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## CAUSE-RELATED MARKETING FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT: A CRITICAL ENGAGEMENT

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### ABSTRACT

*Cause-related marketing (CRM) initiatives have become very popular in the past decade or so. They range from Product (RED) co-branded products, a portion of which profits or sales goes directly to the Global Fund to Fight HIV/AIDS, TB and Malaria<sup>i</sup>, to a bottle of Carlsberg's Kildevæld water that gives 3 liters of clean water to Africa<sup>ii</sup>. In these CRM initiatives, the purchase of a product triggers a business donation (typically to a nonprofit organization) for the purpose of solving a social, environmental or animal welfare 'cause'. In this article, we analyze CRM initiatives that address specific international development causes and involve celebrities in their launch, mediation and/or management – what we have called elsewhere 'Brand Aid' (Richey and Ponte 2011).*

A spate of books over the past decade has examined the possibilities of whether a form of capitalism that is more creative, social-minded, and to scale can solve global problems that historically were subjected to political debate in democratic societies (see, inter alia, Bishop and Green 2008; Edwards 2008; Kinsley 2008). Termed 'creative capitalism' (by Bill Gates), 'social innovation' (by US President Obama), 'philanthrocapitalism', social entrepreneurship, private philanthropy, and Brand Aid, all involve the investment by business for social returns, or 'using enterprise models for social impact' (Shortall 2009). Criticism has come from the side of business, arguing that business should focus on what it does best: provide goods and services to consumers and maximize profits and shareholder value (Kinsley 2008). Other critiques, from a social justice perspective, argue that forms of philanthrocapitalism are the symptoms of an unequal world, rather than being its cure (Edwards 2008).

- i. [www.joinred.org](http://www.joinred.org)
- ii. [www.3literrentvand.dk](http://www.3literrentvand.dk)

Still, a growing number of analysts and leaders, such as former US President Clinton, see potential in what the rich, large corporations, assisted by professional intermediaries and celebrities, can do in solving global problems. Such potential stems not only from the money they can spend, but the leverage they can apply on other actors (NGOs, governments) to use resources more innovatively, efficiently, and in a business-like manner, termed ‘philanthro-policymaking’ (Rogers 2011). As Bill Gates sums up, “the challenge is not to identify the right problems but to identify the right solutions” (cited in Bishop and Green 2008:152).

Not only should business be part of finding development solutions, consumers must do their part too. Consumers have to enact political and/or ethical consumption – they need to shop to save the world. “Ethical consumers are those whose decisions about what to consume (the ‘consumption’ part) are shaped by their assessment of the moral nature of that context (the ‘ethical’ part)” (Carrier 2012:1). As demonstrated by the variety of the contributions to a recent collection on ethical consumption, ranging from shopping for Hungarian nationalism to support for leftist politics, the values underpinning consumption choices are extremely diverse (Carrier and Luetchford 2012). Holtzer (2006) argues that political consumerism is the collectivization of private consumption choices, guided by a social movement. Holtzer places emphasis on individual consumers lending their purchasing power to social movements to enable them to effectively voice concerns and leverage sanctions – such as boycotts and ‘buycotts’. But other contributions to the now large literature on ethical and political consumption have sought to go beyond dual characterizations of ethical versus non-ethical consumption and *good* versus *bad* products (e.g. Goodman et al. 2010). They have also fine-tuned the links between the consumption’s ethics and politics (Barnett et al. 2010; Clarke et al. 2007; Clarke 2008) and examined the ethics of everyday consumption (Barnett et al. 2005; Jackson et al. 2009; Miller 2001). One of the important findings from this literature is that the possibility of consuming ethically is based on the consumption of branded products, despite the earlier ‘No Logo’ battle cry of the anti-globalization movement. In other words, it is brands’ vulnerability to ethical concerns that opens up space for consumer action. But because branded companies seek to minimize such vulnerability, they are also setting up initiatives (such as CRM) that deflect ethical

concerns from the products themselves, and relocate them instead to the ethics of supporting a cause.

