



# The real purpose of purpose-driven branding: consumer empowerment and social transformations

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## Abstract

Despite the concept of *purpose* gaining attention in the business world, academic research on purpose-driven branding is scarce and the cognitive–affective–conative categories used in previous studies are not sufficient to explain how it works. This paper outlines a framework that explains how purpose branding is performed in practice. Such a framework is lacking from the extant scholarship, the key reasons for which can be found in the research limitations in previous studies. We argue that studies on brand purpose should include new theoretical categories: consumer empowerment and transformation of practices. We advance this idea based on the theory of social practices. Using case studies of purpose-branding campaigns, we discuss how brand purpose empowers consumers and fosters transformations of their practices. We present a framework that explains how purpose branding works using the categories suggested.

**Keywords** Purpose-driven branding · Empowerment · Transformation of practices · Theory of social practices

## Introduction

Practitioners' and scholars' interest in brand purpose has increased sharply in the last decade (Ignatius 2019; O'Brien et al. 2019; Swaminathan et al. 2020). "Purpose" has been indicated as the key concept to consider if aiming for success in the twenty-first century by both the *Harvard Business Review* (Ignatius 2019) and *Fast Company* (Clendaniel 2013). In addition, leading consulting agencies have published reports highlighting the meaning of purpose from the perspectives of consumers and businesses. In their report on purpose-driven strategies, E&Y (2016) metaphorically compared purpose to a licence to operate in the twenty-first century. In a global study conducted by Accenture (2018), it was found that 62% of customers would like companies to build their purpose around current and relevant issues such as sustainability, transparency, and fair employment. According to a poll reported by Edelman (2018), 53% of people put more trust in brands than in governments to

address and solve social issues. However, purpose in business does not consist only of customers' expectations. It is also reflected in improved business performance: 56% of companies with a brand purpose outperform their competitors' revenue growth, compared with 46% of those without a purpose (Ipsos 2015). A recent study conducted by Deloitte confirmed that purpose-driven companies experience higher market share gains and grow three times faster than their competitors (O'Brien et al. 2019).

Despite significant practitioners interest in brand purpose, scholarly research on it has lagged behind, resulting in a limited understanding of the concept (Alegre et al. 2017; Khalifa 2012; Neff 2019). Although previous branding literature has focused on brand mission (Alegre et al. 2017; Campbell and Yeung 1991; Khalifa 2012; Urde 2003), core values (Yoganathan et al. 2018; Urde 2016), and brand meaning (Batra 2019; Fournier and Alvarez 2019; Holt 2004), these concepts relate largely to categories of identity and communication issues and their outcomes, whereas the mechanisms of changing patterns of consumer behaviour resulting from such communication remain unexplored. Moreover, the traditional cognitive–affective–conative model of sequencing brand attitudes based on three dimensions (brand knowledge, feelings towards the brand, and behavioural intentions evoked by the brand) (Dapena-Barón et al. 2020; Oliver

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1997; Silva and Alwi 2006) leaves unanswered the question about relations between meanings and actions in real, particular practices. As noted by Naidoo and Abratt (2018), brands may act as catalysts to a change in behaviour, so scholars should focus on the transformation of practices in this regard (Holt 2012).

To date, few studies have systematically explored the exact nature of brand purpose, resulting in its precise conceptualization being unclear (Swaminathan et al. 2020). Also, recent studies on brand purpose have presented the firm's perspective, according to which brands are assets (Sinclair and Keller 2014) and research problems relate to the various functions, roles, and benefits of brand purpose for firms. Such studies leave unexplored the social perspective, according to which brand purpose can be presented in societal and cultural contexts as affecting consumers' practices through social forces, structures, and institutions (Swaminathan et al. 2020). Golob et al. (2020) argued that brand management should go beyond solutions and suggestions for brand managers by paying attention to its wider social influence. Swaminathan et al. (2020) noted that brands are trying to expand their social role via purpose-driven branding that could impact consumers and result in social change; however, there is a research gap in this field concerning how such change could be achieved (Swaminathan et al. 2020).

We argue that the ability of the brand to transform the status quo assumptions of consumer practices is a core quality of brand purpose. We advance this idea based on the theory of social practices (TSP) and its three main categories (principles, skilful actions, and resources) that offer novel insights into behaviour change (Reckwitz 2002; Shove and Pantzar 2005; Shove and Walker 2010; Spotswood et al. 2015; Vargo and Lusch 2016; Warde 2005, 2014), as the transformative assumption hidden in brand purpose leads us to the concepts that explain how such transformation can be achieved. This perspective (transformative quality) has not been considered in previous research on brand purpose. Alegre et al.'s (2017) systematic literature review on mission statements showed that scholars, despite using the terms *mission* and *purpose* almost interchangeably, have not linked these concepts with the transformation of consumer practices. We also argue that the category of consumer empowerment is a relevant output to investigate in studies on brand purpose (Cyril et al. 2016).

This paper is organized as follows. Section 2 describes the main concepts used in research, highlighting the differences between brand purpose and related concepts; in this section, we also conceptualize brand purpose by integrating brand meaning with TSP and consumer empowerment. Section 3 outlines the method used in this study, while Sect. 4 presents the main findings. Section 5 contains a discussion and a framework that proposes new categories for inclusion in studies on purpose-driven branding. Section 6 presents the conclusions.

## Literature review

### Brand purpose: firm perspective vs society perspective

We begin by reviewing extant concepts related to the notion of purpose-driven branding: brand mission, which is the most prominent and widely used concept in brand management literature and practice (Alegre et al. 2017; Campbell and Yeung 1991; Khalifa 2012; Urde 2003); brand meaning, which has gained interest with the rise of a socio-cultural context in brand research (Arnould and Thompson 2005; Batra 2019; Holt 2004; MacInnis et al. 2019; O'Guinn et al. 2018; Swaminathan et al. 2020); and core values (Urde 2009, 2016; Yoganathan et al. 2018), which complement brand mission and form a brand ideology model (Collins and Porras 1998). We review these concepts by distinguishing between two main research perspectives: a firm perspective and a society perspective.

