‘Brands that do Good’ (11th global brand conference), University of Bradford School of Management

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Corporate brands today have an extraordinarily significant impact on how consumers, countries, citizens, and companies are meeting the world’s biggest challenges (Iglesias and Ind 2016). The social compact between firms and consumers as the world tackles sustainability challenges across the board is increasingly studied by marketing researchers, greatly enriching as well as challenging the fields of corporate branding, corporate reputation and identity management (Brunk 2010; Dawkins and Lewis 2003; Rindell et al. 2011). Researchers from over 20 countries in Europe and further afield gathered to present, discuss and debate this important theme at the 11th Global Brand Conference of the Academy of Marketing’s SIG in Brand, Identity and Corporate Reputation, generously hosted by the University of Bradford School of Management from the 27 to the 29 of April last year. As usual, only the best papers from a crowded field were accepted, and of these, only six have been accepted for publication in this special issue, showcasing rigorous, original research on the theme, ‘Brands that do Good.’

All the papers featured in this special issue present new insights into conceptualizing, measuring, or evaluating the contributions of brands to society, communities, and other stakeholders in some way. Claire Rademeyer’s and Russell Abratt’s paper on ‘Brands that do good: insight into social brand equity’ is a valuable contribution to literature hitherto dominated by commercial brand equity models. The authors, by dint of qualitative research conducted with an international cohort of experts in social marketing, discover salient brand constructs that would be useful in developing

a social brand equity model: brand awareness, brand relevance, brand leadership, brand loyalty, and brand resonance.

Another highly interesting paper on a non-commercial context—the city brand—is provided by Bill Merrilees, Dale Miller, Gloria Ge, and Charles Tam. Unusually, the authors employ a quantitative approach to elucidate the role of ‘culture’ and the meaning of ‘place’ in city branding, using Hong Kong as a case study. Hong Kong is a canny sample because the literature on Asian city brands is still relatively scarce; furthermore, the relationship of culture to brand meaning is under-researched. This paper contributes to researchers’ understanding of how social bonds shape the meaning of a city to its residents, showing how Confucian values and other material values associated with consumption play an important role in defining the meaning of the ‘Hong Kong’ city brand for its residents.

The question of how *consumers* view socially responsible companies as opposed to *competent* companies is an intriguing one. This subject is admirably tackled by Zachary Johnson, Yun Jung Lee, Minoo Talebi Ashoori in their paper, ‘Socially responsible companies are valued for experiences and competent ones are valued for product attributes’. In an experimental study that uses coffee as a context, it is shown that consumer’s value competence over and above social responsibility when evaluating product attributes; on the other hand, they value social responsibility more than competence when evaluating the experiences surrounding their consumption. To quote them directly, the research “contributes to the literature by demonstrating that when the benefits that consumers seek are experience-oriented (versus product attribute-oriented), social responsibility associations lead to more favorable evaluations—thus, demonstrating a reversal of the dominant findings within the literature.” The implications of

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such findings for brand and experiential marketing research are certainly provocative: To the extent that products and services are increasingly defined by experience and sensorial evaluations, socially responsible companies should focus on the quality of experiences they offer as well as the product attributes they aim to deliver.

A product marketing perspective is provided by Mark Pritchard and Terry Wilson in their paper detailing whether adding a green new product helps a company's corporate reputation. To test this relationship and to clarify it in service settings, survey responses were used on a structural model. The findings show that while adding a green new product to a company's product offering boosts consumer perceptions of the company's corporate reputation, the degree of congruence, or fit, between the green product and the company moderates the relationship.

Much is written and claimed in the name of corporate social responsibility (CSR). Often because of the glut of CSR initiatives and claims of activity on corporate websites there is considerable cynicism about CSR activities, particularly that which is claimed by global brands. It is a pleasure, therefore, to direct you to the paper by Anthony Samuel, Dan Taylor, Gareth White and Matthew Norris entitled "Unpacking the authenticity gap in corporate social responsibility: lessons learned from Levi's 'Go forth Braddock' campaign." This paper looks at a campaign that is both innovative and long-term in its commitment to a town that has suffered badly due to the macro-environmental factors that many people living in ex-industrial towns and cities will resonate with.

The important issue of evaluating brands that 'do good' is addressed by Vignesh Yoganathan, Fraser McLeay, Victoria-Sophie Osburg and David Hart in their paper, 'The core value compass: visually evaluating brands that do good'. This paper is an excellent attempt to show how marketers and researchers alike can address the inherent tensions between 'being good,' 'doing good,' and 'looking good' by focusing on core values. Using a public sector brand as an illustration, the paper demonstrates a readily usable visual tool for evaluating core values based on a set

of 'goodness' criteria identified from extant theory. By remaining sensitive to the temporal and evolutionary possibilities of doing good as well as to the paradoxes and tensions in brands that either try, or purport to try, to do good, the Core Value Compass has considerable value.

These papers collectively and individually make a strong case for how consumers, researchers, marketers and even residents of a city perceive, commune with and consume brands in diverse sectors. The themes of a 'green' corporate reputation, core values, city branding, community/stakeholder perceptions of socially responsible versus competent brands extend the boundaries of the current state of research in the field. The hard work and insight of the authors have made the work of preparing this Special Issue a special pleasure for us. We hope very much you, too, enjoy the scope of the papers rigorously reviewed and accepted for publication here and agree, further, that we have every reason to move beyond any lingering doubt, mistrust or cynicism about the fact that brands do *a lot of* good for society and the world.

With best regards from the guest editors,
Professor Stuart Roper
Dr. Ming Lim
Dr. Oriol Iglesias

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