

## How Social Entrepreneurs Facilitate the Adoption of New Industry Practices<sup>[1]</sup>

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**ABSTRACT** This paper explores how social entrepreneurs use rhetoric to facilitate the pervasive adoption of new, socially focused, industry practices. Our conceptualization proposes that the nature of social entrepreneurs' rhetoric hinges on perceptions of their relationships to the industry members they seek to influence. We develop a framework that explains the effects of two cognitive structures – identity and power – on social entrepreneurs' perceptions of industry members and, in turn, the social entrepreneurs' rhetorical strategies for persuading the industry members to adopt new practices. Our framework specifies mechanisms through which social entrepreneurs facilitate systemic social change and, in doing so, informs theory at the intersection of social entrepreneurship, sustainable social change, and rhetoric.

**Keywords:** entrepreneurship, rhetoric, social change, social cognition, sustainability

Social entrepreneurs are actors who seek to create social value by innovating industry practices that address social needs (Austin et al., 2006; Bornstein, 2007; Dacin et al., 2010; Dees, 1998; Martin and Osberg, 2007; Miller et al., 2012; Short et al., 2009; Zahra et al., 2009). Such actors focus on a diverse range of issues (e.g., the environment, poverty, and education), take various forms (e.g., individuals, non-profits, for-profits, and B-Corps), and operate from different industry positions (e.g., insiders or outsiders).

Prior research has provided ample illustrations of social entrepreneurs in action. For instance, Muhammed Yunus, the founder of Grameen Bank, sought to reduce poverty by providing microloans to the poor (Battilana and Dorado, 2010; Bornstein, 1996; Zhao, 2014); 4CORE and other environmental organizations sought to limit environmental degradation by introducing 'clean' energy solutions (Pacheco et al., 2014; York et al., 2015); and Gloria de Souza, the founder of Parisar Asha, sought to improve educational systems by replacing rote-learning methods with experiential-learning methods (Bornstein, 2007).

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Such work has largely focused on how social entrepreneurs enact new, socially focused, industry practices (Austin et al., 2006; Zahra et al., 2009). However, in order to achieve their core objective of systemic social change (Bornstein, 2007; Dees, 1998; Mair and Marti, 2006; Martin and Osberg, 2007; Zahra et al., 2009), social entrepreneurs must involve broader sets of industry members in their efforts (Dacin et al., 2011). For instance, to enhance the impact of Grameen Bank's micro-lending practices on poverty in Bangladesh, Muhammed Yunus called for nationalized banks to adopt comparable practices. The tendency of research to focus on social entrepreneurs' efforts to innovate practices indicates that extant theory may not adequately explain social entrepreneurs' efforts to facilitate the pervasive adoption of these practices by industry members. Our objective is to develop theory that explains the latter phenomenon.

Recent research has suggested that rhetoric, which describes persuasive language, may play a crucial role in social entrepreneurs' efforts to generate systemic social change (see Dacin et al., 2011; Green et al., 2009; Waldron et al., 2015). The core function of an actor's rhetoric is to persuade audiences that new practices are preferable to existing versions by manipulating their values and beliefs (Berkenkotter and Huckin, 1995; Miller, 1994; Orlikowski and Yates, 1994). Effective rhetoric shifts audiences' perceptions of 'normal' and 'appropriate', prompting them to enact change (Burke, 1969 [1945]; Green et al., 2009; Suddaby and Greenwood, 2005). Muhammed Yunus, for instance, used a variety of arguments to legitimize microlending among the senior managers of Bangladeshi nationalized banks, prompting the managers to adopt versions of this practice (Bornstein, 1996). Given the utility of rhetoric in influencing actors' efforts to facilitate how communicators' think and act, we examine the rhetoric that social entrepreneurs use to persuade industry members to adopt socially focused practices.

Our conceptualization proposes that the nature of social entrepreneurs' rhetoric hinges on their perceptions of the industry members they seek to influence. Two cognitive structures with sensemaking utility – identity and power – inform these perceptions and, in turn, affect the rhetorical tactics used by social entrepreneurs. We first propose that differences in the self-definitions that social entrepreneurs perceive between themselves and industry members – which we label identity differentials – affect how the social entrepreneurs frame and argue for new practices. We then propose that the differences in influence that social entrepreneurs perceive between themselves and industry members – which we label power differentials – affect how the social entrepreneurs validate and tailor messages to the industry members. We conclude by developing a framework that conveys the joint effects of identity and power differentials on social entrepreneurs' rhetorical tactics. As illustrated in Table I, the framework identifies four combinations of identity and power differentials, recognizes the rhetorical tactics associated with each combination, and highlights the rhetorical strategy enacted through these tactics.<sup>[2]</sup> Overall, by explaining how social entrepreneurs persuade industry members to adopt new practices, we advance theory germane to social entrepreneurship, sustainable social change, and rhetoric.

The manuscript unfolds in three parts. In the first part, we elaborate and exemplify the distinct effects of identity and power differentials on social entrepreneurs' rhetorical tactics. In the second part, we depict the joint effects of identity and power

Table I. Matrix of social entrepreneurs' perceptions and rhetorical strategies

		Perceived Power Differential <i>Nature of differences between social entrepreneurs' and their audiences' industry positions</i>	
		<i>Favourable</i>	<i>Unfavourable</i>
Perceived Identity Differential <i>Extent of differences between social entrepreneurs' and their audiences' defining qualities</i>	<i>Minor</i>	<p><i>Quadrant 1</i> Strategy: Fatalism <i>Description:</i> Social entrepreneurs articulate that industrial trends will require industry members to adopt new practices that incrementally improve on extant versions. New practices represent an opportunity – created by evolutionary forces in their industries – for industry members to advance themselves. <i>Rhetorical tactics:</i> Isomorphically framed, logical arguments conveyed through uniform communications</p>	<p><i>Quadrant 2</i> Strategy: Puffery <i>Description:</i> Social entrepreneurs construe themselves as contributors to or catalysts of industrial trends that will require industry members to adopt new practices that incrementally improve on extant versions. New practices represent an opportunity – created by the entrepreneurs – for industry members to address evolutionary forces in their industries and, consequently, to advance themselves. <i>Rhetorical tactics:</i> Isomorphically framed, logical and character arguments conveyed through diverse communications</p>
	<i>Major</i>	<p><i>Quadrant 3</i> Strategy: Napalm <i>Description:</i> Social entrepreneurs articulate that social trends will require industry members to adopt new practices that drastically differ from extant versions. New practices represent a chance – created by revolutionary shifts in societal expectations – for industry members to honour these expectations and, consequently, to avoid stigmatization. <i>Rhetorical tactics:</i> Non-isomorphically framed, dramatic arguments conveyed through uniform communications</p>	<p><i>Quadrant 4</i> Strategy: Dissidence <i>Description:</i> Social entrepreneurs construe themselves as contributors to or catalysts of social trends that will require industry members to adopt new practices that drastically differ from extant versions. New practices represent a chance – created by the entrepreneurs – for field members to honour revolutionary shifts in societal expectations and, consequently, to avoid stigmatization. <i>Rhetorical tactics:</i> Non-isomorphically framed, dramatic and character arguments conveyed through diverse communications</p>

differentials on these rhetorical tactics, identify rhetorical strategies enacted through these tactics, and provide examples of each strategy. In the final part, we discuss the theoretical implications of our conceptualization and outline opportunities for future research.