CRM campaigns have a venerable history, originally focused almost exclusively on local causes. CRM with international development (thus, *distant*) causes have emerged more recently. In its simplest form, CRM is essentially marketing – it is devised to sell a product or service to consumers by highlighting that part of the profit, or sale price, will be donated to a *good cause*. The size of the donation is typically linked to the volume of sales during the CRM campaign.

The birth of CRM dates back to the American Express campaigns of the early 1980s, when card-holders were encouraged to use their cards in specified campaign periods to support a number of US local causes (Daw 2006). The success of these initiatives led AmEx to legally trademark the term ‘Cause-Related Marketing’ in 1983, when it began piloting the approach nationally with a three-month campaign to restore the Statue of Liberty. This campaign cost \$4 million in advertising, raised \$1.7 million for the cause, and also triggered a 27% rise in AmEx card use and 45% increase in new card applications (Daw 2006:4). The experience demonstrated to AmEx, and many other companies after it, that they could ‘do well by doing good’.

The business studies literature<sup>1</sup> suggests that CRM campaigns have experienced a consistently upward trend since their beginning (Daw 2006; CSR Europe 2000; Einstein 2011; Integer Group 2011). Historically, CRM has evolved from being predominantly a one-off tactic to increase sales, to an approach aimed at building brand reputation and customer loyalty through deeper long-term commitment, linking a brand with a cause organically, and even toward becoming the public face of responsibility for the most advanced companies in this realm (Daw 2006). The explosion of CRM has been fueled by the expansion of social media and the word-of-mouth marketing that it enables (Einstein 2011).

Part of the attractiveness of CRM, from the point of view of consumers, is that it triggers a donation with every purchase (Integer Group 2011). “This may be due to the instant gratification and constant feeling of doing good shoppers receive with each purchase, which, in turn, encourages repeat purchase and loyalty for a brand”

(Integer Group 2011:3). Einstein concludes that tying a product to a cause not only increases profits, but also leads to “increased sales for the *entire line of products connected to the brand*... These sales increases bring in earnings well above the cost of the company’s charitable donations” (2011:35). The Integer Group study also found that long-term commitment to a cause pays off in terms of consumer appreciation. Yoplait was ranked the number one purchased, cause-linked brand in the US on the basis of its 13+ years campaign Save Lids to Save Lives. The top-10 list also included General Mills, which has been running the Box Tops for Education program since 1996, and Product (RED). This trend towards longer-term commitment is a sharp departure from earlier CRM, when the idea was “to make an impact, not to become just another accepted but ignored addition to the marketing clutter out there” (Welsh 1999:2).

The business studies literature lists numerous corporate benefits arising from CRM: increased sales and financial performance; extended market exposure by reaching new consumers; improved employee sense of belonging and retention; improved corporate and brand image; and better relations with other stakeholders, such as investors and government (see, inter alia, Carroll and Shabana 2010; Liu et al. 2010; Kurucz et al. 2008). Thus, even transactional CRM (requiring the purchase of a product) has become not only about marketing, but also about corporate image, legitimacy and reputation (Gupta and Pirsch 2006)<sup>3</sup>.

An emerging critical literature has started to highlight CRM’s problematic aspects as well. A first set of issues raised in this literature questions transparency and information accuracy. CRM campaigns do not always detail the specifics of their agreements in support of the recipient organizations. In fact, according to Berglind and Nakata (2005:450) “some CRM campaigns rely on consumer misunderstanding about the donations.” CRM consultants insist that “the cause issue must be presented in a compelling, uplifting way...Marketing can’t be about negative consequences... [it] is about finding an answer, making a positive difference” (Daw 2006:27). In their effort to be positive and uplifting, the tendency in CRM is to minimize controversy, alternative approaches, complexity and the size of the challenge or overstate the probability that a contribution can actually make a difference. Thus, CRM campaigns tend to focus on funding research for a cure for disease, for example, but would never support research on the social and environmental causes of the disease (see King 2006).

They often describe donations in terms of ‘lives saved’ or ‘liters of water purified’ – making it more difficult to monetize the donation size and highlight the contradictions between profit and donation (see Hawkins 2011; 2012a; 2012b; King 2006; Richey and Ponte 2008, 2011; Ponte, Richey and Baab 2009). The tyranny of the positive lends itself to misrepresentation and a lack of transparency.

