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The Purpose Challenge: Bridging the Gap Between Industry and Academia to Achieve Social Impact Goals

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Background: From Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) to PURPOSE

PURPOSE is one of the most currently talked about concepts in advertising and public relations. Traditional agencies are developing PURPOSE divisions and hiring Chief Purpose Officers, such as Tombras Agency's recent hire of Lindsay Stein Harris as Chief Purpose Office. Purpose Agencies are being formed to focus solely on helping clients transition to purpose. (https://www.forbes.com/sites/lindsaykohler/2022/02/14/the-rise-of-the-chief-purpose-officer/?sh=1aa35f4673d2)

What is PURPOSE and how does it differ from CSR? To those engaged with Purpose, it's vastly different. CSR entails efforts on behalf of an organization in addition to its main business. Purpose is embedded in the core functionality of an organization. That is, the organization itself is a social enterprise with social impact as a primary *purpose* of the business. The ability to create profit is needed to create the systemic social change desired. While promoting sales and services remain a primary goal, practitioners in purpose-driven work want to use their platforms to make lives better, to address hate, economic justice, sustainability, opportunity, consumer empowerment, and other issues that typically affect marginalized communities (LaVoi and Haley 2021).

Business may operate at different levels of Purpose – from none, a traditional business focusing only on profit—to a social enterprise, a business that is focused on and intentional in its societal impact. Some businesses are created as purpose organizations. Others may wish to pivot from traditional business models to a purpose model. Each type of purpose-oriented business addresses unique communication challenges. Purpose requires advertising and public relations agencies to think beyond our traditional outcomes of sales, message exposure, and public opinion. If clients need advertising and public relations communications expertise to assist with social transformation, then how do we staff, how do we act, and how do we measure our

impact? In academic research, this forces scholars to broaden our perspectives on what is advertising and public relations scholarship as well.

Our Focus

This special topics session explored the challenges for advertising agencies, marketers and advertising scholars working to address Purpose. The aim of the discussion was to find ways the ad industry and ad researchers/educators can work together to help industry successfully assist marketers with purpose goals through our unique areas of expertise.

Panel participants were asked to discuss the following major areas:

1) What challenges does assisting a client with Purpose goals bring to an advertising agency?
2) How does Purpose change the nature of the advertising agency and its goals and functions?
3) Are there disconnects between brands' purpose messages and company behaviors?
4) What new knowledge is needed to achieve purpose goals?
5) What research avenues (topics, tools) do we have as academics that can assist?
6) How can agencies and academic researchers work together to inform and achieve purpose goals?

The moderator asked the above questions and panel members freely discussed their thoughts and experiences around the topic areas. The audience members were also invited to join in the dialog.

Emergent Themes

Key themes emerged focusing on the different issues addressed under the PURPOSE umbrella, how advertising agencies differ from corporate in purpose-driven marketing initiatives, and how academia can be a resource for professionals on this topic. The UT Purpose Project was discussed as a potential outlet for purpose research. From the conversations about academic purpose-oriented studies, industry professionals saw value in the potential insights derived from academic work. Cultural differences between industry and academic were discussed such as the industry's need for speedy decisions and academician slower pace in producing quality research. Professionals felt they needed the potential insights from academic work to help justify decisions in a more objective way to their teams, executives and clients. However, it was acknowledged by both profession and industry professionals that the way academic articles are written hinders communication between academics and industry. As a solution, professional panelists noted their desire for current, relevant, white-paper type research being available for public consumption. The academic researchers desired conversations with industry professionals about purpose questions that would be relevant to industry as a way to make research more useful.

Participants:

Lindsey Stein Harris, Chief Purpose Officer, Tombras, NYC.

In the newly created role of Chief Purpose Officer, Lindsay works across disciplines at Tombras to ensure purpose is at the core of client strategy and campaigns, from creative and brand-thinking to media activation and communications. She also leads the agency's relationship with

the Tombras School of Advertising & Public Relations at the University of Tennessee, which is focused on diversifying the next generation of industry talent. Prior to joining Tombras, Lindsay served at Havas as Chief of Social Impact, where she drove the agency's internal purpose-driven initiatives, such as its commitments around being a Certified B Corp and its philanthropic programming; as well as its pro bono work, like the #BuryTheBills campaign in partnership with NYC Pride, which has won numerous industry awards.

