Shoppers of the World Unite:
(RED)'s Messaging and Morality in the Fight against African AIDS

by

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After living and working in Ghana, Malawi, and Ethiopia at various times over the last decade, Norma Anderson's interest in the social and economic ties between the United States and Africa has only grown stronger. As a doctoral candidate in sociology, she is focusing on issues of funding and the effects that western giving has on AIDS organizations in parts of Africa.

Abstract

Recently, Africa has become the focus of much media and celebrity attention. In particular, AIDS in Africa has received significant attention. (Product)RED, a business initiative/ philanthropic venture, is one of the most visible campaigns in the effort to raise money for AIDS work on the continent. This paper is guided by a simple theoretical endeavor: I examine how (Product)RED constructs a moral/common sense imperative, using long-held cultural tropes and schemas of Africa to do so. Because western ideas of Africa are so entrenched, (Product)RED can focus our attention on its products and create an impetus to buy them, rather than specifics about AIDS or Africa. Performing a content analysis of the (Product)RED website and its MySpace comments, I analyze how it constructs the problem and solution, and how the (Product)RED message is interpreted by some consumers.

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Introduction

A philanthropic trend has emerged in which companies encourage people to buy products, promising to give a percentage of the profits to charities. Such "embedded giving" (Strom 2007) or "cause marketing" (Stole 2008) promotes consumerism, tying buying to benevolence. (Product)[RED] (hereafter (RED))[1] is a fine example of this phenomenon. (RED) encourages people to purchase products that fund AIDS work in Africa. (RED) is a unique business model that uses cultural schemas and categories to link capitalism to a humanitarian effort, constructing it as a moral issue. (RED) is not simply advocating the purchase of products, it is also attempting to persuade us,[2] as consumers, that we have the opportunity to save Africa without ever leaving the comfort of our homes or malls, without doing *anything* but shop. Because it gives such a simple solution, (RED) tries to convince us that not only do we have the opportunity to change the world, we also have an obligation to do so.

Using a constructivist perspective, I explore (RED)'s messaging, examining the ways in which (RED) is creating a moral imperative and firmly entrenching it in consumer culture. This paper is by no means a definitive study of (RED) or its outcomes. Rather, it is an exploratory paper, considering multiple issues related to the organization and its ties to Africa. I hope to demonstrate that (RED) uses previously existing social categories and tropes to convey its purpose and to show that people do internalize (RED)'s information. I seek to connect its message and outcomes with larger theoretical questions and social issues. By performing a content analysis of (RED)'s website, I will show how it creates its cause. Furthermore, by examining consumer responses to (RED) on its MySpace page, I will explore how its message has affected consumers and how they have interpreted (RED)'s purpose.

What is Product (RED)?

Walk into, or past, any Gap Store[3] and large displays or posters advertise (RED). Musicians Wyclef Jean, Natalie Maines, and Mary J. Blige, actors Abigail Breslin, Terrence Howard, and Penelope Cruz, and model Christy Turlington are just some of the celebrities, photographed by the famed Annie Liebowitz, lending their faces to (RED) advertising. The white parenthesized letters on the red background pop up in magazines and newspapers around the world. The (RED) media blitz is huge, and its message seems obvious: all these celebrities are wearing/buying (RED), so should you. But the ads give little indication of what (RED) actually is.

Co-founded by Bobby Shriver and U2 singer Bono, (RED) has brought together numerous corporations and is a marvel of creative marketing. (RED) is a brand-on-brand strategy: by charging a licensing fee, (RED) has enabled The Gap, Emporio Armani, Converse, Motorola, American Express, Hallmark, and Apple to use the (RED) brand on selections of their (already branded) products, of which a certain percentage of the cost (from five to fifty percent) is used for AIDS work in Africa.

Money raised through the sale of (RED) items is sent to the Global Fund to provide antiretroviral drugs (ARVs) for Africans suffering from AIDS. Prohibitive prices have prevented most Africans from accessing ARVs, which are common in western countries.

