

Conceptualising Brand Purpose as a Multidimensional Marketing and Management Construct: A Qualitative Framework

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Abstract

The construct of brand purpose has received increasing attention from scholars and managers alike, yet the literature is scattered and inconsistent regarding its dimensions and lacks operationalization for measurement purposes. To this end, this research project aims to develop a preliminary multidimensional framework of brand purpose and obtain expert-informed conceptual refinement. To develop dimensions for brand purpose, a multi-phase qualitative approach was conducted. First, prior literature on brand purpose and related concepts, such as stakeholder theory, brand equity, brand authenticity, brand sustainability, and related frameworks/models, was reviewed to derive initial dimensions of brand purpose. The provisional dimensions were then subjected to expert consultation. A 15-member panel of academics and practitioners provided written input to refine the provisional dimensions, while a separate 11-member expert panel responded to dimension-specific prompts used by the authors to formulate preliminary items. Expert feedback was coded via grounded-theory-informed coding processes and expert verification loops. Results of this qualitative analysis provide preliminary expert-informed support for eleven dimensions of brand purpose: Beyond-Profit Orientation, Enduring Commitment, Integrated Values, Genuine Action and Authenticity, Stakeholder Nurturing, Consumer Empowerment, Transformation of Practices/Social Impact, Sustainability Stewardship, Dialogue and Involvement, Brand-Purpose Equity Roles, and Emotional and Inspirational Value. Moreover, the results indicate that brand purpose is both manifested internally (e.g. reflected in organizational strategy, culture, day-to-day operations, decision-making) and externally (experienced by stakeholders via trust, dialogue, fairness, emotional attachment, societal value). This framework advances the initial scale development of brand purpose by bringing together previously scattered literature to provide initial dimensions of the construct for greater construct clarity, as well as initial items to build on for future scale development. Additionally, this framework may be used by practitioners to gauge how legitimate, deep-seated, and well-aligned their brand purpose activities are on both organizational and stakeholder levels. Accordingly, the results are interpreted as expert-informed conceptual refinement of a literature-derived framework rather than independent empirical or psychometric validation of a measurement scale.

1. Introduction

Purpose-driven marketing and branding have been embraced by both scholars and practitioners alike in recent years. In contrast to past decades, current-day organizations are expected to “do good” and tackle prevailing social, environmental, and ethical issues besides providing goods and services (Loureiro et al., 2023). This shift in consumerist culture and market trends has forced companies to adopt values-based leadership, acting as vehicles of change by investing in long-term sustainable impact on society (Rüger et al., 2025). France et al. (2024) noted that brand purpose has become a core brand attribute overarching taglines and affecting businesses’ strategic choices and stakeholder relationships.

Furthermore, both scholarly conversations and industry activities around social-focused movements such as Brand Activism, Conscientious Branding, and Sustainable Consumption reinforce the need for

organizations to think beyond profits and define their reason for being (Walter et al., 2024). Thus, scholars have sought to develop a clearer understanding of what brand purpose entails and how it affects stakeholders' perceptions of brands, their overall equity, and long-term performance. Nonetheless, there is a major gap in the literature, as no unified, validated scale has been established to quantify the phenomenon. Previous attempts have either been conceptual or case-driven and failed to provide sufficient operationalization to test empirically.

France et al. (2024) defined the BEING framework for purpose-driven companies consisting of five dimensions including 'beyond profit' and 'enduring commitment'. Although widely recognised in business practice, Zürn et al. (2023) also developed a Perceived Purpose Score containing three major components: customer benefit, social value, and profit. However, these are by no means exhaustive, and the existing literature still lacks an understandable construct structure from which potential items can be drawn and further tested.

Therefore, this study's main objectives are threefold. First, it seeks to provide better depth and understanding of "brand purpose" from a theoretical standpoint. Next, the research aims to identify and refine major factors or dimensions through which organizations can approach brand purpose. Finally, this study attempts to provide and propose items that could act as a preliminary guideline/reference for scholars and practitioners to develop their scales to measure brand purpose within varying industries and organizational settings.

The purpose and relevance of this study are derived from its potential academic and managerial implications. On one hand, by providing a foundation to develop constructs that measure brand purpose, this study offers scholarly insights into a concept that has been influencing consumers' behavior and companies' missions. On the other hand, the model presented in this study can serve as a tool for managers and decision-makers to evaluate the depth and authenticity of their brand purpose efforts.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Brand Purpose as a Strategic Branding Construct

Brand purpose has been defined quite extensively in the literature. Many define it as "a brand's reason to exist beyond profit" and describe a brand's intention to create value for their customers, society, and environment (Brosch, 2023; Ibn-Mohammed et al., 2026, p. 3). France et al. (2024) state that brand purpose is "a multi-dimensional construct that is lived within strategic intent, embedded in organizational values and purpose, and actualized through stakeholder partnerships." Unlike simplistic definitions of brand purpose as mere marketing rhetoric or corporate social responsibility efforts, Calder (2020) argues that purpose enables brands to resonate with consumers on a cultural and emotional level by connecting corporate existence to the betterment of society at large. Lastly, Zürn, Buder, and Unfried (2023) developed their own definition of brand purpose as the consumers' perceived trade-off between customer benefit, financial performance, and socio-ethical goodwill. Because of this, brand purpose

should be articulated and demonstrated across an organization's business model, stakeholders, and practices, as well as long-term vision. It has become a key ingredient in developing brand equity, trust, and competitive advantage (Walter et al., 2024). Earlier research around branding mostly focused on whether brands had social responsibilities (Porter and Kramer, 2011). Today, researchers acknowledge brand purpose as a key strategic driver that impacts brand equity, trust, and long-term stakeholder outcomes (France et al., 2024; Feri, Ind, & Tjandra, 2024). Brand purpose is now considered a method to differentiate; it is also becoming a social and moral indicator of the brand's willingness to help.

Other research has attempted to break down brand purpose further into dimensions that comprise the overall idea. France et al.'s (2024) BEING framework is considered one of the most comprehensive academic efforts. The authors identify five dimensions of brand purpose: Beyond, Endure, Integrated, Nurture, and Genuine. As depicted in the model, brand purpose is portrayed as multidimensional and prompts readers to look beyond purpose statements and evaluate how purpose is infused throughout an organization's purpose. Zürn, Buder, and Unfried (2023) took an empirically driven approach and based their model off of how individuals perceive a brand's motive. The authors identified Perceived Purpose Score which consists of a consumer's perception of the brand's purpose across three dimensions: creating financial performance, creating customer benefit, and creating social contribution. The research discovered that individuals do not simply accept brand purpose at what it appears to be. Instead, consumers draw on prior experiences with the brand and current brand cues to form judgments about brand purpose.

