medians between 2.0 and 5.75 while standard deviation varies from 0.92 to 1.54.

Table 3. Means and standard deviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Median</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relationship Commitment</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4.75</td>
<td>4.62</td>
<td>1.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5.75</td>
<td>5.52</td>
<td>1.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship benefits</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5.42</td>
<td>5.36</td>
<td>1.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared values</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5.33</td>
<td>5.47</td>
<td>0.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5.17</td>
<td>5.15</td>
<td>1.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunistic behavior</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>2.36</td>
<td>1.37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(n=120\)
5.2 Reliability test
The reliability check was performed with the help of Cronbach’s alpha coefficient measuring the internal consistency of the items. According to Pallant (2012) and DeVellis (2003), the coefficient should be higher than 0.7 for results to be regarded as reliable. Thus, the analysis showed that all the constructs used in the study are reliable (Table 4). Namely, the analysis was conducted on the next constructs: relationship commitment (0.952), trust (0.863), relationship benefits (0.728), shared values (0.707), communication (0.880) and opportunistic behavior (0.803). Thus, all the values are above 0.7, therefore, the scales are reliable and further analysis can proceed.

Table 4. Reliability analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Cronbach’s alpha</th>
<th>Number of items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relationship commitment</td>
<td>0.952</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>0.863</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship benefits</td>
<td>0.728</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared values</td>
<td>0.707</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>0.880</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunistic behavior</td>
<td>0.803</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n=120

5.3 Validity test
The Pearson correlation analysis was conducted in the present study to ensure the validity of the constructs. The correlation analysis was run between all the variables of the study. The Pearson’s correlation analysis indicated significant relationships between relationship commitment and all the other variables (Table 5). Four variables showed significant positive correlations and one variable, opportunistic behavior, found to be negatively significantly correlated with commitment. All the significantly correlated variables indicated modern correlation below 0.9 which implies that there is no effect of multicollinearity (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Therefore, the variables do not measure the same thing. The validity analysis demonstrated the existence of the relationships between all the variables with exception of lack of correlation between opportunistic behavior and trust, relationship benefits and shared values. No multicollinearity effect was identified, therefore the hypotheses testing can proceed.
Table 5. Correlation analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relationship commitment</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>0.65**</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship benefits</td>
<td>0.707**</td>
<td>0.571**</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared values</td>
<td>0.403**</td>
<td>0.507**</td>
<td>0.396**</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>0.485**</td>
<td>0.622**</td>
<td>0.462**</td>
<td>0.483**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunistic behavior</td>
<td>-0.190*</td>
<td>-0.046</td>
<td>-0.074</td>
<td>-0.046</td>
<td>-0.218*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sig * p<0.05, ** p<0.01. n=120

5.4 Hypotheses testing

5.4.1 Direct effect

The next step of the data analysis was hypotheses testing. This was done with the help of multiple linear regression. As it was mentioned earlier, the hypotheses testing involves several steps. Firstly, the direct effect of three antecedent of relationship commitment (further RC in the analysis part) and the possible influence of control questions were tested. The results are presented in Table 6.

On the first stage of the hypotheses testing five linear regression analyses were performed to test H1, H2, and H3 and to consider the possible effects of control questions on hypothesized relationships. Table 6 presents the results of five regression tests ran separately, where Model 1 includes only control questions and Model 2, 3 and 4 include the results of the tests of relationships between RC and trust, RC and relationship benefits and RC and shared values and the effect of control questions on these relationships. Model 5 indicates the mutual effect of control questions and three of mentioned above independent variables on RC. To begin with, only one control question appeared to be significant in all the models which is the length of the membership in the organization. With significance level p<0.01, the length of the membership in the organization has an impact on tested relationships.

According to the individual tests of hypotheses, each independent variable has a significant positive relationship with the dependent variable relationship commitment. However, according to Model 5, only two of the suggested relationships are significant. Model 5 has adjusted $R^2 = 0.605$ which indicates that the model explains 60.5% of the variance; $R^2$ change is 0.501 which show that the Model 5 was improved by 50.1% in comparison to Model 1. That illustrates that the model has relatively good explanatory power, fits well with studied population and has been significantly improved.