While anti-AIDS organizations have been able to acquire some public sector funds, it has been more difficult to obtain private sector funding; (RED) seeks to change that. The companies actively create and market their (RED) products, folks buy them, and the companies send a stated percentage to the Global Fund which, in turn, sends money to organizations that meet its strict funding criteria. "A percentage of each (PRODUCT)[RED] product sold is given to The Global Fund. The money helps *women* and *children* affected by HIV/AIDS in Africa"[4]. If African organizations fail to meet the Global Fund's requirements, they do not receive further funding and may, in fact, have to pay back part of what they were given[5].

The main idea behind (RED) is that people are going to buy products and companies are going to spend money marketing products. Therefore, spending money on marketing, or purchasing specific products that can actually do some good, makes good, kind sense. Bono, in a note on (RED)'s website, wrote, "(RED) is the consumer battalion gathering in the shopping malls. You buy the jeans, phones, iPods, shoes, sunglasses, and someone – somebody's mother, father, daughter or son – will live instead of dying in the poorest part of the world. It's a different kind of fashion statement."[6] According to the (RED) website, approximately $25 million were raised its first year and given to the Global Fund, while between $30 and $40 million were spent by companies on their marketing campaigns. Because the money is targeted for African AIDS programs, (RED) claims to be making a big difference, and it may indeed be a brilliant marriage of marketing and philanthropy. According to the website, (RED) funds have provided ARVs to thirty-one thousand people in Rwanda and Swaziland. They have also been used to build testing centers, start education campaigns related to HIV/AIDS prevention, train counselors and health workers, and establish several school feeding programs for children with AIDS in Swaziland[7].

Theoretical Orientations

I argue that (RED)'s message is embraced easily because it draws upon socially constructed categories of Africa, African AIDS, and philanthropy with which most westerners are familiar and because its consumerist message means cool stuff for shoppers and better brand awareness and profits for its companies. (RED) uses socially constructed ideas and understandings of these concepts, but also helps to bring visibility to the issues, simultaneously causing our interpretations of the problems to become more fully entrenched.

(RED) can be successful only insofar as people purchase its products. Therefore, there must be a significant incentive for them to do so. This paper emphasizes how (RED)'s messages use previously internalized social categories to set up a framework in which many people find it simple and "morally right" to "act" on the issue. Jeffrey Alexander[8] argues that particular cultural traumas may be transformed into moral universals that function as an analogy of the suffering of a variety of religious, ethnic, and minority groups around the world.

I believe that (RED), in its advertising and self-promotion, is trying to create a moral imperative, in which we feel compelled to help. Though we already have a variety of categories and social schema into which Africa and the problem of AIDS fit quite nicely, (RED) must not draw only upon these categories, but also make us realize that we must *do* something about the problem and that (RED) is the solution. Bono, in a letter on (RED)'s website, calls AIDS in Africa "the greatest health crisis in human history"[9], but one that can be fixed by purchasing (RED) products.

Creating a moral imperative, or making use of one, with relation to philanthropy is not an unusual idea. Tracing the construction of the concept of charity throughout the 1900s, Dorileen Loseke[10] argues that though historical situations change over time, charity is a powerful model because there are multiple moralities embedded within it, allowing for different emphases at different times, thus the ability to withstand changes in public sentiment. "Charity becomes a sacred morality of religion, an all but sacred morality of democratic community, an economic morality of capitalism, a human morality of compassion for others"[11]. In the United States, and in some parts of Western Europe, neo-liberalism has become a part of dominant political ideology, with governments scaling back social welfare programs and shifting the burden of assistance to private charitable organizations, reinforcing a culture of individual responsibility[12]. Interestingly, (RED) was launched first in the UK, then in the US, both of which experienced neoliberal turns. Comparing French and North American workers, Michele Lamont[13] found Americans more likely to view volunteerism and philanthropy through a moralistic frame. Exploring the social construction of emotions, Markus and Kitayama[14] suggest that ignoring such notions of morality with regard to helping others when we have the opportunity to make things right could negatively impact our own feelings. Because (RED)'s goal is raising money for African AIDS work, it must tap into our emotions and our sense of morality. It must make us want to help, want to buy products to support its work.