Researchers have begun to look at the relationship between brand purpose and outcomes similar to brand equity. These authors suggest that brands with purpose cultivate higher levels of brand trust, loyalty, and competitive differentiation (Calder, 2020; Mirzaei, Webster, & Siuki, 2021). Mirzaei et al.'s (2021) study on nonprofit organizations is unique as it uncovers that there are four types of brand purpose: empower, support, fight, and change. The study goes on to suggest that these purposes inform stakeholders about what the organization cares about at its core, influencing brand authenticity perceptions. Walter et al. (2024) uncovered another dimension that researchers should consider when thinking about brand purpose: "woke-washing." This article sheds light on how brands can use social causes to profit off of movements they may not actually support. Results show that it mattered if these brands were perceived as authentic, and stakeholders' perceptions of "woke" brands influenced if these brands could avoid negative backlash. Therefore, brand purpose can be thought of as not only a branding tactic but also as a brand liability if consumers do not believe what the brand is saying. This research is therefore guided by the need to systematically define and measure brand purpose using a multidimensional approach rooted in the existing literature. It begins by addressing the first research question: RQ1: What is the conceptual nature of brand purpose as discussed in contemporary literature? The study then explores the second research question, RQ2: What dimensions or factors constitute brand purpose, as derived from literature and refined through expert input? Finally, it addresses the final research question, RQ3: What items can be proposed to evaluate the explored factors in the study?

2.2. Theoretical Foundations of Brand Purpose

Articles on brand purpose often draw on theories from various disciplines. Among these theories, stakeholder theory is the most frequently used theory to explain brand purpose. According to the brand purpose literature, brands should provide value to all stakeholders rather than focusing solely on shareholder returns. Thus, stakeholder theory helps inform multiple studies' explanations of stakeholder nurturing as a dimension of purpose (France et al., 2024). The next most frequently used theory in the brand purpose literature is institutional theory, which states that brands change as institutions change in society (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). From this theory, as purpose becomes more institutionalized, there is potential for mimetic isomorphism, and companies' purpose becomes purely about being seen as legitimate (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). This could be done knowingly through falsification, but it could also be present in companies that copy purpose-driven actions to benefit strategically or profitably, despite different intentions and goals.

Studies examining brand equity also contribute to the theory on how purpose affects consumer-based brand evaluations. Calder (2020) found that brand purpose is crucial for emotional attachment, identity alignment and meaningful differentiation of brand equity. Gonçalves Filho et al. (2025) utilized grounded theory to discover brand-purpose equity drivers from the perspective of practitioners. Their study helps confirm the practical applications of purpose as a driver of value. Transformational leadership theory is also evident in works such as Feri et al. (2024), which describe brands as able to influence society and change behaviors, narratives, and systems.

2.3. Existing Frameworks and Measurement Approaches

Although brand purpose has recently been garnering significant academic and managerial interest, the construct is still nascent in terms of measurement. Research has introduced several measures of brand purpose, but scholars generally lack consensus on what dimensions are of primary importance. While many researchers have offered unique and valuable frameworks (e. g., France et al., 2024; Feri et al., 2024; Calder, 2020), there is yet to be an agreed upon method for how brand purpose should be operationalized and measured consistently. Research has mainly focused on qualitative analysis, case-based reasoning, or semantic analysis of brands' purpose statements (Rudeloff and Michalski, 2024; Hajdas and Kłeczek, 2021). Though frameworks like BEING (France et al., 2024) and the Perceived Purpose Score (Zürn et al., 2023) provide helpful constructs, they fail to offer a psychometrically valid multi-item scale. Gonçalves Filho et al. (2025) offered one of the first theoretical models grounded in brand-purpose equity but does not validate their measurement scale. To date, there has been no agreed upon method for how scholars should measure brand purpose that can be applied across industries, demographics, and organization types.

There is a critical need for this within the academic literature as the lack of standardization hinders academic generalizability and managerial application. Benchmarking. Valid scales are needed that assess multiple dimensions of brand purpose. Not only should these dimensions speak to how a company internalizes its purpose and its stakeholders' perceptions of a brand's purpose (Zürn et al., 2023), but they should also assess emerging dimensions of purpose such as brand authenticity (Hajdas and Kłeczek, 2021), brand empowerment (France et al., 2024), and sustainability (Delagnes et al., 2017).

Additionally, having a validated measure would allow for brand comparisons across different industries and contexts. To the authors' knowledge, this research will be the first to make an attempt to synthesize the current literature on brand purpose in order to create something new. With this research, we hope to answer France et al.'s (2024) and Walter et al.'s (2024) calls to action to think beyond traditional frameworks and measure brand purpose in a way that differentiates purpose that is embedded in company culture versus purpose that is superficially displayed for the sake of marketing.

Building on the measurement gap identified above, this study argues for a multidimensional framework that captures both the internal expression of a brand's purpose and external stakeholder perceptions. Such a framework should include dimensions such as authenticity, employee and consumer empowerment, sustainability initiatives, stakeholder engagement, and brand equity roles while remaining applicable across industries and brand contexts.

3. Research Methodology

This research employs a multi-phase, theory-driven methodology to formulate dimensions for assessing brand purpose. The methodology proceeds through sequential yet interrelated phases: literature-based dimension identification, expert consultation and refinement, and exploratory item generation. The methodology has been informed by grounded theory (Corbin and Strauss, 2008), which was integrated during the qualitative phase to promote inductive analysis of expert insights, thereby enhancing the construct framework. An effort was made to combine inductive and deductive strategies for dimension justification and proposed item creation. The deductive component was reflected in the use of prior literature to identify initial domains, while the inductive component was reflected in the interpretation of expert responses.

3.1. Literature-based derivation of the preliminary dimensions

To make the derivation of the initial domains explicit, the literature stage was undertaken as a concept-focused synthesis. First, studies and frameworks that directly defined or conceptualised brand purpose were examined. Second, the review was extended to closely related streams—stakeholder orientation, brand authenticity and purpose-washing, consumer empowerment, sustainability and SDG-oriented branding, dialogic stakeholder engagement, social transformation, brand equity, and emotional attachment—to capture aspects not represented fully in the focal frameworks. Third, recurrent concepts, labels, and definitions across these streams were compared, and conceptually similar terms were consolidated under a common domain label. Finally, the domains were checked for conceptual distinctiveness so that a preliminary dimension represented a theoretically distinguishable aspect of brand purpose rather than a duplicate label. A domain was retained when it had direct support in the brand-purpose literature or convergent support across related literature streams.

