



Strategies for Membership Growth in Nonprofit Organizations: Evidence from Lions Clubs New Zealand

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ABSTRACT

Nonprofit organizations, particularly service-based groups like Lions Clubs, play a vital role in community development and social engagement. However, many such organizations in New Zealand face challenges related to declining membership, ageing demographics, and evolving communication patterns. Understanding the factors influencing membership attraction and retention is essential for ensuring long-term sustainability. This study employed a mixed-method research design combining quantitative and qualitative approaches. A structured survey using Likert-scale questions was administered to Lions Club members to assess motivations, awareness, and marketing effectiveness. Additionally, semi-structured interviews with selected participants and direct observations of club activities were conducted to provide deeper contextual insights. Statistical analysis, including descriptive statistics, Chi-square tests, correlation, and factor analysis, was performed using SPSS. The findings indicate a predominance of older, long-term members, highlighting sustainability concerns. Altruistic motivations such as community service and helping others, along with social factors like companionship and relationship-building, significantly influence both joining and retention. Awareness-generating activities show a strong association with membership attraction. Traditional marketing strategies, especially word of mouth and local newspapers, were found to be more effective than digital platforms. Strong positive correlations were observed between initial motivations and long-term engagement factors. The study emphasizes the need for adaptive strategies that integrate traditional and digital outreach methods while targeting younger demographics. Strengthening social engagement and community-oriented values can enhance both recruitment and retention, ensuring the sustainability of nonprofit service organizations.

Keywords: Nonprofit organizations, Membership Retention, Awareness Strategies, Volunteer Motivation, Lions Clubs

JEL Classification: L31

1. INTRODUCTION

Nonprofit organisation (NO) is crucial in promoting social development, community participation and management of resources sustainably. These bodies play an important role in the environmental governance, social services, and community-based initiatives in New Zealand (Albrecht et al., 2023; Bataille et al., 2020). Service organizations like Lions Clubs are one of the important segments of nonprofit sector because of their humanitarian activities, fundraising and development activities

in the local area. Such organizations are also dependent on the voluntary participation and collective action to sustain their activities (Cordery and Davies, 2016). Nevertheless, in the nonprofit world, organizations are becoming more and more prone to the issues of decreased membership and ageing of volunteers. The decline in societal participation in voluntary activities has been caused by the change in the framework of societies, changing work patterns, and a shift in priorities (Jones and Smith, 2023; Martin et al., 2020). In New Zealand, the bigger alterations in the government and community areas and shifts in the models of

governance and participation have also contributed to engagement with nonprofit organisations (O'Neill and Powell, 2020; O'Neill, 2017; Gazi et al., 2025). Such trends require the establishment of novel methods of retaining and increasing memberships to service-oriented organisations.

The Lions Clubs in New Zealand are in the process of losing their membership and the club is facing the demographic imbalance; where there is high number of older members. There is a high percentage of members belonging to older age categories hence the concern of long-term sustainability and continuity. Simultaneously, the procedure of attracting younger people has been a challenge and the retention of the new members is also a major challenge. The problems are intensified by the transformation of communication habits and the development of new demands of interaction. Although such traditional methods as word of the mouth and community-based outreach remain significant, digital and social media-based communication are gaining more and more momentum in modern communication (Beatty, 2017). These strategies have varying success depending on the demographical groups and this leaves the question of the best strategies to use in nonprofit organizations. Also, changes in sponsorship, funding forms, and involvement in community affairs have also contributed to the engagement patterns (Cody and Jackson, 2016; Forbes et al., 2018).

Despite the existence of past research that has explored nonprofit participation, volunteerism and the issue of organizational governance, research has not been done on the health impacts of awareness, eventual and marketing techniques on membership growth. The available literature has mostly addressed solitary factors like motivation of volunteers or funding systems (McGann et al., 2021; Joannidès de Lautour, 2018), but there has been a lack of knowledge regarding the interaction of these issues in practice. More than that, although the use of social media and digital communication tools continues to increase as an outreach tool, their usefulness in comparison with more traditional communication approaches remains uncertain (Antric et al., 2021). The lack of empirical data on how the initial motivation of joining nonprofit organisations can be associated with long-term retention behaviours is also essential to create sustainable membership practices (Morrison and Misener, 2021; Mountifield, 2024). The bigger contextual literature, such as the one discussing institutional resilience and social adaptation, emphasises the role of engagement strategies in the preservation of participation (Joshi et al., 2018; McCormack, 2017). Even though there is some literature that is not related to the field, including healthcare innovation (Boucsein et al., 2024), and shows how technology can enhance this sphere, how it can be applied to nonprofit membership expansion remains an untapped field of study.

