

Judge a nonprofit by the partners it keeps: How does cross-sector partnership disclosure influence public evaluations of the nonprofit?

A DISSERTATION  
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF  
THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA BY

Chuqing Dong

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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May 2020

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## **Acknowledgements**

It would be impossible for me to complete this dissertation and my doctoral degree without support, guidance, trust, and caring from a great number of people. First and foremost, I would like to express my deep and sincere gratitude to my advisor, Dr. Hyejoon Rim, for her incredible patience, generosity, and support throughout these years. Dr. Rim is not only a talented scholar, but more importantly, a scholar with kindness and compassion. She often reminded me that what is more important than the outcome is the process; we conduct social science research because we have the curiosity, and can we care about others and the society. Taking on the advising responsibilities as an assistant professor is already a challenging task and dealing with an advisee like me is a double burden. Dr. Rim has showed me the highest standard of being an advisor, and I wish to pay it forward in my future career.

I also owe many thanks to my co-advisor, Dr. Jisu Huh, for her continuous encouragement during my doctoral studies. I enjoyed every class and personal conversation with Dr. Huh. The most important things I learned from her are to respect different, even conflicting, scholarly ideas and approaches; and always assume other people have good intentions. I think these lessons have not only helped me to develop as a responsible scholar but also to be a better human being. I also want to thank Dr. Amy O'Connor for inspiring my research interest in cross-sector partnerships and helping me appreciate the value and beauty of qualitative research. I would not have made it this far without her tough love. I would also like to express my heartfelt gratitude to Dr. David Knoke for serving on my committee and sharing insightful feedback on my work. Dr.

Knoke is such a role-model scholar, and taking his class was one of my best education experiences.

I have been blessed to be surrounded by a group of amazing faculty, peers, and staff members in Murphy Hall. The great knowledge I learned from our faculty has been a tremendous asset to me and they together have contributed to the development of my own research agenda. Every teaching assistant experience has also been valuable as I have learned instructional strategies influenced by the professor's style. In addition, I would like to acknowledge the help, advice, and emotional support I have received from the HSJMC community. I especially want to thank Prof. Steve Wehrenberg, Dr. Claire Segijn, Dr. Ruth Defoster, Dr. Soojung Kim, Dr. Michelle Chan, Dr. Xuan Zhu, Dr. Susan LoRusso, Dr. Lauren Gray, Dr. Hyejin Kim, Dr. Jisu Kim, Dr. Alexander Pfeuffer, Dr. Xinyu Lu, Scott Memmel, Michael Myers, Weijia Shi, Hao Xu, Renée Mitson, and Eu Gene Lee. In addition, I owe many thanks to Yafei Zhang, Ran Ju, Leping You, Rhys Lim, Jordan Morehouse and many others who kindly showed their support throughout my dissertation process.

I cannot thank my family back in China enough. Attending graduate school overseas is beyond my parents' life experience, but they were very brave to send their only daughter here and supported every decision I have made ever since then. Their unconditional love is the source of my strength. I also appreciate all the love from my chosen families in Minnesota. Special thanks go to Sook Jin Ong, Regina Blevins, Dan Schulzetenberg, and their families for trusting in me and taking care of me for many years. I also cannot forget to thank Yunzhao Xiao, my husband, for being a patient

listener, a problem solver, a role model for how to have a strong work ethic, and, perhaps most importantly, a good housekeeper all the time - well done, thank you!

*Dedication*

*To my grandmother, Rong Shen. I wish you were here to be proud of me.*

## **Abstract**

Cross-sector partnerships between nonprofit organizations, businesses, and the government have become a popular strategy for nonprofits to secure economic support, acquire scarce resources, advance their missions, and address larger and more complex problems in society. Despite these merits, these collaborative efforts are also controversial given the inherent distinctiveness and incompatibility between cross-sector partners. Under careful public scrutiny and confronted with consistently declining public trust, it is critical for nonprofits to strategically communicate about their cross-sector partnerships. However, current research on cross-sector partnership communication has not paid adequate attention to the nonprofit's perspective, and rarely has it focused on publics' reactions to nonprofits' partnership disclosures.

Taking a network approach, this study considers a nonprofit's partnership portfolio as its egocentric network, which includes multiple partners that are simultaneously supporting the nonprofit. How a portfolio is configured, such as how many and with whom the nonprofit works, reflects the nonprofit's discretion in partner selection and its embeddedness in alliance networks. When the nonprofit publicly communicates about the partnership portfolio, it becomes visible and can function as informational cues that influence publics' perceptions of the nonprofit. To understand the effect and effectiveness of the partnership communication, this dissertation project is centered on two overarching questions: How does a nonprofit's disclosure of different portfolio configurations (size, industry diversification, and organization type diversification) influence individual publics' evaluations of the nonprofit? How do such

portfolio communication strategies interact with nonprofit cynicism to affect publics' evaluations of the nonprofit?

To address these research questions, this dissertation conducted two experiments. Study 1 adopted a between-subject design to examine the main and interaction effects of *portfolio size* and *industry diversification* on individual publics' trust, attitude, and intention to support the focal nonprofit. In addition, it tested the interaction effects between nonprofit cynicism and these two portfolio configurations on the communication outcomes. Study 2 adopted a between-subject experimental design to examine the main and interaction effects of *portfolio size* and *organization type diversification*, as well as how nonprofit cynicism influences the effects of these portfolio strategies.

The key findings from the two studies revealed that having a small number of partners compared to a large number did not lead to a significant difference in publics' evaluations of the nonprofit. Inclusion of partners within the same business industry compared to diverse industries also did not affect publics' evaluations. However, displaying partners of the same organization type, as compared to different organization types, led to stronger intention to support the nonprofit. Both industry diversification and organization type diversification showed a significant interaction effect with nonprofit cynicism, but the effects were in opposite directions. As for industry diversification, as the level of nonprofit cynicism increased, individuals had more positive evaluations of the nonprofit when exposed to a heterogeneous portfolio than a homogeneous one. When it comes to organization type diversification, as the level of nonprofit cynicism increased, individuals evaluated a nonprofit less positive when exposed to a heterogeneous portfolio



than a homogeneous one. The results also indicated an interaction effect between portfolio size and organization type diversification. The focal nonprofit was more favored when it disclosed a small number of partners that were in the same organization type than in different organization types.

This dissertation advances the current literature on cross-sector partnership communication by providing empirical evidence on the effect and effectiveness of partnership portfolio communication from an individual public's perspective. The findings also offer useful practical implications for nonprofits' partner selection and portfolio development that can effectively respond to an increasingly cynical fundraising environment.

### **Glossary**

**CSR:** Corporate social responsibility

**NPO:** Nonprofit organization

**N2B Partnership:** Nonprofit-business partnership

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## CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Nonprofit organizations (NPOs) make important contributors to democracy, pluralism, and economic growth of society. However, they face multiple challenges in and the current social and economic environment, such as uncertainty about government funding, growing competition within the nonprofit sector for donors and volunteers, and a drop in traditional charitable giving (AL-Tabbaa, Leach, & March, 2013). Recent years have seen NPOs increasingly forming cross-sector partnerships with corporations, government agencies, and/or other nonprofits to secure more and more diversified resources to address social and environmental problems that cannot be solved by a single sector (Austin, 2000; Austin & Seitanidi 2012; Bryson, Crosby, & Stone, 2006).

For example, nonprofit-business partnerships have become a popular form of corporate social responsibility practice through activities such as cause-related marketing, sponsorship, licensing agreements, and corporate philanthropy (Austin, 2000; Wymer, Knowles, & Gome, 2006; Wymer & Samu, 2003). Evidence shows that corporate giving increased to \$18.55 billion in 2016 (Giving USA, 2017), and 74% of corporations worldwide conduct corporate social responsibility (CSR) with cross-sector partners (C&E Business & Society, 2018). In addition, the Urban Institute reported that government agencies provided 350,000 contracts and grants with about 56,000 NPOs (Pettijohn, Boris, De-ita, & Fyffe, 2013). For instance, government agencies collaborate with nonprofits such as Goodwill and food banks to deliver critical public services. These nonprofits also rely heavily on government contracts and grants to advance organizational missions.

Increasingly, these alliances are visible to publics through various channels, such as corporate websites, social media, and personal contacts (Yang & Ji, 2019). From a public relations perspective, individual publics depend on NPOs' voluntary disclosure to learn about the organizations' management and operational decisions. The voluntary disclosure of alliance information improves nonprofits' financial transparency and information symmetry, which is what the public is increasingly demanding for (Behn, DeVries, & Lin, 2007). Thus, to maintain organizational accountability and relationships with various constituents, it is vital for NPOs to effectively communicate the meaning and value of their activities to publics (Gugerty, 2009; Sanzo-Perez, Rey-Garcia, & Alvarez-Gonzalez, 2017; Willems & Faulk, 2019).

For NPOs, however, publicly communicating about cross-sector partnerships could be a challenging task. Publics have diverse expectations of how NPOs should operate, and they are more sensitive to nonprofits' behaviors that contradict their expectations. A major risk of cross-sector partnerships is the inherent differences across the sectors in terms of their ownership, functions, values, and identities (Berger, Cunningham, & Drumwright, 2004; Liston-Heyes & Liu, 2011; Shumate & O'Connor, 2010a, 2010b). In addition, nonprofit, corporate, and business partners represent distinctive and even conflicting resource pools. Thus, these partnerships create tensions over power and control inevitable (Selsky & Parker, 2005). Questions may arise regarding the nonprofit's mission drift, loss of autonomy, or commercialization in such collaborative, yet contradictory interorganizational relations (AL-Tabbaa et al., 2013; Baur & Schmitz, 2012; Sanzo, et al., 2017; Selsky & Parker, 2005). Thus, NPOs need to

be cautious about their publics' potential negative reactions to the partnership and the communication about such partnerships.

To further complicate the situation, the nonprofit sector is facing an increasingly cynical fundraising environment. Public trust in NPOs has reached a record low (Edelman, 2018; Sargeant, Ford, & West, 2000). Recent statistics show that public trust in NPOs dropped from 58% in 2017 to 49% in 2018 among adults between 18 to 64 in the U.S. (Edelman, 2018). Frequent media coverage of nonprofit scandals, such as the Red Cross Relief's funding fraud and the Nature Conservancy Controversy's strong monetary ties with large oil companies, including BP, have increased publics' cynicism toward NPOs' ethical conduct. As a result, publics have increasingly called for greater transparency in NPOs' use of funding and other operations.

Given the potential public dissention toward cross-sector collaborations and growing public cynicism toward the nonprofit sector, it is important for nonprofit practitioners to strategically form and disclose such partnerships. How should nonprofits effectively develop and communicate cross-sector partnership portfolios to individual publics? What partnership portfolio strategies work best for nonprofits operating in a cynical fundraising environment? These questions that concern by nonprofit practitioners remain unexplored.

Current research on cross-sector partnership communication has revealed several gaps. First, a common assumption is that cross-sector alliances create a win-win situation (e.g., Austin, 2000; Seitanidi & Crane, 2009). This bias is significant in the CSR communication literature where supportive evidence has been overwhelmingly focused



on the corporate side (e.g., Du, Bhattacharya, & Sen, 2010). Few empirical studies are related to the effects on the partnered NPOs, leaving an incomplete understanding of CSR communication effects. Second, extant research on cross-sector partnership communication has primarily focused on the alliance in a dyad setting (e.g., Lichtenstein, Drumwright, & Braig, 2004; Nan & Heo, 2007), neglecting the fact that NPOs are not exclusive in forming cross-sector alliances. Most NPOs are simultaneously embedded in multiple alliances that create partnership portfolios (Groza, Cobbs, & Schaefer, 2012; Shumate, et al., 2016). The relative lack of academic attention on the multi-partner phenomenon in cross-sector partnership research seems to “stand in sharp contrast to practice” (Ruth & Simonin, 2006, p. 7). Previous research has viewed an organization’s partnerships as an egocentric network formed by the focal organization (Shumate et al., 2016; O’Connor & Shumate, 2014; Shumate Fu, and Cooper, 2018). These studies have provided macro-and meso-level analyses on the alliance network configurations and addressed “why” and “how” NPOs configure particular cross-sector portfolios. However, from a micro-level perspective, unanswered questions still remain regarding how an NPO’s partnership portfolio configuration affects individual publics’ responses to the focal organization. In addition, the portfolio configuration provides richer information about an organization’s interorganizational relations. However, existing literature has not provided enough theoretical explanation on how partnership portfolios are cognitively processed by individuals (Mishra, Singh, Fang, & Yin, 2017).

## **Research Focus**

To address these research gaps and practitioners' concerns, this research aims to understand how a nonprofit's disclosure of cross-sector partnership portfolios affect individuals' evaluations of the NPO. In addition, this research explores how different partnership portfolio configurations interact with an individual's cynicism toward the nonprofit sector to affect the communication outcomes.

Specifically, in this study, a nonprofit's cross-sector interorganizational relations are represented through a partnership portfolio (Shumate et al., 2018), in which two or more partners are presented simultaneously. Focusing on the key configurations of partnership portfolios (i.e., portfolio size, industry diversification, and organization type diversification), the author argues that they are important informational cues managed by the NPO to signal involvement in cross-sector relations and serve as heuristics to influence public evaluations of the NPO. As for a theoretical framework, this research applies psychological mechanisms of a social proof heuristic to explain the effects of portfolio size, and relies on the mechanisms of categorization and cognitive consistency to explain the effects of portfolio diversification.

This research includes two survey experiments. Focusing on nonprofit-business partnerships, the first study manipulated the portfolio size and industry diversification and examined their main and interaction effects on the communication outcomes. Focusing on tripartite partnerships, the second study manipulated size and organization diversification of the partnership portfolio and examined the main and interaction effects on the communication outcomes. To understand how nonprofit cynicism moderates the

effects of portfolio configurations, in both studies, the interaction effects between nonprofit cynicism and the different portfolio configurations were also examined. In doing so, this study identifies communication strategies for cross-sector partnerships, which will enhance our understanding of fundraising in the current challenging season of increasing cynicism.

### **Significance of the Study**

This research aims to provide both theoretical and practical implications. First, this research is among the earliest attempts to examine partnership portfolio communication effects from a nonprofit perspective. Focusing on a nonprofit perspective, the current study contributes to an important yet understudied area in CSR communication research. The findings offer empirical evidence to revisit the win-win assumption in the current strategic alliance literature (Austin, 2000). Second, this study takes a network perspective to examine partnerships using a portfolio approach. This perspective moves beyond the current dyadic level of analysis. By focusing on the effects of portfolio strategies on individuals' evaluations, the findings of this research add insights to the cross-sector partnership communication literature at the micro-level of analysis. Last, this study builds on the emerging scholarly attention to the interconnected stakeholder relationships (Crane, 2018) by empirically testing how an organization's interorganizational relationships may affect publics' responses to the focal organization. In doing so, this study contributes to public relations research by making theoretical linkages between interorganizational and organization-to-public communication.

Practically, this study addresses the collaborative yet contradictory dynamic of cross-sector partnerships, which is a timely issue for nonprofit practitioners (Waters & Ott, 2014). The publics' declining trust in NPOs provides an illuminating context to examine the effects of NPOs' disclosure of partnerships. By showing the extent to which a cynical fundraising environment and portfolio communication strategies collectively influence individuals' reactions to nonprofits, the findings of this study provide recommendations for NPOs that are in or considering entering collaborative networks to better respond to the current complex communication environment.

### **Dissertation Chapters and Organization**

The outline of this dissertation is as follows. Following the introduction in Chapter 1, Chapter 2 reviews the literature on several relevant research areas that are of interest to the current study. First, it provides an overview of research on cross-sector partnerships, particularly from a nonprofit perspective. Second, it focuses on communication and discusses how the strategies and outcomes of cross-sector partnerships are studied in communication scholarship. Third, it articulates the conceptualization of public evaluations as the key communication outcomes. Fourth, it discusses the portfolio approach of studying the effect of cross-sector partnership communication, conceptualizes the key portfolio configurations (i.e., size and diversification), and reviews the relevant research. Last, it highlights the relevant research on nonprofit cynicism, which reflects the challenging fundraising environment confronted by the nonprofit sector. Chapter 3 includes hypothesis development of the research questions, as well as the theoretical underpinnings. Chapter 4 and Chapter 5

describe the method, data analysis, results, and discussion of the findings for Study 1 and Study 2, respectively. Chapter 6 summarizes the key findings, discusses theoretical and practical implications, articulates the limitations of the two studies, and provides suggestions for future research.

## CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### **An Overview of Research on Nonprofit's Cross-Sector Partnerships**

The nonprofit sector refers to a wide array of organizations and activities pursuing voluntary and social purposes (Powell & Bromley, 2020). Scholars and practitioners have several names for this domain including charitable organizations, non-government organizations, civil society organizations, social purposes organizations, third sector, or independent sector under certain contexts and historical stages (Powell & Bromley, 2020; Salamon & Anheier, 1992). Although a sharp and clean definition is difficult to reach, it is commonly agreed that nonprofit organizations (NPOs) share several key features: formal, private nonprofit distribution, self-governance, and voluntary compliance (Salamon & Anheier, 1992). Given these distinctions, NPOs should have an institutional presence and structure (Pressgrove and Waters, 2019) that are distinguished from amorphous gatherings. NPOs are also institutionally separate from the government, even though they can receive government support. Unlike companies, NPOs do not distribute surplus revenue as profit. In addition, NPOs are self-governed and have a high level of autonomy in deciding internal procedures. Last, voluntary participation is an important contributor to NPOs' sustainability and development.

From a practical perspective, NPOs are defined by government regulations and tax policies. In the U.S., the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) has categorized more than 30 types of tax-exempt NPOs under section 501(c) (3). According to the National Center for Charitable Statistics (McKeever, 2015), approximately 1.56 million NPOs were registered with the IRS in 2015. Among the registered NPOs, public charities were the

largest category (69.7%). However, the exact number of NPOs in the U.S. is larger than what has been reported and remains unclear because a large portion of organizations were not included in the report (Liu, 2012). For example, in the U.S., religious entities and NPOs with revenue under \$5,000 are not required to register with the IRS (Powell & Bromley, 2020).

The nonprofit sector plays a distinctive role in society. In pursuit of social benefits, the nonprofit sector exists as an alternative to business and government organizations, and functions as a supplement to their failures or inefficiencies in solving social problems, such as poverty, healthcare, human rights, and education (Powell & Bromley, 2020). The nonprofit sector also contributes to the pluralism of civil society by representing the interests of its constituents and the larger community to the government and political authorities (Guo & Musso, 2007). They provide a medium for publics to discuss and act on issues with like-minded others, mobilize social capital, and foster collective civic engagement (Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012; Putman, 1995; Pressgrove and Waters, 2019). In addition, nonprofits are increasingly important economic drivers. The nonprofit sector contributed approximately \$985.4 billion to the U.S. economy, consisting of 5.4% the country's GDP (McKeever, 2015). It is the third largest workforce in the U.S., creating jobs for 12.3 million people (Salamon & Newhouse, 2019).

However, despite its importance to the society, the nonprofit sector faces multiple challenges including sustainability and development. According to a recent survey of more than 350 financial professionals and executives working in the nonprofit sector, the top concerns of nonprofit organizations' are uncertainty surrounding government funding

and the regulatory environment, increasing competition with other nonprofits for donors and volunteers, increases in operational costs, and a lack of proficient technology use (WIPFLI, 2018). These challenges have pushed nonprofits to expand fundraising, diversify revenue streams, and reduce operational costs to survive in the turbulent environment and continue pursuing their missions (Al-Tabbaa et al., 2013). One way to respond to these challenges has been for NPOs to increasingly form cross-sector partnerships to secure and diversify resources in pursuit of their own missions (Austin, 2000; Austin & Seitanidi 2012; Bryson, et al., 2006).

Cross-sector partnerships represent a distinct strategy of building interorganizational connections, gaining economic and social capital, and creating social value (Austin, 2000; Selsky & Parker, 2005; Shumate et al., 2016). Known also as social alliances (Jamali, Yianni, & Abdallah, 2011), social partnerships (Seitanidi & Crane, 2008), or cross-sector collaborations (Bryson et al., 2006), these arrangements allow the partners to leverage their capacities to cooperatively address complex social problems that are beyond the sectoral or organizational boundaries (Bryson et al., 2006), and thereby create both social value and organizational benefits (Le Ber & Branzei, 2010).

In this research, nonprofits' cross-sector partnerships are defined as "cross-sector projects formed explicitly to address social issues and causes that actively engage the partners on an ongoing basis" involving actors from two or more different social sectors (Selsky & Parker, 2005, p. 850). Seitanidi and Crane (2009). These cross-sector partnerships are categorized into four groups: business–nonprofit, government–business, government–nonprofit, and a tripartite partnership across business, nonprofit, and



government. This research focuses on two types of partnerships that are commonly adopted by nonprofits: *Nonprofit-Business Partnerships* and *Tripartite Partnership*.

A nonprofit-business partnership is often studied in the context of CSR practices (Du et al., 2010; Seitanidi & Crane, 2009). The past two decades have seen tremendous growth in such partnerships through activities like cause-related marketing, sponsorship, licensing agreement, and corporate philanthropy (Austin, 2000; Wymer et al., 2006; Wymer & Samu, 2003). Nonprofit-business (N2B) partnerships are generally defined as a “discretionary agreement between an NPO and a for-profit business to address social or environmental issues and to produce specific organizational benefits for both partners” (AL-Tabbaa et al., 2014, pp. 658-659). Tripartite partnerships involve partners across three major social sectors, namely, businesses, nonprofits, and governments. These collaborations can include large-scale projects at national or international levels or they may address social problems at the local level or those faced by the general public in daily life, such as community development, social service, education, and public health (Selsky & Parker, 2005).

Both types of cross-sector partnerships have attracted research interest from diverse academic fields, such as sociology, business, public affairs, and communication (Austin, 2000; Bryson et al., 2016; Knoke, 2009; Selskey & Parker, 2005; Shumate & O’Connor, 2010a). In particular, primary research interest in nonprofits’ engagement in cross-sector partnerships has emerged in three main areas: (1) motives for forming the partnerships; (2) process and implementation of the partnerships; and (3) outcomes of the partnerships.

The first body of research focuses on why organizations form cross-sector partnerships. Previous studies have drawn on various theoretical grounds, such as resource dependence (Froelich, 1999; Selsky & Parker, 2011), social exchange (Kolk, van Dolen, & Vock, 2020; Seitanidi & Crane, 2009), institutional (Vurro, Dacin, & Perrini, 2010), and legitimacy perspectives (Herlin, 2015; Huybrechts & Nicholl, 2013). These studies have suggested that nonprofits enter into cross-sector partnerships with mixed motivations, including both altruistic and instrumental motivations (Murphy, Arenas, & Batista, 2015). Runte, Basil, and Deshpande (2009) found that NPOs are motivated to gain both first-order and second-order benefits from partnerships with corporations. First-order benefits include short-term gains, such as getting financial support from corporations or cause-related marketing activities; second-order benefits include long-term development of the NPO, such as improving the nonprofit brand and cause awareness among a broader group of people, which helps better achieve the NPO's mission (Runte et al., 2009). In addition, nonprofits are driven by providing better social services, influencing corporate behaviors, and creating greater social value when entering into partnerships with the government and other nonprofits (Samuel, Wolf, & Schilling, 2013; Selsky & Parker, 2005)

In terms of the process and implementation, Austin and Seitanidi (2012) identified five stages of the value creation process, including partnership formation, partner selection, partnership implementation, and partnership institutionalization. Austin (2000) proposed a collaboration continuum, which characterizes three stages where different types of nonprofit-business alliances occur. In the philanthropic stage, which is where

most CSR partnerships are at today, corporations act as charitable donors and NPOs are recipients. In the transaction stage, NPOs and corporations exchange resources to provide products or services. In the integrative stage, both allies' missions and resources are merged to co-create value, which is considered a high level of strategic collaboration.

Wymer and Samu (2003) highlighted partner selection including two considerations for organizations entering into partnerships: where to find a cross-sector partner and what to look for in a potential partner. The authors suggested that both nonprofit and business managers can leverage their social networks to build new connections and expand their collaborative circles. The right partners "must be screened for suitable characteristics," (Wymer & Samu, 2003, p. 18) which means a good fit in terms of mission, management, workforce, target market, cause, or culture (Drumwright, Cunningham, & Berger, 2004). In a similar vein, Austin and Seitanidi (2012) noted that partnership value creation is based on resource complementarity between the partners, and that the fit within the partnership is "a fundamental determinant of the realization of value emerging from resource complementarity" (p. 931).

As for the outcomes, ideally, cross-sector partnerships can lead to a win-win situation for the partners (Austin, 2000; Porter & Kramer, 2011). For example, for corporations, partnering with a nonprofit help improve the corporate's reputation, brand attitude, purchase intention, positive word-of-mouth, and employment engagement (Dickinson & Barker, 2007; Du et al., 2010; Rim, et al., 2016; Seitanidi & Crane, 2009). For the government, partnering with nonprofits can improve service delivery and better satisfy public expectations for government accountability (Gazley & Brudney, 2007). In

terms of nonprofits, a major benefit is acquiring resources from the government and businesses. For example, cause-related marketing can lead to more nonprofit donations (Lichtenstein et al., 2004). Corporate volunteers also add additional human resources to nonprofits (Samuel et al., 2013). Partnering with the government may also help nonprofits overcome criticisms for lack of scale, resources, and formalization because the government is considered “more reliable, equitable, and democratic, legally mandated and professional” (Brinkerhoff & Brinkerhoff, 2002).