This synthesis produced the eleven preliminary dimensions used in the expert phase. The BEING framework primarily informed Beyond-Profit Orientation, Enduring Commitment, Integrated Values, Genuine Action and Authenticity, and Stakeholder Nurturing (France et al., 2024). Work on perceived purpose and stakeholder value further clarified the beyond-profit and stakeholder-balance domains (Freeman, 1984; Zürn et al., 2023). Research on consumer empowerment and social transformation informed Consumer Empowerment and Transformation of Practices/Social Impact (Hajdas & Kłeczek, 2021; Mirzaei et al., 2021). Sustainability- and SDG-oriented branding research informed Sustainability Stewardship (Feri et al., 2024), while studies of dialogic communication and co-creation informed Dialogue and Involvement (Rudeloff & Michalski, 2024). Brand-purpose equity research informed Brand-Purpose Equity Roles (Calder, 2020; Gonçalves Filho et al., 2025), and research on purpose engagement, emotional attachment, and stakeholder trust informed Emotional and Inspirational Value (Gulati & Wohlgezogen, 2023; van Ingen et al., 2021). These eleven dimensions were treated as provisional, literature-derived domains for subsequent expert examination rather than as a fixed final framework.

3.2. Expert panel and consultation rounds

An extensive review of the academic literature on brand purpose identified 11 preliminary dimensions that capture its multifaceted nature. These preliminary dimensions were then examined through expert panel consultation. The expert panel consisted of 15 experts with relevant marketing and management expertise, including senior academic researchers, managers working in sales and marketing, corporate social responsibility (CSR) specialists, and business consultants. The experts provided written responses to open-ended prompts concerning the concept of brand purpose within a specified timeframe. The expert consultation was used to examine whether the dimensions identified through the literature were conceptually relevant, understandable, and sufficiently representative of brand purpose.

The panel was constituted to obtain perspectives from both academic and practitioner settings. Selection was based on the relevance of the experts' academic or professional roles to marketing, sales and marketing management, corporate social responsibility, or business consulting. This selection constituted a purposive, criterion-based expert-sampling approach. In the first consultation, the 15 experts independently considered the meaning, essential features, implementation, and organisational and stakeholder manifestations of brand purpose. The provisional dimension names, definitions, and keywords were not shown during Round 1; they were introduced only in Round 2. Their input was not restricted to accepting the literature-derived domains. Experts could confirm a domain or raise a doubt, objection, or suggestion concerning its name, definition, conceptual boundary, overlap, or completeness. Such feedback could therefore lead to refinement, reclassification, merger, or the proposal of an additional domain, and the preliminary framework was not treated as fixed. In the second consultation, the same experts were provided with the provisional domain names, definitions, and literature-derived keywords. Individual comments were circulated to the panel iteratively until a consensual interpretation was reached. Round 1 responses were collected in written form. The excerpts presented in Table 1 were lightly edited for grammatical readability without altering their substantive meaning. The study

comprised two formal consultation rounds; the iterative circulation of comments constituted follow-up clarification cycles within Round 2.

3.3. Coding and consistency of interpretation

Expert responses were analysed using a hybrid deductive–inductive, grounded-theory-informed coding procedure. Open coding captured concepts expressed by the experts, while axial and selective coding examined how those concepts related to, challenged, or refined the provisional literature-derived domains. The same experts were again contacted to verify the domains. This time, the names of the domains, their respective definitions, and the keywords associated with each domain, taken from the literature, were provided to the experts for verification. If any doubt, objection, or suggestion was put forward by experts at the individual level, it was again shared with all experts iteratively. After their consensual verification, the domains were considered as dimensions. This iterative process helped refine the dimension structure and ensured that the final dimensions were supported by both prior literature and expert judgement.

The analysis followed a grounded-theory-informed coding sequence. During open coding, meaning-bearing expressions in the expert statements were assigned descriptive labels that stayed close to the participants' wording. During axial coding, related open codes were compared and grouped in relation to the provisional literature-derived domains; because a single statement could express more than one idea, multiple axial codes were permitted. During selective coding, the resulting categories were reviewed against the overall concept of brand purpose to determine the domain to which each code contributed and to identify conceptual overlap requiring refinement. Coding consistency was pursued through a documented coding table, repeated comparison of expert statements with their open and axial codes, and verification of the coded interpretations by the expert panel. Disputed classifications were reconsidered and recirculated until consensus was obtained. The initial coding was undertaken by the first researcher and independently reviewed by the second researcher. Differences in code assignment and domain mapping were resolved through discussion. The study therefore relied on independent review, discussion, and iterative interpretive verification rather than a statistical intercoder-reliability coefficient. After the eleven dimensions were finalised, the four broader conceptual groups shown in Fig. 1 were reviewed by the 15-member expert panel.

3.4. Item-generation stage and participant numbers

Eleven questions were developed for the item-generation stage. Each question was linked to one of the dimensions and administered to 11 experts. Their written responses were collected, and the authors developed candidate items from those responses. Therefore, item generation was done in an exploratory way to create an initial pool of items, not an empirically validated measure. These items can be used as a starting point for empirical validation through processes such as exploratory factor analysis, confirmatory factor analysis, reliability analysis, and validity analysis.

The two reported expert numbers refer to different stages and separate panels. Fifteen experts participated in the dimension-development and verification rounds, whereas a separate panel of 11

experts participated in the subsequent item-generation exercise. The 11 item-generation experts were not drawn from the original 15-member panel. At this stage, the dimensional structure had been finalised, and the purpose was to translate each dimension into a preliminary set of candidate items.

3.5. Consultation protocol

The consultation protocol comprised three components. Round 1 used open prompts concerning (a) the experts' understanding of brand purpose, (b) the features required to capture its essence, (c) how organisations implement brand purpose, and (d) how it is reflected in organisational and stakeholder-related practices. Round 2 asked experts to examine each provisional domain name, definition, and associated keyword and to provide confirmation, doubt, objection, or a suggested revision, including possible reclassification, merger, or addition. The item-generation component used one open-ended question for each of the eleven final dimensions; these eleven questions are reported in Section 5.

4. Identification of Brand Purpose Dimensions

Informed by previous literature, we identified 11 initial dimensions of brand purpose: Beyond-Profit Orientation, Enduring Commitment, Integrated Values, Genuine Action and Authenticity, Stakeholder Nurturing, Consumer Empowerment, Transformation of Practices/Social Impact, Sustainability Stewardship, Dialogue and Involvement, Brand-Purpose Equity Roles, and Emotional and Inspirational Value. Together, these initial dimensions represented psychological, emotional, social, and ethical considerations related to brand purpose. We used these dimensions to guide expert consultation, refinement, and item generation.

