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Planning Jagathon: Commitment and Social Identities

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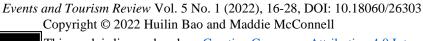
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Abstract

Jagathon has been one of the most significant events at IUPUI which is hosted and planned by IUPUI students. The study used social identity theory to indicate the planning process of Jagathon's influences on Jagathon planners. The researchers conducted a qualitative study by interviewing 8 Jagathon planners. The results of the research showed that social identities can be enhanced through the planning of Jagathon as planners have gained self-development and found themselves more committed to IUPUI and themselves. The researchers also found that diversity can lead to increased participation. Based on the findings, this study provides some discussions about how IUPUI can enhance students' experience and engagement on campus and increase students' long-term commitment to IUPUI.

Keywords: Social Identity, Students' Commitment and Engagement, IUPUI, Jagathon, Diversity

Planning Jagathon: Commitment and Social Identities

How a university affects the cognitive well-being of its students during and well after college has been a developing topic of interest (Weidman, 1989). More specifically, the social facet of college becomes the primary reason students resonate with a university and the entities within it. People, in this case students, all socially identify themselves with something or someone. Meaning students feel a great sense of belonging and are content with who they are when associated with a given group, brand, or organization. Henri Tajfel, a well-known psychologist, calls this the social identity theory (McLeod, 2019). This theory clearly presents itself within the planning and executing of Jagathon, a 15-hour dance marathon hosted by IUPUI, with the purpose of fundraising and bringing awareness to pediatric research (IUPUI Student Foundation, 2022). Jagathon specifically caters to children at Riley Children's Hospital, and has been serving and inspiring them for over 20 years (IUPUI Student Foundation, 2022). The event is bigger than dancing for money, it is a continuous movement of hope driven by passion, and all planned by students on campus that perhaps have the most passion to keep the tradition alive.

IUPUI dedicates an entire class to the planning and organization of Jagathon, filled with twenty-five students with various backgrounds and lifestyles (IUPUI Student Foundation, 2022). The researchers will target this diverse group of students to ultimately demonstrate that diverse populations can identify with similar groups. Due to the focus in such a diverse and interactive environment, the aim of this research is to find out each student's cognitive relationship to Jagathon with the purpose of emphasizing the importance of extracurricular activities and their direct effect on alumni retention and new student recruitment. This can be viewed as the ongoing cycle of student involvement, and with this study, the researchers want to discover if Jagathon can be an effective tool for the cycle.

First, the research will take a deeper dive into the demographic picture of the Jagathon executive board. What is their position on the board, gender, ethnicity, and education level? From there the research aims to interpret the students' motivations and constraints of planning Jagathon.

What are they and why? Why do they dedicate their time? Once these questions are answered, the research dissects our ultimate research questions:

- How does a planner's involvement in Jagathon affect their social identity to IUPUI and Jagathon itself?
- How has the planning experience affected their long term commitment to IUPUI and Jagathon?

The above questions guide the research to ultimately identify various reasons for extracurricular involvement, distinguish the disconnect between social identity and social gaps, and explain the importance of alumni retention. It is important to achieve such objectives because the longevity of IUPUI programming and student groups is essential for enticing purposes as new students arrive on campus, and retention purposes for alumni impact after earning a degree. The research should fill the social gap that is present in students who struggle to identify with something or someone here at IUPUI as the study can be an advocate for Jagathon, and unveil why social identity is present in the Jagathon planners.

While the research will indicate the demographic and cognitive make-up of Jagathon planners, it is also going to provide insight on one's attachment to a sole event and why. The findings will supply a better understanding of the cognitive relationship between the planning experience and the students, as the researchers are on a quest to discover each of the planners' reasons for commitment and identification. The research will discuss the importance of student involvement and how it relates to the overall growth and sustainability of IUPUI's heartfelt event.

This study will be using a deductive approach while dissecting the social identity theory. With this, the results of the study will interpret how various students at IUPUI mentally and emotionally identify with Jagathon and how it can contribute to student commitment to the university long after graduation. Overall, the goal is for this research to assist IUPUI in meeting and exceeding its students' social needs. It is essential for IUPUI to have a sense of belonging for students, as the students can identify with something or someone that will always resonate with them, like Jagathon.