A second set of CRM critiques are over whether a contribution given through a purchase is always better than nothing, as its supporters often take for granted. A pilot study demonstrated that consumption of CRM products may decrease overall contributions to *good causes*, suggesting that even when CRM products cost no more than others, consumers tend to decrease their charitable giving, because they feel that they have done their part already (Krishna 2011; see also Einstein 2011). Additionally, the Integer Group study (2011) found that the amount of money that the brand is willing to give to a cause is *not* an important influence on consumers’ choice to purchase it.

CRM critics also question the consequences that CRM campaigns have on power dynamics, distribution and redistribution of resources, portrayals of communities in need, and the possibility of stimulating social change. Nickel and Eikenberry, for example, claim that CRM collapses

“the distance between the market and the negative impacts it has on human well-being . . . [and] stabilizes the very system that results in poverty, disease, and environmental destruction”(2009:975). CRM is especially insidious as it “creates the appearance of giving back, disguising the fact that it is already based in taking away” (ibid.). From an analysis of dozens of, mostly US-based, CRM campaigns, Einstein (2011) concludes that most are self-congratulatory and serve to further corporate interest, while rarely affecting real change. She argues that CRM is not about marketing causes, but rather about “attaching a cause to a consumer product for the purpose of creating profits to the manufacturer. What happens to the cause is secondary, except in terms of what it can do to further the goals of the corporations” (Einstein 2011:132). CRM leads to an expectation of return when acting magnanimously, because “when you give you get” (ibid.:137). One of the most poignant CRM critiques is King’s (2006) work on the Pink Ribbon breast cancer campaigns to support the Komen Foundation. Linking the

purchase of everything from luxury cars, to dog food, to the powerful cause of fighting breast cancer, King shows how CRM is based on the “assumption that quick, convenient, and relatively inexpensive acts of giving have nonetheless powerful effects and deep spiritual meaning” (King 2006:73).

CRM initiatives with a development cause have started to be analyzed critically as well. Brei and Bohm (2011) analyzed ten brands of bottled water that claim to contribute to campaigns aimed at providing drinking water to ‘poor African people’, concluding that these companies are mainly attempting to create a better image for an industry beset by environmental and social criticism. Hawkins (2012a) suggests that women in the South are typically portrayed as being closer to nature, but at the same time unable to fulfill their role of responsible mothers due to environmental conditions. She highlights how CRM campaigns emphasize individual action and market-based solutions to complex issues and how “everyday lives in the North are constituted as separate from natural environments *except* through consumption choices, a dangerous idea that constitutes the market as the only route to participate in development interventions, caring, and environmentally responsible actions” (Hawkins 2012a:758).

This brief review of CRM debates highlights the need to explain why and how international development causes are being offered to consumers as symbolic value embedded into a branded product. In Richey and Ponte (2011), we developed the concept of ‘Brand Aid’ to describe how branded products are sold as ethical items through their mediation by celebrities, who link them to worthy causes in developing countries. Brand Aid, we argued, is aid to brands because it helps sell products and improve a brand’s ethical profile and value. It is also brands that provide aid, because a proportion of the profits, or sales, are devoted to helping others.

In this article, we further apply this conceptual apparatus by expanding the empirical gaze from Product (RED) to two other contemporary Brand Aid initiatives - CRM with international development causes and celebrity mediation: DC Comics’ ‘We Can Be Heroes’ campaign; and TOMS Shoes. These are both ‘transactional’ (they require the purchase of a product, not just a brand experience, such as visiting a website, leaving a message, or liking a Facebook page), and represent two different models of

business engagement in CRM. DC Comics represents the ‘commercial model’, in which existing companies select specific products to enhance their ethical value through their link with development causes; and TOMS represents the ‘social enterprise model’, in which social value is the *raison d’être* of the business itself.

