

PRO-SOCIAL MARKETING: THE MIRROR OR VEIL?

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ABSTRACT

The multitude of interconnected, multi-scalar issues facing humanity and the collective natural world frame corporate pro-social strategic communications within the United States. Organizations from across sectors are collaborating, brands are becoming activist, and corporations are using media platforms to speak out on a range of issues. The study deals with the emerging phenomena of purpose-led marketing and social impact communications from an agency standpoint. More precisely, the study uses a critical constructivist grounded theory to provide an understanding into the role of communications and agency inter-action that span across corporate sectors and society.

The study advances academic knowledge across cross-sector collaboration, corporate social responsibility, communications, marketing, and social change. The conceptual and theoretical findings provide an in-depth practitioner narrative and relational view of pro-social communication. The agencies facilitate sectoral transformation and provide value-mediation between organizations, society, and stakeholders. The study discusses the participant's action-based storytelling approach to cultural and structural social change.

Keywords: Prosocial Marketing and Communications, Social Impact, Social Change, Social Purpose, Nonprofit Communications, Critical Constructivism

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The introduction is multi-fold as you will soon see; it functions as an introduction and reflexivity. Academia? Don't worry it is part of the methodology. It doesn't conform to the confines of a study; it's flexible and raw; it's an emotion; it's void; it's a story within a story that can never be understood. The author is multi-vocal not bound to one voice, yet diluted, stripped of complexity bound to this paper, void of color, rhythm, sound, movement, and multi-dimensionality.

Those things, I call life. Therefore, it will take the form of a story. I'll introduce concepts, tensions, dualisms, and thoughts. I'll ask more questions than give answers as I think it should be—I call this creative transparency.

CURIOSITY

Like all good stories, it started with curiosity, an ideal, a dream, a purpose? Let's look back to my statement of 'purpose,'

A recent worldwide survey, the Superbrand report, conducted by Havas Worldwide revealed that 73% of consumers believe that companies have a responsibility to do more than just generate profits. Consumers are indicating that a brand's social purpose is among the top factors that influence purchase decisions. Corporate social responsibility is not only something that I believe should be established in every company, but a theme which has manifested itself into my inclination for a purposeful career. This aspiration to create a positive impact through corporate social

responsibility has led me to pursue further education with the University of Tennessee, Knoxville within the College of Communication and Information...After more than a year and a half in the workforce, and despite the creative accomplishments I had achieved, something was missing in my career. I had noticed while working in advertising that many of my creative concepts would span more of a strategic realm, involving how campaigns could be used not only to promote a product or service, but also to benefit a cause and the community... After countless 'what do you want to do when you grow up' talks, I have confirmed my calling: a career in corporate social responsibility marketing.

TEACHERS

Next, I met teachers. Teachers that ask questions, and listen to answers:

Is it X asks a student? Well what about Y? or B? And don't forget C? A perpetual game of questions, of this and of that, always no answers. I had not and still do not yet understand the true value of questions.

Answers are roadblocks; questions allow us to see. We asked questions of human nature, of reality, of space, of time, and stories. I learned about metaphors, theories, and research—especially the importance of questions. But, not just any questions. Questions of language and how they shape reality; of knowledge, of action, and of what we perceive. I learned critical thought and saw upside down, and right side up momentarily.

PARADOX AND INTERACTIONS

Paradox's good friend? Duality. When people asked what I was studying, I heard a typical response. Social-good marketing. Isn't that a paradox? Echoing into

infinity. Why yes, I smiled. Wait, do I understand paradox? Can a paradox live in a paradox? Oppressed by language? If we make meaning from language, who defines paradox?

SELF-OTHER

I struggled with voice, and the 'right' story to tell. I explore self-other in the study's methodology. Trying to find self in all other I let participant and academic knowledge co-lead the way. The story won't be able to do justice to all realities. You'll notice voice and language change; I think it helps better tell the story, the tensions, and the changes.

An Ecosystem View of the Study

The phenomena of purpose-led and social impact communications are emerging tangentially and within external creative agencies, an organization's corporate social responsibility units, and across traditional constructions of communications (i.e., advertising, marketing, public relations). Academia discusses the phenomena of pro-social communications across disciplines and organizational sources (i.e., private corporations, nonprofits) in relation to the audience. The most prominent existing literature in the context of the study is communications in corporate social responsibility and cause-marketing literature. The study sought to understand the phenomena on its own using a critical constructivist variation of

grounded theory. Therefore, the study briefly discusses industry aspects that spurred the research and then introduce the literature review. A literature review in constructivist grounded theory acknowledges previous knowledge; but is written in interaction with the methodology and findings (Charmaz, 2006).

PHENOMENA ASPECTS

The growth of a company's purpose and positive social impact is rising in importance for an individual's purchasing decisions. Edelman (2017) states that 'the world wants more from brands' and that over 53% of consumers believe that 'the system is failing me,' and believe brands can help solve social problems. Edelman warns that if brands ignore purpose, they will be trapped in "no brands land" (p. 2). A plethora of industry reports focus on the raising social expectations of brands for younger generations (Cone Communications, 2017; Shelton Communications Group, 2018; Edelman, 2017; Havas Group, 2019; Dentsu Aegis Network, 2017, Barton, Ishikawa, Quiring & Theofilou, 2018). The reports describe Generation Z as the 'pivotal generation,' due to the amplification of Millennial behaviors that believe the organizations should work toward a supportive role (not a hero), present reality, focus on human equality, and the increase of curated social media (Barkley, 2017).

Moreover, the internal importance of a company's societal contributions is steadily increasing over the past years and is continuously transforming the way

businesses operate. The growing belief that companies should benefit society through ethical and philanthropic responsibility created the need for companies to communicate how they are fulfilling these expectations effectively. Public relations, marketing, and advertising firms are now specializing in social-good strategy and communications. The organizations of purpose-led and social impact communications are not bound to a specific sector and therefore are operating in-between the standard worlds of for-profit and nonprofit corporations.

Scholarly literature across disciplines mirror the trends discussed in the private sector and industry consumer reports stating that:

today we see nonprofits becoming more like business, with an emphasis on earned revenue and a strategic, outcome-orientation. We also see traditional businesses becoming social mission organizations conspicuously adopting a double or triple bottom line. We see philanthropists asking for their philanthropic return on investment, and we see investors asking for the social impact of their marketplace activity. Philanthropists are blending business with philanthropy, government and politics with giving (Reich, Cordelli, & Bernholz, 2016, p. 10).

From a sectoral perspective, there is a notable emergence of a 'fourth sector,' which represents the converging aspects of for-profit, nonprofit, and governmental organizations. Additionally, social enterprises represent a new organizational structure that mixes entrepreneurial aspects of a business with the aims of creating positive social value for people, communities, and societies.

Social organizations, enterprises and cross-sector relations are prominent features of the emerging sector, which marketing plays a crucial role in growing (Austin, 2003; Aspen Institute, 2009).

The study's explores pro-social communication from the lens of the external communications agencies rather than the organizations. Since creative agencies work across corporate worlds, it is important to understand both the for-profit and nonprofit worldview of social responsibility and relationship with advertising and communications. The study takes an agency practitioner perspective to understanding the overall phenomena and agency relationships.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this paper is to gain an abstract understanding of the agency perspectives of social impact and purpose-led marketing and communications. First, the study seeks to provide agency definitions of social impact and purpose-led communications. Next, the study offers insight into the role of the agencies in the emerging phenomena of pro-social corporations and organizations. Third, the study worked to understand the agencies societal responsibilities and relationships. An understanding of social impact and purpose-led marketing academically helps close the academic-practitioner gap and advance communications literature.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

A historical understanding of advertising and its relation to various sectors serves as a foundation for rooting the paper's findings. First, the literature review provides a conceptual understanding of an institution. The reviewed literature uses an institutional perspective to provide the relevant historical context of advertising and philanthropy. Next, the literature review discusses corporate social responsibility literature, the landscape of communications research, and cause marketing. Lastly, the literature review discusses the agency perspective the study used to gain insight into purpose-led and social impact communications.

Understanding Institutions of the Past and Present

Scholars can explore advertisements and the role of advertising in a variety of ways; conceptualizations range from communication that provides information on products and services available in the market to a deceptive communication that influences the masses to idealize consumer culture to an approach used to change behaviors positively (e.g., social marketing). Advertising and communications studies also focus on context-specific situations regarding the

audience and communication source. To fully understand the phenomena the literature review will first explore the social institutions related to the phenomena.

Social Institutions

An Institution, as defined by Walter H. Hamilton (1932) in The Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences,

is a verbal symbol which describes a cluster of social usages. It connotes a way of thought or action of some prevalence and permanence, which is embedded in the habits of a group or the customs of a people...Institutions fix the confines of and impose form upon the activities of human beings (p. 3).

Institutions in a social scientific view are socially constructed structures that give meaning to language, ideas, behaviors, oneself, and others. Institutions are 'informal bodies of usage' that also give an individual's interaction with others and use of objects, customs, and unquestioned behaviors significance through socially institutionalized ideas (e.g., money, time, marriage family) and also create social structures (e.g., gender, race, class). Institutions crystalize as influential organizations that have more direct control over language, ideas, behaviors used by individuals to interact with others and the world such as education systems, corporations, family structures, legal systems, the media, and religion. Institutions are socio-historically shaped and contextually bound to the social norms within groups, communities, and cultures.

To understand institutions that shape social conventions, one can look to the past; however, that will only provide a partial view.

It is impossible to discover for such an organic complex of usages as an institution a legitimate origin. Its nucleus may lie in an accidental, an arbitrary, or a conscious action...Even if it is deliberately established an institution has neither a definite beginning nor an uncompromised identity...It is impossible even in the most rudimentary culture to find folkways which are simple and direct answers to social necessities. In all societies, however forward or backward, the roots of the most elementary of arrangements—barter, burial, worship, the dietary, the work life, the sex union—run far back into the unknown past and embody the knowledge and ignorance, the hopes and fears, of a people. In fact, as an aspect of continuous social processes an institution has no origin apart from its development. It emerges from the impact of novel circumstances upon ancient custom; it is transformed into a different group of uses by cultural change. In institutional growth the usual may give way to the unusual so gradually as to be almost unnoticed...It often happens that new arrangements spring up under the cloak of an established organization (p. 4).

Institutions define the social conformities that an individual can choose to depart from in favor of the unconventional which can spark an idea, the beginnings of an alternative institution, or rather the continuum of social processes that give shape to the realities socially perceived that compete, intertwine, transform, and amalgamate with dominant institutions. Institutions are ingrained with power, whether they are fluid or ridged, and often perpetuate prejudices and the oppression of what and who society considers as 'other.' Institutions are living and dynamic, whether physically manifested or are unseen coalesced ideas that shape knowledge and 'common sense.' Ways of knowing and understanding institutions are in itself institutionalized; one can only begin to explore the

epistemic institutions that shape the unknown from the known, bound by institutionalized language, temporality, and the inquiry processes in research.

While there are limitless possibilities of communication, ideas, behaviors, relations, and truths; institutions serve as an “imperfect agent of order and of purpose in a developing culture.” Intention and happenstance, conscious and unconscious, known and unknown, share in an institutions creation and uses. There is emancipatory power in a vision, an idea, or a spark that often through conformity becomes an institution that it sought to escape. Hamilton states that,

It like any creation of man be taken into bondage by the power it was designed to control. It is a folkway, always new, yet ever old, directive and responsive, a spur to and a check upon change, a creature of means and a master of ends. In its social organization an instrument, a challenge and a hazard; in its wake come order and disorder, fulfillment, aimlessness and frustration...Institutions and human actions, complements and antitheses, are forever remaking each other in the endless drama of the social process (pp. 9–10).

Social scholars have analyzed a variety of social structures and processes from an institutional viewpoint. First, the literature reviews advertising (in its native relationship with for-profit organizations) from an institutional standpoint. Next, the study discusses philanthropy (in its native role with nonprofit). Understanding advertising and philanthropy as institutional powers through an institutionalized process is only able to provide certain aspects of the phenomena. Adopting an institutional perspective, in particular, highlights the evolving trends, relationship

with culture, and historical events that shape the formation and implications of advertising and philanthropy.

Advertising as an Institution

Advertising as an institution has primarily revolved around a particular debate between the advertisement-culture-person relationship. In other words, does advertising create or respond to socially felt needs? The academic discussion is referred to as the market-driven or producer-driven debate (Taylor, Hoy, & Haley, 1996; p. 72). The literature review works through the market-driven/producer-driven tension concerning advertising as an institution from various literature. First, the paper discusses the origins of advertising.

CLASSICAL LIBERALIST ROOTS

To institutionally understand advertising, it is necessary to surmise the historical origins that provided a 'fertile seedbed' for the growth of advertising that originated from classical liberalist ideas of egoism, intellectualism quietism, and atomism. In a classical liberalist view, "human nature," was classified by self-seeking and individual actions (even altruistic) are understood as self-motivated. The popular idea of a self-interested being, founded upon naturalized (i.e., speciesism) ideas that humans are rational and that unlike 'instinct-driven' behaviors in the 'animal world;' humans are considered to be deliberative and calculating. An egotistical, rational being is assumed to only to exert energy when

promised a reward; using this assumption individuals engage in activities, not for the activity itself, but rather a means to an end. If there is no desired reward, humans are thought to remain apathetic and disinterested.

The idea of self-motivated individuals making up society is the basis of atomism. The construction of atomism as 'natural laws' that assume the whole (society) is nothing more than the sum of its parts (individuals), meant that the aggregate of individual decisions would benefit the whole (i.e., the invisible hand). When one views society through an atomistic lens, all historical oppressions creating disadvantages or institutional manipulation of individuals is considered absurd. An atomistic market assumes that the 'natural process' of competition would lead to self-correction. In a classical liberal worldview, there is no moral judgment or responsibility of an individual to do anything beyond what is best for oneself monetarily (Rotzoll, Haefner, & Hall, 1990). Individual property rights are foundational to the market itself and are expressed and protected by competition. The final assumption is that if an individual holds adequate knowledge, the market will function properly. Here, lies the 'fertile seedbed' that propelled the institution of advertising and consumer culture today.

THE CHARACTER OF ADVERTISING

The originating role of advertising is to provide dissemination of information to the market to fuel the hallmark assumptions of rationality and competition that would

give the 'markets' information desired (i.e., the market-driven perspective).

During the nineteenth century when rapid industrialization fostered mass production, and centralized marketed powers—advertising then transformed into the modern institution of mass communication where 'information' became persuasive to drive competition that would keep the market in check while upholding the assumption of a rational being which in turn justified persuasive communication. After reappearing issues of dominate market powers gaining control, the market system changed from production-based to consumption-based. The focus on consumption amplified the role of advertising and spurred various debates about advertising's role in relation to a consumer society.

Academic literature discusses the exact character of advertising and consumer culture from a variety of perspectives including a) a logical corollary to the market system, b) a hegemonic system of control, and c) a complex combination that is dependent on context. The corollary view of advertising is rooted in the traditional ideas of individuals needing information for the market to run efficiently using liberalist assumptions. A human and organizational conscience was assumed to act as a gut-check for market activities and create social responsibility. In this view, advertising is necessary to keep a decentralized market system run effectively by providing information to keep organizations competitive.

Carey (1960) proposes that a) “the role of advertising acts as an agency of social control providing norms of behavior appropriate to current economic conditions,” and b) “represents the expression of property rights held by firms in goods and services controlled, it is hoped, by social conscience” (p. 33). Because of the growth of industrial capitalism, sellers and buyers more explicitly became markets and consumers, which created a prominent role for advertising to create and react to market demands, not strictly persuasion. Carey suggests the 'advertising problem' conversation should focus on what type of information is socially needed, and who should supply the communications, rather than criticize the information-based function of advertising historically. Potter (1954) provides an antithetical concept of advertising and its hegemonic role as an institutional power.

Potter (1954) in *People of Plenty: Economic Abundance and the American Character*, highlights the neglect of advertising as an institutional power given the influential control over media and cultural standards. Advertising is commonly condemned as a conspicuous sidekick for corporate interests apparent in media while overlooking that advertising created modern mediums of communications. Advertising had transformed from a vehicle of communications for existing supply and demand, but actively created demand. Since the communication's goal changed from providing information to exerting social

influence, producing a consumer culture is only possible in an economy of abundance.

A society focused on consumption instead of production shifts the societal values that hold dangerous implications. The shift situates the institution of advertising in the most elite group of institutions that Potter terms “instruments of social control,” along with the church, school systems, and corporations. Advertising doesn’t force control but appeals to and cultivates human desires while often producing envy of others consumption. In this view, the alarming 'advertising problem' concerns the cultivation of a materialistic culture in which individuals are chasing an economy of abundance.

There are undoubtedly issues with any, and all institutions acting as an instrument of social control, Potter points out that advertising is unique in the fact that it has ‘no social goals’ and or responsibility. The absence of a ‘social purpose’ creates a dire cause of concern in that the principal aim has been to conceive individuals as consumers. Advertising in a consumer culture does not perceive individuals as rational beings, but emotional ones and uses ritual communication to abstract ideas so that mass audiences can find value, confirmation of one’s worldview and sense of self. The danger isn’t in our economies warns Potter, but the very values of society institutionalized to glorify materialistic virtues (Potter, 1954).

Mason Griff (1969) expands that the change of social values adds to the breakdown of one's rational processes and influence an individual's moral inner sphere led by a desire-based consumption. The metaphorical aspect of advertising situates more value in person-object relations than person-to-person relations. Advertising uses the same moral-meaning metaphors that folk artists used in fantasy, folklore, and religion to mirror societal needs, aspirations, and wishes. Griff warns that advertising subjects individuals to:

all types of indignities and enslavement...In the very act of giving authority to the new standard of living reflected by advertising he has released and recognized the forces of life only in their most raw and brutal manifestation. It is these tendencies that now prevent advertising from playing a useful part it could play in disciplining human fantasy and overcoming the tendency of symbolism to magical perversions (p. 137).

Advertising in this view is the sole creator of consumer culture, amplified by the force of economic abundance and metaphorical ideas that convince individuals that their role is to consume. Why is it that consumer culture is a prominent aspect of American society?

Schudson (1984) argues the roots of consumer culture aren't from advertising alone, but in geographic and social mobility, urban growth, and modes of communication. The increase in public transportation from the 1850's omnibuses to the trains and subways of the 1900s, geographic and social mobility transformed the spatial habits of daily life and paved the way for urban growth. The opportunity for social mobility, the iconic American dream, created a 'great

but wrenching liberation,' that separated individuals from bloodline and fostered a 'world of strangers.'

The anonymous customer, independence from family, and a search for social identity gave rise to a consumer lifestyle. "Identity becomes less tightly connected to one's family of origin, more closely connected to one's associates, whoever they may be" (p. 64). The individualist ideas in American households allowed mass media and advertising to influence identity. Schudson expands the argument that if one believes that youth adopt a 'prefabricated identity' through advertising, then one must also acknowledge a weakening in coercive religion, education, and family before 'condemning too quickly.' The mass media's role in the opening of social fabric did not manufacture new needs but convinced a citizen to look to commodities to fill them. The amplification of choice came at the cost of obfuscating needs; an act of opening a world of possibilities accompanied by a detrimental comparison with others. In a world of choice led by the pursuit of social mobility, material possession functioned as social status and entry into desired social worlds, even if a façade.

However, the ego-based argument of consumption is not always valid; familiarity, cost, and reliability are often the motivation for material goods. Analyzing the historical roots of the production economy illustrates that a critical innovation to mass communication was not 'advertising' but corporate organization allowing

manufacturers to build mass-market. The nineteenth century social, economic, technological and manufacturing changes muddle the debate of advertising as reflecting or influencing a consumer culture. Schudson (1984) concludes “that advertising is a form of social control can scarcely be denied, but that it was calculated, class-wide effort at social control is very doubtful” (p. 77). The emergence of consumer culture is more complex and corporate capitalism through advertising actions alone cannot stand as the root of the masses in “passive enactment of corporate manufactured dreams.” One can then ask, are the masses passively acting out a consumerist manufactured dream? Or are individuals living out their dreams and turning to consumption to fill them?

And consequently ask: are the masses passively acting out a religious dream? An educational dream? An institutionalized dream? A cultural dream? When does an individual dream become a social dream? And when does a social dream become institutionalized? While these questions have multiple answers, there is a prominently clear facet of capitalism, advertising, and consumer culture—a lack of responsibility.

Philanthropy as Institution

“Acts of human kindness are as old as humankind,” (p. 8) and like all institutions, there is not a pinpointed origin of philanthropic actions. Philanthropy from its

Greek roots means 'love for humankind.' Philanthropy, in today's society, is far more than an altruistic act, and crystallizes as a complex economic and policy structure. As Reich, Cordelli, and Bernholz point out in *Philanthropy in Democratic Societies* (2016), philanthropy today is an 'institutionalized' practice and production of privately funding 'public benefits,' that hasn't received the scrutiny other influential institutions of social power have. The evolution of philanthropy from its religious ties to the organizational philanthropy prominent today is apparent when pinpointing the linguistic emergence of the nonprofit organization known today. However, the origins of the nonprofit organization hold an eerily familiar pretension that later shaped the separation between public and private notions of 'public good,' creating the for-profit and nonprofit corporations.

During the nineteenth century, the "outcome of private corporate profit-making was of great, even a 'philanthropic' benefit to the public" (p. 21). The once 'benevolent' mixed public/private corporate form, known as the republican corporation. Corporations were granted incorporation by state legislatures that chartered all corporations on a discretionary basis to perform public purposes. Upon the passing of general state incorporating laws, a corporate charter became a free right of citizenship rather than a discretionary grant of popular sovereignty on behalf of the public. The decision created a liberal corporate universe of moral and institutional binaries. The republican moral idea of benevolence (i.e., well-intentioned; a corporate mixture of benevolent private and

public action) was replaced with a dualistic moral concept of altruism and egoism creating the base for nonprofit and for-profit corporations respectively.

NONPROFIT ORIGINS

“Philanthropy can also be seen in the norms and institutional forms that structure and shape individual behavior. Over the long course of history, philanthropy has taken a multitude of forms and shapes, reflecting the different attitudes and organizational decisions of different societies” (p. 83). In the nineteenth century, the democratic state created legal structures (e.g., tax laws) that grew and supported philanthropic activities. The nineteenth-century leaders believed that leveraging private and public giving would maximize the public good. In the twentieth century, democratic states provided federal money to assist nonprofit activities, but drew strict political lines between philanthropic and political action. Nonprofits primarily functioned as experimental organizations aimed at innovative ways to deliver public services that would be handed over to the state if successful. The legal structures promoting active collaboration between civil society, the government, and philanthropic organizations, all in the name of public-good, today involves a new-generation of particularly wealthy individuals and drastic changes in private charities.

The public sentiment on philanthropists also drastically changed, from one of outrage in the nineteenth century, to the celebrated philanthropists known today, amplified by distrust in government intuitions. Horvath and Powell (2016) discuss

philanthropy's relationship with the government regarding societal sentiment and point out the disruptive side of philanthropy—connected to democracy's decline instead of its complement. For the majority of history, the government and nonprofits worked collaboratively on publicly-agreed upon agendas whereas now private philanthropy sets the agenda and provides alternatives to government solutions.