In the firm perspective, a brand mission is defined as the brand's fundamental reason for existence (Campbell and Yeung 1991). Scholars have emphasized the role of mission in internal brand building (Urde 2003) and in defining how a business will generate economic value (Quinn and Thakor 2018). Unlike a mission statement, purpose has been perceived by authors as going beyond economic profits and organizational borders. Mission is mainly internally focused, serving employees and organizations as a definition of a company's domains and competencies, whereas a brand purpose is externally focused (Garbe and Stengel 2013). Other scholars have stated that mission can be both internally and externally oriented (Alegre et al. 2017). According to Campbell (1992), purpose relates to defining who would benefit from the company being in business. Accenture (2018) defined purpose as the underlying essence that makes a brand relevant and necessary. Kantar Consulting's (2019) definition of purpose highlighted the positive impact on people's lives and the world in general. Purpose-driven branding refers to making the purpose a part of brand identity or even the whole business model (Osterwalder and Pigneur 2010), which is a longer-term and strategic decision. In purpose-driven branding, the central issue are beliefs about what the world should look like (Quinn and Thakor 2018). The brand purpose can, therefore, be rooted in perceiving the social or market reality as something that can be transformed.

The society perspective in branding research focuses mainly on brands as carriers of meaning shaped by institutions and collectives (Batra 2019; MacInnis et al. 2019; O'Guinn et al. 2018; Swaminathan et al. 2020). The main research problems concern the relationships between cultural meanings, the marketplace, and consumer actions



(Arnould and Thompson 2005). Scholars in this stream address issues of iconic brands (Holt 2004) and how they contribute to culturally bound consumption practices (Epp et al. 2014; Swaminathan et al. 2020). MacInnis et al. (2019) noted that culturally relevant normative influencers (without stating if these are people or brands) impact consumer behaviour and various consumption practices (gift giving, food consumption, leisure activities).

Yoganathan et al. (2018) related “brands that do good” with core values, defining them as a set of deeply rooted principles that define the characteristics of brands and should be reflected in the actions of an organization’s employees. Urde (2003, 2009, 2016) suggested three viewpoints on brand core values: organization (the organization’s common values and ideas that build an organizational culture), brand (meaning of a brand, stakeholders’ perceptions), and customers (customers’ perception of values). However, previous research on brand values has not included categories that explain how brand values can transform social practices or impact consumer behaviour in social perspective.

Despite significant insights, the research on brand meaning and core values has interpreted branding as a communication problem and has focused on the analysis of cognitive or affective categories (Fournier and Alvarez 2019). Consequently, neither the brand meaning category within the society perspective nor the core values category has addressed conative categories based on transformations of consumers’ social practices. These practices involve three elements: meanings, skilled actions, and usage of resources (Spotswood et al. 2015). Moreover, the traditional cognitive–affective–conative model of brand attitudes (Oliver 1997; Silva and Alwi 2006)—or “heart, head and hand” as Dapena-Barón et al. (2020) put it—has left unanswered the questions on relations between meanings and actions in real, particular practices. The conative construct in the above-mentioned model is defined as “an intention or commitment to behave toward a goal in a particular manner” (Oliver 1997, p. 393); thus, it excludes actions and practices, but includes individual behavioural intention.

Previous research on the socio-cultural aspects of branding leaves unanswered the question about the mechanism of the practice’s transformation. In relation to purpose-driven branding, Swaminathan et al. (2020, p. 16) pointed out that brands can act as “vehicles for bringing about social change”; at the same time, however, the authors indicated a research gap in this field.

We augment the above-mentioned perspective by offering two potential insights. The first is that brand meanings may not be sufficient to transform consumer practices. We advance this idea through TSP. A second suggestion is that the transformation of practices requires the empowerment of users. We develop both insights in the following sections.

## How purpose-driven branding may challenge status quo practices and foster their transformation

Branding scholars have noted that change in behaviours should be studied in the context of social campaigns, but they have also acknowledged that behaviour change is difficult to measure given the variety of factors affecting the individual (Bayerlein 2005; Naidoo and Abratt 2018). In contrast to individualistic approaches to behaviour change, TSP does not focus on individuals but rather on the social and collective practices, assuming that these entities shape individuals’ perceptions, interpretations, and actions within the world (Hargreaves 2011). TSP (Reckwitz 2002; Shove and Pantzar 2005; Shove and Walker 2010; Spotswood et al. 2015; Warde 2005, 2014) conceptualizes social practice as a configuration of (1) principles (what is “right” or “wrong” in a particular practice), (2) actions (embodying the principles of practices, but also requiring the acquisition of skills), and (3) resources used in a specific way for a given practice.

By integrating TSP and branding, we understand that the resources are the products or services, packaging (materials), distribution (infrastructure), or other solutions offered by a brand within its strategy; actions are how users use them; and the principles are the norms, meanings, and rules that users follow when acting in the practice. Consequently, if companies want to transform consumer practices, they should provide resources (tools, materials, infrastructure, knowledge) so that users can implement new practices (Camilleri and Neuhofer 2017).

Assuming the transformative quality of purpose-driven branding, a deeper understanding of how such transformations happen is required. Researchers using TSP conceptualizations (Schwanen et al. 2012; Shove and Pantzar 2005; Shove and Walker 2010; Spotswood et al. 2015) have questioned the effectiveness of educational interventions (e.g. social campaigns) in changing consumer decisions and actions. Researchers of social change have argued that there is considerable doubt about the effectiveness of measures which assume that people lack information or motivation and that once either of them is supplied the individual will be more inclined to change their practices (Arnott et al. 2014; Bonsall 2009; Seethaler and Rose 2009). TSP interprets specific consumer decisions (e.g. acts of consumption or use) as “moments” or the implementation of specific collective, routine practices—configurations of principles, actions, and resources. Consumers implement, reject, or modify new practices after a period of improvisation with the new tools of these practices provided by innovators (companies, organizations or brands trying to transform old practices into new ones). The use of new resources may precede or determine new principles (Shove and Walker 2010).

