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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Brands that do good: insight into social brand equity

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Abstract Brand equity has been accepted as an important construct as evidenced by the proliferation of models and arguments on the concept. Brand equity has multiple definitions which reflect the commercial intention of brands. Social brands, however, have social intentions. It is therefore plausible that determining the value of social brand equity may be different from determining the value of commercial brand equity. The purpose of this article is to conduct exploratory research to obtain a sense of whether existing brand equity models apply to social brands, and if not, what modifications are needed to help in the measurement of social brands. In-depth interviews were conducted with fifteen experts from four continents. In general, constructs of brand equity were agreed upon as valid and useful in social brand equity. However, the application of two constructs is tempered by ethical and funding issues. This is due to the context of measuring social brand equity, and the unassailable fact that the social sector consists of complexities, over and above those experienced by the commercial sector.

Keywords Brand equity · Behaviour change · Social branding · Social marketing · Social brand equity

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Introduction

Brands have played a leading role in well-known social marketing campaigns. Komen Race for the Cure, Oxfam with its mantra "The power of people against poverty", American Cancer Society, "the official sponsor of birthdays", The Sierra Club "explore, enjoy and protect the planet" and UNICEF works globally for the "rights of every child" are examples of global, well-known social brands. Branding has played a pivotal role in three effective social marketing campaigns from the USA, namely *The Heart Truth* campaign that sought to raise heart disease awareness and prevention among women (Long et al. 2008); the *VERB*™ campaign that was designed to increase physical activity among children aged 9–13 years (Price et al. 2009); and the *TRUTH*℠ campaign that pitted itself against tobacco manufacturers as a non-smoking lifestyle brand for teenagers (Evans et al. 2002). Brands also played a role in social marketing campaigns in other parts of the world. Sisimpur, an adaptation of Sesame Street in Bangladesh, is designed to meet the needs of three- to six-year-olds with objectives that include promoting good nutrition, safety and hygiene. In Africa, three branded HIV/AIDS prevention social marketing campaigns were designed to reach adolescents and young adults: Trust in Kenya, Salama in Tanzania and LoveLife in South Africa (Evans 2008). For the purposes of our study, we define social brands as representing a cluster of functional, emotional and behavioural benefits that supports a social issue.

In social marketing, brands help individuals to indicate to themselves and others that they identify with a specific behaviour (Kirby 2001) and in doing so, it may speed up the exchange process, with more immediate benefits and positive reinforcement (Lefebvre 2013). Brands also serve to build relationships (Wood 2008), and create emotional connections between the issue and the individual (McDivitt 2003). Brands are not simply a logo or tagline, but represent what a behaviour, programme and sponsor mean to people (Lefebvre 2011). Brands also act as reminders and catalysts to perform specific actions, engage in a social movement or change behaviours, and help campaigns gain visibility and raise awareness of issues (McDivitt 2003). Possibly most importantly, a branded world is the world that modern individuals relate to and know (Wood 2008), and while there may be ethical concerns about the consumerist nature of brands, there is also an opportunity to convert this familiarity into positive behaviour change (McDivitt 2003). Further, given Wymer's (2011) argument that social marketers must move beyond the limitations offered by the individual and look more broadly, the social brand may serve to create the community that moves the focus of social marketing campaigns from the individual to the general.

Beyond these roles, there is a more strategic role for a brand in a social marketing campaign. Branding represents an investment (DeChernatony and Dall'Olmo Riley 1998; Yoo et al. 2000), and when the brand carries sufficient value, it can be regarded as a determinant of success (Samad et al. 2010) and be used to motivate for continued donor funding or co-branding in societal campaigns. On a practical level, brands transcend the constraints of literacy (Lefebvre 2011), a real factor to consider for many social marketing programmes.

In social marketing, the product is the desired behaviour, with the cause being marketed by the campaign, and linked to motivators of the required behaviour change (Kotler and Zaltman 1971). Through social marketing, the core product is seen to offer a benefit that the target market values (exchange process) (Wood 2008) and/or is an important solution to their problem (Grier and Bryant 2005). There are three product levels: firstly, the core product, offering the benefits of the desired behaviour; secondly, the actual product, representing the actual desired behaviour; and finally, the augmented product, which consists of the tangible objects and services to support behaviour change (Kotler and Lee 2005). A social brand can have both a campaign brand and a behaviour brand (Mulcahy et al. 2015).