The research has been helpful to the field of study and practice as it gives an outline of membership dynamics in nonprofit organizations. The results provide useful information on how to enhance the recruitment and retention practices especially the service clubs in communities. The study also adds to the existing literature on the nonprofit marketing and volunteer engagement and the sustainability of an organization in New Zealand, showing

the necessity of adaptive strategies within the changing social environment. The research aids the sustainability of nonprofit organisations who are working in more complex and dynamic situations by discovering the effective methods.

1.1. Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the relationship between awareness-generating activities and membership attraction in Lions Clubs
2. To evaluate the key factors influencing member retention and long-term engagement within the organization.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1. Overview of Nonprofit Organizations and Volunteerism

The nonprofit organizations are critical in meeting the needs of social, economic and community development through providing the services that are usually lacking in the government or the private sector. Volunteer participation is an important resource of these organizations to maintain their activities and fulfill the goals. Volunteer participation enhances service delivery, social cohesion and community involvement (Hustinx et al., 2022). Nonetheless, the latest developments show the challenges of decreasing participation and ageing of the volunteers, which begs the question of long-term sustainability. Participation is also influenced by structural inequalities and changing patterns within society, which makes it challenging to recruit younger and diverse volunteers. These changes are important to understand in order to create strategies that guarantee continuity and resilience in nonprofit sectors.

2.2. Volunteer Motivation in Nonprofit Organizations

The motivation to volunteer is a crucial aspect that determines the involvement in nonprofit organizations, which can be classified into intrinsic and extrinsic. The intrinsic ones include altruism, helping others, and giving back to the society and the extrinsic ones include networking, skills development and recognition. These incentives have great impact on the recruitment and long term retention process. The works focus on the dynamism of volunteer motivation that depends on personal values, social surrounding and organizational context (Kamri et al., 2025). Members will tend to be more involved when their aspirations are in tandem with the mission of the organization. This knowledge of these motivation drivers can help organizations to create specific plans that can lead to better recruitment and retention and long-term engagement (Neely et al., 2022).

2.3. Factors Influencing Volunteer Retention

Volunteer retention is the long-term involvement retention and is crucial in stability of an organization. It is affected by satisfaction, commitment and emotional attachment. The more the volunteers feel appreciated and significant in their involvement, the better chance of staying engaged. Social interaction and relationship building creates a sense of belonging and organizational support, which comes with good management, communication, and recognition increases satisfaction. The lifecycle viewpoint indicates that motivations change with time and that there is a need to have adaptive strategies. The studies indicate that regular

involvement, favorable experiences, and congruency between expectations and organizational objectives are critical factors that determine retention, and hence the need to have a supportive and inclusive workplace (Merrilees et al., 2020).

2.4. Role of Social and Altruistic Factors

The key aspect of participation and sustained engagement in volunteering is social and altruistic factors. The commitment and satisfaction are enhanced by social bonding, sense of belonging and interpersonal interaction. Volunteers are in search of meaningful relationships and conducive conditions and altruism is also a major driving force behind participation. These variables are related to each other, because in many instances, altruistic involvement increases social bonds in organizations (Blau, 2017). Long-term involvement is also strengthened with a sense of purpose and shared identity. The social exchange viewpoints imply that the engagement may be maintained when the emotional and social rewards outweigh the expenses, and these aspects are crucial in maintaining the engagement.

2.5. Marketing and Awareness Strategies in Nonprofits

Marketing and awareness are essential in attracting members and increasing the visibility of the organization. Communication is effective in assisting organizations to communicate their mission and attract potential volunteers. Conventional strategies like the word of mouth, community outreach, and the local events are still efficient, whereas digital technologies like social media and websites may reach a wider audience, particularly younger people. Nonetheless, the efficiency is not the same across all demographics and access to technology. The combination of both conventional and online methods can enhance the outreach and reach a wide variety of audiences, which would enhance the attraction of membership (Alasiri et al., 2025).