Principles in TSP in the branding context may be referred to as the “rules of the game,” brand meanings (Holt 2004;



MacInnis et al. 2019; O'Guinn et al. 2018; Swaminathan et al. 2020), cultural codes (Schroeder 2009), or conventions that drive particular practices.

Vargo and Lusch (2016) regarded the principles of practices as institutions. They suggested that value co-creation is coordinated through interactively generated institutions (principles in the view of TSP; meanings in the view of brand management studies). The suggestion reflects the interest in using the categories of institutions (meanings) and their challenges (purposes) in the context of market and social settings (Chandler and Vargo 2011; Vargo and Lusch 2011, 2016; Vargo et al. 2017). Vargo and Lusch (2011, 2016) and Chandler and Vargo (2011) argued that institutions are routinized mechanisms that coordinate networked actions that can be created by interactions and shared among the actors. This opens up the research avenue of how brand purposes challenge the status quo institutions embedded in particular social practices, how they perform the transformation of the practices, and what the outputs of the strategy are.

To explain the mechanism of social transformations, Sinek (2010) highlighted the category of transformative leaders who challenge the rules of status quo practices. We argue that this category can be extended to branding research. Although scholars have investigated the concept of a challenger brand (de Chernatony and Cottam, 2009; Morgan 2009), previous studies on this concept have not included the category of social transformation. Chiang et al. (2020) have shown that transformational leadership can be investigated in the branding context, and they found that this leadership style impacts brand-related attitudes and the behaviours not only of employees but also of customers.

We argue that *brand purpose* is the challenge to status quo meanings (institutions). By challenging existing principles, brands can lead to the reconfiguration of core elements of practices, which results in their transformation. It is worth noting that brands can also act in an opposite way by maintaining existing institutions, as suggested by Holt (2012) whose example of bottled water producers highlights how such brands can take part in market reproduction (lock-in) of unsustainable consumption.

### How purpose-driven branding may empower users

We argue that research on purpose-driven branding should include the category of user empowerment, as it provides users with the power and the ability to transform their practices. In the previous literature, the category of user empowerment is underdeveloped, and it requires refinement for it to be useful in studies on purpose branding and on the transformation of consumer practices.

The concept of empowerment has been used across diverse research disciplines, including social science, community development, community psychology, and

economics, resulting in many definitions in these fields, with the psychological field probably being the most advanced (Cyril et al. 2016). Zimmerman and Rappaport (1988) defined psychological empowerment as a process of change involving intrapersonal, interactional, and behavioural components. In the management field, the concept of organizational empowerment has been defined as the equipping of individuals to employ control in achieving organizational effectiveness in service delivery and policy development (Zimmerman 2000). In recent years, however, there has been a shift from research on organizational empowerment (a perspective enabling improvements in task efficiency) to research focusing on customers' benefits (Fuchs and Schreier 2011; Pranić and Roehl 2012). The latter approach has been termed a consumer-directed theory of empowerment (Kosciulek 1999).

Several attempts have been made to conceptualize consumer empowerment. Wathieu et al. (2002) defined consumer empowerment as the enabling of consumers to control issues that are usually controlled by marketers. In a similar vein, Wright et al. (2006) focused on consumers' efforts to regain control of their consumption processes from suppliers. Hunter and Garnefeld (2008) introduced the term "a marketer's empowerment strategy," indicating that this strategy is successful when a consumer experiences empowerment—the positive state resulting from increasing control. Some scholars have investigated user empowerment in digital settings. Füller et al. (2009) suggested that the level of experienced empowerment depends on the design of the applied virtual interaction tool, the related enjoyment of the virtual interaction, the participants' task, and product involvement. Ramaswamy and Ozcan (2016) suggested that digitally empowered consumers have upset the conventional model of brand management, changing it from a one-way process (with feedback) to a (more complex) multi-sided, multi-stakeholder joint creation process. This means a focus not on managing the brand per se, but on managing the quality of co-creation infrastructures that facilitate (or constrain) the joint agential and experiential creation of brand value. Akhavannasab et al. (2018) proposed two manifestations of consumer power perception: a personal power, which is the perceived ability to resist or ignore a firm's persuasive efforts and to make final decisions independently; and a social power, which is the perception of influencing a firm's decisions and responses.

We find one limitation in previous studies on user empowerment: they focus on regaining control over shopping activities and on experienced (perceived) empowerment. Moreover, previous studies have not related empowerment to the transformation of social practices, which we think should be studied when considering the results of a purpose-driven strategy. Our understanding of user empowerment is based on explaining the mechanism of the transformation of



practice. We consider that TSP explains how such empowerment could be achieved: by providing the required infrastructure or tools, or by educating users in how to transform their practices.

By integrating concepts from TSP and the user empowerment category, we define *brand purpose* as the brand aim and activities directed towards challenging status quo principles and aimed at both user empowerment and the transformation of social practices. We argue that companies performing purpose-driven strategies can inspire both transformations of consumers' practices and consumers' empowerment.

Therefore, the research questions (RQs) in this study are:

**RQ1:** How do companies use “purpose” to build their brand strategies, and what are the results of such actions?

**RQ2:** Which theoretical categories are used to report the outcomes of purpose-driven brand strategies?

**RQ3:** Do brands using purpose-driven strategies report user empowerment as a result, and do they achieve transformation of practices?

**RQ4:** Which elements of TSP are used and highlighted in purpose-driven strategies?

This research gap led us to adopt the exploratory approach described in the next section.