As social marketing is largely founded on commercial marketing concepts, much of the social marketing framework is based on adaptations from commercial marketing concepts. At the same time, there is an increased interest in the contribution that branding can bring to social marketing (Samad et al. 2010; Wood 2012). Brand equity is one such concept that has been accepted as an important construct by both academics and practitioners, specifically in the realm of commercial marketing, as evidenced by the proliferation of models on the concept. "Brand equity" is generally known to represent the value of a brand which sits on a company's balance sheet under trademarks and goodwill, and can be traded (DeChernatony and Dall'Olmo Riley 1998). Brands therefore bring opportunity and power in business, and it would be of interest to social marketers to harness these results, albeit in a social context, in order to optimise social marketing campaigns. This underpins the purpose of this study. To date, there is limited research on whether brand equity would be applicable to social brands in the same way as other brands, with the available models of brand equity having been designed for commercial organisations.

Brand equity has multiple definitions (Yoo et al. 2000; Aaker 1996; Keller 1993), which traditionally reflect brands with a commercial lens. Social brands, however, have a social lens in that they have more specifically social intentions, such as changing peoples' behaviour (Grier and Bryant 2005; Andreasen 2002). It is currently unclear whether a social brand functions in the same way as a commercial brand in the mind of the individual. It is also unclear which social brand characteristics are deemed important by the brand's stakeholders, which range from the brand owners to the society it aims to reach. This lack of clarity suggests that the means of valuing social brand equity may be different from valuing commercial brand equity. Given that the value of brands used in social marketing campaigns can partially serve as evidence of success or failure of a social marketing campaign (Price et al. 2009), it suggests that there is merit in conducting further research on brand equity for social marketing campaigns to determine campaign effectiveness and that further research should be done on the brand equity constructs (Blahut et al. 2004; Price et al. 2009). Further, it is of interest to socially orientated organisations to understand how to value social brands so as to build strong social brands for future social marketing campaigns. According to Aaker (1996), the measurement of brand strength and brand value guides and enhances efforts to build on brand objectives and brand programmes. This measurement is known as brand equity. Brand equity seeks to define the relationship between the brand and individuals, that is, consumers, indicating a myriad of measures such as financial value, strength of consumer's attachment to the brand and description of associations that the consumer has about the brand (Wood 2012).

Much work has been done to enhance our understanding of brand equity, but this work has typically been undertaken on brands with commercial intentions. The ethical dimensions of brand equity management have been researched by Abela (2003), Bendixen et al. (2004) studied brand equity in the B2B market; Dahlen and Rosengran (2005) show that slogans may work as carriers of brand equity; Das et al. (2009) lay the foundation for an integrated systems model of brand equity; Papadopoulos and Heslop (2002) suggest that country brands have built-in equity that individuals in various target markets develop over their lifetimes; Jones (2005), developed a stakeholder model of brand equity; M'zungu et al. (2010) suggest that brand management ought to play an important role in safeguarding brand equity and proposed a three-stage conceptual model for building and sustaining brand equity; research by Dwivedi and Merrilees (2012) explained the effect of brand extensions on the relationship equity of a parent brand; Pauwels and Dans (2001) found that brand equity in the marketplace can be efficiently leveraged into the market space. Online readership depends both on offline popularity and on the profile fit between the typical Internet user and the typical offline reader of the newspaper; Raggio and Leone (2007) propose a new framework for conceptualising brand equity that distinguishes between brand equity, conceived of as an intrapersonal construct that moderates the impact of marketing activities, and brand value, which is the sale or replacement value of a brand; Villarejo-Ramos and Sanchez-Franco (2005) studied the impact of marketing communications and price promotion on brand equity; Spielman (2014) recommending new assets and liabilities unique to brands that are bounded to their origins. These are brands that are inseparable from their origins, as is the case with most wines; and Uggla (2004) presented a conceptual model for leveraging partner brand equity. While we now know much about brand equity in such commercially driven contexts, by comparison, very little is known about brand equity of social brands or brands that promote social causes. It is unclear whether the dimensions of "generally accepted commercial" brand equity are similar and relevant to social brand equity, and whether they can and should be directly transposed to social brand equity. It is also unclear whether these dimensions can be consistently applied, if at all.

The purpose of this article is to conduct exploratory research to obtain a sense of whether existing brand equity models apply to social brands, and how; and if not, what modifications are needed to assist in the measurement of social brands. Behaviour change is notoriously difficult to measure given it is typically witnessed as incremental change over a long period of time with a multitude of factors in varying degrees potentially affecting the individual (Bayerlein 2005). In many instances, this lack of evidence and certainty is the reason for donors to stop or limit their financial support. Therefore, a means of valuing social brand equity may serve as a monitoring and evaluation tool. Further, understanding social brand equity will create increased understanding as to the value of brand equity co-created through other brands, plus in converse, how social brand equity can assist corporate brand equity (Hoeffler and Keller 2002), deepening the argument about the corporate value of a relationship between social brands and corporate brands. A good example of this is the Komen Race for the Cure, which is sponsored by major commercial organisations.