## **SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURS' PERCEPTIONS AND RHETORICAL TACTICS**

Our theory adopts a socio-cognitive perspective of social entrepreneurship. This perspective emphasizes the perceptual foundations of behaviour and suggests that actors rely on evaluations of environmental cues when deciding how to act (Berger and Luckmann, 1966; Waldron et al., 2013; Walsh, 1995; Weick, 1979, 1995; Weick et al., 2005). As they scan the environment, actors assign meaning to environmental cues based on the mental frameworks – described as cognitive structures – that they use to make sense of information. Cognitive structures provide actors with a basis to interpret, compare, and reason (Garner, 2007) and shape actors' views of themselves, their groups or organizations, and their external environments (Berger and Luckmann, 1966).

Social entrepreneurs, like other actors, often evaluate their environments when deciding how to act (e.g., Battilana and Dorado, 2010; Mair and Marti, 2009; Tracey et al., 2011; Zhao, 2014). Extending this premise, we propose that social entrepreneurs draw on various cognitive structures to make sense of the industry members they aim to influence. Scholars have emphasized the impact of two cognitive structures – identity (e.g., Dutton and Dukerich, 1991; Waldron et al., 2013; Weick et al., 2005) and power (e.g., Kim, Pinkley and Fragale, 2005; McKinley et al., 2000; Walsh, 1995; Weick et al., 2005) – on actors' evaluations of their environments. Our conceptualization draws on this work to suggest that social entrepreneurs rely on self-conceptions of their identities and power to evaluate the nature of their relationships to industry members. Each cognitive structure affords social entrepreneurs with a distinct perceptual lens for evaluating these relationships. Whereas identity enables social entrepreneurs to assess their similarity to industry members, power enables social entrepreneurs to assess their ability to influence industry members.

We also propose that, in defining their perceptions of industry members, social entrepreneurs' cognitive structures determine their rhetoric for persuading industry members to adopt socially focused practices. Scholars have emphasized the roles of certain rhetorical tactics – frames, explanatory and character arguments, and message uniformity – in actors' efforts to persuade audiences to act in desired ways (Aristotle, 1991; Green, 2004; Green and Li, 2011; Green et al., 2009; Suddaby and Greenwood, 2005). Frames refer to the meaning systems in which actors position their calls for audiences to act (Benford and Snow, 2000; Druckman, 2001; Snow and Benford, 1988). Explanatory arguments refer to the reasons that actors offer audiences to act, and character arguments refer to the information that actors provide to ensure the credibility of their reasons for audiences to act (Aristotle, 1991; Green, 2004; Suddaby and Greenwood, 2005). Message uniformity refers to the extent to which actors adjust their frames and arguments for action to appeal to the groups that comprise their audiences (see Conway et al., 2012; Magnusson, 2000).

Our conceptualization suggests that social entrepreneurs rely on these four rhetorical tactics to foster industry members' attentiveness and receptiveness to new practices. Each rhetorical tactic performs a distinct function in such efforts. We suggest that frames and explanatory arguments influence industry members' attentiveness to social entrepreneurs by establishing the meaning and value of new practices, respectively, to the

industry members. Additionally, we suggest that character arguments and message uniformity influence industry members' receptiveness to social entrepreneurs by making their frames and explanatory arguments for new practices credible and relevant to industry members.

In the remainder of this section, we specify how identity and power affect the rhetorical tactics favoured by social entrepreneurs. Differences in the compatibility of the cognitive structures' and the rhetorical tactics' functions mean that each cognitive structure affects the use of certain rhetorical tactics more than others. By facilitating evaluations of their similarity to industry members, for instance, identity affects how social entrepreneurs portray the meaning (i.e., frames) and value (i.e., explanatory arguments) of new practices to influence their audiences' attentiveness to change. Additionally, by facilitating evaluations of their ability to influence industry members, power affects whether social entrepreneurs validate (i.e., character arguments) and diversify (i.e., message uniformity) their portrayals of new practices to influence their audience's receptiveness to change.

We begin by examining the relationship between social entrepreneurs' identities and rhetorical tactics in more depth.

### **The Effect of Identity on Rhetorical Tactics**

Social entrepreneurs' identities shape how they portray new practices to industry members. Identities, which have received attention from organizational scholars in a variety of disciplines, describe actors' beliefs about their own defining attributes or, more basically, who they are and what they do (Albert and Whetten, 1985; Corley et al., 2006; Elsbach and Kramer, 1996; Navis and Glynn, 2011; Whetten, 2006). Actors derive significant value from their identities (Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Dutton and Dukerich, 1991), including their self-concepts and self-worth (Dutton et al., 1994; Fauchart and Gruber, 2011; Mael and Ashforth, 1992).<sup>[3]</sup>

Identity provides actors with a baseline to gauge the legitimacy and fit of their defining qualities with external audiences (Gioia et al., 2000; Whetten, 2006). The comparative function of identity is relevant to social entrepreneurs, who evaluate their relatedness to industry members in terms of worldviews, objectives, and operations when deciding how to ensure their audiences' attentiveness to new practices. To conduct such evaluations, social entrepreneurs use their identities as baselines to discern the extent to which they define themselves in ways that seem comparable to (or different from) industry members. We describe the degree of overlap (or distinction) that social entrepreneurs perceive to exist between conceptions of their own and their audiences' defining qualities as identity differentials.

The identity differentials experienced by social entrepreneurs can range from minor to major. Minor identity differentials occur when social entrepreneurs define themselves in ways that seem comparable to industry members.<sup>[4]</sup> Such evaluations cause social entrepreneurs to view industry members as 'similar others' and, consequently, to focus on commonalities with their audiences. In contrast, major identity differentials occur when social entrepreneurs define themselves in ways that seem divergent from industry members. Such evaluations lead social entrepreneurs to view industry members as 'dissimilar others' and, consequently, to focus on contrasts with their audiences. By shaping

whether social entrepreneurs focus on commonalities or contrasts with industry members, identity differentials determine the frames that social entrepreneurs use to imbue new industry practices with meaning and the arguments that they use to justify the adoption of the new practices.

*Identity differentials and frames.* Frames refer to the meaning systems in which actors situate their calls for audiences to act (Benford and Snow, 2000; Druckman, 2001; Snow and Benford, 1988). Actors rely on a variety of frames – including political philosophies (e.g., conservative or liberal), social issues (e.g., civil rights or sustainability), and ideological leanings (e.g., social or economic), among others – to dictate the meaning of desired actions to their audiences (Zald, 1996). To make new practices meaningful to industry members, social entrepreneurs may rely on industry logics to frame new, socially focused practices. Logics describe the socially constructed patterns of practices, values, beliefs, and norms that reflect reality for actors in a given industry (Thornton and Ocasio, 1999; Thornton et al., 2012). Some social entrepreneurs frame new practices as extensions of the logics that are salient to industry members (see Hargadon and Douglas, 2001; Tracey et al., 2011), whereas others frame new practices as departures from these logics (cf., Maguire and Hardy, 2009; Zahra et al., 2009). We refer to the former frame as *isomorphic* and the latter frame as *non-isomorphic* (George et al., 2006).