The significant regression was found between RC and trust with the significance level of p <0.001 and $\beta = 0.388$. Therefore, H1 which states the existence of a positive direct effect of trust on relationship
commitment in the context of the customers of NPO is accepted. Further, H2 is accepted as well due to the significance level of $p<0.001$ with $\beta = 0.418$. Thus, there is a positive direct effect of customer benefits derived from the relationship with NPO to their relationship commitment towards NPO. In addition, comparing the $\beta$ coefficients for trust and relationship benefits it can be concluded that relationship benefits explain RC better than trust.

The third hypothesis, however, is rejected due to an insignificance of a regression equation. Thus, no direct effect of shared values on RM has been found in the context of non-profit organization.

Table 6. Regression analysis. Direct effects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Model 1 Control</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th>Model 3</th>
<th>Model 4</th>
<th>Model 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Constant</strong></td>
<td>3.887</td>
<td>-1.245</td>
<td>-1.023</td>
<td>0.756</td>
<td>-2.533</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Membership length</strong></td>
<td>0.331(0.180)****</td>
<td>0.297(0.134)****</td>
<td>0.137 (0.139)**</td>
<td>0.276(0.167)***</td>
<td>0.185 (0.126)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level of education</strong></td>
<td>-0.092 (0.273)</td>
<td>-0.078(0.204)</td>
<td>-0.061(0.203)</td>
<td>-0.067 (0.251)</td>
<td>-0.063 (0.182)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td>0.049 (0.274)</td>
<td>0.029 (0.204)</td>
<td>-0.014(0.204)</td>
<td>-0.125 (0.256)</td>
<td>0.019 (0.188)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>H1. trust - relationship commitment</strong></td>
<td>0.630(0.096)****</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.388 (0.113)****</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>H2. relationship benefits - relationship commitment</strong></td>
<td>0.662 (0.103)****</td>
<td>0.418 (0.114)****</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>H3. Shared values - relationship commitment</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.391(0.138)****</td>
<td>0.020(0.118)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>R²</strong></td>
<td>0.124</td>
<td>0.519</td>
<td>0.521</td>
<td>0.268</td>
<td>0.625</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Adjusted R²</strong></td>
<td>0.101</td>
<td>0.502</td>
<td>0.504</td>
<td>0.243</td>
<td>0.605</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Change in R²</strong></td>
<td>0.395****</td>
<td>0.397****</td>
<td>0.145****</td>
<td>0.501****</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>F-value</strong></td>
<td>5.468****</td>
<td>30.974****</td>
<td>31.277****</td>
<td>10.547****</td>
<td>31.411****</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>df</strong></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sig * $p<0.1$, **$p<0.05$, ***$p<0.01$, ****$p<0.001$. n = 120

Relationship benefits showed significant and greatest contribution to the development of relationship commitment. However, relationship benefits have been operationalized in terms of two dimensions,
psychological and social benefits. To obtain more results of the nature of the high significance of relationship benefits, the author ran an extra test, where psychological and social benefits were divided. Prior to this step, the reliability analysis of psychological and social benefits had been performed, showing the acceptable level of Chronbach’s alpha according to Malhotra (2010) (0.867 and 6.69 respectively). As regression has been already done for the model consisting of only the dependent variable and controls (Model 1 in Table 6), of the dependent variables, controls and trust (Model 2 in Table 6) and shared values (Model 4 Table 6), those steps are skipped. Table 7 below presents the results which are obtained analogically with previous testing but for two types of benefits separately.

Table 7. Regression analysis with two groups of relationship benefits.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th>Model 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-0.619</td>
<td>1.607</td>
<td>-2.443</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Membership length</td>
<td>0.293 (0.154)****</td>
<td>0.154(0.160)*</td>
<td>0.182(0.127)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of education</td>
<td>-0.038(0.235)</td>
<td>-0.093(0.230)</td>
<td>-0.066(0.183)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>-0.076(0.234)</td>
<td>0.004(0.232)</td>
<td>-0.016(0.189)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological benefits – relationship commitment</td>
<td>0.498(0.126)****</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.157(0.129)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social benefits – relationship commitment</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.546(0.075)****</td>
<td>0.345(0.064)****</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust – relationship commitment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.401(0.121)****</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared values – relationship commitment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.024(0.119)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>0.366</td>
<td>0.385</td>
<td>0.626</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted $R^2$</td>
<td>0.344</td>
<td>0.363</td>
<td>0.603</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change in $R^2$</td>
<td>0.243****</td>
<td>0.261****</td>
<td>0.502****</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$F$-value</td>
<td>16.631****</td>
<td>17.970****</td>
<td>26.769****</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>df</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sig * p<0.1, ** p<0.05, ***p<0.01, ****p<0.001. n = 120