Moreover, the declining public trust in government situates private philanthropy as the preferred provider of public goods. The most notable aspect is the ideological foundations of business (e.g., scaling markets, disruptive, innovative, competitive) as better equip to solve social problems than foundational concepts of government which requires patience and deliberation. The current unintended consequences include a change in public agendas, individually-motivated research funding at universities, reliance on the market logic (i.e., competition for best outcomes), and state reliance on private funds (e.g., social impact bonds).

The current and potential unintended consequences include a change in public agendas, individually-motivated research funding at universities, reliance on the market (i.e., competition for best outcomes), state reliance on private funds (e.g., social impact bonds). At first glance, the traditional experimenter role of nonprofits remains the same but contains a foundational difference of reliance on private wealth and philanthropist-driven motivations.

Hence it is less of a public-private partnership and more of a private-public partnership. As such, the state's goal must appeal to philanthropic sensibilities such as concerns with measurable outcomes or earnings potential, or models that prize market logic and free choice over responsible oversight and legal protection (Horvath & Powell, 2016, p. 113)

There is no denying that partnerships across all sectors need to happen, but the danger lies in philanthropic privilege dictating what exactly is public good.

Horvath and Powell (2016) give examples of philanthropist-driven workarounds that dissolve democratic participation including Zuckerberg's startup education reform in Newark, and New York City's mayor-philanthropist Michael Bloomberg's creation and use of social impact bonds (SIB) that signal a problematic new normal that directly allows wealthy individuals to select public goals with scant public input.

The concern is not in the private funders that choose to pursue public good, but the ramifications for democracy. Horvath and Powell (2016) state that "a democratic system may be rife with inefficacies and entail deliberations and compromises, but the disruption of democracy in which 'choice' replaces consent—appears to us a risky answer" (p. 116). The institutional risk in philanthropy lies in its use as a private form of power, and privileged role interacting between society, organizations, and government. The institutional background of advertising and philanthropy provides a foundation to understand another private form of philanthropy—the philanthropic giving through for-profit

organizations corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs, initiatives, and philanthropic foundations.

Corporate Social Responsibility and Communications

The study does not discuss corporate social responsibility through an institutional lens, but corporate philanthropic actions communicated to audiences can be seen as an institutionalized form of philanthropy and advertising in the relational context of cause marketing. The section first looks at the academic origins of corporate social responsibility and the various academic research areas of communicating a company's social responsibility and philanthropic action. Next, the study explores the role of strategic communications (i.e., cause-marketing) in cross-sector collaboration. Lastly, the section discusses the practitioner perspective and paradigm of strategic communications.

The Question of Responsibility

Scholarly literature in the 1950's and 1960's began to question what responsibilities a business owes to society. In 1953 Bowen suggested that corporations should follow policies and make decisions that support the objectives and values of society. A multitude of scholars looked to define the specifics of what corporate social responsibility should entail. The conversation

was kicked off by Milton Friedman's 1970 essay *The Social Responsibility of Business Is to Increase Its Profits*. Next, Keith Davis 1973 stated that CSR is "consideration of, and response to, issues beyond the narrow economic, technical, legal, requirements of the firm," and shortly thereafter, Archie Carroll's concept that "the social responsibility of business encompasses the economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary expectations that society has of organizations at a given point in time" (Brest, 2016, p. 130).

Carroll's (1979, 1991) CSR framework outlines a company's expected social responsibility is most referenced today in academic literature. Carroll presented four levels of corporate social responsibility: economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic. Economic responsibilities have historically been the primary motive of businesses—to provide goods and services while maximizing profit for shareholders continuously. After the foundational level of economic responsibilities, companies are expected to obey legal guidelines. The legal responsibilities act as a "social contract between business and society" (p. 41) and are assumed to co-exist with the economic responsibilities of a business in the free market.

Next, the ethical responsibilities encompass the belief that companies should operate above what is required by law. The ethical layer of corporate social responsibility is dynamic due to shifting societal values and expectations.

Philanthropic responsibilities include the expectation that businesses should engage in activities that promote social well-being and serve their communities. A significant distinction between ethical and philanthropic responsibilities is that companies are considered unethical if they don't practice ethical responsibilities, while philanthropic responsibilities are sought after but not as vital. The four levels should not be viewed separately but together as a process demonstrating the foundations needed for achieving corporate social responsibility. Carroll (1991) summarizes that companies should make a profit, adhere to the law, act ethically, and foster social well-being.

Following Carroll's framework, scholars more recently have tried to create a more comprehensive definition to assist management decisions given the evolving expectations. The exact dimensions and elements of social responsibility are not explicitly defined but typically involve environmental, social, economic, stakeholder, and ethical features. The most noticeable change is a company's environmental responsibility not covered in Carroll's framework (Dahlsrud, 2008). The globalized corporate landscape, transnational legal structures, and competing notions of organizational ethical business behaviors and societal expectations make formulating a formal definition a problematic task. The perennial debate in academia and industry is between financial and social motivations, obligations, and decisions.

Romantic notions of CSR that allude or explicitly deem all activities are inevitably beneficial to the bottom line are duplicitous when analyzing the classic liberalist assumptions of the market. Doane and Abasta-Vilaplana (2005) illustrate the common 'myths of CSR.' The central myths assume that a) the market can deliver both short-term profits and longer-term social goals, b) market and consumer-driven logics of change, and c) an ethics-based competition between corporations that d) will create a global economy where countries compete for 'best ethical practices.' The barrier for corporate social responsibility is not in the ideals per se but the market assumptions that uphold the reality of the global economy. The market assumptions paradoxically perpetuate the increasing environmental and social issues of eminent concern.

More recently, there are many different divergences of the business-society relationship frameworks that organizations follow, including conscious capitalism (CC), creating shared-value (CSV, i.e., triple bottom line), and benefit-corporations (B Corps). The distinctive commonality among frameworks is the alteration of profit-driven responsibility and favor of profit-based decisions secondary or equivalent with an organization's social aims and responsibility. Literature classifies the alternative paradigms either as distinct (often as social ventures) or as an extension of CSR practices (Doane & Abasta-Vilaplana, 2005; Brest, 2016).

Brest (2016) uses an advocate/critic framework to analyze the tensions of social responsibility and profit among the traditional and distinct variations of social responsibility using Friedman's model extremely against any social responsibility to provide an unambiguous reference point. The analysis finds that socially responsible aspects of a) managing perceptions of the firm, b) corporate integrity, and c) creating shared value can all align with maximizing profitability. The finding has two implications regarding management decisions. First, that even companies with a strict profit-orientation can practice those tenants (without any monetary loss). Secondly, from a critical point of view, implementation of those can be profit motivated instead of socially motivated or responsible.

Countering the idealistic advocate standpoint, the idea of responsible corporate behavior and sequential bottom line rebound (i.e., ethics pay) doesn't always hold. The analysis illustrates there are times that organizations may compromise profit. Brest suggests exercising a realistic sentiment of 'ethics count' to acclimate the occasional profit loss necessary for social responsibility. The particular aspects include a) legal requirements, b) required or voluntary environmental, social, and governance disclosure, c) shareholder willingness of profit sacrifices (seen in B Corps), and d) moral principles.

The literature highlights the complexity of CSR and unresolved aspects of the institution of the corporation and economy itself. While there is no simple solution

for organizations to solve the intensifying social problems on a profit-oriented structure,

to the extent investors make investment decisions, consumers make purchasing decisions, and employees make job decisions based on corporations' good behavior, what once might have been a sacrifice becomes a good business practice simply in terms of protecting shareholder value (Brest, 2016, p. 157).

Traversing through societal expectations, corporate activities, cross-sector collaboration, and organizational actions lies the required and controversial role of communicating corporate social responsibility.

COMMUNICATING SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

The expansive increase of the public's concern of business impacts has extended into various professional and academic fields and increased focus on the communicative aspects of corporate social responsibility. Given the various relations involved in a company's social responsibility activities, the specific audience influences the particular role communication plays. A corporation's internal actions that shape foundational levels (i.e., economic, legal, and ethical) of CSR actions position communication as a public relations activity. The 'philanthropic' aspect of corporate social responsibility (i.e., donating to a nonprofit) has fallen into the marketing and advertising realm (i.e., cause marketing) and often involves cross-sector collaboration (Austin, 2003). CSR communications at all levels are delicate and remain highly debated among across literature.

CSR communications on all levels include a negative connotation tied to a corporation communicating responsibility but having little action to back it up, or purposefully creating an inaccurate picture for profit motives—commonly known as forms of washing (i.e., green-washing, pink-washing, blue-washing) (Coombs & Holladay, 2009; Crane & Glozer, 2016). Organizations are hesitant to holistically focus on the communications aspects which results in department or initiative specific communications. From an institutional perspective, Coombs and Holladay (2009) comment on the opportunity for CSR communications ‘becoming’ an institutional structure involved in managerial decision making (e.g., strategic communications management), or ‘being’ institutionalized as a technical function.

The functional assumption is rooted back to dominate organizational views of communication, issues with green-washing (i.e., the ‘spin’), and the multi-faced role of communications (Coombs & Holladay, 2009). The strategic opportunities of communications as a vehicle to better understand internal and external concerns, foster two-way communication and inform managerial decisions is overlooked and is instead considered a tactical role scattered across departments. Similarly, academic literature concerning CSR communications remains divided into various disciplines.

Crane and Glozer (2016) conducted a thematically-driven literature review to understand the scattered literature more comprehensively. The study's findings illustrate the broad range of communication happening in academic research. The role of communication spans across six purpose areas classified as "stakeholder management, image enhancement, legitimacy and accountability, attitude and behavioural change, sensemaking, and identity and meaning creation" (p. 1232). The dominant leaning of research includes an external audience focus, transmission view of communications (functionalist paradigm). The ongoing ideological tensions between constitutive (constructing reality) and functional (reflecting reality) worldviews of communication heavily influence the siloed research in which researchers preserve their paradigmatic views. The scholars pose the following framework to understand current and potential research in CSR communications (see figure 2.1).

1. Integration: focuses on internal stakeholders using the assumptive function of communicating a company's social responsibility with employees; current research shows employees as ill-informed and skeptical.
2. Interpretation: focuses on the internal acts of sensemaking, language performativity, and narrative between management, employees, and the audience.
3. Identity: focuses on an organization's external image and how to communicate with external stakeholders that typically employ a transmission model of communication; high degree of audience skepticism.

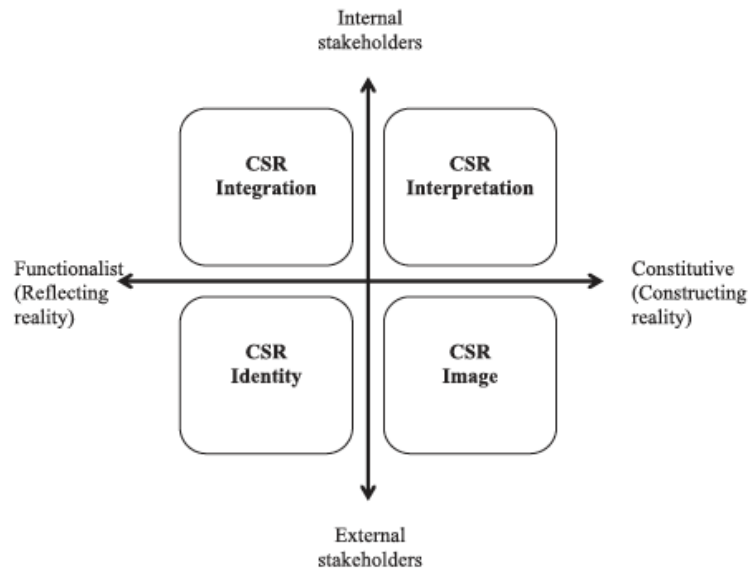


Figure 2.1. Crane and Glozer's 4I's Model of CSR Communication Research.

From Crane & Glozers, 2016, p. 1240.

4. Image: also focuses on external communications founded on the assumption that firm communications interact with the audiences multiple competing realities in the aim of revealing a fluid and discursive communication among numerous stakeholders.

The scholars recommend several research areas and comment on the 'untapped potential' or interdisciplinary research spanning domains. Advancing knowledge of the construction of 'new organizational arrangements' (e.g., social enterprises, benefit corporations) are of particular relevance to the study's research aim.

A notable barrier for the role of communications across disciplines includes the 'inside-outside' approaches in academia and the industry. The organizational inside-out approach functionalist role of communication influences audience skepticism; which plays a large role in CSR communications research. The 'dangerous dynamic' of audience, academic, management critical sentiment of communicating social responsibility frames a 'missed opportunity':

by listening to others, business can adapt to changes in their constituents...Two-way communication acknowledges the social construction function of communication. The nature, meaning, and performance of CSR-related action should be jointly constructed. CSR is driven by constituent expectations (Coombs & Holladay, 2009, p.95)

However, the skepticism research from communications has similarly employed an inside-out approach to two-way communication, and often looked to understand audience skepticism from an organizational-oriented position (Torelli, Monga & Kaikati, 2013; Öberseder, Schlegelmilch, & Gruber, 2011). One can

suggest another missed opportunity isn't understanding 'the spin' from an organizational-public perspective, but also integrating a critical perspective.

Critical marketing studies looking at CSR identify that,

corporations will need to surrender some of their power to their external stakeholders for CSR to be consequential and effective and not consolidate their hegemonic authority by using marketing to engender a false consciousness of ideology. Inclusive and open dialog is an important first step to empower stakeholders and overcome cynicism (Prasad & Holzinger, 2013 p.1920)

The critical perspectives from a communications perspective often focus on traditional cause-marketing rather than the communications from nonprofits or the 'new organizational arrangements.' While the shareholder willingness to lessen profits is a noteworthy solution to the short-term/long-term CSR profit myth (Doane & Abasta-Vilaplana, 2005); social enterprises remain reliant on liberalist market assumptions of egoism, intellectualism quietism, and atomism. While social enterprises are bringing institutional change to business norms, the social enterprise-specific literature remains dispersed across fields and lacks an established definition useful for advancing academic knowledge across disciplines (Forouharfar, Rowshan, & Salarzahi, 2018; Phillips, et al, 2015).

An Agency Perspective

Since communications agencies are working externally and across sector paradigms, the multi-paradigmatic research opportunity can span factors that are

interactivity happening within the 'new organizational space' (Crane & Glozer, 2016) and advance strategic bi-lateral strategic communication (Coombs & Holladay, 2009) discussed in corporate social responsibility communications literature. Scholars and industry researchers readily acknowledge the vital role of communications in cross-sector collaboration, stakeholder engagement, and the success of emerging social sectors (Austin, 2003; Aspen Institute, 2009; Srivetbodee, Igel, & Kraisornsuthasinee, 2017). However, the literature constructs communicative activity in pre-defined aspects of communication relative to the organizational source which constructs communication as source-produced rather than form an external agency. The study uses the strategic communications paradigm to give a fluid construction of the various strategic forms of communication. Strategic communication is academically defined as:

specific activities can be conceptualized in various ways—from coordinating administrative functions to product promotion and relationship building—all of these disciplines involve the organization, defined in its broadest sense, communicating purposefully to advance its mission. This is the essence of strategic communication. It further implies that people will be engaged in deliberate communication practice on behalf of organizations, causes, and social movements (Hallahan, et. al, 2007; p. 4)

The paradigm of strategic communications includes organizational, marketing, advertising, social marketing, and public relations forms of communication activity. The paradigm positions strategic as a multi-dimensional concept but focus on the purpose of advancing an organizations mission and aspects of

communication. The increase of full-service agencies that offer a variety of services is aligned with the strategic communications paradigm.

The study frames communication as strategic communications in its varied relational forms and focus on the pro-social orientation of the phenomena.

An agency perspective of pro-social strategic communication allows for a tangential construction of communication's role in emerging sectors and organizational-societal relationships. The institutional views of advertising and philanthropy provide historical grounding for an agency perspective of the multi-faceted aspects of phenomena. The methodological orientation, theoretical approach, and methods used to understand the phenomena of purpose-led and social impact communications are reviewed in chapter three.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

The thesis introduces the methodology and methods used in chapter three. First, the section clearly explains the researcher's critical constructivist methodological orientation used in the study and the epistemological alignment with the emerging phenomena. Second, the paper discusses the theoretical lens of constructivist grounded theory. Third, the methods section explains the study's particular design and method used to conduct the research.

Methodology

A clear articulation of the study's methodology provides a broader framework of the critical constructivist worldview the thesis used to understand the phenomena. The particular use of a multi-paradigmatic view that uses a constructivist foundation with a critical lens requires a methodological awareness. Several philosophical, theoretical, and institutional considerations influence research before embarking on a research study making researcher epistemology and methodological congruence a crucial aspect (Gray, 2014). Furthermore, the philosophical stance situates the research questions and method relative to current advertising research and literature.

Metaphysics

The interrelationship between researcher and research can be viewed on a relational-spectrum rather than posing strict governance on theoretical perspectives. Philosophical self-awareness allows researchers to identify potential tensions in methodology and assumptions inherent in the chosen phenomena and research questions. Crotty (1998) states that social science researchers:

at every point in our research—in our observing, our interpreting, out reporting, and everything else we do as researchers—we inject a host of assumptions....Without unpacking these assumptions and clarifying them, no one (including ourselves!) can really divine what our research has been or what it is now saying (emphasis in original, p. 17).

The paper follows Guba and Lincoln's (1994) sequential 'inquiry questions' that pose fundamental questions that shape the metaphysical nature of research. Questions of ontology seek to investigate the essence of existence, what is 'real,' what constitutes reality, and the nature of truth(s). The ontological assumptions affect epistemology, which questions the nature of knowledge and the knower's relationship to 'reality' and truth(s). The methodology is then affected by the nature of knowledge, what's considered truth(s), and nature of existence that is assumed by the researcher.

The paper clarifies the researcher's philosophical assumptions, research lens, and approach limitations—all of which follows baselines of reflexive social

science research and suggested best practices of using grounded theory in advertising research (Goulding, 2017).

Constructivist to Critical Constructivist Epistemology

The researcher's epistemological stance, or theory of knowledge, can be described as a critical constructivist approach used to understand the landscape of social impact and purpose-led agencies. Both constructivist and critical lenses veer away from the philosophical assumptions of positivism and post-positivism which assumes a (probabilistically) apprehensible reality, knowledge from non-falsified facts, and an objective researcher role that produces value-free findings aimed to explain, predict and control phenomena (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The study first discusses constructivist and critical assumptions related to researcher epistemologies, rather than implicitly adopting a theory of knowledge from the theoretical lens of grounded theories, which today contain multiple philosophical variations. A multi-paradigmatic critical constructivist stance is founded on constructivism but applies a critical lens to epistemological and ontological assumptions (Kincheloe, 2005). The foundation of constructivism will first be explored to understand the specific worldview of critical constructivism.

CONSTRUCTIVISM

The nature of inquiry in constructivism situates the researcher as an empathic co-participant that asks, “what does IT mean,” and seeks to understand the world (Taylor, 2017). Theoretically, there are various related paradigms (e.g., interpretivism) that seek to understand ‘what it means,’ but the paper is concerned with metaphysical assumptions of the researcher epistemology. Constructivism holds relativist ontological perspectives that assume a dynamic and emergent world that humans act upon by exercising free will. Humans construct and interpret a ‘reality’ of the world through a meaning-making process (i.e., constructions) that influence behavior. Cultural, social, and experiential knowledge influence constructions, which are in turn dynamic, multiple, contextual, and held collectively and individually. While no single absolute ‘truth’ or reality of the external world exists, the interplay between constructions and the external world constitutes multiple realities that are bound by context, time, and the individuals who believe them (Gray, 2014; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Morrison, Haley, Sheehan, & Taylor, 2011; Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

The paradigm interweaves epistemology and ontology, knowledge of the phenomena is transactional and subjectivist (co-constructed) as the research proceeds. Multiple ways of knowing and truths can co-exist with relative consensus and evolve through knowledge accumulation. Constructivism assumes a value-bound transactional axiology—viewing knowledge as an

inherently valuable vehicle for emancipation. Methodologies include hermeneutic and dialectical interaction aimed to understand and collectively reconstruct phenomena. Research findings facilitate a multi-vocal construction of phenomena while critically examining the researcher's role as 'human instrument' (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Next, the section explores the assumptions and views of knowledge in critical inquiry to next illustrate how the study embodies a critical lens of constructivism.

CRITICAL INQUIRY

Critical epistemologies act as an umbrella term for the various theoretical orientations (e.g., postmodernism, feminist, critical race) that use a value-determined researcher epistemology for inquiry. The critical nature of inquiry asks, 'whose power does IT reinforce,' and positions the researcher as a just change agent and liberator (Taylor, 2017). Traditional critical orientations assume a historical realist ontology. In other words, what's 'real' is socially constructed by hegemonic ideologies and institutions that are individually perceived (erroneously) as 'real' and perpetual. The reality of the external world is multi-layered and bound by historical context, dominant structures, and an individual's relationship with privilege and oppression (Taylor, 2017; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

In critical research, humans have free will but are confined by the 'reality' of the world based on hegemony. Researcher knowledge is transactional and subjectivist similarly to constructivism; however, the historical and structural reality illuminates' insights and situates constructed knowledge as value-mediated. Knowledge provides a means for transformative structural change and social empowerment. The value-dependent axiological orientation directs the research question and the intrinsic motive of liberation. Methodologies require dialogic and dialectical processes that foster hegemonic consciousness which leads to transformative actions (Taylor, 2017; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

The Relational Space Between Philosophical Tensions

Constructivist and critical epistemological and methodological assumptions are relatively coherent while traditional views may consider the ontological (worldview) assumptions as posing 'incompatible' paradigm tensions, research today isn't strictly bound by paradigm lines. Moreover, researchers have long viewed specific methods as accommodating, even if the philosophical constructions of paradigms were classified as incommensurable (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). More recently, researchers state that philosophical paradigms are commensurable, especially if "axiomatic elements that are similar or that

resonate strongly” are shared between paradigms—which is evident in critical and constructivist orientations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 117).

A critical ontology assumes a multi-layered ‘reality’ that can be understood through historical insights, while constructivism eschews a ‘reality’ in favor of multiple and dynamic realities. A critical constructivist worldview contains relativist realities that allow for multi-layers of critical consciousness interactively situated in local-historical-cultural hegemonic constructions. Kincheloe (2005) positions the constructivist grounding due to the epistemological assumption that “nothing exists before consciousness shapes it into something perceptible” (p. 8). Critical constructivism expands epistemological and ontological awareness of research co-constructions to the hegemonic forces that influence knowledge, human nature, inter-actions, and participant’s constructed realities.

In this view, humans inter-act with the world which constructs multiple realities—but without critical consciousness, the constructions remain constrained by the dominant structures. Critical constructivism contains an ontological nuance that positions individuals as inter-active ‘parts of’ the world rather than a realist world containing humans or a cognitive constructivist world. The locus is the transactional process constructing ‘multiple local ontologies’ based on a dynamic and emergent ‘becoming’ world orientation (Hosking, 2004, Gray, 2014). The ‘local’ ontology in relational realities contain socio-historical constructions that

can “both *resource* and *constrain* the future” (emphasis in original, Hosking, 2004, p. 9) of relational realities. Researcher knowledge is relational and involves understanding socio-historical influences co-constructions of knowledge that are contextually bound to the researcher's interactions within the ‘web of realities’ (Kincheloe, 2005).