A Theoretical Framework

This study exists to evaluate the people behind Jagathon. It is set out to reveal their motives for planning and how their planning experience influences their social identities while at IUPUI. The study develops a conceptual model while highlighting the social identity theory. With this theory, the research will provide a more thorough understanding of the catalysts that kickstarted the executive board's involvement and how Jagathon resonates with them so much that they socially identify with this group. In turn, the study will indicate the possibilities of a long-term commitment to IUPUI for students well beyond graduation and the commonality of interest within diverse populations. Ultimately researchers want to unpack how involvement initiates the social identification process within university students.

Social identity theory proposes that people characterize who they are by affiliating themselves into social groups (Fujita, Harrigan, Soutar, 2018). In fact, social identity is often compared to group identity. Rightfully so, as they both imbricate under the identity theory. Group refers to the membership in a community of specified others, like a school or organization (Davis, Love, Faris, 2019). On the other hand, social denotes an individual's position within the overall social structure, like race, age, and gender (Davis, Love, Faris, 2019). The two identities represent a

single unit and best explain how identities are multifaceted and involve individual, interpersonal, and social processes rooted in social structures (Davis, Love, Faris, 2019). Once these identities are pertinent within an experience, individuals begin to validate their affiliation by finding meaning through group interaction (Davics, Love, Faris). In other words, once an individual is aware of their social identification with a group they start to distinguish how and why that is the case. This is a direct reflection of what the researchers intend to do while studying the affiliation of student planners of Jagathon and IUPUI.

With all that said, the social identity theory consists of three components: cognitive, affective, and evaluative. All of which are initiated in various situations and involve people who are willing to represent a group at the highest level, while being the best of its kind (Fujita, Harrigan, Soutar, 2018). Cognitive refers to the self-awareness one has of their group affiliation. Affective, referring to the commitment and emotional bond to their group, resulting in a sense of belonging, enthusiasm, and pride. Evaluative, referring to an affiliate's perspective of how the outsiders view the group; in turn, being a self-esteem booster for the affiliate. All of these aspects of social identification arise from meaningful interactions where people establish meanings through verbal and nonverbal exchanges which includes the social channel of shared ideas, values, and traditions (Fujita, Harrigan, Soutar, 2018). Similar to how identifying with a sports team can enhance traditions and experience, identifying with a renowned event can enhance rituals and establish history. Furthermore, people's identity with an organization intensifies when it is apparent their affiliation opens doors for other prime social roles (Fujita, Harrigan, Soutar, 2018). With that said, students may identify with IUPUI more when taking a lead role in Jagathon makes them feel heavily supported. With this, the diverse group of students that make up the Jagathon executive board, become influencers on campus. Meaning inclusivity is present when historically underrepresented communities feel like they belong. What makes this phenomenon even more unique is the longevity of the affiliation attached to that belongingness.

Methodology

The current literature raises the question as to if and how social identity theory is present in a college environment and how that may affect students' commitment to a given institution. Using an ontological approach, this overall question is best acknowledged within a qualitative design to develop insight of student belongingness within Jagathon and on IUPUI's campus. The researchers noticed that the understanding of students' cognitive motivations needed to be understood while the reasonings behind these motivations were discovered. Consequently, this research was constructed phenomenologically, meaning the researchers set out to explore human experience with a phenomenon, in this case, Jagathon (Creswell, 2012). This idea dialed in on consciousness within an experience such as an individual's judgments, perceptions, and emotions; simply put how an experience made one feel (Connelly 2010). This idea also dialed in on what causes those feelings and how the feelings are maintained. A phenomenological form of study has become a rather popular research perspective to learn about an experience in the humanistic and social science regimens (Jamal, Pernecky 2010). This construct allowed the researchers to depict subjects' level of attachment to and involvement within the social experience at hand.

Data Collection

The study presented the viewpoints of students who were 18 years of age or older, IUPUI students or alumni, and affiliates of the Jagathon planning team. Also, all interviewees were either

past or present Jagathon executive board members. A sample size of eight interviews was conducted for the study, with four students from historically underrepresented communities and four Caucasian students. There were a plethora of reasons the previously mentioned criteria was used for the researchers' interviewees. First, though there are dance marathons nationwide, Jagathon is specifically unique to IUPUI and its student body. Second, the study was exclusive to only present and former Jagathon planning team members because they were immersed in the year round experience as opposed to future executive board candidates. Third, the four dedicated interviewee slots for historically underrepresented populations are essential for the researchers to indicate the power of student involvement and fusing diverse populations.