We focus on initiatives with a direct purchase-contribution link because they reflect the different kinds of social relations surrounding CRM (see also Hawkins 2012b). First, the focus on buying a particular product directly links a product with a cause in ways that draw on the awareness raised by decades of activism for fair trade and ethical consumption. But this also pushes the meaning of ethical consumption away from the attributes of the product itself (the social, environmental, or animal welfare conditions of its production) and places them onto the worthy cause, as the basis for ethical engagement (see Richey and Ponte 2008, 2011). Second, the focus on purchase-linked donation encourages increasing consumption (see Goodman 2010). As you spend money, purchase products and consume, you are actively helping. Third, in the direct purchase-contribution model, the point of action or engagement is clear and distinct. It is the point of purchase. This clear action is a way of defining the entry point for everyday consumers into activism, providing ‘development’ or just ‘helping’ others in need.



## CASE STUDIES

### *(a) We Can Be Heroes*

DC Comics, a Warner Bros. Entertainment Company, has launched a CRM initiative, “We Can Be Heroes”, based on the sale of several items carrying images of the Justice League characters, including a We Can Be Heroes iPhone case that reads ‘One small act can make you a hero’. DC Entertainment donates 50% of the purchase price (\$39.95) to their nonprofit partners: Save the Children, International Rescue Committee, and Mercy Corps to fight hunger in Africa. Other products available include T-shirts, mugs, posters, and a water bottle with representations of these animated celebrities. This initiative also includes the possibility of directly making a donation, independent of any purchase, with the funds being divided between the three campaign partners and matched with a donation by DC Entertainment, up to a total contribution of \$1 million<sup>5</sup>. An additional twist in this case, is that the Justice League characters both embed value in the products on sale and are animated celebrities themselves. But other celebrities have also been involved; including Chris Daughtry, who provided a song entitled ‘Rescue Me’, the net proceeds of which will go to the We Can Be Heroes partner organizations. He also teamed up with Jim Lee to create special edition lithographs that trigger a donation of 75% of the purchase price. Slightly more unusual, the gaming icon, Chiren Boumaaza, known as Athene, launched Op ShareCraft 2012-Save the Children Challenge, an online fundraising campaign, in which he “brought thousands of people together to fight the hunger crisis in the Horn of Africa by live streaming his own hunger strike online.”<sup>7iii</sup>

The initiative website is titled: ‘Worst hunger crisis in 60 years. Over 9 million in need of immediate assistance. The people in the Horn of Africa need you now’. A photograph of a small, forlorn-looking African girl sits above the link to donate, and another link shows the ‘Darkness and Light’ art inspired by heroes and villains, hope and heroism. However, the centerpiece of the webpage is a powerful two minute video clip.

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<sup>iii</sup> [www.wecanbeheroes.org/gaming-icon-athene-raises-1-million-for-relief-in-the-horn-of-africa/](http://www.wecanbeheroes.org/gaming-icon-athene-raises-1-million-for-relief-in-the-horn-of-africa/)

The video opens with shadowy images of the map of Africa, juxtaposed over a silhouette of Batman, and the following words fade onto the screen: “In the Horn of Africa. 13 million people are suffering/ through the worst hunger crisis in 60 years/ They need a hero [the silhouette shifts to Wonder Woman and Superman, and Africa has faded into their background glow]/What do you do when someone needs you? Here video faceshots of a diverse group of Northern urbanites flash on screen. The first to speak is an African American man who responds to the challenge: “A time in my life when what?” followed by a young woman speaking with a British accent, “Wow, that’s a really hard question.” Then, there is a flash back to the African American man, “When I was needed?” A twenty-something white man in glasses and a comical furry hat is next, “I haven’t felt needed yet, so far I’ve been needy” he says. A Hispanic man with gold chains adds in an extremely sincere tone, “My sister. She needs me.” Then two young twenty-something, men are on screen, one laughs and says, “I am actually being needed right this second. Excuse me.” He looks down, and then turns away to answer his mobile phone as the other young man laughs, slightly embarrassed [a tactical disruption to permit an emotional pause,<sup>6</sup> after which the clip then returns to a tone of absolute sincerity]. The 13 year-old girl from the website’s homepage image begins to speak in a tone of regret, “There was this kid in my class named Brady. I thought about standing up for him but I didn’t want to be embarrassed so I didn’t. But I should have. Yea” [she looks down remorsefully—the scene is enhanced by instrumental background piano music of profound emotion]. The initial image of the glowing African map emerges onto the screen with the written words: You are needed/ Thousands of children are struggling to stay alive/ One small act can make you a hero. The video switches back to the cameos of ‘normal’ Northern people who begin to respond as the music becomes upbeat in tempo. A twenty-something woman begins: “I didn’t think. I just went.” Then an African American man with short dreadlocks says, “When. Where. How. What do we need to do?” Switch back to the previous woman, “It just felt very exhilarating. I sort of had that feeling of being a hero [she shrugs]”. The dreadlocked man says, “I felt like I was necessary.” An older man with a few gray hairs in a long beard, wearing a baseball cap and a hippie scarf says, “So I fell to the ground with her. And just laid right next to her. And she goes, why did you do that for?”