Hegemony in critical constructivism represents a ‘power over’ construction of a dualistic self-other relationship situated in social-historical constructions and processes that can constrain (through re-construction) realities. The omnipresence of power itself is an ongoing, relational process with opportunities to change the ‘power over’ interactions (oppressive interactions and therefore realities) through a ‘power to’ approach (i.e., empowering or ‘power to act’) that aims to create transformative ‘power with’ relations that co-construct equality for all life forms (Hosking, 2004, 2007).

Methodologically, research can use dialectical, hermeneutic, and participatory approaches. While constructivist assumptions situate research methods, ingrained is a relational and critical aspect. Language remains an essential aspect of critical constructivism, it is not ‘representational’ as in constructivism, but rather (representative of) one of the relational processes used in reality construction. Methods make space for non-conceptual relational knowledge as well (i.e., sounds, visuals, listening). For example, listening becomes an active

embodied action in co-constructing knowledge and realities, rather than simply a methodological instrument, which opens up space for emptiness and reflexivity. Research knowledges are co-constructed and illuminated through a non-hierarchical multiplicity of relational truth(s) rather than consensus-based 'truths.' The orientation differs from traditional 'critical' approaches. Rather than a critique of 'others' based on a trans-socio-historical reality, critical thought in constructivism focuses on (but not limited to) critically transforming the relational aspects of power constructions through openness and appreciation. (Hosking, 2004, 2007).

The researcher is positioned as a co-creator of transformative relational knowledge—seeking understanding while questioning uses of power in interactions. Instead of critical knowledge transforming a world reality, co-constructions of reality are transformed, which can collectively amplify the 'power to' create social constructions in favor of equitable, local, and multi-relational co-constructions of realities (Hosking, 2004, 2007). Table 3.1 summaries constructivist, critical, and critical constructivist assumptions.

Table 3.1. Metaphysics and Paradigm Positions

Issue	Critical	Constructivism	Critical Constructivism¹
Ontology	Historical realism, multi-layer reality	Relativism, co-constructed multi-realities	Relational multi-realities; co-genic web of realities
Epistemology	Transactional/subjectivist, value-mediated	Transactional/subjectivist, co-created knowledge	Transactional/subjectivist, (embodied procedural)
Methodology	Dialogic/dialectical	Hermeneutical/dialectical	Relational hermeneutic/sensorial-dialectic
Human–world relationship	The world contains humans	Humans act upon the world	Humans inter-act with the world
Research Aim	Let's liberate the world	Let's understand the world	Let's co-create an equitable world

Note. Adapted from Taylor, 2017; Lincon, Lynham & Guba, 2011; and Hosking, 2004, 2007.

Theoretical Influences

Concurrent with the embodied philosophical assumptions of a researcher, theoretical perspectives contain ontological, epistemological, and axiological assumptions that become implicit in research methodology. Philosophical self-awareness provides a grounding for methodological awareness of relevant theoretical orientations, any potential tensions in research design, the design's feasibility of chosen phenomena, and a relational framework for appropriate methods. However, a philosophical grounding is not meant to limit research to strict philosophical and methodological congruence. Methodological awareness also allows researchers to break free from “from the obligation to fulfill philosophical schemes through research practice, while remaining aware of the value of philosophical and political reflexivity” (Seale, 1999, p. 466; Gray, 2014).

Institutional, phenomena-oriented, and situational factors significantly influence both the theoretical frame and research design. First, the study discusses institutional factors within the academic field of advertising research. Next, the paper illustrates the implication of the phenomena's surface aspects of the projected 'reality.' Lastly, the chapter explores the theoretical paradigm of constructivist grounded theory and the relational utility to the research at hand.

Answering an Institutional Call

Advertising in the academic and praxis-oriented level don't operate independently from the relational intersections of sociology, communications, and marketing phenomena. While acknowledging the inherent relationships, the paper situates its orientation and perspective from within the scholarly and professional discipline of advertising. Academic literature establishes a majority of advertising research on positivist orientations assuming an objective reality that can be tested often through deductive methods such as experiments and surveys. The dominance of positivist methodologies mirrors the scientific reliance of foundational disciplines when advertising as an academic field emerged; namely a heavy influence from media effects (in mass communication) and psychology literature (in marketing). A content analysis of leading academic journals (Journal of Advertising, Journal of Advertising Research, International Journal of Advertising, and Journal of Current Issues and Research in Advertising) reveals 83.18% of methodologies used are quantitative studies (Chang, 2017).

The uniformity of scholarly literature perpetuates the lack of advertising-originated theories, and the gap between industry trends and practices and academic advertising research (Chang, 2017; Belk, 2017). Scholars call for the increase in qualitative studies within the academic literature to help understand new phenomena, bridge the academic-practitioner gap, contribute to theory-

building and answer questions beyond (positivistic) cause and effect. However, this is not to say that there is not a decent amount of qualitative research that explores advertising phenomena. Due to the flourishing of anti-positivist thinking in social sciences, various fields such as sociology, cultural studies, gender studies, and history use qualitative research to understand advertising, consumer ideologies, advertising–society relationship. Although peripheral in comparison with quantitative studies, the many qualitative studies within advertising examine a range of phenomena from reader responses, cross-cultural, cultural co-optation, to the world of advertising creatives (Belk, 2017; Goulding, 2017).

The discipline's call for qualitative research situates grounded theory with the useful potential to open up the theoretical and innovative inquiry opportunities within the dynamic landscape of the field. However, several difficulties create barriers for publishing qualitative research using grounded theory in advertising journals due to methodological negligence. Exemplar research using grounded theory commonly published in advertising journals includes studies of advertising consumption (Hirschman & Thompson, 1997), understanding the world of practitioners (Taylor, Hoy, & Haley, 1996; Nyilasy & Reid, 2009), and theoretically-orientated studies (see Goulding, 2017 for more). The identification of methodological stance, phenomena congruence and justification, clarity of methodological processes that provide analytic techniques and detail, and

theoretical contribution are methodological standards for advertising journals (Goulding, 2017).

Advertising scholars suggest future qualitative methodological approaches for theory-driven, innovative, future-orientated research. While there are recommendations for grounded theory in advertising-society relational issues (Goulding, 2017), a lingering of positivist philosophical assumptions remain in what is considered valid qualitative research for advertising-specific journals overall (Belk, 2017). For example, suggestions that privilege research benefiting marketers by limiting the validity of reader response studies not of the creator's intention and constructing critical consumer response as something for innovative research to 'overcome' which reinforces positivist thinking that a call for qualitative research in advertising suggests expansion away from.

Acknowledging the practical reasons that influence the recommendations, one can nevertheless suggest that for innovative qualitative research there is a need for alternative researcher epistemologies.

Furthermore, instead of leaving critical theoretical perspectives to sociology, and cultural studies, critically informed perspectives from advertising scholars offer reciprocal transformative power to advertising-societal relations by utilizing knowledge grounded in the field of advertising. From a critical constructivist perspective, one may ask why can't advertising research advance the

advertising-society relationship rather than concerned with either (advertiser) or (societal) research orientations? Beyond the tensions of advancing advertiser-oriented research; answering the more profound questions of 'why' will require advertising literature to become inclusive of alternative researcher orientations and perspectives concerning the societal-advertising-practitioner relationships.

Influences of the Phenomena's Relation to Academics

There are currently no known studies of social impact and purpose-led communications from the advertising or communications disciplines. The paper conceptualized 'surface aspects' (i.e., assumptive aspects based on industry literature) of the phenomena that influence the theoretical approach. There are two major influences from the phenomena of social impact and purpose-led communications agencies; a) the focus on societal contributions, and b) the inter-sectoral location.

Social impact and purpose-led agencies uniquely produce communications aimed at bettering society. Therefore, the societal-source relationship emphasizes positive social outcomes (assumed to produce reciprocal brand outcomes) and social action. Understanding a phenomenon aimed at societal-transformation without critical thought is paradoxical. Constructing room for critical questioning, openness, relational knowledge, and action requires

methodologies that mirror the intentions of the phenomena. The value-determined nature of the practitioner aspects directly the relational aspects to axiological elements of social action. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) locate a sharp shift in constructivist and phenomenological research aim from understanding to including aspects of social action as one of the “most conceptually interesting of the shifts” (p. 117).

The inter-sectoral (public, social, and private sectors) location of the phenomena calls for research open to insights from related academic literature. Grounded theory offers benefits to both critical and interdisciplinary inquiry. While discipline-specific research often advocates for the advancement of discipline knowledge, interdisciplinary aspects of the phenomena are crucial in academic understandings. Theoretically, grounded theories are not concerned with disciplinary boundaries, which requires a researcher ‘boldness’ to navigate the perceived subversive nature of grounded theory (Martin, Scott, Brennen & Durham, 2018).

While the study is unable to empirically co-construct insights from distinct locations of the relational academic paradigms—the interaction of interdisciplinary insights relative to the position of advertising is enabled. A critical constructivist worldview aligns with the phenomena’s need for interdisciplinary paradigm interactions. The focus on relational processes that co-construct

embodied procedural knowledge fosters openness to the ‘web’ of realities (Hosking, 2007; Kincheloe, 2005) able to better understand influential aspects of the phenomena.

Theoretical Orientation

Today, there are several versions of grounded theory with differentiated philosophical orientations. The variations include classic grounded theory, evolved grounded theory, constructivist grounded theory, and transformational grounded theory (Goulding, 2017). The section first explores grounded theory and its evolution, and secondly, examine in depth the version of grounded theory used in the thesis—constructivist grounded theory. The study then discusses the nuances between the metaphilosophical orientation and theoretical assumptions of constructivist grounded theory.

Understanding Grounded Theory

Grounded theory provides a framework for theoretical conceptualizations ‘grounded’ in the phenomena of inquiry. Grounded theory can be viewed as both a method and methodology (Charmaz, 2006). Sociologists Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss (1967) are the founding theorists of grounded theory which transformed qualitative approaches in the social sciences from the quantitative

methodological dominance within the social sciences in the mid-1960s rooted in positivist inquiry paradigms. At that time, researchers viewed qualitative research as inferior to quantitative methods, fostering a growing gap of theory and research. Grounded theory validated qualitative inquiry and provided a systematic framework to advance qualitative research beyond hermeneutic explanations and allows for theoretical constructions. Glaser's positivist training at Columbia University and Strauss's pragmatic background from Chicago School fostered sociological thought able to provide a systematic method of 'codifying' research to a pragmatic view of society, reality and self (Charmaz, 2006).

The introduction of grounded theory as a method with no explicit methodological assumptions was justified through the process of the method and usefulness for developing theory without pre-contrived theoretical influences. Defining aspects of Glaser and Strauss' classic grounded theory position call for simultaneous involvement in data collection, analysis, emergent analytic codes (not pre-conceived), continuous analytic comparison of data, inductive theoretical development, memo-writing, sampling for theoretical construction, and construction of the literature review after developing an independent analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 2006).

Instead of logical-deductive thought that privileges existing theory (theory, method, data, findings) grounded theory uses inductive analysis that systematically raises conceptual understand of phenomena (method, data, findings, theory). The approach transformed qualitative research from positivist influences of testing 'grand theory' from sociological forefathers, and instead allows for theory to develop from the research data.

A Glaser and Strauss split lead to an evolved grounded theory from Strauss and Corbin's (1990) introduction of additional coding structures that consist of categorical codes of the a) phenomena, b) conditions, c) actions/interactions, and d) consequences (Goulding, 2017; Morrison, Haley, Sheehan, & Taylor, 2011). The evolved variation also introduced stronger ties to pragmatist underpinnings that positioned the theoretical from 'pure discovery' toward verification. Later, Charmaz (2006) introduces a constructivist approach to grounded theory that acknowledges the researcher's role in the research process. The constructivist approach further moves the method from the positivist assumptions that dismisses a researcher's epistemological awareness and opens the method to innovate orientations.

A more recent version introduced by Redman-MacLaren and Mills (2015) is transformational grounded theory—the transformational variation is rooted in critical realism and pushes grounded theory's utility for participatory action and

decolonization research. The transformative orientation positions grounded theory to study social phenomena while connecting an individual's experience to the social, cultural, and economic structures that situate knowledge and propose just changes to oppressive structures.

The scholarly debate between purist and evolved views of grounded theory's utility as a method or methodology, the theory's relation with positivist, constructivist, pragmatic, postmodern, and critical approaches, and methodological best practices remain ongoing (Martin, Scott, Brennen, & Durham, 2018). However, many scholars view the original grounded theory as providing general guidelines for qualitative methods open to methodologically adaptation in various ways for a diversity of studies (Charmaz; 2006; Redman-MacLaren & Mills, 2015; Martin, Scott, Brennen, & Durham, 2018).

Looking back to Glaser and Strauss's (1967) introduction of grounded theory, the scholars state,

Our suggestions for systematizing should not curb anyone's creativity for generating theory; in contrast to the ways of verification, they should encourage it...Our principal aim is to stimulate other theorists to codify and publish their *own* methods for generating theory (p. 8, emphasis in original).

Although there are distinct variations of grounded theory, there is also numerous shared strategic aspects of the method. Charmaz (2017a) describes the grounded theory as 'a constellation of methods' (see p. 2) that theorists can use

congruent with their district version. Theorists may not consistently follow all of the outlined aspects, but typically include several of the following:

- 1) A processual fluidity between collecting and analyzing data, which allows the data collection to focus subsequent data collection.
- 2) A focus on 'what is happening' that attends to emergent actions and processes that develop and change while theorizing possibilities.
- 3) Making constant comparison of data, codes, and categories that emerge; codes are constructed into categories when inherent analytic power of abstraction (i.e., the code has 'legs' to raise the conceptual level of analysis).
- 4) Comparison of data used to define the aspects and boundaries of the conceptual category further.
- 5) Using the data to create original and inductive concepts directly from the analysis.
- 6) Memo-writing that expands on emerging ideas of the data codes, categories, and conceptual ideation.
- 7) Elaboration of conceptual categories (rather than empirical situations)
- 8) Construction of new theory that is checked later with data.
- 9) Explicitly stating the implications for praxis and public policy.

The standard methods provide a common, but flexible structure (i.e., theoretical instrument) for conceptualizing phenomena, while the specific variations of grounded theory can be thought of as influences *how* the researcher uses the methods.

A Constructivist Grounded Theory

Charmaz's (2006) constructivist grounded theory critiques the objectivity of the researcher in the original Glaser and Strauss (1967), and instead assumes:

that neither data nor theories are discovered. Rather, we are part of the world we study and the data we collect. We *construct* our grounded theories through our past and present involvements and interactions with people, perspectives, and research practices (p. 10, emphasis in original).

Beyond scrutinizing the role of the researcher in the research process, there are several distinctions of constructivist grounded theory. Significant differences include theoretical agnosticism, a critical orientation of the researcher, co-construction of data, crucial reflexivity, the inquiry's contextual temporality that is value-bound.

The historical, social, and situational aspects of research methodology should be understood—a new methodological self-consciousness. Furthermore, constructivist grounded theory is situated in a constructivist space and time oriented toward abstract understanding rather than the explanatory and the predictive power of positivist theory. From the standpoint of theoretical agnosticism, grounded theory acknowledges influences of researcher knowledge of earlier research (e.g., literature review and existing theories) while conducting rigorous critique and deconstruction situated in doubt. An orientation of doubt allows for analyzing taken-for-granted assumptions in the literature, and in the researcher's data, method, and analysis.

The critical orientation questions the taken-for-granted assumptions of both participants and the researcher offering a relational space to further contextual understanding of meaning and actions. Charmaz (2017a) states “*the most*

important things to know about a person are what he or she takes for granted.

And these include power, privilege, and position” (p. 5, emphasis in original).

Methodologically, un-constructing pervasive assumptions provide the opportunity for innovative methods for qualitative research. Charmaz (2017b) gives the example of ideologies of individualism in qualitative methodologies that often focus on individual analysis, without paying attention to related hegemonic structural and ideological aspects. Researchers can “interrogate how, when, and to what extent taken-for-granted individualism shapes our assumptions and actions” (Charmaz, 2017b, p. 37). The approach views the data itself as co-constructed which calls for critical analysis of researcher influences. The critical orientation continues throughout the research process allows for emerging critical questions and raising the critical awareness of theoretical understandings.

A constructivist grounded theory extends the ability to connect the ‘subjective with the collective,’ while allowing for statements about structural inequalities with a prominence of individual’s empirical perspectives. Reflexivity in constructivist grounded theory is crucial and manifests throughout the methodological processes. (Charmaz, 2017a; 2017b). The literature illustrates how constructivist grounded theory is utilized in critical inquiry; however, there are subtle differences in the philosophical assumptions of constructivist grounded theory and a critical constructivist worldview.

A critical approach to constructivist grounded theory, in particular, offers innovation to advertising literature by taking a relational approach interacting with both societal and practitioner concerns through a focus on relational analytic questions. The theoretical aim in a critical constructivist grounded theory is co-constructions of concepts that “serve as interpretive frames and offer an abstract understanding of relationships,” while enabling the opportunity for transformative and just reconstructions (Charmaz, 2006, pp. 139–140; Hosking, 2007).

Research Design and Methods

The research design and methods section discuss the study’s research questions, participant collaboration, data collection, and analytic procedures. The thesis is concerned with ‘what is happening’ overall within the phenomena of social impact and purpose-led communications from a practitioner standpoint. However, three overarching research questions frame the study’s methods:

Q1: How do agency practitioners define purpose-led or social impact marketing and communications?

Q2: What is the role of the communications agency?

Q3: How do practitioners view the agency’s societal relationship?

The inter-sectoral aspect and critical constructivist methodology justify the relational orientation of the research questions. The guiding questions are broad

and allow for in-depth exploration using constructivist grounded theory. The inquiry into the agencies' societal relationship provides an opportunity for critical insights into a practitioner view of social benefit.

Participants

The study's praxis-orientation calls for purposeful interviews with experts within agencies that specialize in purpose-led or social impact communications. The study identified agencies creating purpose-led and social impact communications through industry publication mentions, socially-oriented collaboratives, and search engine results. While several communications agencies had social impact or purpose divisions, the study only identified agencies exclusively specializing in purpose-led and social impact communications. Next, an informal content analysis of the agency's website and past work was conducted to qualify potential agencies. All of the agencies identified are located in the United States of America.

The researcher sent participation requests to agencies via email or phone and requested participation using agency-specific variations of the IRB approved script that briefly detailed the study's aim and procedures. Upon the agencies' confirmed interest, the researcher requested participation of senior leadership from various agency departments. Once the participants understood the study's

aim and confirmed their interest in participation, the researcher provided an IRB approved informed consent (see appendix) and arranged interviews at the time and location (including teleconferencing) of the participants choice.

After twelve in-depth interviews and follow up communication, theoretical saturation was met. The theoretical saturation in grounded theory isn't generalizable to all social impact and purpose-led communication activities, but relationally reflective of the participants' experience and provide analytic grounding for abstract understanding (Charmaz, 2006). The study met a relational consensus on key concepts. The theoretical saturation is reflective of agencies that solely specialize in purpose-led and social impact communications which are notably different from larger agencies with pro-social divisions. The study will not discuss additional information such as demographics or leadership role of the participants to protect confidentiality given the small population size of social impact and purpose agencies.

Interviews and Data Collection

The study conducted in-depth interviews using a (loose) semi-structured interviews with participants. Congruent with Charmaz's (2006) guidelines for intensive interviewing, the researcher asked open-ended questions about the participants' experiences in the industry, definitions of social impact and purpose-

led communications, societal relationships, relational aspects of their roles, and probed relevant elaboration. The interviews lasted approximately an hour and were audio recorded upon participant agreement and signed informed consent. The researcher also received verbal consent before audio recording the interviews. Before the interview began, the researcher informed participants that comments including concrete experiences (i.e., specific campaign and client experiences) would not be used in the findings to protect confidentiality. Participants were asked to use culturally relevant examples of communications that the agency did not have as any client relationship with. If any conceptual clarification was needed.

To adequately understand the meaning-making processes the participants predominately led the interviews with the researcher probing the participant to clarify comments by asking 'you mentioned____, can you tell me more about that.' The process allows the researcher to 'follow hunches' and explore beneath surface level experiences that can potentially lead to theoretical insights. The participant primarily led the pace of the interview. Unlike conversational interviews, the researcher made space for silence allowing for the participant to re-iterate views. Creating space for silence in a critical constructivist epistemology is equally essential as the space filled with talking (Hosking, 2007). Particular comments that the researcher probed to understand deeper levels of meaning were restated to check for accuracy. At the end of each interview, the

researcher summarized the topics covered and asked participants for any additional views, including how the participants think academia could help further praxis. After concluding the interview, the researcher informed the participant of the next steps involving data transcription, and participant-checks.

Data Analysis

The researcher transcribed and self-analyzed the interview transcript to provide the participants with an interview summary. The researcher reviewed the interview memos before completion of the participant checks. Next, the researcher sent protected interview summary statements via email to participants to check and identify any misinterpretations. Upon analytic and conceptual completion, the researcher sent the study's conceptual categories to participants to ensure authentic co-construction of one's voice in the overall findings.

Participant checks in a critical constructivist view also provide interaction for procedural knowledge rather than verifying a concrete representative 'truth.' The nuance here is that the findings are not meant to create 'more or less true' explanations based on participant consensus, but rather provide a relational consensus. A relational consensus fosters non-hierarchical insights to scholarly literature while remaining open to theorizing and transformative co-constructions.

The researcher conducted line-by-line coding to create codes to identify key concepts and conceptual categories. The categories were further refined to create an adequate foundation for answering the general research questions. The researcher conducted additional interactive analyses creating unexpected conceptual categories manifesting in the form of interactive narrative concepts.

The analysis examined dualistic tensions, taken-for-granted assumptions, and identified rebel voices and inter-active voices that construct alternatives to the dominant narrative in data and literature (Hosking, 2004). The research uses plurivocality that provides contextualized and relational knowledge. Lastly, the researcher kept reflective memos, and conducted self-critique throughout the study to ensure an authentic self-other (i.e., researcher-participant) relationship and reduce researcher 'power over' data of unreflective qualitative research.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Chapter four presents the study's results in a narrative format that led to theoretical concepts discussed in the next chapter. The section first introduces the structure and voice of the study's findings. After the study introduces the four narrative categories, each section discusses the conceptual categories developed during data analysis that created each narrative category. The result section is structured using a narrative format; however, it is crucial to note the concepts did not emerge in chronological order and emerged from the interview data interactively (Goulding, 2017, p. 68; Suddaby 2006; Goulding 2009)

Illuminating Participant Worlds

Here, the study articulates multiple realities within the confinement of this study using the participants' narrative of the phenomena. A critical constructivist research inquiry regards participant narratives as social and interactive constructions (i.e., not subjective reality) which provides results that are relational and open to possibilities rather than unified truth(s) (Hosking, 2004).