Snowball and purposive sampling were used for this study, as the interviewees were recruited through the researchers' professional and personal networks, while having subjects allude to additional interviewees. The eight participants ranged from underclassmen, upperclassmen, and alumni from various academic departments across the university campus. As a result of the researchers' concentration in event tourism studies, and the networks that were built within those studies, the researchers were able to schedule the initial interviews with simplicity. With the use of snowball sampling, the remaining participants would follow along with their varying profiles. The interview participants were within the age range of 19-23. Of the eight participants three obtained their bachelor's degree, while five were still pursuing theirs. Six interviewees were femaleidentifying individuals and two were male-identifying. A detailed breakdown of the interviewee sample profile can be found in Table 1.1. Uniquely enough, two interviewees were not only IUPUI affiliates, but Riley Children Hospital affiliates as well, whether it be as a patient or a relative of one. Lastly, three of the eight respondents participated in dance marathon planning in high school. These stats contribute highly to the motivational and diverse aspects of the study. Throughout the remainder of this study, all participants' confidentiality are secured as the researchers will address them with the use of numerical labels.

Table 1.1 Interview Sample Profile

Variable	Frequency	%
Gender		
Male	2	25
Female	6	75
Education		
High School/Some college	5	62.5
Bachelor's Degree	3	37.5
Ethnicity		
White	4	50
African American	1	12.5
Asian American	1	12.5
Hispanic	1	12.5
Indian	1	12.5

Others	0	0	
Age			
18-20	4	50	
21-23	4	50	

This methodology was used as a result of the structure of Jagathon's planning team. A diverse group of students designated an entire class to plan this well-known campus event. The researchers received the class roster from IUPUI faculty, along with past e-board members and purposely selected interviewees from that roster. To pursue the planners' motives for Jagathon leadership, the researchers structured interview questions that help define social identity aspects to be explored, while also allowing the researcher and interviewee to elaborate and diverge if needed. The interview includes the following sections:(1) basic demographic information (2) planning experience of Jagathon (3) motivations of planning Jagathon (4) social identifiers and feelings (5) impact of social identity through the Jagathon experience.

The interview questions are as follows:

Demographic

- 1. Can you tell me your age, gender, ethnicity, education level?
- 2. Can you tell me your involvement with Jagathon?
 - a. Participation
 - b. Involvement
 - c. Reasons to participate in Jagathon

Planning experience of Jagathon

- 3. Have you participated in Jagathon before becoming a member of the executive board?
- 4. What other things do you do on campus?

Motivations

- 5. How/Why did you get involved in Jagathon?
- 6. What is the biggest motivation for you to host Jagathon?

Social identifiers & feelings

- 7. How does Jagathon make you feel as an IUPUI member?
 - a. Do you feel Jagathon makes you more committed to IUPUI?
 - b. Do you feel a sense of belonging or achievement?
 - c. Do you feel proud?
- 8. What does Jagathon mean to you?
 - a. Does Jagathon help you with self actualization?
 - b. Does Jagathon help you Increase self-esteem?
 - c. Does Jagathon offer you a self-defining moment? Self-identification
- 9. Do you feel related to the group of executive boards of Jagathon?

Impact of the experience

- 10. After the completion of Jagathon, do you feel more committed to yourself or to the group?
- 11. Do you feel empowered through the planning of the Jagathon?
 - a. As a minority? This portion will be added above for the 4 historically underrepresented students.
 - b. Do you think Jagathon is a diverse and inclusive event?

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- 12. Do you plan to stay connected with Jagathon after this year/graduate?
- 13. What are the biggest challenges for you to host Jagathon?
- 14. Extra comments?

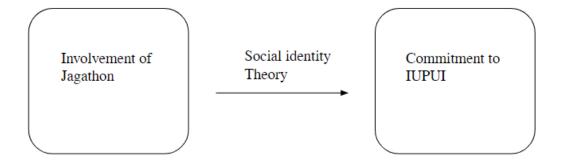
As displayed above, the questionnaire included many open-ended and unbiased questions that allowed for true, authentic comments by all participants. Some questions were followed by probes for elaboration purposes, so researchers could gather a full understanding of Jagathon planners' motivations and momentous thoughts. The interviews were conducted via Zoom under a semi-structured format and ranged from 10-30 minutes in duration, with the average interview length being 15 minutes. From the interview recordings, participant responses were transcribed through the Zoom platform. Prior to dissecting and analyzing the transcribed content, the researchers individually verified each script to reflect the interviewees responses.

