

Honest, Authentic & Distinct:
Ethical Not-For-Profit Branding

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Charities and not for profit organizations (NPOs) are typically hesitant to adopt

brand-marketing strategies fearing that in so doing, they risk the ethical purity of their cause related ends. This essay seeks to answer the question: are persuasive corporatized branding techniques unethical, and if so, what aspects in particular make them unethical? I argue that charities and humanitarian organizations are categorically different than for-profits in intentionality and ethical impetus. Ethical branding for NPOs is rooted in the persuasive articulation of truth claims. Hence, the lack of ethicality comes from the misuse of truth in examples of associative and exaggerated claims, suppressed truths, or other deceptive or manipulative techniques. The unethical manipulation of truth is most often utilized by for-profit branding strategists in order to construct a false cultural authenticity for consumers by force situating the brand within cultural epicentres. I argue that NPOs and charities ought to focus their branding strategies differently as charitable work presupposes some form of communal authenticity already, undermining any need to falsify or construct such an image. Charities and NPOs risk their ethical cultural currency by assuming overtly corporatized branding techniques, rather than understanding that NPO branding is a distinct field of marketing with its own ethical rules and moral duties.

The case study on Free the Children and Me to We focuses on these increasingly corporatized techniques and the resultant skewing of the charity branding model away from advocating change, awareness or truth and towards selling shirts and vacation packages. Not for profit brands feature a unique ethical topography negating the need for sneaky strategic donor manipulation. The truths being promoted by an NPO are ideally ethical in nature and, therefore, a brand's goal of cultural authenticity need not be constructed. Rather, the charitable brand ought to utilize its already developed cultural authenticity and ethical currency by relying on truthful marketing techniques, instead of

puffery, suppressive, or overly associative techniques.

The role that marketing plays in a cause based organization can mean the difference between success or failure in the field. I argue that ethical branding for NPOs is fiscally, as well as morally, beneficial to an organization due to the growing role of the Internet and online watchdog communities, which regularly publicize hypocrisy or overly deceptive branding techniques displayed by organizations. Being labeled as a hypocritical or deceptive brand risks destabilizing a donor/consumer base, possibly undermining the authenticity of an organization's future branded claims, losing both current and potential donors, and tarnishing the far more broadly situated 'brand' of charities themselves

Ethical branding techniques, centred upon an effective utilization of truth claims, can satisfy skeptical donors and watchdogs alike, while still effectively promoting an ethical brand. Because the ethics of branding are situated primarily in the ethics of truth telling, not for profit organizations are particularly well situated to utilize these techniques ethically and successfully in the Internet age. I argue that NPO branding ought to be distinct from corporate branding as the role that ethics plays in a charity ought to be reflected in its branding as well.

Part I: Literature Review: Aspects of the Field.

The field of not for profit branding ethics is an almost entirely new one with very little scholarship to draw upon; therefore, this review will article notable literature in a wide range of surrounding fields. First, we will chart the history of ethics, and the ethics of persuasion. This will be followed by a review of applied ethical issues within marketing as a whole, and a focus on brand marketing scholarship in particular. Finally, I will provide an account of the writings on the ethics of branding, not for profit branding,

and conclude by documenting the sparse writing on ethical branding in not for profits in particular.

Truth, Persuasion and Ethics:

The history of ethics is far too long and myriad to elaborate upon in detail, however, as a whole, the study of ethics can be said to be a study on numerous conceptions of ‘goodness’, be it intrinsic, act based, outcome based, a quale or an ephemeral force. One hesitates to say that ethics is the study of ‘rightness’, due to potential normative connotations, however, choice, intention and action clearly play a role in deconstructing ethics as well.

Some have argued that a significant difference between moral and ethical claims or propositions exists. I will likely follow in the footsteps of those who equate the two terms, if nothing else, deriving simply from the etymological fact that one term is Greek, while the other is Latin (Brenkert, 2008, Pg. 7). However, there are some who argue that the term ‘morality’ is referring to a binary of actioned ‘right’ or ‘wrong’, whereas ethics is then conceived of as allowing for a more plural and broad conception of the inherent ‘good-ness’ of a debated article, rather than an absolutist viewpoint. Alternately some may distinguish ethics as the theoretical or reflective study of morality, which is hitherto understood as those values, norms and ideals people live by (Weiss, 1942). Finally, famous sociologist and philosophers Durkheim (2002) and Miller (2002) support a popular distinction that issues of morality deal in religious and/or normative, duty-based, concepts, while ethical issues deal more with the complexity of moral thought, rather than the duty that follows theoretical investigation (Miller, 2002, Pg. 57). Encompassing all these

definitions, morality can refer to what we would deem moral standards, whereas ethics may be used to refer to the formal study of morality within, and beyond, the parameters of human standard or conduct (Bauman, 1994). Although there are these distinctions, regarding issues of moral or ethical turpitude, unless otherwise specified, in the name of simplicity both terms will be used somewhat interchangeably for the duration of this paper.

Thousands of years of thought have created three distinct disciplines of ethical study, each with many subfields of study: meta-ethics, normative ethics, and applied ethics. Meta-ethical theory is concerned with the truth-value of moral or ethical claims such as goodness, wrongness, etc. G.E. Moore's *Principia Ethica* (1903), which contained his analysis of the naturalistic fallacy, is seen as the initial major work in meta-ethical theory that engaged an analysis into whether truth and ethics are intrinsically interrelated. Meta-ethics do not seek to evaluate specific choices as being better or worse than any other, instead favouring investigation into the metaphysical properties or logistical roots of ethical theories and truth itself. Despite rarely articulating normative ethical considerations, meta-ethical analysis often has profound implications on normative and applied ethical theory, in particular, those of assessing truth and validity.

Normative ethics are concerned with actions and notions of choice, prudence, and is/ought relations. The two most common normative ethical theories are Utilitarianism (broadly attributed to Jeremy Bentham and John Stewart Mill), and Kantianism, founded by Immanuel Kant. Utilitarianism was founded on the presumption of a 'moral calculus' wherein one ought to act in that way which provides the most benefit and the least harm. Kantianism, on the other hand, appealed entirely to reason, and thus, it is a more

traditional rule based morality, structured around a categorical imperative rather than a contextual arithmetic. In large part Western legal systems are founded upon Kantian ethics with a leniency toward Utilitarian conceptions when dealing with quantitative issues.

As the scientific field began to overtake the theological field in popular thought, traditional pragmatic ethicists such as John Dewey, F.C.S. Schiller, C.S. Pierce, and William James began to question the objective validity of moral claims, concluding that ethics ought to evolve parallel to scientific knowledge and that moral truths ought to reflect scientific findings (McDermott, 1977). ‘Pragmatic’ philosophers resorted to criticizing traditional Kantian logic of truth claims via correspondence as being mired in apriorism, and having no relevant grounding in investigative fact. According to the pragmatic maxim, an object or concept can only be understood by understanding its practical consequences, leading critics (Lovejoy, 1908; Putnam, 2004) to argue an oversimplification of epistemic belief and understanding. That said, the pragmatic movement has consistently argued against any radical epistemic skepticism. C.S. Pierce argued that the existence of truth is based as much in hope as it is in scientific investigation (1878), hence, under the pragmatic conception, the ethical value of truth is derived from those who use it. Truth is instrumentally malleable and shaped by both utility and experience. “Any idea upon which we can ride...any idea that will carry us prosperously from any one part of our experience to any other part, linking things satisfactorily, working securely, saving labor; is true for just so much, true in so far forth, true instrumentally.” (James, 1907).

This only further highlights the ethical problematization of truth, and yet, in all forms of ethical thought, truth and ethical action are deeply intertwined due to the relationship between relational trust and the authenticity of claims. St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas and Immanuel Kant, among many others, all argued that lying is immoral, with no exceptions, however their degree of assumed turpitude varied between them from absolute sin to moral slight. Although deception has been widely regarded as definitively unethical, barring concepts of ethical ‘white lies’ (Zuwerink Jack & O’Brien, 2004), persuasive techniques such as puffery (Gurnani K., & Talati, 2008), weasel wording (Yonghui, 2007), and selective truths (Marlin, 2002), haven’t received the same degree of criticism. Often a successful persuader is associated with skillful oration, charisma and argumentative tact, but the distinct use of persuasive technique can be seen as problematically blurring the lines of ethical truth utilization.

The history of persuasive techniques can be traced to ancient Greece, specifically with the Sophists and Aristotle’s work on *rhetoric* (Rorty, 1996) wherein he defined rhetoric as, “the power to admit the persuasiveness of which any particular matter admits. For of no other art form is this the function” (Aristotle, 1991).

T.H. Irwin (1996) attempts to harmonize Aristotle’s rhetoric within a sphere of virtue ethics (an ethical model build around character rather than action) and eudaimonia (happiness/human flourishing). A number of thinkers, (Bristol, P., Rucker, D.D., Tormala. Z.L. & Petty, E.R., 2004), view successful persuasion as a means of undermining cognitive resistance; indeed, without a resistant force to work from, there is no belief to overcome and thus no truth to persuade one towards. Theories of persuasion such as Harmon-Jones’ most recent application (2002) of the *Cognitive dissonance theory*,

originally theorized by Festinger in 1957, center around the technique of presenting conflicting stimuli to remove or alter opinion. William and Pamela J. Benoit (2008) attempt to mitigate the ethical pitfalls of persuasive action by incorporating a utilitarian calculus (ends vs. means), alternately Randal Marlin (2002) balances this view by utilizing a pseudo Kantian deontology (rule based ethics) and his maxim of universalizability to argue against propagandistic persuasive techniques. Beyond the field of moral academia, is a dearth of scholarship (Bone and Corey, 2000; Brock 2009; Thaler and Sunstein, 2008) that negotiates ethics, reframing it as that which is most beneficial to corporate outcome. This viewpoint highlights the corporatizing of the 'ethical brand', as well as the tenacious attempts of marketing ethicists to justify morally elusive actions.

Each of these thinkers understood that a comprehensive study into the ethicality of various persuasive endeavors was intrinsically linked to the ethical parameters of truth. However, as Aristotle noted, the truth is as much contextual and relational as much as it is utilizable (Ramage, 1998). The ethical models describing persuasion and its relation to truth undervalue truth's relation to morality, or persuasion's relation to truth. Regardless, any analysis into the ethicality of truth as a utilizable tool must walk a fine line between rigid veracity and malleable utility. Conceptually, these seem satisfactory, however, a review of scholarship within the applied world of persuasive marketing and business ethics presents a far more complicated and diverse set of issues than those on a wholly theoretical scale.