This article is structured as follows: We first discuss the theory that informs this study; brand equity definitions and models. The research method is then described which included the in-depth interviewing of fifteen experts. The results are then discussed, propositions are developed, and recommendations are made. This article contributes to the literature on brand equity by clarifying the dimensions of social brand equity and its application to academics and practitioners.

Brand equity

There is good reason to measure and evaluate brand equity: measurement has a predictable and meaningful impact on customer acquisition, retention and ultimately profitability (Stahl et al. 2012). Brand equity therefore serves as a means of benchmarking, provides guidance into building a brand and what attributes are required, assists with ongoing management of the brand (Aaker 1996), can be used for accounting purposes, for merger, acquisition or divestiture purposes, and for improved marketing productivity (Keller 1993). There is general consensus that brand equity should measure the marketing results that stem directly and uniquely from a brand (Keller 2009), and that all stakeholders play a role in creating brand equity (Meyer et al. 2008).

In determining the measurement of brand equity, Aaker (1996) suggests that firstly, the measures must be indicative of that which is actually being measured; secondly, it should determine where the value lies in creating brand equity; and thirdly, that the measures must drive the market. In other words, if a change in tactic is employed on one of the measures, it will change the face of the financial results. Finally, Aaker (1996) suggests that the measures must be applied across brands, product categories and markets. By comparison, Neal and Strauss (2008) say that to determine brand equity, measures must be buyer-focused, valid, reliable and actionable, with a focus on tangible and intangible attributes. Representing these varying views are several brand equity models that are globally accepted by marketing practitioners as well as academics.

The Young and Rubicam (Y&R) Brand Asset™ Valuator (BAV) represents research on more than 700,000 people in 49 countries covering 44,000 brands (Young & Rubicam 2010). This customer-based brand equity model (Johansson et al. 2012) is based on four pillars of brand equity which together feed into two essential streams (Neal and Strauss 2008). The first stream, the Brand Strength, represents the future of the brand (Kotler and Keller 2009) and comprises of the two pillars: differentiation, which measures the degree to which a brand is deemed different to others; and relevance, which measures the relevance of the brand to the consumer's needs (Stahl et al. 2012). The second stream, Brand Stature, looks at the past performance of the brand (Kotler and Keller 2009), and comprises of the two pillars: Esteem, which measures how the brand is regarded and respected in terms of leadership, reliability and quality; and Knowledge, which measures how familiar and intimate consumers are with the brand (Stahl et al. 2012). Together, these streams form a Power Grid to depict brand equity.

Another well-known commercial model is the InterBrand Model which relies on a financial perspective and converts the brand's future income into current value by calculating the weighted average brand product revenue before taxes, for the previous 3 years, discounted for the earnings attributed to the brand (Jia and Zhang 2013). This value results from combining a financial analysis, which looks at the financial value of a brand less taxes and capital expenditure to create the brand, a market analysis, which creates industry context for the financial analysis result, and a brand strength analysis which looks at ten specific characteristics, clarity, commitment, protection, responsiveness, authenticity, relevance, differentiation, consistency, presence and understanding. These Brand Strength Analysis Drivers are each rated to produce a brand multiplier, which is applied to the results of the other analyses, and ultimately a value for the brand is determined (Rendón and Morales 2013).

Developed by marketing consultants, Millward Brown and WPP, the Brandz Model determines brand equity by assessing stages of brand building. The outcome is a financial valuation for a brand. Their annual report of the Top 100 Global Brands is based on research with more than 2 million consumers in over 30 countries on more than 10,000 brands (Millward Brown 2013).

The Brand Resonance Model was developed by Keller (2001) to reflect his concept of Customer-based Brand Equity. This model reflects four steps to develop a strong brand, and when successful, six brand building blocks result. These building blocks are salience, imagery, performance, feelings, judgements and finally, the most valuable, resonance (Keller 2001). The interrelationship is depicted in a pyramid ultimately resulting in the penultimate goal of resonance.