Data Analysis

To analyze the data the researchers conducted a thematic analysis, which is the process of identifying patterns or themes within qualitative data (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). A thematic analysis is a very flexible method and considered very advantageous for researchers due to the diversity of research that is conducted (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). The analysis flow chart is described in Figure 1. Based on Braun & Clarke's six-step framework to conduct a thematic analysis the researchers performed these steps. First, the researchers became familiar with each transcript (four each), as they read the transcript line by line numerous times and made note of any intriguing responses that were found. Then the researchers organized the data in a significant way through coding common terms, ideas, and phrases (Beamon 2010). Next the researchers, as a collective, modified the codes into themes, which are patterns that are characterized by their significance (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). From there, the coding and theming continued until new themes were absent from the interviews. The major themes that were evident after coding were commitment, skill enhancement, connections, empathy, personal development, and evolution. As sub-themes presented themselves the researchers further dissected the data accordingly. Following the acquiring of themes, the researchers created a write-up that properly portrayed the analysis along with the subjects' feelings, motivations, and social identifiers of Jagathon.

Figure 1.

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Findings

A total of eight individuals participated in this qualitative study and their demographic information can be found in Table 1.1. Many researchers have noted that student involvement has played a pivotal role in a balanced and enjoyable college experience. It has also been said that getting involved creates a sense of belonging on campus for students, and this study confirms these findings (College Data, 2020).

Motivations

The participant responses were direct and noted that Jagathon was an event that embraced the meaning of impactful experiences. From that, the most common motivations were proved to be helping the children, the emotional high during the event, and the people that make the event possible. Participant 5 explained wanting to find something that resonated with him on campus and finding that after the atmosphere of Jagathon filled him with great emotion. Motivated by identification is evidence that Jagathon can be a great extracurricular activity to create belonging during a student's college career:

Once I got to experience [Jagathon]... being in that atmosphere and in that environment... the emotions it's like a whole other experience when you're actually there... I was like yeah, this is my thing.

As for other respondents, being surrounded by different people from all walks of life while planning was a riveting time for them and very beneficial. Participant 8 mentioned how she thrived off those differences:

One of my biggest motivators were the people . . . because everyone is so different . . . we all have different majors, from different schools, from different walks of life.

When asked why they wanted to get involved, Participant 2 emphasized the children and displayed a great example of empathy, while Participant 3 described empathy and her why that is way beyond the monetary value. Their responses are listed in order respectfully:

The kids that are having a harder time than you are that don't have the regular kid life that we possibly grew up with they're sitting in hospital rooms waiting for good news [and] bad news treatments, they don't know what's going to be happening next.

They're going through this experience with heart and understanding why they're doing is just really a large part of my why and helps me see the other side of research and how it's being conducted.

Although not all participants had the same motivations, as expected, all participants dedicated their motivation for planning Jagathon to their surroundings and witnessing the experience first-hand. That experience initiated each self-identification process for the participants, and contributed to their enjoyable college experiences.

Feelings

When the questions were themed around the feelings Jagathon brought to the participants and how those feelings contributed to their affiliation to IUPUI, a sense of belonging and discovering passion were evident in these discussions. Several participants identified their personal and professional development taking place during the planning process. Others expressed the community Jagathon created. Both resulted in the event generating meaningful and purposeful

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outcomes. More specifically, Participant 7 defined what the community and passion recipe delivered for her:

It meant a lot to me . . . I always felt like this was a community, a family . . . I found my passion through [Jagathon] as well . . . I started volunteering at Riley.

One respondent highlighted what literature suggests; how most students are craving for something or someone to identify with during their young adulthood. Participant 5 described his want to find a place he enjoyed, then realizing he belonged within the Jagathon community:

It definitely increased my sense of belonging with IUPUI... I went the first three months not finding something I truly enjoyed... but I was really just looking for that thing, and I did. I'm so glad that I found that thing.

Participant 5 also reinforced that once a student is aware of who or what they identify with, it makes decision making quite simpler. Take the decision to transfer schools for example:

I was going to transfer because I changed my major... but one of my main motivations for staying at IUPUI was Jagathon.

When Participants 2 and 4 were asked about what Jagathon meant to them in regards to their future careers, they both emphasized the importance of the planning experience and its impact. Their responses are listed below respectively:

Jagathon has definitely influenced me for my future career, possibly wanting to do fundraising events for nonprofits, especially children's hospitals.

I definitely know that as of right now it's a group, but I definitely will take these aspects that I've learned and to future jobs.