Marketing Ethics:

Marketing, as defined by the American Marketing Association, is the “activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large” (2007). Often marketing can include advertising, product design, economic concerns such as pricing and exchange, promotions and consumer research and development. Despite Rutherford’s (1994) famous claim that Marketing and Ads “*are an accidental art, born of necessity*” (P. 8) the advanced utilization and further adoption of sophisticated marketing techniques have allowed corporations to increasingly target consumers and directly influence the spending habits of potential customers. The techniques utilized by the majority of corporate marketers strongly resemble propagandistic techniques (Bernays, 1923). However, Carey (1997), whose focus is on corporate propaganda, contrasts persuasion in the commercial field with persuasion in the realm of education by arguing that intentionality plays a subtle but essential role, “The form and content is selected with the single-minded purpose of bringing some target audience to adopt attitudes and beliefs chosen in advance by the sponsors of the communications...to be contrasted with ‘education.’ Here, at least ideally, the purpose is to encourage critical inquiry and to open minds to arguments...rather than close them.” (P.105). One can see contrasts here between the aims of NPOs and charities and corporate ends of influence and money making. Edward Bernays, one of the fathers of modern advertising and public relations, strongly contradicted this view by arguing that the only difference between education and propaganda was perspective. What we *choose* to believe is then deemed ‘education’, what we do not is seen as propaganda and requires a more active and distinct

persuasive element (1923). If this is true, then trust and authenticity are two of marketing's holy grails. If a marketer can convince a target demographic to trust the messenger of marketing, then he potentially avoids the constant burden of truth favouring, instead, familiarity (Holt, 2008).

Nowhere are the techniques of persuasion currently more pervasive, and ethically problematic, than in advertising, branding and marketing. While marketing and business ethics cover a wide range of issues from pricing fairness, outsourcing and market research, issues of truth telling and promotional tactics are often primary concerns. For Brenkert (2008), there exists a two-way relationship between marketers and consumers, each requiring distinct rights and responsibilities regarding information, including minimizing reliance of *caveat emptor* (buyer beware) on both sides. Alternately, Machan (1987) attempted to mediate the degree of truth that merchants and marketers owed toward their clients, argued that beyond *suppressio veri* or issues of liability a marketer may 'play' with the truth, so long as he avoids categorical 'untruths' (P. 337).

For Saucier (2008) a regulated and ethical marketplace can be mutually beneficial for both marketers and customers by changing the perceived manipulative nature of the industry, thereby building consumer trust. Intention doesn't seem to factor into his argument, leaving room for his theory to be misinterpreted as nothing more than an ad hoc white wash solution and an attempt to mitigate the precarious role of trust in the consumer/corporate relationship. Waide (1987), however, criticizes the deceptive notions present in any associative advertising and marketing practices arguing that it "desensitizes advertisers to compassion and concern"(P. 348) and that it influences audiences to neglect non-market cultivation of virtue and substitute them with goods

instead. Although his argument arrives at a somewhat thin conclusion, Waide's pairing of virtue ethics and marketing issues is compelling, particularly those aimed at the technique of associative advertising and its relation to truth telling. The concerns in marketing ethics, particularly those of 'playing' within the ill-defined parameters of truth, mitigation of trust relationships, and the articulation of corporate perception relate directly to many issues within branding as well.

Branding & Brand Ethics:

Modern brand marketing, or "branding" as it is more commonly described, is an arm of marketing which has undergone a plethora of changes in form and function. In the 1920's Taylorist scientific management principles, once used to organize workers, were applied to gauge customer satisfaction and preference (Fligstein, 1990). At the same time, behaviourism was gaining in popularity and beginning to influence advertising principles (Holt, 2002). In the late 20's former Procter & Gamble executive Stan Resor took over J. Walter Thompson and began to apply behaviourist theories to marketing on the premise that, "laws of human behavior could be discovered through scientific investigation and a redefinition of advertising as a marketing tool" (Kreshel, 1990) and in the 1930's, Resor hired John B. Watson, a noted behaviourist, to manage consumer actions using emotion-laden stimuli (Olsen, 2000). In the decades leading up to the 60's, advertising was dominated by a select few advertisers who each aligned within differing schools of thought; Resor and Reeves argued that systemic repetition was the best tool to engineer customer desires (Holt, 2002), alternately, Burnett and Ogilvy used the motivation research of Ernst Dichter and Pierre Martineau, arguing that the use of clinical

psychology could motivate customers towards their brands utilizing archetypal images (Horowitz, 1998).

The sixties marked a cultural shift. With disposable income and a postmodernist sense of self, marketers who could not adapt to the first generation raised on television, fell to the wayside. Alternately, those who understood that consumers were beginning to, for the first time, define themselves vis a vis a brand or externalized product or element, thrived. “Consumer culture emphasized that, to be socially valued, cultural content must pass through branded goods...postmodern consumer culture only insists that meanings – any, take your choice- must be channeled through brands to have value.” (Holt, 2002).

As branded marketing began to rise in popularity, so too did its scholarship, with a notable spike in interest in the late 1980’s through to early 1990’s (DeChernatony and Dall’Olmo Riley, 1998). Following this spike in interest, a highly influential debate concluding the ‘death of the brand’ in the late 90’s highlighted for many the transparency of branded techniques and signaled the supposed end of direct targeting era (Earle, 2000), and beginning the age of ironic, reflexive and/or culturally appropriated advertising, such as Mini’s “think small” campaign, Nike’s “Just do it” and Fubu/Diesels subcultural demographic alignments (Holt, 2002). These ads which “sought to distance the brand from overt persuasion attempts became commonplace” (Goldman and Papson, 1996) resulting in a new trend in branded marketing in which the brand attempted to be embedded as a member of a community, something so commonplace now that it is almost ubiquitous. This shift toward cultural authenticity, paired with the rise of branded wish fulfillment, has given rise to the ‘branded community’ one rooted in consumption and corporate ideological alignment as identity indicators.

The more recent rise of the Internet and social media has changed branding and brands in both form and function, and has taken hold as one of the most essential and holistic aspects of the modern marketing topography. Attempts at a cohesive definition of branding are myriad. At its simplest and most traditionally salient definition, branding is described as a legal statement of ownership (Crainer, 1995). In the 60's, branding as logo and visual feature design was consistently adhered to as the most common definition and many thinkers (Aaker, 1991; Kotler et al, 1996; Dibb et al, 1994) continue to utilize this definition. Indeed, if we look to early marketing figureheads such as Calkins, Ogilvy and Burnett we see a balancing act between notions of a brand as a symbol of legitimacy and prestige, and the early forms of advertising and P.T. Barnum-like hucksterism (Holt, 2002). In recent years, however, branding has developed into a far more elusive term, both broadly defined and yet intuitively known. Brock offers a viable starting point, arguing that branding is any impression garnered from a customer interaction, "every touch point with customers affects their perspective of you, and thus your brand. Hence, all the advertising in the world won't help your brand if a customer has a bad experience with an employee who does not live out the values you espouse" (2009). In this sense, branding is as much about relationship building as it is about controlling consumer perception, product quality, tailored reputation, and controls over mediated truth claims. Reflecting the somewhat ambiguous nature of populist definitions of branding, DeChernatony and Dall'Olmo-Riley's study (1998) attempts a much more in depth investigation into a comprehensive branding definition. They propose a multidimensional construct matching a firm's functional and emotional values, paired with the performance, reception and psychosocial needs of consumers (P. 417). This reflects Kapfer's classic

and prescient 1992 study, which was one of the first to offer the now commonplace 'holistic' definition, "A brand is not a product. It is the product's essence, its meaning, and its direction, and it defines its identity in time and space... Its central concept is brand identity, not brand image." (P. 11).

As the definition of branding has progressed from a functional feature of a product or promotional campaign to a more holistic and all encompassing feature of the interactions between client and consumer, so has branding become a far more dynamic and universal aspect of modern consumer culture. For consumers, a brand can become far more developed and relational than a mere 'product'. In the words of Hazel Kahan, "brands are now gunning for a share of consumers' inner lives, their values, their beliefs, their politics; yes, their souls" (quoted in Hall, 1999, Pg. 40). As such, a number of notable scholars have begun to address the ethics of branding, a sparse, yet growing, field of study. Fan (2005) argues that despite a growing interest in business and marketing ethics, "Not a single academic study has been found on branding ethics after an extensive literature search covering the following sources: three online database (ABI Inform Global, Ebsco and Infotrac), three journals (Journal of Business Ethics, Journal of Brand Management and Journal of Product and Brand Management), dozens of books and websites. (P. 1)". One major issue in Fan's analysis is his division of Corporate identity and brand identity, arguing that a corporations ethical misstep can often result in undue blame being placed upon a corporation (Pg. 5), this line of thinking is categorically false. The brand *is* the identity of the corporation or organization. A brand identity, much like an individual's is marked by the totality of their behavior rather than a segmentation of it.

To divide the two is akin to not blaming the person for the behavior of the mouth or hand. The modern brand *is* the public identity of the organizational whole.

Brock's 2009 claims argues primarily for the value of perceived corporate ethicality over an impossible ethical internalism. Similarly, Polonsky and Jevons (2006) analyze ethical branding through the lens of the fiscal benefits to corporations via perceived ethicality, i.e. white washing, rather than ethics unto themselves. It is a consistently weak argument to propose an ethical stance *merely* for its egoistic benefits, however, there is seemingly no lack of examples of this stance in marketing and business strategy journals and articles. In short, many ethical analysis of branding argue for presenting an ethical image, rather than actually *being* ethical. Alternately, Macdonald (2011) and Middlemiss (2003) hold a more forthright ethical stance regarding the reputational aspects of corporate whitewashing, claiming that ethical behavior is based as much on disclosure and tactful presentation as it is about materiality, "In the end, even a concern about 'mere reputation' has to be grounded in ethical principles" (MacDonald, 2011). Beyond attempts at corporate positioning and leveraging stakeholders, there is an urgency to incorporate corporate social responsibility (CSR) tactics into branding strategy beyond its monetary benefits. A growing number of thinkers (Blumenthal & Bergstorm, 2003; Kitchin, 2003; Saucier, 2008) have also considered CSR within a branded framework, with mixed success. Efforts to apply CSR to branding, often fails due CSR's linear model of ethical propriety and hierarchical assertion, whereas branding, by necessity, is far more ephemeral and relational.

Regardless, Bone and Corey's (2000) study does address an important aspect of brand ethics in the ethics of perception, i.e. the ethicality of presenting ones brand

inaccurately vis-a-vis puffery, framing or exaggeration. Saucier (2008) continues this line of thinking, however, he argues that puffery in particular (exaggerated or embellished communication) is a double-edged sword. On the one hand effective at generating excitement for the brand, on the other, a risky strategic move potentially undermining customer trust (Pg. 108). Fan (2005) articulates the notion of misrepresentation as a prime ethical issue at play in postmodern brand construction, arguing that a brand, much like a person, has distinct duties to others. In large part these duties correlate with interpersonal ethics. Similarly, Jevons and Gabbot (2000) argue the brand as a surrogate of trust and hence, a reliable identifier of certain inextricable values and virtues that must be nurtured and monitored beyond the superficial level.