Other than references to saving lives in Africa, (RED)'s website devotes little space to actual facts about AIDS or Africa. Yet, (RED)'s focus is to bring attention to the fight against AIDS in Africa and rouse individual and business participation in improving the lives of millions of people who suffer from the condition on the continent. I argue that (RED) need not spend much time educating or informing consumers about Africa or AIDS in Africa because western consumers already have deeply embedded "knowledge" about the continent.

Our understandings of Africa and African AIDS are socially constructed; they have become part of our taken-for-granted daily lives[15], formed from interactions with others and interpretations of media images. Thus, (RED) can focus on introducing and extolling its products, trends that do not form part of our existing knowledge.

DiMaggio[16] advances insights from cognitive psychology to build a theoretical argument connecting our individual thought and action to structural frameworks that *constrain* thought and action. He writes that because cultural knowledge is fragmented within our minds, particular organizing schemes are necessary to make sense of our social world and to choose the right strategies of action. DiMaggio[17] notes that the most important method for making sense of this variety of information is

> *[c]ulturally available schemata – knowledge structures that represent objects or events and provide default assumptions about their characteristics, relationships, and entailments under conditions of incomplete information…Schemata are both representations of knowledge and information processing mechanisms.*

We are more likely to take note and respond to events or situations that fall into pre-existing schematic categories. (RED) uses pre-existing ideas (schemata) about Africans and Africa, as well as appeals to values and helpfulness, that are already embedded in the minds of many westerners and thus, may greatly influence our ability to perceive a desired outcome, helping sick Africans and therefore, act with relation to that outcome. This does not presuppose that the desired outcome is the only reason we act (we might, for instance, simply like the t-shirts), but that the desire concords with various cultural schemata and thus, helps direct our actions.

Fundamental to any discussion of schemas or cultural understandings must be a discussion of categories. Amsterdam and Bruner[18] contend that categories serve a variety of functions for us: they allow us to quickly and easily identify information without constantly having to interpret things as "new;" they help serve as representations of what matters to us; they create a basis for relating to others who think "like us;" they serve our own personal needs and ideals; they help us reduce risk and make decisions based on judgments about others or situations. It is critical to remember that we take categories for granted; they simply make sense and help us make sense of the world. (RED)'s message is powerful and probably decisive in influencing our decision to buy (RED) products because its stories seem familiar. The "poor suffering African" is a "stock script"[19]. It is virtually America's only script because the vast majority of news we receive about the continent is so negative and heavily focused on poverty, disease, and war in Africa. To hear that Africans are dying and need our help seems right to us – we are deeply familiar with that tale. Thus, (RED) need not educate us about the problems of Africa; it need only state that we must help and we believe.

Africa and AIDS

HIV/AIDS is not only a complex disease, but a disease of complexities as much a product of overlapping inequalities as of viruses and vectors of transmission. Yet in the west, AIDS in Africa has been portrayed in a relatively straightforward manner – an entire continent devastated by the disease. Africa does have a higher HIV infection rate than any other region of the world, with approximately 22.5 of the estimated 33.2 million global infections[20] but not all countries are equally affected. Swaziland has a surveyed prevalence rate of 25.9%, Central African Republic, 6.2%, and Benin, 1.2%[21]. Despite glaring between-country differences, all Africa is perceived to be and is portrayed as plagued by HIV/AIDS. Certainly, such massive numbers in any country indicate a need for a real response. But without denying the severity of the disease in parts of Africa, we must also recognize how the disease has been framed, understood, and addressed, and note that our interpretations of AIDS on the continent have been influenced by long-held social beliefs.[22]