Social entrepreneurs who perceive minor identity differentials to exist view industry members as ‘similar others’, leading the social entrepreneurs to believe that they subscribe to the same logics as their audiences and to build on this commonality to imbue new practices with meaning. Using vocabularies germane to the industry members they seek to influence, social entrepreneurs craft messages that portray new practices as consistent with industry values, norms, beliefs, and practices (Greenwood et al., 2002; Hargadon and Douglas, 2001). An important aspect of this approach is that, although they innovate practices to address social needs, social entrepreneurs will present such practices in terms familiar to industry members. Such isomorphic frames downplay the novelty and extremity of new practices by depicting them as incremental, beneficial, inevitable reinforcements to industry logics (Suddaby and Greenwood, 2005). Minor identity differentials, then, may prompt social entrepreneurs to contextualize new practices as natural extensions of industry logics.

The connection between minor identity differentials and isomorphic frames is evident in Tracey et al.’s (2011) account of how Paul Harrod and Mark Richardson founded *Aspire* – a British magazine retailer – to provide employment for homeless people. Harrod and Richardson – who had worked in for-profit and non-profit sectors – identified *Aspire* as a hybrid enterprise, much like those they hoped would adopt *Aspire*’s practice of hiring homeless people. To give meaning to this practice, Harrod and Richardson emphasized the perceived similarity to their audience by framing the practice as a reinforcement of the logics that were salient among hybrid enterprises. As Tracey et al. (2011, p. 73) report: ‘Harrod and Richardson emphasized that social and commercial objectives were complementary rather than contradictory and that *Aspire* could operate as viable business as well as achieve important social outcomes. For example, Richardson said that *Aspire*’s business model [recognizes a business can have social objectives and still work as a business] (Rigby, 2000, p. 17), and Harrod commented that [this is



not about handouts. This is a business, even if it is not-for-profit] (O'Hagan, 2001, p. 12)'. Building on the preceding logic and example, we propose that:

*Proposition 1a:* The more minor the identity differentials perceived by social entrepreneurs, the more likely they will be to use isomorphic frames to give meaning to new industry practices.

Social entrepreneurs who perceive major identity differentials to exist view industry members as 'dissimilar others', leading the social entrepreneurs to believe that they subscribe to different logics from their audiences and to build on this contrast to imbue new practices with meaning. Using vocabularies of those who desire more socially focused industry practices, social entrepreneurs craft messages that define these practices as inconsistent with the extant constellation of industry values, norms, beliefs, and practices (Maguire and Hardy, 2009; Maguire et al., 2004; Markham and Waldron, 2016; Zahra et al., 2009). An important aspect of this approach is that social entrepreneurs neither obscure the fact that they create new practices to address social needs nor present such practices in terms familiar to industry members. Such non-isomorphic frames embrace the novelty and extremity of new practices by depicting them as revolutionary departures from industry logics (Waldron et al., 2015). Major identity differentials, then, may prompt social entrepreneurs to contextualize new practices as noteworthy disruptions, rather than as natural enhancements, to industry logics.

The connection between major identity differentials and non-isomorphic frames is evident in Bornstein's (2007) account of how Fabio Rosa facilitated the adoption of a low-cost electricity distribution system, one that made electricity accessible to disadvantaged Brazilians. Rosa's electricity distribution system faced strong opposition from the very organizations he looked to for support, including the state electric company – Companhia Estadual de Energia Electrica (CEEE), cement and aluminum cartels, and government agencies. Rosa identified himself as an advocate for the disadvantaged, in stark contrast to those that he wanted to adopt his electricity distribution system. To give meaning to his system, Rosa emphasized the perceived difference from his audience by framing it as a disruption to the logics that were salient to these organizations. 'What we had invented worked beautifully, but it was illegal', explained Rosa. 'If the government has no money and the technical standard is expensive, then you have to change the standard' was Rosa's rallying cry (Bornstein, 2007, p. 24). Building on the preceding logic and example, we propose that:

*Proposition 1b:* The more major the identity differentials perceived by social entrepreneurs, the more likely they will be to use non-isomorphic frames to give meaning to new industry practices.

*Identity differentials and explanatory arguments.* Whereas frames allow social entrepreneurs to establish the meaning of new practices to industry members, explanatory arguments allow social entrepreneurs to provide reasons for industry members to adopt these practices. Rhetorical theory suggests that logical (i.e., logos) and dramatic (i.e., pathos) arguments play important roles in explaining the need for audiences to act (Aristotle, 1991;

Green, 2004; Martens et al., 2007; Suddaby and Greenwood, 2005). Logical arguments provide objective reasons – often in the form of factual information, statistics, and explanations – to justify the need for industry members to adopt new practices (Suddaby and Greenwood, 2005). In contrast, dramatic arguments provide moral reasons – often in the form of emotional imagery, metaphors, analogies, and verbiage – to justify the need for industry members to adopt new practices (Suddaby and Greenwood, 2005). Although social entrepreneurs can leverage both logical and dramatic arguments, identity differentials may lead them to favour one type of argument over the other.

Social entrepreneurs who perceive minor identity differentials to exist view industry members as ‘similar others’ and believe that they maintain comparable operational objectives, interests, and methods to their audiences (see Turner, 1982, 1991). These commonalities provide a robust foundation for social entrepreneurs to rationalize the need for industry members to adopt new practices. Using logical explanations that resonate with the industry members they seek to influence, social entrepreneurs articulate the performance implications if industry members implement or resist new practices. The core intent of such explanations is to cause industry members to view new practices as promising avenues for enhancing their efficacy. This approach enables social entrepreneurs to add explanatory substance to frames that portray new practices in terms familiar to industry members and as incremental progressions of industry logics. Minor identity differentials, then, may prompt social entrepreneurs to substantiate the isomorphic frames that give meaning to new practices with objective reasons for adopting those practices.

The connection between minor identity differentials and logical arguments is evident in Bornstein’s (2007, pp. 17–20) account of how Gloria de Souza founded Parisar Asha to facilitate the adoption of an innovative learning method. de Souza – who pioneered the learning method while working as a teacher in Indian schools – identified Parisar Asha as an educational provider, much like those she hoped would adopt her learning method. To justify the need for Indian school districts to adopt this practice, de Souza emphasized the perceived similarity with her audience by using research to explain how it improved upon established learning methods. This approach played an important role in catalyzing the practice change that de Souza desired: ‘Her patient work of adoption, persuasion, training, and organizing spread her impact widely. Eventually the government of India introduced her work into other districts’ (Ashoka, 2011). Building on the preceding logic and example, we propose that:

*Proposition 2a:* The more minor the identity differentials perceived by social entrepreneurs, the more likely they will be to use logical arguments to justify the need for new industry practices.

Social entrepreneurs who perceive major identity differentials to exist view industry members as ‘dissimilar others’ and believe that they maintain different operational objectives, interests, and methods from their audiences. These differences lead social entrepreneurs to dramatize the need for industry members to adopt new practices. Using emotional explanations that resonate with the societal audiences who desire socially focused industry practices, social entrepreneurs alert industry members to the visceral implications of failing to adopt these practices. The core intent of such



explanations is to cause industry members to question the appropriateness of their existing behaviour and, more generally, their legitimacy among societal audiences. This approach enables social entrepreneurs to add emotive flare to frames that portray new practices as unfamiliar to industry members and as drastic departures from established industry logics. Major identity differentials, then, may prompt social entrepreneurs to infuse the non-isomorphic frames that give meaning to new practices with normative reasons for adopting those practices.