A number of thinkers (De Chertony & Dall'Olmo Riley, 2010; Klein, 1999; Arvidsson, 2005) present frank critiques of branding and include its ethical implications. Klein (1999) attacks brands as a form of cultural irrigation, stripping consumers of choice, jobs, and freedoms of choice. Alternately, Arvidsson (2005) argues that brands creates an ethical surplus by creating a shared experience and common identifier. This line of neo-Marxist thought is in direct opposition with Horkheimer and Adorno's (1996) arguments about cultural authority. The issue for both is that these are outdated critiques for the branded life world of today. Indeed, each of these critiques seem dated in the zenith of branding (arguably the mid to late 60's and early 90's) when advertisers had "carte blanche to push brands at consumers and shape their desires at will and when consumers often ceded this role." (Holt, 2002). Arvidsson has the most ammunition to bring to the discussion of ethical branding, in large part due to the community labour involved in modern branding such as social mediated word-of-mouth and stealth branding

techniques. Issues of branding as corporate role construction (Haas, 2001), perceptual honesty, and reputational ethics each require a more dynamic model of ethics due in large part to notions of flexible epistemics and perceptual manipulation inherent to branding.

Not-For-Profit Marketing

Defined as “a co-alignment of marketing strategy and corporate philanthropy” (Varadarajan and Menon, 1998, P. 58), cause based marketing can arguably be traced back to its earliest form in the fundraising efforts of in early Jewish charities (Mullen 1995), however, Sargeant and Wymer (2008) describe a 14th century Austrian monks’ “fundraising” handbook outlining tactful applicant letters as requiring “a honeyed salutation” and “ a graceful peroration” (1). In the late 60’s Philip Kotler first explored the not-for-profit marketing field, while many critics argued that marketing had no place outside its traditional domain in the economics marketplace. (Luck, 1969.) In the early 70’s Kotler and Levy’s work in the field of marketing for nonprofits was briefly discussed and celebrated (Ferber, 1970; Lavidge, 1970; Ardnt, 1978), however, by decade’s end the debate essentially ‘fizzled out’ (Lovelock and Weinberg, 1990). The late 80’s and early 90’s saw a sudden flurry of activity in the nonprofit marketing field. Numerous journals, conferences and courses were introduced (Sargeant and Wymer, 2008) and in the ten years leading up to 2006, over 250 courses in nonprofit management were offered in the US alone (Mirabella, 2006).

The field of cause marketing has since developed somewhat independently of mainstream corporatized marketing; however, charities have begun to adopt a number of traditional marketing strategies as well (Fine, 1990; Shabbir, Palihawadana & Thwaites, 2008). In turn, nonprofit marketing has faced critical philosophical questions, such as

whether corporatized marketing techniques used to sell cars, beer and films *ought* to be utilized to market need or societal issues? In response, Shelby Hunt (1977) argued that a division must exist between the nonprofit and the corporate for-profit realm until for-profit and non-profit marketing issues and employees face the same issues and employ similar tactics (P. 54). Ignoring the circularity of this logic, it highlights the distinction between the two fields and the concern for infiltration of corporatized marketing techniques embedding themselves in charitable fundraising tactics. However, as social marketing began to take shape, some proponents (Earle, 2000; Thaler & Sunstein, 2008.) asserted a more ‘mainstream’ corporatized effects model of behavioral and psychological marketed change in order to motivate donors to give, much like tobacco advertisers ‘motivate’ consumers of their product to continue purchasing. This brings issues of ethicality, paternalism and desire construction to the fore, and problematizes the distinction between NPO brand and for-profit brand as well (Andreasen, 2006).

Alternately, Pringle and Thompson (1999) argue for a far more ‘holistic’ approach, eschewing traditional for-profit marketing in favor of the reverse. They argue that the spiritual, moral and religious values within nonprofit and charitable organizational messages can transcend marketed forces, and, as such, would be beneficial to for-profit marketers as well (274). Finally, Earle (2000) encourages a ‘Baptist plus Barnum’ approach to cause based marketing, wholly applying traditional corporatized marketing techniques to charitable campaigns with the added zeal of ‘doing the right thing’. “As an advertising professional, do all the smart things you would regularly do to sell detergent or a new SUV model. Then if it also provokes a soul-satisfying emotion when you see it, that’s a plus and so much the better!” (242). The divide in corporate or

non-corporate (holistic, eg.) approaches to non-profit marketing raise a number of concerns. As Baylin, Cunningham and Cushing (1994) show, a wide range of ethical concerns must be taken into consideration in any marketing campaign, be it cause related or otherwise. Issues of intent and respect for all individuals involved (corporate, charity, donor, cause recipient, etc.) are heightened due to the sensitive nature of the work in question. Indeed, one of the issues in any ethical theory, especially marketing ethics, is to balance the needs and responsibilities of the individual and those of the group or society while still preserving the strategic efficacy of the charity itself. What differentiates cause based marketing from its for-profit cousins is the assumed ethicality of the 'product' itself, and thus, the ethical issues of respect for all parties involved are paramount.

Not-for-Profit Branding & Ethics

As with its corporate for-profit contemporaries, the modern incarnation of nonprofit and cause based branding is a relatively new concept. Much of the scholarship that discusses the branding of charitable organizations does so indirectly, often alluding to a 'persona' or the conveyance of an organizations values or beliefs (Harvey and McCrohan, 1988; Dixon, 1996). Sargent proposed potentially the first branding model specifically catered to the nonprofit realm (2004), featuring a number of elements in common with those developed in earlier, for-profit iterations (Kapferer, 1992) with a few notable differences. Sargent's model is structured primarily around brand essence, akin to corporate branding, however, his model differentiates itself through the notion of moral reflection and duty to donors, as opposed to stakeholder theory. By utilizing the 'feel good' element of charitable giving and volunteerism, Sargent's model addresses briefly a

subtle difference between for and nonprofit organizations, that of inbred moral obligation.

Historically, nonprofits have been reticent to adopt corporate branding practices in large part due to nonprofits' difficulty committing internal stakeholders to the process (Grounds and Harkness, 1998) or the previously mentioned difficulty accommodating for-profit branding techniques within a not-for profit framework. As Stride (2008) notes, there is a distinct fear within the nonprofit community of the "over-commercialization of the [nonprofit] sector and misappropriation of techniques developed specifically for the commercial environment. (P. 115)" Alternately, a number of scholars (Juntunen, Juntunen, and Autere, 2012; Shabbir, Palihawandana & Thwaites, 2008) have regarded this skepticism as overly pessimistic, arguing in favor of corporate strategies for nonprofit branding campaigns, asserting that the free market is competitive and to ignore effective strategies is denying potentially useful donors.

Kylander and Stone (2011) articulate these points even further by highlighting the issues with cause based branding on a global stage. With products, they argue (8), there is a tangible article to promote as opposed to an issue or cause in need of attention. This difficulty with intangibles is further confused when viewed through a culturally diverse lens wherein symbols and morals might have shifting or differentiated meanings. The further introduction of social media and the increasing migration of branding and advertising online means that charitable fundraising is being forced to compete in a constantly evolving digital realm where traditional and cause based advertisers are acutely aware that, without reinvention, those customers/donors will go elsewhere (Hudson, 2008). In the case of cause based marketing, this lack of donorship can often have tragic real world impacts, making an efficient, flexible and, above all, ethical system

of cause based branding and promotions all the more imperative.

How social causes are promoted can lead to a number of burgeoning ethical considerations in regards to the changing nature of charitable framing (Madden & Scaife, 2008; Carson, 1998), donor relations (Ledingham & Bruning, 2001; Money, Money, Downing & Hillenbrand, 2008), and a distinctive model of CSR (Waide, 1987; Smith & Ferguson, 2001). That being said, the scholarship on the ethics of nonprofit branding is, for all intents and purposes, nonexistent. After a search including hundreds of sites, blogs, four separate library collections, and over sixteen academic journals and databases, not one article directly analyzes the ethicality of the nonprofit branding realm. Although there appears to be no academic articles dealing specifically with the ethicality of this particular aspect of the not for profit sector, many ethical insights can be gleaned from indirect sources.

For instance, Smith and Higgins (2013) challenge the notion that CSR is beneficial to cause based marketing. Following the work of Zygmunt Bauman, they argue that vociferous avowals of concern represent both a distancing from brand engagement and the donor/consumer as a whole, rendering the point of promotion null and ineffective (p. 309). They further this claim by articulating the somewhat anti Kantian sentiment that ethicality cannot be separated from its instrumental ends (p. 316). Vestergaard (2008) presents one of the most philosophically viable studies in NPO branding by analyzing the humanitarian branding efforts of Amnesty International, arguing that humanitarian branding efforts present an enormous challenge in choosing between information and emotionality when framing a perception of the world. A number of thinkers (Kylander and Stone, 2011; Fan, 2005; Holt, 2002) each articulate issues of identity construction,

interaction and perception within the world of branded interactions.

Javons and Gabbott (2010) reiterate the notion that the brands' role is that of a 'surrogate' for trust. This reflects a pivotal shift in marketing from a transactional model to an interactional one. If this relationship is tarnished through misrepresentation or lack of trust then a product cannot imbed itself in the purchasing world of the consumer. In the not-for profit field, however, this exercise becomes more complex due to the product being an issue, idea, or cause (Hudson, 2008). Furthermore, misrepresentation or puffery on the part of the nonprofit (NPO) has been construed (Shabbir, Palihawandana & Thwaites, 2008; Brock, 2009; Saucier, 2008) as more than merely a calculated strategic error; it could be argued that there is an ethical imperative as well. Aristotle claims that a successfully virtuous rhetorician must skillfully and ethically wield pathos and logos, weave them carefully together to elicit a *phantasiac* response, a call to engagement, a 'soul-stirring' (Rorty, 1995). As such, it is the ethical duty of any rhetorician, including NPO branding managers, to balance the tools of effective persuasion, with those of ethical salience.

It is clear that the ethicality of NPO branding resides in two distinct areas. Firstly, NPO branding ethics are distinct from for-profit efforts, and the adoption of for profit techniques by charities and cause based marketing strategies opens the door to further ethical complications. Secondly, truth, and in turn trust and authenticity, are complex features in any business, and indeed make up the cornerstone of a large degree of NPO marketing ethics research (Money, Money, Downing, Hillenbrand, 2008). As Holt (2002) argues, truth is conveyed by brands through the utilization, cultivation and projection of a sense of authenticity. Authenticity, much like truth, is a malleable force, capable of great

influence over consumer opinion and trust. When conflated with intentionality, duty, virtue, ethicality of practice regarding donors and subjects, and the careful and delicate use of truth and authenticity as malleable but taught elements for branded persuasion, one can quickly see how the ethics of persuasion within NPO branding has become a distinct and challenging field deserving of attention, philosophical insight, and practical investigation.

