

Abstract: The role of brands as frames for engagement in meeting pro-social goals: a multi study investigation. Karen Hand (2014).

Brands and branding increasingly play a role in NGOs, charities and pro-social initiatives but their use can be resisted and resented internally and externally. This thesis explores the role of brands and branding in pro-social contexts and aims to make a theoretical contribution to a pro-social theory of brands and to more general theories of branding. It explores pro-social brands as frames (Lakoff, 1974) for social engagement and uses mixed methods to investigate the research questions. The first research study investigates how NGO decision-makers construct brands and branding using the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA, Smith, 1996) method, and identifies four master-themes around brands and branding within NGOs. The second research study investigates charity donor decision-making and explores the different contributions of surface framing (charity communications) and deep framing (the world-views of the donors), using a laboratory experiment between subjects. The third research study investigates the dynamics of good will (as operationalized by kindness experienced and kindness intended) at multiple levels, using a naturalistic SMS-based pro-social experiment over six weeks. In addition it experimentally investigates the influence of relational framing (as operationalized by providing feedback of the previous weeks average results randomly to a third of the participants each week) on engagement with the pro-social initiative over time. Taken together the three studies demonstrate the potential trade-offs for pro-social brands in terms of stakeholder engagement at four levels: decision-making, shared identity, cultural legitimacy and system legitimacy. The potential contribution of deep framing (beliefs around pro-social efficacy) and relational framing (feedback on collective progress) to stakeholder engagement in pro-social goals are also demonstrated. Following Hatch and Schultz (2009), this thesis supports the possibility of an interactional symbolic framework for pro-social brands, as a frame which engages internal and external stakeholders and works dynamically to guide, align and harmonise their expectations and experiences, around brand-as-purpose. Critically this thesis argues that pro-social brands differ from other sectors because pro-social initiatives, and by extension their brands, are anchored in moral capital (Kane, 2000), which in turn is both derived and generated from their pro-social objectives, actions, relationships and learning.