And I said, cuz, uh, someone needs to be on the ground with you. So I can help you up.” The shadow image appears with seven Justice League figures and the written text: Join the Justice League to fight the hunger crisis/ Give now. DC Entertainment will match it 100%/ We Can Be Heroes/ [www.WeCanBeHeroes.org](http://www.WeCanBeHeroes.org) [with logos beneath of Save the Children, International Rescue Committee and MercyCorps and DC Entertainment].

In 2:09 minutes, an entire imaginary of multi-cultural heroism is shown, in which men, women and children of all races come together to save millions of suffering Africans. Local affective scripts for Americans of childhood bullying, of the 9/11 rescue by firefighters, and of close families in need are juxtaposed with scripts of African suffering and Western heroism. The only information about what help actually might mean in this saga, is found on the partners’ page, which links a single, vague notion of intervention objectives with each organization. Their targets include children of the Horn of Africa, acutely malnourished and displaced families, and communities where they provide water, medical care, and food in response to lost livelihoods, drought, and hunger.

*(b) TOMS Shoes<sup>8</sup>*

TOMS Shoes is a social entrepreneurship model, in which the cause itself is inextricably linked to the objective of the business. TOMS was founded in May 2006 by a celebrity, Blake Mycoskie, who became known for his participation in the American TV show called *The Amazing Race*. The genesis story of the brand is that Mycoskie was in Argentina playing polo, when he joined a group of foreigners donating used shoes in a village. This was a life-changing experience, and thus he started a company that sells an alpargata shoe, inspired by those worn by Argentinian farmers, priced at twice the product value, in order to permit the company to donate a pair of shoes to a child in need<sup>iv</sup>, for every pair purchased by the consumer (according to TOMS, shoes are a fundamental resource for protecting children’s health). This Buy One, Give One (BOGO) marketing strategy links the purchase-donation directly with the product and brand of TOMS. It is now advertised as “One

person buys. One person is helped<sup>v</sup>, as the company expanded its product line to include TOMS

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iv. <http://www.toms.com/>

v. <http://www.toms.com/eyewear/our-movement>

glasses, which works in partnership with the Seva foundation.<sup>9</sup>

TOMS is allied with a variety of Giving Partners, works in over 60 countries, and as of June 2013, TOMS has given more than 10 million pairs of new shoes to children in need<sup>vi</sup>. The donated pair of shoes is most frequently a black, unisex canvas slip-on with a sturdy sole, except in Argentina where TOMS gives shoes similar to our colorful Classics, and in Ethiopia, where they give a variety of locally produced shoes.<sup>10</sup> Its donation missions, termed Giving Trips, reward TOMS staff and contest winners with the opportunity to visit their Giving Partners in developing countries. Each week, one customer (who must be a US resident of 13 years or older and must have submitted his or her full name, phone, and email information on the website) is selected to join in a TOMS shoe drop. These trips are well-documented on the blog with colorful photos of young, attractive students, traveling to places like El Salvador to distribute shoes together with organizations like Save the Children. Photos of thin, beautiful university students kneeling at the feet of Third World children to place a shoe, literally, on the feet of the poor, invoke images of cultural Christianity that play on Western consumers' imaginaries of beneficence (see Richey and Ponte, 2011 for an analysis of how this works in Product RED).