PART II: Why Ethical NFP Branding?

Many not-for-profit organizations are hesitant to refer to their organization as a brand or engage in branding practice assuming, instead, that their reason for being is ‘the cause’, rather than some hollow corporate existential justification (Tan, 2003; Richie *et al*, 1998). “The concept of charities and campaigning organizations as brands still seems to provoke furrowed brows and flurries of concern” (Grounds, 2005, Pg. 65) namely because “Branding of NGOs is often seen as conflicting with ideals of altruism, voluntarism, democracy and grass root action. The spread of managerial principles and advancement of capitalist logic and consumerism is by many considered a threat to civil society and democracy” (Csaba 2005). However, not-for-profits are very well situated to become powerful and effective brands while continuing to affect change and stay true to ideological goals. For example, when filing for NPO status, a non-profit must present a cohesive mission statement describing the activities, goals and cohesive structure of the organization (Canada Revenue Agency, 2011). This mission statement is often written off as arbitrary and meaningless, however, NPOs are in the enviable position of having a distinct focus and cause-trajectory from which to draw upon (Krug and Weinberg, 2008). If succinctly and substantively put, a charitable mission statement can help form an

organizations 'persona', avoid ambiguity, and maintain focus (Tan, 2003) while staying on brand.

Addressing practical concerns for NPOs considering brand strategy, as well as utilizing philosophical perspectives, is particularly relevant since many charities and non-profit organizations perceive branding techniques as being somehow less ethical than traditional philanthropic models due to brandings' corporate roots. Furthermore, many charities are unknowingly presenting themselves as de-facto brands and an effective and ethical brand strategy is becoming increasingly necessary for both organizations and potential donors concerned with the quality and ethical transparency of their charity of choice. As Baylin, Cunningham and Cushing explain, "Cause related marketing [and branding] is a fast growing and complex phenomenon. It has the potential to serve society well; misused it can cause considerable harm (1994, Pg. 30)." The necessity for NPOs to construct a feasible, effective and ethical brand strategy is becoming increasingly important. Differentiating the NPO model from the for-profit model ensures that the ends of the branding strategy remain cause oriented and honest.

Branding, at its core, is about fostering and reinforcing relationships. As such, charities utilizing long-term branding relation strategies are able to develop a brand relationship founded in trust in the authenticity of the messages and actions of the organization resulting in more fiscal security, control and freedom regarding funds (Money, *et al*, 2008). A foundation of committed and knowledgeable donors will be more willing to spread news of your organization and be more knowledgeable when doing so, due in large part to the continued relationship developed with the brand (Juntunen, 2012). A strong brand "can convey the values and beliefs of a nonprofit to potential donors and

suggest very potent reasons why it might be worthy of support” (Hudson, 2008) increasing returns in the long and short term. Furthermore, Not-for-profits are increasingly utilizing socially mediated marketing techniques such as Facebook, Twitter and Reddit to attract new donors to their organization. In a 2012 study, 47 and 46 out of every 48 advocacy groups used Facebook and Twitter respectively to communicate with their audience (Obar, Zube, and Lampe, 2012). Without brand consistency, such as those outlined in an effective mission statement, and monitored through effective branding management, social media strategies can often become disorganized and drift away from the locus of the organizations goals.

The central goal of any branding strategy is to foster this long-term relationship with donors and create a niche for an organization’s brand to fill. In the case of NPOs, this branded relationship is a critical element in staying afloat, garnering grants and developing a reliable, informed and committed donor base. As such, it is easy for many branding strategists to promote tactics, which may manipulate the truth. Truth is the paramount issue in branding. Without a sophisticated understanding of the parameters and topography of branded truth claims, an organization risks undermining the trust of donors, faith in an organizations cause oriented goals and strategies and the authenticity of future claims as well. Furthermore, the charitable sector is distinct in the breadth of damage that a blemish in trustworthiness can have across the entirety of the NPO field. No other sector suffers the same collateral damage when a controversy takes place within the broad categorical sector it exists. As such, it is the responsibility of *all* charities to be as ethical as possible.

Branding concentrates all the various features of an organization into a compact identity, something that has clear marketing benefits. At the same time, however, this concentration of identity means that problems with any one feature (labour practices, efficacy of aid, use of donor money, etc.) can easily expand and tarnish or undermine brand identity as a whole. Branding can provide an essential service to any organization; promoting the core message of a cause can stir up public interest, can create long term donor relationships, and encourage an consistent returns for charities. However, the increased corporatization of cause-based marketing has understandably irked a growing movement of critics and has made many NPOs resistant to adopting these practices.

Anti-Branding Watchdogs

In 2003 popular branding futurist Martin Lindstrom predicted that every child would promote themselves with a personal branding homepage; Facebook, the social networking site, was launched in 2004. In 2005, he predicted the rise of multisensory platform use in branding strategy, now employed by two thirds of Fortune 1000 brands. In 2012, he predicted that the importance of ethics would become a pivotal cornerstone of branding and an essential part of future consumer relationships to brands within their branded daily life. This shift will be encouraged, he predicts, by independent organizations online acting as ethical watchdogs monitoring the ethical maneuvering of a variety of brands (Lindstrom, 2012).

The resistant adoption of corporatized branding techniques by NPOs, paired with the increased use of social media sites, has given rise to a number of distinct criticisms regarding the ethicality of NPO branding, and branding in general over the years (Arvidsson, 2005; Holt, 2002; Baylin *et al*, 1994, etc.). As branding has become

increasingly intermingled in our day-to-day habits, its ubiquity has, in turn, resulted in a strong corporate watchdog/anti-branding movement. Lindstrom may be a few decades late in his predictions as sites such as Reddit (www.reddit.com), Accuracy in Media (aim.org), and 4Chan (www.4chan.org) regularly oust contradictory or deceptive corporate promotions techniques often creating subgroupings dedicated to undermining or countering specific deceptive brand practices. Eric Schlosser's best selling *Fast-Food Nation* (2001), Naomi Klein's *No Logo: Taking Aim at the Brand Bullies* (1999), the books of historian Tom Frank (1997, 2000), and Lasn's magazine *Adbusters* (www.adbusters.org), which has been around since 1989, each link firms' branding efforts to central ethical concerns such as environmental and cultural degradation, health issues, and deception and misinformation. These examples, and many many more, "suggest that the anti-branding movement is becoming [has become] a dominant chromosome in the DNA of America's counterculture" (Holt, 2002).

Hollenbeck and Zinkhans (2006) analysis of three distinct anti-branding communities reveals that Lindstrom's predictions regarding the growing community of connected, organized and critical consumers may be correct, and may ultimately force brands to acquiesce themselves to broad, consumer monitored, ethical frameworks. The increasing utility of online communities such as those on Twitter (www.twitter.com), Reddit (www.reddit.com) and Facebook (www.facebook.com) to voice their concerns or criticisms highlights the necessity for firms to acknowledge consumer criticisms. "These communities serve as a powerful consumer agency and information resource. Consumers have instant access to an empathizing audience and to historical accounts of accusations against the firm...with Internet capabilities, these communities are even more powerful

(e.g., number of participants) and progressive (e.g., technology-driven action strategies) than earlier social movements” (Hollenbeck and Zinkhan, 2006, P. 484.)

These online communities have also gained an increased awareness of particular tactics used by many branding and marketing agencies (MacDonald, 2011) resulting in firms being forced to constantly adapt new means of presenting an ‘authentic brand’.

“The internet has become a powerful vehicle for the viral dissemination of the backstage activities of corporations” (Holt, 2002). A modern example of this type of digital protest is the recent PR failure by the General Mills owned *Cheerios* brand. After launching a Facebook App asking fans to write sentiments regarding ‘what *Cheerios* means to them’, the messages would then appear in the distinctive black on yellow *Cheerios* font (complete with cereal-dotted I’s) and be publicly posted on the *Cheerios* Facebook wall.

The company was forced to pull the app after only a single day due to a flooding of critical posts such as, “poison”, “cancerous”, “colony collapse disorder” and a host of others (most of which criticized the use of GMO’s in the product), all in a distinct *Cheerios* font (Callaghan, 2012). The wave of criticism towards the brand began when it was revealed online that General Mills, maker of *Cheerios*, spent over a million dollars lobbying to defeat a motion in California forcing brands to mandatorily label genetically engineered food as such (Ibid).

This incident highlights two pivotal aspects of modern, socially mediated branding (charitable or otherwise): Firstly, a corporation hoping to create a strong brand in the public eye cannot avoid the skeletons in its closet. Those aspects will see the light of day online. Secondly, a brand can no longer merely project a specific brand ‘character’ or ‘persona’ when the facts of that branded statement are in direct opposition to the

claims being made. In the past, branding was primarily concerned with perceived authenticity. However, as Holt argues, the forced transparency provided by the Internet and anti branding movements has forced brands to reassess the parameters of perception, persuasion and authenticity. “Marketers are engaged in a tooth and nail ideological struggle with the anti-branding movement over the meaning of authenticity” (Holt, 2002). Anti-branding activists and authors have found an increasingly attentive audience online. Brands hoping to continue being perceived in a certain light, despite the ticking of a telltale heart, must either abandon a falsely constructed image, or wholly abandon the now necessary digital realm in their branding efforts. The rise of corporate transparency via the anti branding movement, ethical watchdogs, culture jammers, independent news services, social media and the increased literacy and sharing of critical corporate documentation, has forced any brand claiming to be ethical to ‘walk the ethical walk’ or suffer the consequences.

The critiques that these groups levy against a firm can be myriad in content, severity and context. Over the years, a number of distinct criticisms have been levied upon NPO branding and cause related marketing directly. Many of these critiques are articulated against consumerist culture and traditional marketing as a whole, and as such, do not always directly parallel aspects addressed by NPO branding, or even branding in general. However, as Vestergaard (2008) argues, “while the practices of commercial organizations are becoming increasingly ethicalized, so the practices of non-profit organizations are becoming increasingly commercialized (2).” Much like traditional corporate branding, nonprofit brand campaigns exist within a capitalist culture of direct competition. NPOs continue to compete for donations and grants through fundraising

campaigns and increased use of traditional marketing tactics such as branding. As such, many critiques levied against for-profit marketing can reflect themselves in the charitable sector as well. However, one important distinction between humanitarian branding and for-profit branding exists: in profit based branding, authenticity is constructed to sell a product or service; alternately, a charitable organization is distinguished because of its involvement in the community, thus granting it a real world authenticity, negating a need to falsely construct it. Furthermore, the end of a charity or NPO is rarely a fiscal one. Donations or grants are a means to the ends of alleviating suffering, providing aid or addressing a need. The primary fear for charities is that corporatized branding techniques conflate the act of giving with one of profit.