Apart from the optimistic win-win argument, recent research has also acknowledged potential disadvantages for nonprofits. Focusing on organizational capacity, Shumate et al. (2018) surveyed 452 nonprofits and found that having more cross-sector partnerships was not associated with a nonprofit’s greater organizational capacity, which combines the capacities of financial management, strategic planning, external communication, board leadership, mission orientation, and staff management. Gazley (2010) suggested that partnerships with the government may also impose risks to the nonprofits, such as mission drift, loss of autonomy, and greater investment of financial and time resources. In addition, the financial and power imbalance between nonprofits and corporations make nonprofits more vulnerable to cooptation and the loss of independence (Baur & Schmitz, 2012; Sanzo, et al., 2017; Waters & Ott, 2014). With regard to tripartite partnerships, while some believe that these partnerships blur sectoral boundaries, others argue that conflicts of power and identity are inevitable in all cross-sector collaborations (Selsky & Parker, 2005).

### **Cross-sector Partnerships Communication**

Cross-sector partnerships have also received growing attention in the field of communication. Communication scholars argue that publics' awareness, understanding, and evaluation of partnerships depend on the effective communication of the "existence, character, and valuation" of the partnerships (Shumate et al., 2016, p. 9). Shumate and O'Connor (2010b) suggested that cross-sector partnerships are "interorganizational communication relationships that are symbolized to stakeholders in order to influence the mobilization and creation of capital" (p. 578). By socially sharing their connections, organizations within partnerships can demonstrate their legitimacy to other stakeholders, establish source credibility, and mobilize capital (Shumate et al., 2016). Thus, the cross-sector relationships are considered valuable a "strategic communication asset" (Yang & Ji, 2019, p. 3)

Two themes have emerged in the communication research on cross-sector partnerships: 1) the patterns of cross-sector partnership communication, and 2) the effect and effectiveness of cross-sector partnership communication. These two research streams focus on different levels of analyses, theoretical perspectives, and methodological approaches. However, they are not completely isolated from each other as together they provide a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics and impact of cross-sector partnership communication.

The first body of literature has strong roots in interorganizational communication. Drawing on a variety of theoretical perspectives, such as stakeholder theory (Morsing & Schultz, 2006), institutional theory (O'Connor & Shumate, 2010),

legitimacy theory (Yang & Ji, 2009), relationship management theory (Harrison, 2019), the Symbiotic Sustainability Model (Shumate & O'Connor, 2010a), and social network analysis (Burton et al., 2017), communication scholars focus on why and how the cross-sectoral and interorganizational connections are formed, maintained, and facilitated through communication activities at both the macro and meso levels.

In particular, previous empirical studies have investigated the communication patterns of cross-sector partnership relations and provided insights on partner selection (O'Connor & Shumate, 2014; Shumate et al., 2016; Shumate & O'Connor, 2010; Shumate et al., 2018; Yang & Ji, 2019). From a nonprofit perspective, Shumate, Fu, Cooper, and Ihm (2016) surveyed 852 nonprofits and found that the majority (70.58%) of nonprofits regularly communicated with restricted within-sector collaborations, and fewer maintained (11.72%) cross-sector portfolios. O'Connor and Shumate (2014) identified the characteristics of nonprofits that are reported by large U.S. Fortune 500 corporations as partners. They suggested that nonprofits of different types (service or advocacy), different operational scopes (local vs. national), and mission focus (e.g., children-related) have different weights when corporations report them as partners.

Shumate et al. (2016) examined the number and patterns of nonprofit-business partnerships as reported by large nonprofits compared to those reported by corporations (Shumate & O'Connor, 2010). They found that nonprofits are more active than their business counterparts in publishing information about the partnerships. They also found that unlike businesses, nonprofits' partner selection is not restricted by industry-level isomorphic pressure. In other words, nonprofits within the same social issue industry do

not limit their business partners to the same economic industry. The authors argued that these dissimilar patterns are due to the different goals and orders in seeking economic and social capital between nonprofit and business entities.

Yang and Ji (2019) also observed the heterogeneity in nonprofits' cross-sectoral communication on social media. The authors examined the Facebook communication network focusing on environmental and sustainability issues and identified the tie formation patterns across the nonprofit, corporate, and government sectors. Specifically, they found that organizations preferred to form relationships with other organizations with a different background from their own. As the author suggested, for nonprofits, the inclination to engage in cross-sectoral communication is a way to demonstrate organizational capacity (Yang & Ji, 2019).

Taken together, this body of research highlights a network approach to addressing the multiple-partner phenomena in cross-sector collaborations. An important argument is that organizations do not casually communicate about their cross-sector partners to publics; they carefully decide how many and with whom they publicly communicate with in order to obtain social and economic capital (Shumate et al., 2016; Yang & Ji, 2019). In addition, selective partnership communication reflects careful consideration of organizational, stakeholder, and institutional conditions (Selsky & Parker, 2005; Yang & Ji, 2019; Shumate & O'Connor, 2010; Wassmer, 2010).

The second body of research focuses on the effect and effectiveness of partnership communication on an individual level. Taking a social psychological approach and using survey and experiment techniques, this line of research focuses on

how different communication strategies influence individuals' cognitive, attitudinal, and behavioral responses to cross-sector partnership communication. In the context of alliances between businesses and nonprofits, numerous empirical studies have identified key influential factors of successful CSR communication. For example, Du et al. (2010) proposed a conceptual framework indicating that several factors play important roles in influencing affective outcome of CSR communication (e.g., nonprofit familiarity): message content, consumer characteristics (e.g., stakeholder type, motivation to engage in CSR, individual social value orientation), the company's characteristics (e.g., reputation, industry, and marketing strategies), as well as the nonprofit partner's characteristics (Du et al., 2010; Heller & Reitsema, 2010; Lichtenstein et al., 2004; Rim et al., 2016). Other studies have found that different types of fit, such as functional fit, activity fit, and created fit, are important factors affecting stakeholders' responses (Kim, Sung, & Lee, 2012; Maktoufi, O'Connor, & Shumate, 2020; Nan & Heo, 2007; Simmons & Becker-Olsen, 2006).

Notably, most previous studies on CSR partnership communication have only examined the alliance between two partners, such as one corporation and one nonprofit. In addition, the majority of these studies have focused almost exclusively on the business side. Few empirical studies have examined the effects of disclosing cross-sector partnerships on publics' reactions to the partnered nonprofit (Bennett, Kim, & Loken, 2013; Lichtenstein et al., 2004; Rim et al., 2016). The findings are inconclusive on how cross-sector partnerships affect publics' reactions to the nonprofit partner.



Some studies have suggested that nonprofits can receive more public support by engaging in business activities. Lichtenstein et al. (2004) conducted one field experiment and three lab experiments to examine how cause-related marketing affects customers' donations to the corporate-supported nonprofit. The findings consistently showed that such marketing promotion has an indirect, positive effect on nonprofit donations through increased customer-corporation identification. Boenigk and Schuchardt (2015) also focused on campaign effects in the context of luxury business-nonprofit partnerships. They found that the customers of a luxury hotel were more likely to donate to the nonprofit when they were exposed to the partnership campaign compared to a traditional nonprofit solicitation campaign. They also found that luxury-nonprofit partnerships lead to a more positive nonprofit attitude when the nonprofit is unfamiliar to the customers. The findings suggest the possibility of nonprofits acquiring new donors through partnerships with luxury brands.

Rim et al. (2016) conceptualized positive word-of-mouth behavior about nonprofits as part of CSR supportive outcomes. The authors conducted an experiment to examine the effects of prior corporate reputation, nonprofit familiarity, and the company-nonprofit cause fit on individuals' CSR supportive outcomes. They found that a positive corporate reputation, a familiar nonprofit partner, and a good fit between the nonprofit's cause and the company's core business all contribute to individuals' supportive behaviors related to the CSR activity. Basil and Herr (2003) also noted that CSR partnerships enhance an individual's attitudes toward a charity when it is paired with a favorable

brand. The positive effects are stronger when the charitable cause is unfamiliar (Lafferty & Goldsmith, 2003).

In contrast, there is growing concern that cross-sector partnerships may potentially harm publics' support for the nonprofit. In the context of advertising, comparing donations to a nonprofit with and without showing corporate sponsors, Bennett et al. (2013) found that donors were less willing to donate when corporate sponsors were presented. The authors argued that this might be because corporations are wealthier donors, which makes individual donors feel that their support is less important. Bower and Grau (2009) found that adding a nonprofit partner's logo to an advertisement would lead people to believe that the presented nonprofit is an endorser of the advertised product, although it was not the nonprofit's intention to do so. The authors cautioned that such misleading cues might have taken advantage of the nonprofit's brand value which could result in "derogation of the well-intended nonprofit" (p. 120).

To summarize, although these studies have provided ample evidence on how various factors such as content and organizational attributes contribute to the effect and effectiveness of a nonprofit's partnership communication, this line of research has several limitations including inconsistent empirical findings, overly business-centered, and constrained to a dyadic partnership setting. Yang and Ji (2019) suggested that the strategic disclosure of multiple cross-sector partnerships can influence publics' perceptions about the partnered organization. Thus, the current research in this area can benefit from taking a network approach by studying cross-sector partnership relations in a

portfolio setting (Shumate et al., 2018) and examining how publics respond to specific partnership portfolio configurations.

### **Key Communication Outcomes: Public Evaluations of the NPO**

Nonprofits' sustainability and development rely on a variety of publics including donors, volunteers, employees, and the general public who are all potential audiences of a nonprofits' communication activities. The present research refers to publics as an inclusive concept that describes the diverse individuals who have access to a nonprofit's disclosure of alliances. This research focuses on the following public evaluations as the key communication outcomes: 1) perceived trust of the NPO, 2) attitude toward the NPO, and 3) supportive intentions toward the NPO.

**Trust of the NPO.** The importance of public trust in nonprofits cannot be overemphasized. The existence and sustainability of nonprofits rely on trust because it grants "legitimacy, effectiveness, nonfinancial as well as financial support" to nonprofits (Bryce, 2007, p. 112). Trust is critical to donor relationships and public support for NPOs (Bryce, 2007; Gaskin, 1999; Gugerty, 2009). Bryce (2007) illustrated the trusting relationship between donors and NPOs as a reciprocity of expectations, through which an NPO sticks to its mission to provide quality public service in exchange for donations. NPOs who violate these expectations will lose public trust. Unethical behaviors of managers, financial mismanagement, and inappropriate funding are all common causes of trust breach (Willems & Faulk, 2019).

This study adopts a social psychological approach to examine trust that is developed between a nonprofit and its publics (Mcknight & Chervany, 2001). Trust can

be developed based on a set of trusting beliefs (Gefen, 2002). According to McKnight, Choudhury, and Kacmar (2002), trusting beliefs refer to the attributes of a trustee that are perceived as beneficial to the trustor. Drawing on previous research (Gefen, 2002; McKnight et al., 2002; Mayer et al., 1995), this study conceptualizes the perceived trust of nonprofits based on three trusting beliefs: integrity, benevolence, and competence. Integrity is the belief of a nonprofit's adherence to "appropriate accepted rules or conduct" (Gefen, 2002, p. 43), including characteristics such as reliability, honesty, and keeping promises (McKnight & Chervany, 2000). A nonprofit's operation is expected to fulfill its mission. As Bryce (2007) argued, publics expect NPOs to adhere to their mission, and may lose trust in a nonprofit if their expectations are violated. Benevolence refers to a nonprofit's genuine intention to "do good to the trustor, aside from an egocentric profit motive" (Mayer et al., 1995, p. 718). Competence refers to the degree to which a nonprofit has the appropriate skills, ability, or power to perform its duties and obligations (Gefen, 2002; Hon & Grunig, 1999; Mayer et al., 1995). Together, these three dimensions of beliefs reflect an individual's perceived trust in an NPO.

Trust shares common ground with credibility, as they are both important assets of nonprofits and have been frequently used as an indicator of publics' positive evaluation of nonprofits. However, the two concepts need to be carefully differentiated in this study. In the nonprofit literature, source credibility factors have been examined in relation to a nonprofit's website design (Long & Chiagouris, 2006), including the professionalism, navigation options, information clarity, and the availability of customer service. These factors contribute to the truthfulness and believability of the source or the information.

Compared to credibility, trust is more relationship-oriented (Roy, Huh, Pfeuffer, & Srivastava, 2017). Bryce (2007) argued that “trust cannot be understood without understanding the nature and structure of relationships” (p. 113). The relational aspect of trust reflects one’s willingness to rely on the other party in the confidence of the relational partner’s good attributes (Yang & Lim, 2009). Conversely, credibility is more about one-way communication leading to the perception of credible attributes of the source (Cho, Huh, & Faber, 2014; Roy et al., 2017).

**Attitude toward the NPO.** Attitude is defined as “general evaluations people hold in regard to themselves, other people, objects, and issues” (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986, p.127), which is developed from a variety of behavioral, affective, and cognitive experiences, and can consequently influence people’s behaviors (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). In this study, a nonprofit attitude represents a learned predisposition to respond in a consistently favorable or unfavorable manner toward the focal nonprofit disclosing partnership information.

**Supportive behavioral intentions to the NPO.** Public support is vital to the nonprofit sector because a large portion of charitable donations is from individual donors (Austin, 2000; Bennett et al., 2013). This study considers donation, volunteer, and positive word-of-mouth as key supportive behavioral intentions toward the NPO, which comprise both monetary and nonmonetary support from individuals (Bekkers & Wiepking, 2011; Bennett et al., 2013; Lichtenstein et al., 2004; Rim et al., 2016).

### **Cross-sector Partnership Portfolio Configurations: Size and Diversification**

Partnership portfolio is commonly defined from a cumulative perspective, viewing a partnership portfolio as the aggregate of all strategic alliances of a focal organization (Wassmer, 2010). From a network perspective, a partnership portfolio is a focal organization's egocentric network, showing direct ties with multiple partners (Baum, Calabrese, & Silverman, 2000; Hoffmann, 2007; Jiang, Tao, & Santoro, 2010; O'Connor & Shumate, 2018). In this research, a nonprofit's cross-sector partnership portfolio is defined as strategic alliances with two or more partners supporting the focal nonprofit simultaneously (Groza et al., 2012; Yousaf, Mishra, & Gupta, 2018). Specifically, a nonprofit-business partnership portfolio includes multiple corporate partners. A tripartite partnership portfolio represents "a rich assemblage of integrative partnerships" between a nonprofit and its corporate, nonprofit, and government partners (Shumate., 2016, p.4).

Wassmer (2010) suggested that a partnership portfolio configuration is a complex concept comprising multiple dimensions, including size, structural, relational, and partner dimensions. The size dimension is determined by the number of partners included in the portfolio; the structural dimension is aligned with the network structures of the alliances, such as the breadth and density of the portfolio; the relational dimension refers to the tie strength between the individual alliances within the portfolio; and the partner dimension highlights the partner-related characteristics, such as firm size, reputation, and country-of-origin. These dimensions of alliance portfolio configurations require different levels of analysis. The size and structural configurations are on the portfolio level of analysis; the

relational dimension is on the individual alliance level of analysis, which focuses on each dyad; and the partner configuration is on the organizational level of analysis.

Communication scholars suggest that “inherent in the formation of cross-sector partnership formation is the choice about both number and type of alliances partners selected” (Shumate & O’Connor, 2010a, p.212). Focusing on the portfolio level of analysis (Wassmer, 2010), this study emphasizes two key portfolio configurations that are highly relevant to nonprofits’ cross-sector partnerships: *portfolio size and portfolio diversification*. These portfolio configurations have both organizational and communication meanings. From an organizational perspective, they represent the quantity and diversity of information and resources to which the focal nonprofit has access through cross-sector collaborations (Hoffmann, 2007). From a communicative perspective, as nonprofits’ fundraising activities are under greater public scrutiny, the configurations of an NPO’s partnership portfolio form important observable cues to influence publics’ perceptions and evaluations of the NPO (Yang & Ji, 2019).

The following section discusses the conceptualization of portfolio size and diversification, as well as the relevant research.

**Partnership portfolio size.** The definition of portfolio size is derived from a network approach. Considering a partnership portfolio as a focal organization’s egocentric network, the portfolio size indicates the number of direct ties with which the central actor is connected (Knoke, 2001; Hoffmann, 2007), which is commonly measured by degree centrality (Shumate & O’Connor, 2010a). In this research, partnership portfolio size refers to the number of partners that are concurrently presented in an organization’s

partnership portfolio (Ruth & Simonin, 2006). Specifically, a nonprofit's business partnership portfolio size refers to the number of corporate partners supporting the focal nonprofit; a nonprofit's tripartite partnership portfolio size refers to the number of business, government, and/or nonprofit partners having collaborative relationships with the focal nonprofit.

Previous research on partnership portfolio size has strong roots in the business and management literature (Duysters, De Man, & Wildeman, 1999; Todeva & Knoke, 2005; Hoffmann, 2007). Studies in these fields have offered different opinions on whether maintaining a large number of interorganizational alliances is more beneficial to the performance or development of the focal organization. Many scholars agree that a large partnership portfolio is “an important source of competitive advantage” (Duysters et al., 1999, p. 182). Partnership portfolio size indicates the quantity of resources, such as information and knowledge, that are achievable by the central organization in the network (Knoke, 2001). Given that the focal organization can access more resources, it obtains an advantageous position in the network and can seize opportunities faster within its large network (O'Connor & Shumate, 2018; Wratschko, 2009). More sources make the central actor less vulnerable to any withholding or distorting of information (Knoke, 2001). They also highlighted the NPO's accumulated social capital and ability to mobilize resources within the collaborative network (Knoke, 2001, 2012; O'Connor & Shumate, 2018).

Other scholars, however, are concerned about the cost. Huxham and Vangen (2013) warned about the cost of forming cross-sector partnerships, stating that “seeking



collaborative advantage is a seriously resource-consuming activity so it is only to be considered when the stakes are really worth pursuing” (p. 13). Some have argued that along with the benefits of additional partners is the added cost of managing these partnerships (Rothaermel & Deeds, 2006). In addition, the marginal benefit of an additional partner may diminish when the portfolio reaches a certain size. For example, Frankort, Hagedoorn, and Letterie (2012) found a U-shaped relationship between a firm’s R&D partnership portfolio size and the firm’s knowledge gathering output. Shumate and O’Connor (2010a) also found that corporations only disclose relations with a limited number of nonprofit partners to avoid fragmented communication and strengthen the public’s memorization of the alliances.

From a communication perspective, the size of a person’s affiliated network relations is an observable cue signaling certain attributes and the capacity of the person to external publics (Tong, Van Der Heide, & Langwell, 2008). For example, conceptualizing a person’s friend portfolio as a friendship network, Utz (2010) examined how many friends a person has on social media influences other users’ impression formation of the person. The study found that the target was perceived to be more popular when observers saw the target had 382 friends compared to 82 friends. Likewise, for cross-sector partnership communication, scholars have suggested that a large portfolio size also signals a NPO’s greater professionalism in fundraising and competency in resource acquisition (Bennett et al., 2013; O’Connor & Shumate, 2018; Shumate et al., 2016). In addition, allied organizations can be seen as endorsers of each other; as the number of alliances increases, it signifies the social endorsement of the allies to the focal

organization (O'Connor & Shumate, 2018). However, empirical evidence is still absent regarding the relationship between an organization's partnership portfolio size and individuals' perceptions of the organization.

**Partnership portfolio diversification.** Partnership portfolio diversification is defined as the level of heterogeneity of the partners (Dacin & Smith, 1994; Gammoh, Voss, & Fang, 2010). From a network perspective, it indicates the uniqueness of each tie with which the focal organization connects (Goerzen & Beamish, 2005). Central to the decision of portfolio diversification is the question of with whom the focal organization partners (Jiang et al., 2010; Shumate et al., 2016). Past research has identified numerous indicators showing the diversity of partners, such as firm size, geographic location, country of origin, product category, experience, and governance structure (Goerzen & Beamish, 2005; Jiang et al., 2010). This study focuses on two key indicators of diversification that are closely related to nonprofits' cross-sector partnerships: industry diversification and organization type diversification.

**Industry diversification.** Industry diversification refers to the degree of variance across the corporate partners in terms of the business industry. A heterogeneous (high-diverse) portfolio includes businesses from different industries, and a homogeneous (low-diverse) portfolio includes businesses from the same industry. For example, the American Cancer Society (ACS) reported partnerships with seven different pharmaceutical companies on its website (Shumate et al., 2016). Given that all the corporate partners are in the same industry, ACS's partnership portfolio shows low diversification.

Unlike, ACS, a nonprofit may support several causes and have a broad scope of activities (Kim et al., 2012), which can align with multiple business industries. For example, CARE's work encompasses disaster relief, food security, health, education, and women's empowerment. Thus, collaborating with multiple business partners from different economic industries is a common strategy used in such nonprofit-business partnerships (Shumate et al., 2016). Shumate and O'Connor (2010b) suggested that each nonprofit-business alliance must convey a distinctive message to maximize the gain of social capital. Because business industries have varying levels of accumulated economic and social capital based on the products and services they provide (Shumate & O'Connor, 2010b), it seems beneficial for a nonprofit to diversify its industrial connections to acquire nonredundant resources from each economic domain and pursue more opportunities for innovation (Sanzo, Alvarez, Rey, & Garcia, 2015). However, concerns about the increased cost of managing partnerships with businesses have also been documented in the literature (Austin & Seitanidi, 2012; Seitanidi & Crane, 2009).

A partnership portfolio showing industry diversification also indicates the attractiveness and popularity of the nonprofit and its cause to a wide range of businesses. Some causes are more popularly supported by corporations in CSR investment, such as environmental, health, and children-related nonprofits; whereas others are less popular, such as religion and animal rights nonprofits (O'Connor & Shumate, 2014; Shumate et al., 2016; Shumate & O'Connor, 2010a). In contrast, partnering with the same business industry indicates a nonprofit's significant impact on the business and its dedication in influencing corporate behaviors in a specific area (Hond, Bakker, & Doh, 2015; Shumate

et al., 2016). The prominent alignments between certain nonprofits and business industries could be a result of stakeholder expectations (Shumate & O'Connor, 2010a).

Despite its importance, publics' reactions to industry diversification as a portfolio strategy has rarely been studied. Only a few empirical studies are available in the marketing and brand alliance literature, and they have not reached a solid conclusion on how industry diversification shapes public perceptions. Gammoh et al. (2010) argued that a homogeneous portfolio will have limited benefits to the focal brand because it does not offer additional or new information to consumers. To test this hypothesis, the authors used a fictitious smartphone brand as the focal brand and manipulated the brand alliance portfolios in four conditions, including no ally, one ally (Microsoft Office), a homogeneous portfolio (three allies of the same product category: Microsoft Office, Adobe Photoshop, and Intuit's Quicken), and a heterogeneous portfolio (three allies in different product categories: Microsoft Office, Intel, and Cingular Wireless). However, the results showed that there is no significant difference between the heterogeneous and homogeneous portfolios in terms of consumers' perceived product quality, brand attitude, and purchase intention of the focal brand.

In the context of co-branding between a primary brand and multiple secondary brands, Mishra et al. (2017) conducted another study examining how the heterogeneity of the product categories among the secondary brands affects consumers' perceptions of the primary brand. Drawing on attribution theory, the authors argued that heterogeneous alliances created more uncertainty associated with inconsistent information, and thus negatively influenced the perceived quality of the primary brand. However, the study did

not find a significant direct effect of alliance diversification on the evaluation of the primary brand.

***Organization type diversification.*** Following previous studies (Austin, 2000; Milne, Iyer, & Gooding-Williams, 1996; Moore, Sobieraj, Whitt, Mayorova, & Beaulieu, 2002), this study defines an allied entity's organization type based on the social sector to which the entity belongs. Specifically, this research focuses on three distinctive organization types: nonprofit organization, business organization, and government organization. A heterogeneous (high-diverse) portfolio includes partners of at least two different organization types; a homogeneous (low-diverse) portfolio includes partners that are the same type of organization.

Organization type diversification indicates a focal nonprofit's embeddedness in cross-sector relations. Given the increasing pressure from economic and environmental turbulence as mentioned in the previous section, nonprofits must seek a variety of resource providers to support their mission-related work. Nonprofit, business, and government partners each represent a distinctive resource pool (Jiang et al., 2010), and it is difficult for these resource pools to replace each other. For example, alliances with government agencies could grant a nonprofit greater influence on changing policies (Milne et al., 1996), which may not be achieved simply by collaborating with corporations or other nonprofits. Collaborating with corporations also allows nonprofits to access a large consumer base and adopt innovative practices (Sanzo et al., 2015), which is what the government and other nonprofits lack. Thus, a partnership portfolio with such

heterogeneity would enhance the focal nonprofit's breadth of resources (Wassmer, 2010) and enable the focal nonprofit to address larger social problems (Tulder & Keen, 2018).

As for the downside, the organization type diversification could face more complex relationship management issues due to the inherent distinctiveness across the nonprofit, business, and government partners (Selsky & Parker, 2005). Considerably dissimilar partners also lead to additional administrative and communication costs, goal displacement, and loss of autonomy (Froelich, 1999; Goerzen & Beamish, 2005; Milne et al., 1996).

In terms of the effects of organization type diversification, Milne et al. (1996) surveyed the presidents or representatives of environmental organizations and found that they believe that compared to alliances with other nonprofits, cross-sector alliances with the government or businesses were perceived as less effective in bolstering the focal nonprofit's political position. However, scant empirical research has focused on how the general public processes and responds to the diversity of partners in terms of organization type.

Taken together, portfolio diversification indicates the extent to which the partners differ from each other. Previous studies have suggested that diversification in both industry and organization type could be beneficial to the focal nonprofit because they bring redundant resources; however, such diversification may also add additional cost to manage complex relationships. From a communication perspective, a portfolio with heterogeneous or homogeneous industry connections indicate the nonprofits' different levels of popularity and attractiveness to business partners. It also implies the degree of

influence a nonprofit has on certain corporate behaviors. A portfolio with heterogeneous organization types may indicate that the focal nonprofit has a greater ability to address complicated social problems. However, given the limited research and theoretical explanation on the communication effects of industry diversification and organization type diversification, empirical evidence is still needed to better explain how the types of diversification are processed by individuals and the impact on publics' evaluations of the nonprofit.