The results section forefronts the participants' realities demonstrating their voice while providing a relational and local context of the phenomena. Theoretical insights are not explored until the discussion section to ensure research authenticity. However, the conceptual categories introduced ground the abstracting of insights in the discussion. The conceptual categories each discussed in-depth in narrative categories:

Narrative Category 1: Tensions that Inspire a New World

Narrative Category 2: Worlds Together and Apart

Narrative Category 3: A Multi-Dimensional Spectrum of Storytelling

Narrative Category 4: Impact Influences and Society

The narrative categories are interactive and inter-dependent although the study presents the concepts in sequential order. The narrative does not represent the dynamic nature of the interviews themselves, the participants' introspection during the interviews, and data analysis.

Tensions that Inspire a New World

To understand the phenomena from a participant's world, the researcher must first understand their world. The past experiences, moral orientations, and futuristic visions of the participants immensely shaped motivations, passions, and

‘calling’ for leaving the dominant notions of an agency or corporate career and creating a more ‘meaningful’ career using their skills from the agency world or past work experiences. Participants spoke of two conceptual categories that led participants to create the emerging world of marketing for social impact. The section will explore the following categories:

Category 1: Misalignment and Alienation from Work

Category 2: Commodification of Creativity

Mis-Alignment and Alienation from Work

The participants described a misalignment within their personal and professional lives that resulted from a range of individual values quintessential for the participants. A participant stated:

I fell in love with the world of advertising where you could use your strategic brain, and you could use your creative brain. You could come up with ideas and think about innovative ways to tell stories...I started to climb the ladder and work on the big global brands. I had a great time doing it but reached an inevitable crossroads where I felt quite disconnected to the product that we were putting out into the world...I felt like my personal values weren’t really aligned, or in-tune, with what was happening professionally in the work I was doing every day.

Another participant highlights:

What I struggled with all the time was aligning my personal values with my work values. Often in some cases feeling like my personal values were in direct contrast to what would make myself or my clients successful. And that was a real struggle... I didn’t know how to reconcile that.

The tension between personal and work values negatively manifested in the participants temporal and social relations (co-workers, family, friends, society). One participant mentioned doubting the value of advertising, “it’s the Thanksgiving dinner test where you’re around the table, and people are like what do you do? Well, I’m a doctor. What do you do? I invent technology. What do you do? I make fucking pizza ads.” Another participant (9) recalls “when someone asks you what you do and you’d like to move on as quickly as possible, that’s sort of a great sign you aren’t spending your time well.”

For some participants, tensions of alienation resulted from a misalignment of time; specifically, the limited amount of time in a given day separated between work and supporting causes. One participant stated, “I can’t spend 40 hours, or how many hours you work each week, doing something I just don’t care that much about...there was a tension for me only being able to give so much time volunteer wise.”

Even for participants working for global agencies with social-impact teams, or ‘purpose silos,’ there was a misalignment between the agency motive of international relations and new business contrasting the impact driven motive of the participants. One participant recalls working for a social impact team within a large agency stating the fact that,

a lot of big agencies have “social impact” units that they put on their websites...the reality is often that those are just new business units...often PR exercises more than functional teams...then the business that comes in would be channeled to various offices of the broader agency network. There’s nothing wrong with that in and of itself, it just wasn’t what we wanted to be doing...we were trying to create a more functional team that could actually do the work...come up with ideas, and work on design. That was not what they envisioned as a large corporation...it was a difference of philosophy and strategy and I think we saw an opportunity to build something that would be able to actually do it.

Commodification of Creativity

The participants further explained the importance of creativity, ownership of work, and work culture. One participant recalled the allergic feeling of working alongside the design team at a large fashion corporation in a position that was:

uncreative, hyper-structured role with very specific tasks that didn't require much thinking. On top of that, I was just really shocked by how materialistic the culture was. Obviously, it was all about making clothes and fast fashion... On Monday’s people would come back to the office and when you ask them, what did you do for the weekend? They would say: oh, I went shopping, I went to the store, and I bought this, and I bought this. And, at first, that was cool. Then afterward I was like, is that literally the only thing you did over the weekend? Like your whole life revolves around making clothes, and then buying clothes, and then wearing them. I really hated that a lot. I just had this allergic reaction.

Participants also noted trends from the increase of digital communication and marketing that drained creativity and innovation from conceptual-based advertising. The participants voiced a commodification of creative work

“especially on the digital marketing side; everything has become commodified.”

Another participant elaborated that,

the natural progression of how people and social media has allowed people to find out the real information about a brand or product made advertising less effective...it kind of lost luster for me when it became less...less innovative, less smart, less sexy.

The focus and transition of brands focusing on influences, social media, and other digital platforms resulted in the conceptual aspects of creative work.

The participant compares it to trends in the film industry, “like how many Marvel comics movies can we see? It just became kind of pain by numbers; safe, derivative...advertising has the same feel.” Another participant voices the concept calling it the “lowest common denominator” approach prevalent in digital creative work often employed by larger agencies and in relation to client expectations:

it’s hard to be creative...clients don’t have the willingness or openness...I think some of them are just happy with the block and tackle stuff...but, I do think there’s a tendency in agencies to revert to a formula for a lot of the work they do, which I guess is understandable, most companies want to productize their work.

The importance participants put on creativity, personal and professional value-alignment, and one's time created unresolvable tensions within past work. The participants’ desire for value-aligned work is meant leaving behind the dissonant “a job is a job” mentality and created the workplaces they hoped to see in the world. One participant commented:

So finally, after spending a year and a half really wrestling with values misalignment, or rather, values conflict. What it meant to be a successful business person—it just didn't feel like who I wanted to be just as a person-person. So that's why we created the agency

The tension purpled the participants into action toward creating and joining workplaces that are value-aligned; authentic social impact and purpose-led work—unexplored work that “that has a little bit more hardship to it.” The past experiences of the participants cultivated nuances in the worlds or pro-social communications.

Worlds Together and Apart

Congruent with the exchangeable vocabulary found during the study's identification of specialized pro-social communications agencies, some participants used purpose-led and social impact interchangeably when discussing the trend of societal-oriented benefits of their work. However, the interactive process of interviews and analysis revealed a nuance of the specific vocabulary an agency used to describe their work and the overall phenomena best. The context of the agency's client focus, aspects of the project, and concepts of social impact revealed nuanced worldviews influencing the use of specific terms.

It is imperative to note that the emerging nature of the phenomena means the agencies are “trying to sort through a common language because it [pro-social communications] has really moved a lot in a very short period of time.” The study's discussion of the participants' worldview and the interplay between abstract and concrete uses of vocabulary lie on an overlapping spectrum rather than a “hard and fast definition.” The dynamic evolution requires a sensitization to terms that give context to the descriptions of the work itself. However, linguistic sensitization and differentiation in the study are used to voice the nuanced worldviews of participants. Holistically, the emerging pro-social 'worlds' are closer together than apart.

Narrative Category 1: Departing the World of CSR

Narrative Category 2: A Blending of Worlds

Narrative Category 3: Value-Orientations and Clientele

Departing the World of CSR

The emergent and relational construction of the phenomena identified a conceptual grounding for what the participants voiced purpose-led and social impact communications work wasn't—cause marketing. When articulating the nuances of purpose-led and social impact work, the agencies illustrated the differences using traditional marketing and more specifically foundational notions

of philanthropic level corporate social responsibility (CSR). The agencies identified the evolving, however simultaneous restrictive, nature of CSR and corporate cause marketing.

The traditional corporate social responsibility ideologies associated with economic foundations are voiced as self-serving and ultimately oriented toward growing shareholder value rather than making an authentic societal impact. The participant's past experiences in communicating corporate CSR programs and related communications provides the participants' unfiltered look into how they view the opportunistic nature of CSR. The participants communicate a 'realistic' view of corporate motivations for CSR initiatives such as a rebrand of internal cost-savings, an offensive strategy of deflecting criticism, or the tax motivations of philanthropic giving. A participant voices the notion that:

Corporate social responsibility, quite often is a byproduct of industry-wide agreements that large corporations go into with each other or the United Nations (e.g., UN's SDG's) that are totally voluntary and allow the companies to say, "Hey, we're not absolutely greedy asshole pigs that want to get rich." And they still do, but now they have a CSR program...If there's a legislation that comes through that says every company has to have a certain amount of carbon emissions cap and if you go beyond that carbon emissions cap, you will be taxed. Why wouldn't they say "we have a great corporate social responsibility in capping our carbon emissions." It becomes a financial equation, a PR equation.

The point that a company's CSR traditionally hasn't been used as a societal "force for good" is why it hasn't been "used as marketable." On the philanthropic-specific level, CSR ideologies from the 90's and 2000's created a "world where

companies that are broadly doing shitty things in their day to day lives...make up for the wrong that they're doing by giving to charity or doing pro-bono work." The participants mentioned the 'brick wall' between business and philanthropic giving that creates missed opportunities and keeps companies in a CSR mindset giving the example of,

a for-profit entity knows they need to get back to the community, they spin off a CSR arm. It's very much a grantee-granting relationship where the for-profit grants to CSR and then they do things like give to the CEO's wives favorite autism charity when they're a lumber company. Which is again, no judgment other than as a business you could be making that spend work a lot harder and go a lot further for you...they might be giving away \$5,000,000 a year. But it's still kind of very much like that one-off giving, or let's take our volunteers out, or let's take our employees out to volunteer day at a habitat for humanity, which is great. But again, not strategically aligned with the overarching business goals in that company. I could get a phone soapbox about that and talk about...making what you're already spending work better and work harder in a way to deliver a stronger impact on the social side, and stronger business returns on the other side.

While many corporations are stuck in the world of self-serving initiatives and philanthropic contributions, a participant noted the notable evolving nature of CSR stating that:

more and more companies are beginning to focus on 'S' of CSR, their social responsibility. And, they're seeing that there's a lot of social problems that governments and NGO's are not tackling...Delta airlines saying, "we're not going to support the NRA anymore" for example.

While actions remain opportunistic and self-motivated, the participants voice that companies that are on the progressive side of CSR understand that the most valuable thing they have "is people, not assets," and are actively asking "what

can we do to make their lives better? And by extension their families' lives better...their neighborhoods better...their cities better."

Participants voice that a company having a CSR program is undeniably better than the alternative, but both traditional and progressive approaches remain constricted by the underlying ideology that companies should be led by profit maximization. The companies often have a "brick wall" between philanthropic CSR activities and business function and are hesitant to take authentic social stances because they "don't want to take a stock hit," which ultimately restricts the action needed to authentically have a socially responsible business in the participant's view. The agencies view all marketing and communications originating from an economic CSR mentality (including company-centric, social stances, and philanthropic giving) as cause marketing.

The agencies identify a "big difference between purpose-led marketing and cause marketing." From a business perspective, participants reject the ideologies of separated business and foundation activities and voice that when companies integrate both to "drive more impact" there is an immense opportunity for the company as well. The companies with fully integrated impact and business aims are "wildly profitable...with wildly happy employees, doing wildly cool shit," which manifests as a social enterprise. The paper will further explore the blending of

sectors and the emergence of social enterprises that shape the agencies distinctive approach to communication.

A Blending of Worlds

The agencies differentiate work through a pro-social orientation and describe working across sectoral boundaries, or 'worlds.' Participants voice that there isn't a clear definitive 'space' for social impact, but a nuanced variation of how they defined agency work, and the opportunity for social impact that happens along a spectrum emerges upon further explanation. The agencies only work on projects that have a clear social benefit. A participant states that rather than doing commercial and social impact work, "we just decided to differentiate ourselves and define ourselves by working on social impact" exclusively.

Therefore, before the paper introduces participant descriptions of purpose-led and social impact communications, the study discusses the 'space,' or spectrum for social impact to happen within. The below statement illustrates the general sentiment:

Interviewer: Can you speak to the type of clients' the agency is partnering with?

Participant: Yeah, so it's a whole spectrum. We have, on the world stage, worked with intergovernmental agencies. We work with a lot of national-level organizations and we also work with local city agencies or local organizations. We define social impact very broadly. So, it can be a

nonprofit, it can be a company that maybe has a mission-aligned initiative. It can be a governmental organization, it can be an NGO. It can be lots of things... that we really tried to use the word social impact because we are not just with nonprofits.

The agencies weren't in an unrelated world of their own, but rather traversed worlds and define creative outputs in relation to the client(s) world or specific aspects of the project. Since agency work can happen across sectors, the paper will first explore the relational 'world' that clients are positioned within. Agencies mentioning that they aren't "just with nonprofits" alluding to the idea that social impact has traditionally been assumed to happen within the nonprofit space. Another participant comments that "nonprofits are inherently social impact entities." The participants describe an increased opportunity for social impact across sectors led by the development of social enterprises which "blend the best of both worlds."

Social enterprises, in particular, reject the dichotomy between for-profit and nonprofit orientations. The growth of social enterprises has created a larger blending of for-profit and nonprofit worlds. Participant describes social enterprise as "such an exciting space to be in because it's a new intersection of commerce and cause when it was just such a divided area before. I think it's such a beautiful hybrid."

When comes to defining a social enterprise participant comments “it kind of depends on who you talk to.” For the general public and traditional organizations, the term social enterprise is a “relatively new term that people are still becoming used to. I define a social enterprise typically as for-profit social impact” organization.

The fluidity between social impact and profit in social enterprises fosters two major ideological implications voiced by the participants. First, the participants voiced that it changes profit-first for-profit ideologies, enabling organizations to use “the power of their business, the power of capitalism to impact or accelerate the resolution to social problems, social purpose, social issues in that particular culture.” Moreover, the participants mention the ideological difference of many startups today stating that “companies born in the last five years, don’t even think about corporate social responsibility. They just think about the DNA of their brand...and do the right thing by people and the planet.”

Second, it equally means that nonprofits can overcome the financial and political limitations they are legally bound to. One participant mentions, “having worked for some fairly large nonprofits, I do think there are limitations to that model.” The participant further explains:

a great way of framing it is no margin, no mission. So, you can make more change in the world if you have more money to play with if you will. I think the more money you make, the more good you can do to a certain degree. And, nonprofits obviously are limited by law with not being able to have

that financial flexibility. I think they're also limited in the ways that they can affect policy or political change. Whereas you see a brand like Patagonia that can take a stand on national monuments that's really game-changing for the whole conversation.

Participants inevitably, or when probed to give examples of non-client organizations that embodied their view of what an ideal social enterprise is, mentioned Patagonia as the ideal of social enterprises. At the zenith of a social enterprise, the separation between an organization's business and social impact aim is indistinguishable; which participants described as being completely purpose-led. Purpose in the broadest sense is an organization's "reason for being," which all decisions of the organization emanate from.

A company's purpose is "really the ethos, the internal crux of what a company is...a higher reason for being." When the reason for a company's existence isn't for profit, but a higher calling, all of the organizational decisions in all aspects (e.g., supply chain, hiring, partnerships) are led by the company's purpose. For a social enterprise, the social purpose is "baked in" and "integrated into every corner of an organization's being." One participant voices the opinion that for Patagonia, "the daylight between the brand and the purpose is nil. There is none, and you have this really highest order of a social impact brand in many ways. Again, the cause and the brand, there is no daylight between the two."

However, not every company is able to indistinguishably integrate business and social impact aims. Traces of incongruent ideological value-orientations of for-profit and nonprofit organizations are subtly apparent in the social enterprise sector. The study defines the subtle difference as business-impact-orientation and impact-business-orientation.

A social enterprise can be created with a business-impact-orientation that uses business to fill a consumer need while having a positive social impact. The business-orientation is pulled toward business motives while creating shared-value, it's "changing the way people build businesses." A social enterprise can have an impact-business-orientation that looks to solve a social issue through a for-profit model integrated into an organization's theory of change—creating a "sustainable business model" rather than the traditional nonprofit model. An impact-business-orientation positions organizational focus toward solving a social issue or serving a social need.

A business-impact-orientation and impact-orientation can both provide a positive social impact on society, and both reject organizational decisions led by a profit-orientation of many large corporations. Figure 4.1 shows the participants' notion of the various sectoral world orientations of business.

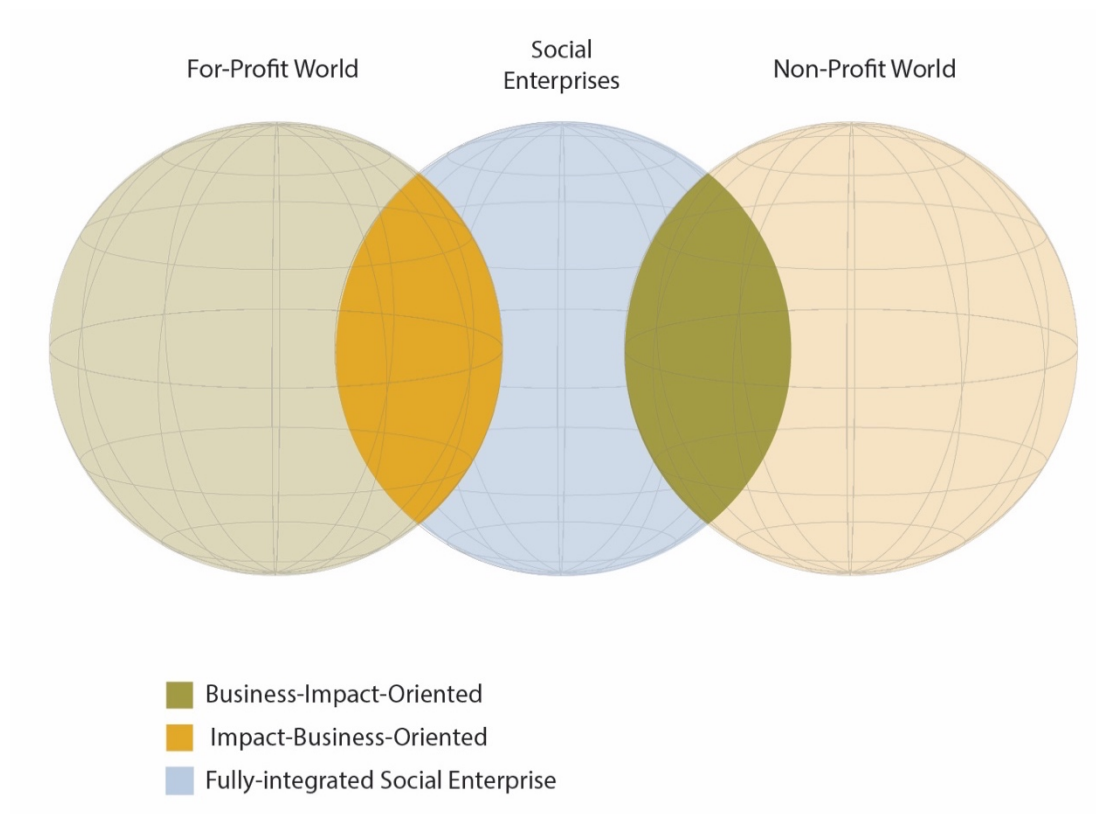


Figure 4.1. Social Enterprise Impact Orientation

It is notable that the difference in orientations of social enterprises can be clear, convoluted, or both—and are contextually dependent. The participants mentioned that becoming a legal benefit-corporation or certified B Corp is a good way to verify an organization aim of having a positive social impact. One participant summarized the notion stating that:

when you become a public benefit corporation, at some point you're asked to validate it through a third party, which is where B Lab and then certified B Corp comes in. [The validation rates companies on things like] what is your wage gap internally? How transparent are you with like your salary and wage structure? How is your company doing when it comes to diversity, equity and inclusion? Do you have a wellness program? Do you have paid parental leave? Do you have a company recycling program?

However, agencies voiced that clients are not always benefit corporations or B Corps and that by solely being a benefit-corporation doesn't automatically meet an agencies' standard of what is considered socially beneficial. Similarly, the agencies voiced a project could have a positive social impact without the company being a social enterprise. The agencies each described deliberating what potential projects are considered pro-social for all sectors, including nonprofit work.

Clientele and Value-Orientations

Although the agencies work across sectoral lines, societal value-orientation positions the agency “point of view” used within the social impact space. The

agencies work on a spectrum, and the subtle differences of agency orientation are noticeable when participants described clientele, the agency's role, and creative or strategic output. The agency's clients are a vital part of how the work creative work is defined. One participant states that the work in the social impact space is "definitely half who we're doing business with and then it's also half how we're doing business." The section illustrates how the agencies described clients and partners based on the particular impact-value lens of the agency.

The agencies have unique approaches describing "ideal client profiles." The agencies' social impact points of view are fluid throughout the various sectors rather than relying on a fixed sectoral position. However, the complex differences reveal "layers of reality," within the social impact space influencing what the agencies consider as a public good.

Agencies that work within the social purpose space identify for-profit clients that both have and are wanting to become purpose-led. The clients without a purpose, or "a clear north," are voiced as organizations that "truly want to go in this direction, but don't know how to do it...the companies we work with now are coming to us because they're raising their hands and they want to be." The agencies mentioned that clients often already have the corporate social responsibility "table stakes," and are interested in the "pivot to purpose."

The agencies also work with clients with an existing purpose or who are social enterprises. One participant illustrates the business-impact-oriented client spectrum of social enterprises and corporations interested in the 'journey' to purpose, or clients that need purpose-led creative work:

our target audience for our company is....whether they're benefit corporations, or certified B corps (either one), that have a decent size budget, and see the value of marketing and are committed to spending money in that area. That said, not all of our clients currently or probably in the future necessarily fit into that category...Our secondary target audience for business development are companies that are very interested in kind of this journey. So, they're maybe not a B Corp right now, but they are making some changes to....add all organic ingredients to products they sell. Or, are wanting to take a hard look at their supply chain to be more respectful of human rights, or whatever the thing might be.

Agency work for for-profit organizations also involves the aspects of the project; agencies that identified with a particular lens of social impact work accessed the project's aims and potential for positive impact for the public.

On the nonprofit and impact-business-orientated clients include "nonprofit clients who are more traditional that may do fundraising and apply for grants and things like that," and NGO's, or are impact-business-organizations defined as "social start-up organizations." For agencies identifying work through a specific social-impact lens; the agencies had specific focus areas of expertise and typically worked with clients in aligned areas. For example, clients that "are working toward social impact nationally and internationally through structural change," or

focused on public health, social justice, economic equality, energy innovation, and international empowerment and development.

One participant explains that clients are often working toward improving social justice, “we see our clients as changemakers either with their ideas or with levers to affect change from within the system.” Another participant states that the clients are working toward “unequivocally positive” impact for “society or whoever the intended audience is.” On the global scale, one participant mentions the agency's approach to international empowerment focusing on “underserved changemakers,” stating that:

Obviously, there is a need for basic services, but kind of one level up is the support systems for NGOs and social entrepreneurs just weren't there, in developing markets as they are here in the US for obvious reasons...There just isn't that level of social capital or infrastructure in these developing markets and contexts...that's the gap we wanted to fill [by working with] clients who are focused on services align with basic human needs.

The agencies further define the strategic and creative output using various relational aspects. The study next discusses the elements of communications, the agency role, and comparison with cause-marketing.