Although it is comprised of fifty-three countries with hundreds of languages spoken and innumerable contrasting cultures, Africa remains a monolithic entity in the minds of many westerners. Our understanding of African AIDS is linked indelibly to this construction of "Africa." Over time, Europeans and North Americans have created a myth of Africa as backward, strange, and in need our "our help"[23] Ignoring the agency and, at times, humanity, of Africans, westerners have exploited the continent for its human and natural resources while also sending missionaries (of both a religious and secular nature) to alter the customs and cultures of African peoples and to try to "fix" some of the glaring economic and governmental problems that exist on the diverse continent[24]. Africans have never been powerless or passive and have themselves played a large role in positive (and negative) changes that have occurred on the continent.[25] Still, the frames westerners use to interpret issues on the continent and to rally resources to battle the issues inevitably play a role in outcomes.

Shop to Save Lives: A Content Analysis of (RED)'s Website

(RED)'s website, like (RED)'s ads, is quite eye-catching, with a variety of images to attract visitors' attention. Aside from the main page, which introduces (RED) and currently plays a video clip about AIDS in Africa, (RED) has pages for Products, which, on a timeline slider, describes when each was launched; its "Manifesto" details (RED)'s mission; the Global Fund describes the organization to which all (RED) money is given; (YOU)[RED] provides a product calculator – a person can fill in how many of each product they've purchased and the calculator will tell you what your purchases might have accomplished;[26] News gives links to articles about (RED); Get Registe(red) allows visitors to sign up for email updates about (RED); Friends lists affiliated companies that do not actually have products, such as MySpace; and About shows (through simple drawings) how (RED) works, provides a frequently asked questions section, and includes notes from Bono and Bobby Shriver.

Given space constraints, it is impossible to do a complete content analysis of the entire website. Instead, I will focus on two particular pages, the home page with the video clip about African AIDS and the (RED) Manifesto. They both epitomize the message of (RED), using pre-existing social categories and understandings.

Vivid Images: From Near-Death to Full-of-Life

When a visitor arrives at the homepage of (RED),[27] a thirty-second video clip immediately loads and begins to play. The title of the clip is "The Lazarus Effect," which flashes on the white screen in red letters as music begins to play. We then see the statistic, "4,400 people die every day of AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa," which is replaced by "Treatment exists." In this way, (RED) introduces visitors to the magnitude of the HIV/AIDS problem. The music then stops and is replaced by a woman's voice. I will transcribe her words completely, with descriptions of the accompanying images:

> *In about sixty days [A picture of a gaunt, emaciated woman's face is visible. A caption to her right tells us her name is (Silvia).] an HIV patient in Africa can go from here to here. [A healthy-looking Silvia replaces the former image. She is holding a baby and smiling widely.] We call this transformation the Lazarus effect. [A new picture. A man, named (Nigel), is lying on a bed, with his hand over his naked chest, ribs protruding.] It's the result of two pills a day taken by an HIV/AIDS patient [An image of Nigel, looking much better, standing with a woman and two children, smiling at the camera. He is in color, the others in the picture are in black and white.] for about sixty days. [A man, (Elimas), also shirtless, is shown looking at his reflection in a mirror. His eyes are dull, he is skinny, and he looks very ill.] Learn more about how you can help give people this chance at life [Elimas is sitting up, smiling at the photographer, wearing a red scarf in an otherwise black and white photo, and looking very alive. There is a woman in the background, whose face we cannot see.] at JoinRed.com"[28]*

With this short commercial, (RED) not only sets up the problem, but provides images of the devastation of HIV/AIDS for the human body, specifically the African body, and the hope that such horror can be reversed. Using very familiar-looking images of Africans, the clip accords with our beliefs and understandings about African poverty and illness.