The connection between major identity differentials and dramatic arguments is evident in Maguire and Hardy's (2009) account of how Rachel Carson facilitated the removal of DDT from pesticides. Carson – who was an environmentalist and a writer – identified herself as an advocate for natural ecosystems, quite unlike the chemical companies she hoped would replace DDT with less harmful chemicals. To justify the need for such change, Carson emphasized the perceived differences with the chemical companies by using emotional claims about the devastating effects of DDT. Her book *Silent Spring* described 'in detail the problems that pesticides, including DDT, posed for human health and the environment, directly challenging taken-for-granted practices of pesticide use. [The book opened] with an apocalyptic tale, describing a fictional town marked by [a shadow of death] as a result of problems caused by pesticides, including [new kinds of sickness] and the deaths of children. Instead of spring birdsong, [only silence lay over the fields and woods and marsh] (Carson, 1962, p. 2)' (Maguire and Hardy, 2009, p. 152). Building on the preceding logic and example, we propose that:

*Proposition 2b:* The more major the identity differentials perceived by social entrepreneurs, the more likely they will be to use dramatic arguments to justify the need for new industry practices.

### **The Effect of Perceived Power on Rhetorical Tactics**

Whereas social entrepreneurs' identities shape how they portray new practices to industry members, the entrepreneurs' conceptions of their own power may shape how they validate these portrayals to industry members. Power, which has received attention from organizational scholars in a variety of disciplines (e.g., Blau, 1964; Emerson, 1962; Pfeffer, 1981), describes an actor's ability to influence others. As with other social environments, industries often consist of hierarchies that range from a few dominant actors toward the apex to many weaker actors toward the bottom (Levy and Scully, 2007). An actor's place in this hierarchy depends on various factors, including the resources it possesses and the attributions of superiority it receives from industry members (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983).

Though scholars have generally depicted power as an objective 'thing' that actors possess to varying degrees (Pfeffer and Salancik, 1978), actors must *think* that they have power in order to leverage it (Kim et al., 2005). Such perceptions may prove relevant to social entrepreneurs, who approximate their ability to influence industry members when deciding how to ensure their audiences' receptiveness to new practices. To conduct such evaluations, social entrepreneurs use self-conceptions of their positions in industry

hierarchies as baselines to discern their dominance – or lack thereof – relative to industry members that the social entrepreneurs want to adopt new practices (i.e., targets). We describe the nature of the difference that social entrepreneurs perceive to exist between conceptions of their own and target industry members' hierarchal positions in industries as power differentials.<sup>[5]</sup>

Power differentials can range from favourable to unfavourable. Favourable power differentials occur when social entrepreneurs believe that they occupy higher levels of industry hierarchies than target industry members. Such evaluations lead social entrepreneurs to view target industry members as 'subordinates' and, consequently, to believe that they can influence the targets *without* assistance from other actors. In contrast, unfavourable power differentials occur when social entrepreneurs believe that they occupy lower levels of industry hierarchies than target industry members. Such evaluations lead social entrepreneurs to view target industry members as 'superiors' and, consequently, to believe that they can only influence the targets *with* assistance from other actors. By shaping whether social entrepreneurs focus on advantages or disadvantages relative to target industry members, power differentials determine the arguments that the former uses to imbue their calls for new practices with credibility and the uniformity of the content that they use in these calls.

*Power differentials and character arguments.* Character arguments play an important role when actors attempt to build credibility for themselves and, as a result, the explanatory arguments that they use to justify the need for audiences to act (Aristotle, 1991; Green, 2004). Character arguments describe those in which actors tout themselves as experts on the actions that they advocate, construing the actors as trustworthy sources of information and validating their explanatory arguments for such actions (Garud et al., 2002; Suddaby and Greenwood, 2005). Actors may draw on various sources – including relevant education, experience, profession, and achievement, among others – to establish credibility for themselves and their reasons for audiences to act (Cialdini, 2007). Actors – such as social entrepreneurs – differ in their reliance on character arguments, with some avoiding and others embracing such arguments.

Social entrepreneurs who perceive favourable power differentials to exist view target industry members as 'subordinates' and maintain confidence in their ability to influence these industry members. However, such confidence may lead social entrepreneurs to experience conflicting views of their credibility among target industry members. One perception is that target industry members, cognizant of the social entrepreneurs' superiority, assign gravity to the entrepreneurs' calls for new practices. The other perception is that target industry members, sensitive to their subordinate positions in industry hierarchies, question social entrepreneurs' motives and view new practices as a way for the entrepreneurs to solidify their dominance. Operating on the premise that target industry members view their calls for new practices with a combination of seriousness and skepticism, social entrepreneurs may try to quell such doubt by emphasizing objective or moral reasons for the target industry members to adopt new practices. Favourable power differentials, then, may prompt social entrepreneurs to obscure their own expertise by avoiding character arguments, instead allowing explanatory arguments to justify new practices on their own merits.

Social entrepreneurs who perceive unfavourable power differentials to exist view target industry members as 'superiors' and do not maintain confidence in their ability to influence these industry members. Such insecurity may lead social entrepreneurs to develop mutually reinforcing perceptions of their credibility among target industry members. One perception is that target industry members, cognizant of the social entrepreneurs' inferiority, assign little gravity to the social entrepreneurs' calls for new practices. The other perception is that target industry members, protective of their dominant positions, question the purity of the social entrepreneurs' motives and view new practices as an instrument for the entrepreneurs to become more dominant. Operating on the premise that target industry members view their calls for new practices with skepticism, social entrepreneurs may look to garner more serious consideration by supplementing objective or moral reasons for targets to adopt new practices with references to their expertise on these practices. Unfavourable power differentials, then, may prompt social entrepreneurs to establish their credibility through character arguments as they justify the need for new practices through explanatory arguments.

An example of the connection between perceived power differentials and character arguments is evident in Bornstein's (1996) account of how Muhammed Yunus founded the Grameen Bank to facilitate the adoption of micro lending practices in Bangladesh (1996). One of Yunus' biggest struggles was to build support for micro lending, which involved the provision of small loans to impoverished people, among Bangladesh's nationalized banks. Initially, when Grameen Bank was new and unproven, Yunus saw that he maintained little ability to influence the nationalized banks and referenced his own credentials to validate explanations for why the banks should offer micro loans (Bornstein, 1996). However, once Grameen Bank became recognized and successful, Yunus saw that he maintained the ability to influence the nationalized banks and thus allowed his explanations for micro lending to stand on their own merits (Bornstein, 1996). Building on the preceding logic, we propose that:

*Proposition 3:* The more unfavourable the power differentials perceived by social entrepreneurs, the more likely they will be to use character arguments to establish credibility for themselves and their explanatory arguments for new practices.