A Multi-Dimensional Spectrum of Social Impact Storytelling

Research Q1 sought to understand how practitioners define the agency's pro-social communications (i.e., purpose-led and social impact). Research Q2 questioned the role of the communications agency within the social impact space. The study found the overarching insight that defining purpose-led and social impact creative communications and the agency's role are relationally dependent on the particular agency's worldview or relational reality.

Category 1: Storytelling for Social Impact

Category 2: Agency Consultancy

Category 3: The New Norm: Purpose or Good-Washing

The section first discusses how the participants define the creative output as storytelling. Next, the study presents the agency consultancy role. Lastly, the overall phenomena of corporations communicating value-oriented messages are discussed.

Storytelling for Social Impact

Although a focus of the agencies' work includes using approaches from marketing and advertising the work itself is not narrowly defined as marketing or advertising. One participant mentions that upon forming the agency, the big question was "how we could take the professional tools of the trade and apply

them to social impact problems.” Another participant mentions a major formative point when “we started to think that the power of marketing and advertising can be for good.” The acknowledge an “agency” orientation, but participants hesitantly describe the work itself as marketing or advertising and mention overcoming with the “marketing is bad ideologies” with clients.

The participants bring their strategic problem-solving and creative abilities from the worlds of advertising and marketing but describe their worlds as “the creative world of storytelling” once explaining what the agency does. One participant highlights the interaction of storytelling, client strategy, and work across sectors stating that:

We come at it specifically from the strategic storytelling point of view. And, that is when it comes to nonprofits and foundations in that world, there's always amazing grassroots work being done, but often they had marketing, storytelling, narrative building as a bit of an afterthought. And the fact is when you're trying to build coalitions—when you're trying to build an army of the willing, and you're trying to change behaviors or change attitudes, what we do in the creative world of storytelling is really important and vital and can actually lead to tangible outcomes. So, we bring that to that world. And then equally when it comes to the private sector, you're looking at a very powerful collection of brands and businesses who—if they started to align in a more purpose driven way and started to transform their businesses—they'd have an incredible footprint on the causes that they chose to champion. So, we are built to help C-suite teams in brands do this right. Think about the impact that business is having on the world. And, also see this as a white space opportunity for growth because you have conscious consumers who are going to demand that businesses lead with their values. So actually, it makes smart business sense as well as being the right thing to do.

When describing work for social enterprises, the communication's goal is to "elevate brands that are interested in leaving a positive social or environmental impact on the world, or who are trying to solve real world problems through business," and caution against inauthentic trends toward purpose marketing. The participant states that: "purpose marketing, at least the way we do it, is founded in honesty, ability to measure your impact, and to tell authentic stories on behalf of the brands that are really trying to make a difference in the world." Another participant mentions that for social impact work the agency's work plays "a really critical part in helping our clients figure out what kind of story they want to tell the world about the work that they're doing."

The agencies are helping clients across sectors "show their impact" with a storytelling approach; the tension with traditional notions of marketing and advertising is most prominent in the nonprofit world and provides context to the tendency to refer to work as storytelling. One participant mentions that with the experience working between for-profit and nonprofit worlds, "I have the ability to look at both sides and communicate in that way. For a lot of my nonprofits, it's just helping them understand like marketing isn't gross. It's not a bad word."

Meetings with potential clients often include an educational conversation of:

marketing is the process and relationship you have to the people on the other end....'surprise' you're already marketing! You may not be doing it well or intentionally, but you're already doing it. So, let's figure out a way for you to do it better and put some strategy behind it.

Another participant mentions “a lot of hand-holding and education” to help clients understand:

why branding is going to be really good for the organization, or why storytelling is good for the organization... there are definitely some conversations where I'm like, I thought people knew this already, but no, I have to go back to like one on one and here is the basic foundational explanation of why these things are important.

Once the agencies “shift nonprofit mindsets,” and build trusting relationships, the agencies voice the ability to span beyond surface layers of “creative storytelling” and design as a superficial layer and expand impact-focused creative work. The agency helps their clients further impact by pushing clients to think about:

how do we use design to do more meaningful, deeper things? Like, can we start a podcast series about some of the issues, or can we do an installation, or exhibition that is design-forward that allows our audiences to step inside the issues that we care about? I think as design has become really integrated in the corporate world that has slowly raised the bar in the nonprofit world too.

The participants voiced several “vital aspects” shared across a pro-social approach to communications. The client and impact-area shape the role of the agency and how the participants view communicative work in relation to social impact effects. The paper will next explore the communications aspect of purpose-led and social impact that position the agencies’ role as an agency-consultancy.

Agency-Consultancy

The agencies across all sectors functioned as a mixture of a consultancy and a creative shop. The “agency-consultancy” role means that the agencies often work with “the highest levels of our clients' decision-making apparatus,” rather than brand or marketing teams within a company. They are “thought partners” to clients and help identify and solve business-oriented problems using an impact-oriented lens and provide relevant creative solutions. The solutions aren’t “stuck in a marketing funnel,” and include “the reality of the steps that we're taking [to solve problem] and then how did that lead to breakthrough storytelling.” The work across sectors meant that specific aspects of the role are often dependent on the client and problem at hand rather than “executional” or “surface-level” creative work. The prominent aspects of the agencies’ work were a focus on strategy, integration of action, and creative collaboration. The section will introduce the three aspects in relation to the client and the project's impact orientation.

STRATIC PARTNER

For social start-ups, the agencies help clients think “holistically about their brand, come in early, and really be more of a strategic partner.” For clients with an existing business, the consultancy role of agencies involves a deeper look into the business-oriented problem at hand and,

figure out how we can create strategic communications plan that aligns with business objectives rather than just like feeling super reactive or being handed an assignment that doesn't necessarily make sense in the

larger context. We like to be collaborative in that we're kind of at the table as those things are being hashed out.

The exact nature of the consultancy side is dependent on the client's impact value-orientation. One participant describes the consultancy side when working with for-profit organizations looking to become purpose-led:

it's like we are psychologists for brands around the issue of purpose. We go in, we diagnose, we prescribe, and we do all that with creativity—the art of imagination and strategy. Every brand that comes through the door has, is that a different level of problem, or challenge around purpose.

The process remains the same when working with nonprofits, sometimes referred to as “cause-organizations,” but the problem is different, “they typically come in and they have their cause, they have their finger fighting for or against something, and they need to break through the noise...because they already have their purpose” the focus changes to a communications problem.

The agencies describe that creative solutions for the nonprofit client's problem at hand often includes “storytelling,” but also incorporates design and strategic input relative to social impact. Overall, the agencies take on a consultancy role due to the transformation happening within the nonprofit world. The participants' voice nonprofits are starting to see the value in human-centered and design-based approaches to solving social issues, resulting in integrating design and communications into their “theory of change.”

One participant describes what the trend means for the role of strategy in the agency, that creative work traditionally been the “outer layer, and all of the structural and foundational work was done before the designer came to the table. It was very executional.” And, from a strategic perspective for the agency is that the agency is working with clients on a “stronger theory of change, why design is a critical part of the equation to creating positive social change.” The agency is widening the strategic processes so “design gets in at the ground level and is the mechanism for understanding a problem and coming up with a solution to a problem, but then also packaging the solution to the problem in a pleasing to the eye way.” The participant expands that a focus on strategy does two things:

I think the first is that doing some robust strategy up front; we can do a better job of integrating our work into their theory of change. But I think secondly, and maybe, more importantly, is that the world of social impact is like a very consensus-driven world, people are risk-averse. Their reputation is on the line. They have to answer to exactly where all their money is going...they need to go back to their people and say, this is why we spent the money the way that we did. And, I think that is the case that strategy lays out... we provide this report that people can take back to their funders and say, one, two, three, four, five, these are all the reasons that we are moving forward the way we are. But more importantly, the strategy has made the process of design work collaborative with the clients. So, we do a lot of workshoping.

Employing a “human-centered design-thinking approach” to social change and communication helps the agency create a more “meaningful” impact. The agencies had flexible strategic frameworks rather than a hyper-structured process constraining creative problem-solving. When describing the specific role of a strategist within a social impact agency the participant states that:

strategy is a very broad field of thinking. I always say it's like a toolbox and every strategist has their own toolbox you may have a hammer, a saw, a monkey wrench, or whatever. You have your fundamental things, but then as you get stronger working with those tools, you start adding other tools. And what is really unique about it is that you ultimately curate your own toolbox to have the tools that you like, and you have the freedom to switch out the tools and apply different ones to different problems.

The agencies mentioned that all creative outputs are strategically-led to “get it right.” Moreover, the participants mentioned the innate creative role that strategists use approaching different problems and providing a “really strong research and evidence foundation to build the creative on.” One participant explains that for social impact communications,

the possibilities are so endless; there needs to be guidance along the way to know what we're communicating and how, and for who. And that's the role that strategy has played, because pretty much any studio, who does this work over the last five or six years has added a significant strategy component into their work because it's just necessary to every project now.

INTEGRATION OF ACTION

The agencies discussed the importance of action on several levels that affect the agency strategic approach, proposed solutions, audience engagements, and client responsibilities. “Strategically speaking, it's architecting a framework that has action built into it and understanding—having a deeper understanding of the issue at hand.” Participants discussed the integration of action for brands looking to become purpose-led the agency may “have to help find that issue for a brand.

Maybe the brand already knows what they want to take action on and rather than just developing communications, developing the action roadmap that can lead to the communications that it looks like a long-term journey.” No matter the particular project, the agencies stress the importance of incorporating action into the entire process of the agency’s work with organizations.

The participant (9) further explains that for for-profit organizations the action roadmap requires collaboration with issue experts or stakeholders.

we operate on a sort of stretch model where we take very seriously trying to get in the right type of expertise, diversity of opinion, and experience to make these solutions work. So, rather than just have a room full of people who are good at doing a certain thing creatively, if we're working on something that is around environmental sustainability, we will be sure that we have a sustainability specialist as part of the strategy team. We're doing more of an outside-in approach, and we're making sure we're holding ourselves responsible for having solutions that are grounded in reality. And we're also going to lead to real impact—not just make a news cycle splash.

Another participant discusses what the integration of action means when helping social purpose clients, stating that purpose-led work “isn’t just about helping brands articulate purpose, but show it, it's so much more about, not storytelling, but story showing.” The participant expands on the importance of involving audiences in action which creates:

a really cool opportunity for people to do things, and then you can show that through all these different digital channels. It's one thing for a company to sort of put on their website passively, ‘hey, we're doing all these great things,’ or to put on their package, ‘hey, we're doing, we're giving back.’ But to actually show how you're making an impact and

involve people in that process and things like that—I think that it's so much more impactful than just telling it.

Participants also discuss that the integration of action also includes adding in impact-metrics beyond the traditional audience metrics of brand attitudes. For “a purpose-driven brand, you also have to add impact metrics.” More often than not the agencies note that organizations often are “applying traditional brand metrics to impact-oriented efforts.” The participant further voices the role and current state of brand and impact-metrics in the statements below:

Participant: what we advocate is make sure you do both. And, also have a bit of patience with it because the long-term outcomes are really why you're in the game. Both qualitative and quantitative outcomes in the long term can tell a really amazing story....you can also use those moments to talk to your consumers and talk to your audiences and celebrate success, or talk about failure, but it would involve them in what you're doing. And that makes it more of a two-way street and worth conversation.

Interviewer: Does the agency help companies build out those metrics, or is it the client strategizing that?

Participant: Yeah, we try to help them where we can. We're doing a lot more of it, which is exciting. There isn't really a perfect model yet...but, I think when it comes to the industry at large on the impact effort, it's still kind of catching on and people are still kind of figuring out how to do it in the best way possible.

The participants discuss that action frameworks in the nonprofit world happen intrinsically through providing services or activism, “whether it's digital activism, supporting like a petition or, calling a senator or whatever to like actually showing up somewhere and like participating in events.” However, the focus for nonprofits

often revolves around amplification, “organizers need to reach a broader audience of people who care about social issues.” In other cases, the agency integrates action by advocating for the nonprofits to “engage in direct communication with the human beings they are trying to have an effect on.”

The agencies aim to amplify an organizations action through innovative ways they engage an audience to become more participatory. One participant discusses the inclusive approach to communication that agencies advocate for when working with clients “has all kinds of repercussions” beyond communication including: “the way their cultures are inside their organizations. The way their leadership is structured, the way they collaborate together, the way they listen to their stakeholders.” The agencies further explain how collaboration is intertwined in action for the audience, and for the agency-client relationship itself which changes creative processes.

CREATIVE COLLABORATION

Using a collaborative agency-consultancy approach affects how the agencies work internally, their relationships with clients, and the creative approaches for the output. A participant mentions that:

every agency has some degree of strategic and creative process. The bones of it are probably very similar. I will say one thing that we do, particularly on the of brand positioning and strategic positioning that works exceptionally well is having a series of collaborative workshops, where we really walk through all of our research insights, interviews, the surveys that we've done on landscape, and case studies—with the full leadership team,

which works pretty well. Most of the organizations we work with are not that large...everyone throws all their ideas out and gets their voice heard. It has been really helpful for us, and we often find that it flows over into business strategy and into management, and all a range of other components of the business because a lot of the communications and brand decisions are directly related to the operational, programmatic work that they do as well.

Another participant mentions that agency approach to workshopping for milestone meetings:

We bring all different people from the client side into one room, and we do all of these really fun, creative activities that are actually designed to solve very particular parts of the problem. It's meant to be a collective problem-solving experience. There's a whole architecture to it, and like sequencing that you do from behind the scenes—for me, it's planning it and designing it. It's extremely structured, and I plan everything down to exactly what I'm going to say... but from the receiving side, the people sitting in the room, it just feels like an extremely productive meeting. You know, where annoying people weren't taking up the room talking about random stuff, or you weren't off the agenda going off on tangents. And every time they come out of it, they say, "wow, that was great." They can never truly put their finger on what it is, but you can see that they got to experience something really cool.

The participants mentioned that the focus on strategy and collaboration with clients has an impact on creative work, and will sometimes create tensions with the creative teams, but is required given the nature of the work. One strategist commented that “I think when you're a creative person you want freedom, but I don't know if creativity for the sake of creativity has a role in the world of social impact.”

Another participant mentions that “as a creative, you have to be very thoughtful and very strategic. It helps to have a really good strategy team to guide you. The brief needs to be really close.” The creative solutions are grounded in collaborative strategy at the consultancy level role and expand into creative strategy.

Interviewer: can you tell me how being at a purpose-led agency affects creative?

Participant: Yeah, it's a lot more thoughtful...There needs to be a reason for doing a lot of it. There needs to be more of an emotional connection to your artwork, and sometimes that can be hard as a designer because you take things a little more personally because you have a lot of strategy that goes into it, you want to get it right. And then after that, you really want to think about every little a factor that can come into account and how people might perceive that.

The participants' statements of doing it "right," which involve a focus on strategy, action, and collaboration, contrast with the "new norm" of value-oriented marketing work produced from an organization's internal or commercial agencies.

The Purpose Marketing Norm

The agencies that are working with for-profits to become purpose-led further voiced their opinion and approach on doing purpose the right way to avoid good-washing, and general trends in marketing today. Whereas the agencies focused on a specific lens of social impact comment that there is some overlap, but they

remain concentrated on particular impact-specific projects when working across sectors. One participant notes the following agency view on purpose-led work,

the commercial world of late has been trending towards the purpose side of the spectrum anyway. That's just a general trend in products, and start-ups, and branding as a field. So, do we have a point of view on it? No, we keep charting along in our lane.

Another participant commented that with social enterprises:

I think there's some overlap there, although that purpose is often is more on the, how do large corporations or companies align their business interests with broader social purpose or social-impact, which we're certainly not opposed to, many of our clients have been more on the either NGO-side, startup-side.

The spectrum of agency social impact work created various relationships with purpose-led work, but the sentiment on purpose-washing was congruent. The section discusses in-depth how the agencies describe the overall phenomena of value-oriented communications, and what they consider good-washing.

INACTION VERSUS PULLING A PEPSI

The participants voice that “what's happening now with companies that are getting into social and social impact, elevating CSR is that there's an increased social chorus around social issues.” The agencies voice that the trend is “just the new era of marketing.” One participant commented that,

This is going to be the norm if it isn't already where brands have to think about how to talk about their values and take a stand on a variety of issues. So, I think it's natural that some people are going to get it wrong and they shouldn't be punished for that forever and people are trying

different things, but I just think there needs to be a bit more thought and wisdom put into making those decisions.

The progressive brands focused on the “S” of CSR, are now speaking out on social issues, but brand activism doesn’t make them purpose-led brands. The general sentiment is summarized in the following:

I think what we're seeing is a lot of brands are jumping on the purpose bandwagon, which is fantastic. But a lot of the efforts feel shallow in that they might want to use their media buy, or they're marketing to speak out on a certain issue, but they're not always aligning their own actions and operations and setting tangible ambitions to compliment that. So, what you get is a lot of telling, which is positive if they're sitting there trying to break through stereotypes, or they're communicating a values-driven message, that's all good. But what they really need to be looking at is themselves and how their actions are actually actioning that purpose, and how they're being responsible in bringing it to life. So, what that means is the hope is your solution is not just coming out of your marketing department, but that every single department in your business is going to understand how to champion the purpose of things and that should affect your supply chain, should affect how you treat and hire employees. It should affect, of course, the stories that you're telling, your marketing division, but it needs to feel like a holistic approach and that's our belief we're trying to help brands, businesses recognize.

The participants give the example of the recent Gillette advertisement about toxic masculinity; the sentiment overall is summarized in the following:

I'm sure you've heard about the Gillette ad, making the rounds about cautioning young boys and men about toxic masculinity, and that's a great ad, and I'm super glad that they did it. But at the end of the day, they're still Gillette, and they charge way more for razors marketed to women than they do to men. I think it'd be really interesting to see how many women and people of color are on their senior leadership teams, and looking at where they get the materials that are used in their razors, how much plastic is in their packaging? And what happens to that plastic, is it ending

up in our oceans, could they use any material other than plastic to sell their products? Social purpose is a whole fundamental company DNA sort of thing. And, I think that it's shortsighted for big brands like Gillette, or Pepsi, or whoever; to think that they can just like do an ad and like check the box to me that's good-washing, even if it wasn't awful and maybe spread some interesting conversations, I don't think it's enough.

The agencies voice that for brands to speak out on social issues in a purpose-led way, the brands must look within and make sure internal responsibilities to the planet and people are up to par. One participant comments that the “table stakes nowadays are what is the company doing to reduce its impact on the world? We should all try to have very limited or zero waste...We should all try to play our part in helping the environment and taking care of our employees.” The agencies indicate that not all companies have bad intentions, but rather lack the understanding and discount the appropriate action that should be taken internally by the brand. “I don't think the problem is with intention. I think the problem is with action.”

The organizational patience needed for “pivoting into purpose” can't come from the marketing or CSR department. Purpose requires strength and alignment from the entire organization, “the internal strength to realign processes and realign culture and take some risks and go through some pain.” Another participant states that:

when you're good-washing, you're doing a shallow and somewhat meaningless job as trying to jump in on a cultural issue or take advantage of the news cycle or do something in that vain. I think it's done

unintentionally, there is a good intention, but it doesn't always play out in a way that creates meaningful change, and sometimes it's done because people are lazy about it. Looking at certain outcomes but not thinking about taking the actions which are honestly never going to be easy or convenient, the transformation is really difficult and requires long-term commitments. We're excited and drawn to the work where we know there is appetite and a real drive to make those longer-term commitments.

Although brands have to be willing to take the heat, “the backlash to a bad ad is nowhere near as bad as the backlash to a bad purpose ad, because you’re dealing with much more emotional levels.” The participants give the example of Pepsi’s advertisement with Kendall Jenner as a grievous example of good-washing. One participant mentions that,

Pepsi had no authority to be a champion for civil rights...Also, they were not taking the black lives matter situation seriously, because what that ad ultimately was trying to say is that you can solve any protest or march just by handing someone a Pepsi, which is just a complete miss. Also, Pepsi in American history has done nothing to say that they are champions for causes such as that.

Authenticity, organization-alignment, and audience relevance are foundational to the strategy, action integration, and community collaboration needed for purpose-led work. One participant voiced that “you don't want to pull a Pepsi and just jump in somewhere not so relevant for you.” The agencies on the impact-specific side mention congruent personal opinions on good-washing trends, and lack of appropriate action required:

This is just me personally, but I think it's the equivalent of greenwashing, right? It's like catching everything in Halo. I think that particular initiative or issue that the company is talking about maybe valuable and worth

discussing, but most likely the rest of their actions remain the same. So, the net impact of this one conversation they're starting is minimal. They're just doing it to increase their brand image. I don't know that it has fundamentally shifted the values of the company and how they approach their work holistically.

The social impact agencies do not typically help brands with purpose due to a particular lens of social impact work. The next section will discuss general trends in the social impact space, value-mediated layers of social impact, agency responsibilities, and societal relationships.

Social Influences, Agency Responsibility, and Society

This section explores the agencies' views on the societal side of social impact and purpose-led communications. RQ3 inquired about how the practitioners view the agency's societal relationship? The participants discussed views on aspects influencing the phenomena, the agencies' social responsibility, and the impact on society.

Category 1: Social Impact Influences

Category 2: Agency Responsibility

Category 3: Social Impact and Society

The section first discusses what the agencies attributed as societal-driven influences of purpose-led and social impact communications. Next, the participants discussed the increased agency responsibility that comes with being in the social impact space—lastly, the participants describe views of the phenomena impacting society as a whole.

Social Impact Influences

The participants voiced multiple societal-driven influences fostering the trends for purpose-led and social impact communications. Three prominent forces were culture, technological communication, and political landscape. The influencing factors are multi-dimensional and intertwined; one participant voiced that “all of these things are playing together to make some of these shifts,” not one particular thing. The study presents them separately, and in relation to the for-profit and nonprofit worlds, however, the participants voiced them in an intermingled manner.

A CULTURAL CRY FOR CHANGE

The agencies voice that the social impact space overall is a “broad and fuzzy term,” another participant expands on the sentiment stating that:

Every company, like every human being, has an impact on the earth, right? And, it's social, so you can really make the existential argument that everything is a social impact business, and it really is. However, social

impact has a cultural intonation today.

The participant expands that culture defines the concerns considered a social issue or problems. Social issues may be “relevant to one country but wouldn't be relevant in another country...to say social impact, it obviously has a lot of cultural relevance to it....every culture has social tensions.” Sometimes the tensions are obvious (e.g., toxic masculinity and police brutality), and sometimes it's not as obvious or unexpected (e.g., Donald Trump picking a fight with immigrants). The participants mentioned the list of social issues in culture “goes on and on,” and gave examples of environmental issues, public health, economic disparities, treatment of workers, government accountability. “We have a free society, so there's quite a bit. And that's why I think this work is just getting started.” The participants mentioned the cultural history of generational concerns influencing the emergence of the social enterprise in particular. One participant commented that for social enterprises,

The Boomers kicked it off. The boomers asked, can we change the world? And, then Gen X and Millennials asked, can you change [the world through] what product I buy? Gen X and Millennials kind of did that together. Older millennials especially...And, now you have Gen Z, these 22-year old's, and younger, they are seeing the world like I don't think anyone can understand, except for them in my opinion...I think they're a great generation and they're really engaging the world so differently.