Adjusted $R^2$ of the last model is 0.603 while a change in $R^2$ is 0.502, which indicates that the model has been improved by 50.2 % in comparison to the original model (Model 1 in Table 6). According to the test, the logic of the main hypotheses testing was kept, and so trust and both types of relationship benefits have significant effects on relationship commitment. However, by comparing Beta coefficients for psychological and social benefits (0.157 and 0.345 respectively) it is evident that social benefits
bring double more increase in relationship commitment in comparison to psychological benefits. The level of significance is also higher for social benefits (p<0.001) than for psychological benefits (p<0.05). However, contrary to the previous test, trust contributes more to relationship commitment than relationship benefits if two types of benefits are analyzed separately.

Looking back to the control questions, as the length of the membership in the organization has been significant, the author conducted additional tests to get more insights on the nature of this phenomenon. It was possible to perform since all three groups have sufficient numbers of respondents and there is no extreme difference between a number of respondents belonging to each group (34, 52 and 34 respectively). As all the respondents were induced to choose one of the three possible options of how long they have been members of the organization (1 semester, 2 semesters or more than 2 semesters), the analysis was conducted for those three groups separately.

Regression analysis, following the same principle as in the first step but separated for the three groups was performed. The results of regressions are presented in the Appendix B (Table B1). According to regression analyses, the results for different groups vary substantially. Thus, for the first group of respondents, who have been the members of the organization during one semester only, the positive direct relationship between trust and RC was found to be significant (p<0.01). Two other suggested predictors of relationship commitment have not shown a direct effect on relationship commitment. However, gender as a control question has shown a significant effect (p<0.1) on tested relationships.

For the second group, two relationships, namely between trust and RC and relationship benefits and RC were significant with p<0.001 and p<0.05 respectively. Therefore, there is a positive significant effect of trust on RC and of relationship benefits on RC for those who have been members of the organization during 2 semesters.

For the last group, which consists of the members longer than 2 semesters, only the second relationship, which is between relationship benefits and RC was significant with p <0.01. Therefore, for this group, only the positive direct effect of relationship benefits on RC has been found. None of the controls has been significant for this group either.

The summary of the findings in presented in Table 8 below. Notably, the models for every group have similar explanation power, with commitment antecedents explaining 55.2%, 55.9% and 56.1% of the total variation of relationship commitment respectively.
Table 8. The relationships tests based on the length of the membership

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Length of the membership</th>
<th>Trust - relationship commitment</th>
<th>Relationship benefits - relationship commitment</th>
<th>Shared values - relationship commitment</th>
<th>Control variables</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Level of education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 semester</td>
<td>Significant</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 semesters</td>
<td>Significant</td>
<td>Significant</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;2 semesters</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Significant</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As for the two groups based on memberships’ length the positive significant effect of relationship benefits on commitment was found, the author conducted one more test, based on separation of psychological and social benefits following the logic of previous one (Table 7) for three groups separately. That demonstrated if there were any differences between the contributions of mentioned types of benefits on relationship commitment depending on the length of the membership. The regression analysis table is placed in the Appendix B (Table B2).

The analysis demonstrated that psychological benefits do not have any significant effect on relationship commitment in none of the groups. Instead, social benefits showed the significant positive impact on relationship commitment for every group, which is especially strong for the group 3 (members longer than 2 semesters). Beta coefficient for this group gives the highest value, in comparison to the other groups (0.567 with p<0001). Moreover, social benefits for the third group are the strongest and the only significant antecedent of relationship commitment. Looking at trust, it is evident that trust has the most contribution to the development of relationship commitment in the first and second groups (Beta coefficients 0.525 and 0. 507 respectively with p<0.001), however no significant effect in the last group. Furthermore, the regression model for the third group has the highest explanation power with $R^2 = 0.587$. 

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5.4.2 Indirect effect
The next step of the analysis is to check possible indirect effects of communication and opportunistic behavior to test H4 and H5. As it has been mentioned in the methodology chapter, an indirect effect between variables can be tested with the help of mediation analysis. The mediation analysis for every hypothesized relationship has been divided into four steps.