*Power differentials and message uniformity.* When attempting to influence their audiences' receptiveness to desired actions, social entrepreneurs must also account for the unique attributes – such as objectives, interests, and perspectives – of the groups that comprise their audiences. Message uniformity describes homogeneity in the content of actors' communications to their audiences (see Conway et al., 2012; Magnusson, 2000). While actors may emphasize common frames and arguments across their entire body of communications, they may adjust the content – such as topics, terminology, information, or 'talking points' – used to enact these rhetorical tactics in individual communications. Such adjustments enable actors to account for the unique attributes of the different groups that comprise their audiences (Aristotle, 1991; Green, 2004). Actors, such as social entrepreneurs, vary in the uniformity of the content conveyed in their communications to these groups, with some actors favouring more homogeneous content (i.e., high uniformity) and other actors favouring more heterogeneous content (i.e., low uniformity) (see Magnusson, 2000).

Social entrepreneurs who perceive favourable power differentials to exist view target industry members as 'subordinates' and believe they do not need assistance from other actors to motivate the targets to adopt new socially focused practices. Such perceptions lead social entrepreneurs to focus more narrowly on and to communicate more exclusively with target industry members. The mindset underlying this approach is that target industry members will recognize the social entrepreneurs' dominance and thus respect the entrepreneurs' calls for new practices. Addressing a single group, particularly one comprised of the industry members they aim to influence, leads social entrepreneurs to appeal to this group in standardized ways. Favourable power differentials, then, may prompt social entrepreneurs to rely on more homogeneous content to convey their frames and arguments for the adoption of new practices.

Social entrepreneurs who perceive unfavourable power differentials to exist view target industry members as 'superiors' and believe that they need assistance from other actors to motivate the target industry members to adopt new socially focused practices. Such perceptions lead social entrepreneurs to focus more broadly on and to communicate more inclusively with target industry members *and* potential stakeholders (e.g., investors, media, government, and consumers). Involving these stakeholders, who endorse new practices or engage target industry members on behalf of the social entrepreneurs, may create 'grassroots' social movements that support the entrepreneurs' efforts. Addressing multiple groups leads social entrepreneurs to consider and appeal to these groups in diversified ways. Unfavourable power differentials, then, may prompt social entrepreneurs to rely on more heterogeneous content to convey their frames and arguments for the adoption of new practices.

An example of the connection between perceived power differentials and message uniformity is evident in Maguire et al.'s (2004) account of how Roberts and Turner (pseudonyms) facilitated more extensive inclusion of HIV/AIDS patients in medication research trials. Roberts and Turner, two individual advocates for HIV/AIDS patients, recognized that they maintained little ability to influence the pharmaceutical companies responsible for the research trials and sought to build additional support for their efforts to include more patients in the trials. To build such support, Roberts and Turner 'assembled an array of arguments that framed problems and justified the new practice they were promoting in ways that resonated with a variety of different stakeholders' (Maguire et al., 2004, p. 670). Building on the preceding logic and example, we propose that:

*Proposition 4:* The more unfavourable the power differentials perceived by social entrepreneurs, the less likely they will be to use uniform content in their communications.

## **SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURS' RHETORICAL STRATEGIES**

Having examined the distinct effects of identity and power differentials on social entrepreneurs' rhetorical tactics, we now explore the joint effects of these perceptions on the entrepreneurs' rhetorical strategies. Creating a holistic framework of this sort is valuable for two reasons. First, although identity and power differentials have distinct effects on rhetorical tactics, social entrepreneurs formulate, consider, and act upon these

perceptions collectively in real time. Second, collections of rhetorical tactics represent methods for enacting rhetorical strategies, and each rhetorical strategy serves a distinct function. In this section, we explain how identity and power differentials jointly affect social entrepreneurs' rhetorical tactics, identify the overarching rhetorical strategies enacted through these tactics, highlight the distinct facets of these strategies, and illustrate the usage of each one. Table I summarizes the rhetorical strategies favoured by social entrepreneurs when they experience different combinations of identity and power differentials. Though we focus on ideal types of identity and power differentials for brevity (Doty and Glick, 1994), our framework accounts for the continuous nature of social entrepreneurs' perceptions of these differentials.

### **Rhetorical Fatalism**

Quadrant 1 considers social entrepreneurs that face minor identity differentials and favourable power differentials. Since such actors view themselves as similar and superior to target industry members, they embrace commonalities with the targets and believe they can convince the targets to implement new practices without assistance. Perceptions of this type motivate social entrepreneurs to convey isomorphically framed, objective arguments through communications of high uniformity. To leverage perceived commonalities with target industry members, social entrepreneurs tend to rationalize new industry practices as evolutionary improvements to the target industry members' extant logics. Additionally, since Quadrant 1 social entrepreneurs think they can directly influence target industry members, these entrepreneurs do not tout their expertise on desired new practices to build credibility among the targets and standardize the content of their communications to appeal primarily to the targets.

We suggest these tendencies reflect a *rhetorical fatalism* strategy. Akin to the teachings of religions that suggest 'higher powers' determine earthly events (e.g., Christianity, Judaism, and Islam), rhetorical fatalism proffers that external forces determine transformations to extant industry practices. When engaging in rhetorical fatalism, social entrepreneurs depict themselves as impartial harbingers of incremental change that will move focal industries forward and require minor adjustments by target industrial members to keep pace. A key facet of this strategy involves proposing that industry trends will create opportunities for target industry members to sustain existing or to accrue additional performance benefits should they adopt new practices. Since the social entrepreneurs see themselves as 'effectual industry insiders', the entrepreneurs may emphasize recognizable shifts in industry standards that could feasibly catalyse the advent of new practices without much effort.

For instance, Thomas Edison – a renowned inventor – relied on a rhetorical fatalism strategy to facilitate the adoption of his new electrical lighting system. This system constituted a more practical, affordable, and safer alternative to the gas lighting system of the time, leading one journalist to herald Edison as a 'benefactor of the human race' (*Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 1 December 1878; in Israel et al., 1998, p. 736). Edison also recognized that, by revolutionizing energy production and distribution, his system addressed an important societal need (Conot, 1979): 'After the electric light goes into general use', Edison said, 'none but the extravagant will burn tallow candles' (New York Herald,

1880, p. 6 as cited by O'Toole, 2012). Despite this, Edison publicly portrayed his system as the result of incremental advancements to the gas lighting system (Hargadon and Douglas, 2001): 'In each house, I can place a light meter whence these wires will pass through [existing gas pipes in] the house tapping small metal contrivances that may be placed over each burner' (Israel et al., 1998, pp. 504–05). Effectively, Edison reduced, rather than widened, the perceived gap between the old standard and his invention (Hargadon and Douglas, 2001). The crux of his fatalism strategy was to suggest that an industrial movement would incrementally shift the energy industry's production and distribution standards, requiring limited change to reap the benefits of the new technology. Consistent with the preceding logic and example, we propose that:

*Proposition 5:* The more minor the identity differentials and the more favourable the power differentials perceived by social entrepreneurs, the more likely they will be to use a rhetorical fatalism strategy.