The participants comment on the younger generations cultivating a consumer-driven shift in purchasing decisions, one participant expands that “there's a shift in brands standing for something more, it used to be about who's got the best price, or it used to be much more functional, and now people are making

decisions more on what they believe in. Does it match my belief? Does it match what I stand for as a person.” The agencies mention consumer research from Edelman, McKinsey, Cone Communications and others when discussing the phenomena as consumer-driven; one participant adds that:

a lot of the primary research is coming out of like Edelman and McKinsey, which doesn't make sense, especially because I don't consider them to be social enterprises, but they're doing around this topic even if they're not necessarily living out.

In the nonprofit world, there's “been like a big push towards thinking about equity, towards thinking more towards being more inclusive, and diversity” in organizations. A participant mentioned that for nonprofit public audiences,

there's a lot of momentum right now or to enact policies that move towards ending the systematic oppression of the system...A lot of that stuff has been happening for a long time, but people just don't pay attention to it.

As awareness and education become a priority within the nonprofit world, there's been a push toward policy solutions to on-going problems rather than remaining stuck in a serving mentality.

In order to push change through whether it's policy or whether it's just the socializing an idea—ideas need to get socialized. The more people that are aware of them and understand them and can get behind them, the easier it is for an organization to successfully push that idea through.

In relation to society overall, the participants voice that “people are fed up with things,” and the cultural mood further intertwines with technological advancements and modern politics.

POLITICS IN THE TRUMP-ERA

The agencies voice the intertwining of politics and culture, pinpointing an increased tension during the 2016 election that created ripple effects in action happening across sectors. The participant commented that the tension society is putting on the for-profit sectors, and emergence of social enterprises, is causing existing brands to react in a variety of ways. The sentiment is summarized in one participant's comment on politics influence on culture.

Interviewer: Have you seen societal trends pushing social action?

Participant: I think the election has really ramped up a lot of things going on in culture. I mean from everything from the me-too movement to Trump to the environment. There's a lot of crises going on right now... You can't ignore what's happening in culture. And, a lot of brands are stepping up and doing things—I'm just thinking from things like the government shut down... Kraft opened up a pop-up store to help people get food and groceries for government employees that weren't being paid. All the gun violence... kids are doing fire drills around gun stuff... I mean there's just a lot of fear and unrest, and just crazy stuff going on. It feels like over the past few years that has really ramped up people's emotions, and I think brands are starting to react to that. So certainly, culture has a very important impact on how people view the world, how they make decisions and companies are starting to really play into that.

Reaction from brands often includes brand activism, that when done correctly “political ramifications can be positive,” and signals a new territory for political influence that the law limits for nonprofits.

Nonprofits are limited in the ways that they can affect policy or political change. Whereas you see a brand like Patagonia that can take a stand on national monuments, that's really game-changing for the whole conversation. Nonprofits can only spend about 10 percent of their total revenue on lobbying activities, and most are really scared to even do that.

So, there just isn't like that tolerance for political risk. Brand activism is one of the most exciting kinds of spaces, especially with having previously worked in public affairs, seeing the kind of power that business can have.

The participants voice the inaction of government solutions to “meaningful policies” that are required for the laundry list of social issues today fostering a decline in citizen trust, social venture opportunity, and the mixed emotions of what that means for society:

when you see a government, like ours.... shutdown, incapable of affecting some of the really meaningful policies that need to happen to mitigate global warming, or provide affordable housing, cities are kind of at an impasse as to how to solve that. And then you have B Corps that are stepping up to try to tackle those issues. I think that's really compelling, and I think in many cases consumers are more inclined to trust businesses that they trust and align with their values than they are the government, which is kind of scary as somebody who feels like the government has a role to play in society....But businesses are not tied down by the red tape to the same extent that government or a nonprofit sometimes are, and they can move faster, and drive to make change quicker and trying new things and innovate, anything that can be really helpful in trying to tackle some of the problems that we are facing.

Another participant echoes the sentiment of opportunity for social enterprises to step up to the plate:

I think we're living in a time where trust is at an all-time low in so many institutions, and I think many people feel that government is failing to serve on some of the issues that have become critical to this next generation. And so that opens the door for the private sector to take the lead. The reality is they have great untapped power that, that hasn't always been directed at thinking about how to solve global problems but know if there was a collective effort to do so. I think that we see much faster progress.

The agencies working with purpose-led brands are trying to help push a collective effort to solve societal issues, whereas the agencies working primary on the impact side comment on the political tensions influencing nonprofit's value-mitigated approach to communication, advocacy, and policy solutions.

I would say in the nonprofit world, there's just a bigger shift after Trump. I think before the Trump administration, organizations were comfortable staying neutral. Like they weren't very comfortable saying we're a non-partisan organization [they would say] "we make ends meet across the aisle," it was common that we would do work with organizations that had very much politically neutral lens. But I feel like recently a lot of nonprofits are feeling the necessity to say something, or to shift their position to make a slight political statement. They may not put themselves all the way out there, but there's definitely a trend to want to be very firm about what they stand for and where their line is—just making it clear that they have a set of values.

Another participant discusses what the increased political tensions mean for the agencies creating communications on impact-oriented projects that have policy implications:

we don't have an explicit political identity...that's not explicitly part of what we do. And, so in the sense that there are agencies and organizations out there that are more within the political, specifically within political advocacy space, we're a little different than that. A lot of the work that we do is more focused on public benefits...While we've worked on campaigns for specific political causes, they have largely been nonpartisan in their nature.

a non-partisan approach to a what could be seen as a partisan issue....to the degree that we see impact and social impact for the societal good. It's not politically defined, even though we all have our own political beliefs, we don't want to get shoehorned into being seen as just a political shop that does campaign work for political campaigns. Particularly when we're looking at specific issues, we spent a lot of time thinking about and working on systems, or communications, that are directly engaged with

the relevant audience for that specific issue. The proposed solution may have some partisan implications or political implications. But we're not coming at it first and foremost from a political perspective. We're coming at it from audience impact perspective in one way or another.

The participants mentioned that intertwined with culture and politics, is the technological innovation that has completely changed communication for organizations across sectors.

INNOVATION TO COMMUNICATION

The innovation in technology and communications have a tremendous influence on how organizations and audiences communicate, culture, and politics. The agencies discuss that technology has provided a digital “capability to be anywhere in an instant...and see how other people are living, what they’re doing, and what they’re making that we buy,” which has highlighted a lot of transnational issues. Technological advancements in digital space have transformed organization-audience communications into a two-way street and give audiences power. One participant explains the impacts on advertising and the trend toward purpose-led communications:

advertising used to be a one-way communication. It was ads talking to people. Well, now people have the power to talk back to ads and have this true back and forth and communication. I think that's really critical. That's where I think companies will miss the mark if they don't allow for that...the whole process of advertising is really changing from seeing consumers as reactive and just consuming ads and the media—now there's a two-way street of communication. Brands have to involve their audiences and consumers in this process and engage with them in their purpose-led

tactic.

Another participant describes that cultural values of younger generations and social media have created a new way of brand-audience relationship giving increased power for audiences acting to brands and social enterprises accountable to their activities:

All of this generation says, "you better get it right or else. If not, not only am I not only going to not buy you, but I'm going to post on my 5,000 friend-account because I started my Instagram account when I was in one." Let's say you suck, the generation will call you out, and I don't even know where it's going to go; It's crazy.

The participant further explains that for brands wanting to increase their positive impact and social purpose for their consumers, companies will need to work with "the consumer and then really ask different kinds of questions, that are not typical marketing questions and find out where the hotspots are" that the brand can help improve. The power dynamics in communication has also shifted how nonprofits communication to the general public and stakeholder audiences.

For nonprofit organizations technology and digital media has opened up barriers to communicating on a larger scale, propelling the relationship with creative agencies:

more organizations doing advocacy work, who needs to build a community of people who are interested in an issue and will be there to support either financially or other types of activism. Whether it's digital activism, supporting like a petition, calling a senator, or actually showing up somewhere and participating in events. Organizers need to reach a broader audience of people who care about social issues.

The increase in audiences that organizations are communicating with has effects on “the tone, the content, the format of communication, the way that it looks...everything.” Depending on the issue it also means that instead of being a ‘voice for’ communities and advocating on behalf of particular groups; a more direct conversation is happening. One participant summarized the sentiment in the following statement:

a lot of nonprofits and institutions, come from the view of smart people in an ivory tower, who don't really talk to the people that are trying to affect systematic change on or at least don't talk to them directly... It needs to get a little bit more of direct dialect.

Increased Agency Responsibility

The agencies' pro-social specialization puts participants in a unique position between society and organizations which increases agency-responsibilities when working between sectors that differ from traditional agencies. The agencies voice holding themselves responsible for providing solutions that have a positive impact on society and internally living their notions of a pro-social company. The section first discusses the internal actions of client and project selection. Next, how the agencies voice walking the talk concerning culture and daily decisions.

CLIENT AND PROJECT SELECTION

None of the agencies pitch for clients and voice typically being “self-reflective,” in the sense that organizations approaching the agencies “get a feel for the tone

and the values behind” that the work the agency produces. While the participants had unique perspectives on how they defined social impact, all of the agencies held open internal discussions to reach consensus on agency partners and the specific projects accepted.

For agencies working with for-profit companies avoiding good-washing begins in client selection. One participant described that “if we get a phone call from anyone outside of the C-suite or VP level, I know the company's not serious about what they're trying to do there. They're more likely good-washing.” While the agency-consultancies working with for-profit companies don't have control over the purpose-led internal transformation of a company, they take client selection seriously to avoid good-washing. A participant comment summarizes the sentiment likening good-washing to green-washing:

Interviewer: Can you talk about greenwashing?

Participant: A long well documented dark side of marketing and advertising companies putting up bullshit window dressing just to make themselves look good. And, having no impact, really no interest in making a difference—just throwing their chips on the table because they feel like they have to. We just had one we turned down, but without naming names, is one of the biggest companies in the country...They wanted to do this and this, and give \$100,000 to a cause organization, and I was like, you've got to be kidding me. They wanted to put it on that point of purchase display; they thought they were really doing good, and a nonprofit can always take 100,000, but that's nothing other than good-washing in my opinion.

Interviewer: So, you turn the company's down that aren't serious about the journey to purpose?

Participant: I do. Greenwashing campaigns don't do anything for me, and they don't do anything for anybody else.

The agencies commented on the financial loss taken to ensure that the project and clients are serious about social impact. For social ventures and nonprofits who innately have a positive social impact, the agencies still have a “case by case evaluation” to decide if they consider the work aligned with their view of social impact. One participant explains that there isn’t a formal process, but open evaluation and discussion, “We've had clients who've had potential projects where we've been a little unclear on where we stand on it. We've had one or two where we said no to something.”

An agency's specific lens of a value-mediated impact influences the evaluation of potential clients, one participant mentions the complexity of discussion when working with nonprofit organizations focused on social justice, or creating awareness for communities facing systematic oppression:

A lot of them are sort of fuzzy and require a lot of discussion...some projects have great intentions, but they have a big blind spot. Some have agendas that we need to reconcile whether the benefit of the projects surpasses the sort of agenda, the hidden agenda of the projects. It's complicated. There's no clear cut this one is good, that one is bad. It's sort of like, well it's going to do good in this way, but it could potentially like have this other effect—do we want to do it? Do we want to make that judgment call?

Participants acknowledge the delicate nature of working with underserved communities and issues of structural power in inequalities. By evaluating the

projects intention, blind spots, (hidden) agenda, potential unintended consequences, and opportunity for positive impact allow the agencies to maximize the positive impact, while reducing any potential harms. Another participant mentions the delicate and complicated nature of client selection when working globally with underserved communities,

we're also very thoughtful about the clients we bring on. We're really careful to work with clients who we feel like are properly working within communities versus just coming in being white saviors. I mean we're very careful about trying to find organizations that besides just working on basic human need are doing so in ways that are sustainable beyond just philanthropic, pure philanthropy.

The participant further explains that the agency would “like to say we’re 100% able to only partner with locally-led organizations, but the state of global development, unfortunately, means that there are a lot of western-led organizations.” The agency also evaluates a proven (or promising) model, healthy organization infrastructure, and alignment with SDGs, alongside local leadership and power transference.

The agencies also mention having to navigate tricky conversations with clients and approach the uncomfortable conversations with “honesty and integrity and say things that might be uncomfortable but are the right things to say.” The agencies often discuss social issues and opportunities for improvement with clients and internally that “in a traditional business that might be off limits.”

DAILY RESPONSIBILITY AND AGENCY CULTURE

The delicate nature of working with for-profits and organizations on social impact initiatives means the agencies have “walk the walk” and are living value-aligned operational missions. One participant commented,

it's just in the daily decisions you make working with your team or working with your clients...I never want to sell a client something I know we can't deliver on. Which should be obvious, but I think in many agencies it's often not. As an account manager, I've had to go in and try to hit quotas and sign budgets that are much bigger than I'm comfortable with...that's a big piece, we want to be really good stewards of our client's budgets, the little that they have.

The agencies mention the internal culture and diversity of thought is essential for social impact work and includes difficult internal discussions. One participant highlights that difficult discussion “provides an opportunity for exploring tensions together, to understand each other better, to build empathy,” the kindred empathy the agency seeks to cultivate in the world. Without adequate representation of diverse points of views on an agency team, seeing the tensions ingrained in all social impact work is difficult.

The agencies mention that third-party evaluations (B Corp) is an excellent way to continually “gut check” agency decisions. The ability for internal responsibility also provides grounding for conversations with clients:

We actually do a thing where every time we have to travel for work, we offset it by buying carbon credits to offset our own agency's carbon footprint. So, there are lots of things that you can do even as a small business. And, I feel like often you hear from some other small businesses

is that, oh, it's too expensive. You could never offer paid parental leave, and ours isn't as much as I think it should be, but at least it's something.

Another agency discusses the "higher-purpose" of their work beyond social-purpose and social impact communications that influences agency culture.

Having a higher purpose builds an internal culture that gives more meaning to work rather than just helping other companies provide a positive impact. "We want to work with people who want to make a difference in the world," One participant explains that the agency culture, "it's just trying to do good no matter how big or small for someone down the road." And, social impact work in general "it reminds you about, the things that make you fortunate in your life and maybe that other people could use, or other people could benefit from as well, or how you can spread some of your good fortunes to other people in your life."

Societal Strings Attached

When discussing agency definitions of authentic social impact versus good-washing communications, the participants also voiced a range of societal implications of social impact work and good-washing. The participants expressed congruent sentiments on the "obvious bad actors" and the action required for social impact work. However, maverick voices arose on the exact societal implications of social impact-action and the value-meditated notions of societal consequences. The conceptual insights concerning societal implications revolved

around a) contextual knowledge and b) companies using a consumption model. The section will first present the issue of contextual knowledge, and next discuss opinions around consumption-based social enterprises.

CONTEXTUAL EMPOWERMENT

The participants voiced increasing communications and organizational focus on pro-social actions from all sectors (i.e., companies taking action to have social impact) as beneficial to society. However, some participants voiced a more critical view on potential societal implications even if companies take action. One participant stresses the importance of contextual knowledge when working to solve social issues—particularly in developing contexts because if not, it can perpetuate a “new colonialism.” And, instead of the “we’re going to come in and save you” mentality, social enterprises and nonprofit organizations should be asking “how do we have resources that can help strengthen communities, and transfer leadership and power into the hands of the communities in which we’re working?” The participant expands that if there’s no contextual knowledge of the social issue when companies deploy any type of resources, the societal implications can potentially be dangerous.

You can actually be harmful. So again, in the development space, that might be white medical missionaries coming in doing some surgeries with crazy complications, leaving, and the community not having the capacity to manage it afterward. Or economic development organizations coming in and starting social enterprises in developing context, and in doing so, weakening or undermining the local market and the local price, the

commodity price for things.

In a critically conscious view of social impact even if the intentions are 100% pure, the solutions to the social problems can end up harmful rather than helpful, and for underprivileged or underserved communities it can create dependencies rather than community empowerment. The participant voices the social issue-relevance of pro-bono work from creative agencies within the social sector who provide services without contextual knowledge,

For the pro-bono sector from within these agencies are coming in and saying, okay, here's the website, see-ya bye. As creative professionals, and as marketing professionals, we also have to be really careful of assuming that our work and inserting ourselves into these situations is always going to be helpful. And instead acknowledge that there may be times where, helping can hurt, and pro bono can actually be detrimental because we have to be really thoughtful about how we deploy pro-bono resources in the social sector.

The agencies voice that without awareness of power differences and contextual knowledge the increase in social impact work can have unintended consequences. The second societal implication mentioned concerns consumption concerning notions of purpose-washing.

THE ISSUE OF CONSUMER CULTURE

Participants voice a range of sentiments of consumption-based social enterprises and the potential societal impacts of purpose-washing. The nuances highlight the tensions of the business-impact-orientation or impact-business-orientation lens that one can use to view social enterprises. The section discusses the

participants' views utilizing the variation of business-impact and impact-business orientations introduced in figure 4.1 describing social enterprise orientations.

Some participants voice that social enterprises and purpose-led companies provide an excellent way for people to “vote with their dollar,” providing the best of both worlds by amplifying impact through the purchasing of consumer goods. “I haven't seen anyone say, you know, what is TOMS shoes? That's a stupid idea” Another participant states that “if I had to choose one pair of shoes over the other, in a lot of instances we could find ones that does good things. And, from that example, it's such an easy sell, and it blends the best of both worlds.” The participant further explains if,

someone needs a new pair of glasses, then I can say, oh, well you should look at Warby Parker glasses because they're reasonably priced and they have one for one model. So, if you're going to buy glasses, find a pair that you like and then also know that somebody is going to benefit because somebody in need will get glasses as well.

In a win-win view, the example organizations might be viewed using a consumer view of a business-impact lens since the purchase solves a consumer (business-oriented) need that leads to a social impact. However, objectively the example can be seen as impact-business-oriented as well that uses a profit-business model aimed at providing social needs to others.

Whereas, other participants voice the buy-one, give-one, and 1% models promoting consumption as an example of purpose-washing. A participant commented that purpose-washing is,

companies being a little bit lazy...brands who find a social impact extension that fits within the Instagram bio page word count allocation, or the “buy our phone case and every phone case you buy does something.” It's all just kind of like more of like a soundbite purpose message.

Another participant discusses that purpose-washing doesn't “pose any risk inherently to companies doing who are doing substantial, meaningful work,” but voices potential unintended consequences for the general public.

It poses a risk in that to the average person, if they live in a world surrounded by purpose and meaning in everything they do, buy, and interact with supposedly has purpose and meaning. I think it makes it hard for you as a person to distinguish between what is real and what is not. And, I just personally don't think it's useful to society if people think they're doing something good for the world by buying a T-shirt and as an afterthought, there's a donation going somewhere as a result of that purchase. That's just a lazy person's approach to caring about the world.

In this view, the participants view social enterprises models promoting consumptions through an impact-business-orientation that contain societal concerns. However, the opposed notion of a consumption-based culture apathetic to buying behaviors is voiced as the “dark forces” lurking. One participant explains that:

Well...broadly speaking, I would say a consumer culture convinced that what they buy, how they buy, the products they choose, things like that make no difference in the world. If that became a culturally accepted norm that would be very disturbing...I'd say though the momentum for people wanting to see purpose and impact in the things that they buy, and in the

companies they engage with—I don't see anything suggesting that will slow down. And, in fact there's a ton of evidence, and it's going to accelerate.

The contrast exemplars the age-old market-driven versus producer-driven debate regarding issues of a culture based on consumption. In the case of consumption-dependent social impact organizations, will advertising shape and amplify consumer desires using a hypnotic version of materialistic warm glow? Or will advertising act as a mirror reflecting society's cry for social change? While the advertising and society debate will continue on, pro-social communications agencies are traversing between a different vehemently debated ground—one questioning structural and cultural change.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Chapter five discusses the theoretical insights gleaned from the thesis' conceptual categories and provide new theoretical insights for academic literature. The study's use of practitioner perspectives advances the current understanding of the blending of sectors, the dynamic nature of social impact and purpose-led communications, and relationship to market assumptions. The analysis and interpretation of the conceptual categories led to the following theoretical insights:

Theoretical Insight 1: Agency Guidance in Sectoral Convergence

Theoretical Insight 2: Layers of Social Impact

Theoretical Insight 3: Structural Dualisms

The study's use of a multi-paradigm methodology is enabled to provide a complex and multi-faceted view of the phenomena (Crane & Glozer, 2016). The section presents each theoretical insight in relation to corporate social responsibility, philanthropic, and advertising literature. The chapter further discusses the implications relative to institutional perspectives of advertising and philanthropy. Next, the section explores practical and academic

recommendations, along with the study's limitations. Lastly, the study concludes with researcher reflexivity.

Visual Theoretical Worlds

The emerging nature of the phenomena requires an abstracted view of purpose-led and social impact communications in line with constructivist grounded theory's aim of abstract understanding (Charmaz, 2006). Moreover, the participants voice the complications of "trying to sort through a common language," making it difficult to strictly define communications. The theoretical insights focus on abstracted visual frameworks that present a multi-dimensional nature of the findings and agency orientations. The visual frameworks provide alternative ways to make sense of the phenomena from various academic disciplines.

Agency Guidance in Sectoral Convergence

Academic studies identifying the convergence of the private and social sectors and the emergence of social enterprise organizations often use a macro sectoral perspective when discussing communications as a functional aspect rather than contributory to convergence (Reich, Cordelli, & Bernholz, 2016; Aspen Institute, 2009; Austin, Gutiérrez, Ogliastri & Reficco, 2007). Conversely, studies

concerned with communication's role in cross-sector collaboration and social enterprise marketing often use case studies and focus on stakeholder value-propositions rather than macro aspects (Austin, 2003; Srivetbodee, Igel, & Kraisornsuthasinee, 2017).

The study's insights illustrate the agency-consultancy role of communication as a contributory factor in the current blending of sectors and in organizational-societal relations. The agencies' embodiment of pro-social orientation and consultancy functions empowers the agencies to act as a multi-faceted intermediary. The value-mediator role of the agencies has various implications for the role of communication across sectors, social value creation, and societal change initiatives. The consultancy aspects that prioritize strategy, action, and collaboration enable a contributory role. The study discusses the contributory aspects in relation to each sector.

AGENCY INTERACTIONS

The agencies discuss partnering with private sector organizations on social impact projects in varying capacities. Overall, the work wasn't conceptualized as traditional CSR communication or philanthropic cause marketing, noting the pro-social ideological influences of the agencies' consultancy role and creative outcome. However, some agencies did work with corporations "raising their hands" in an aim to "pivot to purpose" that required potential clients to have an

adequate foundation of corporate social responsibility practices. The dominant ideology of an organization's social responsibility in the private sector uses traditional versions of CSR privileging financial responsibility whereas socially-oriented organizations follow different frameworks (i.e., conscious capitalism, shared-value organizations, social enterprises, and benefit-corporation). The noticeable difference being the organization's profit orientation becoming equal with or governed by societal factors and aims (Doane & Abasta-Vilaplana, 2005; Brest, 2016).