## Method

### Research design

To accomplish the research goal, we used a multiple case research. This approach enables a “replication” logic (Yin 2003), where each case study allows the researcher to confirm or refute the observations made in previous cases. We chose the case research method to explore how companies use “purpose” to build their brand strategies, which theoretical categories are used to report the outcomes of purpose-driven brand strategies, and whether in the strategies or reported outcomes elements of TSP or user empowerment can be found.

### Case selection

As stated by Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007), theoretical sampling is recommended in exploratory research. Therefore, we aimed to identify a sample that would be useful in revealing insights into the terms of the researched concepts and categories (Strauss and Corbin 1998). Our cases were selected intentionally by searching for brands that have used a purpose-driven approach. We selected three cases (see Table 1).

## Data sources and collection

Having identified the cases, we first visited each brand's website to search for its mission statement or other statements, such as vision, goal, philosophy, or a statement of purpose. We also gathered available online promotional materials relating to each of the analysed strategies, such as ads, videos, and social media posts. With regard to our research goals, we were particularly interested whether we could identify any TSP elements (principles, tools, skilful actions) in strategy execution.

We then searched for how each of the strategies had been reported in industry media or by the companies themselves and whether in these reports we could identify categories such as user empowerment and transformation of practices. In our study, neither a particular brand nor its strategy was the focus; rather, we were investigating how the purpose-driven strategy was promotionally executed and how it was reported in various secondary sources. We “bounded” each case in this way, following Bartlett and Vavrus's (2017) suggestion that, in case studies, research boundaries are not found or prescribed but are made by researchers. This approach allowed us not to flatten the cases by ignoring valuable contextual information (Bartlett and Vavrus 2017), such as how various secondary sources produced a sense of purpose-driven strategies with regard to the central phenomenon under study (i.e., the transformation of practices and user empowerment).

## Data analysis

We conducted a contextual analysis, meaning that to interpret the examples we followed the “value-in-context” approach suggested by Vargo and Lusch (2016) and Grönroos et al. (2015) in both our analyses and our framework. Contextual analysis is based on the idea that “value creation can only be fully understood in terms of integrated resources applied for another actor's benefit within a context” (Vargo and Lusch 2016, p. 18). Grönroos et al. (2015) argued that value depends on the context in which the usage takes place,

**Table 1** Cases selected for the research

Case nos.	Brand	Product category	Geographical and temporal coverage of analysed strategy
C1	Huggies	Diapers	Canada, 2015
C2	Ariel	Laundry detergent	India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka, 2015–2016
C3	Bodyform	Sanitary pads	UK, 2017



so the value should be studied together with the context (Grönroos et al. 2015, pp. 77–78). In our analysis of the examples, we focused on how purpose-driven strategy was reported in the context of transforming the old practice (old values, skills, and resources) into a new practice (new values, skills, and resources).

In the next section, we present a “thick description” of each brand’s purpose-driven strategy. As a result, we are able to formulate our findings and analytical generalizations (Yin 2003), and, based on these, to create the final framework.

## Three brands and their purpose-driven strategies

### Huggies “No Baby Unhugged,” Canada, since 2015

Branding in the diapers category has traditionally focused on functional benefits. The communication convention for the category has been established by its leader, Pampers, who performed product demos but also developed hospital endorsements. This made Pampers the default brand choice for most new mothers (Strategy Online 2017), and the first purchase was often made even before the child was born (Warc 2018a). Products offered under the Pampers brand together account for 99.4% of the promotional investment in the diapers category (Robertson 2017).

The Huggies brand, whose identity has been built less around functional claims and more around the emotional benefits of hugs, decided to go further and turn the comforting gesture into a bigger purpose. The main insight was discovered through consultation with paediatricians, who admitted that hugs are much more than a gesture: they regulate body temperature, strengthen the immune system, promote weight gain (Strategy Online 2017), and impact breathing patterns (Warc 2018a). This insight was turned into a campaign, “No Baby Unhugged,” which had two marketing goals: to build brand perception that Huggies is better for new-borns than other brands, and to double the number of new mothers signing up to the Huggies database (Cassies 2017). The campaign was based on educating new mothers on the power of hugs as well as on enabling each baby to experience and benefit from this power, even if their mothers were still recovering or had to leave their infants for a longer hospitalization (Strategy Online 2017). The strategy execution was based on (1) online videos explaining the medical benefits of hugs; (2) launching a programme in cooperating hospitals, where carefully selected volunteers provided new-borns with hugs if their mothers could not be there; and (3) creating and promoting the “Hug Plan” for new-borns. All these actions were summed up on the brand’s landing page, which also had educational features.

The outcomes of the strategy included an increase in market share by two points, and an increase in Huggies New Born Diapers sales by 16% at the expense of Pampers (the goal was 10%), which helped the company to reverse a four-year decline in the business (Effie 2017). In its first year of strategy execution, overall sales of Huggies, on a dollar basis, rose 19.2%, which was a significant improvement on the same period from one year before, particularly given that the category as a whole grows about 1% per year due to flat birth rates (Robertson 2017). The campaign generated more than two million likes, comments, shares, and retweets on social media, with an engagement rate of 60% (Strategy Online 2017). The company tripled the number of mothers listed in its customer database (Robertson 2017). In terms of brand associations, Huggies achieved a 10-point increase in the dimension of “better for newborns than any other brands” (Cassies 2017). The strategy also gained industry recognition, receiving several prestigious awards in advertising contests, including the WARC 2017 Awards: Silver and Analytics Special Award, Best Use of Brand Purpose, Effie 2017 Silver Award, and the Silver in Building Brand Equity category (Cassies 2017).

Our interpretation is that the providers of Huggies are transformative leaders (Chiang et al. 2020; Sinek 2010) who transformed (Shove and Pantzar 2005; Spotswood et al. 2015) the status quo of new-born care practice by suggesting the Hug Plan and its new principle of the practice that “hugs are important for health” and by offering both the new knowledge (education) and the tools (Hug Plan, volunteer hugging programmes in hospitals) for the new practice. In this way, the company empowered customers for their future lives (dealing with new-born’s in the future). However, we have found that none of the sources cited above that interpret this strategy adopt either the TSP categories (principles, actions, resources) or user empowerment to analyse the case of Huggies.