### **Nonprofit Cynicism**

Although the nonprofit sector continues to thrive and play important roles in society, it is also confronted with rising pressure from publics (AL-Tabbaa, 2014; Powell & Bromley, 2020). Nonprofits rely on its publics to acquire resources and maintain legitimacy; publics evaluate nonprofits based on how well their expectations are satisfied by the focal nonprofit. However, nonprofits are situated in a complex environment with diverse publics including donors, volunteers, members, staff, media, and the government. To further complicate the situation, these publics hold diverse and sometimes conflicting expectations. AL-Tabbaa et al. (2013) suggested that nonprofits are subjected to various types of accountability expectations, ranging from more transparency in financial disclosures (Blouin, Lee, & Erickson, 2018) to providing high-quality services (Powell & Bromley, 2020). These expectations vary and are sometimes conflicting, and thus, they represent “a source of uncertainty” (Balsler & McClusky, 2005, p.296) and a concern for nonprofit professionals (Liu, 2012).

Like corporations and the government, “NGOs are not infallible,” (Burger & Owens, 2009, p. 1263). For the nonprofit sector, an alarming recent trend is an increase in cynical donors. According to a recent report (Giv.org, 2018), although the majority of Americans said trusting a nonprofit is important when making donation decisions, only 19% of the respondents said they highly trusted charities and only 10% believed that the nonprofit sector is becoming more trustworthy. This increasing cynicism toward the nonprofit sector is pertinent to the declining trust in all social institutions, increasing media coverage of nonprofit scandals, aggressive fundraising activities, excessive administration expenses, and lack of transparency in disclosing funding sources (AL-Tabbaa et al., 2013; Edelman, 2020; Sisco, 2012)

Cynicism can be traced back to ancient Greek philosophy. Ancient Greek cynics who strictly adhered to ethics and morality criticized materialism, and advocated for an alienation from fame, wealth, and power (Navia, 1996; Andersson, 1996). Contemporarily, cynicism describes the negativity toward sincerity, goodness, and selflessness in human motives and actions (Kanter & Mirvis, 1989). Research on cynicism is of interdisciplinary interest but the concept has been defined in different ways (Stanley, Meyer, & Topolnytsky, 2005). Although it is difficult to agree on a universal definition, there is general consensus that cynicism is a multidimensional concept consisting of belief, affect, and behavioral components (Dean, Branders, & Dharwadkar, 1998).

Andersson (1996) defined cynicism as “both a general and specific attitude, characterized by frustration, hopelessness, and disillusionment, as well as contempt



toward and distrust of a person, group, ideology, social convention, or institution” (p. 1398). Cynicism is also defined as a moral dimension involving “stronger levels of distrust and hostile impugning and vilification of the motives of another person” (Turner & Valentine, 2001, p. 128). Stanley et al. (2005) defined the cognitive component of cynicism as “disbelief of another’s stated or implied motives for a decision or action” (p. 436). In addition, cynicism has been identified as a behavioral tendency to engage in critical and disparaging expressions (Kim, Bateman, Gilbreath, & Andersson, 2009).

Scholars also have distinguished social cynicism (Leung & Bond, 2004) from personality cynicism (Abraham, 2000). As Li, Zhou, and Leung (2011) explained, personality cynicism is “defined by beliefs about oneself”, whereas social cynicism is “defined purely by beliefs about other people and social institution” (p. 340). Social cynicism, also known as societal cynicism, represents a biased view of some social groups, a mistrust of social institutions, and a disregard of ethical ways of achieving an end (Leung & Bond, 2004; Leung, Ip, & Leung, 2010; Leung, Lee, & Zhou, 2012). It involves relatively stable and learned attitudes with a negative valence (Abraham, 2000). Andersson (1996) viewed social cynicism as a result of a social contract breach between the individual and society. In this regard, social or institutional cynicism evolves from disconfirmation of expectations that people hold for the target (Abraham, 2000; Dean et al., 1998) to expressing distrust, disappointment, or feelings of betrayal (Dean et al., 1998; Kanter & Mirvis, 1989).

Previous literature has identified several types of social cynicism targeting specific social institutions. For example, business cynicism refers to individuals’

predisposed suspicion of business entities (Helm, Moulard, & Richins, 2015; Rim & Kim, 2016). Political cynicism is “a lack of faith or trust in politics, governmental institutions, or politicians” (Schenck-Hamlin, Procter, & Rumsey, 2000, p.55). This study focuses on sector-specific social cynicism reflecting publics’ worldview toward the nonprofit sector. Nonprofit cynicism indicates a lack of confidence in and a feeling of distrust toward the nonprofit sector, including institutions and practitioners (Furieux & Wymer, 2015), which can be derived from an individual’s knowledge of or experience with nonprofits in general (Abraham, 2000), instead of toward a specific organization.

The social exchange dynamic between nonprofits and their publics is like what is in the market exchange paradigm. While the proliferation of the nonprofit sector has made nonprofits more business-like, it may violate people’s expectations of what nonprofits should look like and induce resentment and anger toward nonprofits’ fundraising appeals (Gaskin, 1999). As a threatening factor to the nonprofit sector, nonprofit cynicism has led people to question NPOs’ fundraising motives, doubt the worthiness of NPOs, and scrutinize charity fraud and malpractice (Gaskin, 1999), which could, consequently, reduce individual donations (Meer, Miller, & Wulfsberg, 2017).

Previous research has consistently supported that social cynicism leads to negative interpersonal trust and less cognitive flexibility (Andersson & Bateman, 1997; Singelis, Hubbard, Her, & An, 2003). Cynicism represents people’s predisposition to impede moral and helping behavior (Turner & Valentine, 2001). For example, Andersson and Bateman (1997) found that cynical employees tended to be less engaged in organizational citizenship activities. Thus, both scholars and practitioners have warned

that the growing cynicism reflects a hostile sociocultural context for fundraising activities, which is harmful to the sustainability and development of the nonprofit sector (Bennett, 2017; Stavrova & Ehlebracht, 2015).

Communication scholars have also noted that nonprofits are built on their accumulated social capital (Shumate et al., 2016), and the external sociocultural environment shapes and restricts how nonprofit communication is practiced (Liu, 2012). A survey with public relations professionals revealed that overcoming public cynicism is a primary concern in communication work (National Association of Government Communicators, 2008). As a specific type of social cynicism, nonprofit cynicism is particularly relevant to the success of charitable fundraising endeavors. However, it has not been thoroughly studied in the context of nonprofit communication, and it remains unclear how nonprofits should strategically disclose partnership information in response to such increasing stakeholder pressure.

### **CHAPTER 3. HYPOTHESES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

Wassmer posited that the outcomes of a multiple-partner collaboration “essentially depend on how efficiently an alliance portfolio is configured” (p. 151). This research conceptualizes partnership portfolio configurations as information cues that are visible to individual publics (Yang & Ji, 2019) and are used by individuals to form social perceptions of the focal nonprofit (Crane, 2020; Groza et al., 2012). This research takes a social psychological approach to examine the effects of a nonprofit’s partnership portfolio configuration. The following sections discuss the theoretical underpinnings explaining the effects of portfolio size and portfolio diversification and the relevant research supporting the development of hypotheses and research questions.

#### **Theory Explaining the Effect of Portfolio Size: Social Proofing**

This study predicts that partnership portfolio size will have positive effects on public evaluations because a large number of cross-sector partners leads to social-proof consensus on a nonprofit’s quality. This prediction is built on a social influence heuristic: social proof. The social proof heuristic suggests that when people cannot determine how to behave correctly, they tend to follow the norm created by a majority of others and use their behaviors as a reference to reduce ambiguity (e.g., Burnkrant & Cousineau, 1975; Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004; Cialdini, Wosinska, Barrett, Butner, & Gornic-Durose, 1999). The behavior of many others creates a consensual endorsement, which is further used as a modeling reference to determine a person’s appropriate behaviors, especially in uncertain situations (Cialdini, 1993; Cialdini & Trost, 1998; Goldstein, Cialdini, & Griskevicius, 2008). When little conscious thought is devoted to the evaluation process,

consensus created by other external sources can serve as a heuristic, providing a default answer to decision making (Conway & Schaller, 2005). In other words, using a social proof heuristic seems to be a method to simplify cognitive information processing.

The effects of social proofing have been examined in various social contexts, including consumer cooperative behavior (e.g., Goldstein et al., 2008), product evaluations (e.g., Cohen & Golden, 1972), online shopping (e.g., Moe & Schweidel, 2012), and online information processing (Metzger, Flanagin, & Medders, 2010). For example, consumers use other consumers' testimonials to make informed purchase decisions when shopping online (Amblee & Bui, 2011). Metzger et al. (2010) found that aggregated testimonials, reviews, or ratings from other online shoppers help individuals evaluate the trustworthiness of the source, regardless of the information content or the source itself.

In terms of supportive behaviors, research shows that individuals' conformity to charitable solicitations is influenced by the prosocial behaviors of others (Gerber, Hui, & Kuo, 2012; Shearman & Yoo, 2007). Reingen (1982) tested the effects of informational social influence tactics in donation requests and found that showing a list of other donors before requesting a donation improved the compliance rate. In addition, the compliance was stronger when a longer list of other donors was presented. In a similar vein, in their field study on donation solicitation, Shearman and Yoo (2007) found that a message stating "many others have made donations" significantly improved the compliance rate compared to a simple request for donations.

The social proofing heuristic is also applicable to organizational endorsers. Ruth and Simonin (2006) suggested that a list of brand sponsors may serve as a signal about an event and its quality. Although Herlin (2015) warned that extensive collaborations with corporations may jeopardize the legitimacy and independence of a nonprofit in CSR partnerships, it is important to note that these concerns were expressed by nonprofit managers and employees who had developed a deep relationship and strong identification with the organization. If general publics have not heard about a nonprofit before, they may rely on the available social proof heuristics to develop perceptions and evaluations of the organization. Since business entities are usually perceived as being more competent than nonprofits (Aaker, Vohs, & Mogilner, 2010), their endorsement would convince people that this nonprofit is worthy of support.

Based on the social proof heuristic, this study argues that in the context of cross-sector partnerships, a large partnership demonstrates a high level of consensus that the nonprofit has positive qualities, can be trusted, and is safe to support. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

**H1:** A large partnership portfolio, as compared to a small one, will lead to a) higher trust of the NPO, b) more favorable attitudes toward the NPO, and c) higher intention to support the NPO.

### **Theories Explaining the Effect of Portfolio Diversification: Categorization Theory and Cognitive Inconsistency**

This study predicts that partnership portfolio diversification, in both industry and organization type, will have negative effects on public evaluations due to inconsistency in

categorizing multiple partnership information. The perception of portfolio diversification is based on the evaluation of the similarity between salient attributes of the nonprofit's partners (Gammoh et al., 2010; Pappu & Cornwell, 2014). People may only evaluate limited salient attributes due to the countless features associated with the objects and constraints of knowledge, capacity, time, and motivation (Pappu & Conwell, 2014). Thus, individuals need to rely on mechanisms to simplify their cognitive processing, and consistency is one of these mechanisms (Shaver, 1975).

Categorization theory suggests that people rely on meaningful categorization or mental schemas to organize information more efficiently (Loken Barsalou, & Joiner, 2008). A categorical representation is defined as "information that becomes stored in the cognitive system for a consumer category, and that is later used to process it" (Loken et al., 2008, p. 133), which serve as a "simplification heuristic" (Cobbs, Groza, & Rich, 2016, p. 10). Through the categorization process, information is classified into mental schemas based on the perceived similarity or distinctiveness. For example, individuals will place two or more brands into the same category or schema if they share salient similarity. Otherwise, if the brands are placed in separate schemas, brand extension fails. Shaver (1975) framed the process of categorization as "an interchange between the existing cognitive category and new information that is received" (p. 15). This means an earlier-formed category will shape later input. Once a phenomenon is categorized, a confirmatory bias reinforces the original categorization (Dutton & Jackson, 1987).

Cognitive consistency plays an important role in the process of categorization. The attributes associated with the earlier-formed category can screen out relevant

information and then be added to information that is consistent with the existing category (Dutton & Jackson, 1987). Thus, consistency facilitates the categorization of multiple corporate allies in a partnership portfolio as similar information can be easily grouped into the existing mental schema, which reduces cognitive efforts in information processing. In contrast, when there is inconsistency, it requires more cognitive effort to place the dissimilar information into separate mental schemas.

In a partnership portfolio, multiple alliances have a collective effect on information processing (Chien, Cornwell, & Stokes, 2005). Individuals can use categorical representations to organize the multiple-partner information in a meaningful manner and would prefer that the process is smooth and less complicated (Dutton & Jackson, 1987; Loken, Barsalou, & Joiner, 2008). In our case, when an NPO is affiliated with a homogeneous (less diverse) group of partners, publics have less complex information from which to form evaluations of the focal nonprofit. However, in a heterogeneous (high-diverse) condition, since each partner is from a distinctive industry or social sector, individuals need to work harder to assimilate new information into the existing knowledge structure. Since a partnership portfolio includes more than two partners, if an additional partner shows strong dissimilarity with the existing one(s), it may enhance the unpleasant experience of cognitive disfluency, and thereby trigger negative thoughts and feelings.

Wassmer (2010) argued that alliance portfolios often involve “a mixed bag of individual alliances,” which may fail to convey a coherent and consistent message (p. 148). Loken and John (1993) also warned that brand extension may lead to brand



dilution. Since high diversification increases information inconsistency in the partnership portfolio, it may dilute the core identity of the nonprofit and trigger confusion about what it represents (Henderson, Iacobucci, & Calder, 1998). For example, given the controversies around nonprofit-business partnerships, as discussed in the literature review chapter, publics may suspect that business industry diversification is a sign that the nonprofit is nonselective in taking money from businesses, and thus question the integrity of the nonprofit and negatively perceive the nonprofit. In the case of organization type diversification, the nonprofit, business, and government partners are drastically different in function and identity, and each represents exclusive social resources. Processing information about partners of heterogeneous organization types is likely to increase cognitive inconsistency as individuals need to work harder to rationalize the alliances.

Research on brand extension found that having homogeneous product brands provides a better diagnostic cue about the parent corporation, which improves consumers' evaluations of the parent corporation (Dacin & Smith, 1994). Following this logic, a homogeneous portfolio in industry and organization type would make an NPO's positioning in the alliances clearer and more salient (Shumate et al., 2016). Individuals may positively evaluate a nonprofit if they see that the nonprofit is dedicated to influencing corporate behaviors in a certain area or addressing social problems with a certain type of social player. Thus, regarding the effect of portfolio diversification (i.e., industry and organization type) the following hypotheses are proposed:

**H2:** A heterogeneous partnership portfolio in business industry, as compared to a homogenous one, will lead to a) lower trust of the NPO, b) less favorable attitudes toward the NPO, and c) lower intention to support the NPO.

**H3:** A heterogeneous partnership portfolio in organization type, as compared to a homogenous one, will lead to a) lower trust of the NPO, b) less favorable attitudes toward the NPO, and c) lower intention to support the NPO.

### **Interaction between Nonprofit Cynicism and Portfolio Size**

This study proposes that nonprofit cynicism interacts with the cross-sector partnership portfolio size to affect public evaluations. Nonprofit cynicism is an individual psychological status showing a stable negative propensity toward the nonprofit sector in general. A person's existing cognitive structure affects the external information the person receives and is affected by it (Kelley & Michela, 1980). The impact of information cues may be weakened when it conflicts with an individual's prior expectations about the target. The impact can also be strengthened when the information cue is consistent with the individual's existing beliefs. Thus, depending on each individual's cynicism level, the effects of portfolio size on public evaluations may vary.

Previous research has consistently supported that social cynicism leads to negative interpersonal trust and cognitive flexibility (Andersson & Bateman, 1997; Singelis, Hubbard, Her, & An, 2003). Cynicism also impedes an individual's predisposition toward moral and helping behavior (Turner & Valentine, 2001). These negative associations suggest that cynicism is an underlying psychological state that triggers less favorable attitudes about charitable activities. Fein (1996) posited that

heightened suspicion evokes greater cognitive elaboration in a negative manner (Tao & Ferguson, 2015). With a negative view of the nonprofit sector, cynical people are less likely to trust, favor, or support a specific nonprofit that is unfamiliar to them.

Cynical people will also pay closer attention to a nonprofit's alliances with corporations and other social entities. The more partners that an NPO has, the more involved the NPO is in cross-sector activities that are beyond the ordinary scope of a nonprofit's operations, and thus, these activities may be perceived as a greater contradiction to the NPO's social identity niche. A large number of partners also means that the NPO has scarcer resources, which may be seen as a greater potential for financial misconduct. Thus, these hostile feelings toward the NPO may diminish or even backfire against the social proof effects granted by the cross-sector partners. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed.

**H4:** Nonprofit cynicism interacts with portfolio size to affect individuals' a) trust, b) attitude, and c) supportive intention toward the NPO. The positive effect of portfolio size would diminish as the level of nonprofit cynicism increases.

#### **Interaction between Nonprofit Cynicism and Portfolio Diversification**

As discussed earlier, a highly diverse portfolio is likely to generate more negative responses due to heightened inconsistency in the cognitive processing than a less diverse portfolio. In contrast, when individuals are not strongly cynical about the nonprofit sector, they are likely to have more positive attitudes about an NPO's diverse collaborative activities and be less sensitive about the inconsistency in partner selection. Consequently, a lower cynicism level diminishes the difference in public evaluations of

the NPO between high and low diversification conditions. In contrast, cynicism would trigger stronger sensitivity to inconsistencies in NPO partnership information, which can worsen the negative effects of the portfolio heterogeneity. As a result, the difference between public responses may be enlarged when the person has strong cynicism toward the nonprofit sector. Accordingly, the following hypotheses are proposed:

**H5:** Nonprofit cynicism interacts with industry diversification to affect individuals' a) trust, b) attitude, and c) supportive intention toward the NPO. The negative effect of industry diversification would be intensified as the level of nonprofit cynicism increases.

**H6:** Nonprofit cynicism interacts with organization type diversification to affect individuals' a) trust, b) attitude, and c) supportive intention toward the NPO.

The negative effect of organization type diversification would be intensified as the level of nonprofit cynicism increases.

### **Research Questions**

To realize the full potential of partnership portfolios, it is important to examine the combination of different portfolio configurations. Wassmer (2010) proposed that portfolio size alone does not determine the benefits to the focal organization. To understand the impacts of the full picture of portfolio, other configuration factors need to be included and their interaction effects should be examined. Both the size and diversification of CSR partnership portfolios, which can be observed and evaluated by publics (e.g., Gammoh et al., 2010; Ruth & Simonin, 2006), are important configurations (e.g., Dacin & Smith, 1994; Gammoh et al., 2010; Mishra et al., 2017; Ruth & Simonin, 2006).

Together, these two aspects of a portfolio configuration indicate the scope and embeddedness of a nonprofit's cross-sector network and can be observed simultaneously. Thus, it is likely that these two aspects of portfolio configurations have a joint impact on the communication outcomes. In addition, a more complete portfolio communication strategy may interact with nonprofit cynicism to influence public evaluations. Given that limited research is available, this study proposes research questions to explore the interaction effects between the configurations of cross-sector portfolios, as well as their interactions with nonprofit cynicism on public evaluations of the nonprofit.

In the context of N2B partnerships, this study focuses on portfolio size and industry diversification and proposes the following research questions:

**RQ1:** How does partnership portfolio size interact with industry diversification to influence publics' a) trust, b) attitude, and c) supportive intention toward the NPO?

**RQ2:** How does the interaction among partnership portfolio size, industry diversification, and nonprofit cynicism influence publics' a) trust, b) attitude, and c) supportive intention toward the NPO?

In the context of tripartite partnerships, this study focuses on the portfolio size and organization type diversification and proposes the following research questions:

**RQ3:** How does partnership portfolio size interact with organization type diversification to influence publics' a) trust, b) attitude, and c) supportive intention toward the NPO?

**RQ4:** How does the interaction among partnership portfolio size, organization type diversification, and nonprofit cynicism influence publics' a) trust, b) attitude, and c) supportive intention toward the NPO?

In the following chapters, Hypotheses 1, 2, 4, and 5 and RQs 1 and 2 will be addressed in Study 1, which focuses on a nonprofit's partnerships with businesses. Hypotheses 1, 3, 4, and 6, as well as RQs 3 and 4 will be addressed in Study 2, which is contextualized in a nonprofit's tripartite partnerships.

## CHAPTER 4. STUDY 1: NONPROFIT-BUSINESS PARTNERSHIP

Study 1 focuses on the cross-sector collaborations between a nonprofit and businesses (N2B partnerships). The goal of this study is twofold. First, it examines the effects of two partnership portfolio configurations, size, and industry diversification on individual publics' trust, attitude, and intention to support the partnered nonprofit. Second, it examines the interaction effects between nonprofit cynicism and the two N2B partnership portfolio configurations on the publics' evaluations of the nonprofit. Specifically, Study 1 tests H1, H2, H4, and H5 and answers RQs 1 and RQ2.

An experimental design is appropriate for this study as it can demonstrate causal relationships between the independent and dependent variables (Campbell & Stanley, 1963). Study 1 employs a 2 (portfolio size: small vs. large) x 2 (industry diversification: low diverse vs. high diverse) between-subject design, with a control group that does not present any partnership-related information. N2B partnership *portfolio size* and *industry diversification* were independent variables and manipulated. *Nonprofit cynicism* was treated as a measured variable.

This chapter first describes the sample, data collection, and experimental procedure for the main experiment. Then, the pretests and stimuli development are explained in detail. Next, the measurement items are articulated, and data analysis and results are reported. Last, a discussion of the results is provided.

### Method

**Sample and Data Collection.** The participants of the main study were recruited from Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) with \$1 incentive per person. MTurk is an

online marketplace that allows businesses and researchers to reach out to participants to complete tasks that require human intelligence. Researchers can register as “requesters” to recruit MTurk workers to complete human intelligence tasks (HITs) and provide monetary incentives for their participation (Amazon Mechanical Turk, n.d.). Currently, MTurk offers access to over 500,000 different workers from 190 countries, and most of them are based in the U.S. (McDuffie, 2019). Although MTurk has limitations (e.g., seasoned research participants, low incentives), it remains a widely used participant recruitment application in social science and public relations research (Berinsky, Huber, & Lenz, 2012; Lee & Rim, 2017). Scholars have suggested the appropriateness of using MTurk samples due to its cost efficiency, reliable data quality, and better geographical representation of the U.S. general population as compared to using student samples (Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011; Mason & Suri, 2012). To enhance the external validity of this study and consider the pragmatic limitations, the author chose to use MTurk to recruit participants.

To further improve the data quality on MTurk, the main study followed the guidelines of previous research (e.g., Mason & Suri, 2012) and required qualified participants to be U.S.-based, to have obtained a 98% and higher approval rate of HITs, and to not have completed any of the pretests to prevent potential biases. Each participant was only allowed to take the survey once. In addition, to ensure that participants were paying attention to the questions, two attention check items were included. The first one was incorporated at an early stage of the survey, asking participants to recall the social



cause of the given NPO. The second one was incorporated at the middle stage of the survey to filter out participants paying inadequate attention to the questions.

A total of 173 participants took the survey from March 9 to 10, 2020 and 151 participants completed the whole survey. After removing responses for not passing the attention checks (n=15), straight lining (n=5), and outliers of stimuli exposure time (n=2), only 129 responses remained in the analytical sample. Given this small size sample, an additional round data of collection was conducted on April 8. A total of 36 participants took the survey and 28 completed the survey. Among them, 3 responses were removed for not passing the attention checks. Thus, the final analytical sample included 154 responses. The average time to complete the survey was 7.90 minutes ( $SD = 272.46$  seconds). Table 1 shows the cell sizes of the experimental conditions.

Table 1. *Study 1: Experimental Conditions and Cell Sizes*

<b>Experimental Condition</b>	<b>N</b>
Small size + low diverse	30
Small size + high diverse	31
Large size + low diverse	31
Large size + high diverse	28
Control group (no partner)	34
Total	154

**Participants.** Among the participants, 48.7% (n = 75) were male, 50.0 % (n = 77) were female, and two participants preferred to not disclose their gender. The average age was 32.24 ( $SD = 11.13$ ). More than half of the participants were White (68.2%), had an associate or bachelor's degree (56.5 %), and had an annual household income below \$74,

999 (61.0 %). Table 2 illustrates the descriptive statistics of the demographic information in Study 1.

Table 2. *Study 1: Descriptive Statistics of Demographic Information.*

		N = 154	
<b>Age</b>		33.21 (SD=10.11)	
		n	%
<b>Gender</b>	Male	75	48.7
	Female	77	50.0
	Prefer not to answer	2	1.3
<b>Race</b>	White	105	68.2
	Hispanic or Latino	21	13.6
	Black or African American	10	6.5
	Native American or American Indian	3	1.9
	Asian / Pacific Islander	12	7.8
	Other	2	1.3
	Prefer not to answer	1	.6
<b>Household income</b>	Less than \$10,000	7	4.5
	\$10,000 to \$24,999	14	9.1
	\$25,000 to \$49,999	33	21.4
	\$50,000 to \$74,999	40	26.0
	\$75,000 to \$99,999	28	18.2
	\$100,000 to \$149,999	16	10.4
	\$150,000 or more	8	5.2
	Prefer not to answer	8	5.2
<b>Education</b>	No schooling completed	0	0
	Some high school, no diploma	1	.6
	High school graduate, diploma or the equivalent	33	21.4
	Associate degree	17	11.0
	Bachelor's degree	70	45.5
	Master's degree	25	16.2
	Professional degree	2	1.3
	Doctorate degree	5	3.2
	Prefer not to answer	1	.6

**Experimental Procedure.** Participants were recruited from MTurk and directed to Qualtrics to take the survey. After completing the consent form, participants were asked to indicate their general perceptions toward the nonprofit sector (nonprofit cynicism). Then, all participants were exposed to the homepage of an NPO. In this phase, the participants were asked to read a brief mission statement of the NPO and then to complete an attention check question by recalling the social cause of the NPO they just read about. Those who selected the correct answer were able to continue the survey and were further randomly assigned to one of the designed conditions.