4.1. Beyond-Profit Orientation

Central to brand purpose is its beyond-profit orientation. Many scholars note that brands must seek to do something beyond creating value for shareholders (Bocean and Vărzaru, 2025). The "Beyond profit" dimension in France et al.'s (2024) BEING framework encapsulates purpose statements that explicitly seek to benefit society—not slogans designed to increase profit. Likewise, Calder (2020) states that purpose must indicate how a brand will positively contribute to humanity or the ecosystem to be deemed legitimate. In so doing, purpose becomes framed as something transcendent to traditional marketing methods. This does not imply that profit is irrelevant; rather, financial viability enables a brand to sustain and extend its positive impact. Purpose needs profit to further empower and support its positive impact (Whitler & Pohl, 2021; Zürn et al., 2023). However, when considering why a brand exists, there needs to be something more than profits. Therefore, brand purpose provides a reason for a brand's existence. We define a brand's beyond-profit orientation as 'a brand's core reason for existence, that is, not confined to making money but instead devoted to creating a beneficial and significant impact on society or the environment.'

4.2. Enduring Commitment

True brand purpose is not a short-lived campaign but a sustained strategic commitment. France et al. (2024) describe enduring commitment as evidence of a long-horizon vision of brand purpose. Walter et al. (2024) emphasize that enduring brand efforts build stakeholder trust, especially when tied to long-term programs and embedded in decision-making processes. Brand-purpose objectives pursued through strategies such as CSR require long-term commitment (Pandey & Joseph, 2025). Hence, 'enduring commitment' is defined as a 'brand's stable and continuous dedication to its purpose over time'.

4.3. Integrated Values

A brand's purpose achieves authenticity when it permeates internal systems and is reflected in strategy, operations and culture. France et al. (2024) describe integrated purpose as one that influences every aspect of an organization, from supply chains to incentive structures and employee onboarding. This echoes Feri et al.'s (2024) findings that purpose-aligned organizations uphold social values. According to France et al. (2024), integrated values means "...brand purpose should act as a guiding principle that connects and aligns the core values of the brand within the firm...". Integrated values are essential for maintaining consistency in communication with stakeholders and for facilitating purposeful dialogue with them (Duncan, 2015). Therefore, in this study, the definition of Integrated Values is 'the extent to which brand purpose is embedded throughout an organization's operations, strategy, internal culture and brand identity.'

4.4. Genuine Action and Authenticity

Authenticity is a cornerstone of brand purpose credibility (Sebastián-Morillas et al., 2023; Abratt et al., 2025). Walter et al. (2024) demonstrate that stakeholders evaluate purpose based on observable and consistent brand actions rather than aspirational claims. Feri et al. (2024) note that authenticity increases when purpose-driven actions are validated by third parties or supported by transparent reporting. France et al. (2024) further emphasize "genuine action" as critical to stakeholder trust. Accordingly, to establish brand authenticity, brand actions must be guided by brand purpose (Whitler & Pohl, 2021). In this study, Genuine Action and Authenticity is defined as 'the alignment between a brand's stated purpose and its actual behaviours, characterized by transparency, consistency, and evidence-based initiatives.'

4.5. Stakeholder Nurturing

Purposeful brands recognize and address the interests of multiple stakeholders — including employees, customers, communities, and investors. Many organisations have begun to adopt this approach (Whitler & Pohl, 2021). France et al. (2024) underscore "nurturing stakeholders" as a key element of meaningful purpose, while Feri et al. (2024) highlight multi-stakeholder engagement as central to achieving SDG-aligned outcomes. This reflects Freeman's (1984) stakeholder theory, which proposes that organizational success is contingent upon the well-being of all stakeholder groups. Effective stakeholder management can yield desirable outcomes (Loi, 2016), and active stakeholder participation can lead to supportive behaviour towards the brand (Källström & Ripoll González, 2025). Hence, 'Stakeholder Nurturing' refers

to ‘a brand’s intentional effort to balance value creation across all key stakeholders, fostering mutual benefit and trust.’

4.6. Consumer Empowerment

Empowering consumers to act in alignment with their values is an emerging indicator of brand purpose. For example, younger consumers expect organisations to take a stand on social issues, and they evaluate the alignment between their beliefs and those expressed by organisations (Williams et al., 2022; O’Sullivan et al., 2026). Rudeloff and Michalski (2024) found that purpose-led brands on social media enable consumers to participate meaningfully in brand initiatives and societal issues. Mirzaei et al. (2021) also noted that non-profit brands use empowerment as a lever for deepening relational ties. Empowerment manifests through tools, calls to action and participatory mechanisms. For example, allowing customers to propose ideas or choose among product options (Bachouche and Sabri-Zaaraoui, 2017; Hur and Ha, 2020). Hence, in the present study, ‘Consumer Empowerment’ is defined as ‘a brand’s facilitation of consumer agency, enabling individuals to act on their values and participate in meaningful societal engagement through the brand.’

4.7. Transformation of Practices / Social Impact

A key indicator of authentic brand purpose is its capacity to catalyze lasting transformation. AlQahtani (2025) argues that SDG-aligned brands must demonstrate changes in behaviour, systems, or norms, not just intentions. Kapitan et al. (2022) suggest that brands can act as institutional forces capable of producing collective benefit when purpose is linked to strategic transformation. The difference between authenticity and transformation of practices is that authenticity concerns the consistency of behaviour, whereas transformation concerns the outcomes of that behaviour. Hence, in the study, transformation of practices is defined as ‘the ability of a brand’s purpose to produce sustained and measurable changes in organizational behaviour and contribute to meaningful changes in societal norms or community-level outcomes.’

4.8. Sustainability Stewardship

Environmental stewardship is often tied to a credible brand purpose (Zhang et al., 2025). France et al. (2024) note that purpose-driven brands often align with environmental goals such as carbon reduction, circularity, or lifecycle transparency. Feri et al. (2024) emphasize SDG integration as both a strategic and moral imperative for modern brands. These practices help define the environmental legitimacy of a brand’s purpose. A well-defined brand purpose aligned with sustainability enhances trust among customers, resulting in loyalty (Papasureeechote and Wonglorsaichon, 2025; Armutcu, 2025). Hence, Sustainability Stewardship is defined as ‘the incorporation of environmental responsibility and alignment with sustainability goals as integral elements of a brand’s purpose.’