### **Rhetorical Puffery**

Quadrant 2 considers social entrepreneurs that face minor identity differentials and unfavourable power differentials. Since such actors view themselves as similar and subordinate to target industry members, they embrace commonalities with the targets and believe they cannot convince the targets to implement new practices without assistance. Perceptions of this sort motivate social entrepreneurs to convey isomorphically framed, dramatic and character arguments through communications of low uniformity. Similar to Quadrant 1 social entrepreneurs who leverage perceived commonalities with target industry members, Quadrant 2 social entrepreneurs rationalize new practices as evolutionary improvements to the targets' logics. However, since Quadrant 2 entrepreneurs think that they cannot directly influence target industry members, they also tout their expertise on new practices to build credibility among the targets and diversify the content of their communications to appeal more broadly to the targets *and* potential stakeholders.

We suggest these tendencies reflect a *rhetorical puffery* strategy. Like organisms that exaggerate their size and strength when faced with more powerful aggressors (e.g., the spectacled cobra and puffer fish), social entrepreneurs use rhetorical puffery to justify the adoption of new industry practices. When engaging in rhetorical puffery, social entrepreneurs portray themselves as contributors to incremental change that will move industries forward and require minor adjustments by target industry members to keep pace. A key facet of this strategy involves construing social entrepreneurs as experts on or catalysts of industrial trends of particular relevance to industries, validating their calls for target industry members and potential stakeholders alike to support the adoption of new practices. Since the social entrepreneurs see themselves as "ineffectual industry insiders", the entrepreneurs may claim expertise on or take credit for emerging shifts in industry standards that have not yet accrued much legitimacy in the industries and that have not been coopted by others in those settings.



For example, Horizon Organic Dairy – a de-novo startup when it entered the dairy industry – relied on a rhetorical puffery strategy to facilitate the adoption of organic products in that industry. The company's founders, Mark Retzloff and Paul Repetto, viewed their venture's wholesome, responsibly made products as an instrument for establishing the broader utility of organic products (Oberlander, 2006). To do so, they portrayed the emergence of organic products in the dairy industry as the outcome of evolutionary transformations in consumption patterns and cited scientific evidence on the health benefits of organic products to convey their value (DuPuis, 2000; Oberlander, 2006). As Retzloff stated, 'There are fundamental lifestyle changes taking place, and it is happening globally. Organic foods have been growing for 30 years; it isn't a fad. People are taking control of their own health and organic is part of that. Organic foods have had 23 per cent compound growth over the last 26 years' (cited in Higgins, 2000). The company positioned itself as a contributor to this trend by recognizing that its organic products addressed 'consumer concerns regarding food safety, environmental responsibility and animal welfare' (Horizon Organic, 1997). Additionally, to mobilize more expansive support for organic products, they adjusted the content of their communications to guide farmers' efforts to switch from traditional to organic production and informed lawmakers' efforts to establish federal guidelines for such production (Oberlander, 2006). The crux of Horizon's puffery strategy was to position itself as the epicentre of an industrial movement that would incrementally improve industry production standards, requiring change by dairy retailers and farmers to remain competitive. Consistent with the preceding logic and example, we propose that:

*Proposition 6:* The more minor the identity differentials and the more unfavourable the power differentials perceived by social entrepreneurs, the more likely they will be to use a rhetorical puffery strategy.

### **Rhetorical Napalm**

Quadrant 3 considers social entrepreneurs that face major identity differentials and favourable power differentials. Since such actors view themselves as dissimilar from and superior to target industry members, they embrace differences from the targets and believe that they can convince the targets to implement new practices without assistance. Perceptions of this sort motivate social entrepreneurs to convey non-isomorphically framed, dramatic arguments through communications of high uniformity. To leverage perceived dissimilarities with target industry members, social entrepreneurs sensationalize new industry practices as revolutionary departures from the targets' extant logics. Additionally, like Quadrant 1 social entrepreneurs who think they can directly influence target industry members, Quadrant 3 social entrepreneurs do not tout their expertise on new practices to build credibility among the targets and standardize the content of their communications to appeal primarily to the targets.

We suggest that these tendencies reflect a *rhetorical napalm* strategy. Akin to the bombing technique that incinerates terrain without exposing fighter jets to ground

combatants, rhetorical napalm incinerates the appropriateness of the extant industry practices relative to new industry practices without exposing the social entrepreneurs as the source of the change. When engaging in rhetorical napalm, social entrepreneurs depict themselves as impartial harbingers of radical change that will revolutionize the essence of industries and require major adjustments by target industry members to remain legitimate. A distinct aspect of this strategy involves proposing that social forces will marginalize target industry members who resist the adoption of new practices. Since the social entrepreneurs see themselves as ‘effectual industry outliers’, the entrepreneurs may emphasize recognizable shifts in transcendent societal norms that could feasibly catalyse the advent of new practices without their involvement.

For example, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) – an established and well-recognized animal-rights organization – used a rhetorical napalm strategy to facilitate the adoption of new calf-rearing practices by small, independent dairy farmers. The objective of this campaign was to convince the farmers that, rather than remove calves’ horns, they should breed polled – or hornless – cattle to eliminate the need for this procedure (PETA, 2013). PETA’s leaders articulated that changing humanitarian norms would invalidate the practice of dehorning calves. Their communications often conveyed vivid, gut-wrenching descriptions of the dehorning process to underscore its immoral nature, construing innovative breeding practices as much more desirable alternatives. For example, Tracy Reiman – PETA’s Executive Vice President – suggested ‘cows struggle desperately and cry out in pain during these procedures, which are routinely performed without giving them any painkillers’ (PETA, 2013). The crux of PETA’s napalm strategy was to suggest that a social movement would drastically alter the dairy industry’s behavioural standards, requiring change by dairy farmers to remain legitimate members of society. Consistent with the preceding logic and example, we propose that:

*Proposition 7:* The more major the identity differentials and the more favourable the power differentials perceived by social entrepreneurs, the more likely they will be to use a rhetorical napalm strategy.

### **Rhetorical Dissidence**

Quadrant 4 considers social entrepreneurs that face major identity differentials and unfavourable power differentials. Since such actors see themselves as dissimilar from and subordinate to target industry members, they embrace their differences from the targets and believe that they cannot convince the targets to implement new practices without assistance. Perceptions of this sort motivate social entrepreneurs to convey non-isomorphically framed, dramatic and character arguments through communications with low uniformity. Like Quadrant 3 social entrepreneurs who leverage perceived dissimilarities with target industry members, Quadrant 4 social entrepreneurs sensationalize new practices as revolutionary changes to the targets’ extant logics. Additionally, like Quadrant 2 social entrepreneurs who think they cannot directly influence target industry members, Quadrant 4 social entrepreneurs tout their expertise on new practices to

build credibility among the targets and diversify the content of their communications to appeal more broadly to the targets *and* potential stakeholders.

We suggest that these tendencies represent a *rhetorical dissidence* strategy. Akin to the techniques of revolutionaries who publicly undermined oppressive governments or archaic beliefs (e.g., the Founding Fathers of the United States and Copernicus), rhetorical dissidence emphasizes social entrepreneurs' efforts to undermine the acceptability of the extant industry practices relative to new practices. When engaging in rhetorical dissidence, social entrepreneurs depict themselves as instigators of radical change that will revolutionize industries and require substantial adjustments by target industry members to remain legitimate. A distinct aspect of this strategy involves construing social entrepreneurs as experts on or catalysts of social trends, validating their calls for target industry members and potential stakeholders to act in more moral ways (i.e., by supporting the adoption of new, socially focused practices). Since the social entrepreneurs see themselves as 'ineffectual industry outliers', the entrepreneurs claim expertise on emerging shifts in societal norms that have not yet accrued much legitimacy in focal industries and that have not been coopted by other actors in those settings.