### Ariel “share the load” 2015–2016, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka

Ariel Matic’s campaign #ShareTheLoad focused on the uneven distribution of domestic labour and was based on the insight that the vast majority of home duties were undertaken by women (Social Samosa 2017). This situation was a result of a traditional upbringing with strictly defined female roles, which were even more restrictive in cultures where a woman’s credentials as a good wife were based on her domestic skills (Social Samosa 2017). Laundry was no exception to this rule.

The campaign was executed through two videos, which were based on an insight that even if women succeeded professionally, at home they were still second-class citizens



(Spikes Asia 2019). In one video, focusing on the uneven distribution of domestic labour, features two older mothers discussing the evolving role of women in modern society. One of the mothers is sharing the information that her daughter-in-law earns more than her son. The daughter-in-law is shown in the movie, working in the background, just when her husband is asking her about not washing his shirt. The final scene of the video asks the question: “Is laundry only a woman’s job?” The second movie presents a man’s vision of gender equality. It shows a typical day in a woman’s life: the day is filled with domestic duties and multitasking to manage those duties, while her husband is spending time on the sofa in front of the TV. In a voice-over, the father in the film admits how proud he is of his grown-up daughter and sorry at the same time for not preparing her for a more equal future. He apologizes on behalf of himself and the father of her husband for preparing this scenario for her (Social Samosa 2017). The campaign was continued on social media with the #IsLaundryOnlyAWomansJob hashtag and infographics presenting survey results on domestic labour distribution and peoples’ opinions about this issue.

The outcomes of the strategy included an increase in purchase intent, which resulted in a growth in sales value and sales volume by 106% and 105% respectively (Warc 2016); a 28% uplift in ad recall for Ariel among people who saw the “Share the Load” copies on a social media platform; and over 1.6 billion free earned impressions gained as a result of the campaign. In addition, Ariel witnessed consumer engagement increase nearly threefold, and 98% of consumers interviewed stated they would recommend Ariel to their friends (Venkateswaran 2016). Ariel Matic generated a 42% increase in unaided brand awareness, as well as \$12.3 m in earned media coverage and conversations on social media (Warc 2018b). The campaign received several industry awards and recognition, including a Glass Lion in 2015 for its content marketing, and it won every M&M Global Awards category it was entered for: Best Use of Content, B2C Campaign of the Year, Best Multiplatform Campaign, and the International Effectiveness Award (M&M Global 2017). The campaign has also influenced society: in 2014, 79% of Indian men perceived household chores as a woman’s/daughter’s job and “outdoors” work as a man’s/son’s job, whereas in 2016 this number had dropped to 63% of men. Also, over 1.57 million Indian men pledged to do the laundry (Ariel 2019).

Our interpretation is that the providers of the Ariel Matic #ShareTheLoad campaign (transformative leaders: Chiang et al. 2020; Sinek 2010) challenged the status quo principle (Spotswood et al. 2015) that “laundry is only a woman’s job” by suggesting the new principle that “laundry is also a man’s job.” In this way, the providers wanted to transform the status quo practice by empowering beneficiaries (by revealing the limitations of the status quo principle) for their future

lives (dealing with the laundry in the future). However, the whole strategy was based on changing a cultural meaning (MacInnis et al. 2019), or, from the perspective of TSP, on changing a principle (Shove and Pantzar 2005; Spotswood et al. 2015), not on providing the users with new tools or new knowledge. As stated by Akaka et al. (2013), resources (tools and skills) might enable, but at the same time they might also limit the implementation of practice. In this context, it is worth noting the case of the Philips brand, which launched an iron “for amateurs” several years ago. In one of the films promoting the product, Philips’ designer admitted that he wanted to help his wife with domestic duties when their children were born. He thought ironing was easy—“you just turn it on and you start ironing... but that’s not the case”—but found out that “you need to tune to a different temperature with different types of fabric” (Philips, n.d.). He concluded that the new iron was good for amateurs, allowing them to “iron without thinking” (Philips, n.d.). In this way, the product itself was a tool intended to empower amateurs, downgrading the level of skills required to transform the practice. “Amateurs” do not practice ironing if the required skill is too high. One might say that ironing requires similar skills to doing the laundry: in both cases, some parameters of the machine need to be adjusted to the type of fabric, while with the laundry there are also issues of washing similar colours separately, and adding appropriate types and quantities of powder, softener, and whitener. Thus, if amateurs consider ironing not to be easy, probably doing laundry requires a little bit more thinking and cautiousness. As yet, the Ariel brand has only reported a change in the number of men admitting they would start participating in laundry tasks (Ariel 2019), so the results in relation to actual social change remain unknown. In the analysed strategy, however, we see no transformation of the tools involved in order to change the practice; likewise, we see no transformation of skills in the discourse of the above-mentioned sources. If companies want to transform consumer practices, they should consider providing resources (tools, materials, infrastructure, knowledge) so that users can implement new practices (Camilleri and Neuhofer 2017).

### **Bodyform “#BloodNormal,” UK, 2017**

The marketing communication in the sanitary pads category has for decades followed the pattern of functional claims, product demos, and a blue liquid representing menstrual blood. Although blood was often presented on the silver screen, menstrual blood was culturally forbidden (Marketing Society 2018). This was rooted in cultural norms and taboos around periods, which made girls and women ashamed of even mentioning “these days” in public. The market leader, Always, adopted a more cultural approach in their brand strategy, turning from product demos to girls’ self-esteem,



which has brought new energy to the whole category. In 2016, Bodyform was third in the UK market and could not afford to compete on price and promotions or to outspend Always, so a different approach was required for a challenger in a commoditized category (Marketing Society 2018). Also, as the “women’s confidence” concept was communicated not only by Always but also by many other brands from various categories, it started to become commoditized itself.