4.9. Dialogue and Involvement

When organizations follow brand purpose, their communication is highly context-specific (Rudeloff & Michalski, 2024). With the growth of social media, engaging in meaningful two-way communication is

essential for co-creating brand purpose with stakeholders and building strong relationships (Rudeloff and Michalski, 2024; Herrada-Lores et al., 2025). Hardianto (2023) found that social platforms offer new ways for consumers to shape and co-own purpose. Involving customers through dialogue, e.g., via social platforms, leads to higher satisfaction and stronger relationships with the brand (Colliander et al., 2015). Dialogue must be continuous for organisations to maintain customer engagement and satisfaction (Merdiaty & Aldrin, 2022). Dialogue and involvement are defined as ‘the continuous and participatory interaction between a brand and its stakeholders, through which purpose is co-developed, refined, and enacted.’

4.10. Brand-Purpose Equity Roles

Brand purpose contributes strategically to a brand’s market position and meaning-making. Research suggests that purpose serves as a differentiator, source of emotional equity, and long-term loyalty driver (Calder, 2020; Bianchi et al., 2020). Practitioner studies, for example, Gonçalves Filho et al. (2025), show that brand managers view purpose as central to consumer identity and category leadership. In the present study, brand-purpose equity roles are defined as ‘the functional and emotional contributions that purpose makes to brand value—including differentiation, identity creation and stakeholder inspiration.’

4.11. Emotional and Inspirational Value

Finally, purpose must resonate emotionally to foster brand attachment. Studies (Calder, 2020; Chebab and Boukerch, 2025; Cestare and Ray, 2019) emphasize that emotional meaning, such as hope, belonging and inspiration, drives loyalty and advocacy. Walter et al. (2024) and van Ingen et al. (2021) show that emotionally rich purpose communication enhances credibility and engagement. When purpose is enacted sincerely, it fosters positive stakeholder emotions (France et al., 2024; Gulati and Wohlgezogen, 2023). Positive emotional value only emerges when purpose is trusted and aligned with action (Vredenburg et al., 2020). Emotional and inspirational value in the study is defined as ‘the emotional connection and sense of meaning that a brand’s purpose generates in stakeholders, often reflected in feelings of hope, pride or shared identity and strengthened identification when purpose is communicated and enacted authentically.’

5. Findings

The literature review and expert consultation process supported the retention and refinement of eleven dimensions of brand purpose: Beyond-Profit Orientation, Enduring Commitment, Integrated Values, Genuine Action and Authenticity, Stakeholder Nurturing, Consumer Empowerment, Transformation of Practices/Social Impact, Sustainability Stewardship, Dialogue and Involvement, Brand-Purpose Equity Roles, and Emotional and Inspirational Value.

Expert responses showed that the literature-derived dimensions were also reflected in practitioner and academic interpretations of brand purpose, including authenticity, long-term commitment, stakeholder fairness, sustainability, dialogue, and emotional value.

Table 1 presents selected expert statements and their coding. Since several statements reflected more than one domain, axial coding was applied adaptively, and the resulting domains were shared with experts for interpretive verification. Experts regarded solidarity and social justice as aspects of fair stakeholder benefit allocation; these codes were therefore subsumed under Stakeholder Nurturing after agreement among the panel.

Although the expert consultation began with literature-derived domains, the framework was not treated as fixed. Experts could challenge, rename, merge, separate, or propose additional domains. As reflected in the final structure, their input principally refined conceptual boundaries and overlaps rather than producing an additional standalone dimension; the clearest recorded refinement was the placement of solidarity and social justice within stakeholder nurturing/benefit balance. Accordingly, the expert input is interpreted as support for conceptual relevance and refinement, not as empirical or psychometric validation. All eleven provisional dimensions were retained; none was deleted or split.

Table 1
Sample of grounded-theory-informed coding (adaptive application)

Expert No.	Statements	Open Code	Axial coding and corresponding literature-derived domain(s)
1	"...A brand that exists only to make profit has no purpose. Though profit is important and must be part of purpose, it cannot be the only thing in an organisation.... ...A true brand purpose demands a clear and actionable contribution towards society. It should be articulated in a manner that reflects a deeper commitment than revenue or campaign goals...."	Brands beyond campaign messaging; beyond revenue; contribution to society	Beyond-Profit Orientation
2	"...purpose is a long-term promise, not a quarterly initiative. It should continue even when budgets shrink, or leadership changes happen.... ... if it fades when challenges arise, it was never a real purpose..."	Long term promise; Purpose continues during leadership changes and downturns	Enduring commitment (long-termism)
3	"...purpose needs to be strategically embedded in how an organization operates... ...it must influence strategy, HR policies, sourcing, and performance incentives... ...when purpose lives only in talks and not in action, customers can immediately sense the disconnect..."	Purpose embedded across operations, strategy, culture	Integrated values
4	"...people nowadays no longer trust claims without proof. A brand should demonstrate authenticity through consistent action across time and contexts... ...if impact cannot be traced, purpose remains questionable... ...every stakeholder should feel acknowledged in the brand's decisions. When employees, communities, society, and investors all see value in the journey, purpose becomes inclusive rather than selective... ...Justice to all stakeholders is essential for long-term credibility."	Proof of impact required; deeds must match claims; authenticity; Decisions must consider all stakeholders; justice to all stakeholders	Genuine action & authenticity / Stakeholder nurturing

Expert No.	Statements	Open Code	Axial coding and corresponding literature-derived domain(s)
5	"Brands must help people express who they are and what they believe... ...When customers feel pride and meaning through association, purpose becomes emotionally resonant.... ... Empowerment transforms them from consumers into advocates..."	Brand helps consumers express identity & advocacy; customers feel pride; empowerment; emotionally resonant	Consumer empowerment / Emotional & inspirational value
6	"Purpose must reshape systems and outcomes, not just intentions... ... It should lead to observable improvements in lives and social behaviours... ...Real impact is measured through change, not through communication."	Purpose must reshape systems & behaviour with evidence; improvement in lives and social behaviour in society	Transformation of Practices/Social Impact
7	"...environmental responsibility is no longer a choice.... ...a brand that harms the earth cannot claim to have purpose. ...sustainability must be designed into every step of the value chain... ...brands must support fair treatment and representation in both internal and external environments. Silence on injustice contradicts brand purpose... ...there should be balance in providing benefits to all people related to the organisation, one way or another..."	Environmental responsibility becomes mandatory; Support inclusion and fairness; silence is complicity	Sustainability stewardship / Stakeholder nurturing
8	"... purpose requires listening continuously to the people it claims to serve. Two-way engagement builds shared ownership and accountability. Brands should be in conversation, not in monologue.... purpose should strengthen what the brand stands for in people's minds... It must differentiate the brand from competitors, reinforce identity and build emotional loyalty.... When purpose becomes a driver of preference and advocacy...brand purpose directly enhances brand value rather than existing as a separate social agenda for example any CSR as a responsibility...."	Listening and co-creating with communities; two-way communication with customers; Brand perception; differentiator, associated with identity, loyalty, enhances brand equity.	Dialogue & involvement / Brand-purpose equity roles