Adam Spangler, Senior Marketing Director, NIKE, Portland, Oregon

Adam Spangler is a Senior Marketing Director who oversees Global Sustainability Engagement. He's a Nike veteran, with extensive experience in writing, digital storytelling and general marketing innovation. His career path has been intertwined with his personal passion and advocacy for the environment.

Kevin Kirksey, Senior Creative Director, Global Social and Platform Innovation, NIKE, Portland, Oregon

Kevin Kirksey is a Senior Creative Director who oversees NIKE's global social media strategy and platform innovation. During is 12 years at NIKE he has served in various capacities including: Creative Director – Global Athlete Studio; Senior Editorial Director – Global Brand Creative; Senior Brand Director – Greater China; Senior Brand Director – North America. Prior to joining NIKE, he was in Marketing for ESPN for 11 years, and has an advertising agency background (Ogilvy NYC, Y&R NYC). Kevin is a graduate of the University of Tennessee's advertising program.

Brandon Viney, Group Creative Director, Google, Portland. Oregon

Brandon Viney has an 18+ year advertising career as an art director and creative director. Before his present position at Google, he was an art director at Weiden + Kennedy, Portland. His Purpose campaigns have included Google's Moments in Black History and Google's Moments in Black Girl Magic, PowerAid's The Rose, and Nike's Don't Do It. He is experienced with bringing Purpose Campaigns to life creatively and can speak to the process and obstacles to doing Purpose advertising for clients. brandonviney.com

Tyler Milfeld, Villanova

Tyler Milfeld is a former brand manager for Hershey and Colgate. Recently, Dr. Milfeld worked with Dave's Killer Bread, a purpose-driven company, on research to inform their communication strategies aimed at economic and employment opportunities for former felons. This collaboration resulted in a Dave's national advertising campaign and in a *Journal of Advertising* Best Article Award 2021. As an assistant professor at Villanova, he continues to actively publish in the area of purpose communication exploring how brand equity and stage of purpose commitment/reputation impact a brand ability to speak about purpose.

Yoon Joo Lee, Washington State University

Yoon Joo Lee is a researcher in the field of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and purpose-driven advertising (e.g., drunk-driving prevention cause, anti-racism against Asian Americans), with over 30 published articles on the topic. Her studies further delve into how different mediums, including virtual reality and social media, affect the outcomes of purpose-driven advertisements. She was also invited to share her findings on CSR advertising at the Advertising Research Foundation's Insights Studio Series in 2020.

Sophia Mueller-Bryson, University of Miami

Sophia Mueller received her Ph.D. from the University of Florida's College of Journalism and Communications. She is currently an Assistant Professor of Advertising at the University of Miami. Her research focuses on the topic of purpose in advertising. Purpose, where a firm takes on the philosophy that they exist in order to do good, can take on a variety of different forms, including but not limited to corporate social responsibility and brand activism. Her research on these topics has been published in the *International Journal of Advertising* and *Journal of Current Issues & Research in Advertising.*

Eric Haley, University of Tennessee

Eric Haley has researched advertising's social responsibility across three decades covering topics such as advocacy advertising, corporate social responsibility advertising and Purpose. Haley is a six-time best journal article winner and has received such awards from all three AAA journals. He was recently presented with AAA Ivan L. Preston Award for Outstanding Contribution to Research in recognition of his career contribution to ad scholarship. Eric is involved with the newly-formed Purpose Project, an initiative of the Tombras School of Advertising and Public Relations, UTK.

Courtney Carpenter Childers, University - Moderator

Courtney Childers's research encompasses various aspects of advertising strategy, the advertising profession, and influencers. In addition to being a Professor in the Tombras School of Advertising and Public Relations, she is serving as the interim Director of the School of Journalism and Media at UTK.

Sources:

Kohler, Lindsay (2022). The Rise of the Chief Purpose Officer. Forbes, February 14. (https://www.forbes.com/sites/lindsaykohler/2022/02/14/the-rise-of-the-chief-purpose-officer/?sh=1aa35f4673d2)

Lavoi, Samantha and Eric Haley (2021) How Social-Purpose Agencies Define Themselves and Their Value: An Emerging Business Model in the Advertising Agency World, Journal of Current Issues and Research in Advertising, 42(4), 371-390.