After exposure to stimuli materials, participants were asked to answer a questionnaire administering the measures of the manipulation check items, dependent variables (i.e., trust, attitude, supportive intention), and covariates (e.g., personal relevance, prior nonprofit support). Participants in the control group were directed to the questionnaire measuring the dependent variables and covariates. Attitude and trust toward each industry were measured by all participants. Demographic information was collected toward the end of the survey. Finally, participants were debriefed and thanked.

**Stimuli Development.** A series of pretests was conducted to select the nonprofit cause, create a fictitious NPO, manipulate the portfolio size and industry diversification, and develop stimuli materials for the main study.

*Selecting social causes and creating a fictitious NPO.* Instead of using a real NPO, this study used a fictitious NPO in the stimuli to avoid potential confounding effects stemming from prior knowledge of and associations with the focal nonprofit. To ensure a basic level of engagement with the stimuli, the selected social cause should be

perceived as generally important and personally relevant to the general public. To avoid confounding effects induced by biased opinions about certain social issues, the selected cause should be perceived as generally positive and less controversial. In addition, the selected social cause should engage in N2B partnerships in reality, thereby ensuring reasonable external validity.

To satisfy these selection criteria, a pretest was conducted using an online survey ( $n = 37$ ) on MTurk with an incentive of \$.75 (for each person). Participants were told to give opinions about ten different social issues. A list of ten common nonprofit causes were generated from existing documents and literature (Cone Communications, 2009; GuideStar, n.d.; Shumate et al., 2016), including 1) animal welfare, 2) arts & culture, 3) education, 4) environment, 5) health, 6) human services, 7) international, 8) public, societal, benefits, 9) religion, and 10) women, children, and youth. Following GuideStar's Directory of Charities and Nonprofit Organizations (GuideStar, n.d.), a short description was created for each cause. These ten social causes were randomly presented to participants to reduce ordering effects.

After reading a short description, the participants were asked to rate their familiarity with the cause, attitude toward the cause, cause importance, personal relevance, and perceived cause controversy. Familiarity with the cause was measured by a single item on a seven-point Likert scale, "I am familiar with this social cause" (1=strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree). Their attitude toward the cause was measured by three items using bi-polar semantic scales, "(dislike (1)/ like (7); unfavorable (1)/ favorable (7); negative (1)/ positive (7)). Personal relevance was asked by "To what

extent do you personally care about this nonprofit cause?" (not at all (1)/ very much (7)) (Nan & Heo, 2007). Perceived cause controversy was measured by asking "To what extent do you believe there is public disagreement about this nonprofit cause?" (no extent (1)/ great extent (7)) (Vahdati & Voss, 2019).

Animal welfare, environment, and health were ranked among the highest in familiarity, attitude, importance, and personal relevance. However, the environment was not selected because it was perceived as more controversial ( $M = 4.57$ ,  $SD = 2.75$ ) than the average score of all the causes (4.10). Animal welfare was not selected because of this issue sector's lower involvement in CSR. According to a recent study, nonprofits in the environmental, healthcare, and human service issue sectors were more active in reporting connections with businesses on their websites, whereas animal rights, education, and religious nonprofits were less active (Shumate & O'Connor, 2016). Health was perceived as less controversial ( $M = 3.68$ ,  $SD = 1.72$ ) than the average score of all courses (4.10). Taken together, health was a more appropriate cause for further stimuli development given its relatively high scores in familiarity, favorability, importance, personal relevance, and low score in perceived controversy. Thus, the fictitious NPOs were created in the healthcare issue sector.

A fictitious NPO, HealthyGen Action, was created, focusing on healthy eating and childhood obesity. Childhood obesity has been widely recognized as a major public health problem in the U.S. (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2019) and is a popular social issue supported by businesses (Wishman, Kraak, Liverman, & Koplan, 2007). Previous N2B partnership literature has also suggested that NGOs focusing on

providing services to improve children's lives are more likely to be included in cooperative relationships with corporations (O'Connor & Shumate, 2014). Thus, external validity was taken into consideration.

***Manipulation of N2B partnership portfolio size.*** In this study, the portfolio size was manipulated by varying the number of corporate partners included in the N2B partnership portfolio. It is important to note that the perceived portfolio size is subjective to individuals' perceptions and can vary depending on the context. The challenge of manipulating the portfolio size is to maintain a good balance between internal and external validity. Three selection criteria were used: 1) the perceived portfolio size between small- and large-size conditions should show significant statistical differences; 2) the portfolio sizes should reflect the NPOs' common involvement in CSR activities; and 3) selection of the portfolio size should consider the feasibility of manipulating diversification because this study was intended to manipulate both size and industry diversification in a single stimuli.

Previous research has provided guidelines to determine the portfolio size. According to O'Connor and Shumate (2014), NPOs with four or more business ties are considered prominent NPOs in N2B networks. Previous marketing and brand alliance literature on sponsorship size (Chien et al., 2011; Groza et al., 2012), brand alliance size (Gammoh et al., 2010), and event roster size (Ruth & Simonin, 2006) have used one or two organizations to show a smaller portfolio size and have used five or ten organizations to indicate a larger portfolio size. However, there has been no formal manipulation check on the portfolio size. Therefore, two pretests were conducted to help determine the

appropriate number of businesses to include in the small and large N2B partnership portfolios.

The first pretest used a student sample of 219 undergraduates recruited from the Hubbard School of Journalism and Mass Communication's SONA system. Students received extra credit for participation. After signing the consent form, participants were presented with a mission statement of a fictitious NPO (HealthGen Action). They were then randomly assigned to one of eight conditions showing zero, two, three, four, five, six, eight, or ten corporate partners. The manipulation message for portfolio size stated, "HealthyGen Action believes dynamic corporate partnerships are essential to improve breast cancer awareness and prevention. We are now collaborating with  $X$  corporate partners who share our vision and demonstrate an enduring commitment to fighting breast cancer."

The perceived partnership portfolio size was measured using three items adapted and modified from previous research (Bruhn & Holzer, 2015), including "This NPO's engagement with businesses is very extensive," "This NPO collaborates with many businesses," and "This NPO has a large business network" ( $M = 4.95$ ,  $SD = 1.16$ ,  $\alpha = .85$ ). A one-way ANOVA test showed that the perceived N2B partnership portfolio differed significantly across the eight conditions ( $F(7, 211) = 6.92$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The results from the Tukey post-hoc test further revealed that the N2B portfolio size of the two-business condition was perceived as significantly lower than the five-businesses condition ( $p < .001$ ), six-businesses condition ( $p < .001$ ), eight-businesses condition ( $p$

< .05), and ten-businesses condition ( $p < .001$ ). Therefore, a N2B partnership portfolio consisting of *two* companies can be considered small.

To further identify the conditions for a large partnership portfolio size, a follow-up pretest was conducted with 80 participants recruited from MTurk, with a \$0.5 reward for participation (per person). Participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions showing two, five, six, or eight corporate partners. This time, the partnership information was visualized in a work-in-progress webpage. Participants were told that on the webpage, each blank circle represented a corporate partner, and since the web page was still under development, the company logos would be inserted in the circles later. Following Ruth and Simonin's (2006) guidelines, this approach ensures a relatively pure manipulation of the number of partners and reduces brand-related associations with real companies.

The results from a one-way ANOVA test showed consistent patterns to the first pretest. The perceived N2B partnership portfolio size differed significantly across the four conditions ( $F(3, 76) = 18.88, p < .001$ ). The results from the Tukey post-hoc test further revealed that the N2B portfolio size of the two-partner condition was perceived as significantly smaller than the five-partner condition ( $p < .001$ ), the six-partner condition ( $p < .001$ ), and the eight-partner condition ( $p < .001$ ), whereas, there was no statistical difference among the five-, six-, and eight-partner conditions. In other words, partnership portfolios with five, six, and eight partners were perceived as similarly large, and they were comparably larger than a portfolio with only two partners. Considering the



feasibility of manipulating industry diversification in the portfolio, the author decided to use *eight* partners to indicate a large portfolio size.

***Manipulation of industry diversification.*** Industry diversification was manipulated by varying the corporate partners' business industries in the portfolio. The following two selection criteria should be met. First, an extremely high or low cause-business fit can trigger negative feelings or skepticism toward the partnership (Cornwell et al., 2005; Du et al., 2010). Thus, the selected business industries should be a neutral fit with the NPO's cause. Second, to reduce the confounding effects from industry-associated attributes, the selected business industries should maintain neutral attitude and trust.

A pretest was conducted with 29 participants recruited from MTurk, with a \$0.4 reward for participation (per person). Participants were asked to rate a list of business industries in terms of cause-business fit, attitude toward the business, and trust in the business. A total of 17 industries were presented in random order. The business industries were chosen based on the Fortune 500 business sector categories, previous literature on health nonprofits' connections with businesses (Shumate et al., 2016), as well as the websites of major healthcare nonprofits (e.g., Feed America, PATH). The following industries were removed: industries that were rated extremely low (e.g., Motor vehicle and parts) and high (e.g., Food products & services) in fit; industries with very low (e.g., Pharmaceutical) and high attitude (e.g., Computer & electronic products); and those with low trust (e.g., Financial services). Finally, eight heterogeneous industries were selected

for further development of stimuli: Retail, Medical device, Household products, Media, Telecommunications, Transportation, Apparel, and Hotels, casinos, and resorts.

*Creating NPOs' webpages.* After determining the social cause, business industries, and the number of business partners, five mock web pages were created, including one homepage and four partnership pages of the fictitious NPO (HealthyGen Action). The webpage design was a simplistic style and all pages were consistent in size, fonts, and text length. On the nonprofit's homepage, a short mission statement was provided, stating that, "HealthyGen Action is a tax-exempt nonprofit organization under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. Our mission is to promote healthy eating and fight against childhood obesity by providing access to physical activities, educational information, and healthier foods for children, families, and schools, especially in low-income communities and rural areas." Four fictitious webpages of an NGO named "Meet Our Partners" were designed to present the different combinations of partnership portfolio size and industry diversification (Table 3).

Table 3. *Study 1. Manipulations of Portfolio Size and Industry Diversification.*

Condition	Manipulations of portfolio size and industry diversification
C1: Small size + Low diverse (n = 30)	HealthyGen Action collaborates with <i>two</i> companies in the same industry ( <i>Retail</i> ).
C2: Small size + High diverse (n = 31)	HealthyGen Action collaborates with <i>two</i> companies in two different industries ( <i>Retail and Telecommunications</i> ).
C3: Large size + Low diverse (n = 31)	HealthyGen Action collaborates with <i>eight</i> companies in the same industry ( <i>Retail</i> ).
C4: Large size + High diverse (n = 28)	NPO collaborates with <i>eight</i> companies across different industries ( <i>Retail, Medical device, Household products, Media, Telecommunications, Transportation, Apparel, and Hotels, casinos, and resorts</i> )

### Measurements.

**Manipulation check items.** Perceived portfolio size was measured using the same items as in the pretest (Bruhn & Holzer, 2015) ( $M = 4.62$ ,  $SD = 1.45$ ,  $\alpha = .88$ ). Industry diversification was measured using a modified scale from Mishra et al.'s (2017) diversification index to best fit the objective of this study. Participants were asked to rate the extent to which the business industry of the NPO's partners did not vary (1)/ varies a lot (7); not different at all (1)/ very different (7); not diverse at all (1)/ very diverse (7) ( $M = 4.63$   $SD = 1.59$ ,  $\alpha = .92$ ).

**Moderator.** Nonprofit cynicism was operationalized as the extent to which the participants indicated cynicism toward charities and the nonprofit sector in general.

Seven items developed for social cynicism, organizational cynicism, and nonprofit literature were adopted and modified to measure nonprofit cynicism (Abraham, 2000; Bourassa & Stang, 2016; Leung et al., 2002; Sargeant, West, & Ford, 2001). Participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the statements, including “Charities/ NPOs will tell a lie if they can gain by it,” “Charities/ NPOs claim to have ethical standards, but few stick to them when money is at stake,” “Charities/ NPOs pretend to care more about social issues than they really do,” “Most charities/ NPOs are just out for themselves,” “Much of the money donated to charities/ NPOs is wasted,” “Many charities/ NPOs are dishonest,” “There seems to be a lot of corruption in charity collection and distribution.” All items were measured using a seven-point Likert-scale (1- strongly disagree, 7= strongly agree) ( $M = 3.97$ ,  $SD=1.46$ ,  $\alpha = .94$ ).

*Dependent variables.* Trust of the NPO was operationalized as trusting beliefs of the NPO’s integrity, benevolence, and competence (Gefen, 2002; McKnight et al., 2002; Meyer et al., 1995). Measurement scales were adopted and modified from previous research (Bhattacharjee, 2002; Grunig & Hon, 1999; Meyer et al., 1995; Sargeant et al., 2006). Participants were asked to indicate the level of agreement with several statements, including, “I would trust [NPO’s name] to always act in the best interest of the cause,” “[NPO’s name] seems to care about social benefits, not just its own interests,” “It seems [NPO’s name] would do its best to pursue its mission,” “I would trust [NPO’s name] to operate ethically,” “I would trust [NPO’s name] to use donated funds appropriately,” “I would trust [NPO’s name] not to exploit their donors,” “I would trust [NPO’s name] to use fundraising techniques that are appropriate,” “I feel very confident about [NPO’s

name] skills in fundraising,” “[NPO’s name] seems to have the ability to accomplish what it says it will do,” “[NPO’s name] seems competent and effective in promoting its cause.” All items were measured using a seven-point Likert-scale (1=strongly disagree, 7= strongly agree) ( $M = 5.10$ ,  $SD = .86$ ,  $\alpha = .91$ ).

Attitude toward the NPO was measured using four-item, seven-point semantic differentials, including “unpleasant/pleasant,” “unfavorable/favorable,” “negative/positive,” and “dislike/like” (MacKenzie & Lutz’s, 1989) ( $M = 5.36$ ,  $SD = 1.07$ ,  $\alpha = .83$ ).

Supportive intentions toward the NPO were measured using three items developed from previous research (Rim et al., 2016; Simmons & Becker-Olsen 2006). Participants were asked to indicate how likely they were to make donations to the NPO, volunteer for the NPO, and recommend the NPO to family and friends on a seven-point Likert scale (1=very unlikely, 7=very likely) ( $M = 4.09$ ,  $SD = 1.54$ ,  $\alpha = .90$ ).

**Covariates.** To exclude confounding factors that may influence individuals' charitable decisions and prosocial behaviors, this study controlled prior nonprofit support experience (Guo & Saxton, 2013) and personal relevance (Lee & Rim, 2017; Nan & Heo, 2007). Prior nonprofit support experience was measured by asking, “How often during the past 12 months have you supported (e.g., made donation(s), volunteered, helped with fundraising) charities or nonprofit organizations?” on a seven-point bipolar scale (not at all (1)/ very often (7)) ( $M = 4.29$ ,  $SD = 1.96$ ,  $\alpha = .87$ ). Personal relevance was measured by five items adopted from Zaichkowsky (1994): (unimportant (1)/ important (7), irrelevant (1)/ relevant; means nothing to me (1)/ means a lot to me (7); worthless (1)/

valuable (7); and uninvolved (1)/ involved (7)) ( $M = 5.61$ ,  $SD = 1.07$ ,  $\alpha = .88$ ). Previous research also found that demographics, such as income, education, and gender influence donation behaviors (Bekkers & Wiepking, 2011; Lee & Chang, 2007; Wang & Ashcraft, 2014). Thus, the demographic variables were considered as potential covariates.

### **Data Analysis and Results**

**Randomization Checks.** Before testing the hypotheses, a series of chi-square and ANOVA tests were conducted to examine the differences in covariates and demographic characteristics among the five conditions (four experimental conditions and one controlled condition). Some demographic variables were divided and coded into fewer categories because several cells had fewer than 5 participants. In particular, race was coded as a binary variable: white and non-white. Education was coded into three categories: “High school degree or below,” “Associate or some college degree,” and “Graduate degree.” Household income was coded into three categories: “\$24,999 or under,” “\$25,000 to under \$74,000,” and “\$75,000 or above.” Responses of preferred not to answer were coded as a missing value.

The results from the chi-square tests showed no significant differences in the demographic characteristics across the conditions regarding sex ( $\chi^2(8, 154) = 6.38$ ,  $p = .61$ ), race ( $\chi^2(4, 153) = 2.59$ ,  $p = .63$ ), education level ( $\chi^2(8, 153) = 10.55$ ,  $p = .23$ ), or household income ( $\chi^2(8, 146) = 13.77$ ,  $p = .09$ ). The results from the ANOVA tests showed no significant differences across conditions regarding age ( $p = .33$ ), personal relevance ( $p = .11$ ), or prior nonprofit support experience ( $p = .56$ ). Attitude and trust toward each industry were not significantly different across the conditions (all  $p$  values  $>$ .

05). The randomization was considered successful because none of these variables were significantly different among the experimental conditions. Thus, no covariate was included in testing the hypotheses and RQs.

**Manipulation Checks.** Perceived portfolio size was rated as significantly larger in the large size condition ( $M = 5.29, SD = 1.19$ ) than in the small size condition ( $M = 3.97, SD = 1.38$ ),  $F(1, 117) = 32.03, p < .001$ . Perceived industry diversification was rated as significantly more diverse when the presented partners were from different industries ( $M = 5.50, SD = 1.09$ ) than within the same industry ( $M = 3.81, SD = 1.57$ ),  $F(1, 117) = 45.51, p < .001$ . Therefore, the manipulations worked as intended.

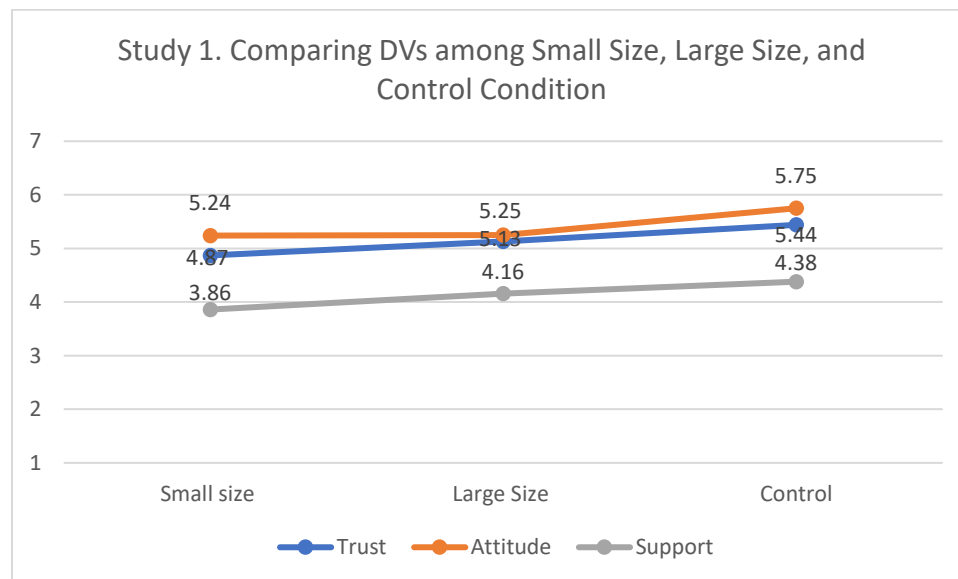
#### **Testing Hypotheses and RQs.**

H1 hypothesized that a large partnership portfolio, as compared to a small one, would lead to a) higher trust of the NPO, b) more favorable attitudes toward the NPO, and c) higher intention to support the NPO. This hypothesis was first tested using a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA). Portfolio size was coded into 2 levels (0= small, 1= large). The results showed nonsignificant overall main effects of N2B partnership portfolio size on the combined dependent variables (Table 4). Although the means of trust, attitude, and intention to support were lower in the small size condition than the large size condition (Table 5), for each independent variable, a series of ANOVA tests showed these differences were not significant ( $ps > .05$ ) Thus, H1 was not supported.

However, further comparison of the two portfolio size conditions with the control condition indicated significant differences in trust ( $F(2, 151) = 5.21, p < .01, \eta_p^2 = .07$ )

and attitude ( $F(2, 151) = 3.09, p < .05, \eta_p^2 = .04$ ) toward the NPO. Specifically, nonprofit trust was rated significantly higher in the control condition than the small size condition ( $M_{\text{difference}} = .57, p < .01$ ) (Figure 1).

Figure 1. *Study 1: Comparing DVs among Small Size, Large Size, and Control Condition.*



H2 predicted that a partnership portfolio showing heterogeneous business industries, as compared to a homogenous one, would lead to lower public trust in the NPO, b) less favorable attitudes toward the NPO, and d) lower intention to support the NPO. Industry diversification was coded as (0 = low diverse, 1 = high diverse). The results of the MANOVA test showed that the main effect of industry diversification on the combined dependent variables was insignificant (Table 4). The results from the series of ANOVA tests indicated that there was no statistical difference between the homogeneous and heterogeneous conditions in trust ( $p = .20$ ), attitude ( $p = .56$ ), or intention to support the NPO ( $p = .19$ ) (Table 5). Thus, H2 was not supported.



However, further comparison with the control condition indicated trust ( $F(2, 151) = 4.62, p < .05, \eta_p^2 = .06$ ) and attitude ( $F(2, 151) = 3.29, p < .05, \eta_p^2 = .04$ ) differed significantly across the three conditions (Figure 2). Specifically, the NPO was more trusted and favored when no partnership information was disclosed than for the low diverse N2B partnership portfolio,  $M_{trust\ diff} = .54, p < .01; M_{attitude\ diff} = .57, p < .05$ .

Figure 2. Study 1: Comparing DVs among Low Diverse, High Diverse, and Control Condition.

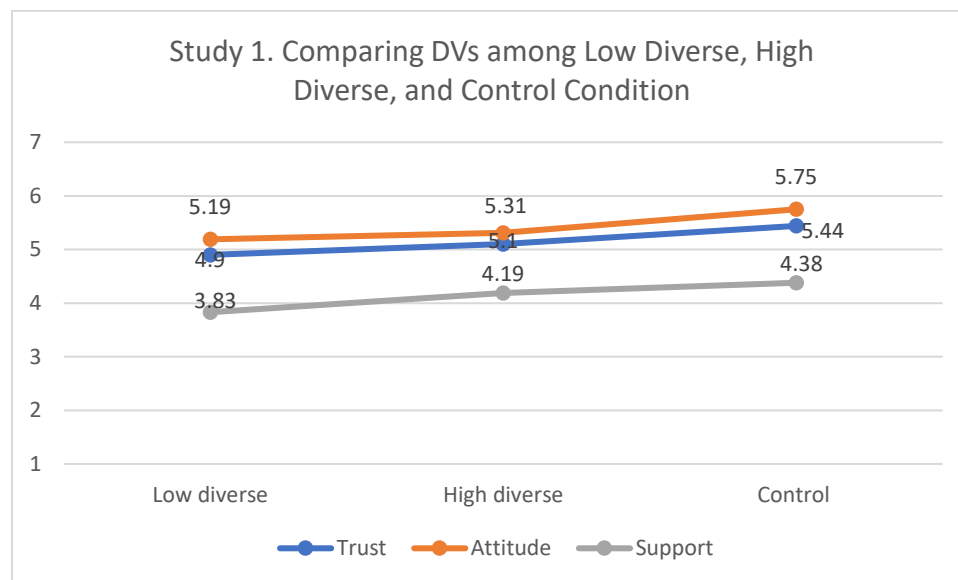


Table 4. *Multivariate Analysis of Variance on Combined Dependent Variables.*

Independent variable	Wilks's $\lambda$	<i>df</i>	Error <i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	$\eta_p^2$
Portfolio size (Size)	.95	3	114	1.89	.05
Industry diversification (ID)	.98	3	114	.84	.02
Size x ID	.99	3	114	.42	.01

*Note.* Participants who were not exposed to any partnership information (control condition) were not included for analysis.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

Table 5. *Main Effects of Partnership Portfolio Size and Industry Diversification on Each Dependent Variable.*

DV	Small size (n = 61)	Large size (n = 59)	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	$\eta_p^2$
Trust	4.87 (.82)	5.13 (.86)	2.81	1	.02
Attitude	5.24 (1.08)	5.25 (1.14)	.00	1	.00
Support	3.86 (1.40)	4.16 (1.58)	1.17	1	.01
	Homogeneous (n = 61)	Heterogeneous (n = 59)	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	$\eta_p^2$
Trust	4.90 (.89)	5.10 (.79)	1.69	1	.01
Attitude	5.19 (1.19)	5.31 (1.01)	.35	1	.00
Support	3.83 (1.51)	4.19 (1.47)	1.77	1	.01
	Control condition (n = 34)				
Trust	5.44 (.82)				
Attitude	5.75 (.86)				
Support	4.38 (1.68)				

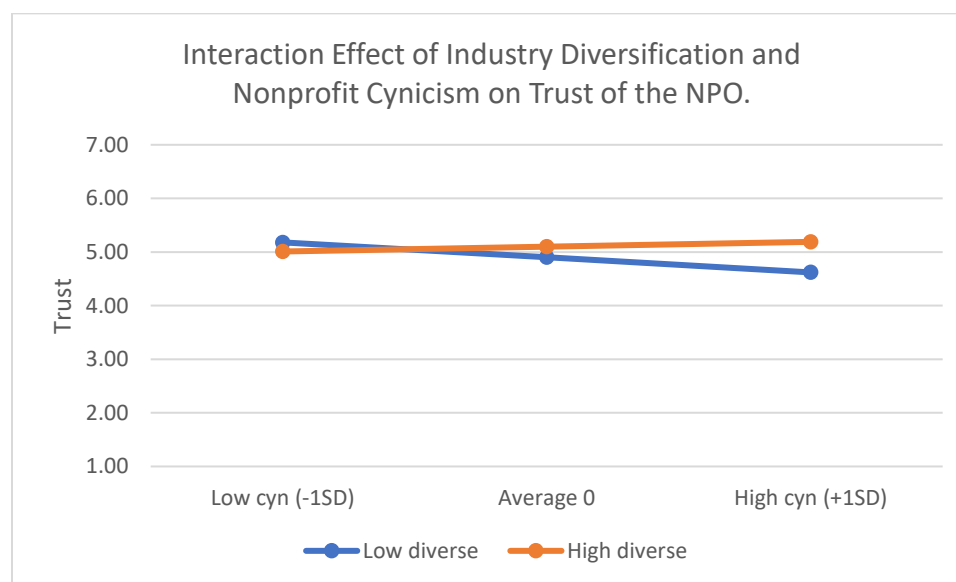
*Note.* \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$

H4 posited an interaction effect between nonprofit cynicism and partnership portfolio size on a) trust, b) attitude, and c) intention to support the NPO. Three separate moderated regression analyses were run to predict each dependent variable (Table 7). Partnership portfolio size was coded as a binary dummy variable (0 = small, 1 = large), and the small size was treated as the reference group. Nonprofit cynicism was treated as a continuous variable. Before running the regression analysis, the continuous variable was centered by mean. Adoption of the mean-centering approach was based on two considerations. First, mean-centering this variable helps in interpreting the regression output in a more meaningful way (Dowson, 2014). Since nonprofit cynicism was measured using a 1-7 Likert scale, it does not have a meaningful value of 0. After mean-centering, the score of 0 in nonprofit cynicism indicated that the person had an average level of cynicism toward nonprofits in general. Second, mean-centering helps adjust micro multicollinearity (Aguinis & Gottfredson, 2010). Thus, an interaction variable was created by multiplying the binary dummy variable and the mean-centered continuous variable.

