

Special Issue

CONSCIENTIOUS BRANDS: MAKING SUSTAINABILITY AND RESPONSIBILITY WORK

CALL FOR PAPERS

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Background of this special issue

As the world faces increasing societal and environmental challenges, stakeholders have raised their expectations for the conduct and integrity of organizations and their brands (Salzer-Mörling and Strannegård 2007; Bhagwat et al, 2020; Hambrick and Wowak 2019; Sarkar and Kotler 2020). It is no longer enough for brands to merely acknowledge the problems facing the world, stakeholders now believe that brands should actively contribute to solving these problems by improving the quality of life and addressing environmental issues (Ramaswamy and Ozcan, 2016). The sustainability agenda, which balances the needs of people, planet and profit, is rapidly becoming a requirement simply to operate. This means more than simply telling positive stories. It concerns a brand's willingness to embed conscience into its actions and to shift to a broader focus on creating value. This is the arena of conscientious brands, which suggests that brands, like people, can have moral agency and can choose to act in ways that make a positive contribution to the world (Iglesias and Ind, 2016, 2020; Ind and Hurlings, 2016). Such brands are built on their willingness to think issues through critically from the perspective of all stakeholders and to work together to deliver transformative change (Ind and Iglesias, 2022). Conscientious brands encompass a moral orientation that can integrate concepts such as sustainability, diversity, inclusion and equality as deliberative acts.

The concept of conscientious brands was first introduced in the Journal of Brand Management Special Issue in 2011 edited by Nicholas Ind and Ian Ryder (Ind and Ryder, 2011) as an attempt to go beyond corporate social responsibility (CSR). During the last decades, most corporate brands have tried to address their broader responsibilities beyond profit through CSR programs. However, too many corporate brands have only embraced CSR as a reputation cleansing mechanism (Maxfield, 2008; Pope and Wæraas, 2016) or as a tactical tool to manage potential risks (Walsh and Beatty, 2007). Additionally, CSR is confined into an organizational department and tends to be disconnected from the brand and corporate strategies (Iglesias et al, 2023). These limitations of CSR, together with the emergence of brands such as Patagonia, Tony Chocolonely, Rabobank or Oda in the corporate arena, have led to a renewed interest in the idea of conscientious brands. This is evident in recent

publications on the topic (Markovic et al., 2023) focusing on conscientious corporate brand co-creation (Iglesias et al, 2023; Iglesias and Ind, 2020; Vallaster and Lechner, 2022) and on conscientious B2B brands (Beitelspacher and Getchell, 2023; Keränen et al, 2023; Abratt and Klein, 2023). This renewed interest can also be related to the results of the changes in stakeholder attitudes and behaviour. Stakeholders have growing expectations of brands and in turn brands have become more willing to associate themselves with social-political activist ideology and activities (Schmidt et al, 2021) such as Black Lives Matter, #MeToo, Pride and School Strike for Climates. These changes have also led to a growing research interest, vis-a-vis to that of conscientious brands, in the fields of brand activism (Wannow et al, 2023), brand management and sustainability (Golob et al, 2022), corporate social responsibility and brands (Golob and Podnar, 2019), and brands that do good (Roper et al, 2018), as the four different JBM Special Issues recently published show.

However, further discussions are needed to connect these different streams of research. In parallel more research needs also to be conducted as to whether, and how, embedding conscience in the brand's principles and actions could benefit their organisations and stakeholders, and align sustainability and responsibility strategies.

The aims of this special issue

Due to the increasing interest in the topic and changes in the marketing sphere, it is time to expand the debates and discussions on conscientious brands. We welcome paper submissions that focus on enhancing the existing body of literature on conscientious brands. Contributions can be conceptual and/or empirical (qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods). Possible research topics include, but are not limited to the following:

First, some recent studies have started to conceptualize the key characteristics of conscientious brands (Iglesias and Ind, 2020; Iglesias et al, 2023; Abratt and Kleyn, 2023). However, more research is needed capable of more profoundly conceptualizing the construct of conscientious brands. In this same line, it is important to further understand its antecedents and outcomes. Some suggested research questions are:

- What are the key characteristics of conscientious brands?
- What are the drivers of conscientious brands?
- What are the expected outcomes for brands embracing conscientiousness?

Second, Ind and Iglesias (2022) have suggested that conscientious brands should define a conscience rooted in a corporate brand purpose and a set of guiding principles, and that this should emerge from a co-creative process with manifold stakeholders. In this regard, future studies should examine (Markovic et al., 2023):

- What participatory mechanisms need to be promoted to build a conscientious brand?
- What is the role of co-creation in building conscientious brands?

Third, conscientious brands cannot come alive without a committed network (Rindell et al, 2011) of strategically aligned business partners (Mingione and Leoni, 2020). A few related relevant research questions are:

- What is the role of business partners in building conscientious brands?
- How should conscientious brands promote the strategic alignment of their business partners around their organizational conscience?
- How can conscientious brands monitor, but also empower its business-to-business network?

Fourth, there is extremely scarce research on how to communicate conscientious brands (Ind and Iglesias, 2022). However, it remains key to better understand how to communicate a conscientious value proposition and how to inspire and nudge consumers to adopt more responsible and sustainable behaviours. Overall, future studies should focus on understanding:

- What are the best potential ways of effectively communicating conscientious brands?
- What is the role of transparency in communicating conscientious brands?
- How can conscientious brands best influence their consumers to adopt more responsible and sustainable behaviours?

Fifth, recent research suggests that conscientious brands are co-created from inside out (Biedenbach and Biedenbach, 2022). However, little is still known regarding what the best way to activate the organizational conscience is. This leads to the following research questions:

- What type of corporate culture can best promote conscientious brands?
- What are the key traits that should define conscientious leaders?
- What are the leadership development tools that can help a conscientious brand to internally grow a relevant number of conscientious leaders?

Sixth, conscientious brands will also need to decide how to confront the potential ethical dilemmas related to the new emerging technologies (Brand and Blok, 2019). Artificial Intelligence, machine learning, or geolocalization raise relevant concerns from the consumers and other stakeholders' perspectives. On the other side, new technologies can also foster new and more sustainable innovations. Some potential research questions are:

- How should conscientious brands engage with the new emerging technologies?
- What are the internal mechanisms that need to be promoted in order to ensure an ethical use of the new emerging technologies?
- What are the opportunities offered by new technologies to promote more conscientious, responsible and sustainable brands?

Submission of manuscripts

Manuscripts submitted for consideration in this Journal of Brand Management (JBM) Special Issue must conform to the latest author guidelines for JBM as outlined on the journal's website at the time of submission (<https://www.palgrave.com/gp/journal/41262>). Manuscripts should be between 5,000 and 8,000 words in length, inclusive of words in tables but excluding references.

Manuscripts must be submitted via the online submission system of JBM while ensuring to select the option *Special Issue: Conscientious Brands* during submission (<https://www.editorialmanager.com/jbma/>).

The submission and review process will be managed by the Journal Guest Editors.

The SI **submission** option will **open** in the online submission system on **30/06/2024**.

The **closing date** for submissions is **30/09/2024**.

Contacts and further questions

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For all technical submission queries (e.g., problems with the online submission system) please contact Prasanth Dhandapani at the publisher's Journal Editorial Office by email: prasanth.dhandapani@springernature.com

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