In his satirical piece "How to Write About Africa"[29] Kenyan writer Binyavanga Wainaina says,

> *Never have a picture of a well-adjusted African on the cover of your book, or in it...An AK-47, prominent ribs, naked breasts: use these...Africa is to be pitied, worshipped or dominated. Whichever angle you take, be sure to leave the strong impression that without your intervention...Africa is doomed.*

Viewing "The Lazarus Effect" commercial as text, we can see how (RED) "writes about Africa." It shows us one woman and two men, both of whom are shirtless, their ribs very visible through their skin. Their naked or semi-exposed chests typify the extreme wasting that often accompanies AIDS. It is interesting to note that in several places on the website, (RED) emphasizes that it assists women and children. Thus, it seems strange that the commercial focuses on two men, and only one woman. In some ways, showing lifeless, emaciated men may be more effective in arousing shock than showing wasted women, because these images of shrunken, shirtless men are emasculating and do not fit a conception of the strong able-bodied male. Women are more often portrayed as weak and burdened than men are, so (RED)'s images of frail males seem more devastating. Therefore, the images of reinvigorated men (especially Nigel, pictured healthy, standing with, and taller than, a woman and children) agree with preexisting gender ideologies in order to exemplify the power of the drugs (RED) provides.

The pictures of AIDS patients on (RED)'s website look surprisingly like pictures of famine victims – they are gaunt, eyes sunken, ribs protruding, looking lifeless. But "saved" Africans are represented very positively. (RED) then explains that this is "the Lazarus Effect"[30] – the benefits gained by ARVs. In this way, (RED) paints the enemy as AIDS and our own unwillingness to provide pills, but quickly emphasizes that we can overcome the enemy and give people their lives back. The disease is the evil, the pills are the saving grace, and we are the humanitarians who can resurrect Africans from near-death. By representing Africans in this way, (RED) creates a powerful image of our potential to change lives for the better, as well as a frightening and straightforward idea of what will happen if we do not help.

William Easterly[31] argues that the west has perpetually drafted overly simple solutions to ameliorate the world's most complex problems and that, in their simplicity, these plans fail to address or fix the issues. Despite early recognition that AIDS would be a monumental health catastrophe, partly due to conservative skittishness about addressing certain causes and means of prevention of HIV/AIDS (i.e. safe sex), western organizations and western *and* African governments ignored the warnings, enabling HIV/AIDS to reach epidemic proportions[32]. But while the *reasons* HIV/AIDS is so prevalent in parts of Africa are complex and necessitate a frank discussion of global inequality, efforts to address AIDS focus more on treatment than prevention.

Patterson[33] writes that westerners have tended to frame HIV/AIDS in Africa as an emergency, rather than a development problem. Framing it this way necessitates a particular, short-term response, instead of a long-term dedication to dealing with the issues. While Africans themselves report that their problems are structural[34], westerners stress the AIDS emergency and advocate drugs and treatment as the way to combat it. As is evident in the commercial, (RED)'s messaging stresses both the magnitude and emergency-status of HIV/AIDS in Africa and the simple drug-centric model for fixing the problem.

A Capitalist Manifesto

In a striking diversion from Marx's well-known manifesto, the (RED) Manifesto is not a call to collectively rise up against the oppressive forces of capitalism, but rather a call to collectively rise up and support behemoths of capitalist production.[35] Designed to provide a brief overview of the aims of (RED), the (RED) Manifesto is the essence of the campaign's simple plan. Written entirely in caps, perhaps to emphasize its message, the Manifesto outlines (RED)'s mission and our own call to arms in support of (RED). It is short, but thoroughly demonstrates (RED)'s messaging agenda. For this reason, it is useful to analyze the entire (RED) Manifesto carefully.