Tables 9 below presents the four steps of the mediation analysis conducted to test H4 which suggests that there is a positive indirect effect of communication on RC mediated by trust. Each of the discussed below steps included control questions in the multiple regression tests. The model presented in Step 1 shows the regression analysis of the relationship between communication and relationship commitment. According to it, the relationship is significant with p<0.001 and therefore the next step can proceed. On Step 2 the multiple regression tested the possible relationship between the independent causal variable communication and the mediator trust. Step 3 included the multiple regression ran between trust and relationship commitment (as H1) and it was significant as well. The regression equation was as well significant with p<0.001. Therefore, the next step could have been carried on, where the multiple regression was performed between communication and trust as independent variables and RC. Both relationships were significant with p<0.001 and p<0.1. Therefore, only partial mediation exists in the hypothesized relationship. Thus, H4 is partially accepted. The effect of length of the membership as a control questions was also identified.

Table 9. Mediation analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Step 1</th>
<th>Step 2</th>
<th>Step 3</th>
<th>Step 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Constant</strong></td>
<td>0.671</td>
<td>2.757</td>
<td>-1.245</td>
<td>-1.471</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Membership length</strong></td>
<td>0.328(0.153)****</td>
<td>0.049(0.102)</td>
<td>0.297(0.134)****</td>
<td>0.302(0.1320)****</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level of education</strong></td>
<td>-0.095(0.233)</td>
<td>-0.025(0.154)</td>
<td>-0.078(0.204)</td>
<td>-0.082(0.201)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td>-0.090(0.235)</td>
<td>-0.083(0.155)</td>
<td>0.029 (0.204)</td>
<td>-0.046(0.203)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Communication – Relationship commitment</strong></td>
<td>0.495(0.100)****</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.164(0.111)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Communication-trust</strong></td>
<td>0.629(0.066)****</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Trust-relationship commitment</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.630(0.096)****</td>
<td>0.527(0.121)****</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>R2</strong></td>
<td>0.367</td>
<td>0.397</td>
<td>0.519</td>
<td>0.535</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Adjusted R2</strong></td>
<td>0.345</td>
<td>0.376</td>
<td>0.502</td>
<td>0.514</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>F-value</strong></td>
<td>16.683****</td>
<td>18.950****</td>
<td>30.974****</td>
<td>26.200****</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>df</strong></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sig * p<0.1, ** p<0.05, ***p<0.01, ****p<0.001; n=120
Lastly, in order to test H5, the mediation analysis should have been conducted including three variables – opportunistic behavior as the independent variable, trust as the mediator and RC as the dependent variable. However, according to the correlation analysis, the relationship between opportunistic behavior and trust is not significant. Therefore, a significant regression is not possible between those two variables. This fails the condition of Step 2 of the mediation analysis. Hence, the mediation test was not performed further. Thus, as no relationship exists between causal variable and mediator, the mediation effect is not possible. Therefore, H5 is rejected.

To sum up, the analyses above demonstrated that two of hypothesized relationships are accepted, two rejected and one is partially accepted. These results are summarized in Table 10 below.

Table 10. Overview of hypotheses testing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypothesis</th>
<th>Accepted/Rejected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>H1</strong> Trust positively affects customers’ relationship commitment to non-</td>
<td>Accepted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>profit organizations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>H2</strong> Relationship benefit positively affect customers’ relationship</td>
<td>Accepted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>commitment to non-profit organizations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>H3</strong> Shared values positively affect customers’ relationship commitment</td>
<td>Rejected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to non-profit organizations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>H4</strong> Trust mediates the positive effect of communication on customers’</td>
<td>Partially accepted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>relationship commitment to non-profit organizations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>H5</strong> Trust mediates the negative effect of opportunistic behavior on</td>
<td>Rejected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>customers’ relationship commitment to non-profit organizations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6 Discussion
The analysis of the results showed that two hypotheses have been accepted, two rejected and one partially accepted. Therefore, the earlier assumption that Morgan & Hunt’s (1994) model demands adjustments in order to fit the non-profit context has been verified.

As it has been previously suggested, trust has a positive direct effect on relationship commitment (for example, Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Sharma & Patterson, 1999). If one believes that the partnering organization will act reliably and trustworthy (Doney & Cannon, 1997), then there will be more commitment towards the relationship with this organization (Bansal et al. 2004). Considering the operationalization of those two variables, the results imply that identification with the organization and the attachment to it depend on a level of a reliability and benevolence that customers perceive towards the NPO. A positive influence of trust on relationship commitment is supported by various studies including the previous applications of the commitment-trust theory in the different contexts (Kalafatis et al. 1997; Mukherjee & Nath, 2007; Lancastre & Lages, 2006). The earlier study in the non-profit context discovered the positive relationship between trust and relationship commitment being significant in terms of donors and funders (MacMilan et al. 2005). In fact, trust was earlier argued to be the very important factor for NPOs (Sargeant & Lee (2004). As for the examined organization, if the customers do not trust the organization they would not attend the events or use services which would obviously negatively influence commitment. Since commitment represents the highest level of relationship ties (Dwyer et al. 1987), the customers of NPOs cannot feel that extent of an attachment towards the organization without filling up all the preceding relational bonding stages, where trust is one of the most significant ones. The results of the present study recognize the established relationship and evidence that the more customers of non-profit organization trust it, the more committed to the relationships they are.

