



Moral Relationships: Bridging the Gap, Bringing the Community Together.

1. Moral Foundations

Long ago in a galaxy far, far away...

- Democrat and Republican politicians worked together in relatively harmonious tension. They knew they were in the business of governing the country and worked together to create coalitions, carve out compromises, and do deals.
- Conservatives and Liberals - and all shades in between - were often close friends, colleagues or partners. Most often, they did not allow their differing views on politics or social issues to cloud relationships between them. Subject only to their individual needs and preferences - they all purchased and used the same brands.
- Companies were concerned primarily in furthering the financial interests of owners and shareholders. They often contributed generously to both major parties, and avoided getting involved publicly in contentious political or social issues. It was bad for business.
- Brands were managed purely according to the logic and dictates of the market place. Brands were targeted at appropriate segments defined by consumer needs.
- Universities were value-neutral institutions which were centers of academic excellence, repositories of knowledge and culture, and nurturers of open enquiry.

Today, in our part of the cosmos, things are very different....

Many corporations and their brands now take a stance on social and political issues, and have begun to take on a political hue. In the same way, we believe, universities - academic brands - cannot afford to remain above the fray. Staying silent, not taking a position is now perceived as stance, and is no longer a viable policy. President Christopher Eisgruber understands this and eloquently explains the forces of divisiveness pressuring the **Truth-Seeking** moral foundation of the University in his article *Higher Education: Risk and Resiliency*.

Clearly, a university should not adopt a distinct partisan stance. However, in order to avoid alienating segments of alumni who hold strong values of a particular hue, and to be relevant to them, knowledge and understanding of these values are essential.

In 2012, Jonathan Haidt, a moral psychologist now Professor at the Stern Business School of NYU, published "The Righteous Mind." In his book, he describes his work in digging beneath the specific issues that divide people, in order to identify and articulate the underlying moral/ethical instincts that motivate political/social positions. Haidt identified and measured 5 such dimensions, which he labeled "Moral Foundations." These Moral Foundations seem to be consistent worldwide, and the Moral Foundation Theory has subsequently become a burgeoning field of study. The 5 Moral Foundations are:

- **Care/Harm:** Sensitivity to signs of suffering and need. It underlies virtues of kindness, gentleness, and nurturance and sees cruelty as abhorrent.
- **Fairness/Cheating:** Sensitivity to the principal of reciprocity. It is based on justice, rights, and shared rules.
- **Loyalty/Betrayal:** Sensitivity to signs that another person is/is not a team player. Makes us want to trust and reward or alternatively ostracize people. It is the foundation that underlies patriotism, populism and self-sacrifice for the group
- **Authority/Subversion:** Sensitivity to signs of rank or status, and to signs that others are/are not behaving properly, given their position. It underlies virtues of leading and following, including deference to legitimate authority and respect for traditions and stability
- **Sanctity/Degradation:** Sensitivity to what and who are judged pure and what and who are contaminated. Highly related to opinions of abortion, same sex marriage, casual sex, and immigration.
- To these five moral foundations, we have added **Honesty /Deception** and **Truth–Seeking/Fact-Rejecting**

Using an adaptation of Haidt's methodology, BlackBar successfully measured the Moral Foundations of a set of brands. To our knowledge, we are the first and only research organization to do so. The results converged on Haidt's research conclusions:

- Liberals are more likely than Conservatives to share values with brands they identify with Caring and Fairness.
- Conservatives are more likely than Liberals to share values with brands they identify with based on foundations such as Loyalty and Authority.

2. Brands' Moral Foundations and Moral Relationships

Brands' Moral Foundations are consumers' perceptions of brands' moral underpinnings - the moral/ethical equivalent of brand image. Beliefs about a brand, a corporation, or an institution's Moral Foundations by themselves can explain why people feel a brand - or a university - fit with their own moral/political values. And, they are more apt to influence choices people make - whether to purchase, engage with, or to volunteer, and donate. They are not the whole story, because , there are another set of factors which control the influence of the Moral Foundations.

The missing variable in the equation are *Brand's Attitudes*, consumers' interpretation of the beliefs, intentions and behaviors of the brand, and of the corporation or institution. A "bad" attitude can negate or even reverse the effect of good values (for example, if a particular stance comes over as just "virtue signaling" rather than as a genuinely held belief). A "good" or appropriate attitude can help reconcile differing values (for example, if respect for authority is seen to be caring and benevolent). The appropriate brand attitude can serve to "soften" a conservative foundation or to "harden" a liberal foundation which provides a broader base of appeal for the brand.

BlackBar Consulting has applied the measurement of brands' attitudes to large brand databases across multiple sectors, and has developed a general model of Consumer Brand

Relationships. By combining the measurement of brands' attitudes and brands' Moral Foundations, we have extended this model to incorporate Moral Relationships.

This unique system of measurement of perceived moral values of an institution, and the relationship model that seeks to find the bridges between contrasting values can, we believe, be applied quantitatively to the perceptions of the university by the alumni in order to guide programs that will maximize engagement advocacy and giving.

3. The Princeton Donor program is leaving possible volunteers and money¹ on the table, if these questions are not answered.

1. How can Princeton develop a message that bridges alumni diversity of values and actions? And when the culture is extremely divisive how do you craft an overarching message and programs compelling to all?
2. Given a community whose political, economic, and moral values are polarized, what message unifies a community, motivating common action?
3. How does Princeton find the group of motivating values across its 90,000 plus diverse alumni to improve effectiveness of the Annual giving program?
4. What are the interests and passions of volunteers and how significant are the University's moral values and mission?
5. Can the diverse drivers of engagement (advocacy and volunteering) be identified by moral relationships with Princeton?
6. Could "Why Give to Princeton" as opposed to competitive alternatives be answered by Moral Relationships and their contribution to brand Princeton?
7. What is the appropriate research methodology that produces insights and strategies to answer these questions and guide program development?



1. BlackBar has continuously demonstrated that brand relationships have significant positive impact on business metrics including: brand usage, franchise development, brand advocacy, pricing power, and market valuation.