2.6. Role of Organizational Management and Engagement

Organizational management and engagement practices have a great impact on volunteer experiences and retention. With good leadership, communication and supportive frameworks, a good environment will be established where volunteers will feel important (Edeigba and Singh, 2022). Engagement opportunities, recognition and participative decision making are encouraged to promote participation. Leadership, which promotes cooperation, enhances dedication and fulfillment. Involvement is also enhanced through training, feedback and support (Lorente et al., 2024). The engagement indicates the personal motivation and organizational culture. Better managed organizations can retain more volunteers due to trust, a sense of belonging, and long-term commitment (Krasniqi, 2024).

2.7. Research Gap

The literature provides details about motivation, retention and engagement but have a tendency to explore them separately. Such fragmented approach limits the information on how such factors interact to influence membership processes. There is no integrated study on the interaction of awareness strategies and motivation and retention, particularly in nonprofit organizations that are service oriented. This gap implies the need to take a holistic

approach where the synergistic effect of awareness, motivation and organizational practices in attracting and retaining membership is taken into consideration.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study is founded on the available theories of the behavior of volunteers and their participation in the nonprofit organizations. Having both intrinsic and extrinsic drivers, the motivation of volunteers influences the individual engagement. Intrinsic motivations such as altruism, social interaction, personal fulfillment play a significant role in participation and contribution to participation, however, extrinsic factors also have a role. These motives change according to the personal experience and corporate environment. A clear explanation of how intrinsic satisfaction and external rewards influence behavior and participation in the long term is the self-determination theory (Ryan and Deci, 2020).

The study also applies social exchange principles which presuppose that individuals will remain in organizations as long as they perceive that there are more benefits than costs associated with them. Social relations, personal satisfaction and contribution to the community are some of the advantages that aid in sustaining long term participation. Commitment is built through positive experiences and meaningful interactions, and satisfaction is built through effective volunteer management practices, which encourage further participation (Piatak and Carman, 2023).

Moreover, the engagement-based views highlight the importance of organizational environment, leadership, and communication in influencing the volunteer experiences. Belonging and commitment are encouraged by supportive structures, recognition and participation opportunities. Volunteer-based management and participatory practices also result in a higher level of satisfaction and engagement in the long run (Prince and Piatak, 2023). Combined, these theoretical bases give a profound insight into the determinants of membership attraction and retention in nonprofit organizations.

4. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The study has a conceptual framework that describes the connection between essential variables that affect membership processes in nonprofit organizations. It assumes that the effects of awareness measures, marketing measures and volunteer motivations are all factors that affect membership attraction and retention. The interaction of individual motivations and organizational practices determines the results of engagement in volunteering (Stukas et al., 2016).

The awareness-creating activities and marketing programs, both traditional and digital communication channels, are the main sources of membership attraction as they make the organization more visible and aware of the activities of the organization. The digital platforms, and, specifically, social media, have widened the reach and allowed reaching a wider and more diverse audience (Young, 2020). At the same time, altruism, social interaction, and

personal growth are some of the volunteer motivations that affect the attraction of and retention in the volunteer process.

The dependent variables are membership attraction and retention, whereas the independent variables are awareness activities, marketing strategies, and social media usage. Interpersonal communication and networking provide as a source of reinforcement that enhances long-term involvement. It has been proven that positive experiences in volunteering and meaningful interaction have a tremendous impact on retention and further involvement (Wymer and Čačija, 2025). The framework presumes that the congruence of personal motivations and organizational practices enhances recruitment and retention, which help in sustaining the organization.

5. METHODOLOGY

5.1. Research Design

This paper has taken the mixed-method research design to fully examine the issues that affect membership development in Lions Clubs in New Zealand. The quantitative and qualitative methods were used to make the findings more profound and valid. Quantitative component involved a structured survey to discover patterns and relationships whereas the qualitative component involved semi structured interviews and direct observation to give contextual information. Such a combination allowed triangulating the information and enhanced the credibility of the research results.