Linked to TOMS is the 'One for One'<sup>TM</sup> Movement, where compassionate young people are getting involved through campus clubs, internships and branded interactions on social media. The most famous TOMS brand activity is the One Day Without Shoes campaign in which supporters go barefoot to spread awareness of the impact a pair of shoes can have on a child's life. On this day, supporters are encouraged by the brand to walk barefoot, photograph their feet, stencil-shirts ("Go Without Shoes So Kids Don't Have To!" and "Ask Me About My Feet"), share the TOMS giving videos, and hold concerts with shoeless musicians.

TOMS effectively manages many of the features of new marketing, such as word-of-mouth through social media, real and virtual events, video storytelling, education-cum-marketing, and engaging a movement of consumers-cum-activists. Mycoskie himself is also extremely apt at navigating the popular culture industry and its current need for multi-product and multi-media strategies.

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vi. TOMS One for One Giving Report 2013.

He has authored a book *Start Something That Matters* ('With every book purchase, a new children's book will be provided to a child in need. One for One™'), with a teaching guide that can be downloaded for free. The company includes a Campus Programs Department to provide resources for students and teachers who have "embraced the TOMS philosophy and shared it with their communities inside and outside the classroom."<sup>vii</sup>

Detailed instructions are given on how to form a TOMS campus club, including registering all events with the company, hosting at least one event per semester to raise awareness of the TOMS story.<sup>11</sup> With a catchy slogan and easy to understand truisms, TOMS has become the brand of compassion for many American young people. The author of the popular book and blog, *Where Am I Wearing* sums up how TOMS fits with American values: "I've met so many raving TOMS fans that have no idea where TOMS are made [in China]. All they know is that a pair was given away somewhere—probably Africa—because they bought a pair. And that's enough for them to feel swell about their shoes."<sup>viii</sup> The development imaginary linking America and Africa is complicated by the inclusion of productive (not merely recipient) Others in China, who are actually making TOMS feel-good shoes.

TOMS uses a multi-channel integration strategy to bring awareness to their cause, and to sell their products, framed in terms of inspirational storytelling, not advertising. TOMS relies heavily on its online community for marketing, and has an extensive network on Facebook with over 1.5 million 'likes', including over 4,000 people who have added their own photos or videos to the page. Additionally, TOMS is active on Twitter and has its own YouTube channel; the charismatic founder Mycoskie has a popular blog that he uses to keep consumers informed on the products and their social

impacts.<sup>12</sup> In a social entrepreneurship enterprise like TOMS, the CEO and company founder manifests the social goals in identifying

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vii. A letter from TOMS Founder and Chief Shoe Giver, Blake Mycoskie

viii. [www.wheramiwearing.com/?s=Toms&x=0&y=0](http://www.wheramiwearing.com/?s=Toms&x=0&y=0) last accessed 1 August 2012.

ix. <http://blakemycoskie.blogspot.it/>

as the chief giver. No mention is made, of course, of the obvious calculation that if a consumer paid half the price for the shoes, then she/he could become the chief giver outside of the consumption experience of buying a new pair of overpriced shoes. Mycoskie, however, is also a popular speaker at American church groups, university TOMS clubs, and on US television.<sup>13</sup>

TOMS has been critiqued for labor conditions in shoe production in China (all shoes for sale), Ethiopia and Argentina, and the company has responded that it is third-party audited to insure that no child labor is used and fair wages are paid.<sup>x</sup> In response to the sustainability of shoes for children whose feet grow, TOMS strives to set up long-term giving partnerships that allow them to keep giving as children grow. How often this is practically achieved, given the mobility of families and development partners, is not documented. Little is actually known about TOMS Giving Partners' work, beyond the distribution of shoes, and even less about the actual details of production, sales or partnerships between the company and its beneficiaries.<sup>14</sup> Other serious critiques are levied against TOMS and any sort of giving in-kind because they distort local economies of production.<sup>15</sup> A counter-campaign to TOMS A Day Without Shoes was launched on the blog Good Intentions Are Not Enough<sup>xi</sup> and entitled A Day Without Dignity. It asked aid workers, the diaspora and people from areas that receive shoe drops and other forms of charity, to speak up on blogs, twitter, and at school. They posted numerous interventions from critics of the initiative, including videos and photos documenting the widespread availability of shoes in local Third World markets. Still, Mycoskie has won awards from the Smithsonian Institution in 2007, and the US Secretary of State's award for Corporate Excellence in 2009.<sup>xii</sup>