Aaker (1996) created The Brand Equity Ten. The Brand Equity Ten consists of criteria, which have a strong corporate and commercial bias. The dimensions are loyalty, perceived quality, associations, awareness and market behaviour measures. Nguyen et al. (2015) studied the relationships between financial brand equity and consumer-based brand equity. They found that consumers do not necessarily value an organisation's efforts to present it as more sustainable and these efforts could even lead to a deterioration of its financial brand value. Baalbaki and Guzman (2016) developed a brand equity conceptualisation and scale determined by dimensions that consumers perceive. Their consumer-perceived consumer-based brand equity scale is made up of four dimensions: quality, preference, social influence and sustainability.

By comparing these widely accepted brand equity models, it is possible to discern several overlaps in wording, description or intent. For example, InterBrand's (2013) Brand Strength Analysis Driver "Commitment" is very similar to Aaker's (1996) Brand Equity Ten "Loyalty". It therefore suggests that where such overlaps occur, there is a strong likelihood of the brand equity model measuring the same construct; it is only the language that has changed in the brand equity model and not the intent.

Brand equity in social marketing campaigns

In some instances where brands have been central to a social marketing campaign, such as *TRUTH*™, the success of the campaign was determined through assessing the brand equity of the desired behaviour. Therefore, people must have had an experience of the desired behaviour in relation to the current behaviour, which was deemed the "competition". The measurement of brand equity on the *TRUTH*™ social marketing campaign was seen as a central measure of the campaign strategy (Evans et al. 2002), and according to Lefebvre (2013), this valuation included attributes such as high awareness, fostering of loyalty and having a unique appealing identity and personality. In the absence of a robustly researched social brand equity model, the researchers developed a variant of Aaker's (1996) model. The initial research was confirmed using factor analysis on the same social marketing campaign indicating that the brand equity scale items previously selected represent a well-defined, reliable higher-order construct (Blahut et al. 2004). By applying these scales to a sample, it was determined that strong brand equity existed and thus behaviour had been affected.

Brand equity was also ascertained in the *VERB*™ campaign (Price et al. 2009), using the constructs of The Brand Equity Ten, namely Brand loyalty and satisfaction, Brand leadership and popularity, Brand personality, and Brand awareness. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) declared these constructs appropriate for the study. The purpose of assessing brand equity was to see if the brand had in fact mediated positive attitudes towards physical activity (Lefebvre 2013), and the researchers found that youth in the high brand equity group were more likely to hold positive attitudes and engage in more physical activity (Price et al. 2009). The campaign was deemed successful.

These results suggest that Aaker's (1996) model may be an effective departure point for the creation of a social brand equity model. However, this model is not definitive and given the crossover from commercial marketing to social marketing, further research into the key characteristics for social brands ought to take place. Blahut et al. (2004) note that the application of Aaker's equity model is not commonly used for lifestyle. It is rather applied to a product, while Lefebvre (2013) suggests the development of brand equity, in the social marketing context, is for desired behaviours.

Brand equity was applied to a social behaviour brand by Mulcahy et al. (2015) to identify the responses to an electronic social marketing game and evaluate its effectiveness. Their findings indicate that there are significant relationships between brand equity dimensions for the social behaviour brand, indicating relevance of a commercial marketing theory for social marketing.

Neal and Strauss (2008) suggest that the optimal way of determining brand equity is by evaluating the price premium that consumers are willing to pay for a branded product or service, compared to an equivalent unbranded product or service. This suggests that the purpose of the brand is reflected in the brand's success. In commercial marketing, this translates into a brand having a profit motive. This speaks to the profit purpose of commercial brands. By contrast, in social marketing, brand equity must reflect a relationship with behaviour change (change representing a "before" and an "after"). Thus, the value of the "before" or existing behaviour must be measured in relation to the value of the "after" or desired behaviour, to determine the strength of brand equity. Given the complexities in behaviour change, it is worth noting that in some cases, the "after" behaviour may not yet have been attained or sustained, and simply an awareness of the behaviour would be a mark of progress. Similarly, if a brand drives the *intention* of behaviour change, this should be measured as part of brand equity. It stands to reason that when behaviour change has been achieved, the campaign has been optimally successful and given that the purpose of the brand has been attained, one can deduce that brand equity would be high.

Corporate brands are easier to monetise given that profitability is a measurable result of business and branding activities. This is acknowledged in both the InterBrand and Brandz models, outlined briefly above, which have a strong financial bias. By comparison, this element was not included in the constructs selected for the *TRUTH*™ and *VERB*℠ campaigns. However, it is acknowledged that difficulty of measurement should not necessarily preclude it as an important construct in social brand equity. Firstly, a cost–benefit analysis, where the costs of the campaign are weighed against the benefits that result, could be considered as a financial measurement. For example, the health costs associated with a society of smokers are considered in relation to the costs of implementing an anti-smoking programme. This would be done specifically to monetise efforts, rather than using a cost effectiveness analysis which produces a ratio of comparison on the effectiveness of two efforts (for example, the effect on society of conducting an anti-smoking campaign compared to not conducting an anti-smoking campaign).