Coming to the second hypothesis, it has been proposed that perceived benefits derived from relationships with a non-profit organization positively affect relationship commitment. The hypothesis has been accepted, validating that in the customers’ context relationship benefits contribute significantly to relationship commitment. Relationship benefits have been identified consistently with Gwinner et al. (1998) in terms of psychological and social benefits that customers gain through the partnership with an organization. These findings of the present study come along with a number of earlier works in relationship marketing which examined the nature of the association between the benefits and relationship commitment (MacMilan et al. 2005, Kalafatis et al. 1997; Mukherjee & Nath, 2007).
However, the additional test that was run for psychological and social benefits separately, gave the interesting results. Thus, social benefits contribute twice more to relationship commitment than psychological benefits. In fact, this result is opposite to the statement of previous authors who found that psychological benefits are more important for customers than social (Gwinner et al. 1998; Garbarino & Johnson; 1999). This disagreement of the results might take place due to the specifics of the sector. For the non-profit sector, personal communication is of a primary importance, which is also supported in the previous studies (Brennan & Brady, 1999). Different non-profit organizations maintain the relationships with various stakeholders which often happen through personal interaction (Brennan & Brady, 1999; Buttle, 1996; Bussell & Forbes, 2006).

Another reason for that might be the special features of the organization and its members. As it is a student organization, most of the customers are relatively young and as Sweden is a foreign country for many of them, their primary goal is to build a social network with different people. Therefore, they pay a lot of attention to establishing the relationships with other people and estimate the services and entertainments based on the opportunity to get such social benefits.

To investigate this phenomenon further and to look into the controlling role of the memberships’ length for the first three hypothesized relationships the additional test for three separate groups of memberships’ length was performed. According to it, psychological benefits do not have any significant effect on relationship commitment in none of the three tested groups. Social benefits, oppositely, indicate significant positive impact in each group being most influential in the third group (members longer than 2 semesters). Thus, those who are keeping the relationship with the organization more than 2 semesters are committed to the relationship with it mostly due to the social factors, such as a friendship and familiarity with the organizational staff. Those results are not surprising, as during such a time people can get to know each other and build social ties. Those ties might be the primary reason why the customers keep the relationship with the organization.

In fact, the role of a relationships’ age on the pillars of the relationship concept has been previously examined through several studies (Verhoef et al. 2002; Mortimer et al. 2016; Coulter & Coulter, 2002). As a result, the findings of the present work are in an agreement with the previous papers which showed a significance of age of relationships’. In the current study, the length of being a customer (member) in the organization controls the relationship between trust, shared values, relationship benefits, and relationship commitment.
Thus, for customers who have been the members of the organization during one semester (approximately 6 months), only a positive link between trust and relationship commitment has been significant. However, when relationship benefits are divided, then the positive significant effect of social benefits on relationship commitment is found for the first group as well. This again underlines the importance of social benefits. For the second group, which consists of students bonded with the organization during two semesters, both trust and relationship benefits are found to positively predict relationship commitment. This result is consistent with the main hypotheses testing. For those who have been customers of the organization longer than two semesters, only the second hypothesized relationship, which is the effect of relationship benefits on relationship commitment, discovered to be significant. Moreover, for the first group gender controls the relationship between trust and relationship commitment. That means that the association between trust and relationship commitment might be different for women and men, which however was not reflected when the benefits were divided. Moreover, the value of this control is very low and thus the effect is minor.

These controversial findings draw an interesting picture which can be interpreted in different ways. Those who have been connected with the organization during one or two semesters feel more committed towards the relationships with it if they trust the organization. That might be explained by the fact that trust is the most obvious predictor of commitment. The “new” customers are more attached to the organization if they consider it as trustworthy. At the same time, for them the contribution of social benefits is low probably due to the reason that they did not have enough opportunities to be familiar with the staff and become recognized by them.