Competition problematizes ethicality as it establishes a contextual topography of traditional moneyed economics (in the form of fund-raising and non-charitable spending). Competition can further blur the distinction between goals and means by equating the economic returns for a marketed branding campaign with an instrumental construction of moral actions, thus making ethical conduct increasingly problematic from the point of view of truth (puffery, associative marketing, validity), trust (sincerity, credibility) and authenticity (reputation, cultural alignment, community involvement). The corporate /nonprofit distinction is essential for an analysis of nonprofit's increasing adoption of traditional branding techniques, particularly, when we acknowledge that the crux of the anti-branding movement's critiques are aimed at the issues with encouraged corporatized and consumerist culture. Furthermore, with these ethical critiques increasingly delivered via publicly accessible mediums such as message boards, social media platforms and news aggregator sites, the necessity for firms to acknowledge and communicate their

ethical intentions and strategies becomes paramount to brand strategy as a whole.

The branding campaigns for religious (*thesalvationarmy.ca*, *worldvision.ca*), environmental (*worldwildlife.org*), international development (*habitat.ca*, *cacha.ca*), local community projects or outreach (*bigbrothersbigsisters.ca*), medical and biomedical research facilities (*doctorswithoutborders.org*, *amrefcanada.org*), education (*smilengo.org*, *teacherswithoutborders.org*), justice (*transparency.ca*) infrastructural (*heifer.org*, *Kiva.org*, *landesa.org*), information gathering (*redcross.org*, *thesentinelproject.org*), not to mention many non charitable foundations working under the NGO/NPO banner, all indicate that specific criticisms of particular branding for, say, a biomedical charity would not apply necessarily to an orphanage in Tanzania. Due to this diversity, before addressing the multitudinous critiques of NPO branding, it must be noted that each critique will not apply to all NPOs.

Although specific case studies or examples may not relate directly, the broad themes of truth telling can relate to any branding campaign striving for ethicality. Each category builds upon the previous one. You cannot be perceived as truly authentic in your branding claims without the trust of the consumer, and due to the necessity for transparency, you now cannot have trust without truth.

Part III: Truth & Authenticity

Truth is an incredibly difficult concept to pin down. Although intuitively known, philosophers, lawmakers and historians alike have debated its contours for thousands of years in an attempt to discern a feasible system of confirming and articulating facts *qua* facts (in the purest, most total sense). Needless to say, the debate on what merits the term “truth” is still raging to this day. Without drawing this paper down a severely convoluted

rabbit hole, let us refer to Oscar Wilde in saying that ‘truth is rarely pure and never simple’ (1899, Act 1). Truth, like branding, is a relational element. Truth has the power to build or undermine the trust in a brand relationship and thus is a paramount ethical attribute to critique.

Aristotle argued that no general philosophical rule regarding lying was possible because the rule-maker advocating lying would automatically have their word cast in doubt (Aristotle, 1991). That said, the ethics of truth telling are vastly myriad. There are almost no valid ethical theories that defend lying qua lying or argue *against* truth telling, barring fringe philosophers such as King (2008) who argue that deception is only a viable choice if the gains from the deception outweigh those of the trust lost in the case of the deception’s discovery. Although certain theories such as utilitarianism, or specifically situated interpretations of virtuous (virtue ethics) wisdom may defend white lies or lying under duress, the lie being told is not a moral article, instead, it functions as a means to a moral end. Alternately, rule-based Deontologists such as Kant and Aquinas argue that lying is *never* a moral decision, even in the face of murder (Kant, 1781). Although Kant is somewhat notorious for his absolutism, his rationale is valid. Under his model, lying is unequivocally wrong for two reasons. First, lying undermines the part of a person that gives them moral worth: the ability to make rational decisions and be self guiding and autonomous. A lie undermines this intrinsic worth Kant titled ‘human dignity’ by forcing them to decide other than they had would they have known the truth (Mazur, 1993).

In regards to marketing, truth is often the prima facie ethical concern within advertising, branding and trading. As H.G. Wells once said, “Advertising is legalized lying”, however, truth plays an important part in assessing ethicality in NPO branding as

well. If a brand makes a claim regarding an aspect of the product, cause or organization, such as its professional reputation, ability, or even something more ephemeral such as the character or ‘persona’ of the organization, when the evidence is to the contrary, then issues of deception (either intentional or not), hucksterism, puffery and suppression are brought to the fore which can potentially undermine a brand.

Suppressio Veri

An ethically contentious aspect of branding’s utilization of truth claims is the issue of *suppressio veri*. Machan (1987) argues that although *suppressio veri* (the suppression of the truth) is almost universally seen as ethically problematic, it would be wrong to ask advertisers to disclose *all* information related to their wares (Pg. 336). For instance, when advertising a Honda, there ought not be a necessity to describe the make and model of lug nuts on the car, alternately, would it be wrong to demand information on the quality of bandages used by red cross workers in their advertising? Machan, an ardent ethical egoist, concludes that any relevant truth about an item or service should be told, however this does not mean it is necessary to present the *whole* truth as consumers can research this on their own if need be.

The issue of whether or not the totality or wholeness of truth can adequately be conveyed, achieved or even conceptualized is as problematic as any of the ethics surrounding *suppressio veri* itself; however, Machan illuminates an interesting point regarding truth telling when he discusses relevance. He argues that, much like a person on a first date, it is only natural to present one’s ‘best face’ and “we tend to deck ourselves out in a way that certainly highlights what we consider our assets and diminishes our liabilities” (Machan, 336). It is true that advertisers and branding agents in

for profit and not for profit firms have a duty to put the best foot forward, however, there is arguably another duty to customers (and I would argue an even stronger one toward donors) regarding presenting the relevant information to allow for rational decision making. In some instances these two align, in other examples, when consumer awareness is undermined, we find ethical problematization. As Kant noted, failing to provide another person with relevant information so prevents autonomy and undermines human dignity (Mazur, 1993). As Leister notes, “not telling them [customers/donors] facts that are relevant to the question of whether they ought to purchase a particular product...is almost certainly unethical” (Leister, 1979, Pg. 479).

Since Machan’s publication, the investigative ease of digitally connected individuals has increased tenfold. In the case of activists and critics of sweatshop labour practices by corporations such as Nike, part of the message that was communicated concerned Nike’s hypocrisy for making claims, not so much the truth regarding its labour practices per se, but about its professed identity as a socially responsible corporation that ‘cared’ about the underprivileged and socially excluded (Greenberg and Knight, 2004). In turn, activists were able to criticize Nike’s discursive identity, thus undermining its marketing strategy and expanding the brand to include the characteristic of illegitimate labour practice as well. This forced Nike to bear the brunt (and expand the issue’s relevance) of the ethical weight regarding sweatshop labour as a whole. In short, critics rebranded Nike’s discursive identity, casting doubt and undermining trust. It was the *relevance* to the truth, rather than truth per se, that was put at stake to do so.

In turn, this has transformed issues of *suppressio veri* and issue relevance on its head, potentially forcing the issue to become one centered upon organizational

paternalism rather than organizationally preferential assessments of legitimate relevant elucidation. For example, does an organization assume its potential donors require consistent transparency and give maximum access to any and all information, or is it best to assume that donors and supporters will consistently do independent research, thereby affording an organization significant artistic license with the truth and the level of depth covered in advertising, design and PR practices. An example of this creative licensing is when Citibank paired with the Hands Across America program to address homelessness, and chose to focus advertising away from the 'homeless issue' and "instead focus on 'people helping people', which they believed was a more marketable image" (Baylin, *et al*, 1994).

The rise of the Internet and critical communities has presented a paradigm shift in traditional brand thinking that allows us to analyze the question of whether an organization ought to be too paternalistic or, alternately, somewhat reticent with the information regarding its brand and its donor base. Simply put, the answer is both. "Businesses and brands are facing a period of unparalleled and intensive scrutiny. At the same time, however, consumers have been emboldened by the opportunities offered to them by the Internet and social media and increasingly expect companies and brand owners to be open, responsive, and transparent as a pre-condition of doing business or making a purchase (or donation)" (Wilson, 2012). A related survey by Cohn and Wolfe of 1000 U.K consumers discovered that transparency had become a more significant factor than recommendations or other effective persuasion techniques (Dawson, 2012). The same study also found that being open and honest about the operational details, sourcing, and/or raw ingredients of a brand is seen as most critical, with 38% of people

citing this as significant.

Furthermore, NPOs, specifically charity organizations, must improve their accountability and transparency. Citing a study of charitable disclosure practices in Malaysia which revealed an incredibly low level of disclosure, (with a mean average of only 23.98/88 on the disclosure index), the authors of the study state, “the lack of transparency between NPOs and donors can be minimized through more transparent information disclosure (Zainon, *et al*, 2012).” Regardless of the circular redundancy of this statement, it is clear that the binary choice between paternalistic oversaturation of information, and trust in consumers and donors to investigate and research information on their own, is a false dichotomy. The shifting attitudes of donors, aided in large part by the rise of the digital sphere, has made transparency a necessary element for any NPO hoping to be seen as reliable, ethical and trustworthy in today's charitable marketplace.

Differing from issues of *suppressio veri*, wherein we debate the quantitative ethical aspects of truth (*how much truth to tell?*), we now investigate qualitative ethical issues relating to truth. Persuasive branding, messaging and advertising techniques such as puffery and associative marketing mark a different set of ethical parameters, however, similar to the issue of *suppressio veri*, the rise of online message boards and Internet watchdogs has forced NPOs to err on the side of truth over hucksterism.

Associative Branding

Associative marketing is defined as the technique of identifying a non-market good for which the target market feels a strong desire (Waide, 1987). The technique is vastly popular in for-profit advertising as it gives an object or service a degree of social capital and replaces a real world need (respect, companionship, belonging, etc.) As

Hudson continues, “When seeking to differentiate the brand, charity makers consider the nature of the emotional stimulation engendered by the organization, the nature of the voice projected by the charity, the character of their service provision and the extent to which the organization might be viewed as traditional” (2008, Pg. 71.). The extent of traditionalism to which an organization may choose to align itself is myriad. For example, PETA routinely features sexual imagery in its advertising utilizing famous models, shown nude or semi-nude, with the tagline “I’d Rather go naked than wear fur” (Halverson, 2012), going so far as to launch a soft-core pornography website (*peta.xxx*), to promote the vegetarian/vegan lifestyle and animal free products. The assumption is that these efforts frame this particular organization’s branded identity as inherently sexy. The non-market good promoted by PETA is sex and sexual desirability for those who refuse meat products. By associating their brand with jarring imagery of nudity, the assumption is that PETA can garner more attention from potential donors toward their cause, hopefully translating into increased donorship.