TOMS imaginary of development is one in which growing up barefoot is the primary obstacle to receiving education and avoiding disease:

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- x. <http://apersonaldiaspora.blogspot.it/2011/04/toms-discussion-on-bad-aid.html>  
xi. <http://goodintentions.org/in-kind-donations/a-day-without-dignity>  
xii. [www.toms.com/blakes-bio](http://www.toms.com/blakes-bio) last accessed 1 August 2012.

Shoes are a fundamental resource for protecting children's health and providing them with opportunity.<sup>xiii</sup> TOMS is an award-winning social enterprise model, transmitted in a three-minute video with emotional music, smiling brown children with white saints sitting at their feet - 'aid-vertising'<sup>16</sup> clearly works to get a buy-in from consumers, based on stories they tell themselves.

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<sup>xiii</sup> [www.toms.com/our-movement-why](http://www.toms.com/our-movement-why) last accessed 1 August 2012.





## DISCUSSION

CRM initiatives with an international development cause and celebrity involvement – what we have called elsewhere ‘Brand Aid’ (Richey and Ponte 2011) – are teaching people how to give from a narrowly individualistic and consumption-oriented perspective. Products are manufactured and then linked to *needs* identified in the developing world. They are sold together with the work of a *story factory* – producing truths about international development and consumer engagement that make development appear simplified and manageable and outside of history or politics (Flannery 2009). Companies that produce these necessary goods and sacrifice their corporate profit to share them with the global poor, invite consumers to partner with them through the purchase of branded products. Through real-time and virtual events where people come together to share experiences with others who share their deep frame values (Darnton and Kirk 2011), these companies provide not just the commodities themselves, but construct an entire realm in which these products become meaningful.

In CRM initiatives, ethical value is placed exclusively in the realm of the Northern consumer through the purchase of a particular product or the donation within a branded experience. CRM sells an imaginary of development in which consumers can be heroes. Making a donation in a branded environment, or sharing a story that will trigger a matching donation by a branded host, is a way of blending the experience of giving and the feeling of empathy with that brand. These more diffuse branded experiences reflect the recent calls for corporate philanthropy to become more strategically related to brand reputation (Frumkin 2006). Thus, engagement in these initiatives pulls the marketing, corporate philanthropy and brand management sides of business together. Corporate philanthropy becomes shared with the consumer, publicized and celebritized – it is not anonymous, as in past forms. Given that consumers authorize the development interventions through their purchases, there is no concern for participation of the recipient communities or accountability to these supposed beneficiaries.

CRM provides an easy solution to current crises in linking the global economy to international development – one that enables corporations to brand themselves as

caring (without substantially changing their normal business practices), while consumers engage in low-cost heroism (without meaningfully increasing their awareness of global production-consumption relations or the struggles of people they are supposed to help). The problems themselves (whether they be hunger or shoelessness) and the people who experience them are branded and marketed to Western consumers (through multi-media story-telling) just as effectively as the products that will save them.

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## NOTES

1. The business studies literature identifies different kinds of CRM: (1) 'transactional' CRM where donation is triggered by a purchase of a good or service; (2) special product lines, where visibility and awareness of the cause is enhanced through informational leaflets, advertisements and use of nonprofit logos on products; (3) recycling that triggers a donation (returning lids, used cameras, etc); (4) event-sponsorship linked to support for a cause (which provides visibility for a cause and perhaps triggering a donation); and (5) longer term strategic collaborations between nonprofits and corporations and between government and corporations (e.g. public service announcements) (Daw 2006; Liu et al. 2010; Vanhamme et al. 2011).
2. See an early contribution in Adkins 1999; and a recent review in Vanhamme et al. 2011.
3. In their review, Vanhamme et al. (2011) identify three key variables that can mediate the impact of a 'cause' on corporate image in CRM campaigns: cause type, cause scope and cause acuteness. Their hypothesis is that consumers identify more with causes that: (1) address primary needs, rather than quality of life; (2) are local or national rather than international; (3) are sudden rather than ongoing. However, when they tested these in a field experiment, they found that only the first and third hypotheses were confirmed (although the third only with marginal significance), and consumers seem to evaluate corporate image more