Bodyform has found purpose in breaking down the cultural taboos around periods by portraying them more realistically in advertising. The campaign was based on the brand’s belief that a lack of realistic representation of periods in mainstream culture hinders girls’ self-esteem. The belief was confirmed by research showing that 61% of women believed the presentation of periods in feminine hygiene advertising was unrealistic, while one in five women polled said that the silence around periods decreased their confidence (Roderick 2017). As a result, Bodyform launched the #bloodnormal campaign with realistic references to periods that aimed to show periods as a normal part of everyday life and one that should be a part of normal discussion (Adobo Magazine 2018).

The marketing director responsible for the Bodyform brand admitted that, since the campaign launch, the brand was not only outperforming the market, which was flat overall, but that it had also become the fastest growing brand in the category. The company saw all the brand measures increase, including brand relevance (Roderick 2017). Nearly two-thirds of women had a more positive opinion of the brand due to the campaign and a third stated that they would purchase the brand as a result (Marketing Week 2018). The campaign became number one in social share of voice versus competitors—with an increase from 37 to 90%—and it gained a PR-earned impression of over 5.5 billion (Marketing Society 2018). The campaign for Bodyform won the Grand Prix in the Effective Use of Brand Purpose category

at the 2018 WARC Awards, and the Evaluation Award for a brand purpose strategy that had gone the extra mile in measuring both commercial and societal impact (Adobo Magazine 2018). It also won the Grand Prix award for Beauty and Fashion in the Drum Advertising Awards (The Drum 2018) and awards for content, brand purpose, and consumer goods at Marketing Week’s Masters Awards (Marketing Week 2018).

Our interpretation is that the providers of Bodyform (transformative leaders: Chiang et al. 2020; Sinek 2010) challenged the status quo principle (Spotswood et al. 2015) of “the silence around periods” in conversational practice by suggesting the new principle of the “realistic representation of periods,” and that it offered new knowledge for the new practice. In this way, the company tried to empower users for their future lives (dealing with open discussion of periods in the future). However, in none of the sources cited above that describe and interpret this strategy have we found TSP categories (actions, resources, principles) or user empowerment used to analyse the case of Bodyform.

Table 2 presents a summary of the analysed cases.

The case studies show that the decisions to perform purpose-driven brand strategy in the analysed categories were all critical decisions that had an impact on brand results. Referring to RQ1 and RQ2, we can state that, in the cases of all the brands, secondary sources reported the outcomes of purpose-driven strategy based on traditional, cognitive brand categories, such as an increase in brand awareness or improvements in brand image. For two brands (Huggies and Ariel), an increase in affective categories (brand engagement) was also reported. For the third brand (Bodyform), an increase in brand relevance was reported. Only one secondary source in relation to the analysed brands (Ariel) reported a “social shift” (Balbaaki 2012), which we interpret as a category relating to conative effects (behavioural intent). Based

**Table 2** Summary of the three brands’ purpose-led strategies and their reported outcomes

Case no	Brand (strategy)	The purpose	Brand-related effects
C1	Huggies (no baby unhugged)	To raise awareness that hugs are not just emotional comforting gestures but also help babies thrive	Improvement in brand associations Increase in customer engagement High scores of ad recall Free earned impressions and publicity
C2	Ariel (#ShareTheLoad)	To challenge gender inequality resulting in uneven distribution of domestic labour	Increase in unaided brand awareness Increase in customer engagement Increase in purchase intent Increase in willingness to recommend the brand Social shift
C3	Bodyform (#BloodNormal)	To increase girls’ self-esteem by breaking down taboos and shame around periods	Increase in brand relevance Improvement in brand image Increase in purchase intent Free earned impressions and publicity





on these examples, we suggest that a purpose-driven strategy may result in cognitive, affective, and conative effects.

Table 3 presents the summary of reported effects from the point of view of the cognitive–affective–conative model.

Brands with purpose need to act as transformative leaders and transform consumer practices by establishing new values and providing new resources to perform those practices. They do not just educate consumers to transform them (Shove and Walker 2010; Spotswood et al. 2015; Warde 2014). Therefore, we searched in the analysed sources for categories explaining the purpose-driven brand strategies and their outputs using categories relating to transformation of practices. Table 4 presents the summary of these findings.

With regard to RQ3, we found that none of the sources reporting these strategies employed user empowerment as a category of analysis. In relation to RQ4 and our contextual analysis that required studying how purpose-driven strategy is reported in the context of transforming the old practice (old values, skills, and resources) into a new practice (new values, skills, and resources), we found that the analysed strategies were reported using traditional cognitive–affective–conative categories (brand awareness, brand image, ad recall, engagement, etc.) rather than categories based on transformation of practices.

## Discussion

As mentioned in the literature review, scholars have used the terms *brand mission* and *brand purpose* almost interchangeably, focusing mainly on their goals, scope, and target audiences (Alegre et al. 2017; Campbell and Yeung 1991; Garbe and Stengel 2013; Khalifa 2012; Quinn and Thakor 2018; Urde 2003). Two main research streams have emerged in this field: firm-related and society-related. Prior studies have noted the importance of exploring a society perspective in research on purpose-driven branding, pointing out that such a strategy could expand brands' social role and impact on consumers, resulting in social change (Swaminathan et al. 2020). Although researchers and practitioners of the society perspective have highlighted that brand purpose refers to an impact of the brand on people's lives (Accenture 2018; Campbell 1992; Kantar Consulting 2019; Quinn and Thakor 2018), previous studies have not included categories relating to transformation of practices or user empowerment to explain the purpose-driven branding mechanisms and outcomes.