Overall planning Jagathon meant longevity, whether it be future careers, continued friendships, or expanded networks. This highlighted the cognitive relationship the respondents have with Jagathon, as it created a purpose bigger than the present, but beyond graduation.

Commitment

Several references were made to the participants' commitment to their fellow board members, themselves, and Jagathon as a whole. Six out of eight interviewees honed in on their commitment to the group due to the ample amount of time spent together. The remaining two shared their gratitude for the group but extreme gratitude for the person they have become because of the group, because of Jagathon. As an agent of social identity, the commitment aspect has placed students around others they would not have engaged with otherwise. Participant 1 discussed her relationship with her fellow executive members:

My division and my five directors, they are my best friends. Jagathon has given me my absolute best friends.

This type of socialization makes commitment even more apparent in the Jagathon setting. A part of this commitment is growth and learning more about who you are, but what the students did not realize until they were fully immersed in the experience is the effect the group has had on their commitment to themselves. For example, Participant 6 defines this idea in her response:

I am committed to how much the organization has made me grow and how much I have gained from the organization.

The idea of commitment can be the result of numerous things, and Participant 8 revealed a few of those ideas through her response:

I felt very connected to everyone, and everyone was very supportive and helpful. Support and assistance are what keep people going through times of adversary, and these



factors worked to commit the participants to Jagathon. In turn, emphasizing the community that was built leaving a lasting legacy on the Jagathon reputation. This gives largely to the student involvement cycle essential for alumni retention and new student recruitment.

Impact

The impact section of the questionnaire was designed to discover self-defining moments, feelings of empowerment, and ultimately reveal if those instances were impactful enough to stay connected to Jagathon well after graduation. In fact, all respondents viewed the planning experience as exceedingly impactful. One respondent described her empowering moment as being in control of the outcome:

I feel empowered just because we are given the autonomy to make our position, what we want it to be, and to set our goals.

Others felt empowered by the impact of their presence on the executive board. Participant 5 described how he being on the board was more than just for his benefit, but so his presence could be impactful for many beneficiaries. His response to his post-planning feeling is described below:

I feel very empowered that I was able to be a more inclusive face.

Inclusivity was, and will continue to be, an aspect of change for the Jagathon community. As change occurred, it is clear that the students are encouraged by the differences they are making outside of the realm of fundraising, but for social change as well within an organization they identify with.

All participants also mentioned their desire to somehow stay involved with Jagathon and IUPUI after graduation. With the future unknown for most (5 out of 8 respondents) they were optimistic and hopeful to sustain the meaningful affiliation they acquired with Jagathon. The remaining three have since graduated and still are affiliated with the organization. Participant 1 discussed her aspiration to stay involved, while Participant 7 discusses her current affiliate post-graduation:

I plan on becoming a member of our alumni society, so we have a pretty big base of our alumni that come together on the board, they have a president, just like we do on the alumni society, all the way down, so I definitely plan on staying involved.

I am a part of the alumni association . . . I'm still connected . . . I'm still supporting committee members.

These responses have reflected literature and generated the importance of involvement and the profound impact on a student's cognitive and emotional connection to their university of choice (Reichner, 2019). For all participants, Jagathon has been an ingrained part of their college experience because of the unique impact it left on each one differently.

Challenges

The challenges the respondents faced showed their resilience to maintain their commitment, but also their dedication to an identification tool, in this case Jagathon, that they only want to see enhance and advance. All things considered, adversity and obstacles were inevitable when planning a renowned event. It took trust within the built community to maintain the desired outcome. From the collected data, peak challenges within the Jagathon planning experience were diversity and event awareness. Participant 5 defined the concern of many students not knowing what Jagathon was:

It's been really hard to engage people who don't know what [we] do. . . trying to emulate past years, where we made such big strides and big impact . . trying to tell

people why they should be a part of something they haven't seen or heard about at all. While in a time where a worldwide pandemic has limited the occurrences of events for over two years, IUPUI students were stripped of the opportunity to witness a meaningful event in Jagathon. This best explains the responses given about the biggest obstacles student planners had to overcome. In some ways, credibility was lost leaving room for any form of interpretation. On the other hand, diversity was not only an event concern, but nationwide concern that needed to be implemented in all aspects. Participant 5 and 8 recalled some moments of uncertainty and the presence of microaggressions:

I think we need to work on including minorities . . . and just take away that external stereotype like you have to be a certain way [to participate].

So it's definitely weird sometimes like looking around the room and there's not a lot of people of color in our group.