5.2. Study Context

The study was done in the framework of Lions Clubs which are active in New Zealand. Lions Clubs are non-profit community-based service organizations that deal with charitable activities and local interaction. The authors focused on active club members in order to investigate their experiences, perceptions and behaviours in relation to the membership growth and retention. The New Zealand location was a good fit as there have been continuous difficulties with membership sustainability, especially in terms of recruiting more members and retaining those who have just joined.

5.3. Data Collection

5.3.1. Survey

The quantitative data gathered was in a structured questionnaire which was sent to participants who belonged to Lions Clubs in New Zealand. The questionnaire had Likert-scale questions with 1 (not at all important) to 5 (very important), and categorical questions to answer demographic and participation. The questionnaire was structured in such a way that it would be able to obtain the perception of members in terms of the motivation to join and remain, effectiveness of the marketing strategies, awareness of events, and the patterns of social media usage.

5.3.2. Interviews

Semi-structured interviews with seven selected participants were used to get qualitative data. The in-depth discussions that were conducted during these interviews enabled an in-depth discussion of the themes that occurred after the results of the surveys, especially in relation to the issue of membership retention and recruitment. Open-ended questions were posed to participants

about their experience, how they saw club dynamics and what they thought should be done to get younger members. Its flexibility in terms of structure enabled the researcher to enter the intricacies of specific problems and comprehend them more because of the interview design.

5.3.3. Observations

Along with surveys and interviews, the observational data was also gathered based on the observation of the Lions Club meetings and activities. These observations provided some contextual understanding of how the members interacted, how much they participated and the culture of the club. The researcher recorded behavioural trends, involvement in meetings, as well as unstructured interactions by members. Observations were employed as a complement to quantitative and qualitative data to give real time information on the impact practices and social interactions in clubs had on satisfaction and retention of members.

5.4. Variables

The study has explored the independent and dependent variables in order to analyse the factors that affect the membership outcomes. The independent variables were awareness created by the events, the forms of marketing techniques employed and the degrees of the utilization of social media. Membership attraction and membership retention were the dependent variables. These variables were operationalised by questionnaires in forms of survey and analysed to find out connections between the promotional strategies and the member engagement and their overall effectiveness in maintaining and developing the membership in Lions Clubs.

5.5. Data Analysis

The analysis of data was done with Statistical Package of the Social Sciences version 23. Demographic factors and important variables were summarised to create descriptive statistics. The cross tabulation and Chi-square tests were used to test the association between categorical variables, especially awareness and membership attraction. Associations between motivations and retention factors were found by means of correlation. Also, exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis was conducted to cluster the related variables and how to determine the underlying dimensions of marketing strategies and motivations of the members.

6. RESULTS

6.1. Demographic Profile of Respondents

According to the demographic results, the sample is mostly consisting of older and long-term members. Most of the respondents (56.6) said that their membership was more than ten years with 46% of the respondents aged between 51 and 70 years and 39% aged above 71 years. Gender was represented 58 and 42% male and female respectively, which is quite close to the national trends and it means that the sample is representative (Table 1).

Figure 1 describes demographic makeup of respondents, such as age analysis, gender balance, and period of enrolment to the club. It emphasizes the dominance of the older individuals and long term membership in the organisation. The distribution also indicates a

Table 1: Demographic profile of respondents

Variable	Category	Percentage
Membership duration	>10 years	56.6
	Last 2 years	18.2
	3-6 years	16.2
	7-10 years	9.1
Age	51-70 years	46
	71+years	39
	31-50 years	10
	18-30 years	5
Gender	Male	58
	Female	42

balanced gender representation which gives an overview of the sample structure that was used in the study.

6.2. Membership Motivations: Joining and Retention

The results show that the motivation to join and stay in Lions Clubs are highly correlated. Being of good service to the community (64%), service to others (60.2) was identified as very important reasons to join, although companionship (46.9) and social (51.1) are also weighty. Equally, socialising (66%), development of relationships (60%), and assistance to non-members (46%) leads to retention, thus showing the persistence in the initial motivations and future interaction (Table 2).