The (RED) Manifesto (hereafter "the Manifesto") begins with the curiously punctuated statement/paragraph, "All things being equal, they are not"[36]. This statement seems to indicate that an emphasis on inequity is a major component of the Manifesto. The next paragraph reads, "As first world consumers, we have tremendous power. What we collectively choose to buy, or not to buy, can change the course of life and history on this planet"[37]. Immediately we may understand that though things are not equal, we have the opportunity to right the inequality, to make things better. And this betterment may simply come from our shopping habits. By informing us that we have power over life and history, (RED) taps into a potentially strong desire to make positive changes, to improve people's lives. Loseke[38] writes that charity "requires money; those who *send* this money are defined as directly responsible for producing clients' salvation and happiness." The Manifesto quickly taps into these sentiments and presents an easy solution.

The third paragraph reads, "(RED) is that simple an idea, and that powerful. Now, you have a choice. There are (RED) credit cards, (RED) phones, (RED) shoes, (RED) fashion brands. And no, this does not mean they are all red in color. Although some are."[39] After reemphasizing the simplicity and strength of (RED)'s method, the Manifesto reiterates that we have the option, the choice, to participate in that basic, yet powerful, idea, then introduces the objects, the products for purchase, that will allow us to change history and life on our planet. Again, underlying their phrasing is the notion that this is the choice we should make. And we need not worry, for even if we do not like the color red, not all products are made in that color. Therefore, we may not use color preference as an excuse not to make the right choice.

After setting up the options thus far, the Manifesto states, "If you buy a (RED) product or sign up for a (RED) service, at no cost to you, a (RED) company will give some of its profits to buy and distribute anti-retroviral medicine to our brothers and sisters dying of AIDS in Africa."[40] Though seemingly a simple statement of how the brand works, the carefully chosen words help to accomplish two other things. First, the Manifesto indicates that buying (RED) does not affect us at all, in terms of cost. In fact, we have a "free" opportunity to save lives and change the world – we would buy shirts or shoes anyway, why not help at the same time? Coupled with the fact that (RED) appeals to our sense of morality and our wish to feel good about ourselves and our choices, it also appeals to a desire to make a difference without having to spend extra time or money. Perhaps anticipating complaints that we do not have the money to give more to charity or that we do not have time to save the world, (RED) assures us that it does not cost anything to save lives.

Additionally, this paragraph refers to Africans as "our brothers and sisters." A perceived bond or commonality between groups seems critical for a desire to participate in helping projects. What non-profit or philanthropic organization does not seek to connect us, somehow, to the folks it hopes to assist? Alexander[41] writes that personalization and identification with others is a critical component in creating a moral universal. Loseke argues, "Charity as human values is produced…as a morality of friendship…and a morality of compassionate people."[42] Still, given the historic portrait and our categorizations of Africa and Africans as different from "us," it is telling that (RED) has chosen to label those dying of AIDS in Africa as our brothers and sisters. (RED) hopes to further connect its message with our emotions. How can we ignore our brothers and sisters? How can we turn away from our family in this world community?

Also at the heart of the Manifesto, it states, "We believe that when consumers are offered this choice, and the products that meet their needs, they will choose (RED). And when they choose (RED) over non-(RED), then more brands will choose to become (RED) because it will make good business sense to do so. And more lives will be saved."[43] Again, this is the essence of (RED). It is about business, about selling products, about enticing more companies to use the (RED) brand. Stole writes that cause marketing enables businesses to generate customer loyalty and stave off public criticism of booming corporate profits in the face of gross economic inequalities. In addition, a majority of people responding to polls said they would switch products or purchase products if it meant supporting a cause they believed in.[44] Among her respondents, Sarah Moore[45] found that many people conflated charities with corporations, indicating that charity branding strategies are quite effective. From the first, the Manifesto states that consumer shopping habits can change the world. Here, that idea is reiterated and taken one step further – we see *why* our choices matter. The more we buy the products that exist, the more businesses will see that (RED) is worthwhile. More corporations will create more (RED) products for us to buy, and the more we buy, the more money will be sent to Africa. It is a simple, cyclical idea. However, ultimately (RED) is supposed to be about saving lives. This paragraph clearly argues that supporting (RED) – buying its products – saves lives. The more we buy, the more lives can be saved.