Methodology

A qualitative approach was used, which facilitates the study of issues in-depth and in detail (Patton 2002). To conduct the research, two of the three types of qualitative data collection were used, namely: literature review and in-depth open-ended interviews (Patton 2002). As a result of the literature review, a discussion document was created for use in the in-depth interviews. The interviews were held with experts and their responses recorded. Responses were frequently probed because the participant had not fully answered the question or did not provide the complete information required (Bryman 2012). In some instances, the answer opened a different line of thought, which provided greater context and understanding to the response.

All people who have significant knowledge of social marketing were considered as the population for this research. The sample was drawn on a purposive basis. People were considered experts if they are academics in the social marketing field, donors, social marketing practitioners, corporate social responsibility (CSR) professionals, or psychologists who can offer insight into the behaviour change process. There was no geographical limitation of the sample. Selection of the sample was sequential in nature. Individuals were contacted, primarily by email, and provided with background on the research and the purpose of the research. Their involvement in the research was requested, and thereafter, the discussion document and consent form were provided for their perusal. Interviews continued until saturation was achieved (Creswell 2013). A total of 15 interviews were conducted, a size deemed acceptable in qualitative research (Guest et al. 2006).

The discussion document was designed to explore meaning on existing content and guide discussion on emerging trends. It allowed for laddering to take place during the interview, so that the ultimate motive or reason for a thought or action could be immediately identified and noted. It also allowed for interaction across themes to take place with key themes hierarchically recorded. The open-ended nature of this kind of interaction allows one to see the world through someone's eyes without being confined by pre-determined questionnaire categories (Patton 2002). The participant was encouraged to answer the questions in his/her own words (Yin 2011). The discussion document listed issues to be explored during the interview, and provided a point of reference to ensure that all participants were interviewed along the same lines. It also ensured that there were no research gaps in the discussion even while remaining conversational and open (Patton 2002).

Prior to conducting any interviews, the interview protocol was developed to ensure that standard procedures would be applied when recording and conducting the interviews (Creswell 2013). This served to create an environment of trust and comfort so that the participant was willing to share data (du Plooy 2002). The interview was audio-taped and transcribed as soon as possible, after the interview. Notes were also taken during the interview. Together, this ensured that the meaning of the data was not forgotten and lost.

During analysis of the data, all perspectives and findings needed to be acknowledged and explored. To achieve this, the vast amount of data collected had to be reduced into a meaningful and manageable format. A coding frame was prepared, consisting of categories and sub-categories. This served as a means of structuring data so that different meanings could be captured. The frame was constructed to capture the nuances of meaning, such that dimensions thereof are uni-dimensional, mutually exclusive and exhaustive, while achieving saturation (Schreier 2012). Decision rules were included in the coding frame. This assisted in determining to what category the content should belong, specifically when it appeared that the content overlapped categories (Schreier 2012). The open-ended questions could only be coded post the interview. A transcriber first transcribed the interview prior to coding. The first researcher coded the interview using the transcription and interview notes. Content was reduced into smaller units so that it clearly fitted into one category on the coding frame. The units of analysis were physical units, syntactic units, thematic unit and/or propositional units (du Plooy 2002) and could be categorised on a nominal scale. The procedure for analysis was systematically applied. A tally sheet was compiled so that data or units were allocated to specific categories in a logical and consistent manner. This was done manually.

The process was then completed independently by a second researcher. Where discrepancies or concerns were noted, the two researchers discussed the meaning of the data, while referring to the interview notes. This was done to achieve consensus and served to ensure that coding was done reliably. Using axial coding, key themes were grouped hierarchically and evaluated for inter-relationships and importance to the central phenomenon (Bryman 2012). The categories were further refined and integrated using selective coding (Yin 2011).

Findings and discussion

Respondents

A total of 15 interviews were conducted covering various categories of participants. There were five participants in the USA, four each in Australia and South Africa, and one each in the UK and Namibia. As far as the academics are concerned, three were from the USA, four from Australia, and one from the UK. The academics interviewed are considered world leaders in the field of social marketing, each with a large number of published academic articles in leading journals, books or book chapters. Several academics also run social marketing agencies, act as consultants advising leading donor funders on key social issues and sit on regional and/or global social marketing associations; however, such participants were classified first and solely as academics. Of the 8 participants, 6 are full professors with the average number of years in social marketing and related work sitting at over 26 years.