Figure 2 provides major variables that determine the choices of individuals to be members and continue to be members of Lions Clubs. It underscores the comparative values of socializing, serving the community and building relationships. The evaluation of the level of importance compares the impact of starting motivation, as well as continuing motivation, which is influenced by the same social and altruistic motivation in the organisation.

6.3. Relationship between Awareness and Membership Attraction

The Chi-square test showed that there were significant relationships between the activities that created awareness and attraction of membership. The correlation of events that generate awareness and generate new members was found to be quite strong, which implies that visibility is an important element of recruitment. The outcomes of awareness were also largely associated with the fundraising activities. Nevertheless, community events only showed no statistically significant relationship, which implies that a mixture of types of events is more efficient (Table 3).

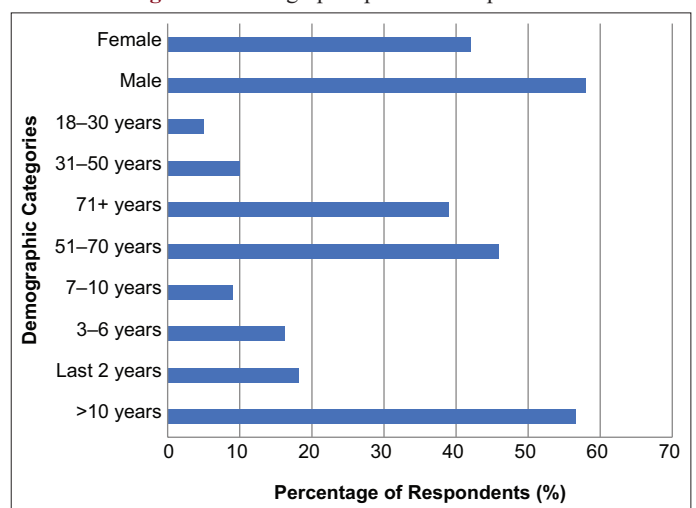
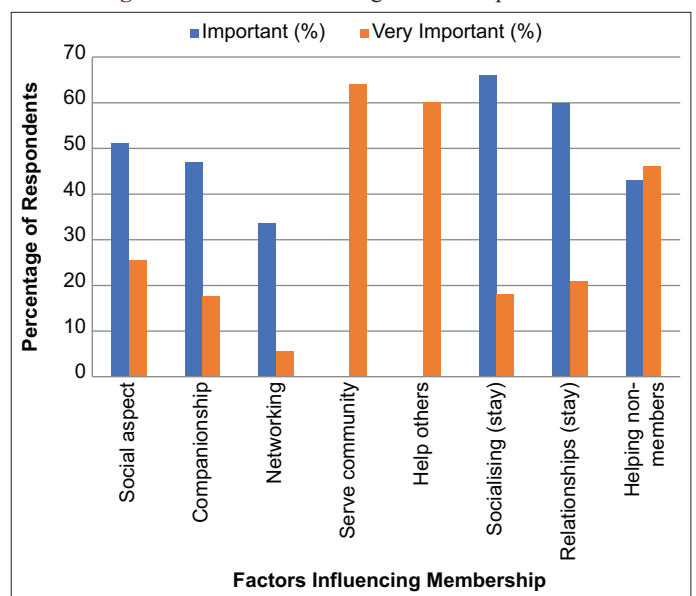
6.4. Effectiveness of Marketing Strategies

Word of mouth proved to be the best-marketing method as 58% of them rated it as being effective and 27.3% of them rated it as being very effective. Moderate effectiveness was achieved with Facebook (41.7) and local newspapers (56.2) and websites and other social media platforms were mostly viewed as neutral. The factor analysis revealed two clusters of marketing strategies, namely: online (Facebook, websites, social media) and traditional (newspapers, flyers, billboards) which implies the dual strategy (Table 4).

Figure 3 shows how the respondents feel about various marketing channels employed to market Lions Club activities. The offline channels, especially the word of mouth and the local newspapers,

Table 2: Key factors influencing joining and retention

Factor	Important (%)	Very important (%)
Social aspect	51.1	25.5
Companionship	46.9	17.7
Networking	33.7	5.6
Serve community	-	64.0
Help others	-	60.2
Socialising (stay)	66	18
Relationships (stay)	60	21
Helping non-members	43	46

Figure 1: Demographic profile of respondents**Figure 2: Factors influencing membership decisions**

seem to be more persuasive than the online channels. The effectiveness of social media and publicity through websites is relatively mediocre, which means that interpersonal and community-based communication strategies would be preferable.