Results from the regression analyses did not find significant interaction effects between nonprofit cynicism and N2B partnership portfolio size on trust ( $p = .67$ ), attitude ( $p = .51$ ), or intention to support ( $p = .25$ ). The effects of different sizes of N2B partnership portfolios on each dependent variable was not affected by the level of nonprofit cynicism. Thus, H4 was not supported.

H5 posited an interaction between nonprofit cynicism and industry diversification on a) trust, b) attitude, and c) intention to support the NPO. In other words, the negative effect of industry diversification would be intensified as the level of nonprofit cynicism increased. To test this hypothesis, industry diversification was coded as a binary dummy variable (0 = low diverse, 1 = high diverse), and the low diverse condition was treated as the reference group. Three separate moderated regression analyses were run to predict each dependent variable (Table 7).

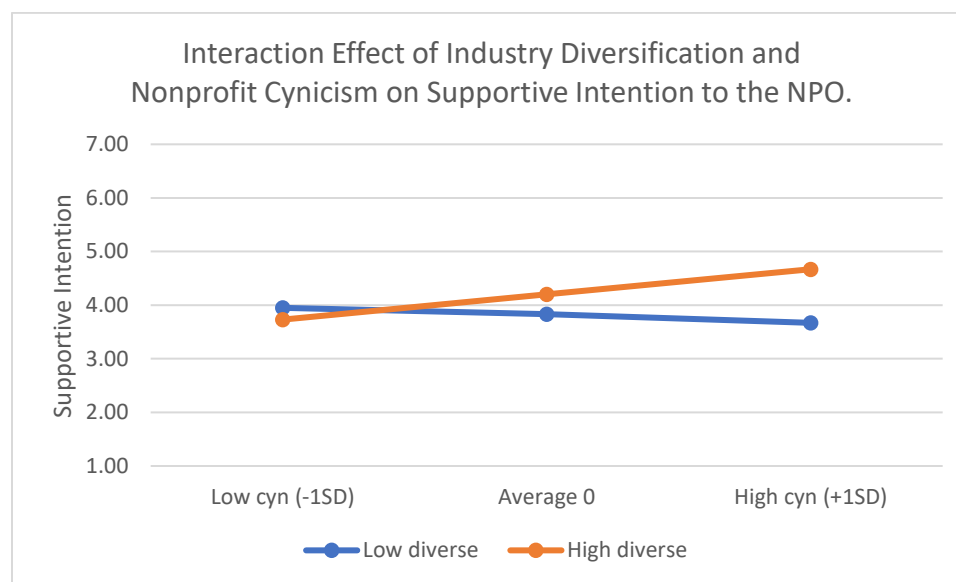
Figure 3. *Interaction Effect of Industry Diversification and Nonprofit Cynicism on Trust of the NPO.*



The results indicated that the interaction between nonprofit cynicism and industry diversification was a significant predictor of nonprofit trust ( $B = .24, p < .05$ ) (Table 7). The slope of nonprofit cynicism changed significantly ( $p = .02$ ) between the low diverse condition (i.e., partners in the same business industry) ( $B = -.19$ ) and the high diverse condition (i.e., different business industries) ( $B = .06$ ). However, the interaction effect

was in the opposite direction from what was hypothesized. The result showed that the effect of industry diversification on the nonprofit trust turned more positive as the level of nonprofit cynicism increased. As shown in Figure 3, as the level of nonprofit cynicism increased, for those who were exposed to the low diverse portfolio, their trust of the nonprofit decreased. Whereas, for those who were exposed to the high diverse portfolio, their trust of the nonprofit increased. In other words, as the level of cynicism decreased, individuals tended to trust the nonprofit more when they saw that the nonprofit's partners were within the same business industry; as the level of cynicism increased, they tended to trust the nonprofit more when it had corporate partners from diverse business industries.

Figure 4. *Interaction Effect of Industry Diversification and Nonprofit Cynicism on Supportive Intention to the NPO.*



Regarding the supportive intention, the results also showed that there was a significant interaction effect between industry diversification and nonprofit cynicism ( $B = 40, p < .05$ ) (Table 7). The slope of nonprofit cynicism differed significantly ( $p = -.04$ )

between the low diverse condition (i.e., partners in the same business industry) ( $B = -.08$ ) and the high diverse condition (i.e., partners from different industries) ( $B = .32$ ). Figure 4 shows that as the level of nonprofit cynicism increased, individuals were more willing to support the nonprofit when it had corporate partners from diverse business industries; whereas, as the level of nonprofit decreased, they were more willing to support the nonprofit when its partners were within the same business industry.

However, the results did not support a significant interaction effect on attitude toward the NPO ( $p = .26$ ). In summary, although the interaction effect was significant on trust and intention to support the NPO, it was in the opposite direction from what was hypothesized. Thus, H4 was not supported.

RQ1 explored the interaction effects between N2B partnership portfolio size and industry diversification on a) trust, b) attitude, and c) intention to support the NPO. The results from the two-way MANOVA test indicated no significant interaction between the two partnership portfolio configurations on the combined dependent variables (Table 4). In addition, no significant interaction effect was found on trust ( $p = .49$ ), attitude ( $p = .27$ ), and intention to support ( $p = .53$ ) to the NPO (Table 6).

Table 6. *Pairwise Comparison for Interaction Effects of Partnership Portfolio Size and Industry Diversification on Each Dependent Variable.*

DV	Small size		Large size		<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	$\eta_p^2$
	Low diverse M (SD)	High diverse M (SD)	Low diverse M (SD)	High diverse M (SD)			
Trust	4.71 (.93)	5.03 (.68)	5.08 (.82)	5.18 (.91)	.48	1	.00
Attitude	5.07 (1.29)	5.41 (.81)	5.30 (1.09)	5.19 (1.20)	1.25	1	.01
Support	3.59 (1.49)	4.13 (1.27)	4.06 (1.50)	4.26 (1.68)	.40	1	.00

Note. Participants who were not exposed to any N2B partnership information were not included for analysis.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

RQ2 asked whether the interaction among N2B partnership portfolio size, industry diversification, and nonprofit cynicism affected public evaluations. The results from the three multiple regressions showed that the interaction term was not a significant predictor of public trust ( $p = .80$ ), attitude ( $p = .90$ ) and intention to support ( $p = .27$ ) the NPO (Table 7)

Table 7. Study 1: Summary of Moderated Multiple Regression Analyses.

Moderated Regression	Trust			Attitude			Support		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>
Size	.26	.15	1.68	.01	.20	.05	.29	.27	1.07
NC	-.04	.08	-.48	-.10	.10	-.95	.24	.14	1.68
Size x NC	-.05	.11	-.43	-.09	.14	-.66	-.22	.19	-1.16
	$F(3, 116) = 3.55, p = .23,$ adjusted $R^2 = .011$			$F(3, 116) = 1.66, p = .18,$ adjusted $R^2 = .016$			$F(3, 116) = 1.33, p = .27,$ adjusted $R^2 = .008$		
ID	.20	.15	1.34	.12	.20	.60	.37	.27	1.39
NC	-.19	.08	-2.46*	-.23	.10	-2.31*	-.08	.13	-.62
ID x NC	.25	.11	2.30*	.16	.14	1.14	.40	.19	2.11*
	$F(3, 116) = 2.80, p < .05,$ adjusted $R^2 = .043$			$F(3, 116) = 2.07, p = .11,$ adjusted $R^2 = .026$			$F(3, 116) = 2.61, p = .05,$ adjusted $R^2 = .039$		
Size	.39	.21	1.84	.26	.28	.92	.49	.38	1.30
ID	.33	.21	1.54	.36	.28	1.26	.54	.38	1.45
NC	-.22	.13	-1.70	-.21	.17	-1.23	-.15	.23	-.66
Size x NC	.04	.16	.24	-.04	.21	-.20	.09	.28	.32
ID x NC	.29	.16	1.76	.17	.22	.79	.62	.29	2.15*
Size x ID	-.23	.30	-.76	-.49	.40	-1.21	-.34	.54	-.64
Size x ID x NC	-.06	.22	-.26	-.04	.29	-.13	-.44	.39	-1.12
	$F(7, 112) = 1.77, p = .10,$ adjusted $R^2 = .043$			$F(7, 112) = 1.11, p < .36,$ adjusted $R^2 = .006$			$F(7, 112) = 1.64, p = .13,$ adjusted $R^2 = .036$		

Note. NC = Nonprofit Cynicism; ID = Industry Diversification; Nonprofit Cynicism was mean-centered.

*B* represents unstandardized regression weights. \*  $p < .05$ . Participants who were not exposed to any N2B partnership information (control condition) were not included for analysis.



## Discussion

This study sheds light on how the disclosure of the N2B partnership portfolio influences individual publics' trust, attitude, and intention to support the NPO. In addition, this study investigates how the current hostile fundraising environment due to increasing public cynicism toward nonprofits could influence the partnership communication effect and effectiveness.

This research began by examining the main effect of N2B portfolio size on public evaluations of a fictitious NPO. Although consensual endorsement was an effective strategy to motivate prosocial behaviors and solicit donations (Cialdini, 1993), this study did not support the notion that a large number of corporate partners would carry a social proofing effect and lead to more positive evaluations of the nonprofit compared to a small number of corporate partners. Interestingly, the study found that trust of the nonprofit was significantly higher when no partnership information was provided than when a small number of partners was disclosed (i.e., two corporations). These findings generally align with a more critical view of the add-on value of N2B partnerships to nonprofits (Bennett et al., 2013; Herlin, 2015), suggesting that associating with more corporate partners does not necessarily benefit a nonprofit from a public evaluative perspective. In fact, to avoid potential harm to public trust, it seems “better to be safe than sorry” for nonprofits when faced with the choice between partnering with a small number of corporations and not forming any corporate partnerships.

There are two possible explanations for the insignificant main effect of portfolio size. First, social proofing occurs when the endorser demonstrates greater credibility,

knowledge, or expertise in the area where the endorsee is practiced, thereby reducing others' uncertainty about the endorsee's quality (Burnkrant & Cousineau, 1975; Cialdini & Trost, 1998; Cialdini, 1993). However, this study did not provide enough information about the corporate partners. Participants might find it difficult to justify the appropriateness and qualifications of the corporate partners as endorsers of the focal nonprofit. The second explanation is related to the cause-business fit. Fit is important in N2B communication because it enhances the attitude transferability from one organization to another. In particular, it determines how much cognitive processing is needed to evaluate N2B partnerships, and how the fit affects stakeholders' responses (Olson & Thjømmøe, 2011). Previous research has consistently found that a high brand-cause fit or company-nonprofit fit prompts positive attribution of the company in terms of the perceived altruism, favorable attitudes toward the firm, and supportive behaviors toward both the firm and the nonprofit (e.g., Nan & Heo, 2007; Rim et al., 2016). In contrast, a low fit can trigger skepticism and negative stakeholder reactions toward the brand and the N2B initiative (Du et al., 2010). However, given that the focus of this study was industry diversification and to reduce bias from a high and low fit, the presented industries were carefully selected based on a neutral fit with the nonprofit's cause. This approach may have weakened the social proofing effect as it failed to provide a strong connection between the nonprofit and the corporate partners. Without a strong cause-business fit, it would be difficult for participants to internalize the logic of the alliances and make an adequate assessment about the nonprofit.

The main effect of industry diversification was also insignificant. Publics' trust, attitude, and intention to support the nonprofit did not differ significantly between a portfolio with industry homogeneity and one with industry heterogeneity. The hypothesis of the negative effect of industry diversification was made based on the categorization and cognitive consistency mechanisms. A possible reason for this finding is that the industry heterogeneity may not be strong enough to trigger cognitive inconsistency and consequently influence the evaluations of the focal nonprofit. The scope of a nonprofit's activities and services can be wide and fluid (Kim et al., 2012), which makes one nonprofit relatable to multiple business domains. In the case of the fictitious nonprofit the study in this study, HealthyGen Action, all the selected businesses maintained a neutral fit with the cause (i.e., childhood obesity prevention). It is possible that the categorization process was biased by the fit between the cause and the businesses. Participants may have categorized the different partners into the same mental schema based on their consistent fit with the cause and may have ignored the difference in business industries.

The insignificant effect of industry diversification offers useful practical implications. Although more focused business connections demonstrate a nonprofit's dedication in influencing specific corporate behavior (Shumate et al., 2016), previous research also warned that business connections may result in mission drift and unclear positioning (e.g., Herlin, 2015). The results indicate no significant difference between the two strategies in terms of public evaluations. That means, nonprofits that are in severe need of corporate resources could be less concerned about the potential loss of donors and members and be more open to diversified business connections. However, it is

important to note that nonprofit trust and attitude was rated significantly higher when no partnership information was presented than when a low-diverse N2B portfolio was presented. Thus, there is a risk when only collaborating with the same business industry.

In addition to the main effects of the two portfolio configurations, this study also sought to investigate how nonprofit cynicism interacts with portfolio size and industry diversification to affect the communication outcomes. The results indicated that there was no significant interaction between nonprofit cynicism and partnership portfolio size, suggesting that having more or fewer corporate partners does not influence how an individual public evaluates the nonprofit, regardless of how cynical the person is.

However, there was a significant interaction effect of nonprofit cynicism and industry diversification on trust and intention to support the nonprofit. Comparing the patterns below and above the average nonprofit cynicism, less cynical people were more likely to trust and support a nonprofit if the nonprofit had corporate partners within the same business industry than from heterogeneous industries. However, more cynical people would trust and support a nonprofit less if its corporate partners were in a homogeneous industry, compared to a heterogeneous industry. These findings suggest that people with different levels of nonprofit cynicism may view industry diversity differently and from evaluations of the focal nonprofit, accordingly. Less cynical publics may perceive prominent partnerships with one economic domain as a positive sign of mission stickiness, which would indicate trust and support for the nonprofit. However, for more cynical publics, a N2B portfolio with industry homogeneity may raise suspicion about the nonprofit's loss of autonomy and mission drift due to the heavy resource

dependence on a specific economic domain and collective pressure from similar businesses. Taken together, this finding indicates that nonprofit cynicism sets a boundary condition of an industry diversification effect on the communication outcomes. Thus, it is important for nonprofits to evaluate the cynicism level of the existing constituents and target audience to inform publics about the strategic corporate partner-selection and portfolio communication.

In summary, this study did not find supportive evidence for the main effects of portfolio size and industry diversification. Several possible explanations were provided to explain the findings and insights into the potential benefits and risks associated with different N2B portfolio strategies. The findings also suggest that nonprofit cynicism is a boundary condition of the effect of industry diversification, which provides practical guidance for partnership communication planning. The theoretical and practical implications of these findings are elaborated on more in Chapter 6.

## CHAPTER 5. STUDY 2: TRIPARTITE PARTNERSHIPS

Study 2 focuses on tripartite partnerships between a nonprofit and corporate, government, and/or nonprofit partners. This study has two main objectives. First, it examines the main and interaction effects of two partnership portfolio configurations, namely portfolio size and organization type diversification, on individual publics' trust, attitude, and intention to support the partnered nonprofit. Second, it investigates how nonprofit cynicism interacts with the partnership portfolio configurations to affect public evaluations. Specifically, this study tests H1, H3, H4, H6, and answers RQ3 and RQ4.

Using the same fictitious NPO (HealthyGen Action), Study 2 employs a 2 (portfolio size: small vs. large) x 2 (organization type diversification: low diverse vs. high diverse) between-subject design, with a control group that does not present any partnership-related information. The cross-sector partnership *portfolio size* and *organization type diversification* are independent variables and were manipulated. *Nonprofit cynicism* was treated as a measured variable.

This chapter first describes the sample, data collection, and experimental procedure, followed by pretests and stimuli development. The measurement items are articulated afterward. Next, data analysis and results are reported. Last, a discussion of the results is provided.

## Method

**Sample and Data Collection.** A total of 271 participants recruited from MTurk took the survey from March 28 to 29, 2020, and 209 completed the survey. After removing participants who failed the attention checks ( $n = 27$ ), straight liners ( $n = 4$ ), and with insufficient response time or page submission time ( $n = 5$ ), the analytical sample consisted of 173 responses. The average time to complete the survey was about 11.53 minutes ( $SD = 1147.71$  seconds). Participants who completed the survey and passed the attention checks were rewarded \$1. Table 8 shows the cell sizes of the experimental conditions.

Table 8. *Study 2: Experimental Conditions and Cell Sizes.*

<b>Experimental Condition</b>	<b>N</b>
Small size + low diverse	37
Small size + high diverse	37
Large size + low diverse	32
Large size + high diverse	33
Control group (no partner)	34
Total	173

**Participants.** Among the participants, 61.8% ( $n = 107$ ) were male, and 38.2% ( $n = 66$ ) were female. The average age was 39.33 ( $SD = 11.85$ ). The majority of the participants were White (71.7%), and nearly half had a bachelor's degree (46.2%). More than half had an annual household income below \$74,999 (67.6%). Table 9 illustrates the descriptive statistics of demographic information in Study 2.

Table 9. *Study 2: Descriptive Statistics of Demographic Information.*

		N=173	
<b>Age</b>		39.33 (SD=11.85)	
		n	%
<b>Gender</b>	Male	107	61.8
	Female	66	38.2
<b>Race</b>	White	124	71.7
	Hispanic or Latino	12	6.9
	Black or African American	18	10.4
	Native American or American Indian	6	3.5
	Asian / Pacific Islander	11	6.4
	Other	2	1.2
<b>Household income</b>	Less than \$10,000	8	4.6
	\$10,000 to \$24,999	12	6.9
	\$25,000 to \$49,999	42	24.3
	\$50,000 to \$74,999	55	31.8
	\$75,000 to \$99,999	29	16.8
	\$100,000 to \$149,999	24	13.9
	\$150,000 or more	3	1.7
	Prefer not to answer	0	0
<b>Education</b>	No schooling completed	0	0
	Some high school, no diploma	0	0
	High school graduate, diploma or the equivalent	29	16.8
	Associate degree	30	17.3
	Bachelor's degree	80	46.2
	Master's degree	30	17.3
	Doctorate degree	4	2.3



**Experimental Procedure.** The experimental procedure was similar to Study 1. After completing the consent form, participants were exposed to the homepage of HealthyGen Action, an NPO focusing on improving childhood obesity awareness and prevention. Then, participants in the experimental conditions were randomly assigned into one of four conditions with different combinations of the number of partners and the organization type(s) (Table 8). In each condition, the participants first read a description of how many partners HealthyGen Action currently had. The description was designed to manipulate portfolio size. After the description, participants proceeded to the next page, which included the manipulation of organization type diversification. The second page presented a short statement of what types of organizations HealthyGen Action collaborated with, followed by the partners' logos. After exposure to the two stimuli materials, participants were asked to answer a questionnaire administrating the measures of manipulation check items, dependent variables, and covariates. Participants in the control group skipped the partnership information and were directed to the measures of dependent variables and covariates. Demographic information was collected toward the end of the survey. Finally, participants were debriefed and thanked.

**Stimuli Development.** Multiple pretests were conducted to develop the stimuli materials for the main study.

*Manipulation of partnership portfolio size.* In Study 2, partnership portfolio size was manipulated in a separate page by presenting the number of partners that HealthyGen Action currently had. This approach allows purer control of portfolio size and avoids the potential confounding effects from organization types or other brand/organization

associated characteristics. The number of partners was determined based on the pretest in Study 1. The present study used two partners to indicate a small portfolio size and ten partners to indicate a large portfolio size.

***Manipulation of organizational type diversification.*** In Study 2, partnership portfolio diversification was manipulated by varying the organization type of the nonprofit's (HealthyGen Action) partners. Specifically, this study categorized partners into three types of organizations: corporate partners, nonprofit partners, and government partners. In the low diverse condition, all partners were the same organization type. The low diverse condition included three sub-conditions: showing only corporate partners, only nonprofit partners, or only government partners. In the high diverse condition, the presented partners were different types of organizations: mixed corporate and nonprofit partners, mixed corporate and government partners, mixed government and nonprofit partners, and mixed corporate, government, and nonprofit partners.

To enhance the external validity, real companies, nonprofit organizations, and government agencies were selected to create the partnership portfolio stimuli. The selection of partners followed three criteria. First, given the potential confounding effect of fit between the focal nonprofit and each partner, the selected companies/organizations should maintain a neutral fit with HealthyGen Action's cause. Second, to ensure participants' basic level of engagement with the stimuli, the selected companies/organizations should be well-known to the general public. Third, to reduce confounding factors related to organizational attributes, especially for corporate partners (e.g., corporate reputation), the selected companies should maintain an overall positive image.

According to the pretest in Study1, the retail industry was perceived as a neutral fit with the cause of childhood obesity. A follow-up pretest was conducted using an MTurk sample ( $n = 22$ ) to select real retail companies/brands to be included in the partnership portfolio. Participants took a survey to rate a list of U.S. top food retailers in terms of the cause-business fit with HealthyGen Action (not compatible at all (1)/very compatible (7)) (Lafferty, 2009); familiarity with the company (not at all familiar (1)/very familiar (7)); and attitude toward the company (negative (1)/positive (7)). The results indicated that Whole Foods Market, Trader Joe's, Costco, Target, Kroger, and ALDI were rated as a high fit to the cause ( $M_{fit} = 5.78$ ) and were familiar ( $M_{familiarity} = 5.77$ ) and positive ( $M_{attitude} = 5.68$ ). In addition, there was no significant difference across the companies in terms of perceived cause-business fit ( $F(5, 126) = 1.54, p = .18$ ), familiarity ( $F(5, 126) = .42, p = .84$ ), or attitude ( $F(5, 126) = .94, p = .46$ ). Thus, these companies were considered comparable.

The nonprofit partners were selected from GuideStar's rank of Childhood Health & Nutrition Nonprofits (Marrow, 2013). Feeding America, National Farm to School Network, Alliance for a Healthier Generation, Action for Healthy Kids, UCNN Rudd Center for Food Policy & Obesity, and The Food Trust were selected because they are nationally recognized NPOs and their missions are closely related to healthy eating and obesity prevention.

As for government partners, the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS), a division of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, provides options for partner selection. The FNS is a nationwide public service aimed at ending hunger and obesity through various nutrition

assistance programs (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2020). Among all the states administrating the FNS, six states that are considered swing states (AZ, PA, MI, NC, FL, WI) in the 2020 election were selected to avoid potential confounding effects induced by strong political views. To make them more comparable, all the selected government partners are health and/or human services agencies (e.g., Wisconsin Department of Health Services).

*Creating the NPO's webpages.* The homepage of HealthyGen Action was the same as that used in Study 1, which included the NPO's basic information and mission statement. Twelve mock webpages containing HealthyGen Action's partnership information were created for each experimental condition. Table 10 outlines the manipulations of portfolio size and organization type diversification for each experimental condition. The stimuli materials are included in Appendix 2. Specifically, two webpages were created to manipulate the small- and large-size conditions. Ten webpages were created to manipulate organization type diversification. In C1 (small size + low diverse) and C3 (large size + low diverse), participants were randomly assigned to one of the three sub-conditions showing all partners in one organization type; in C2 (small size + high diverse), participants were randomly assigned to one of the three sub-conditions showing partners with two different organization types; and in C4 (large size + high diverse), participants were presented with partners in all three organization types.