This attempt to escalate the brand beyond its literal contextual parameters is nothing new, in 1970 Charles Revson of Revlon famously claimed, “in the factory we make cosmetics; in the store we sell hope” (Levitt, 1970). Revson’s comment highlights precisely the value of associative advertising, as well as the potential for deception and ethical issues regarding truth telling, however, Associative advertising raises important ethical questions for NPOs considering its use, namely: can a cause-related brand be ethically extolled if it only communicates the good, rather than the realities of the situations that require the organization’s attention in the first place?

As Waide (1987) claims, associative marketing could be seen as problematic

when applied to charitable issues because it can potentially conflate a desirable consumerist need such as respect, sex, or popularity, with a social issue or cause that is decidedly *not* desirable. In the for-profit branded world, the products being sold are branded as ‘place holders’ for other non-market goods. The advertising and marketing presents the object as having some desirability beyond its utility. Cause branding, alternately, must be careful to not ‘sell’ the good too strongly; ignoring the reality and truth of the situation risks prostituting ones cause. Does PETA, for instance, effectively promote awareness of animal rights, fostering engagement and change, or does its lascivious advertising merely promote PETA? PETA’s need to align its advertising primarily toward its base’s non market needs highlights the issue of decentralization. Marketizing charity as a consumer/donor centred product, rather than externally centred cause is no longer selling the truth of the brand (namely humanitarian aid or beneficence), instead it is selling what the brand can do for the consumer. “If consumerist logic demands for the advertisement to acknowledge the feelings of the consumer, this ‘intimization’ of the appeal makes it difficult for a humanitarian organization to place the rationale behind its cause outside of the consumer’s desires” (Vestergaard, 2008, Pg. 19). Associative advertising is one designate area of NPO brand marketing, which necessitates a far more careful use of non-market goods for fear of decentralizing an organization’s mission.

Criticism aside, Arvidsson’s (2005) analysis of branding culture illuminates the notion of branding (and brands) as icons of discursive unification, as a tool that encourages the commons, and as a facilitator of brand communities. Indeed, even the anti-branding community could not exist without that thing which they oppose.

Furthermore, as Sargeant's 2008 research shows, "donors appear to 'imbue' an organization with particular characteristics, by virtue of its charitable status alone (Pg. 71). Therefore, the responsibilities of a brand to its commons ought to reflect in their prima facie responsibilities to the cause itself. Strategic branding that marginalizes the cause being addressed in favour of some non-market good, or in favour of donor centric messaging, risks diverting itself from its goals, and its brand base as well. In this way, associative branding for NPOs can become an effective tool of iconographic discourse, rather than a literal claim. However, if the associated theme doesn't align with the truth of the brand itself, either by misalignment of brand personality, donor pandering, or cause/associated ideal misalignment, then the brand risks the cultural currency of its reputation.

Puffery

As physicist Ludwig Boltzman once said "If you are out to describe the truth, leave elegance to the tailor"(1995). Puffed or *spun* claims, also known as exaggerated commendation for promotional purposes (Saucier, 2008) mustn't be confused with deceptive messages, however, the thin line between the two is uncertain, resulting in the somewhat contorted use of truth becoming clearly problematic for those seeking ethicality in their branded claims and choices. As Polonsky (*et al*, 2006) notes, "Over-exuberant promotional activities extolling the firm's socially responsible behavior may be seen to be exploitative" (Pg. 7) and hyperbolically deceptive. Saucier (2008) structures his entire book, *Marketing ethics*, around the ethicality of puffery, arguing that these tactics are the cornerstone ethical issue in branding ethics. He argues that puffery and deceptive advertising in branding can also exact a potentially unethical effect upon

consumers (Pg. 28), namely, that a donor/consumer's individual rights are mitigated by being led on by an extravagant claim, rather than one grounded in truth.

Beyond ethical considerations, the pragmatic risks of puffery to long term donors and brand loyalty are numerous. In a 2010 study on puffery, it was discovered that puffery effectively influenced people who were not major consumers of a product, however, it strongly turned away consumers who were experts or have relatively higher knowledge of the organization (Xu, 2010). With digital proliferation, information on a firms' effectiveness in the field or its fiscal responsibility and ability to keep promises are easily uncovered and exposed, damaging the precarious relationship with donors that many charities face. Furthermore, charitable donations are not like single purchase goods or services and therefore rely on long-term subscribers and donors. This further highlights the necessity for relational ethics to be brought to the fore when discussing building, and the risks of undermining, NPO brand loyalty. "There are conceptual connections of trust to the notion of satisfaction and loyalty, and this effort is especially lacking in the brand-consumer relationship" (Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Aleman, 2001). Hence, it is far more effective to keep puffery and other exaggerated claims to a minimum in order to develop a healthy reputation of truthfulness within the organization. Puffery and deceptive tactics will likely get interested parties through the door however any brand allegiance will be undercut once a reputation for misrepresentation and manipulation of the truth is established, potentially undermining trust and potential brand loyalty.

This can be said for visual marketing as well. Although not as easily accessible for critics due to the malleable and interpretive nature of visual communication in general, the rhetoric of the visually branded image is attempting a similarly universalizable

connotative claim as linguistic strategies. Techniques such as meaningful differentiation, consumer preference formation, and irrelevant attribute differentiation, wherein a consumer is ‘trained’ to construct associative meaning and increased exaggerated value via visual cues such as word placement, colour schematics and ‘meaningless’ adjectives such as ‘crunchy!’ on breakfast cereal boxes (Carpenter, *et al.* 1994). Visual marketing functions within a discursive sphere by nature of its necessity to provide or encourage distinct marketed claims and therefore can be held to a standard of truth. As Barnes explains, “the image is penetrated through and through by the system of meaning, in exactly the same way as man is articulated to the very depths of his being in distinct languages” (1977, Pg. 49). Much like linguistic truth claims, visual branding is connotatively situated and intended to be readily recognizable, at least symbolically so, as such, we can also assess the truth claims presented in these images as either ignoring important truths (*suppressio veri*), exaggerating a truth claim (puffery) or, as is most common with visual branding, constructing a visual connotation between the brand and some non market good.

In both linguistic and visually branded messages, issues of truth utilization and manipulation are front and centre for any organization hoping to be perceived as ethical and thus garner the trust and long term allegiance of a potential donor. Marketing techniques can be utilized effectively, however excessive ignorance of the truth through means of puffery or exaggeration runs the risk of ostracizing a brand base, undermining the authenticity of the brand, and thus, the trust in said brand.

Trust

More refers to the nonprofit sector as the ‘trust business’, adding, “Nonprofit

leaders build trust with their donors by sharing information about their programs and their accomplishments. Sharing information builds trust” (Berg, 2011, Pg. 13). Trust is derived from accountability and transparency of the truth. However, for even the most idealistic of NPO organization concerned with effective branding, truth is rarely an end in itself. If a bit of slant and hyperbole can increase donorship, and in turn facilitate the increased promotion of a cause or alleviation of a systemic ill, then all the better, yes? This is misplaced logic however. Firstly, there is the aforementioned practical argument regarding the need for transparency due to increased digital monitoring and the proliferation of the anti-branding branding/watchdog movement, which further emphasizes the need for honest branding. Secondly, the argument for organizational ends over ethical means undermines a potential donor’s right to make an informed, autonomous decision, which, in turn, undermines the relationship between the donor and the brand and the cause itself. Kant argued that relational ethics relied upon this need for understanding and respect towards another person as an autonomous self-directed individual. Thus, trust is an essential cornerstone of truth telling ethics in any relationship. Furthermore, Habermas (1975) argued that a speaker is always accountable for norms of meaningfulness, truthfulness, sincerity and appropriateness. The onus of ethicality in relational communications in on the speaker or, in this case, the branded organization, and thus a relationship between donor and firm ought to be honest and avoid being ethically spurious.

One might argue that a corporation is categorically different from a person, and thus a different ethical standard ought to be utilized. However, a brand is the public identity for any organization, and thus, its ethicality relies upon the same relational ethics

as a persons, if only to promulgate a perceived personae of authenticity. “Trust as an organizational asset is more important within the nonprofit sector than in any other, it is a core motivator for donor engagement and a unique selling point for fundraising CSOs” (Berg, 2011, Pg. 3). Trust is the essential factor in both successful branding and relational ethics. Incidentally, Fan (2005) falsely delineates between corporate ethical/unethical action and brand image, by separating the actions of a corporation from the actions of the branding agent. “It is not the brand or logo, but the bad corporate policies that are responsible for all the wrongdoings. A brand simply becomes the easy target or scapegoat for corporate misbehavior” (Pg. 5). What Fan, and many others, fail to realize is that branding is not merely some department of an organization, it is the sum total of that organization’s behavior, writ large, and displayed for public assessment. The brand is, for all intents and purposes, the personification of the organization, and thus its reputation as truthful and trustworthy are paramount. *Any* corporate missteps in any sector of an organization, from accounting, marketing, environmental, or human resources reflect the brand, rather than affect it. Furthermore, due to numerous scandals in the non-profit sector in the 1990s, for instance in Rwanda (Polman 2003), NGOs have faced growing demands for accountability and efficiency in their performance (Vestergaard, 2008) in order to encourage trust in the brand of ‘charity’ as a whole.

The charitable sector is consistently notable for promoting awareness of an issue as much as, if not more so, than the promotion of the organization itself. As such, undermining an audience’s depth of understanding through means of selective truth and persuasive (rather than informative) branding hurts brand reputation, even if it increases donorship in the short-term. Once again, branding for NPOs can *never* be concerned only

with short-term fundraising. Branding must be aware of an organization's relationship to its donor base, facilitating a relationship founded on a donors' trust that what one *perceives* as an ethical brand is, in fact, truly ethically situated (Saucier, 2008). Where once marketing relied upon consumer perception of branded characteristics, now a brand must reflect the truth accurately, if not through a lightly rose tinted lens. "The fact that marketing presupposes that its audience is capable of making (voluntary) choices and decisions implies that they have (or may obtain) relevant information. It is not enough to have an engine if you don't have fuel for that engine. Information is the fuel for capable choice" (Brenkert, 2008).

Branding strategy no longer exists entirely on an organization's website, on the screen in a commercial, or on the page in a media release, ad or article. The brand exists distinctly from any strategic organizational structure, therefore the trust one builds with a donor, or the truth one tells, is likely to be passed on through word of mouth, digitally and otherwise. This reliance on the information of others defers or transfers trust, but it also intensifies the probability that when problems with the brand come to light, they will expand and contaminate the organization's reputation as a whole as ethically suspect (Jevons and Gabbot, 2000). In the case of commercial products, trust can be verified by personal experience, namely, does the product live up to its brand identity in terms of performance, value, durability, aesthetics, etc. In the case of non-profits, particularly those with distant beneficiaries (Tanzanian children for example), first-hand experience isn't really an option for verifying and trusting claims. Instead, donors and supporters have to rely on information provided by third parties such as watchdog organizations.