6.5. Correlation between Membership Motivations and Retention Factors

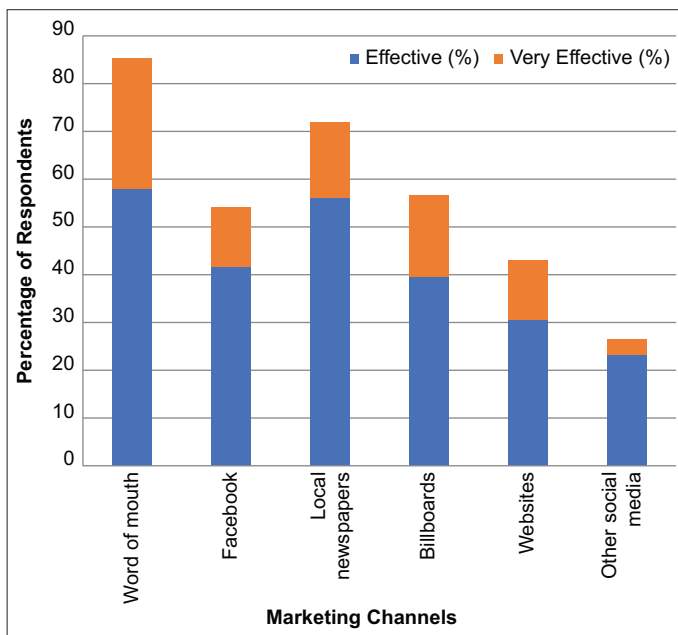
Correlation analysis showed that there were strong positive correlations between motivations to join and retention factors.

Table 3: Chi-square test results

Variables compared	χ^2 value	df	P-value	Result
Awareness (Q8)×Membership attraction (Q9)	62.414	42	0.022	Significant
Fundraising events (Q6)×Awareness (Q8)	38.805	21	0.010	Significant
Community events (Q7)×Membership attraction (Q9)	185.599	182	0.412	Not significant

Table 4: Effectiveness of marketing strategies

Marketing method	Effective (%)	Very effective (%)
Word of mouth	58.0	27.3
Facebook	41.7	12.5
Local newspapers	56.2	15.7
Billboards	39.5	17.1
Websites	30.6	12.5
Other social media	23.3	3.3

Figure 3: Effectiveness of marketing channels in promoting events

Continued membership was greatly related with social aspects like interaction and development of relationships. On the same note, altruistic motives, such as assisting others and serving the community, had high correlation with retention behaviours. These results suggest that the fundamental motivation to join does not change with time, and is highly essential to determine long-term engagement (Table 5).

7. DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicate that the Lions Clubs in New Zealand have an ageing membership structure, suggesting sustainability issues due to low involvement of younger people. The large number of elderly and long-term participants suggest that the existing recruitment processes are not effective in reaching younger populations. This finding corresponds with the research pointing to the presence of demographic imbalances in volunteering and the necessity of specific approaches to recruit younger individuals (Hustinx et al., 2022). Such an imbalance highlights the significance of adopting a set of strategies to

guarantee the continuity between generations and sustainability of the organization in the long term.

Motivations to join and remain in Lions Clubs were identified to be similar, with community service and social interaction coming out as the most powerful. Such consistency shows that the primary motivations do not evolve over time, and it is important to make the organizational activities consistent with the intrinsic values and social expectations of volunteers. Motives to join such as serving the community and helping others are similar to retention motives such as socialising and building relationships. The finding is in line with the self-determination theory, which puts the importance of intrinsic motivation such as altruism and personal satisfaction in sustaining engagement (Ryan and Deci, 2020). These are fundamental motivational factors which can be enhanced to enhance on recruitment and retention. Other previous research also points out that satisfaction, meaningful involvement and the alignment of expectations and organizational practices are among the most significant when it comes to retention (Merrilees et al., 2020).

It is also revealed in the results that awareness is a determining factor of membership attraction. The outreach and efficient communication are needed to increase the visibility and appeal to the potential members, which aligns with the past research in the area of nonprofit marketing (Alasiri et al., 2025).