Expert No.	Statements	Open Code	Axial coding and corresponding literature-derived domain(s)
9	"... a purpose-driven brand considers financial performance and societal impact as interdependent . Customers, society, and shareholders must all benefit fairly . When one is sacrificed consistently, the purpose loses balance.... purpose should stir emotions and increase hope . When people feel inspired or proud of their association, advocacy becomes organic. Emotional connection is a signal that purpose has touched the customer's mind...."	Fair balance among customers, society & business; Inspire pride and advocacy among people	Stakeholder nurturing / Emotional & inspirational value
10	"Purpose is not a peripheral strategy ; it is a guiding premise... Brand Purpose should encourage innovation, partnerships , and category positioning When the brand evolves , purpose should remain its anchor."	Purpose guides strategy; Brand Identity	Integrated values / Equity roles
11	"...Authenticity is most visible during difficult times. ...A brand that chooses purpose over convenience demonstrates integrity. This is when trust deepens."	Authenticity; Choose purpose even when inconvenient	Genuine action & authenticity / Enduring commitment
12	"Purpose-driven brands cultivate actions for community problems . They invite people to join a movement rather than consume a message. Discussions and collaboration build stronger actions around purpose."	Build active communities around purpose	Dialogue & involvement / Consumer empowerment
13	"To claim purpose, an organization must redesign strategies that contribute to societal wellbeing . It's not about occasional philanthropy but permanent shifts in how value is created . Transformation is the real indicator of purpose."	Result-oriented; redesign business models for social well-being; value creation	Transformation of Practices/Social Impact / Brand-Purpose Equity Roles
14	"... environmentally beneficial actions must be embedded into every organisational strategy . It needs to guide product decisions, logistics, and resource cycles... equity and fairness must be visible in how the brand treats people behind the scenes. Representation, living wages, and accessibility reflect real commitments. This all should be supported by organizational policies"	Sustainability embedded in product & supply chain / Equity in workforce & policy, not just messaging	Sustainability stewardship / Integrated Values / Stakeholder nurturing
15	"... consistency is the fuel of trust....When people see alignment between the	Consistency in action; brand delivers what it	Genuine Action and Authenticity / Emotional and

Expert No.	Statements	Open Code	Axial coding and corresponding literature-derived domain(s)
	brand's promise and outcomes, they develop confidence in the relationship.... ...Purpose becomes a durable competitive advantage when trust is repeatedly earned...."	promises; Competitive advantage; confidence and trust	Inspirational Value / Brand-Purpose Equity Roles / Enduring Commitment

The literature-derived and expert-refined structure indicates that brand purpose is a multidimensional construct shaped by beyond-profit orientation, internal organizational embedding, stakeholder experience, and impact-oriented brand outcomes. Figure 1 presents the eleven dimensions organized into four broader conceptual groups. The four broader conceptual groups shown in Fig. 1 were reviewed by the expert panel after the eleven dimensions had been finalised.

In the subsequent item-generation stage, the eleven finalised dimensions and their definitions were provided to the separate panel of 11 experts. Each question focused on one dimension:

1. How could we show that brand purpose is not confined to profit but is beyond that?
2. What do you think could be the indicators of enduring or long-term commitment to brand purpose?
3. In what ways should a brand set its purpose across departments, policies, and employee behaviour?
4. How do experts distinguish between authentic and performative purpose communication? How could customers find out whether the efforts of an organization are genuine or not?
5. How can purpose balance value creation and benefits among customers, employees, communities, and investors? What examples can one give to show this fairness and solidarity?
6. How is consumer empowerment related to brand purpose?
7. Which indicators or statements could show real impact of genuine efforts on society and stakeholders by an organization?
8. How can we know that brand purpose is supporting sustainable development goals?
9. How can reciprocal engagement with stakeholders be demonstrated?
10. How can we capture the equity-building role of brand purpose?
11. How does brand purpose arouse emotional connection or inspiration among stakeholders?

The responses were analysed to identify dimension-specific keywords, and preliminary items were developed from those keywords and expert inputs. These items require future empirical validation before they can be used as a standardized measurement scale. The authors extracted dimension-relevant expressions from the written responses, converted them into concise declarative statements, and removed substantively repetitive wording. This process produced a preliminary pool of 43 items. The final item wording was formulated by the authors and was not returned to the experts for a separate wording review.

Table 2
Proposed preliminary items for brand purpose dimensions

Dimension	Keywords	Items
'Beyond-Profit Orientation'	Societal / environmental impact	This brand actively contributes to social or environmental improvement.
	Identity / existence-based purpose	This brand appears to have a clear purpose that defines why it exists beyond selling products.
	Long-term relationships / customer value	This brand focuses on building long-term relationships rather than short-term sales.
	Purpose scope beyond commercial goals	The brand addresses responsibilities wider than its own commercial success.
Enduring Commitment	Consistency over time	This brand has consistently demonstrated its purpose over time.
	Long-term investment/funding	The brand appears to invest substantial long-term resources in its purpose-driven initiatives.
	Governance anchoring (KPIs/board)	The brand's leadership and governance seem committed to monitoring and achieving its stated purpose.
	Persistence under difficulty	The brand continues its purpose-driven efforts even during difficult market or organizational conditions.
Integrated Values	Cross-functional integration	Different areas of the brand (e.g., marketing, products, service) consistently reflect the same purpose.
	HR/performance alignment	Employees of this brand seem to act in ways that align with its stated values.
	Leadership clarity	The brand's leadership clearly communicates brand purpose and direction.
	Customer-centric orientation	The brand prioritizes customer well-being over purely profit-driven motives.
Genuine Action and Authenticity	Word–action consistency	The brand's actions match what it communicates publicly.
	Transparency/verification	The brand provides clear and verifiable information about its purpose-related activities.
	Trade-offs/sacrifice	The brand appears willing to sacrifice short-term profits to uphold its values.