The next category of participants was that of the social marketers, specifically those who are in the field of practical development and implementation of social marketing strategy. This category consisted of 3 participants of the total 15. It should also be noted that in one case, 2 participants from a particular agency chose to conduct the interview together, with this interview counting as a single (1) participant. Two of the social marketers were from the USA, and one was from South Africa. In each case, the participant has been responsible for running nationwide and best practice social marketing campaigns, including campaigns that have been discussed in the literature review such as "*The Heart Truth*" and "*Scrutinize*" campaigns. Participants also include regular contributors to and/or editors of social marketing communication platforms and journals.

The category of donor also consisted of 3 participants. Participants were from large international donor funder agencies or international corporations committed extensively to corporate social responsibility projects in multiple countries across the globe. Each participant had also previously acted in other roles within the greater social marketing and development context, ensuring that as funders they are well acquainted with practical issues and financial realities. Two were from South Africa and one from Namibia. The smallest category included in the sample was that of psychologists with a total of 1 participant. The participant was selected given the extensive and senior clinical work she is responsible for at a significant behaviour change clinic in South Africa.

On analysis of the findings, it was deemed appropriate to group participants into "Donors" and "Recipients" in order to more clearly assess the findings of the research study. It is, however, noted that at some level, all participants fall within the category of "Recipients".

Brand equity

The constructs were selected based on the literature of the widely accepted brand equity models. Brand awareness has appeared in different guises in a number of brand equity models. In the Young and Rubicam (Y&R) Brand Asset™ Valuator (BAV), it is called Knowledge and is defined as measuring how familiar and intimate consumers are with the brand (Stahl et al. 2012). In the InterBrand model, it is referred to as presence, defined as the brand's omnipresence; being talked about positively by consumers and opinion formers across media. Aaker's (1996) Brand Equity Ten refers directly to Brand awareness. The existing brand equity models are echoed by the participants who felt that: *"brand awareness is pretty important", "awareness is the first step to anything", "it's one of the strongest direct correlations to (brand equity)", "If they are not aware of it…then they don't know what the heck it means"*. While there was a sense that this could be "*one of the goals that you raise awareness around that brand",* and that it is also linked to funding and *"where the brand is seen"* its importance in measuring social brands remained strong.

The success of a brand must be aligned with the purpose of the brand. Neal and Strauss (2008) suggest that the optimal way of determining brand equity is by evaluating the price premium that consumers are willing to pay for a branded product or service, compared to an equivalent unbranded product or service. This speaks to the profit purpose of corporate brands. In social marketing, however, brand equity must have a relationship with behaviour change (change representing a "before" and an "after"). Thus, the value of the "before" or existing behaviour must be measured in relation to the value of the "after" or desired behaviour, to determine the strength of brand equity. In some cases, the "after" behaviour has not yet been sustained, and simply an awareness of the behaviour would be a mark of progress.

In this light, a proposition has been developed:

P1: *Brand Awareness is a social brand equity construct.*

Brand relevance is one of the core constructs of both the Young & Rubicam Brand Asset™ Valuator (BAV) and the InterBrand model, where it is viewed as a fit between the consumer's needs, desires and decision-making criteria across all relevant demographics and geographies. Most participants agreed with the view that *"if it's not relevant to me, I think then it's got no value at all",* and gave brand relevance a very high rating. For participants, the relevance of the brand spoke to *"the severity, the impact…the probability of this happening in my life"*, and that the social brand must be "*relevant to the immediate needs, the immediate environment of the community"*. If a social brand is going *"to be seen as very credible or very meaningful",* it needs to start by being relevant. Blahut et al. (2004) note that the application of Aaker's equity model is not commonly used for lifestyle; rather it is applied to a product. It is posited that for one, relevance of brand could be important to measure in brand equity, given that the individual must see the desired behaviour as personally relevant if they are going to contemplate change.

The evidence therefore suggests that the following proposition should be developed:

P2: *Brand Relevance is a social brand equity construct.*

Brand leadership is a key feature in several brand equity models. The Young and Rubicam (Y&R) Brand Asset™ Valuator (BAV) terms this attribute, Esteem, which measures how the brand is regarded and respected in terms of leadership, reliability and quality (Stahl et al. 2012). InterBrand refers to the attribute under the term "responsiveness", which is broadly regarded as being a leader with the ability to respond to market changes, challenges and opportunities. Finally, brand leadership appears in Aaker's (1996) Brand Equity Ten under the attribute heading, "Leadership and Popularity".