Our work has focused on the conceptualization of purpose-driven branding by implementing TSP (Reckwitz 2002; Shove and Pantzar 2005; Spotswood et al. 2015; Warde 2005, 2014), a theoretical approach that sheds new light on how brand purpose can make a real impact on people's lives

**Table 3** Summary of the three brands' purpose-led strategies and their outcomes from the perspective of a cognitive–affective–conative model

Case nos.	Brand (strategy)	Cognitive effects	Affective effects	Conative effects
C1	Huggies (No baby unhugged)	Improvement in brand associations High scores for ad recall Free earned impressions and publicity	Increase in customer engagement	Not found in analysed sources
C2	Ariel (#ShareTheLoad)	Increase in unaided brand awareness	Increase in customer engagement	Increase in purchase intent Increase in willingness to recommend the brand Social shift
C3	Bodyform (#BloodNormal)	Improvement in brand image Free earned impressions and publicity	Increase in brand relevance	Increase in purchase intent

**Table 4** Summary of the three brands' purpose-led strategies from the perspective of the TSP

Case no	Brand (strategy)	Elements of new practice		
		New meanings	New resources	New actions
C1	Huggies (No baby unhugged)	Hugs are important for health	Education and tools—Hug Plan, volunteer hugging programmes in hospitals	No evidence found
C2	Ariel (#ShareTheLoad)	Laundry is also a man's job	No evidence found	No evidence found
C3	Bodyform (#BloodNormal)	Periods should be a regular topic of conversations	No evidence found	No evidence found



by transforming their practices. By using three case studies of companies performing purpose-driven branding, we have aimed to acquire a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. We were particularly interested in whether, when such strategies and their outcomes are publicly described and reported, companies used the categories from TSP or user empowerment (Akhavannasab et al. 2018). Our research questions were related to these topics.

Our findings show that neither previous scholarship on brand mission or brand purpose, nor companies reporting the results of this strategy, has used transformation of practices or user empowerment to explain the strategies and their outputs. We argue that these categories should be included in research on brand purpose, as they broaden our understanding of the true essence of the phenomenon, which should be evaluated and measured not only by traditional brand and communication metrics, but also by the ability of a brand to make an impact by empowering consumers to transform their practices (Swaminathan et al. 2020). We think that such approach creates an avenue for further research on how brands form and transform values in purpose-driven strategies.

Our understanding of the concept of brand purpose and how it works is summarized in a framework, shown in Fig. 1, which can be treated as a theoretical proposition. Following Wheeten's (1989) suggestions on theory development, our framework addresses the following questions: Which concepts should be considered as part of the explanation of purpose-driven branding phenomena? How are these concepts related? What are the underlying social dynamics that justify the selection of the concepts and their relationships?

The framework was based on integrating case research findings, categories from TSP, and a suggestion that transformation of practices is a relevant research problem (Warde 2014). Our case research has revealed that transformation of practices is missing in secondary sources reporting the outcomes of purpose-driven strategies, whereas the growing body of literature on TSP suggests that such

transformations are relevant research units. Our framework explains how the purpose-driven branding strategy inspires the transformation of consumer practices, using categories from TSP: principles, resources, and actions (Reckwitz 2002; Shove and Pantzar 2005; Shove and Walker 2010; Spotswood et al. 2015; Warde 2005, 2014). The brand (provider) challenges the principle of status quo practice and suggests a new principle for a new practice. The new principle inspires new consumer actions and usage of new tools. The new principle serves as a benchmark for new valuations of elements of the practice and reveals the previously invisible limitations of the status quo principle and valuations. As a result, consumers become empowered to deal with the problem in question in the future. The purpose-driven branding not only facilitates engagement, but it also enables consumers to perform new practices and to understand the limitations of their previous practices. The core logic behind the model follows the principles suggested by Vargo and Lusch (2016) that practices are formed and transformed in interactions between the provider (brand) and the beneficiary (user).

Our framework goes beyond cognitive–affective–conative categories related to brand values (Yoganathan et al. 2018) or brand meaning (Batra 2019; Fournier and Alvarez 2019; Holt 2004), allowing an evaluation of the broader scope of elements required to transform the practice (Spotswood et al. 2015). By integrating TSP and purpose-driven branding, it is possible to see that traditional cognitive–affective–conative categories (Oliver 1997; Silva and Alwi 2006) may not be enough to result in consumer empowerment and behaviour change. Companies that want to transform consumer practices should provide resources (tools, materials, infrastructure, and knowledge, which in branding means product and/or service) so that users can become fully empowered to implement new practices (Camilleri and Neuhofer 2017).

The framework implements the postulates of previous research on purpose-driven branding to explore how brands could expand their social role, impact consumers,

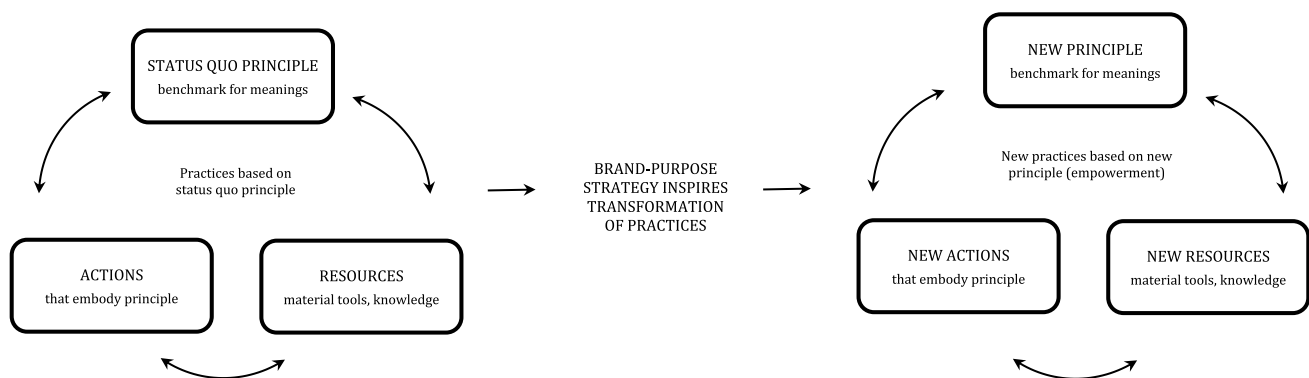


Fig. 1 How brand purpose strategy inspires transformation of practices. Source: Authors



and achieve social change (Golob et al. 2020; Swaminathan et al. 2020). Our study is also in line with the suggestions of Vargo and Lusch (2016) that practices of value formation are relevant research units, as well as the suggestions of TSP scholars (Reckwitz 2002; Shove and Pantzar 2005; Shove and Walker 2010; Spotswood et al. 2015; Warde 2005, 2014) to include transformations of practices in research design and interpretations.