Dimension	Keywords	Items
Stakeholder Nurturing	Evidence of sincerity	The brand provides credible evidence that its purpose-related claims are sincere.
	Fair distribution/ethics	The brand treats its stakeholders fairly and ethically.
	Community reinvestment	The brand reinvests in the communities it serves.
	Stakeholder balancing logic	The brand balances the interests of different stakeholder groups effectively.
Consumer Empowerment	Stakeholder consideration	The brand considers the interests of key stakeholder groups when making important decisions.
	Informed choice/transparency	The brand provides enough information for me to make informed purchasing decisions.
	Consumer agency	The brand enables consumers to act in ways that reflect their personal values.
Transformation of Practices/Social Impact	Ethical consumption confidence	Buying from this brand makes me feel confident that I am making an ethical choice.
	Measurable outcomes	The brand demonstrates measurable results from its purpose-driven initiatives.
	Practice-level change	The brand's purpose leads to visible changes in its products, processes, policies, or practices.
	Stakeholder welfare impact	The brand's actions improve the well-being of its stakeholders.
Sustainability Stewardship	Community or stakeholder outcome	The brand's purpose contributes to meaningful improvement in stakeholder or community outcomes.
	Explicit SDG mapping	The brand clearly connects its initiatives to recognized sustainability goals.
	Reporting & standards	The brand follows recognized standards when reporting its sustainability efforts.
	Measurable targets	The brand sets clear and measurable targets related to its purpose.
	Environmental and long-term responsibility	The brand incorporates environmental and long-term sustainability responsibilities into its purpose.

Dimension	Keywords	Items
Dialogue & Involvement	Two-way dialogue	The brand engages in meaningful two-way communication with its stakeholders.
	Stakeholder influence on decisions	Stakeholders can influence the brand's decisions.
	Co-creation	The brand collaborates with stakeholders to develop solutions or initiatives.
	Formal feedback systems	The brand provides structured channels for stakeholders to give feedback.
Brand-Purpose Equity Roles	Trust & preference	I trust this brand and prefer it over alternatives.
	Loyalty/advocacy	I would recommend this brand to others because of its values.
	Premium willingness	I am willing to pay a premium for this brand because of its purpose.
	Resilience/reputation buffer	I would be more forgiving toward this brand in case of a minor mistake because of its values.
Emotional and Inspirational Value	Values alignment / identity fit	This brand reflects my personal values.
	Belonging / pride / trust	I feel proud to be associated with this brand.
	Meaningful storytelling	The brand communicates its purpose through meaningful and compelling stories.
	Participation in something meaningful	Supporting this brand makes me feel part of something meaningful.

Some keywords for the dimensions Beyond-Profit Orientation and Sustainability Stewardship were found to be similar. This is because when organizations go beyond profit, they may benefit society and the environment. These domains may overlap with sustainability. However, this does not mean that all efforts beyond profit will come under SDGs. For example, efforts focused on legal or ethical responsibilities may not come under SDGs (He & Lai, 2012). In the present study, Beyond-Profit Orientation means all activities or efforts beyond profit. It does not necessarily have to be part of SDGs. On the other hand, Sustainability Stewardship means that the organization focuses on SDGs. This distinction helps maintain conceptual clarity between a broad beyond-profit orientation and a specific sustainability-oriented commitment.

6. Discussion

Purpose should not be approached as just another “language” tool. There have been several conceptualizations of purpose from an ethical, stakeholder, consumer-perception, and brand-equity standpoint (France et al., 2024; Feri et al., 2024; Zürn et al., 2023). In this paper, purpose fragmented insights were woven into a single framework for how brands conceive, communicate, experience, and translate purpose into brand and societal value.

As such, this paper’s contribution should be seen as a literature-informed and expert validated conceptual framework. Fully inductive grounded theory was not the study goal because experts reviewed a priori domains grounded in the literature. Experts challenged concepts, refined definitions, and provided initial content validation, but the dimensionality and suggested items are still open to further empirical testing.

Expert consultation and literature review established beyond-profit orientation as a distinct dimension of brand purpose. Yet, it is not the same as sustainability stewardship. Beyond profit includes responsibilities a brand has to ethical, legal, social, and community principles which can be communicated independently from or through the lens of SDGs. Sustainability stewardship implies a purpose centered on environmental impact or impacting certain SDGs (He & Lai, 2012; Feri et al., 2024; Zürn et al., 2023).

Duration and embeddedness were identified as necessary conditions for stakeholders to view purpose as legitimate. When a company practices what they communicate and has been doing so over a long period, stakeholders can assume the organization values are applied to decision-making and likely embedded throughout strategy, culture, governance, and daily operations (France et al., 2024; Feri et al., 2024; Freeman, 1984; Loi, 2016).

Experts identified several items related to action and proof. Stakeholders care about action – they observe what a brand says and whether it backs it up over time, demonstrates evidence, and has transparency in its efforts. This includes whether brands stand by their values when it becomes difficult or costly. This also aligns with insights from institutional theory as if society expects brands to have purpose, then there will be businesses engaging in decoupled behaviors using the language of purpose to appear socially legitimate without undergoing true organizational change (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

Several dimensions included items that relate to stakeholders, whether they are customers or other stakeholder groups. Nurturing stakeholder wellbeing, empowering consumers, and encouraging dialogue and engagement show that stakeholders help co-create and shape brand purpose. Brands can earn greater legitimacy in their purpose by considering stakeholder needs, facilitating opportunities to participate, and allowing consumers to demonstrate their values by interacting with brands that support their own (Freeman, 1984; Mirzaei et al., 2021; Rudeloff & Michalski, 2024).

Lastly, brand purpose should have tangible effects on the organization and society. Stakeholders can experience brand purpose which can translate to organizational metrics, such as trust, brand preference, loyalty, and advocacy and social ones such as employee pride, emotional connection, and meaningful

identification. Brand purpose is multidimensional because it is conceptualized as a moral and business strategy, relational, and should ultimately drive brand and social values.

7. Implications of the study

The present study offers academic value by clarifying brand purpose as a multidimensional construct and organizing a fragmented body of literature into eleven coherent dimensions. This contributes to construct clarity and provides a foundation for future scale development.

From an industry perspective, organizations can use the eleven dimensions as a diagnostic framework to evaluate whether their brand purpose is deeply embedded, authentic, stakeholder-oriented, and capable of producing meaningful outcomes.

Brand purpose should be treated as an organization-wide and stakeholder-inclusive practice rather than the responsibility of the marketing division alone. It must be reflected across departments, policies, employee behaviour, stakeholder relationships, and communication practices.

When consistently embedded and authentically enacted, brand purpose can strengthen brand equity by enhancing trust, loyalty, differentiation, advocacy, and emotional attachment.