Some participants stated that: *"The more popular, the more successful…suggesting you impacting more people", "so if one rose to the top and engaged you…we really saw that really engaged things and started to make things happen in a way we haven't really seen social brand do before"*. Which increases the ability to attract and retain funding: *"because it (brand leadership) does translate into sustainability and funding so brand leadership is very important",* and that *"funding (is necessary) to become a brand leader"*. However, there is also a sense that brand leadership is undesirable as it increases attention on only one brand, taking focus away from the overall objectives: *"Can you have brand leadership with social brands?…depends on whether you are competing with commercial brands for behaviours or not - brand leadership will become more important to me if there's lots of competing behaviours"*.

In understanding that there is both a financial and social cost of becoming the brand leader the question is posed: *"is it worth investing the resources to become the brand leader versus getting something else done…"* This construct therefore raises a philosophical and ethical argument around the use of resources. There can be increased awareness and resultant behaviour change as a result of being a brand leader; however, the need for funding to make this happen places the focus on the brand and not the issue, and this may not necessarily be the best use of resources. On balance we believe that there is enough evidence to develop the proposition:

P3: *Brand Leadership is a social brand equity construct.*

Brand loyalty is a strong construct in a number of brand equity models including Aaker's (1996) Brand Equity Ten, where Loyalty is one of the ten dimensions and has the attributes of "price premium" and "satisfaction and loyalty". The modified Brand Equity Ten says "Brand Satisfaction and Loyalty" is defined as the individual's willingness to commit to, and recommend the brand. When used in assessing the *VERB*™ campaign, brand loyalty was shown to be an important construct (Price et al. 2009), as it did in assessing the *TRUTH*℠ campaign (Evans et al. 2002). It also stands to reason that when behaviour change has been achieved, there should be maximum loyalty.

Against this backdrop, participants felt that brand loyalty was important in varying degrees: *"that's the most essential thing", "I think it can keep you doing something or keep you coming back", "I think it's very important".* However, there was recognition that the emphasis should always fall on the desired behaviour, rather than the social brand itself: *"I need them to be loyal to my brand against its direct competitors", "end of the day the social brand is about promoting positive behaviour…as long as at the end of the day they are taking those steps".* In this light, brand loyalty should be considered a construct but in the formulation of actual brand equity, weighting should be considered with regard to issue loyalty rather than solely on brand loyalty. The proposition that will be proposed is:

P4: *Brand Loyalty is a social brand equity construct.*

Brand resonance appears in several brand equity models under different labels. For example, the InterBrand Model has a measurement called: "Understanding" which takes the brand beyond ordinary recognition and looks at the knowledge and understanding of the brand's intrinsic qualities. Keller's (2001) Customer-based Brand Equity Model is called the Brand Resonance Model, and looks at six brand building blocks, the most valuable being resonance. Aaker's (1996) Brand Equity Ten refers to Brand personality, which is defined as the associations and appeal of the brand. That an affinity towards a brand could be driven by these intangible attributes, *"that relates to people's value systems", "it's something you identify with",* was matched by participants: *"If something resonates with you, it's going to motivate you to go according to those lines", "resonance could be more of the emotional component of how people respond to a brand".*

The potential overlap with brand relevance is noted, and it is clear that sharper differentiation for participants is required: *"Same as brand relevance", "That's linked very much to relevance".* Overall though, the construct was deemed very important and supports the literature that sees the construct as important in brand equity. When behaviour change has been sustained over a length of time, this would be represented by the termination phase and theoretically, brand equity should be at its maximum, and resonance would have been achieved. All stakeholders would associate with the brand and support the issue involved. This supports the Keller (2001) model.

The proposition that is posited is:

P5: *Brand Resonance is a social brand equity construct.*

We can conclude that brand equity models are relevant to social brands. Our study contributes to the social brand literature by identifying some differences in the application of the brand equity models for a social brand. First, the objectives of the campaign are different and an issue or behaviour change rather than a product is being promoted. Second, as far as brand awareness is concerned, the value of the "before" or existing behaviour must be measured in relation to the value of the "after" or desired behaviour, to determine the strength of brand equity. Third, as far as brand relevance is concerned, the individual must see the desired behaviour as personally relevant if they are going to contemplate change. Fourth, brand leadership raises a philosophical and ethical argument around the use of resources. There can be increased awareness and resultant behaviour change as a result of being a brand leader, but the focus may be on the brand rather than the issue. Fifth, as far as loyalty is concerned, weighting should be considered with regard to issue loyalty rather than solely on brand loyalty. Lastly, to achieve brand resonance, behaviour change has to be sustained over a length of time and resonance would have been achieved.