Table 10. *Manipulations of Portfolio Size and Organization Type Diversification*

Conditions	Manipulation of portfolio size		Manipulation of organization type
C1: Small size + Low diverse (n = 37)	Present only the number of current partners (two partners).	<i>Randomize into one of the sub-conditions</i>	<p>C1.1: Present 2 company logos (Whole Foods Market and Trader Joe's); nonprofit and government partners are marked as "currently no partner." (n = 12)</p> <p>C1.2: Present 2 NPOs' logos (Feed America and National Farm to School Network); corporate and government partners are marked as "currently no partner." (n = 15)</p> <p>C1.3: Present 2 government agencies' logos (Arizona Department of Health Services and Wisconsin Department of Health Services); corporate and nonprofit partners are marked as "currently no partner." (n = 10)</p>
C2: Small size + High diverse (n = 37)	Present only the number of current partners (two partners).	<i>Randomize into one of the sub-conditions</i>	<p>C2.1: Present 1 company logo (Whole Foods Market) and 1 NPO's logo (Feed America). (n = 12)</p> <p>C2.2: Present 1 company logo (Whole Foods Market) and 1 government agency's logo (Wisconsin Department of Health Services). (n = 12)</p>

13)

C2.3: Present 1 NPO’s logo (Feeding America) and 1 government agency’s logo (Wisconsin Department of Health Service). (n = 12)

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<p>C3: Large size + Low diverse (n = 32)</p>	<p>Present only the number of current partners (ten partners).</p>	<p><i>Randomize into one of the sub-conditions</i></p>	<p>C3.1: Present 6 company logos (Whole Foods Market, Trader Joe’s, Target, Kroger, Costco, and ALDI) on the page and a button for “See more”; nonprofit and government partners are marked as “currently no partner.” (n = 11)</p>
			<p>C3.2: Present 6 NPOs’ logos (Feeding America, National Farm to School Network, Alliance for A Healthier Generation, Action for Healthy Kids, UCNN Rudd Center for Food Policy &amp; Obesity, and The Food Trust) on the page and a button for “See more”; corporate and government partners are marked as “currently no partner.” (n = 10)</p>
			<p>C3.3: Present 6 state health or human service department logos (AZ, PA, MI, NC, FL, WI) on the page and a button for “See more”; corporate and nonprofit partners are marked as “currently no partner.” (n = 11)</p>

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C4 Large size + High diverse (n = 33)	Present only the number of current partners (ten partners).	Present 2 companies' logos (Whole Foods Market and Trader Joe's), 2 NPOs' logos (Feed America and National Farm to School Network), and 2 government agencies' logos (Arizona Department of Health Services and Wisconsin Department of Health Services). A button for "See more" is added to each type of partner. (n = 33)
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**Manipulation checks.** Prior to conducting the main study, a pretest was conducted with participants ( $n = 51$ ) from MTurk to test and refine the experimental manipulations. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the four experimental conditions, including C1 small size and low diverse ( $n = 13$ ), C2 small size and high diverse ( $n = 12$ ), C3 large size and low diverse ( $n = 12$ ), and C4 large size and high diverse ( $n = 14$ ). In each condition, the participants first read the stimulus of the portfolio size (two or ten), and then the stimulus of organization type diversification.

The measures of perceived portfolio size was adapted from (Bruhn & Holzer, 2015), which asked participants to rate to what extent the participants agreed that HealthyGen Action had a large partnership network, collaborated with many partners, and had a large number of partners in its network ( $M = 4.15$ ,  $SD = 1.81$ ,  $\alpha = .97$ ). The measures of organization type diversification were modified based on Mishra et al.'s (2017) diversification index.

Participants were first read a short statement, stating that organizations can be generally categorized into three types: for-profit (e.g., business), non-profit (NPOs), and public (e.g., government). Then, the participants were asked to rate the extent to which the organization type differed across the partners they just saw, using seven-point bipolar scales (does not vary (1)/ varies a lot (7); not different at all (1)/ very different (7); not diverse at all (1)/ very diverse (7)),  $M = 4.35$ ,  $SD = 2.12$ ,  $\alpha = .98$ ).

One-way ANOVA tests were conducted to check each manipulation. As intended, the portfolio showing ten partners ( $M = 4.78$ ,  $SD = 1.48$ ) was rated significantly larger than the one showing two partners ( $M = 3.49$ ,  $SD = 1.91$ ),  $F(1, 49) = 7.29$ ,  $p < .05$ . The



condition showing partners that were different types of organizations (high diverse) ( $M = 5.76$ ,  $SD = .74$ ) was rated as more diverse than the condition showing all partners in the same organizational type ( $M = 2.88$ ,  $SD = 2.10$ ),  $F(1, 49) = 43.35$ ,  $p < .001$ . Thus, these manipulations worked as intended.

### **Measurements.**

**Manipulation check items.** Perceived portfolio size was measured using the same items in the manipulation check (Bruhn & Holzer, 2015) ( $M = 4.30$ ,  $SD = 1.67$ ,  $\alpha = .96$ ). Perceived organization type diversification ( $M = 4.45$ ,  $SD = 1.86$ ,  $\alpha = .94$ ) was measured using the modified diversification index (Mishra et al., 2017) as described in the pretest. An additional recall question was added, “Think about the current partners that HealthyGen Action has. Please select which statement best describes the partners.” Participants were asked to select whether “HealthyGen Action's partners are the “same type of organization” (coded as 0) or “Different types of organization” (coded as 1).

**Moderator.** Nonprofit cynicism ( $M = 3.85$ ,  $SD = 1.34$ ,  $\alpha = .94$ ) was measured using the same scale as described in Study 1.

**Dependent variables.** Trust of the NPO ( $M = 5.15$ ,  $SD = .94$ ,  $\alpha = .93$ ), attitude toward the NPO ( $M = 5.60$ ,  $SD = 1.11$ ,  $\alpha = .88$ ), and supportive intentions toward the NPO ( $M = 4.51$ ,  $SD = 1.59$ ,  $\alpha = .90$ ) were measured using the same measures as in Study 1.

**Covariates.** Prior nonprofit support experience ( $M = 4.29$ ,  $SD = 1.91$ ) and personal relevance ( $M = 5.76$ ,  $SD = 1.08$ ,  $\alpha = .79$ ) were considered potential control variables given previous research indicating their impacts on individuals' charitable

behaviors (Lee & Rim, 2017; Nan & Heo, 2007). The measurement items described in Study 1 were also used here, except that two items from the personal relevance measure (i.e., worthless/ valuable and uninvolving/ involving) were deleted to minimize participant fatigue from answering a long questionnaire.

In addition, literature on brand alliance and N2B partnerships (e.g., Delgado-Ballester & Hernández-Espallardo, 2008; Rim et al., 2016; Simonin & Ruth, 1998) suggests that partnerships may trigger affect or positive feeling transfer between the partners. Thus, the relational trust and attitude toward these social institutions were controlled. Trust toward businesses ( $M = 4.19$ ,  $SD = 1.56$ ,  $\alpha = .93$ ), governments ( $M = 4.15$ ,  $SD = 1.62$ ,  $\alpha = .93$ ), and nonprofits ( $M = 5.14$ ,  $SD = 1.12$ ,  $\alpha = .87$ ) were measured using seven-point Likert scales, “X are truthful to us,” “X treat me justly and fairly,” and “X keep their promises” (1= strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree) (Rim & Dong, 2018). Attitude toward business ( $M = 4.42$ ,  $SD = 1.65$ ), governments ( $M = 4.21$ ,  $SD = 1.84$ ), and nonprofits ( $M = 5.49$ ,  $SD = 1.15$ ) were measured using a single bipolar semantic scale ((negative (1)/positive (7)).

Numerous studies have suggested that cause-brand fit is a significant factor affecting public evaluations of alliances (e.g., Du et al., 2010; Nan & Heo, 2007). Given that real companies, government agencies, and nonprofits were used in the partnership portfolios, it was important to control the fit between the focal NPO (HealthyGen Action) and the core business/mission of the partners. Thus, portfolio fit was considered a potential control variable to avoid confounding effects. Unlike the fit between each pair of partners, portfolio fit concerns the overall fit between HealthyGen Action and all the

partners in the partnership portfolio, which encompasses a more inclusive view of the fit. Portfolio fit was measured using a modified scale from Scheinbaum, Lacey, and Drumwright (2019). Participants were asked to rate the extent to which they agreed with the statements “Overall, there is a logical connection between these partners and HealthyGen Action,” “Overall, HealthyGen Action and these partners fit together,” and “Overall, it makes sense to me that HealthyGen Action works with these partners,” on a seven-point Likert scale (1= strongly agree, 7 strongly disagree) ( $M = 5.88$   $SD = .94$   $\alpha = .87$ ).

Previous research also found that demographics, such as income, education, and gender, influence donation behaviors (Bekkers & Wiepking, 2011; Lee & Chang, 2007; Wang & Ashcraft, 2014). Thus, these demographic variables were considered potential covariates.

In summary, the potential covariates include prior nonprofit support, personal relevance, trust toward businesses, governments, and nonprofits, attitude toward businesses, government, and nonprofits, portfolio fit, and demographic variables.

## **Data Analysis and Results**

**Randomization Checks.** A series of chi-square and ANOVA tests were conducted to examine the differences in covariates and demographic characteristics among the experimental conditions. Some demographic variables were collapsed into fewer categories to ensure that each cell had a large enough sample. In particular, race was coded as a binary variable including two levels, White and non-White. Education was coded into three categories, including “High school degree or equivalent,”

“Associate or some college degree,” and “Graduate degree.” Household income was coded into three categories, including “\$49,999 or under,” “\$50,000 to under \$99,999,” and “\$100,000 or above.”

The results of the chi-square tests showed no significant differences in sex, race, education level, or household income level across the five conditions (four experimental conditions and the control condition) ( $p$  ranges from .13 to .96) and the four experimental conditions ( $p$  ranges from .12 to .92). The results from the ANOVA tests showed no significant differences in age, personal relevance, prior nonprofit support, business trust, government trust, business attitude, government attitude, and nonprofit attitude across all conditions ( $p$  ranges from .12 to .98). Trust toward nonprofits slightly differed across the five conditions ( $F(4, 168) = 2.60, p = .04$ ). These variables and portfolio fit did not change significantly across the four experimental conditions ( $p$  ranges from .07 to .93). The significant difference in trust toward nonprofits across all conditions was marginal, and it occurred between condition 1 and the control condition ( $M_{\text{difference}} = -.66, p = .087$ ). Given that the hypothesis testing did not include the control condition, the randomization was considered successful. Thus, no covariate was included in testing the hypotheses and RQs.

**Manipulation Checks.** Perceived portfolio size was rated as significantly larger in the large size condition ( $M = 5.06, SD = 1.19$ ) than in the small size condition ( $M = 3.64, SD = 1.76$ ),  $F(1, 137) = 29.95, p < .001$ . Perceived organization type diversification was rated as significantly more diverse in the condition showing partners of different organizational types ( $M = 5.38, SD = .99$ ) than the condition showing partners of the

same organizational type ( $M = 3.51$ ,  $SD = 2.06$ ),  $F(1, 137) = 46.89$ ,  $p < .001$ ). In addition, a binary logistic regression test revealed that the organization type diversification condition (0= low diverse, 1= high diverse) significantly predicted participants' answers in the organizational type recall question (Wald=35.87;  $B = 2.45$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The odds ratio ( $Exp(B) = 11.56$ ) indicated that the participants in the high diverse condition were 11.56 times more likely to rate the partners as different types of organizations than the participants in the low diverse condition. Thus, all manipulations worked as intended.

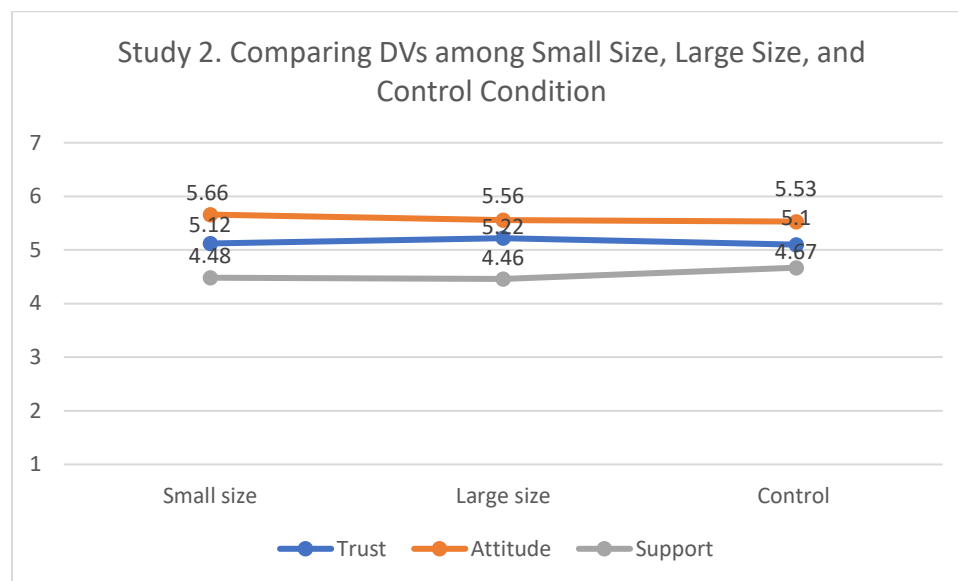
In addition, results from the two two-way ANOVA tests showed that there was no interaction effect of size and organization type diversification on perceived size ( $p = .85$ ) or perceived industry diversification ( $p = .13$ ). Thus, although portfolio size and organization type diversification were both portfolio configurations, participants perceived that these two configurations were separate.

### **Testing Hypotheses and RQs.**

H1 predicted a positive main effect of portfolio size. Specifically, a larger partnership portfolio, as compared to a smaller one, would lead to a) higher trust of the NPO, b) more favorable attitudes toward the NPO, and c) higher intention to support the NPO. The results from the MANOVA test showed that there was no significant overall main effect of partnership portfolio size on the combined dependent variables, Wilks's  $\lambda = .98$ ,  $F(3, 133) = .77$ ,  $p = .52$  (Table 11). Further ANOVA tests did not find significant main effects of portfolio size on trust ( $p = .52$ ), attitude ( $p = .59$ ), or supportive intentions ( $p = .94$ ) toward the NPO (Table 12). Thus, H1 was not supported.

In addition, comparing the portfolio size conditions with the control condition, there was no significant difference between the control condition and small size condition regarding trust ( $p = 1.00$ ), attitude ( $p = .83$ ), and supportive intentions ( $p = .84$ ) toward the NPO. There was also no significant difference between the control condition and large size condition regarding trust ( $p = .81$ ), attitude ( $p = 1.00$ ), and supportive intentions ( $p = .81$ ) toward the NPO.

Figure 5. Study 2: Comparing DVs among Small Size, Large Size, and Control Condition.



H3 predicted a negative main effect of organization type diversification. Specifically, a portfolio showing heterogeneous organizational types, as compared to the same organization type, would lead to lower public trust in the NPO, b) less favorable attitudes toward the NPO, and c) lower intention to support the NPO. The results from the MANOVA test showed that the main effect of organization type diversification on the combined dependent variables was nonsignificant, Wilks's  $\lambda = .96$ ,  $F(3, 133) = 2.06$ ,  $p = .11$  (Table 11).

The follow-up ANOVA tests did not find significant main effects of organization type diversification on trust ( $p = .86$ ), or attitude ( $p = .37$ ). However, there was a marginally significant effect ( $p = .047$ ) on supportive intentions toward the NPO,  $F(1, 137) = 4.01$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .03$ . Specifically, the mean of supportive intentions toward the nonprofit was higher when the partners were the same type of organization ( $M = 4.73$ ,  $SD = 1.49$ ) than when the partners were different types of organizations ( $M = 4.20$ ,  $SD = 1.62$ ) (Table 12).

In addition, comparing the organization type conditions with the control condition, there was no significant difference between the control condition and low diverse condition regarding trust ( $p = .96$ ), attitude ( $p = .74$ ), and supportive intentions ( $p = .98$ ) toward the NPO. There was also no significant difference between the control condition and high diverse condition regarding trust ( $p = .91$ ), attitude ( $p = 1.00$ ), and supportive intentions ( $p = .34$ ) toward the NPO.

Figure 6. Study 2: Comparing DVs among Low Diverse, High Diverse, and Control Condition.

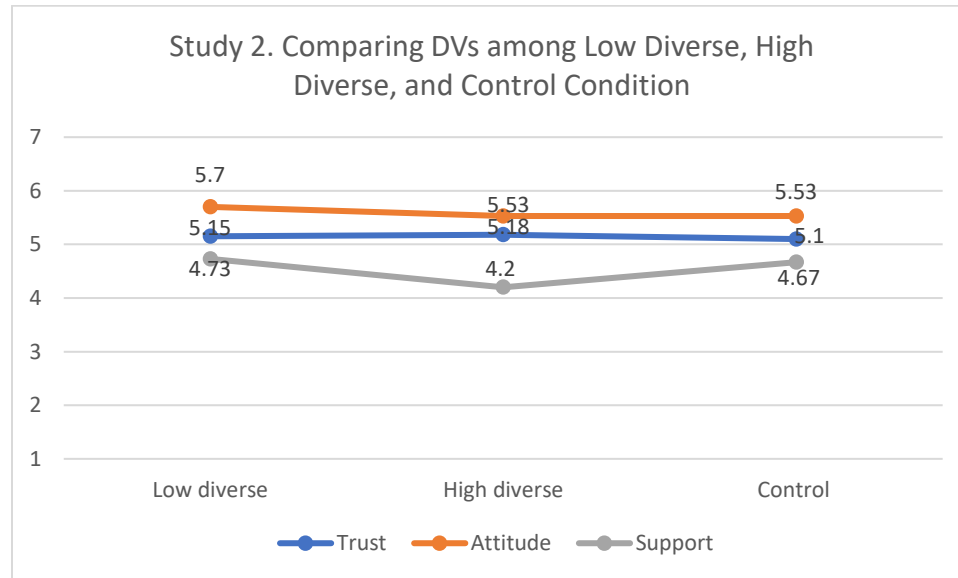




Table 11. *Study 2: Multivariate Analysis of Variance on Combined Dependent Variables.*

Independent variable	Wilks's $\lambda$	<i>df</i>	Error <i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	$\eta_p^2$
Portfolio size	.98	3	133	.52	.02
Organization type diversification	.96	3	133	2.06	.04
Size x OTD	.96	3	133	1.69	.04

*Note.* N = 139. Participants who were not exposed to any partnership information (control condition) were not included for analysis.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

Table 12. *Study 2: Main Effects of Partnership Portfolio Size and Organization Type Diversification on Each Dependent Variable.*

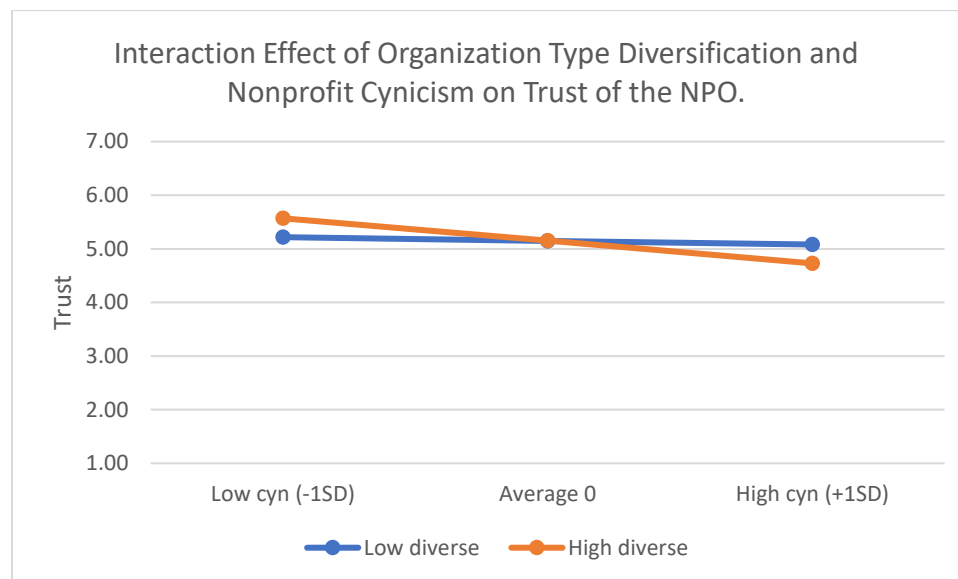
DV	Small size <i>M (SD)</i> (n = 74)	Large size <i>M (SD)</i> (n = 65)	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	$\eta_p^2$
Trust	5.12 (.95)	5.22 (.93)	.43	1	.00
Attitude	5.66 (1.23)	5.56 (1.01)	.29	1	.00
Support	4.48 (1.56)	4.46 (1.61)	.01	1	.00
	Homogeneous (n = 69)	Heterogeneous (n = 70)	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	$\eta_p^2$
Trust	5.15 (.88)	5.18 (1.00)	.03	1	.00
Attitude	5.70 (1.09)	5.53 (1.17)	.41	1	.00
Support	4.73 (1.49)	4.20 (1.62)	4.01*	1	.03
Control condition (n = 34)					
Trust	5.10 (.96)				
Attitude	5.53 (1.03)				
Support	4.67 (1.65)				

*Note.* \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$

H4 posited that there would be an interaction between nonprofit cynicism and partnership portfolio size on a) trust, b) attitude, and c) supportive intentions toward the NPO. Specifically, it predicted that the positive effect of portfolio size would be hindered as the nonprofit cynicism level increased. Three separate moderated regression analyses were run to predict each dependent variable. Portfolio size was coded as a binary dummy variable (0 = small, 1 = large). An interaction term was created by multiplying the centered continuous variable and the binary dummy variable. However, the results did not find significant interaction effects between nonprofit cynicism and partnership portfolio size on trust ( $p = .95$ ), attitude ( $p = .56$ ), and supportive intentions ( $p = .62$ ). In other words, the difference in public evaluations between the small and large conditions did not change significantly at different levels of nonprofit cynicism. Thus, H4 was not supported.

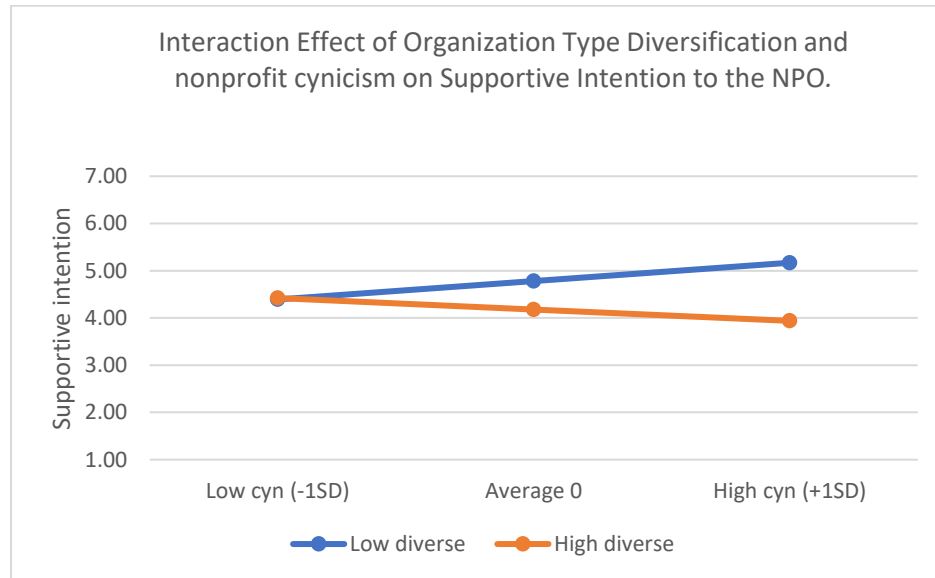
H6 posited that there would be an interaction between nonprofit cynicism and organization type diversification on a) trust, b) attitude, and c) supportive intentions toward the NPO. Specifically, it predicted that the negative effects of organization type diversification on the communication outcomes would be intensified as the level of nonprofit cynicism increased. To test the hypothesis, organization type diversification was coded as a binary dummy variable (0 = low diverse, 1 = high diverse). Nonprofit cynicism was mean-centered. An interaction term was created by multiplying the centered continuous variable and the binary dummy variable. Three separate moderated regression analyses were run to predict each dependent variable.

Figure 7. *Interaction Effect of Organization Type Diversification and Nonprofit Cynicism on Trust of the NPO.*



The results indicated that the interaction between nonprofit cynicism and organization type diversification was a significant predictor of trust toward the nonprofit ( $B = -.26, p < .05$ ). The slope of nonprofit cynicism differed significantly ( $p = .02$ ) between the low diverse condition (i.e., same organization type) ( $B = -.05$ ) and the high diverse condition (i.e., different organization types) ( $B = -.32$ ). As shown in Figure 7, the slope of the regression line for the high diverse condition is steeper. As their level of cynicism increased, individuals tended to trust the nonprofit less when they saw that the nonprofit's partners were in diverse organization types compared to the same organization type.

Figure 8. *Interaction Effect of Organization Type Diversification and Nonprofit Cynicism on Supportive Intention to the NPO.*



The results also supported a significant interaction effect on supportive intentions toward the nonprofit ( $B = -.47, p < .05$ ). The slope of nonprofit cynicism differed significantly ( $p = .02$ ) between the low diverse condition (i.e., same organization type) ( $B = .29$ ) and the high diverse condition (i.e., different organization types) ( $B = -.18$ ). As shown in Figure 8, the two regression lines showed opposite tendencies with the increase in nonprofit cynicism. As the level of nonprofit cynicism increased, individuals exposed to partners with diverse organization types were less likely to support the nonprofit, compared to those exposed to partners with the same organization type.

However, the results did not show a significant interaction effect between nonprofit cynicism and organization type diversification on attitude toward the nonprofit ( $p = .053$ ). In summary, H6a and H6c were supported but H6b was not supported.

RQ3 explored the interaction effects between partnership portfolio size and organization type diversification on a) trust, b) attitude, and c) supportive intentions toward the NPO. The results from the two-way MANOVA test indicated no significant interaction effect on the combined variables, Wilks's  $\lambda = .96$ ,  $F(3, 135) = 1.69$ ,  $p = .17$  (Table 13). In terms of the effect on each dependent variable, the results from the two-way ANOVA analyses showed that the interaction of portfolio size and organization type diversification was a significant predictor of attitude toward the NPO,  $F(1, 135) = 4.53$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .03$  (Table 13).