These responses underlined that there is always room for growth, even within established organizations. There is always someone who is oblivious to what an organization does, and there is always an opportunity to be better than the year before. The researchers gathered that specifically from the respondents from historically underrepresented populations. With that said, for social identification to candidly take place all must feel welcome, and the respondents were willing to accommodate that need.

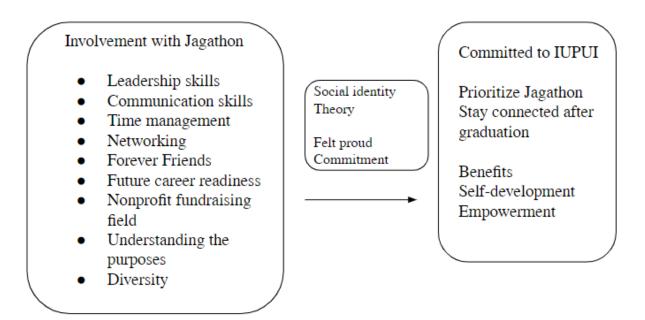
Discussion and Conclusions

To indicate if Jagathon planners' involvement would affect the planners' social identity and their long-term commitment to the planning process and the institution were the ultimate goals of this research. The major findings of the interviewees' responses are presented in Figure 2, as the details will further indicate the conceptual model to be true.

The findings of the interview indicated that the social identity theory does play a dominant role in student involvement at IUPUI and increased their self-realization. All of the interviewees mentioned that during the planning process of Jagathon, they felt empowered and witnessed glimpses of self-development. After the completion of Jagathon, planners felt a sense of pride in themselves and within the event itself. Overall, this study displays that student involvement is linked to the prolonged commitment to a university, and Jagathon is an effective tool for this idea. Ultimately, Jagathon became the main cause for the planners coming to campus and one of the major, if not only, activities they take part in at IUPUI. Through the planning of Jagathon, participants made life-long friends as affiliates and became a family. Respondents expanded their networks and discovered their passions, as these leadership positions prepared them for future endeavors. With that said, interviewees' professional skills developed including leadership, communication, and time management skills. Throughout the entire planning process of Jagathon, planners were working in teams, and discovered the essential need for differences. Planners need to work with different people from different backgrounds and leadership styles. Which, in turn, leads to the importance of diversity in group atmospheres. The findings within this study showed that individuals from diverse populations can socially identify with the same groups. The Jagathon planning team represents the diverse and inclusive efforts that have been made over time; nonetheless, the atmosphere shall keep evolving. Change will come, and the opportunity that it brings is enlightening. All in all, the findings of this study support the original conceptual model in Table 1.2, which indicates that Jagathon is a catalyst for introductory and sustained commitment to

IUPUI. It is through the social identity theory where legacies can be left and impact can be felt when students feel like they belong.

Figure 2



Limitations

The limitations of this research can be universal to many qualitative studies. The small sample size that researchers conducted, is a valid critique. Small sample sizes might affect the outcomes of the results. Since the outcomes are from a small sample, it's hard to generalize a larger population and use the results to represent the whole population of the study, in this case every individual that has planned or will plan a Jagathon. With small sample size, it is also hard to indicate the new themes of the research as there's limitations of the number of the interview participants. As researchers recruit for research participants, it is highly likely that there will be selection bias. Using snowball sampling might affect the diversity of the interviewees and backgrounds. Additionally, this study is finished within the IUPUI Jagathon planning team, which can only represent the Jagathon event only, there are no competing events that have been conducted or mentioned in this study.

For future research and studies, first, researchers should start researching with a larger population to ensure the diverse nature of the interviewees. Secondly, researchers should consider developing hypotheses with the research questions to conduct and indicate future results. Thirdly, the interview was conducted after the completion of Jagathon, the researchers should try to conduct the interview before, during and after the event to see if there's any changes of the interviewee's social identities during those times. There is an opportunity to create a larger alumni society within Jagathon from this research. This can advocate for the long-term impact that Jagathon has brought to them and the planning of their experience.

The interviews were conducted in Spring 2022, when Jagathon had recovered from the COVID-19 pandemic, which Jagathon hosted virtually in 2021. Students campus-wide were lacking information about Jagathon, and the participation rate in both planning and attending may have been

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affected because of it. Now with secure control over the virus, the Jagathon planning team is presented the opportunity to rewrite their story and leave a lasting impact. With that said, a future study can be conducted to measure the length of commitment dedicated to Jagathon from the descriptive results of the current study.

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