The effect of trust on commitment has not been validated for those who are connected to this organization longer, but their commitment is significantly driven by relationship benefits. With the time, probably neither trust nor confidence in quality plays such a big role anymore, as the customers had already experienced many activities and had a chance to gain the confidence of the organizational services and, therefore, could have made a decision either to stay or left the organization. These “old” customers oppositely are more sensitive to benefits as they have a longer experience with the organization. Particularly, as social benefits are significant for every group, as it was discussed above, the importance of communicational ties between customers and staff cannot be denied. However, the role of psychological benefits in the model cannot be completely ignored either. Thus, for instance, cumulatively psychological and social benefits explain more of relationship commitment than trust, even if it is opposite when the benefits are separated. Thereby, to acquire committed customers it is still
important to ensure that customers are confident in an organization and do not have any anxiety when participating in its activities.

The third hypothesized relationship has not been confirmed. No effect of shared values on relationship commitment has been revealed in the customers’ context despite the significant correlation. The concept has been operationalized in terms of ethical values shared by the customers of the organization. Previously, the effect of sharing similar ethical views on commitment towards the relationship has been examined in several studies, which acknowledged the positive effect of it on relationship commitment (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; MacMillan et al. 2005; Naskrent & Siebelt, 2011). The results of the current study are somehow surprising as for non-profit organizations the ethical values are significantly important and are at a heart of any NPO (Sargeant & Lee, 2004; Stride & Lee, 2007). Possibly, the concept of shared values is highly content-dependent and its significance might vary for the customers of different types of organizations. Another reason might be the age of customers, as in the case of the current study the customers are young and might be not very interested in ethical issues or simply avoid thinking about them. For them, it might be not very important if their values match with the values of the organization, which is however crucial for the donors of NPOs (MacMillan et al. 2005). Moreover, the organizational values might not be transparent and it is possible that the customers are simply not aware of them. Interestingly, when the regression test has been run only between control questions, shared values, and relationship commitment, the regression has demonstrated a significant result. The reasons and consequences of that might be studied in the future research.

The second part of the analysis pursued to test the indirect effects of communication and opportunistic behavior on relationship commitment. According to the analysis, the fourth hypothesis has been partially accepted, which implies that trust is a partial mediator of the positive effect of communication on relationship commitment. As in the first part of the analysis, the length of the membership is significant; therefore it controls the examined relationship. According to the theory, communication is a direct predictor of trust (Torres-Moraga et al. 2010; MacMillan et al. 2005). However, what has been of a higher importance for the current study is the indirect effect of communication through trust on relationship commitment proposed by Morgan & Hunt (1994) and verified by Lancastre & Lages (2006). According to the results of this study, trust partially mediates the relationship between communication and relationship commitment while communication has a positive indirect effect on commitment. This implies that communication drives commitment with a condition that trust is present in a relationship; however, the effect of trust is limited and mediates only the part of the positive explanatory effect.
Communication according to the operationalization is a function of listening and informing which implies gathering feedback about customers’ needs and wants and at the same time providing them with relevant, frequent and timely information. The role of an effective communication has been mentioned in earlier studies and its importance for relationships with partners have been emphasized as communication can significantly contribute to it (Theron et al. 2008). That explains the importance of communication for relationship commitment in the current study, as the customers pay a lot of attention to the ways the organization interacts with them. One of the causes of such an importance might be revealed by the fact that customers are young students who are used to be in the middle of numerous information flows. They take for granted receiving the updated information on the organizational websites and social media and the lack of such an opportunity might negatively influence their relationship with the organization. Moreover, the investigated organization claims to take notice of their ways of communication keeping it modern and relevant, including the accessibility for customers’ feedbacks. Thus, the finding goes in line with the previous studies that have underlined the prediction effects between communication, trust and relationship commitment (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; MacMillan et al. 2005; MacMillan et al. 2005; Theron et al. 2008). Hence, NPOs should strive for the good two-ways communication considering the importance of the customers and the need to reach them in the best way (Buttle, 1996; Lewis, 2005).