positively when the campaign adopts an international scope. These observations suggest a changing perspective on international causes for CRM, a finding supported by our review of current CRM initiatives.

4. These two cases were selected on the basis of a data search that focused on the combination of two of the elements of Brand Aid: 'product' and 'cause'. After examining a dozen sites dedicated to CRM, we selected the most comprehensive list of 'new CRM campaigns' compiled by Cause Marketing Forum (CMF). We conducted a data search covering the period from January 2011 (when CMF started to compile a comprehensive list) to April 2012. The CMF search generated 99 hits that were analyzed by reading the campaign press releases and the websites dedicated to them. 21 of these had an international development cause, a sizeable minority, given that the CRM literature in business studies typically advises corporations to link their campaigns to local causes. Of these, seven mentioned a celebrity prominently in their press release and therefore fully qualified as 'Brand Aid'.
5. Furthermore, you sell marketing data for your donation, as the final step in the online donation is 'share your information.' Here you must check, 'By clicking submit, I understand that my name and email will be shared with DC Entertainment and Warner Bros. and that they may contact me regarding updates, special offers, and more.' You can also check optional boxes to share your information with Save the Children, International Rescue Committee and Mercy Corps.
6. See the discussion of Rorty's concept of irony as an imaginative form for thinking through global justice in Brassett (2009).
7. We also discuss this case in a forthcoming article entitled 'Buying Into Development? Brand Aid Forms of Cause-Related Marketing' in a special issue of *Third World Quarterly* on 'New Actors and Alliances in Development'.
8. We also discuss this case in a forthcoming article entitled 'Buying Into Development? Brand Aid Forms of Cause-Related Marketing' in a special issue of *Third World Quarterly* on 'New Actors and Alliances in Development'.
9. The other 'giving partners' are not listed in TOMS public information, but Partners in Health, Paul Farmer's celebrityized NGO has been a partner since 2009.

10. Ethiopia has a competitive footwear industry run by Ethiopians, but this does not figure into the TOMS marketing imaginary.
11. The Campus Programs Guidebook notes that ‘in some cases, schools will not allow clubs associated with a for-profit company such as TOMS. If this is the case at your school, please do not worry too much’ (p. 20). Immersed in the storytelling, giving and inspiration that abounds in the TOMS media universe, this is one of the rare reminders that TOMS sells shoes and glasses for profit.
12. Blake’s last blog was in 2011, and now personal blogging takes place linked directly to the company website and includes first-hand witnessing accounts by TOMS employees, and appears to be most frequently penned by young interns in the company.
13. One of the more unusual TOMS marketing venues is in the genre of YouTube videos known as ‘hauls.’ A very recent phenomenon, hauls consist of a form of video blogging in which young women in their late teens and twenties document the contents of a shopping spree, discussing the contents and demonstrating products, in the context of their bedroom (Jeffries 2011). ‘In addition to admiring the free gift that comes with the shoes—”it looks really cute”—and the shoes themselves—”they’re so cute”—this hauler tells us that the company donates shoes to children “like in Africa or somewhere over there” (1:29)’ (Jeffries 2011:71).
14. A 16 page ‘Giving Report’ was published by TOMS that provides glossy-photo advertising but little actual factual information.
15. For debates relating directly to TOMS, see [www.goodintents.org/in-kind-donations/a-day-without-dignity](http://www.goodintents.org/in-kind-donations/a-day-without-dignity)

16. As aptly termed by Vivek Nema on <http://aidwatchers.com/2011/04/barefoot-on-broadway-warning-gross-feet-pics/>