Simply put, (RED)'s mission revolves around objects. Objectification is (RED)'s fundamental goal. The entire purpose of (RED) is to get us to buy (RED) products. "Objectification can point to the sturdier embodiment of the values they have created, and even of the experiences they imply"[46]. With regard to (RED), objectification is supposed to symbolize our humanitarian values and our ability and willingness to save the lives of people we do not know. By purchasing a GAP t-shirt and wearing it, (RED) suggests that we, as consumers, are showing our commitment to equity, fairness, and value for human life. In this case, a t-shirt or a bracelet is supposed to embody our desire to save African lives. As Bono's quote earlier in the paper demonstrates, (RED) wants the campaign to make you feel like a soldier doing battle against AIDS in Africa. Studying compassion in the UK, Moore argues that choosing to wear symbols of sympathy, such as ribbons or other products, promotes a particular view of the self as empathic and aware. Like yellow ribbons supporting troops in Iraq, *choosing* to buy and wear a (RED) product shows our support for the eradication of HIV/AIDS in Africa and, by extension, our kindness. (It also makes more money for corporations that use the (RED) brand.)

The next paragraph of the Manifesto emphasizes the sensible, utilitarian value of (RED). "(RED) is not a charity. It is simply a business model. You buy (RED) stuff, we get the money, buy the pills and distribute them. They take the pills, stay alive, and continue to take care of their families and contribute socially and economically in their communities."[47] This portion of the Manifesto is particularly interesting to analyze. Why would (RED) not want to be considered a charity? Perhaps because (RED)'s downplaying of charity emphasizes the point made earlier that helping is free and useful to *us*. (RED) is emphatic in its stance that *everyone* should benefit from being a part of (RED). While charity work *may* serve to make us feel better, business participation and our own participation (insofar as we buy more (RED) stuff) is contingent on there being some tangible benefit. Companies that "go RED" profit because the campaign makes their products more appealing to customers. Consumers profit because we get great stuff and help others in the process. Unlike charities, we see the benefits of our "contributions"[48].

By denying that it is a charity, (RED) insists it is a win-win idea – good for every person and every business involved. Perhaps this is why, instead of the "brothers and sisters" of an earlier paragraph, Africans with AIDS are now simply referred to as "they." Rather than emphasizing that we are saving lives because it is simply the thing to do, in this paragraph, we are helping "them" so that "they" may be socially and *economically productive* members of their societies. Loseke writes that charity serves a morality of capitalist practicality: rehabilitating people allows them to lead productive lives within the economic system. Saving lives means allowing people to make money, to take care of themselves, rather than burdening *us* or other members of their communities. (RED) frames itself as able to save lives *and* benefit both businesses and consumers, critical in a neoliberal political context.[49]

The final two paragraphs are shorter. The first states, "If they don't get the pills, they die. We don't want them to die. We want to give them the pills. And we can. And you can. And it's easy." The final statement/paragraph is, "All you have to do is upgrade your choice." Like the opening paragraphs, these sentences paint a picture in which saving lives is easy, simple, and sensible. Again, (RED) appeals to our sense of fairness and our emotions by telling us that people will die without the pills that it provides, then transitioning into the fact that simply choosing to buy (RED) products, will enable "them" to live. Harkening back to the first two paragraphs, the final two reiterate our ability to make choices to save lives. And best of all, it does not cost us anything extra, nor does it require any real effort on our part. It is a simple transaction: buying (RED) will save Africans. Unlike Marx's Communist Manifesto which advocates for revolutionary economic restructuring and an end to capitalism, Bono's (RED) Manifesto recommends no change to economic or political systems, but rather, advances a neoliberal assumption that capitalism itself can cure societies' ills.