Lastly, the fifth hypothesis, which suggests the negative indirect effect of opportunistic behavior on relationship commitment mediated by trust, has been rejected. No significant correlation has been revealed between opportunistic behavior and trust, therefore the mediation analysis could not be carried out. This result contradicts with the previous findings which have indicated the negative effect of opportunistic behavior on trust and commitment (Morgan & Hunt’s, 1994, Torres-Moraga et al. 2010; Sargeant & Lee, 2004). Opportunistic behavior has been previously found to be the most significant predictor of trust (MacMillan et al. 2005). However, no study explored the similar context as this paper as they mostly focused on B2B relationships (for example, Gundlach et al. 1995; Brown et al. 2000) or NPOs’ funders (for example, Sargeant & Lee, 2002; Torres-Moraga et al. 2010). In both those contexts, the relationships between exchange partners are highly relied on investments, therefore, the dishonest and deceiving behavior of the party might lead to the serious money lost. This is not the case in the present context, as no financial obligations or contracts with long-term liabilities exist between customers and NPOs.

Another reason might be that in the case of investigated organization, many of respondents have a short-term connection with the organization. According to MacMillan et al. (2005), the way how organization
has treated the customers in the past might affect their suspicion if the organization will try to take advantage of them in the future. The customers of the studied organization do not have a very long experience with it, therefore they might not have any previous conflicts or negative impressions thus do not perceive the connection between possible opportunistic behavior and their relationship commitment.

Taking into consideration everything mentioned above the model suggested by Morgan & Hunt (1994) has been adapted according to the findings of the current study. The proposed model of commitment and its antecedents in the context of customers of non-profit organizations is presented below (Figure 4).

Figure 4. The new model of commitment and its antecedent in the context of customers of NPOs
Conclusion
The purpose of this study is to explain what affects customers’ relationship commitment to non-profits organizations. To fulfill this purpose the well-known model of relationship marketing proposed by Morgan & Hunt (1994) has been examined in order to disclose the significant antecedents of relationship commitment. The study has been limited to the customers of Växjö International Students, which is a section of the international student non-profit organization.

According to the results of this quantitative study, relationship commitment is driven by several antecedents. However, the Morgan & Hunt’s model (1994) needs to be adjusted to fit the non-profit context. Firstly, only two direct antecedents of relationship commitment have been detected, namely trust and relationship benefits. This is in a good agreement with previous studies from various contexts which also discovered positive direct effects of trust on relationship commitment and of relationship benefits on commitment. However, what is new in this paper is the investigation of distinct effects of psychological and social benefits, which demonstrated the greater contribution of social benefits towards relationship commitment.

Moreover, the study also includes three control questions, one of which – the length of the membership in the organization has demonstrated the significant impact on the relationships between commitment and its antecedents. The extra analysis showed that the respondents bonded with the organization during the different time, associate relationship commitment and its antecedents differently. What is remarkable here is that only social and not psychological benefits showed the positive direct effect on commitment, which is the highest for the respondents with the longest memberships’ period, while for the other two groups trust remains the most significant predictor of relationship commitment.

However, no predicting effect has been found between shared values and relationship commitment. Thus, shared values do not antecede customers’ commitment to the relationships with a non-profit organization.

The present study has also examined the possible indirect effects of communication and opportunistic behavior on relationship commitment. According to the mediation analysis, there is a positive effect of communication on relationship commitment partially mediated by trust. Moreover, this effect is also controlled by the membership length. According to the results, effective coordination of those communicational functions, which are informing and listening to customers, is important to develop relationship commitment but the role of trust is also significant in this process.
The last hypothesis has been rejected due to the lack of correlation between trust and opportunistic behavior which is necessary for identifying the mediation effect. This result contradicts the established theory, which claims that if the partner is perceived to act opportunistically then it negatively influences trust towards the organization, and as a result, indirectly affects relationship commitment.

Overall, trust, relationship benefits and commitment, positively affecting through trust, explain customers’ relationship commitment in the context of the non-profit sector. Despite the required adjustments, the model constructed for the current study has high explanatory power which implies that the modified model initially proposed by Morgan & Hunt (1994) fits the data well and is adequate for the study in the non-profit context.
8 Implications, limitations and further research

8.1 Managerial and Theoretical Implications
The current study sheds the light on the relationships between the customers and non-profit organizations through the re-examination of the relationship marketing theory. As it has been mentioned in the beginning of the present thesis, the non-profit sector is rapidly developing and growing phenomenon which is underexplored both practically and theoretically. The growing number of organizations and their stakeholders calls for the need for an improved understanding of customers and their opinions on relations with NPOs.