Effective brand strategy is akin to relationship building, rather than salesmanship,

as it has been traditionally understood. Brand strategists “may provide some information about the NPO, but funders are not likely to believe this unless they trust the organization in the first place...It is particularly important for an NPO to listen to its funders to build this trust. This, in turn, validates the information that is provided by the NPO itself” (Money, *et al.* 2008, Pg. 45). In short, the teleology of *both* the brand manager and the NPO itself are thus aligned, honesty builds donor trust, which enhances donor relations and encourages donorship as well as heightened awareness of the issue itself.

Authenticity

“To be authentic, brands must be disinterested; they must be perceived as invested and disseminated by parties without an instrumental economic agenda, by people who are intrinsically motivated by their inherent value” (Holt, 2002, Pg. 83). The final goal of any brand strategy is audience adoption, wherein the consumers do the work of promotion for you. Holt describes five techniques adopted to promote brands, including ironic or reflexive brand personas, and stealth branding (a technique wherein a firm individually targets ‘trend makers’ and uses these cultural figureheads to promote the brand.). Although these techniques have evolved drastically since Holt’s writings, the necessity and desirability of having consumers assume a personal connection to your brand has not changed in the slightest. In reference to the ‘Got Milk’ Campaigns of the 90’s, Rich Silverstien, of Goodby, Silverstien and Partners advertising firm explains, “there was hundreds of millions of dollars spent on ‘milk does a body good’ and they would [show a runner] run the hundred yard dash, and he would ‘glug glug glug’. That was untruthful. You do not chug milk after the hundred yard dash. The truth is, you cut

up your strawberries, you put them on your cereal, you're sitting down and [indicates a milk carton pouring empty], 'bleh! You don't have very much!' I need milk, and there's the truth, that's it" (Pray, 2009, at 45:20). The truth may seem like a deceptively simple muse for branding, but it is almost definitely the most effective.

Any brand, including NPO and charitable brands, requires an emotional connection to link the donor, the subject and the brand together cohesively. In the past these connections could be manufactured through strategies such as life-world emplacement and cultural epicenter coat-tailing strategies, which have since been replaced with goals of "going viral". Proliferation of viral branding across all sectors requires a charitable brand to maintain authenticity to ensure the brand identity is distinctly situated. Most NPOs dedicate little funding to their marketing campaigns and thus techniques of message saturation or repetition are unlikely or ineffectively executed, however, a brand that can distinguish itself, either through word of mouth or creative publicity can establish a niche.

Often for-profit brands attempt to gain authenticity by seeking out cultural epicenters and introducing themselves into the community through thinly veiled publicity stunts, such as Red Bull's association with extreme sports, or Burton and snowboarders (Holt, 2002). The work of an NPO, alternately, is often intrinsically linked to particular communities, and thus, if effectively utilized can provide the perfect springboard for garnering support beyond the community itself. While other for-profit brands attempt to distance themselves from their profit-seeking ideals with costly life-world emplacements, and false cinema verite commercials, NPOs practice true life-world emplacement. Truth, therefore, is a charity's most valuable asset, and the branding of an ethically situated

brand itself need not worry about increased corporatization in promotion tactics. While corporations struggle to be seen as authentically integrated into a community, a charity or NPO already is. Promotional tactics beyond this stage rest on trust in these messages and trust that the actions being described in the community are accurately depicted and that the brand is desirable in its actions. This authenticity differentiates NPOs from corporate brands, and reinforces the notion that the utilization of truth rather than manipulative tactics provides the most ethically salient course for a charitable or humanitarian brand.

The work of NPO branding is *not* to sell the consumer on the authenticity of the brand by creating a perceived, and carefully constructed weaving of the brand into a cultural epicenter, community or cause. Instead, NPO branding can sell the authenticity of the brand by highlighting the *actual* weaving of the brand into a cultural epicenter, community or cause. The holy grail of for-profit branding is authenticity and brand identity differentiation, two things that many NPOs have already developed through on-the-ground efforts, yet consistently fail to capitalize on to distinguish their brand.

The primary fear for NPOs considering comprehensive brand strategy is that of corporate marketing ideals undermining the authenticity of the charitable work being done. The authenticity of the NPO brand, however, ought to *be* the strategy. NPO branding's greatest tool is the truth of the work being done in a community, the trust built between this community and the authentic authenticity of the brand itself, rather than the perceived authenticity of a branded claim. Manipulating perceived organizational ethicality is unnecessary when an organization's 'actual' ethicality is already front and centre. Similar to a person attempting to present themselves as 'ethical', when their

actions are actually to the contrary, truly ethical and authentic branding simply necessitates a truly ethical brand.

PART IV: CASE STUDY: Free the Children/Me to We.

Authenticity differentiates NPO brands from for profit brands, however, certain charities, such as Free the Children (FTC) and their for-profit arm, Me to We, have blurred the line between corporatized tactics and commodification, and the charitable work they profess. FTC and Me to We highlight important distinctions that must be made between the for-profit branding tactics of constructed authenticity and consumer centric branding, and the ethics of NPO branding.

In 1995 a 13 year old Craig Kielberger, commandeered his parents basement in Toronto and created the foundations for a global charity brand set on helping children around the world gain access to education, avoid poverty and mitigate exploitative child labour practices: *Free the Children*. Craig, the youngest ever Executive Masters graduate of York University's Schulich School of Business, and his brother Marc, a Harvard scholar with a law degree from Oxford, have built a multi-million dollar global brand. The Kielbergers have been guests on *Oprah*, and have met presidents and the Dalai Lama. FTC currently have programs in 4000 schools across Canada, and have published numerous books promoting the brand and its philosophy of charitable giving. In 2010 alone, the charity took in more than 23.5 million dollars in North America. (Wingrove, 2012). What distinguishes *Free the Children*, from most other charities is the utilization of a model of 'social enterprise'. Social enterprise, under the Kielburger brand, is, to put it simply, either a corporate structure of a charitable minded not-for-profit, or a charitably focused corporate brand. Me to We, which is legally a separate entity from FTC, was

developed with the express purpose of ‘donating’ 50% of its profits to FTC. These funds are procured through selling for-profit ‘products’ such as volunteer trips, motivational speaking sessions and a line of ethically manufactured organic clothing and accessories marketed as “Me to We style” (Jefferess, 2012).

In addition, every year the organization gathers thousands of teenagers in sports arenas around the country to watch performances and speeches by musicians, actors, politicians, corporate representatives and, of course, the Kielburgers themselves, in an event titled “We Day”. Last year We Day was attended by over 20,000 people in the Toronto event alone (Wingrove, 2012). The event is made possible due to many corporate sponsors, each hoping for the chance to influence the consumers of tomorrow. In the 2010 event, hosted at the Rogers Centre, student attendees received coupons for Telus, Natures Gate, and a book from the Me to We publishing company (Newbury, 2010). When inside, they were treated to a wide range of motivational speakers such as Al Gore, Jesse Jackson and spokespersons from the Keg Steakhouse and bar who were promoting their alignment with the FTC’s somewhat exiguous philosophy of youth empowerment. “Those companies that weren’t represented in person aired slick, loud advertisements, introduced by Entertainment Tonight’s Ben Mulroney: ‘Now let’s watch this video about how Telus believes in the power of young people to change the world’” (Newbury, 2010). We Day is, put simply, a stunning example of brand building, corporate or otherwise.

The FTC brand is one of the most successful and effective NPO models currently in practice. No other charity so blatantly utilizes customer acquisition techniques to such effective results. Regardless of the form social enterprise takes, it highlights the blurring of corporate and non-profit models of promotion and branding, with traditional notions of

charitable giving and activism giving way to sophisticated branding strategies and consumer oriented (rather than citizen oriented) giving strategies. The FTC brand model is distinct in its success within the topography of Canadian marketed charities, however, it is neither overwhelmingly unethical in its uses of truth in branding, nor is it distinctly truthful, having utilized many of the techniques discussed in this essay. Instead, FTC and Me to We structure a consumer-centric industry of giving, rather than a cause specific one, which encourages reflection upon the intrinsic differences between charity and profit, donation and purchase, and self help and empathy.

Free the Children attempts to characterize itself within a brand image that can most succinctly be described as ‘benevolent obligation’. “As we learn to feel gratitude and act on our good feelings through reaching out to others, we begin to live the ‘Me to WE’ philosophy” (Kielberger and Kielberger, 2006. Pg. 146). In the construction of this branded philosophy, Me to We and FTC have distinguished their brand strategy from numerous other charities. Although highly successful, the construction and proliferation of the brand is potentially ethically problematic. Regarding *suppressio veri*, through a skilled and highly coordinated branding choreography, FTC and Me to We have consistently avoided the ‘unpleasantries’ of children’s rights infringements the world over, instead highlighting the positives of charitable and social action and paternalistic benevolence. This, in itself, is in no way problematic, and reflects FTCs commitment to spreading ideals of charitable involvement, however, a look at the FTC website reveals a startling absence of any agency behind the production of the problems that FTC is striving to alleviate, instead only highlighting the joy that giving provides the wealthy. In one particular brochure promoting ‘the Kenya Experience’ ‘voluntourism’ package (Me

to We, N.D.), of the 21 photographs, 10 centre on the presence of white tourists, including a full page image of an adult white hand being held by that of an African child, eight others show landscapes or accommodations (described as luxurious) (*ibid*) and only three depict Kenyans without their white ‘helpers’. There is a lack of context, a lack of subtext relating to the more ephemeral non-market good of ‘giving for me’, rather than ‘giving to others’. “The celebrity testimonials of FTC work in Kenya are not geared towards notions of redress or justice for the ongoing violence being perpetrated against the Maasai but how the North American visitor finds fulfillment by loving the suffering people of Kenya” (Jefferess, 2012, Pg. 23). The truths of poverty and hunger have been repackaged as life affirming activities or product oriented brand philosophy directed at the consumer. The philosophy of giving is transmuted into one of taking through giving.