As shown in Figure 9, planned contrast tests further confirmed that attitude toward the NPO differed significantly between the high and low diverse conditions only when the portfolio size was small ( $M_{\text{difference}} = -.55$ ,  $t(135) = -2.11$ ,  $p = .04$ ). In other words, when participants were exposed to a large number of partners that were different types of organizations ( $M = 5.39$ ,  $SD = 1.34$ ), they were more likely to perceive the NPO as more favorable than the people who were exposed to partners that were the same type of organization ( $M = 5.39$ ,  $SD = 1.34$ ). However, there were no significant differences in attitude toward the NPO when participants were exposed to a small number of partners regardless of the organization type,  $M_{\text{difference}} = .26$ ,  $t(135) = .94$ ,  $p = .35$ .

Figure 9. Study 2. *The Interaction between Portfolio Size and Organization Type Diversification.*

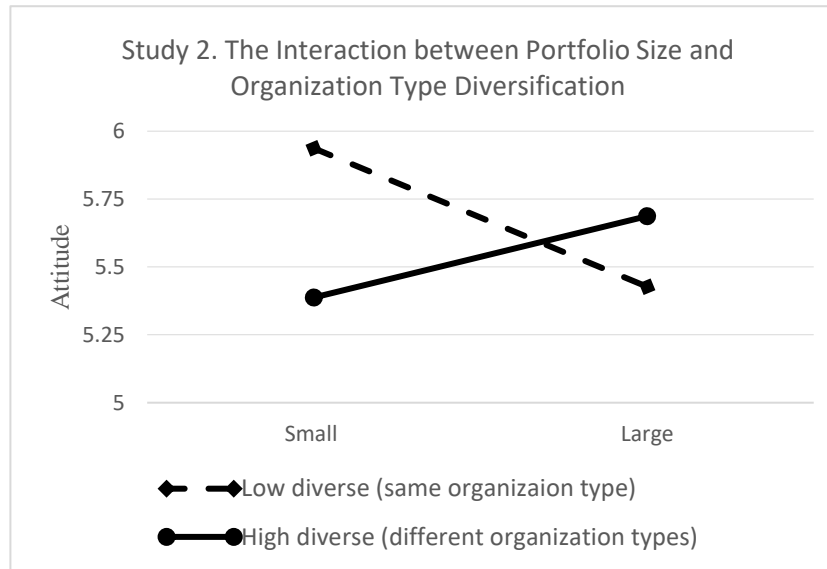


Table 13. *Pairwise Comparison for Partnership Portfolio Size and Organization Type Diversification on Each Dependent Variable.*

DV	Small size		Large size		<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	$\eta_p^2$
	Low diverse	High diverse	Low diverse	High diverse			
Trust	5.19 (.78)	5.05 (1.10)	5.12 (.99)	5.33 (.86)	1.17	1	.01
Attitude	5.94 (1.05)	5.39 (1.34)	5.43 (1.09)	5.69 (.94)	4.53*	1	.03
Support	4.94 (1.41)	4.02 (1.58)	4.50 (1.58)	4.41 (1.66)	2.48	1	.02

Note. Participants who were not exposed to any partnership information (control condition) were not included for analysis.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

RQ4 asked whether there is an interaction effect among partnership portfolio size, organization type diversification, and nonprofit cynicism on trust, attitude, and supportive intentions toward the nonprofit. The results from the three multiple regressions showed that the interaction term was not a significant predictor of individuals' trust ( $p = .16$ ), attitude ( $p = .20$ ), and supportive intentions ( $p = .73$ ) toward the focal nonprofit.

Table 14. Study 2: Summary of Moderated Multiple Regression Analyses.

Moderated Regression	Trust			Attitude			Support		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>
Size	.08	.16	.54	-.11	.19	-.56	-.031	.272	-.114
NC	-.18	.08	-2.19*	-.19	.10	-1.89	.092	.145	.630
Size x NC	-.01	.12	-.06	.08	.14	.58	-.102	.203	-.500
	$F(3, 135) = 3.55, p < .05,$ adjusted $R^2 = .053$			$F(3, 135) = 1.69, p = .17,$ adjusted $R^2 = .015$			$F(3, 135) = .14, p = .04,$ adjusted $R^2 = -.02$		
OTD	.00	.15	.02	-.20	.19	-1.06	-.60	.26	-2.27*
NC	-.05	.08	-.62	-.01	.10	-.05	.29	.14	2.03*
OTD x NC	-.26	.11	-2.31*	-.28	.14	-1.95	-.47	.20	-2.38*
	$F(3, 135) = 5.38, p < .01,$ adjusted $R^2 = .087$			$F(3, 135) = 3.01, p < .05,$ adjusted $R^2 = .042$			$F(3, 135) = 3.33, p < .05,$ adjusted $R^2 = .048$		
Size	-.12	.22	-.54	-.53	.27	-1.99	-.34	.38	-.90
OTD	-.20	.21	-.96	-.62	.25	-2.44*	-.94	.36	-2.61
NC	.02	.11	.16	.01	.14	.05	.25	.20	1.30
Size x NC	-.16	.17	-.96	-.08	.20	-.39	.04	.29	.13
OTD x NC	-.43	.16	-2.63 *	-.45	.20	-2.25*	-.38	.28	-1.35
Size x OTD	.45	.31	1.46	.90	.38	2.39*	.75	.53	1.40
Size x OTD x NC	.33	.23	1.41	.36	.28	1.30	-.14	.40	-.35
	$F(7, 131) = 2.93, p < .01,$ adjusted $R^2 = .089$			$F(7, 131) = 2.43, p < .05,$ adjusted $R^2 = .068$			$F(7, 131) = 1.73, p = .11,$ adjusted $R^2 = .036$		

Note. NC = Nonprofit Cynicism; OTD = Organization Type Diversification; Nonprofit Cynicism was mean-centered. *B* represents unstandardized regression weights. \*  $p < .05$ . Participants who were not exposed to any partnership information (control condition) were not included for analysis



## **Discussion**

Nonprofits are increasingly extending their connections with different types of organizations, such as companies, other nonprofits, and government agencies, to acquire diversified resources and solve troubling social problems. In the context of nonprofits' tripartite cross-sector partnerships, the present study sought to examine the main and interaction effects of two partnership portfolio configurations, including diversification of the size and organization types, on public evaluations of the focal nonprofit. In addition, it investigated how the two partnership portfolio configurations interact with nonprofit cynicism to affect the communication outcomes.

Consistent with Study 1, Study 2 did not find a significant effect of portfolio size on public evaluations. Trust, attitude, and supportive intentions toward the focal nonprofit did not change significantly between a small-size and large-size portfolio. Unlike Study 1, Study 2 did not find a significant difference between the experimental conditions and the no-partnership condition. These findings align with Wassmer's (2010) argument that the effect of alliance portfolio size is rather complex, and portfolio size alone may not have a direct link to public evaluations of the focal nonprofit. It is possible that the relationship between portfolio size and the communication outcomes is non-linear since, comparatively, previous research has found a non-linear relationship between a person's social network size and others' perceptions of the person (e.g., Tong et al., 2008; Westerman, Spence, & Van Der Heide, 2012). It is also possible that the relationship between portfolio size and communication outcomes is dependent on other variables. Additional research is

needed to unpack the linkage between the portfolio size and public evaluations as well as the underlying theoretical mechanism.

In terms of the main effect of organization type diversification, the study found that individuals are more likely to support a nonprofit when the nonprofit's partners are the same type of organization. Although a cross-sector portfolio demonstrates a "rich assemblage of integrative partnerships" (Shumate et al., 2016, p.4), a combination of partners from different organization types also reveals discrepancies in the nonprofit's partner selection. The inherent distinctiveness in the identity and role of each type of organization (Babiak & Thibault, 2009) could induce strong cognitive inconsistency when individuals attempt to internalize the association with the focal nonprofit. Individuals may doubt the compatibility across the partners that the nonprofit works with, and thereby become reluctant to support the nonprofit. This finding suggests that a diversified partnership portfolio in organization type may potentially hurt public support for the nonprofit, such as donations, volunteering, and positive word-of-mouth.

This study also found that trust and attitude toward the nonprofit was not significantly different between the high-diverse (different organization types) and low-diverse (same organization type) conditions. This finding implies that the focal nonprofit may not be able to enjoy a halo effect created by its cross-sector partners. In the latest Edelman Trust Barometer report (Edelman, 2020), the public generally rated the trustworthiness of nonprofits as similar to that of businesses, and both the general and educated public rated nonprofits as more trustworthy than the government. In Study 2, general trust and attitude toward nonprofit, business, and government entities were also

measured as potential covariates. An interesting observation is that participants trusted and favored nonprofits more than business and government entities<sup>1</sup>. Thus, a nonprofit's business and government partners do not, arguably, surpass the nonprofit itself in terms of public trust and attitude. Given the potential risks associated with disclosing cross-sector partners, nonprofits may need to be cautious about partnering with those who are not up to their same level.

Study 2 found that the interaction between portfolio size and organization type diversification significantly influenced individuals' attitude toward the nonprofit. Specifically, the results indicated that when a portfolio included a small number of partners, the partners in the same organization type was favored more than in different organization types. In other words, a small portfolio size may amplify the negative effect of organization type diversification. When fewer partners are included in the portfolio, people's attention is less divided among the partners. Thus, the inconsistency in partners' organization type could become more salient and diagnostic for viewers, and thus could negatively impact their attitude toward the focal nonprofit. In contrast, when more partners are included in the portfolio, the inconsistency could be alleviated.

This finding raises an issue of whether or not to pursue diversified alliances, especially when an NPO only has the capacity to maintain a small number of partners. The findings indicate that the combination of a small portfolio and homogeneous organization type is ideal if a nonprofit has the option to develop dedicated partnerships

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<sup>1</sup> Study 2 found that trust toward nonprofits in general was significantly higher than business ( $M_{\text{difference}} = -.94, t(172) = -9.09, p < .001$ ) and government entities ( $M_{\text{difference}} = -.98, t(172) = -9.20, p < .001$ ). Attitude toward nonprofits in general was also significantly higher than business ( $M_{\text{difference}} = -1.08, t(172) = -8.48, p < .001$ ) and government entities ( $M_{\text{difference}} = -1.28, t(172) = -8.83, p < .001$ ).

with one type of organization. However, this finding does not mean that they should reject partners with different organization types. It is important to note that the attitude toward the nonprofit was rated generally high across all the experimental conditions. Thus, the trade-off between accessing diversified social capital and compromising publics' favorability seems manageable. Since nonprofits have various motivations to form cross-sector partnerships and their partner selections are restricted by the many uncertainties (Babiak & Thibault, 2009; Selesky & Parker, 2005), the partner selection decision on organization type diversification should be made based on each nonprofit's circumstances.

Consistent with Study 1, Study 2 found that portfolio size did not interact with nonprofit cynicism to affect public evaluations of the NPO. However, the study found a significant interaction effect between nonprofit cynicism and organization type diversification on public evaluations of the NPO. Trust and supportive intentions were rated lower in the high-diverse condition than the low-diverse condition as nonprofit cynicism increased, indicating that nonprofit cynicism amplified the negative effect of organization type diversification. More cynical people would trust and support an NPO with partners that are more homogeneous in organizational type, whereas less cynical people would trust and support an NPO with partners that are more heterogeneous in organizational type.

Cynical people may doubt the professionalism, ethical standards, meaning and value of most nonprofits (Gaskin, 1999). Further compounding these suspicions, a mixed group of partners with different or even conflicting social identities could lead

people to perceive the NPO as amorphous in identity, or simply as an opportunist seeking funding sources in a non-selective manner. However, when the partners are concentrated in a single organizational type, regardless of which type it is, the focused connection establishes a clear territory of the NPO's partnerships. People high in nonprofit cynicism may perceive it as a reiteration of the NPO's partner selection logic and become more supportive of the NPO.

According to Liu's (2012) interviews with nonprofit practitioners, public opinion was perceived as a greater constraint of their communication than political and regulatory factors. The empirical evidence from Study 2 confirmed this concern and argued that a hostile public opinion environment poses obstacles to nonprofits' endeavors to communicate about cross-sector partnerships. Practitioners may treat nonprofit cynicism as a reflection of the fundraising climate, which could help them select their partners to best respond to public expectations. For example, an ongoing nonprofit crisis (e.g., scandals) can trigger publics' cynicism toward charities in general. Thus, when cynicism is high, a nonprofit may avoid working with partners with diversified organization types to avoid potential negative effects on public trust and support. In addition, the findings of this study indicated that people with stronger and weaker nonprofit cynicism had the reverse preferences on organization type diversification. Nonprofit practitioners may use these findings to develop partner selection strategies that best meet the psychographics of their key publics.

In summary, Study 2 indicated consistent findings with Study 1 in terms of the insignificant main effect of portfolio size and the interaction effect between portfolio

size and nonprofit cynicism. These findings suggested that further investigations on the mechanism and effect of portfolio size are needed. In addition, Study 2 revealed interesting findings on the interaction effect between nonprofit cynicism and diversification on the public evaluations, which is in an opposite direction to what was found in Study 1. Study 2 also found an interaction effect between portfolio size and organization diversification, which can be used as a reference for nonprofit partnership communication planning. Theoretical and practical implications are discussed further in Chapter 6.

## CHAPTER 6. GENERAL DISCUSSION

Forming cross-sector partnerships is a popular and growing strategy for nonprofits to diversify funding sources, improve organizational capacity, and seek collaborative efforts to solve complicated environmental and social problems (Bryson et al., 2016). However, these collaborative efforts are also controversial. Confronted with consistently declining public trust, nonprofits are under more careful public scrutiny when publicly communicating about their cross-sector partnerships. How should nonprofits strategically disclose their cross-sector partnerships to publics, especially in an increasingly cynical fundraising environment? This study seeks to fill an important gap in the literature on cross-sector partnership communication by examining public reactions to partnership portfolio communication from a nonprofit's perspective.

Conceptualizing nonprofit partnerships as an “interorganizational network portfolio” (Shumate et al., 2018, p. 386), this research focuses on the effects of two partnership portfolio configurations, size and diversification, on individual publics' evaluations of the focal nonprofit (i.e., trust, attitude, and supportive intentions). In addition, this research offers insights into how nonprofits' portfolio configuration interacts with publics' cynicism toward the nonprofit sector and, in particular, how it affects public evaluations of the focal nonprofit. The present research consists of two survey experiments. Focusing on N2B partnerships, the first study manipulated the number of corporations and their business industries in a partnership portfolio of a healthcare nonprofit. Focusing on tripartite cross-sector partnerships, the second study

manipulated the number of partners and their organization type in the portfolio. In both studies, nonprofit cynicism was a measured variable to examine the interaction effects based on the portfolio configuration (i.e., size and diversification).

This chapter first summarizes the key findings from the two experiments and then provides a general discussion of the theoretical and practical implications of this research. Next, the limitations of this research and directions for future research are discussed.

### **Summary of Key Findings**

First, regarding the effects of portfolio size, the results from both studies indicated no evidence of the claim that nonprofits would be more trusted, favored, or supported by working with a large number of partners (eight partners in Study 1 and ten in Study 2) than a smaller number (two partners). Notably, there was a significant difference between showing and not showing corporate partnership information on the nonprofit's website in Study 1. Specifically, trust was much higher when no N2B partnership information was provided than when participants were presented with two corporate partners (i.e., small size). In contrast, in Study 2, there was no significant difference in public evaluations among the small size (two partners), large size (ten partners), and no partnership conditions.

With regard to the effects of portfolio diversification, the results from Study 1 indicated that the business industry of the partners did not have a significant effect on public evaluations of the nonprofit. Trust, attitude, and intention to support the nonprofit did not change significantly between a N2B portfolio with partners from



diverse business industries than one with partners within the same business industry. Nevertheless, both trust and attitude toward the nonprofit were rated significantly higher when no partnership information was disclosed than when the presented corporations were in the same business industry.

The results from Study 2 showed that although the effect of organization type diversification was nonsignificant on trust and attitude, there was a marginally significant effect on the intention to support the nonprofit. Individuals indicated stronger intentions to donate, volunteer, and provide positive word-of-mouth about the nonprofit when its partners were the same type of organization than different types of organizations. In addition, the study found that public evaluations did not change significantly among portfolios with the same organizational type, diverse organizational types, and no partnership information.

In both studies, there was no significant interaction effect between the portfolio size and nonprofit cynicism. However, both types of portfolio diversification (i.e., industry diversification and organization type diversification) interact with nonprofit cynicism to affect public evaluations, but in opposite ways. In Study 1, as the level of nonprofit cynicism increased, the differences in trust and supportive intention between the high and low diverse conditions enlarged. Trust and supportive intentions were rated increasingly higher in the industry heterogeneity condition than in the industry homogeneity condition. Thus, the effect of industry diversification became more positive with increased nonprofit cynicism.

In Study 2, as the level of nonprofit cynicism increased, the differences in trust and supportive intentions between the high and low diverse conditions enlarged; trust and supportive intentions were rated increasingly lower in the heterogeneous organization type condition than in the homogeneous condition. Thus, the effect of organization type diversification became more negative with an increase in nonprofit cynicism.

As for the interaction effect between portfolio size and diversification, the only significant interaction effect was between portfolio size and organization type diversification on participants' attitude toward the nonprofit. Specifically, a portfolio with a small number of partners that were the same type of organization was found to be more favored by publics. In contrast, the combination of a small portfolio and high diversity in organization type yielded a less favorable response. However, no significant interaction effect was found among the three variables on public evaluations.

Taken together, the findings from this research provide several theoretical and practical implications that are relevant to nonprofits' cross-sector partnership communication.

### **Theoretical Implications**

This research contributes to the literature on CSR, cross-sector partnership, and nonprofit communication scholarship. First, this study answers the call for more CSR communication research from a nonprofit perspective (Water & Holly, 2014). Although increased support for partnered nonprofits (e.g., donations) has been cited as a positive

CSR outcome (Bhattacharya & Sen 2004; Lichtenstein et al., 2004; Rim et al., 2016), it has mostly been discussed in corporate-centered CSR models. Rarely have outcomes related to nonprofits been theorized in the framework of CSR communication. This research addresses this gap by adding empirical evidence on publics' cognitive, attitudinal, and behavioral responses to nonprofits embedded in N2B relationships. Adding this missing piece of the puzzle helps complete the picture of the risks and awards of CSR to both allies from a public evaluation perspective.

Specifically, given the nonsignificant main effects of portfolio size and diversification, this research argues that cross-sector partnerships, especially with businesses, bring limited benefits to nonprofits from a stakeholder evaluative perspective. Notably, public evaluations were the highest when no N2B partnership information was disclosed. These findings speak to the challenges expressed by nonprofit practitioners that corporate partners may threaten nonprofits' identity and autonomy and would be taken by publics as a negative signal (Baur & Schmitz, 2012; Harrison, 2019; Herlin, 2015; Samuel et al., 2013). By revisiting the win-win assumption in the N2B partnership literature (Austin, 2000; Porter & Kramer, 2011), this study argues that this assumption should be carefully assessed from a nonprofit perspective. In concert with prior research (Basil & Herr, 2003; Bennett et al., 2013; Lichtenstein et al., 2004), this research calls for more attention to nonprofit-related CSR communication effects, and encourages scholars to add the potential risks nonprofits face to the existing CSR communication framework (Du et al., 2010).

Another contribution is that by employing a network perspective, this study manifests a nonprofit's cross-sector partnership portfolio as an egocentric network (Shumate et al., 2018). In doing so, this research moves away from a dyadic view of partnership to investigate the emerging multiple-partner phenomenon in nonprofits' cross-sector relations. This research emphasizes the role of portfolio diversification in portraying the various investments that nonprofits make in building partnership networks.

By examining two types of partnership diversification (i.e., industry and organization type), the analyses revealed the different interactions with nonprofit cynicism in influencing people's trust and supportive intentions toward the focal nonprofit. These findings suggest that portfolio diversification is a complicated construct and its conceptualization requires further articulation. Diversification can be considered a supplementary dimension of the extant portfolio typology (Shumate et al., 2018), which helps unpack the characteristics of partnership portfolios in greater detail. In addition, it has been unclear whether and how various partnership portfolio configurations influence nonprofits in different ways (Shumate et al., 2016). This research answers this call by providing empirical evidence on the impact of portfolio disclosures from an individual's perspective. The findings add to the existing macro- and meso-levels of analyses of cross-sector partnerships (O'Connor & Shumate, 2014; Shumate et al., 2016; Shumate et al., 2018) and provides an additional perspective in reviewing the outcomes of partnerships (Selsky & Parker, 2005).

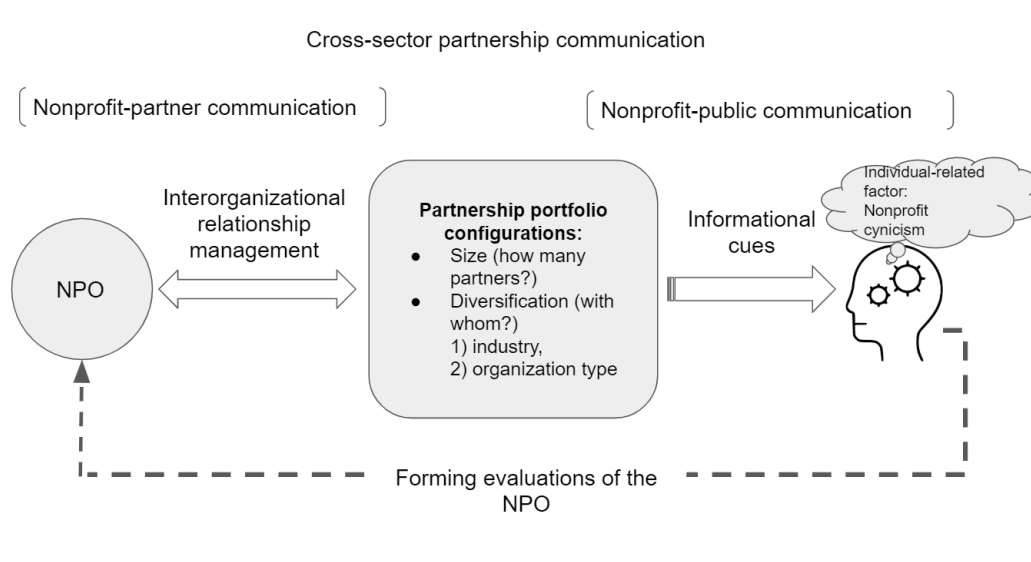
This research also contributes to the nonprofit literature by illustrating the extent to which a cynical fundraising environment and portfolio communication strategies collectively influence individuals' reactions to nonprofits. Based on the interaction effects between nonprofit cynicism and the two types of portfolio diversification, this research suggests that the public opinion environment is an important boundary condition of the effect and effectiveness of communication strategies. Nonprofits are built on public trust and rely on their accumulated social and cultural capital to navigate commercial resources (Bryson, 2007; Shumate et al., 2016). Thus, nonprofits' partnership behaviors are restricted by publics' expectations. Given the rising distrust and criticism toward the nonprofit sector, as well as the controversies around cross-sector partnerships, nonprofit research should pay more attention to audience-related and contextual factors that can shape the communication effect and effectiveness.

In addition, this study contributes to our understanding of stakeholder management in the nonprofit context. Emerging literature has proposed the idea of interconnected stakeholders (Crane, 2020), suggesting that in the information age, an organization's action with one stakeholder is observed by other stakeholders. These observations subsequently influence the other stakeholders' perceived trust of the focal organization. This study illustrates this interconnectedness of stakeholder dynamics in the context of nonprofits' partnership communication. To a nonprofit, both individual donors and partner organizations, such as corporations, are important stakeholders for fundraising. This study suggests that exposure to a nonprofit's interorganizational communication relationships, which are manifested in a partnership portfolio,

individuals with different levels of nonprofit cynicism would perceive the NPO's deliberate fundraising efforts differently and, accordingly, form evaluations of the nonprofit. Thus, this study, in consistent with previous research (Crane, 2020), argues that the partnership portfolio signifies the nonprofit-partner relationships to and function as informational cues to influence nonprofit-public communication in an interconnected ecosystem of stakeholder interests. In addition, these relationships interact with individual-related factors to influence the evaluation of the focal nonprofit (Figure 10).

Last, as discussed in the literature review section, cross-sector partnership has been studied from different perspectives by communication scholars, which can be generally categorized into the interorganizational relationship perspective and the stakeholder reaction perspective. This research argues that, despite their different angles and approaches, these two perspectives are connected through the examination of partnership portfolio. Partnership portfolio is the relational outcome of the interorganizational communication among cross-sector allies; it is also the relationship-centered informational cues that assist stakeholders' responses to the organization (s) embedded in the cross-sector networks. Thus, the author suggests that partnership portfolio has a great potential to consolidate the research on the patterns and effects of partnership disclosures, and further examination of the role of portfolio configurations will contribute to a holistic theoretical understanding of cross-sector partnership from a communication lens.

Figure 10. *Linking Nonprofit-Partner Interorganizational Communication and Nonprofit-Public Communication.*



### Practical Implications

This research provides several practical implications to help nonprofit managers develop their cross-sector portfolio and strategically communicate with their publics about the portfolio. It is important to note that partner selection is a managerial decision making and the disclosure of partnerships is a communication decision. Despite their difference, these two decisions should be consistent to ensure an ethical and transparent communication of cross-sector partnerships. First, nonprofits should carefully evaluate the tradeoff between resource dependency and potentially jeopardizing public evaluations when deciding whether or not to form cross-sector partnerships and how many partners to work with. Study 1 focusing on N2B partnerships found that showing no business partner information yielded higher trust compared to showing two business partners. Thus, when faced with the choice of forming N2B partnerships, nonprofits may focus less on how to maximize good, and, instead, focus on how to reduce harm. It

might be a safer choice to avoid partnering with corporations. However, given the financial pressure many small-size nonprofits face, it would be difficult to reject all possible monetary and other types of resources from businesses. The result showing that a large N2B portfolio and a small one did not yield significant differences in public evaluations implies that there is room for some flexibility in the number of business partners. Small nonprofits should carefully evaluate their own financial situations and the importance of individual donor support before making the tradeoff between whether or not to form N2B partnerships and the number of business partners to work with.