Conclusions and recommendations

Given that the definition and purposes of a social brand is different from a commercial brand in key ways, the conventional means of determining brand equity needed to be evaluated for relevance, depth of similarity, and consistency of application. As expected, different categories of participants had specific departure points on each construct, as it related to their specific area of interest; however, in response, participants discussed this multi-perspectives approach to each construct. This indicated the complexity of the study. With so many stakeholders having a vested

Fig. 1 Social brand equity model

interested in the success of the brand, there was no clear means of determining how the departure point of the stakeholder could impact on the assessment of the value of the brand.

Social sector stakeholders have specific organisational objectives, mandates and positions in the sector, and will accordingly engage with a social brand. While the constructs of social brand equity provide a framework for measurement, the outcome of social brand equity in relation to what is important for each stakeholder should be evaluated.

Social brand equity has different meanings according to the type of stakeholder. What is important to a donor is not the same as to an individual, and recognition of this makes the application of social brand equity more meaningful. The donor must account for their spending and ensure that the return is optimised. Therefore, a financial figure to social brand equity has merit and enables a funder to include the asset of a social brand on their balance sheet. This also assists in the motivation for continued funding. Government must see an improvement on the social issue and so a figure for social brand equity helps government in determining whether there is increased awareness and uptake of the desired behaviour. Government is issue-orientated, rather than brand-orientated; thus, weighting of constructs to take into account ethical and funding considerations would be useful to provide a more equitable picture. For the individual, improved wellbeing and happiness are goals.

It was therefore determined that the stakeholders should be broadly categorised into donors (brand owners, practitioners) and recipients (society, individuals). There were no significant differences between responses across countries/regions.

In general, and according to the two stakeholder groups, constructs of brand equity were agreed upon as valid and useful in social brand equity albeit in varying degrees and forms, as shown in Fig. 1.

This figure indicates that the profit motive has no relevance in the social brand equity model. Further, it indicates that—unlike commercial brand equity—there are multiple and significantly different ways of viewing the value of a social brand. This suggests that the formulae applied by the conventionally accepted brand equity models cannot be directly or consistently transferred to social brand equity.

Nonetheless, all stakeholders have the ultimate objective of achieving social good on a particular social issue, and therefore, resources must be geared towards that broad altruistic outcome, rather than tailored towards building a specific social brand. This means that ethical considerations need to be placed before singular gain. Therefore, social brands by their very nature must have integrity. According to Abela (2003), by brand integrity, it is meant that the idea that a brand's values are clearly accepted and adhered to by all members of the organisation; and found to be agreeable and attractive by all its stakeholders within which it operates. This is in direct contrast with most commercial brands that seek dominance.

In addition, it must be recognised that the application of constructs may be constrained, or boosted, given the availability of funding. Rather than funding being generated by the profit motive or as a result of profit-seeking activities, as would be the case in commercial organisations, social brands are at the mercy of external funding sources. This will accordingly guide the use of funds in a way that will optimise the overall social spend, rather than focus purely on the maximisation of social brand equity constructs.

Hence, while the constructs alone may be meaningful, there is an appreciation that due to the context of social marketing, the weighting of constructs may be impacted. Similarly, the study revealed that placing a financial measure on social brand equity was both useful and possible; but that the context of funding needed to be taken into account and will possibly modify the final value. These considerations significantly increase the complexity of producing a final measurement for social brands in formula form. Ongoing research in this area would be required to produce such measurement. Our exploratory study has, however, determined a foundation for further study.

We believe that this study is a starting point, being a qualitative one, in which 15 experts were interviewed and gave important insights. It added value to the study of social marketing, a relatively new field, and specifically to the measurement of social brand equity. Through this exploratory study, further study can add depth and insights in the means of valuing social brand equity, and how that value is effected by various stakeholder groupings. It also suggests that the determination of a social brand equity model is more complex than that of a commercial brand equity model. But it is noted that the value of such a model will improve the delivery and assessment of social marketing programmes; as a monitoring and evaluation tool, it can feed into, among other, donor and government assessments, and funding priorities and allocations. In the future, a study to develop and validate a scale that measures social brand equity would contribute to social brand equity research and practice.

We acknowledge that our sample size is a limitation. We therefore propose future studies with larger and more diverse populations, with the ultimate objective being to develop a social brand equity model.

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