The philosophy of moving from Me to We encourages an inclusive discourse of belonging and connection, yet saturates the means of constructing that discursive grouping by framing giving as a vocational act, rather than addressing the topography outlining the necessity of said act. The information being suppressed in this case (‘suppressed’ is a very strong term, perhaps, diverted, omitted or occluded is more apt) is anything that leads away from the feelings of subjective happiness, namely the causes of suffering. The subversion of negative information in favor of branded positivity is wholly intentional as any mention of haves/have-nots, or colonialist influences on the socio economic divide risks introspection and potential fiscal inaction on the part of the potentially inculcated youth. “The dominance of the “Me to We” phenomenon...impedes social action by foreclosing the possibility of recognizing how ‘we’ are implicated in the structures that produce suffering and inequality” (Jefferess, 20120, Pg. 19). The

Kielburgers present their Me to WE philosophy as a means of addressing the “gap between our societies soaring monetary wealth and the true wealth of happiness and well being that all of us deserve to enjoy” (2006, Pg. 37). However, the Kielburgers characterize their socially engaged organization within terms of happiness, but implicitly avoid the negative oppositional aspects, which they are seemingly working against. This reflects the corporatized techniques which FTC has adopted in its brand philosophy. By placing the product in a “life world” experience, rather than as an article unto itself, for profit brands can better embed their products into the life style of consumers and create brand loyalty much more easily. Car companies, for instance, will highlight the relationship the car has to you, the consumer, rather than detail information or features of the car as the primary selling point. Furthermore, techniques such as this construct a subjective authenticity as the brand relationship is now wholly consumer centric, rather than existing as ‘merely’ a product.

This obfuscation of both causes and solutions to complex problems has involved a grand display of exaggerated ‘puffed’ claims regarding both the experiential value of Me to We giving in its various forms, and the socio-economic effects of the charitable efforts themselves. These efforts, in large part the brand’s school outreach programs, ‘social enterprise’ philosophy of ethically made for-profit products, We Day, and the voluntourism vacation package colloquially known as ‘the Kenya Experience, have reshaped charity giving in a way that, as Jefferess (2012) argues, “reframes humanitarianism and global citizenship education in the terms of the self-help industry” (Pg. 18) by creating a philosophy of giving based around experiential subjective good, rather than the goods in helping the other. Feeling good, rather than doing good, has

become the primary promise of the brand.

The construction of communally situated responsibilities is similar to a number of notable NPO branding efforts attempting to utilize falsely constituted grass roots collectivism to motivate potential donors. The FTC and the Me to We brands have targeted youth communities and voluntourists. They have been given access to a key demographic involved in spreading both brand awareness and cause-specific (brand associative) awareness within distinct communities through their school programs. As a project geared toward youth, and with the active collaboration of the formal school system in Canada, “Me to We” serves to shape what constitutes “making a difference” (Jefferess, D. 2012, Pg. 24). The Me to We philosophy provides the framework for global citizenship education in many Canadian schools, and thus has ‘cornered the market’ on setting the terms of social and economic ideologies of giving, reframing the discourse around giving the better reflect the FTC philosophy of donor centric philanthropy. More importantly, these student outreach programs foster a branded relationship in potential donors at a very young age, meaning that FTC and Me to We have a distinct responsibility amongst Canadian organizations to frame charitable giving as an act of corporate identity building relating to subjective self aggrandizement or as a tool of objective aid. The corporatization of giving problematizes not only the act of giving itself, but also the act of branding ‘giving’ as a whole.

Me to We and FTC are undoubtedly effectively managed brands, but efficacy and ethicality are often different things. FTC and Me to We typify the issues of NPO branding adopting corporatized techniques. As Holt argues, “postmodern branding floods social life with evangelical calls to pursue personal sovereignty through brands (2002, Pg.

87). FTC typifies the corporatization of giving. No longer are causes, social issues or tragedy enough to engender donorship, instead, the *act* of giving has become commodified, prepackaged and sold in feel-good t-shirt form. If the brand overshadows the ‘cause’, then the ‘product’ being branded is brought into dispute. Likewise, an important difference between charitable ‘giving’ and purchasing a product is that through the act of giving, one retains the right to question the ethicality and utilization of the funds given, whereas in a purchase, such as a t-shirt or a ‘luxury’ vacation package, the consumer is involved in a far more transactional relationship, rather than an interpersonal one. This transactional relationship weakens the right for one to claim accountability regarding the use of ‘their’ funds.

In the end, like any for profit brand, Me to We is seeking consumers by promising a distinct community an ascendant experience from the interaction with said product. The ‘product’ is the paternal beneficence by means of a t-shirt, a stadium event, or a trip. As Earle (2000) characterized, FTC has fully adopted a “Baptist plus Barnum” approach to charity when he described effective (rather than ethical) NPO branding, “as an advertising professional, do all the smart things you would regularly do to sell detergent or a new SUV model. Then if it also provokes a soul-satisfying emotion when you see it, that’s a plus and so much the better!” (242). The shift from promoting awareness for a societal ill, aid toward a crisis, or empathetic understanding of a cause, toward the commodification of ‘giving’ highlights the disjunction in current NPO branding practices.

If there does indeed exist a line between the corporate and the charitable, it has been crossed as is clearly evident in the ‘ethical’ branding extravaganza, We Day. Conor Murphy, a B.C. teacher who attended We Day, argues that his students “were too young

to recognize the hypocrisy of this extravaganza? How can any of us from the Me to We Day feel inspired to ‘be the change’ when our bag of free goodies is advertising a national drugstore chain?” (Murphy, 2009). The critique of the over corporatization that branding techniques may apply to NPOs is potentially valid, though not necessarily so. FTC and Me to We have distanced themselves from cultivating awareness of a crisis and the ‘unpleasantries’ associated with efforts to aid in said crisis, instead favoring the promotions of plastic, feel-good consumerist goods: an ethical product line, vacation tours touting luxury and personal fulfillment, a lavish spectacle in stadiums across Canada with celebrities and free swag. “The products of “Me to We” function as a brand, signifying a specific lifestyle and attitude” (Klein, 1999). The Kielburgers (2006) argue that the non-market good of happiness “comes not so much from achieving your goals as from having the right ones” (Pg. 188). In this way, through youth targeted campaigns, puffed claims, associative branding, ignoring the causes of strife in favour of the subjective pleasures of ‘living Me to We’, the Kielburgers have constructed a brand that is rich in what Bourdieu titled ‘symbolic capital’ (1977) but starved for authenticity. FTC and Me to We reflect the fears of over corporatization within NPO branding, and the differences between for and not for profit branding that must be addressed. NPO branding must put the truths of its cause at the forefront, lest it lose authenticity and risk its ethical ends becoming a hollow commodity.

Conclusion

“The concept of charities and campaigning organizations as brands still seems to provoke furrowed brows and flurries of concern” (Grounds, 2005, Pg. 65). Brand marketing can be a deceptive field, using manipulative tactics to foster strategic

relationships with consumers in order to gain a profit. “Brands now cause trouble, not because they dictate tastes, but because they allow companies to dodge civic obligations. Postmodern branding is perceived as deceitful because the ideals woven into brands can seem so disconnected from, and often contradictory to, the material actions of the companies that own them” (Holt, 2008). I have argued that the field of NPO branding is distinctly different from for-profit brand marketing. I have argued that this is largely founded in the differing ends each seek to achieve with their branding. Although both aim for consumer/donor returns, the ends of the charity utilize those returns towards a grander ethical end. This differential teleological use of funds necessitates different branding strategies appealing to distinct consumer ends, such as empathy and selflessness, rather than personal gain.

The ethical trajectory of charities aligns itself well with brand marketing as branding is primarily concerned with relationship building and authenticity. Where ethical problems arise are in cases such as FTC, Me to We and PETA where a cause is commoditized and the act of giving becomes consumer-centric act, rather than an empathetic one. In examples like these, the atrocity or crisis being addressed becomes secondary to the subjective pleasure of giving itself, rather than, ideally, the reverse. Furthermore, this corporate model of a branded charity results in the justification of persuasive marketing techniques such as *suppressio veri*, associative advertising and hyperbolic puffery. These tactics blur the lines between corporate and not for profit organizations even further by misunderstanding the relationships the brands are seeking to build. In a for profit model, these tactics are used to alter the perception of consumers in order to promote an air of authenticity and facilitate trust in the branded claims. For

charities however, authenticity is often inbuilt, whereas trust is generated through both successful action and the perceived intentionality that an NPO is engaging with the community as an end in itself, rather than a means to monetary gain. This engrained communal link makes ethical and transparent branding distinctly easier for NPO brands. Transparency brings, somewhat poetically, clarity regarding a brand. For a charitable or cause based brand, this clarity aids not only in donor relations and targeting, but also in internal mission statement design, volunteer acquisition, and communications as well.

Furthermore, the promulgation of non-market desires may only distance an organization from the real-world work it is attempting to achieve on the ground. The monetization of giving within the Me to We and FTC campaigns is emblematic of the fears charities have regarding brand marketing. These fears are justified, however, if one conflates NPO branding with for profit branding. By situating the charitable brand strategy within a cause specific trajectory, avoiding false or hyperbolic truths and utilizing relational ethics, the NPO brand can thrive on its own ethical authenticity.

The rise of digital watchdog communities has encouraged more brands on both sides of the NPO/for-profit boundary to reassess their brand transparency for fear of being criticized for manipulative or deceptive practice. This increased digital literacy at the consumer/donor level has encouraged numerous communities to work against falsehoods and inaccuracies within branded messages, forcing brands, particularly those within industries that are judged for their ethical topography (such as charities and other cause-based NPOs), to carefully assess the ethicality of these branded claims. Therefore, NPOs and branding firms have a duty to not only be *perceived* as being truthful or ethical, but also be as transparent as possible, resulting in brand judgment based on the alignment

of truth and value claims in advertising with action and word of mouth corroboration. The argument for *why* one ought to be ethical is both a practical issue and a moral one. Truth, then, is an effective, ethical and desirable base for NPO branding.

Any marketing and branding strategy is relationally centered and thus shifts and contours to the needs of the targeted audience. Puffery, associative marketing, *suppressio veri* are a few of the many tools in a brand strategists toolkit used to construct the perception of value and desirability, however, their use in recent years has necessitated mitigation. Branding is about building relationships with donors or consumers. More than any other, an ethically situated field such as the non-profit cause based sector ought to align itself with an equally ethically based branding strategy which begins with a acquiescence to transparency, a utilization of an NPOs distinct authenticity, and an avoidance of trickery in favor of relational honesty and truth. Hesitation over the increased corporatization of NPOs, and, similarly, hesitancy over ethically situated marketing strategies in general are justified, however, consumer skepticism and increased digital monitoring has forced the hand of marketers to either to align their branded statements and values with the truth of their actions. Authenticity is a direct product of these actions, rather than a choreographed ruse.

The work that a charity does in communities with the suffering, the poor, the needy, is incredibly important. Marketers have marred these efforts by conflating traditional marketing practices with charitable action resulting in the act of ‘giving’ being packaged and sold. NPOs ought to embrace branding practices on their own terms, rather than commodifying the needy, particularly when the ethic of the message, the authenticity of the relationship, and the truth of the work being done, speaks for itself.

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