It is also important for nonprofits to identify how they want to diversify partnership resources and carefully examine potential donors' nonprofit cynicism before communicating about diverse cross-sector partnerships. This research provides suggestions focusing on two diversification configurations: business industry and organization type. Partnering with businesses from diverse industries would be a good strategy when the potential individual donors have strong cynicism toward charities in general. However, when the fund-raising environment is generally positive, nonprofits may consider switching to a more homogeneous industry strategy to protect donor trust and support. As for organization type diversification, nonprofits need to be cautious about including cross-sector partners with distinctive organization types into one portfolio, given that it leads to lower intention to support the nonprofit. In addition, if potential donors have strong cynicism toward charities in general, nonprofits may avoid forming alliances with diverse organization types to reduce harm in terms of public trust and support.



When collaborating with organizations of different types, nonprofits should also consider the balance between portfolio size and organization type when developing a partnership portfolio. According to the findings of Study 2, a recommended strategy is to work with a small number of organizations in the same type of industry because it positively influences people's attitude toward the nonprofit. Since business, nonprofit, and government partners represent different funding pools (Jiang, et al., 2010), it may heighten individual donors' perceived inconsistency of the portfolio if there are too many diverse organizations, and thus, it could induce negative feelings about the focal nonprofit. Considering that there is increasing donor cynicism and decreasing public trust in all three types of social institutions (Edelman, 2020), this research encourages nonprofits to develop a portfolio showing a dedication to collaborating with the same type of organization.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

Despite the theoretical and practical contributions of this study, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, although the experiment design of this research is appropriate to demonstrate the causal effect of partnership portfolio configurations on public evaluations, the results from a controlled lab experiment have an inevitable weakness in terms of generalizability. It is also important to note that the stimuli were created to mimic real nonprofit websites, but the artificial environment may have forced participants to pay more attention to the partnership information than they would if it were real.

In addition, only one fictitious nonprofit was used in the two studies. Although the nonprofit was created based on a relatable social issue, public attitude, personal relevance, and other factors, it is possible that the results from the two studies using this nonprofit were restricted by the mission of childhood obesity. Future research should consider applying partnership portfolio strategies in other nonprofit contexts, such as human services, education, and women and children-related nonprofits, to enhance the generalizability of the findings. In addition, limited information was provided about the nonprofit to reduce potential confounding factors associated with the nonprofit brand. However, in reality, individual donors may have developed a relationship with the nonprofit. For example, previous research suggests that nonprofit familiarity is an important contributor to CSR support (Rim et al., 2016). The organizational attributes of nonprofits, such as its familiarity and reputation, are important factors affecting donation behaviors (Bekker & Wieping, 2011).

Future research would benefit from examining how these factors interact with partnership portfolio configurations to affect public evaluations. In the current research, the baseline public evaluations of the nonprofit indicated in the control conditions was overall high. Given the increased media coverage of nonprofit scandals, future research may investigate how publics perceive a nonprofit's alliance portfolio strategies in a time of crisis when the nonprofit's reputation has been tarnished, which would add more nuances in portfolio communication effects.

Since the focus of this study was not related to the fit, in both experiments, the cause-business fit was carefully controlled through pretests. All the business industries

and companies were selected for their neutral fit with the NPO's cause. Although this approach reduces the potential biased effects from excessive high or low fit, it may weaken participants' engagement with the stimuli. As numerous studies have pointed out, fit is an important factor affecting people's judgement of N2B partnerships (e.g., Nan & Heo, 2007). Thus, future research may consider including both the functional fit as well as other types of fit (Kim et al., 2000) as an additional portfolio strategy and examine the interactions with portfolio size and diversification.

Another limitation is that the manipulations of portfolio size and diversification faced several challenges. The author manipulated the portfolio size following the guidelines of previous research and real nonprofit examples. The researcher needs to consider the portfolio size in terms of the feasibility of manipulating diversification and controlling fit. For example, it was difficult to find more than eight business partners that were comparable in terms of brand attitude, familiarity, and fit with the NPO. Thus, the large portfolio size was restricted to a certain number. Although the manipulation checks showed a significant difference between the small and large portfolio sizes in perceived size, the difference between the small size and large size could be amplified more. For example, Shumate et al. (2016) found that, on average, top nonprofits reported about 30 business partnerships. Further research may consider a larger range of portfolio sizes to identify a clearer pattern of its effects on public evaluations.

In this study of N2B partnership portfolios, both the number and business industry of the corporate partners were manipulated in a single stimulus. This approach

has an inevitable limitation in that when the portfolio size increases, it allows more room for diversification. Although the manipulation checks for both variables were successful, and no significant interaction effect between them were found on perceived size or diversification, the possibility of unintended intervention between them cannot be completely eliminated and should be acknowledged when interpreting the findings.

Limitations in the sample should also be acknowledged. This study used MTurk to recruit participants, which is not a representative sample of the general population. Thus, the findings cannot be generalized to all individual publics. In addition, this study did not differentiate the type of publics and stakeholders of nonprofits, such as nonprofit employees (Herlin, 2015) or activist groups (Maktoufi, O'Connor, & Shumate, 2020). Future research should consider using either a more representative sample pool of the general public or focus on a specific stakeholder group to enhance the practical implications of portfolio strategies.

Nonprofit cynicism was measured at the beginning of the two studies. This decision was made to reduce the potential influence of stimuli on the variable. However, since cynicism measures a negative tendency towards charities, the possibility that such a negative feeling carried over to the rest of the survey cannot be completely eliminated and thereby should be acknowledged. Although there was a short statement in the instructions (e.g., CSR definition) after the measurement of nonprofit cynicism, future research should consider adding a longer break or distractions to reduce the potential carry-over effect.

Finally, this study did not find clear evidence of the underlying psychological mechanisms of individuals' reactions to different portfolio sizes and diversification. Future research may use the present study as a starting point to investigate additional factors that could moderate or mediate partnership portfolio disclosures. For example, Bekker and Wieping (2011) introduced eight underlying mechanisms of charitable donation behaviors. It would be interesting to explore the linkage between the different partnership portfolio strategies of these mechanisms to find an appropriate explanation of the communication effects. Given publics' increasing distrust in nonprofits, future scholars may also draw on attribution theory to investigate whether different portfolio disclosures affect individuals' perceived motivation of the nonprofit, which could consequently influence their donation intentions. It would also be important to conduct qualitative research, such as belief-elicitation studies, to understand the exact concerns and expectations of key publics regarding nonprofits' efforts in developing strategic partnerships.

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## **Appendix A: Study 1 Survey Questionnaire**

### **INFORMATION SHEET FOR RESEARCH**

You are invited to be in a research study of nonprofit organizations and their business partners. You were selected as a possible participant because you are above 18 years old and have a valid work account on Amazon MTurk. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study. You will receive a financial compensation of \$1 for participating in this study.

This study is being conducted by Chuqing Dong at the Hubbard School of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Minnesota.

#### **Procedures:**

If you agree to be in this study, we would ask you to do the following:  
You will be provided with a statement of a nonprofit organization. Next, you will be presented with information about the nonprofit's partnerships with businesses. After that, you will be asked to provide thoughts based on the information.

#### **Confidentiality:**

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report, we might publish, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only researchers will have access to the records.

#### **Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University of Minnesota or the Hubbard School of Journalism and Mass Communication. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any questions or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

#### **Contacts and Questions:**

The researchers conducting this study are: Chuqing Dong (student) and Dr. Hyejoon Rim (faculty advisor). You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact them at 111 Murphy Hall 206 Church St SE, Minneapolis, MN 55455, 612-625-9824, dongx239@umn.edu.

This research has been reviewed and approved by an IRB within the Human Research Protections Program (HRPP). To share feedback privately with the HRPP about your research experience, call the Research Participants' Advocate Line at 612-625-1650 or go to <https://research.umn.edu/units/hrpp/research-participants/questions-concerns>. You are encouraged to contact the HRPP if:

- Your questions, concerns, or complaints are not being answered by the research team.
- You cannot reach the research team.
- You want to talk to someone besides the research team.
- You have questions about your rights as a research participant.
- You want to get information or provide input about this research.

I certify that I have read, understood, and printed a copy of the above consent form and desire to participate in this study.

Yes (1)

No (2)

Thank you for willing to participate in this survey! First of all, we would like to learn about your opinions toward the nonprofit sector in general.

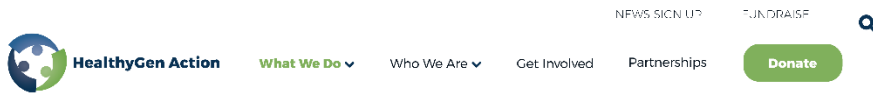
### **Nonprofit cynicism**

Please rate the following statements based on your general perceptions of charities and nonprofit organizations. (Strongly disagree (1) to Strongly agree (7))

1. Charities/ NPOs will tell a lie if they can gain by it.
2. Charities/ NPOs claim to have ethical standards, but few sticks to them when money is at stake.
3. Charities/ NPOs pretend to care more about social issues than they really do.
4. Most charities/ NPOs are just out for themselves.
5. Much of the money donated to charities/ NPOs is wasted.
6. Many charities/ NPOs are dishonest.
7. There seems to be a lot of corruption in charity collection and distribution.

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) partnerships are strategic collaborations between businesses and nonprofits. These partnerships usually address social or environmental issues and produce specific organizational benefits for both partners. Some examples of nonprofit-business partnerships include sponsorship, gift-giving, and cause-related marketing.

On the next page, you will see information about a healthcare nonprofit organization (NPO). Please read the information and answer the questions after that.



## For a healthier generation

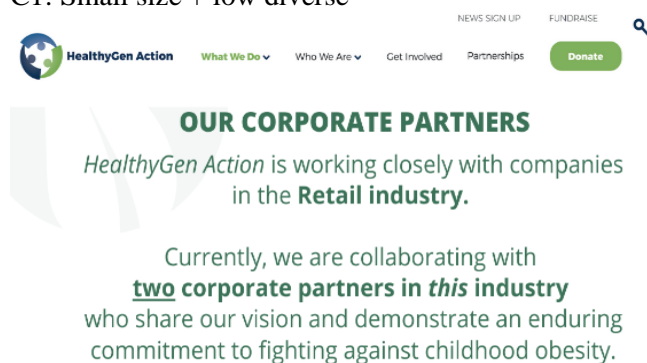
HealthyGen Action is a tax-exempt nonprofit organization under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. **Our mission is to promote healthy eating and fight against childhood obesity** by providing access to physical activities, educational information, and healthier foods to children, families, and schools, especially in low-income communities and rural areas.

**Attention check.** This is an attention check question. Which of the following options best describes HealthGen Action's social cause?

- Childhood obesity (1)
- Breast cancer (2)
- Housing (3)

Next, you will see a screenshot of HealthyGen Action's website showing its partnership information. Please review the information carefully and answer the following questions.

C1: Small size + low diverse





## C2: Small size + high diverse



### OUR CORPORATE PARTNERS

HealthyGen Action is working closely with companies in various industries, including the

**1) Retail industry and 2) Telecommunications industry.**



Currently, we are collaborating with **two corporate partners in these industries** who share our vision and demonstrate an enduring commitment to fighting against childhood obesity.

## C3: Large size + low diverse



### OUR CORPORATE PARTNERS

HealthyGen Action is working closely with companies in the **Retail industry.**



Currently, we are collaborating with **eight corporate partners in this industry** who share our vision and demonstrate an enduring commitment to fighting against childhood obesity.

## C4: Large size + high diverse



### OUR CORPORATE PARTNERS

HealthyGen Action is working closely with companies in various industries, including the

- 1) Retail,
- 2) Medical device,
- 3) Household product,
- 4) Media,
- 5) Transportation & logistics,
- 6) Apparel,
- 7) Hotels, casinos, & resorts,
- 8) Telecommunications industries.



Currently, we are collaborating with **eight corporate partners across these industries** who share our vision and demonstrate an enduring commitment to fighting against childhood obesity.

### Manipulation Checks

Please rate the following statements based on the information you just read:  
(Strongly disagree (1) to Strongly agree (7))

1. HealthyGen Action has an extensive partnership engagement.
2. HealthyGen Action collaborates with many partners.
3. HealthyGen Action has a large network.

Please indicate the extent to which the business industry differs across the partners (with which HealthyGen Action is forming partnerships).

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Does not vary at all	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	varies a lot
Not at all different	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	very different
Not at all diverse	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	very diverse

### Trust

Based on the information you just read about HealthyGen Action, please rate the following statements:

(Strongly disagree (1) to Strongly agree (7))

1. I would trust HealthyGen Action to operate ethically.
2. I would trust HealthyGen Action to use donated funds appropriately.
3. I would trust HealthyGen Action not to exploit their donors.
4. I would trust HealthyGen Action to use fundraising techniques that are appropriate.
5. *This is an attention check.* Please select somewhat disagree.
6. I feel very confident about HealthyGen Action skills in fundraising.
7. HealthyGen Action seems to have the ability to accomplish what it says it will do.
8. HealthyGen Action seems competent and effective in promoting its cause. I would trust HealthyGen Action to always act in the best interest of the cause.
9. HealthyGen Action seems to care about social benefits, not just its own interests.
10. It seems like HealthyGen Action would do its best to pursue its mission.

### Attitude

Based on the information you just read about HealthyGen Action, please answer the following questions:





**Industry trust**

In general,

	Untrustworthy (1)					Trustworthy (7)	
the Retail industry is	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
the Medical device industry is	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
the Household product industry is	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
the Media industry is	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
the Transportation and logistics industry is	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
the Apparel industry is	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
the Hotels, casinos, & resorts industry is	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
the Telecommunications industry is	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**Demographic information**

Last, we would like to learn more about you.

What is your age?

What is your sex?

- Male
- Female
- Prefer not to answer

Please specify your ethnicity.

- White
- Hispanic or Latino
- Black or African American
- Native American or American Indian
- Asian / Pacific Islander

- Other
- Prefer not to answer

What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed?

- No schooling completed
- Some high school, no diploma
- High school graduate, diploma or the equivalent
- Associate degree
- Bachelor's degree
- Master's degree
- Professional degree
- Doctorate degree
- Prefer not to answer

What is your total household income?

- Less than \$10,000
- \$10,000 to \$24,999
- \$25,000 to \$49,999
- \$50,000 to \$74,999
- \$75,000 to \$99,999
- \$100,000 to \$149,999
- \$150,000 or more
- Prefer not to answer

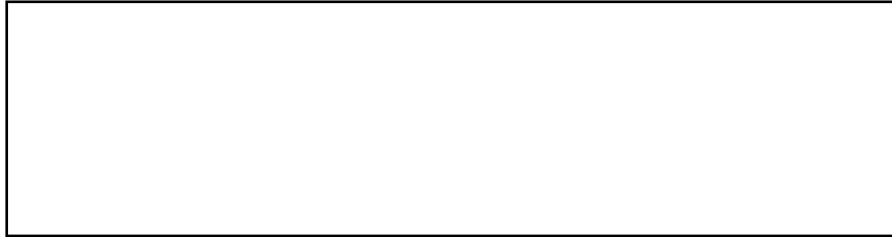
### **Debrief**

Nowadays, nonprofit-business partnerships are getting more and more popular. This is a study to understand how a nonprofit's partnerships with corporations may affect people's reactions to the nonprofit. Your responses will help scholars to understand the impact of nonprofit-business partnerships better and help nonprofit practitioners to make better

decisions when seeking for corporate support.

If you have any thoughts or questions regarding the information you just saw, please share them here.

Thank you for your participation!

A large, empty rectangular box with a black border, intended for the respondent to provide feedback or ask questions.

End of survey.

## **Appendix B: Study 2 Survey Questionnaire**

### INFORMATION SHEET FOR RESEARCH

You are invited to be in a research study of nonprofit organizations and their causes. You were selected as a possible participant because you are above 18 years old and have a valid work account on Amazon MTurk. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study. You will receive \$1 financial compensation for participating in this study.

This study is being conducted by Chuqing Dong at Hubbard School of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Minnesota.

#### Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, we would ask you to do the following:

You will be provided with a statement of a nonprofit organization. Next, you will be presented with information about the nonprofit's partnerships with some organizations.

After that, you will be asked to provide thoughts based on the information.

#### Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report, we might publish, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only researchers will have access to the records.

#### Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University of Minnesota or the Hubbard School of Journalism and Mass Communication. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

#### Contacts and Questions:

The researcher(s) conducting this study is (are): Chuqing Dong (student) and Dr. Hyejoon Rim (faculty advisor). You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact them at 111 Murphy Hall 206 Church St SE, Minneapolis, MN 55455, 612-625-9824, dongx239@umn.edu

This research has been reviewed and approved by an IRB within the Human Research Protections Program (HRPP). To share feedback privately with the HRPP about your research experience, call the Research Participants' Advocate Line at 612-625-1650 or go to <https://research.umn.edu/units/hrpp/research-participants/questions-concerns>. You are encouraged to contact the HRPP if:



- Your questions, concerns, or complaints are not being answered by the research team.
- You cannot reach the research team.
- You want to talk to someone besides the research team.
- You have questions about your rights as a research participant.
- You want to get information or provide input about this research.

I certify that I have read, understood, and printed a copy of the above consent form and desire to participate in this study.

Yes (1)

No (2)

Thank you for willing to participate in this survey! First of all, we would like to learn about your opinions about the nonprofit sector in general.

### Nonprofit Cynicism

Please rate the following statements based on your **general perceptions** of charities and nonprofit organizations. (Strongly disagree (1) to Strongly agree (7))

1. Charities/ NPOs will tell a lie if they can gain by it.
2. Charities/ NPOs claim to have ethical standards, but few sticks to them when money is at stake.
3. Charities/ NPOs pretend to care more about social issues than they really do.
4. Most charities/ NPOs are just out for themselves.
5. Much of the money donated to charities/ NPOs is wasted.
6. Many charities/ NPOs are dishonest.
7. There seems to be a lot of corruption in charity collection and distribution.

On the next page, you will see information about a healthcare nonprofit organization (NPO). Please read the information and answer the questions after that.



## For a healthier generation

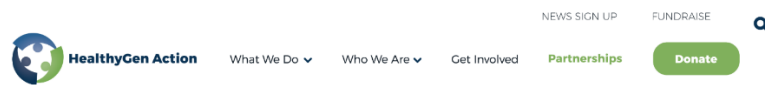
HealthyGen Action is a tax-exempt nonprofit organization under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. **Our mission is to promote healthy eating and fight against childhood obesity** by providing access to physical activities, educational information, and healthier foods to children, families, and schools, especially in low-income communities and rural areas.

**Attention check.** This is an attention check question. Which of the following options best describes HealthGen Action's social cause?

- Childhood obesity (1)
- Breast cancer (2)
- Housing (3)

Next, you will see a screenshot of HealthyGen Action's website showing its partnership information. Please review the information carefully and answer the following questions.

C1: Small size + low diverse



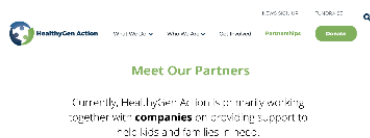
### Partnerships

HealthyGen Action believes that partnerships are essential to improve childhood obesity awareness and prevention.

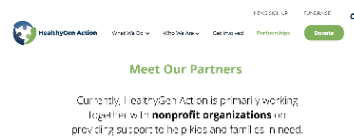
We are collaborating with **two partners** who share our vision and demonstrate an enduring commitment to fighting against childhood obesity.

(Manipulation Check Portfolio Size)

Sub condition 1



Sub condition 2

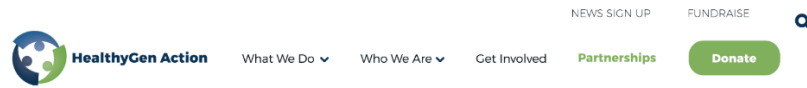


Sub condition 3



(MC Organization Type Diversification)

C2. Small size + high diverse



## Partnerships

*HealthyGen Action* believes that partnerships are essential to improve childhood obesity awareness and prevention.

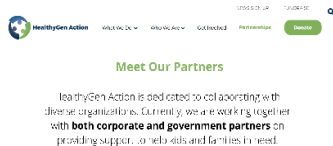
We are collaborating with **two partners** who share our vision and demonstrate an enduring commitment to fighting against childhood obesity.

*(Manipulation Check Portfolio Size)*

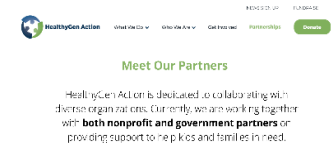
### Sub condition 1



### Sub condition 2

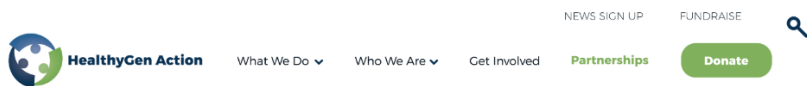


### Sub condition 3



*(MC Organization Type Diversification)*

C3: Large size + low diverse



## Partnerships

*HealthyGen Action* believes that partnerships are essential to improve childhood obesity awareness and prevention.

We are collaborating with **ten partners** who share our vision and demonstrate an enduring commitment to fighting against childhood obesity.

*(Manipulation Check Portfolio Size)*

### Sub condition 1

Currently, HealthyGen Action is primarily working together with **companies** on providing support to help kids and families in need.

### Sub condition 2

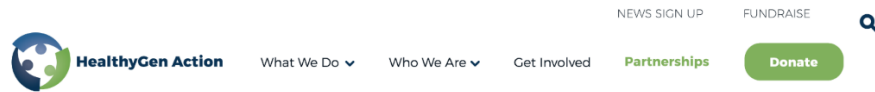
Currently, HealthyGen Action is primarily working together with **nonprofit organizations** on providing support to help kids and families in need.

### Sub condition 3

Currently, HealthyGen Action is primarily working together with **government agencies** on providing support to help kids and families in need.

*(MC Organization Type Diversification)*

C4: Large size + high diverse (firm+np+gov)



## Partnerships

HealthyGen Action believes that partnerships are essential to improve childhood obesity awareness and prevention.

We are collaborating with **ten partners** who share our vision and demonstrate an enduring commitment to fighting against childhood obesity.

*(Manipulation Check Portfolio Size)*



*(MC Organization Type Diversification)*

### Manipulation Check Portfolio Size

Please rate the following statements based on the information you just read:  
(Strongly disagree (1) to Strongly agree (7))

1. HealthyGen Action has an extensive partnership engagement.
2. HealthyGen Action collaborates with many partners.
3. HealthyGen Action has a large network.

### MC Organization Type Diversification

Usually, there are three main organization types: business, nonprofit, and government. Think about the current partners that HealthyGen Action has.

To what degree do you think that the partners are different types of organizations?

Think about the current partners that HealthyGen Action has, which statement best describes the partners?

- HealthyGen Action's partners are the SAME type of organization.
- HealthyGen Action's partners are DIFFERENT types of organization.

The organization type of HealthyGen Action's current partners:

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
does not vary at all	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	varies a lot
is not at all different	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	very different
is not at all diverse	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	very diverse

### Trust

Based on the information you just read about HealthyGen Action, please rate the following statements:

(Strongly disagree (1) to Strongly agree (7))

1. I would trust HealthyGen Action to operate ethically.
2. I would trust HealthyGen Action to use donated funds appropriately.
3. I would trust HealthyGen Action not to exploit their donors.
4. I would trust HealthyGen Action to use fundraising techniques that are appropriate.
5. *This is an attention check.* Please select somewhat disagree.
6. I feel very confident about HealthyGen Action skills in fundraising.
7. HealthyGen Action seems to have the ability to accomplish what it says it will do.
8. HealthyGen Action seems competent and effective in promoting its cause. I would trust HealthyGen Action to always act in the best interest of the cause.
9. HealthyGen Action seems to care about social benefits, not just its own interests.
10. It seems like HealthyGen Action would do its best to pursue its mission.

### Attitude

Based on the information you just read about HealthyGen Action, please answer the following questions:







	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
Nonprofits are truthful to us.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Nonprofits treat me justly and fairly.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Nonprofits keep their promises.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

### Attitude toward government, business, and nonprofit

Please indicate your general attitudes toward the following social institutions

	Negative 1	2	3	4	5	6	Positive 7
Government	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Businesses	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Nonprofits	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

### Portfolio fit

You are close to the end of this survey. As a reminder, below is the image you saw earlier about HealthyGen Action's partners.

[Present the portfolio stimuli]

Fit is the similarity or relatedness between a nonprofit's cause and the core business/mission of its partner. Please rate the following statements:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
Overall, there is a logical connection between these partners and <u>HealthyGen Action</u> .	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Overall, <u>HealthyGen Action</u> and these partners fit together well.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Overall, it makes sense to me that <u>HealthyGen Action</u> works with these partners.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

### Demographic information

Last, we would like to learn more about you.

What is your age?

What is your sex?

- Male
- Female
- Prefer not to answer

Please specify your ethnicity.

- White
- Hispanic or Latino
- Black or African American
- Native American or American Indian
- Asian / Pacific Islander
- Other
- Prefer not to answer

What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed?

- No schooling completed
- Some high school, no diploma
- High school graduate, diploma or the equivalent
- Associate degree
- Bachelor's degree
- Master's degree
- Professional degree
- Doctorate degree
- Prefer not to answer

What is your total household income?

- Less than \$10,000
- \$10,000 to \$24,999
- \$25,000 to \$49,999
- \$50,000 to \$74,999
- \$75,000 to \$99,999
- \$100,000 to \$149,999
- \$150,000 or more
- Prefer not to answer

**Debrief**

This is a study to understand how a nonprofit's partnerships with corporations and other organizations may affect people's reactions to the nonprofit. Your responses will help scholars to understand the impact of nonprofits' partnerships better and help nonprofit practitioners to make better decisions when seeking for corporate support.

If you have any questions or confusion about the information you just saw, please share them here.

Thank you for your participation!



End of survey.