Word of mouth was found to be the most effective marketing tool in terms of its effectiveness, as compared to more traditional forms of marketing such as local newspapers which proved to be less effective. This highlights the importance of interpersonal communication and interactions based on trust in nonprofit engagement. Digital platforms, such as social media and websites, were seen as moderately effective. This is in line with the research that the success of digital communication is determined by the characteristics of the audience and the degree of digital literacy (Young, 2020).

The correlation analysis proves the close association between the motives of joining and retention factors especially social and altruistic factors. Long-term engagement is facilitated by social interaction, networking and community service. Empirical evidence supports that positive volunteer experiences and meaningful engagement enhance retention and continued participation (Wymer and Čačija, 2025). These results reveal the need to establish a working environment where meaningful contributions and good interpersonal relationships can be developed. Effective volunteer management, leadership, and supportive organizational structures further enhance satisfaction and long-term commitment (Piatak and Carman, 2023; Prince and Piatak, 2023).

Such findings are in line with the available literature on nonprofit participation and engagement. The relevance of altruism and

Table 5: Significant correlations between membership motivations and retention factors

Variables	Pearson correlation (r)	P-value	Significance
Social aspect↔Socialising with members	0.596	0.000	Significant
Social aspect↔Relationships developed	0.437	0.000	Significant
Networking↔Networking opportunities	0.787	0.000	Significant
Help others↔Helping non-members	0.563	0.000	Significant
Serve community↔Help others	0.757	0.000	Significant
LCIF contribution↔Helping non-members	0.507	0.000	Significant
Socialising↔Relationships developed	0.565	0.000	Significant

social bonding as determinants of volunteering is highlighted in previous research (Roberts et al., 2019; Saitgalina et al., 2016). The importance of awareness and outreach in recruitment is consistent with the results on community participation in nonprofit membership (Roberts et al., 2021). The argument about the significance of trust-based interactions can be supported by the effectiveness of traditional communication tools, and especially word of mouth (Powell, 2019). Moreover, ageing membership is another problem that has been extensively reported in nonprofit research (Onyx and Nowland-Foreman, 2017). The extended contribution of nonprofit organizations to community development and resilience further stresses the need to remain engaged (Udeuhele and Offor, 2023; Watson, 2019).

This research has a number of practical implications on nonprofit organizations. Certain approaches will be needed to appeal to younger members, such as youth-focused initiatives and the greater involvement of digital communication channels. An integrated approach of traditional and new marketing techniques can enhance the effectiveness of outreach. However, the study has some limitations. It can be limited to Lions Club members in New Zealand and this may be a limitation to generalizability. In addition, the low use of social media among the study participants may also introduce the risk of low social media use influencing the perception of the effectiveness of digital marketing, and self-reported data may cause response bias.

More research should be conducted to investigate the attitude of younger individuals and non-members to understand more about barriers to participation. A broader picture of the dynamics of membership would be possible through the comparative research in other nonprofit sectors and regions. A longitudinal study would help to study the engagement changes over the time, and further research on digital technologies would help to adapt to recruitment and retention strategies.

8. CONCLUSION

This study has addressed the membership predictors of the Lions Clubs in New Zealand with particular focus on awareness, motives, marketing strategies and the retention dynamics. The results indicate that the body is majorly made up of older and long term members, and the need to make younger people to join the membership is dire to maintain sustainability. The research findings indicate that the reasons of coming to the organization and staying there are highly congruent, and the community service and social interaction are the driving forces behind the engagement. The findings also show that awareness-creating events are important

in the attraction of new members though no one type of event is adequate on its own. Also, high correlation coefficients between motivations to join and retention variables indicate that social bond upholding and altruistic values reinforcement is needed to make membership long-term. On the whole, this paper highlights the significance of implementing a moderated and flexible strategy of merging conventional modes of engagement and novel digital practices. The nonprofit organization like Lions Clubs can improve both the recruitment and retention by focusing on awareness, social bond, and the younger demographics. The results are useful in the further explanation of the dynamics of membership and provides more practical recommendations of rendering community-based service organizations viable in the long run.

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