For example, the Rainforest Action Network (RAN), a small, unproven environmental organization, used rhetorical dissidence to facilitate the adoption of new sourcing practices by prominent home-improvement retailers (Waldron et al., 2015). The objective of this campaign was to convince the retailers that, rather than sell products made of lumber from endangered old-growth forests, they should source products made of lumber from more sustainable locations. Like PETA, RAN's leaders articulated that changing environmental norms would invalidate the practice of old-growth sourcing. Their communications often conveyed vivid, gut-wrenching descriptions of this practice to underscore its immoral nature, construing new sourcing practices as much more desirable alternatives. For instance, Michael Brune – RAN's executive director – proposed that selling old-growth wood products is like killing elephants for ivory, or making ashtrays out of gorilla paws' (RAN, 1997). Unlike PETA, RAN's leaders also tailored their communications to appeal to potential supporters of their cause, touted themselves as an expert on the old-growth issue, and took credit for the retailers' decisions to adopt new sourcing practices (Waldron et al., 2015). The crux of RAN's rhetorical dissidence strategy was to position their organization as the epicentre of a social movement that would radically alter the home-improvement industry's behavioural standards, requiring change by home-improvement retailers to remain legitimate members of society. Consistent with the preceding logic and example, we propose that:

*Proposition 8:* The more major the identity differentials and the more unfavourable the power differentials perceived by social entrepreneurs, the more likely they will be to use a rhetorical dissidence strategy.

## DISCUSSION

The purpose of this manuscript was to explain how social entrepreneurs use rhetoric to facilitate industry members' adoptions of new, socially focused practices. The central

tenet of our conceptualization, which adopts a socio-cognitive perspective, is that social entrepreneurs' perceptions of their relationships to industry members determine the nature of the formers' rhetoric for influencing the latter. We suggested that two of the social entrepreneurs' cognitive structures – identity and power – inform these perceptions by providing a foundation for social entrepreneurs to evaluate their similarity to (i.e., identity) and ability to influence (i.e., power) industry members. In the first part of our conceptualization, we elaborated the distinct effects of identity and power on social entrepreneurs' rhetorical tactics – frames, explanatory and character arguments, and message uniformity. In the second part of our conceptualization, we depicted the joint effects of identity and power on social entrepreneurs' rhetorical tactics, identified the rhetorical strategies enacted through these rhetorical tactics, and provided examples of social entrepreneurs using each rhetorical strategy. The result is a holistic framework that predicts the rhetorical strategies used by social entrepreneurs to facilitate systemic change to industry practices.

Our framework informs research on social entrepreneurship, social change, and rhetoric. At a general level, our framework explains social entrepreneurs' methods for facilitating systemic change to industry practices. Scholars have examined how social entrepreneurs enact new practices (Austin et al., 2006; Zahra et al., 2009), such as through the creation of ventures. We advance this work by examining how social entrepreneurs motivate industry members to adopt new practices. Our framework specifies the mechanisms through which social entrepreneurs convert the isolated change that occurs when they enact practices into the more pervasive change that occurs when others enact those practices. Doing so directs scholarly attention to the behavioural implications of social entrepreneurs' efforts (i.e., systemic social change) (e.g., McMullen, 2011), further distinguishing research on such actors from research on actors more focused on economic value creation (Markham and Waldron, 2014).

Explaining how social entrepreneurs facilitate systemic social change informs research at the intersection of the special issue's themes – sustainability, ethics, and entrepreneurship. Social entrepreneurs enhance the ethicality of industry activities when they motivate a broader set of industry members to adopt practices that better adhere to evolving societal norms (Miller et al., 2012; Zahra et al., 2009). A key facet of such efforts is to minimize, neutralize, or improve the impact of industry practices on broader social systems, consequently increasing the sustainability of those practices (Dean and McMullen, 2007; Santos, 2012). Our conceptualization specifies some of the theoretical mechanisms through which social entrepreneurs motivate industry members to adopt more moral, responsible practices. In doing so, we offer richer insights about the links between entrepreneurship (i.e., in terms of social value creation), ethics, and sustainability.

At a more specific level, our conceptualization identifies rhetoric as the instrument through which social entrepreneurs facilitate systemic social change. Prior research has explained social entrepreneurs' *actions* for enacting new industry practices (Dorado, 2005; Short et al., 2009; Zahra et al., 2009). We enrich such work by explaining social entrepreneurs' *language* for persuading industry members to adopt those practices. Our framework proposes that social entrepreneurs depend on four rhetorical strategies, enacted through distinct combinations of rhetorical tactics, to influence industry members' perceptions of new practices. Each rhetorical strategy distinctly enables social

entrepreneurs to frame, argue for, and validate new practices in ways that resonate with industry members, potentially amplifying their attentiveness and receptiveness to the new practices. A key takeaway from our proposals is that, when striving for the adoption of desired behaviour by others, what social entrepreneurs do to enact new practices themselves may prove less germane than what they say about those practices to others. This may explain how some social entrepreneurs broker the adoption of new practices without enacting the practices themselves (e.g., RAN and PETA), indicating that the latter behaviour constitutes neither a necessary nor a sufficient aspect of social entrepreneurship. Finally, by recognizing the strategic functionality of various combinations of rhetorical tactics, we advance research on rhetoric, which has mainly focused on describing the nature of such tactics in isolation.

Our conceptualization highlights how social entrepreneurs' social cognition impacts the rhetorical strategies that they use to influence industry members. Prior research has emphasized individual, organizational, and environmental attributes as antecedents of social entrepreneurs' efforts to enact new industry practices (Fauchart and Gruber, 2011; Mair and Marti, 2009; Meek et al., 2010; Miller et al., 2012; Pacheco et al., 2014; Shaw and Carter, 2007; Zhao, 2014). We complement such work by adopting a socio-cognitive perspective to explain the role of social entrepreneurs' cognitive structures – identity and power – in shaping their communicative efforts to persuade industry members to adopt new practices. Identity and power constitute important perceptual lenses for social entrepreneurs to conceptualize their relationship to industry members and, consequently, to discern what rhetorical strategy to enact when persuading the industry members to adopt new practices. An important implication of this proposal is that, when deciding how to facilitate systemic change, how social entrepreneurs view their relationships to others may prove more germane than how the entrepreneurs view themselves. It also informs research on rhetoric, which has largely proposed that actors rely on objective evaluations of their audiences' worldviews, interests, and attributes when selecting rhetorical strategies.

A closer look at the links between social entrepreneurs' perceptions and their rhetorical strategies offers some intriguing theoretical insights. Our framework suggests that identity affects how social entrepreneurs give meaning to new practices. When social entrepreneurs view themselves as 'like' the industry members that they seek to influence, the entrepreneurs may favour rhetorical strategies – fatalism and puffery – that emphasize commonalities between new practices and established industry logics. In contrast, when social entrepreneurs view themselves as 'unlike' the industry members that they seek to influence, the entrepreneurs may favour rhetorical strategies – napalm and dissidence – that emphasize contrasts between new practices and established industry logics. For social entrepreneurship research, the latter proposal indicates that, even though social entrepreneurs' objectives stem from compassion or related attributes (Miller et al., 2012), such actors may sometimes take confrontational approaches to achieve their objectives. For rhetoric research, it indicates that actors may not always define desired actions in terms that are familiar and comfortable to their audiences.