Every organization strives to gain committed customers and therefore, it is crucial to comprehend, what contributes to the development of customers’ commitment. However, often organizations unadvisedly employ the principles of for-profit marketing, underestimating the importance of the specifics of the field. The results of this study point out, that the established associations between relationship constructs adopted from for-profits industries do not fully explain the drivers of customers’ commitment towards the relationship with an organization. Thus, for managers of NPOs it is worth knowing that, for example, the relationship benefits and trust are crucial in developing relationship commitment. Moreover, considering the fact that social benefits were found to be of such a high significance, it is necessary to stimulate the personal interaction and friendly contacts from the employees’ side to customers. That goes together with another finding regarding the significance of communication in developing relationship commitment. The special attention should be paid to establishing the successful two-ways communication with the customers in order to facilitate commitment.

Regarding theoretical implications, the study fills the gap in the marketing literature in several ways. Firstly, it contributes to the literature related to relationship marketing. In particular, the study deals with the lack of application of the relationship marketing theory in the non-profit context. Although the previous academic works have mentioned the relevance of the relationship marketing for the non-profit sector, only a few studies have actually investigated the employment of relationship marketing principles for NPOs.

Further, many papers dedicated towards non-profit organizations are focused on funders and donors, ignoring the importance of other stakeholders, including customers of NPOs. The current study focuses on the customers, contributing in this way towards a research on stakeholders of the non-profit sector. Finally, the study re-examines the earlier established model in the new context and by doing so introduces the new model which is relevant for the context of customers of non-profit organizations.
8.2 Limitations
The present thesis faced some limitations. Firstly, the nonprobability convenience sample has been used which might affect the representativeness of the studied population. Secondly, not all the respondents had the same opportunity to fill the survey due to the possibility that not all of them have checked their email inboxes or saw the posts with the survey on Facebook. Thirdly, the typical limitations of an online survey such as the lack of control of the environment and the prevailing number of Likert scale questions might have biased the findings. Moreover, the language barrier is also the essential factor that might influence the respondents’ answers. As the majority of the participants are international students from different countries, the content of the survey designed in English might be interpreted in different ways. Lastly, the study was conducted with the sample consisting of the customers of one organization; therefore, the results might not be necessarily applicable to the other contexts.

8.3 Suggestions for further research
Although this study has extended the knowledge and gave the new in-depth insight on the relationships between customers and non-profit organizations, there are several aspects that might be researched further. Firstly, the new model received with the help of the study is applicable in the context of students’ non-profit organizations. It would be beneficial to test the suggested model in the context of organizations with different specializations within non-profit sectors.

Moreover, the lack of prediction power of shared values on relationship commitment might be investigated further in the different NPOs’ settings. Especially it might be interesting as the multiple regressions performed only between shared values, commitment and control questions has been significant. This can be tackled for instance by operationalising shared values in a different manner.

Next, the phenomenon of relationship benefits has to be investigated, as the psychological benefits do not have any significant effect when tested separately for the different length’ of memberships, but have an impact when no group division is done. Therefore, next studies should concentrate on relationship benefits in non-profit contexts and the consequences of their influence on relationship commitment.

Finally, the identified effect of the control question regarding the length of the membership should be discussed further in order to define if there is any other role of memberships’ length except controlling in the context of NPOs’ customers. As in the current study only three groups by the length of the membership have been defined, the next study could look into more long-term relationships, dividing the length into more groups.
9 References


Black, G. S. (2008). Trust and commitment: Reciprocal and multidimensional concepts in distribution


Appendices
Appendix A
Outliers test

Figure A1. Relationship commitment boxplot

Figure A2. Trust boxplot
Figure A3. Relationship benefits boxplot

Figure A4. Shared values boxplot
Figure A5. Communication boxplot

Figure A6. Opportunistic behavior boxplot
### Appendix B

**Table B1. Regression analysis for three groups of membership’s length**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Model 1 Control</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th>Model 3</th>
<th>Model 4</th>
<th>Model 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Constant</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>5.242</td>
<td>0.572</td>
<td>0.777</td>
<td>1.547</td>
<td>-1.223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.520</td>
<td>-0.578</td>
<td>-0.732</td>
<td>0.967</td>
<td>-1.813</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>5.772</td>
<td>2.920</td>
<td>-0.279</td>
<td>4.880</td>
<td>-0.985</td>
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Group 1 – members during 1 semester, n1 = 34  
Group 2 – members during 2 semesters, n2 = 52  
Group 3 – members longer than 2 semesters, n3 = 34.

Sig * p<0.1, ** p<0.05, ***p<0.01, ****p<0.001
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*Sig * $p<0.1$, **$p<0.05$, ***$p<0.01$, ****$p<0.001$