The selective (and internally collaborative) approach agencies use is vital in ensuring work was value-aligned with an agency's view of social impact. Furthermore, the importance of working the "highest levels of a clients' decision-making apparatus" gives the role of communication a strategic influence in an organization's managerial decisions. In CSR communications literature, Coombs and Holladay's (2009) advocate for communication practices 'becoming institutionalized' in management rather than the corporate reality of communications being institutionalized (i.e., functional) throughout departments. Since the agencies are external consultants, the influential role of communication doesn't allude to communication becoming institutionalized within organizations but does signal the increasing importance of strategic bi-lateral communication in relation to socially-oriented organizations.

The societal orientation of the agencies resulted in a collaborative approach to involving and communicating with stakeholders and society. Comparing the findings with Crane and Glozer (2016) 4I's framework of integration, interpretation, identify, and image domains of CSR communications research provides unique communication aspects. The agency-consultancy role allows for work spanning the internal and external communicative domains rather than separated functions. The fluid landscape of stakeholders changes the divided notions of internal and external stakeholders. The agencies' note that it is "important for employees to feel part of the brand mission... they're the heart at what you're starting with." The agencies also expressed collaboratively working external stakeholders to help clients articulate a higher social purpose and create a realistic action framework for corporate activities that will lead to positive social impact. Relative to communications literature in corporate social responsibility overall—and more specifically cause-marketing—the agencies are traversing across the equivalent conceptual domains but employing a distinct societal-oriented approach.

The participants expressed the transition to purpose often included cross-sector collaboration. The agencies all voiced working "across worlds," which affected the approach to communication and cross-sector collaboration. The role of the agencies' in the blending of the space between for-profit and nonprofit sectors

addresses and expands upon known barriers in cross-sector collaboration (Austin, 2003; Austin, et al, 2007; Austin, 2010).

The agencies are helping to mitigate the tensions that arise during private-social collaborations through a focus on “dual amplification and shared value on both sides” versus privileging private sector concerns. However, for the private sector overall, the participants voice the profit-social tensions remain an issue for a sector wide transformation and adequate social responsibility. A participant mentions that after the new tax code (Tax Cuts and Jobs Act 2018) questioning if,

companies will put their money where their mouth is...allocate some of that cash influx into better sourcing or more equitably paying their production supply chain. And, it didn't really seem to play out. Which I thought was a pretty good indication of where kind of the private-sector priorities are.

The selective approach of clientele allowed for more equitable cross-sector collaboration. The agencies expand upon previous notions of cross sector focus of organization-organization concerns (i.e., economic and philanthropic markets) discussed in literature (Austin, et al, 2007). The participants voiced creating amplified social value through collaboration with societal stakeholders.

Additionally, the aspects of communication go beyond the "integrative stage" of cross-sector collaboration (Austin, 2003) that involve organizational shared-value and strategic interaction focused on organizational-motives that are later

communicated to audiences. Whereas the pro-social agencies described actively involving relevant community members and stakeholders (external to the organizations) in cross-sector collaboration to focus on action and community engagement leading to "breakthrough storytelling."

For clients within the social sector, the participants help clients create cross-sector collaborations, innovate and transform organizational models, and actively involve the communities' the organizations are working alongside. Tensions in the social sector involve negative connotations of strategic communications also mentioned in academic literature (Bandyopadhyay & Ray, 2018). The agencies discuss empowering clients to overcome ad-hoc communication processes through educating and involving clients in the strategic and creative processes. Moreover, the agencies worked to build frameworks that fostered community collaboration—noting the importance of working as an ally and not a savior with underserved communities.

VALUE MEDIATION

The active role of the agencies that work not only in-between sectors, but more importantly in-between organizations and society. The embodied pro-social position is demonstrated by proactive community involvement, action, and collaborative two-way communication and is further value-mediated through the agencies' societal impact lens. The approach in some cases crystalizes the

critical academic concerns surrounding social responsibility communications. For example, Prasad and Holzinger's (2013) suggestion of corporate power transference and inclusive and open dialogue is exemplary in the agencies' approach to collaborative creative problem solving focused on action that later leads to storytelling.

The pro-social orientation of the agency creates a unique role acting as a social value-mediator between sectors and society. Since the agencies were all social enterprises, the organizations employ hybrid and flexible business models. The agencies voiced the core team is “purposely small” enabling a “stretch model” to assemble robust and strategic teams for specific social issue areas and client needs.

The agencies acted as a ‘social bricolage’ through the “prioritization of social value creation over revenue generation and the adoption and shaping of bricoleurial strategies in ways that are best suited to the particular circumstances” (Di Domenico, Haugh, & Tracey, 2010, p. 694). One participant commented on the adaptable approach spanning into creative solutions stating that the “creativity never stops... it does have a little bit of structure, but it also has the freedom to do some really weird unexpected things.” The agencies’ adaptive approach fuels the contributory aspect of blending the sectors but requires working through dynamic tensions inherent in social impact work. Figure

5.1 visually shows the tensions between sectors and within the impact-business and business-impact social enterprises orientations.

The framework illustrates the participants' construction of the social impact space happening across sectors. Notably, the delicate nature of meaningful social impact and ambiguous notion of classifying an organization as socially beneficial makes defining the space difficult. The participants voice no "hard and fast definition," but discuss the agencies' point of view used to qualify work which is explored in the next section. In a holistic view, the participants express the blending of worlds is notably changing the norms of businesses the private and social sector.

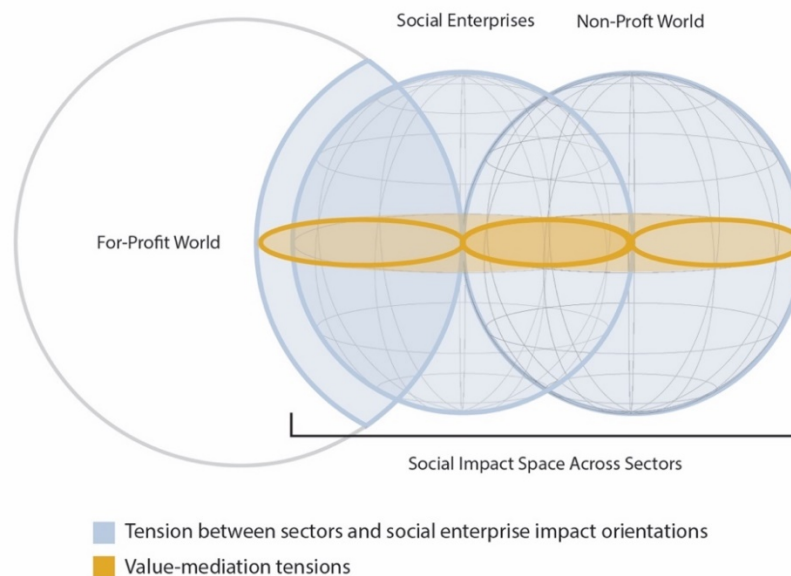


Figure 5.1. Agency Role of Value-Mediator Between Sectors

Layers of Social Impact

The agencies work in all sectors and base work on agency-oriented notions of social impact that are value-aligned with the agency's point of view. The results section discussed the notion that agencies did not narrowly define pro-social communications in a particular manner beyond having an authentic positive societal impact. The participants acknowledge that the idea of social impact is so diluted that anything could be considered impactful and that every brand is saying they are "changing the world." One participant notes that,

All of these startups that are coming up and claiming that they're doing something to improve the world. I'm changing the world has also become such an expansive statement, like my day used to be like doing something really good for the world, or like feeding the poor, or in building more schools. But now, Uber is changing the world. I find it to be just a misappropriation or this facade of human values being co-opted by companies ultimately for the sake of profit and not anything else.

The vague notion of social good is amplified by its extensive use by companies today which requires the participants to determine if a project has significant positive net impact. The participants conceptualize meaningful social impact in relation to the a) social issue context, b) client, and c) agency point of view. First, the section discusses the critical layers of what participants voice as net-impact based on an agency's point of view. Contextual aspects of the social issue and client are then discussed in relation to the communications output.

NET IMPACT

For all agencies the idea of positive net impact went beyond business “table-stakes” of socially responsible business practices, and philanthropic contribution (i.e., corporate cause marketing) perceived as superficially making up for business harms. Meaningful net impact requires an active pro-social orientation that is ingrained in all brand actions. The idea of pro-social net impact resembles a transformation beyond corporate utilitarian enlightened self-interest to conferring benefits to stakeholders or greater society (Gaither, Austin, & Schulz, 2018; L'etang, 1994).

Social enterprise literature positions “net stakeholder value” as the primary objective of the corporation which accounts for the entirety of a company’s impact on all stakeholders, community and society, the environment, and any specific public purpose benefits (Murray, 2012). Since the agencies are acting as external value-mediators, genuine engagement is enabled with stakeholders and society through a collaborative approach. However, at a pro-social level, ‘society’ is neutrally viewed, upholding utilitarian concepts of common-good unless critically influenced by the client or social issue context.

The agencies with a specific social impact lens discuss positive net-impact involving structural change in relation to inequalities and social needs of communities facing oppression and disadvantages. The study constructs a view

of structural net impact—consisting of work on structural issues and employing a critical lens to proposed creative solutions and communications. Critical consciousness in the study’s construction relates to the agencies’ focus on changing social power structures in society that create inequalities (Charmaz, 2011; Hosking, 2014). The two conceptual constructions of net-impact happen on a spectrum (figure 5.2) and abstractly represents the range of views the agencies utilize for value-mediation—the client and social issue context additionally influenced how participants described the agency’s notion of social impact. The agencies voice that within the spectrum of positive net impact collaboration with thought leaders and issue-specific specialists commonly occurs to ensure that solutions are “grounded in reality.”

The multi-dimensional aspects of the phenomena create multiple worlds and multiples layers that interact and require adaptable and creative agency work. The strategic solutions and communications outcome crystalize between the pro-social and structural net impact constructions illustrated in figure 5.2.

The pro-social and structural impact layers contextualize the variation in agency points of view used for value-mediation in relation to the client and social issue. Agencies working with clients on a social purpose projects are transforming the business-society relationship through a pro-social lens—using the “power of business” to benefit society in general or societal stakeholders while creating a

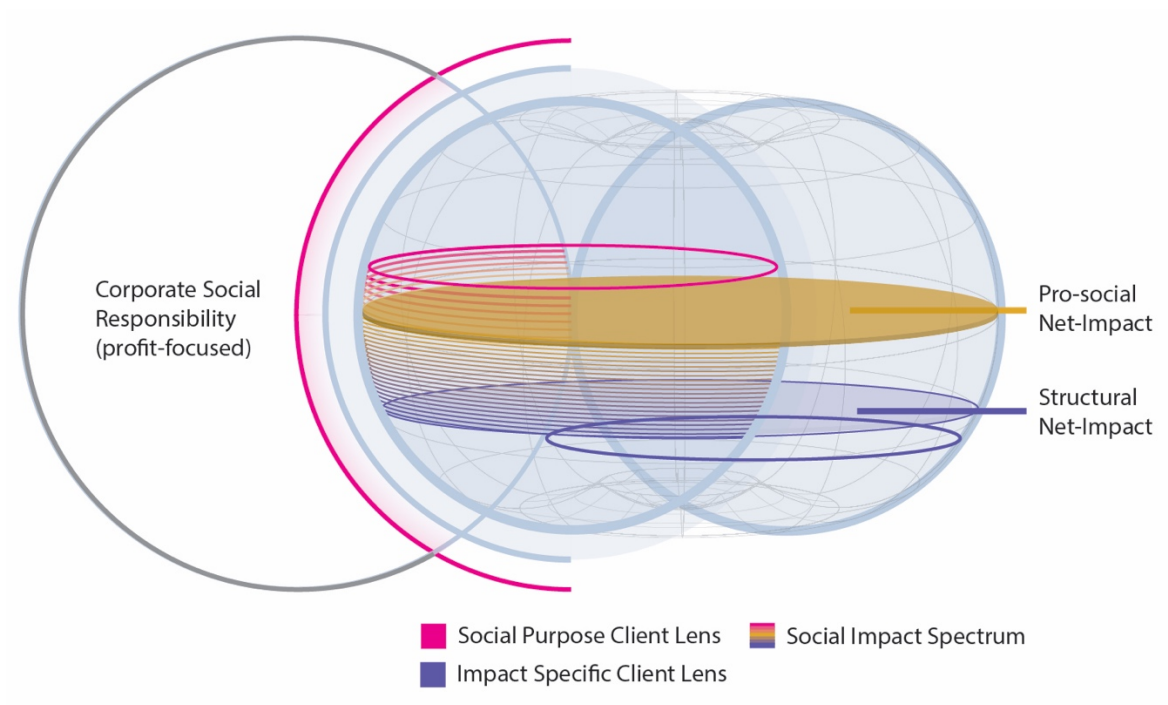


Figure 5.2 Multi-Dimensional Framework of Social Impact

framework to integrate action. The specific social tension, issue, or need can further span the project into involving communication and action fostering structural change.

The agencies with specific-issue areas discuss working with clients and projects with the potential to create structural change and positive impact for marginalized groups through business support, policy, power relations, and increased education on disparities. Participants voices that for the agencies employ an equity lens when accepting projects and producing creative outputs. One participant mentions questioning if projects will create opportunities for marginalized communities, encompass participatory justice, or provide knowledge of issues needed for empowerment. Another participant states that the agency views work through “a social justice perspective in one way or another.”

The projects also interact with and create benefits for society at large through a structural lens. For the social impact space over the social value of communications is tied to the particular social tension of the campaign, participants voice that holistically a secondary goal is to inspire audiences to take action and fight apathy. One participant illustrates a ritual-communications based approach to societal inspiration stating that in social impact communications the communications:

impact doesn't happen till the ad is over, you know what I mean? You're always trying to inspire somebody afterward—not to buy—but to do something that you're not exactly telling them to do...it's awareness—trying to get people to fight apathy.

The study's theoretical insights into the active role of agencies in the blending of sectors and the multiple dimensions that influence social impact and purpose-led communication aims provide context for the dynamic aspects of the emerging phenomena. The insights provide a foundational understanding of pro-social marketing and expand the current understanding of communications in corporate social responsibility, cause-marketing, and social sector literature. The thesis next discusses elements of phenomena in relation to the institutional views of advertising and philanthropy.

Structural Dualisms

The section explores the aspects of social structures that shape institutions and local-social-historical relational realities of individuals involved. The historical roots of the market provide a critical view into the 'invisible' assumptions that influence present relational aspects of the phenomena. The abstract representation of dualities gives context to the local and contextual 'tensions' that the participants voice.

EGOISM AND ALTRUISM

The “new organizational arrangements” of social enterprises, social purpose organizations, and benefit corporations resemble re-constructions of mixed the

“republican corporation” that mixed both for-profit and nonprofit structures. The transition from the “republican corporation” to the classical liberalist (i.e., considered arch conservatives today) for-profit and nonprofit worlds that are historically rooted in the Spencerian moral ideas of egoism and altruism dueling in constant conflict (Levy, 2016; Rotzoll, Haefner & Hall, 1990). Levy (2016) points out that with general incorporation laws, ideas of benevolence and public purpose were linguistically lost in modern vocabulary and the moral vocabulary to describe for-profit (egoism) and nonprofit (altruism) are most commonly understood currently.

It is important to further understand the root assumptions that each world is structured on. The nonprofit (altruism) orientation originally came from the Italian word *altrui*, meaning “of or to others, what is another’s, what is somebody’s.” Which meant that concerns for others are put before self-interested motivations. Altruism appeared in the English language in 1882 on Herbert Spencer visit to the United States. Converse to popular belief, Spencer coined the Social Darwinist phrase “the survival of the fittest,” in context to Carnegie’s Edward Thomson steelworks factory stating; “a month’s stay here would justify suicide.”

Spencer believed altruism to be a biological fact of evolution (i.e., primordial egoism “evolving” to altruism). Spencer warned the risk of “nervous collapse due to the stress of business,” and advocated the dualism rather than benevolence,

saying the opposition of terms was needed for altruistic human evolution (Levy, 2016, p. 32). The popular Spencerian ideas were just to further justify Darwinist ideas of competition needed for the evolutionary “progress” of the human species. The popularized Spencerian logic marginalized alternative perspectives of cooperation in nature arguing that cooperation, not competition, as vital to progressive evolution (Kropotkin & Huxley, 1902).

Ultimately, the egoistic interpretations of “human nature” fueled the laissez faire market structure of competition and efficiency requiring no moral responsibility since the market is “self-correcting” due to ideas of atomism. The competitive, utilitarian zeitgeist of the era was used to further solidify the idea that big businesses in American culture. For-profit corporations that are largely self-governed and lacking substantial government regulation or societal purpose filled the economic landscape of the twentieth century. Overall, the majority of existing corporate entities practice one of two motives—profit maximization or societal missions—rooted in Spencer ideas of human ‘evolution.’

The later concept of corporate social responsibility serving as ‘corporate self-governance’ is beginning to run its course. Society expects more than responsibility from corporations today—the majority (87%) of the general public is worried about “the ability of political leaders to solve the country’s biggest problems” (Pew Research Center, 2019, Infographic para 3). The participants

voice that the distrust in government institutions, technological innovation, and cultural tensions influence the societal expectations and rise of social ventures. However, nonprofits, social enterprises, and for-profit corporations alike avoid questioning the basis of the 'abstract goal of profit making' created on naturalized ideas of an egotistic human nature.

The unchanged market assumptions hold various implications for the different sectors and the hybrid social organizations. Compared to the traditional private sector, the social enterprise models a sustainable alternative than the harmful aspects of strict profit motivation. Academic literature mirrors the participants' sentiment on societal oriented private sector transformation to help solve societal problems. The "new vision is to bring benevolence to business, in the hope that corporate enterprise will be less extractive and can be harnessed to solve public problems" (Horvath & Powell, 2019, p. 69; Gaither, Austin, & Schulz, 2018).

However, the competitive market structure requires social enterprise organizations will have to work to balance dual performance goals and provide accountability to societal stakeholders when making day-to-day decisions (Ebrahim, Battilana & Mair, 2014). The corporate legal structures limit organizations with a complex and often dualistic choice of prioritizing beneficial societal impact or profit maximization.

The beauty of social enterprise lies in the fact that managers and investors can choose which side of the well-worn shareholder wealth

maximization argument they favor through their choice of entity or choice of corporate objective. They can choose their own master. They can choose their preferred paradigm...the traditional legal framework under corporate law already provides social entrepreneurs with most of the flexibility they seek, but posits that the social enterprise statutes might help combat the persistent shareholder wealth maximization norm. (Murray, 2012, p. 52).

The benefits of social-oriented alternative organizations are, as the participants voiced, creating a new “social purpose norm.” The advantages of the private sector changes are intertwined with the professionalization of nonprofit organizations and philanthropy.

The social sector is now adopting disruptive market tactics, formulating social returns on philanthropic investments, and peer organizations compete against one another for funding all in the aim of solving identical social concerns. The professionalization of nonprofit organizations is largely driven by “funders who want to know whether their funds are making a difference or might be better spent elsewhere” (Ebrahim & Rangan, 2014, p. 118). Measuring impact provides accountability for social enterprises but contain concerns tied to feasibility, appropriateness, and the perpetuation of social issues when poorly implemented. For example, nonprofit boards often require organizations to implement administration norms which take away from limited organizational resources. And, in relation to organizations working on social justice issues, the professionalizing of investment-driven norms can further perpetuate inequalities

by advancing reformatory social control rather than transformative and just social change (Smith, 2007; Pevnick, 2016; Cordelli, 2016). In certain situations, the professionalization of the social sector allows for the scale of social impact solutions, but the delicate nature of social issues and needs requires nuanced and contextually relevant solutions.

In the context of public services, Levy (2016) highlights that historical insights of privatized philanthropic solutions stand “as a stark reminder of one possible, though by no means necessary, configuration of corporate power—a zero-sum game in which private action undermines, if not strangles the public good” (Levy, 2016, p. 43). The political implications are of concern across academic disciplines and the sentiment of unacceptable lack of governmental responsibility is discussed in participant interviews as well. The agencies voice the importance of political action, democratic justice, and power transference when working on social needs and structural issues.

Across sectors, the assumptions of the classical liberalist market uphold the institutional forms of enterprise which create barriers to the infinite possibilities of transformative change. As individuals and communities work to use the institutional structures for societal benefit, the findings signal both the renewing of private sector possibilities, and the survival of economic institutions responding stubbornly to change. Emerging institutions often unintentionally perpetuate the issues that alternative constructions seek to escape and require continued

questioning, frustration, and change. “Institutions and human actions, complements and antitheses, are forever remaking each other in the endless drama of the social process” (Hamilton, 1932, p.10). While the social-oriented organizational forms have yet to transform the dominate root assumptions of market specifically—the constructions and agencies’ role in the blending of worlds is influencing cultural and structural aspects of social impact.

CULTURE AND SOCIAL STRUCTURE

The agencies are working across a spectrum to advance both cultural and structural changes for societal benefit. The study’s differentiation is not meant to position one type of change as more appropriate since the agencies’ projects are contextual to the project and community stakeholders. To protect participant confidentiality the study generally discusses notions of cultural and structural change rather than client-specific relations. Since the section does not discuss the contextual insights voiced in relation to the agencies’ clients, the section illustrates an abstract view of pro-social change to inform future research while identifying opportunities and limitations of transformative change.

The active role of the agencies intertwines and contests the various power relations of the private, social sectors, and public sectors. The power structures and relations aren’t objectively or subjectively ridged but situated in the local-historical-cultural realm of relations in which equal power relations require a

multiplicity of ongoing power (re)constructions of power over, power with, and power to (Hosking, 2004, 2007).

The assessment of power relations through value-mediation is dependent on the agencies' client and specific social initiative. The pro-social orientation of the agencies aims to foster 'power with' relations of relevant stakeholders and corporations. The participants discuss the transformation of social-purpose clients as an aspect of cultural change and the culture of business. The reconstructing business norms by means of a society–profit relationship offers alternative forms of a corporation's purpose. The agencies work to transform 'power over' profit motives of organizations to 'power with' constructions that provide societal benefits.

However, from a structural view the change upholds neoliberal ideologies of reformative change that contain variations of power for different stakeholders. Similarly, social enterprise organizations span both structural and cultural change depending on the organization's approach to a social purpose, mission, or initiative. Although culture notably is a social structure in its own right the utilitarian ideals of society constrain opportunities for transformative structural change more adept for just outcomes for communities facing systematic oppression and disadvantages.

The communications outcome inter-acts with cultural change which can provide opportunities to influence political aspects of social structures. One participant voices the importance of cultural conversation and even corporate critique,

I look at it in the highest form of capitalism and I look at it as, as extending its' ability to grease a social conversation, which is always critical in America, at least in the United States. And I think globally, I think it has to be. I think it's a human nature.