Our framework also suggests that power affects how social entrepreneurs validate the need for new practices. When social entrepreneurs view themselves as 'superior' to the industry members that they seek to influence, the entrepreneurs may favour rhetorical

strategies – fatalism and napalm – that emphasize the independent merits of their justifications for new practices. In contrast, when social entrepreneurs view themselves as ‘subordinate’ to the industry members that they seek to influence, the entrepreneurs may favour rhetorical strategies – puffery and dissidence – that introduce their own expertise to authenticate their justifications for new practices. For social entrepreneurship research, these contrasting proposals suggest that social entrepreneurs who think they hold power may not use it to influence others and those who think they lack power may claim that they have it to influence others. For rhetoric research, these proposals may help to explain when communicators tout their own credibility and mobilize support from others stakeholders and when they do not.

Finally, we elucidate the relationship between social entrepreneurship and social movements. Prior research recognizes that social entrepreneurs may mobilize new social movements or coopt existing movements to support their efforts to motivate the adoption of new practices by industry members (see Pacheco et al., 2014). We complement such work by addressing why and when social entrepreneurs attempt to mobilize such ancillary support. Our proposal about unfavourable power differentials suggests that, when social entrepreneurs view themselves as subordinate to – and, thus unable to influence – industry members, the entrepreneurs may attempt to generate support from a variety of other stakeholders. PETA’s efforts to convince diverse actors – including city councils, celebrities, and even other environmental NGOs – to support its campaign represents a potential operationalization of this phenomenon. This proposal may also inform research on social movements by specifying why some actors pursue desired change alone and why some actors pursue desired change with assistance from others.

### **Implications for Research and Practice**

Some intriguing avenues exist to build on our work. The first avenue deals with the effectiveness of social entrepreneurs’ rhetorical strategies. We explained why social entrepreneurs favour certain rhetorical strategies. Scholars and practitioners can build on these explanations to discern when social entrepreneurs’ favoured rhetorical strategies will actually succeed in persuading industry members to embrace new practices. In some instances, perhaps biased by their objectives, social entrepreneurs may misjudge their relationship to industry members and, consequently, favour rhetorical strategies that do not resonate with those actors. Further exploration of social entrepreneurs’ cognition might help to explain when the entrepreneurs will emphasize good-faith efforts to understand their audiences over the pursuit of their own objectives when selecting rhetorical strategies. Additionally, scrutiny of industry members’ perceptions of social entrepreneurs and extant practices might help to explain why the targets might attend and respond more willingly to certain rhetorical strategies than others. Attempting to explain effectiveness represents an onerous challenge (see Pfeffer and Salancik, 1978), but we hope that our framework provides a useful foundation for exploring differences in the outcomes of social entrepreneurship.

The second avenue for future research deals with the impact of hybrid identities and competing logics on social entrepreneurs’ rhetorical strategies. We explained the role of



social entrepreneurs' identities in evaluating and communicating with industry members. However, since social entrepreneurs often maintain hybrid organizational identities (e.g., Battilana and Dorado, 2010; York, O'Neil and Sarasvathy, 2016), understanding which identity they use to evaluate their similarity to industry members might prove to be quite complex. Our framework could provide a foundation for examining why social entrepreneurs might emphasize certain facets of their identities over others and how this emphasis might change over time. Additionally, we explained the role of industry logics in social entrepreneurs' efforts to frame new practices for industry members. Yet, both social entrepreneurs and their audiences exist in environments characterized by multiple logics (see Lounsbury, 2007; Marquis and Lounsbury, 2007; Pache and Santos, 2010, 2013). Our framework could provide a foundation for examining why social entrepreneurs emphasize certain logics over others to give meaning to new practices and how this emphasis might change over time.

The third avenue deals with the temporal dynamism of social entrepreneurs' rhetorical strategies. We explained social entrepreneurs' rhetorical strategies based on their perceptions of target industry members without addressing whether the entrepreneurs maintain favoured strategies throughout their change projects. Scholars and practitioners can extend our work by explaining whether, why, and how social entrepreneurs will use different rhetorical strategies as their change projects unfold. Indeed, social entrepreneurs' views of themselves can drastically change as industry members begin to accept new arrangements, perhaps affecting the entrepreneurs' evaluations of their relationship to and communications with industry members. This means that, although the perception-strategy associations cultivated in this manuscript might generalize across contexts, the particular association most salient to social entrepreneurs might vary during their change projects. The longitudinal exploration of an entire change project provides a useful foundation for examining this type of strategic variation. Scholars and practitioners may adopt a process focus, identify shifts in the social entrepreneur's perceptions and rhetorical strategies during the change project, and make inferences about the reasons for such shifts based on noteworthy project events. By specifying the dynamism of social entrepreneurs and their rhetorical strategies, such inquiry can prove useful in the quest to explain variation in the outcomes of the entrepreneurs' efforts.

A final avenue deals with the delivery of social entrepreneurs' rhetorical strategies. Scholars and practitioners can build on our work by adopting a more tactical or operational perspective and specifying how – when enacting each type of rhetorical strategy – social entrepreneurs deliver messages to their audiences. This idea might prove particularly germane when studying social entrepreneurs who experience major power differentials, believe they need support from diverse stakeholders to influence target industry members, and, therefore, tailor messages to fit each group's interests. For instance, RAN primarily targeted retail home-improvement firms' executives, but it also appealed to shareholders, social elites, and government agencies for support. Future research can specify the forums (e.g., public or private), media (e.g., advertisements, protests, letters, or meetings), and 'talking points' (e.g., economic value, social justice, or the 'greater good') that social entrepreneurs like RAN use to reach and connect with the different groups that comprise their intended audiences. Inquiries of this sort will provide finer explanations of how rhetoric gets from social entrepreneurs' mouths to their audiences' eyes and ears.

## NOTES

- [1] We thank guest editor Gideon Markman and the reviewers for their exceptional guidance during the review process. We also thank Jeff McMullen and Chad Navis for their helpful comments on previous versions of the manuscript.
- [2] Rhetorical strategies refer to a communicator's overarching approaches for influencing its audience's perspective on focal phenomena, whereas rhetorical tactics refer to the tools or techniques through which the communicator enacts its rhetorical strategies (see Clampitt, DeKoch and Cashman, 2000).
- [3] Actors' identities may stem from the categories or groups with which they affiliate (e.g., social identity), or from the roles that they perform (e.g., role identity). Although theories related to social and role identity have evolved somewhat independently, recent research has highlighted the similarities and overlap between the two, suggesting that differences 'are a matter of emphasis rather than kind' (Stets and Burke, 2000, p. 234). For this reason we do not distinguish between social or role identity in our theorizing.
- [4] Given that identities are self-conceptions of uniqueness, social entrepreneurs can, at most, view themselves as highly similar – but not identical – to industry members.
- [5] The power differentials that social entrepreneurs perceive to exist might stem from various sources, including conceptions of their own status, reputation, resources, experience, and morality.

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