Our main theoretical findings are twofold: (1) integrating brand purpose with concepts from TSP (Reckwitz 2002; Warde 2005, 2014) refines our understanding of how purpose-driven branding works and overcomes the limitations of the traditional cognitive–affective–conative model; and (2) brand purpose conceptualization as the challenging of status quo principles (institutions, meanings) with the aim of both user empowerment and transformation of social practices.

## Conclusions

The main goal of the current study was to outline a framework that explains how purpose-driven branding is performed in practice. The investigation of the purpose-driven branding concept has shown that the society perspective in the branding research stream requires exploring how brands could expand their social roles and impact consumers (Golob et al. 2020; Swaminathan et al. 2020). Based on an extensive literature review and three case studies, we have shown that interpreting and explaining how purpose-driven branding works should go beyond traditional categories, which may be sufficient in the firm-oriented research stream on brand purpose but seem to be insufficient in the society-perspective research stream. In the cognitive–affective–conative model (Oliver 1997; Silva and Alwi 2006), the question about relations between meanings, actions and used resources in real, particular practices remains unexplored. Furthermore, the measures of the conative dimension of this model are perceptual and non-contextual. Our framework suggests that actions should be investigated in contexts of real, particular practices, which include different principles (values): when context changes, so the investigated values should change (Grönroos et al. 2015). The traditional cognitive–affective–conative model of brand attitudes excludes the principles from the research unit, sending them into “the black box.”

## Theoretical implications

The present study makes several noteworthy contributions to the literature on purpose-driven branding. This is the first study to integrate the concept of brand purpose with categories from TSP (Reckwitz 2002; Warde 2005, 2014), and it

is also the first to bring a user empowerment category to the equation of purpose-branding strategies and their outcomes. We therefore suggest the possibilities of previously unexplored new relationships between purpose-driven branding and two concepts: user empowerment and transformation of practices.

Our paper contributes to research on purpose-driven branding in several ways. First, we highlight which new concepts should be considered as part of the explanation of purpose-driven branding phenomena (transformation of practices and user empowerment). Second, we conceptualize brand purpose as the challenging of status quo principles (institutions, meanings) with the aim of both user empowerment and transformation of social practices. Third, our framework suggests how the above-mentioned concepts are related, and, following suggestions of TSP scholars, it highlights how brands could empower users and transform their practices by challenging the status quo principles of these practices, offering new tools and resulting in new skilful actions (Reckwitz 2002; Shove and Pantzar 2005; Shove and Walker 2010; Spotswood et al. 2015; Warde 2005, 2014). This study also answers the call made by Vargo and Lusch (2016) to include principles of practices as research units.

## Practical and social implications

Due to the exploratory nature of this study, we are cautious about its managerial implications, suggesting only that brand managers might consider using purpose-driven strategies because such decisions could inspire transformation of social practices and user empowerment. When considering such strategies, managers could include in their decision-making elements of social practices: principles (meanings, norms), resources, and actions. The following social implication results from the research: not only can a purpose-driven brand strategy bring benefits to companies, but it may also help to create social or cultural transformation (Swaminathan et al. 2020), with the result that a brand management discipline can have a wider social influence (Golob et al. 2020).

## Limitations and future research

Our paper has several limitations that need to be addressed in future research. First, it is based primarily on secondary data. Future research needs to use primary data sources for analysis and interpretation. Second, we have studied purpose-driven branding strategies in the context of fast-moving consumer goods. Future research needs to have a broader scope and study whether our conclusions are generalizable to various contexts, such as industry (durable goods, services, and B2B; Österle et al. 2018), type of consumption (hedonic vs utilitarian; Longoni and Cian 2020),



and consumer motivation (altruistic vs egoistic; Birch et al. 2018). Also, as our study focused on a sample of brands with a strong and explicit brand purpose, future research could challenge the mainstream assumption (Lim et al. 2020) that such a purpose needs to be articulated by considering brands with a more implicit purpose manifestation or even a consumer-perceived but unintended brand purpose. Future studies could also move beyond relations between a brand and consumers to explore the effectiveness of purpose branding from the employer's perspective (Barros-Arrieta and García-Cali 2020). Third, our paper represents an initial inquiry into the relationship between brand purpose, transformation of practices, and user empowerment. As our study was qualitative in nature, future research should pursue quantitative and causal findings, for example through experimental research or neuroscientific techniques (Lim 2018). Fourth, our study has investigated three separate purpose-branding initiatives conducted by product brands. Future studies should also investigate how particular corporate brands perform their purpose initiatives over a longer period, how they manage the portfolio of various purposes, and how (if at all) the initiatives constitute the whole purpose-driven strategy.

Our study is exploratory in nature and requires further investigation via qualitative studies among various stakeholders who represent the provider and beneficiary points of view (e.g. interviews with managers responsible for purpose-driven brand strategies and with consumers who are the target group of such strategies). Future studies could explore the conditions of managers' decisions to include or exclude the particular categories from TSP (principles, resources, and actions) in their purpose-driven branding strategies. Future studies could also investigate which of the above-mentioned categories empower users the most and bring about real transformations of practices. More research is therefore needed to better understand when the implementation of purpose-driven branding strategies results in user empowerment and transformation of practices.

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## Compliance with ethical standards

**Conflict of interest** The authors state that there is no conflict of interest.

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