Another participant mentions that,

one of the things you have to keep in mind is that anytime you stand for some sort of cause or an issue, you are 100% guaranteed to piss some people off. If you can just find peace and comfort with that—knowing that not everyone is going to be pleased with what you do, that'll be a lot easier as you actually act with your purpose.

The participants discuss the example of the toxic masculinity Gillette advertisement as “sparking social conversation,” although the agencies did not consider the communication as purpose-led due to the “shallow” and contradictory fact that Gillette charges more for women’s razors. The example illustrates the complexity of impacts on various societal audiences and stakeholders. That the backlash received from audiences claiming the ad was “feminazi garbage was really just fueling the point.” The participants also voice the communication ignores the sexist business practices and market structure Gillette actively perpetuates.

The participants’ voice that nonprofits can (and often) perpetuate social issues if organizations employ “savior” mentalities that often lack appropriate approaches

and scantily question issues of power relations. Through the implementation of a justice-oriented lens the agencies' work to provide 'power to' stakeholders and systematically-underprivileged changemakers. Approaches that empower, educate, and facilitate just participation of communities facing systematic oppression are vital to the participants. The cultural and political landscape also influence the implementation of policy-driven solutions that seek to foster structural change. Figure 5.3 illustrates a framework useful for identifying the intertwining and inter-active approaches useful for identifying and working toward 'power with' relational constructions.

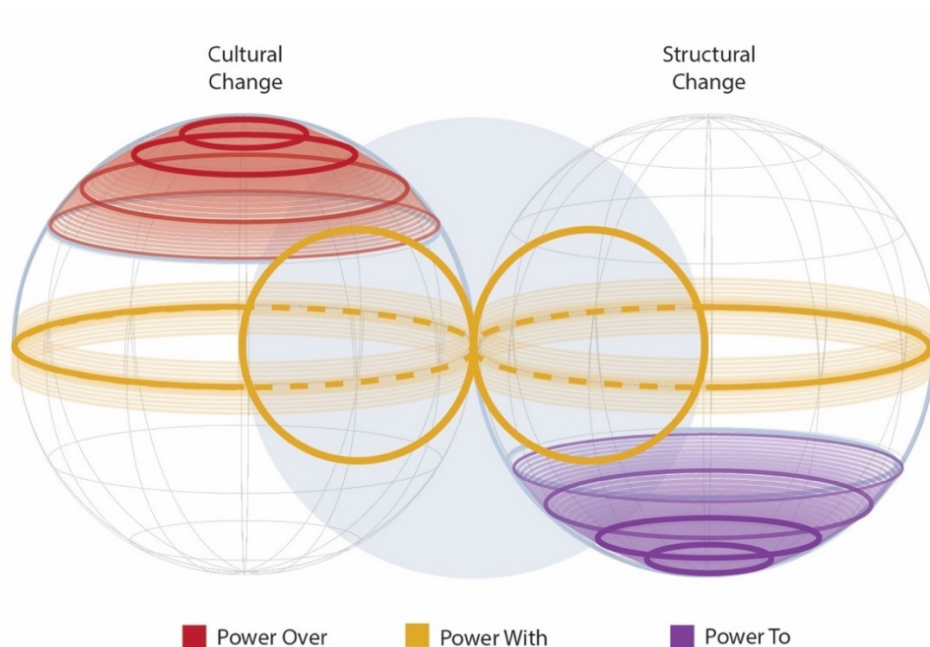


Figure 5.3. Social Change Framework: Cultural and Structural Change

The framework presents the two types of macro-level social change as separate 'worlds' but often overlap and are interdependent with aspects of meso-levels and micro-levels of relational realities of various stakeholders. Aspects of an organizations' social purpose, mission, or initiative influence the identification of the power transformation(s) that impact value-mediated constructions of positive "net-impact." Cross-sector collaboration further expands the interaction of relevant stakeholders and relational constructions of power and accountability that can constrain and resource social impact.

Across sectors and projects, the importance of community collaboration, integration of action, impact measurements, and selectively choosing clientele help mediate hegemonic power constructions and avoid unintentional outcomes. The insights can help inform approaches that seek to maximize the social value of organizational actions and communications. The agency approach and consultancy role provide increase in 'downward' accountability advocated in social enterprise literature (Ebrahim, Battilana, Mair, 2014). The participants voice facilitating collaborate approaches but lack direct influence on organizational decisions long term. The study provides unique insight into the social-value that pro-social agencies are contributing to the phenomena of purpose-led and social impact communications.

Actions and Stories of Change

The participants voice using the power of storytelling for social change and are working across sectors to help organizations amplify pro-social impact. The participants' definitions of strategic communication as storytelling for social change are collectively value-mediated and align with an agency's relationally-dependent pro-social beliefs. The section discusses the theoretical and practical implications of the study.

Academic Implications

The theoretical insights illustrate multiple implications of academic literature across disciplines. The illustration of narratives, co-constructions of social change, and relational mediation that happens within the dominate institutions shaping culture, social structure, organizational action and cross-sector relationships. The participants voice a multiplicity of tensions of working within institutions advocating for a socially accountable construction of capitalism that moves to a "higher calling," and also voice the need for structural change that impacts culture through mass education of human-constructed inequalities.

As for the institution of corporate communications (i.e., advertising and marketing) the participants pro-social orientation symbolizes opportunities, dangers, and institutional paradoxes (Mitra & Fyke, 2017). From an agency point

of view, organizational zeitgeist includes collaboration, strategic action, and a mass call to action—fighting apathy and oppression. Yet, within the macro-structures of institutions, the hallmark assumptions of the market—the “all pervasive confidence in the notion of competition” constrain structural opportunities for collaborative action. The United States’ cultural programming that prioritizes individualism, masculinity, and short-term orientation creates ideological barriers crystallize through either/or choices (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2010).

Market structures requiring competitive ideologies and narratives preserve hierarchal structure and dualistic choice. Organizations are ultimately bound to choices between the prioritization of positive impact and profit making in various situations (Brest, 2016; Ebrahim, Battilana, Mair, 2014; Murry, 2012). Individuals should continue to critically question the limitations of the market to identify alternatives that can foster a just and sustainable future for all. Although the agencies voice competition influencing overall sectoral change, the pro-social agencies illustrate the clear benefits of collaboration’s influence on creative and adaptable outputs rather than objective ‘solutions.’ A prominent take away is the agencies’ ability to embody a pro-social orientation, focus on action, and take risks to cultivate social change by diligently working through tensions to amplify societal benefits.

Practical Implications and Recommendations

The participants mention several inter-active approaches of socially beneficial communications that can result in a multitude of benefits for society, organizations, and stakeholders. The section synthesizes insights from participants and academic literature in relation to practical relevance. The participants note that ultimately the communications “isn’t about the brand or organization, it’s about the movement” and give recommendations for organizations looking to advance social good. Therefore, it is important to discuss the recommendations in the context of value-mediation that focuses on relationally-positive net-impact.

INTERNAL TRANSFORMATION

Organizational transformation of private and social corporations requires leadership, allyship, and patience internally. Beyond robust socially responsible business practices, for-profit organizations pivoting to purpose often requires a vision from leadership. One participant states it’s often,

The CEO or the largest shareholder wakes up one day and says: I've been doing it all wrong. I can't look at my kids in the eyes anymore and tell them that I'm doing something meaningful in this world. I'm going to use the power that I have and the resources that I have to do some good.

The vision of a pro-social organizational transformation next requires internal alignment and collaboration upon accessing how an organization can best benefit society. Across sectors it is suggested that organizations include external

stakeholders and build relationships as allies with communities facing structural-oppression. The approach changes dominate approaches in the social sector through a focus of empowerment, opportunities of power transference, and education for society and marginalized communities. The agencies voice the often-overlooked concept of patience as a vital aspect of the internal strength needed to “realign processes, realign culture, and take some risks while going through some pain.” A proactive approach of positioning patience as a crucial can help ease the difficult parts of collective transformation inclusive of growing pains.

ACTION-BASED APPROACH

The participants note the importance of action before communicating to external audiences. The action of internal transformation is interdependent on collaboration with relevant stakeholders. The opportunities social impact actions often influence the contextual factors of internal transformation. The pro-active involvement of external stakeholders breaks down business-society barriers. The organizational actions then serve as a platform for storytelling that can amplify impact by involving larger audiences and inspiring social action. One participant states it’s “story-doing,” and creates a path for collective action and two-way communication. The agencies discuss it’s important to involve larger audiences in communication rather than communicate unilateral of brand action in a

boastful way. The communication “can accomplish something else for a real life, living human being down the road. That's where it's at.”

A communications approach that prioritizes action and transformation requires a long-term orientation. For organizations across sectors, expectations of short-term monetary gains and social outcomes aren't sustainable. Organizations “have to prove it, and then have to continue to prove it, and then gains will come.” Creating a framework for social impact metrics help identify successful outcomes. Measuring social-impact is a sticking point across sectors and requires a contextually relevant model using both “quantitative and qualitative outcomes” based in transparency. One participant comments the biggest hurdle being the patience of moving from intention to action:

Rarely have I met a human being that when your faced with the opportunity to do something good for others, they'll say no. I don't think the problem is with intention. I think the problem is with action...it's the disconnect between intention and action.

FAILURE AS OPPORTUNITY

The participants voice the common misconceptions of failure as inherently negative. If organizations and individuals acknowledge failure and use the ‘lessons learned’ to inform future opportunities the approach can crystalize authentic communication with stakeholders. The agencies voice that organizations often fear setting and communicating proactive impact goals due to fear-driven ideologies of failure and scarcity mindsets prominent in the social

sector. Furthermore, a transparent approach to an organizations social accountability includes the inevitable shortcomings inherent in social impact work—the “long-term outcomes are really why you’re in the game.”

The agencies voice that by means of a) collaborative and participatory approaches, b) actions grounded in realistic solutions that include audiences, and c) bilateral communication can foster communities of understanding stakeholders and audiences since failure is an inherent part of social change. Along with celebrating successes, discussing failure can bring organizations, audiences, and stakeholders closer together and empower additional action and inspirational storytelling. The abstract practical recommendations provided are immensely influenced by the project, stakeholders, and contextual aspects of the societal purpose, issue, or need.

Limitations and Future Research

The study’s approach and findings provide a relationally-based abstract understanding of purpose-led and social impact communications from a practitioner standpoint. It is important to note the presented narrative and findings are not generalizable to all creative agencies or consultancies working on social-impact work across sectors. Moreover, the multidisciplinary nature of the phenomena creates ample opportunity for further research to understand the

phenomena from different standpoints. The section will discuss the various limitations and opportunities for future research.

Agencies that specialize in pro-social (i.e., purpose-led and social impact) communications are theoretically representative of agency consultancies within the social-impact or purpose-led communications space. The study's findings based on relational consensus demonstrates the "spectrum" of approaches co-constructed by the participants' local-social-historical and interactive realities. A prominent limitation is the emerging nature of the social impact space. The narrative, conceptual and theoretical insights are bound by space and time. Moreover, the relational interactions of the participants are by no means defined; the participants voice working through sensemaking and language barriers to collaboratively decide on group value judgements. The phenomena's value-mediated and relational interdependence that obscures social impact provides agencies a means to work through tensions that might be overlooked if relying on pre-determined concepts.

Future research can explore several areas influential to the phenomena of purpose-led and social impact communications. The constructions of the traditional communications and social responsibility agencies with "social impact silos" can offer alternative constructions and insights. The participants' construction and past experiences that position non-specialized approaches as

“shallow” compared to general constructions can provide additional depth to the phenomena overall.

Research exploring for-profit organizations whom are working to “pivot to purpose,” with and without external services can illustrate alternative worldviews that potentially create underlying tensions voiced by participants. Furthermore, social tensions and issues relative to a purpose-led consumer culture, sensemaking of social purpose, and power struggles in collaborative initiatives are suggested. The traditional nonprofit sectoral perspectives focused on transformation of negative perspectives to appreciate relationships can inform insights into mission-driven sensemaking of the role of communication.

The importance of personal and professional value alignment and creativity voiced by the participants played an influential role in the “calling” toward creating pro-social agencies. Current academic literature looks at creative ego-negations identify, and the paradoxes of advertising and social enterprises separately (Hackley & Kover, 2007; Jay, 2013; Hahn, Figge, Pinkse, & Preuss, 2018). Research to further understand creativity, value-alignment, and alienation can further academic understanding relational aspects of identity negotiation, organizational innovation and pro-social change.

It is important to note that the purpose-led and social impact agencies' creative leadership did not associate themselves with traditional agency creatives in advertising. One participant stated that:

Like all the greatest artist I ever can think of, we're always self-critical and completely like petrified that their next piece of work would be total shit, right. Whereas in advertising, creatives like walk around like they're fucking Picasso's or something...because they have some silverware, and some like statues on their desks and whatnot...it feels to me very antithetical to what a great creative person is. I think a great creative person is... oh, fearful is the wrong word. It's hypercritical... and so that's a good thing for when you do purpose, right? Because what you're trying to do from a purpose perspective is be as hypercritical of yourself as possible in order to make sure that the work that comes out doesn't come off as self-serving bullshit, which most all advertising is self-serving bullshit, right?

Moreover, the participants discuss influences of strategy, action-frameworks, and client creative collaboration that constrain creative ownership, but was rewarding morally and empowered collective creativity. Participants also discussed the creative aspects of strategy and collective problem solving. One participant discussed the most rewarding aspect of social impact work including empowering creativity of others:

one of my guiding philosophies for workshops is that everyone has an innate sense of creativity. On the one hand, I'm really happy they hire us for our creativity—but part of my mission with work shopping is to show people that no matter what kind of role you're in, whether you're in finance or accounting or HR, everyone has an innate creativity they can tap into. It's just a matter of me as a facilitator creating the right environment for people to be able to experience the things I said I liked about my job...identifying a problem, exploring lots of different ways to go about solving it, and experimenting with solutions. I also see that people just

really like being given an opportunity to solve problems because I think there are a lot of jobs in the world that are extremely constricted...that's another big upside to these workshops.

Institutional paradox, critical consciousness, strategic action, creative collaboration and innovation, empowerment and pro-social values contextually situate the distinctive aspects of the participants' realities. Participants voice a "higher calling" of communications and creative agencies that work from inside structures to create change. Functional solutions of creative work sought realistic social impact with an overarching 'social purpose' of strategic story-showing (and telling) of fighting cultural apathy. The reconstructed social purpose of advertising adds another paradox to the amorphous institutional structure and corporate institutionalized role of social control (Griff, 1969; Potter, 1954; Carey, 1960).

The findings by no means mirrors the larger reality of advertising, marketing, and communications of the sectors overall that the participants voice as mostly good-washing. However, the findings do illustrate an alternative and beneficial role of socially-oriented strategic communication and collective action. The optimistic sentiment is not meant to disregard the structural market limitations, importance of social issue knowledge, and the inherent yet unintended consequences discussed. Approaching pro-social communications with a critical consciousness of the dangers that accompany and interdependently interact with transformative opportunities accompanied by ongoing value-negotiation are the distinguishing factors that indicate the potential of opening 'power-full' possibilities (Hosking,

2004, 2007). One can then suggest the possibility of pro-social communications inter-acting as an institutional mirror and transparent veil.

Conclusive Reflexivity

The exploration of the phenomena of social-impact and purpose-led marketing and communications led to multiple conceptual and theoretical understandings grounded by an institutionally-informed approach that interact with the participants' local-cultural-historical relational realities. I reflect back on two prominent perspectives of the study—institutions and critical constructivist researcher epistemology (Hosking, 2004, 2007).

An institutional view of phenomena reveals the ongoing processes and structures crystalized in a society of both the past and the present in which shape each other and outline future possibilities. Emerging institutions that start out as visionary alternatives often get lost in conformity and disconnection with the past—and in the case of the 'new organizational structures'—the reconstructions resemble a not so distant corporate past of benevolence in business (Hamilton, 1932; Levy, 2016).

The pro-social corporate structures represent a transition from the 'power over' and 'business as usual' profit motives. But, the limitations of the market should

continue to be critically questioned and reconstructed to foster a multiplicity of just and sustainable relations. I suggest that a subtle and overlooked hegemonic force of institutions is mass conformity. The methodological approach empowers relational constructions of interdependent realities and advocates a soft self/other differentiation allowing of the researcher, participants, and others open and not constrained constructions of the phenomena. Therefore, the participants' voiced realities interact with academic literature, known and unknown structures of the relational past, present, and future.

The visual theoretical frames established through listening attempt to provide a *way* and a *relational starting point* to see the phenomena. I, as researcher in the study's context, see the phenomena through a multifaceted view voiced by the humans who are attempting to cultivate a better world of relations through embodied and ongoing action. The confinement of humans as 'participants' is a notable disservice to the active co-creation of knowledge and diverse ways of knowing. I hope that the research, narrative, and findings are kept *alive* through the continued questioning and reconstructions of readers. It is intended that through the construction of relational thinking rather than dualistic choices there is 'space' for readers to interact and co-construction ongoing and limitless knowledge, narratives, and openness.

Rather than conclude 'this' or 'that,' the study's intention is to remain open to possibilities that relationally interact with the other constructions through abstract understandings. What's the story you see? A paradox or infinite possibilities? Is advertising the mass system of control, a societal mirror or a contextual veil? What other constructions can it be?

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APPENDIX

A-1: Informed Consent

Informed Consent Form

INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

The Landscape of Social-Good Marketing and Communications

INTRODUCTION

You are invited to participate in a research study being conducted by Samantha LaVoi, an M.S. candidate at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. The purpose of the study is to explore the landscape of social impact and purpose-led marketing and communications. The study aims to advance the subdiscipline of impact and purpose-led strategic communications both academically and professionally.

INFORMATION ABOUT PARTICIPANTS' INVOLVEMENT IN THE STUDY

Your participation in this study will consist of an interview lasting approximately one hour. You will be asked a series of questions about your experience within marketing and communications. There may be additional follow-up/clarification through email unless otherwise requested by the participant. At the end of the interview process, participants will be provided a summary of the interview as a validity check.

Privacy will be ensured through confidentiality. To ensure accuracy, the researcher would like to digitally audio record the interview. You have the right to decline being recorded. All participation is voluntary, and you may refuse to participate or withdraw at any time with no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Please indicate your preference by initialing one of the following statements:

_____ I agree to be audiotaped during my participation in this study.

_____ I do not agree to be audiotaped during my participation in this study.

BENEFITS AND RISKS

The benefit of your participation is to contribute information to the social impact and purpose-led marketing and communications subdiscipline both academically and professionally. Most research involves some risk to confidentiality, and it is possible that someone could find out you were in this study or see your study information, but the investigators believe this risk is unlikely because of the procedures we will use to protect your information.

_____ Participant's initials

CONFIDENTIALITY

The information in the study records will be kept confidential. Data will be stored securely and will be made available only to the researcher conducting the study. Identities of participants will be protected to the maximum extent possible. The researcher will preserve confidentiality by reporting data in the aggregate and removing identifiers from any reports containing the data. The digital audio files and research notes will be scanned or typed and stored on a password-protected computer in a locked office to protect participant confidentiality. Digital recording files will be transcribed as soon as possible. The recordings will only be accessed and transcribed by the researcher. The researcher will secure files in a password-protected computer and within a password-protected data analysis software program on the researcher's laptop computer. Recordings will be destroyed once they have been transcribed. After the study's completion, the informed consent will be stored securely locked in a faculty advisor's office until use is no longer needed but not before a minimum of 3 years after data collection. All other data will be destroyed (i.e., shredded or erased) at the study's completion.

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, (or you experience adverse effects as a result of participating in this study), you may contact the researcher, Samantha LaVoi, at 476 Communications Building Knoxville, TN 37996, and (404) 490-7899. You may also contact the researcher's faculty advisor, Dr. Eric Haley, at 476 Communications Building Knoxville, TN 37996, and (865) 974-3048. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, contact the Office of Research Compliance Officer at (865) 974-3466.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may pass on any question that makes you feel uncomfortable. At any time you may notify the researcher that you would like to stop the interview and your participation in the study. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed your data will be returned to you or destroyed.

CONSENT

I have read the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study.

Participant's signature _____ Date _____

Investigator's signature _____ Date _____

A-2: Example Participant Summary

PARTICIPANT RESEARCH SUMMARY

The research summary is used as a validity check to ensure quality findings. Please identify any misinterpretations. You may also add any additional thoughts on the key themes below, or social impact marketing and communications in general.

Interview Key Themes:

Alignment of values. The world of advertising offers a space for creativity, strategy, that results in “innovative ways to tell stories.” After years of agency experience, the participant reached an inevitable crossroad of disconnection, where “personal values weren’t aligned, or in-tune, with what was happening professionally.” Today, the participant leads a company that uses “the power of marketing and advertising for good,” resulting in personal and professional alignment.

- **Communicating through action.** The agency works with the private, public, and social sectors with a focus on amplifying systematic change through strategic storytelling. Working with all sectors gives the agency a unique perspective that is critical for action-integrated communications.
- **Activating Impact.** Traditionally, nonprofits and foundations use “marketing, storytelling, narrative building as a bit of an afterthought.” The agency works with organizations to use storytelling as a vehicle of change to “build an army of the willing, change behaviors and attitudes, which lead to tangible outcomes.”

The new era of business and marketing: The private sector has tremendous ‘untapped power’ that if collectively focused, could help solve global problems much faster than governmental institutions. For the purpose-economy, brands jumping on the purpose bandwagon signals the potential transformation of the sector overall. Furthermore, purpose-driven marketing is the new norm, but unfortunately, some brands take advantage of culture with a shallow approach to purpose.

- **Good-washing.** For purpose-led marketing it’s “natural that some people are going to get it wrong, while they shouldn’t be punished forever, there needs to be a bit more thought and wisdom put into making those decisions” to avoid (un)intentional good-washing. “A lot of the efforts feel similar and shallow...they’re marketing to speak out on a certain issue, but not always aligning their own actions and operation.” It is often a lazy business move and doesn’t create meaningful change.
- **Responsible purpose-partnerships.** The agency works with private sector organizations that have an authentic drive for transformation and long-term commitment that can lead to social impact. Next, the agency “architects a framework that has action built into it” by integrating issue expertise and a diversity of opinions (e.g., issue specialists, individuals with experience in proposed solutions, grassroots leaders). The agency holds themselves responsible for creating “solutions grounded in reality and will lead to real impact rather than make a news cycle splash,” and helps brands create impact metrics.

VITA

Samantha LaVoi was born in Knoxville, Tennessee. Growing up in the Appalachian Mountains cultivated a deep appreciation for the communities and ecosystems that span across East Tennessee and beyond. After getting a B.F.A from the Art Institute of Atlanta she worked as a strategic communications lead and art director in Atlanta, Georgia. Her favorite questions 'what if' and 'why not' catapulted the pursuit of using creative solutions and strategic communications to create a sustainable and just world, leading her back to Knoxville to pursue an M.S. in Communication and Information.

Samantha continues to be fascinated by questions and the constitutive power that language and inter-action have in shaping meanings, relationships, social behaviors, and worldviews. She plans on using critical creativity to empower equitable relationships between individuals, communities, species, and the ecosystems that sustain life. She hopes to continue academic and industry research at the intersections of human experience, culture, and the natural worlds.