8. Limitations and Future Research

One limitation of the study is that it does not empirically validate the explored dimensions. The reason is that the explored dimensions are general and not focused on any specific brand, industry, or sector. The relative importance of each dimension may vary across industries because of differences in strategic focus. For example, health care could be more aligned with health-related Sustainable Development Goals under category three (SDG 3) (Hung-Baesecke et al., 2025), FMCG could focus more on brand distinctiveness and high-purpose communication (Henning and Nussbaum, 2026), and consumer goods could use sustainability for differentiation (Lu and Ben Abdelaziz, 2026; Gupta et al., 2013). Future research should therefore examine the relevance and relative importance of the identified dimensions across industries.

Another limitation of the study is that the items for the dimensions were proposed through qualitative analysis and require validation before use as an established scale. Future studies may therefore test the proposed items using quantitative scale development procedures, such as exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses, reliability analyses, convergent and discriminant validity analyses, and measurement invariance across sectors or consumer groups.

A further limitation is that presenting literature-derived domains during the verification round may have encouraged confirmatory judgments. Future research should therefore examine the framework through unprompted interviews or independent expert and stakeholder samples before proceeding to quantitative scale validation.

Another future research direction could be to clarify the distinction between the beyond-profit concepts of brand purpose and sustainability stewardship, and to examine the criteria on which the two constructs differ. Such work would help clarify whether sustainability stewardship should be treated as one specific domain of brand purpose or as an overlapping but distinct construct in certain industry contexts.

9. Conclusion

The present study contributes to the emerging literature on brand purpose by addressing the lack of clarity around its conceptual boundaries and measurable dimensions. By synthesizing prior literature and expert inputs, the study structures brand purpose as a multidimensional construct and proposes eleven dimensions that can guide future scale development.

A key insight is that brand purpose is both internally embedded and externally experienced. It is reflected in organizational strategy, culture, operations, policy alignment, and decision-making, while also being judged by stakeholders through fairness, consistency, emotional connection, dialogue, trust, and perceived societal value.

Overall, the findings suggest that authentic purpose can support trust, preference, advocacy, resilience, identity fit, pride, and meaningful participation when stakeholders perceive that the brand's values are enacted consistently and responsibly. The proposed framework therefore provides a theoretical basis for future empirical validation of brand purpose as a measurable construct.

Declarations

Competing Interests:

The authors declare no competing interests.

Consent to Participate:

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study. Participation was entirely voluntary, and participants were informed about the purpose of the study, their right to withdraw at any stage, and the assurance of confidentiality and anonymity.

Consent for Publication:

Not applicable.

Clinical Trial Statement

No clinical trial was conducted in this study.

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Author Contribution

D.C. conceptualized the study, designed the methodology, coordinated data collection, conducted the qualitative analysis, and led the manuscript writing and revisions. R.B. contributed to the literature review, expert consultation process, coding interpretation, manuscript drafting, and critical revision. Both authors reviewed and approved the final manuscript.

Data Availability

All data supporting the findings of this study are available within the paper, and any Supplementary Information will be available upon request.

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Figures

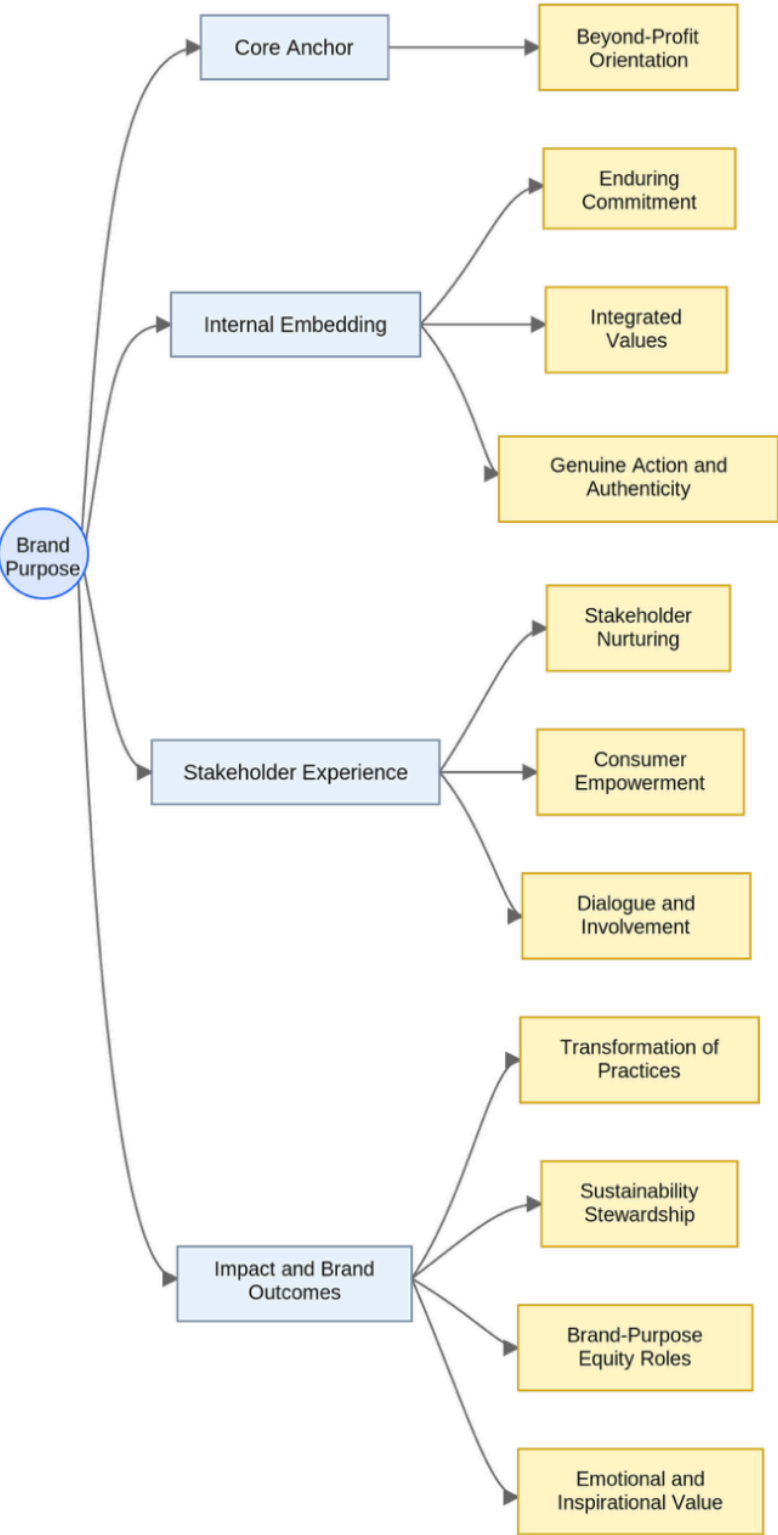


Figure 1