What People are Saying about (RED): Analyzing (RED)'s MySpace Comments

MySpace is a social networking site where people create personal profiles and connect with friends, meeting new people, posting blogs, and sharing music or information. According to MySpace, there are hundreds of millions of members, composed of individuals, bands, and organizations. Due to the high volume of membership and the free access, politicians, political and social organizations, and celebrities all have MySpace sites. In this way, they can post information, pictures, advertisements, samples of music or videos, share opinions, and reach out to millions of young people with ease. (RED) has a MySpace page, which gives a short summary of its work and a link to its main website. As of January 2008, (RED) had 593,266 MySpace "friends" – people/groups who had sent a request, asking their profiles to be linked on (RED)'s space. MySpace allows friends to leave comments on each other's profiles. Often, people leave comments detailing their support, life updates, or general hellos. Because leaving comments necessitates going to the profile of the person/group you are interested in, we can safely hypothesize that those leaving comments on (RED)'s profile know what (RED) is, have some personal interest in it, and are concerned enough to visit the profile and demonstrate their concern/interest. Thus far, I have detailed particular messages conveyed by (RED) and shown how these messages are related to preexisting social categories and schemas that exist. I have considered how (RED) is creating a moral imperative, connecting shopping and consumerism with saving African AIDS patients. Now I will examine (RED)'s MySpace comments, analyzing how (RED)'s message has been interpreted and what parts of the (RED) campaign seem most salient.

As of early January 2008, there were 1,596 comments written about (RED) in 2007 and 2,504 in 2006. Because (RED) was fully established and operational in 2007 and because the comments are more recent, I choose to analyze all comments from 2007. Reading through the nearly 1,600 comments, I coded them according to their primary purpose and found that the majority of comments fit into three categories – general love of or thanks for (RED) – "I love (RED)!" – without talking specifically about products or the work (RED) does; the products; or belief in "the cause"/the work. There are, however, a variety of other categories, such as those I refer to as "shoutouts," in which people say hello, mention a holiday, or use a (RED) phrase such as "I'm desi(red);" comments related to MySpace specifically, such as a request to be in the "top friends" space; other, for comments that I cannot easily categorize, usually related to that person's own agenda or external website; photos, in which people post pictures of themselves; personal stories, in which people give an individual account of their reasons for interest in (RED); AIDS, if they discuss AIDS specifically; and Africa. I also include a code for those comments that fall into more than one category – the comment devotes time to multiple categories, with none being the primary purpose. All comments come from (RED)'s MySpace site: www.myspace.com/joinred. Because people can change their screen names over time, I have identified comments by the date and time they were left. I have not changed spelling or formatting of people's comments, except to make multiple short lines into long lines of text. I use / to indicate line breaks.

Table 1 shows the numbers and percentages for all (RED)'s MySpace comments. As I mentioned, the majority of comments fall into three categories. Four hundred three comments, or 25.25% from 2007, are about people's love of (RED). On Aug 18, 2007 at 9:20 pm, Morgan wrote: "RED, RED, RED/i love RED!!!!/i think the whole organization is bloody brilliant!!!" And on Mar 8, 2007 1:45 am, PrEw wrote: "lovin' the RED baby...absolutely lovin' it...peace and love always." Because these comments do not specify, it is difficult to know what specific aspects of (RED) people love. What is evident is that over a quarter of all comments are written in support/love of the (RED) agenda and that (RED) garners positive feelings from many who think about it. Clearly, people enjoy their affiliation with the organization.

The second most common category for comment is (RED)'s product line. Nearly three hundred fifty, or 21.62% of all 2007 comments, indicate awareness and love of or desire for (RED) products. Most comments seem to focus almost solely on liking the products and wanting more. For instance, on Mar 22, 2007, at 11:31 am, Lela wrote: "I LOVE RED!!! /I GOT THE RED RAZOR/ AND THE IPOD NANO/ AND THE GAP BRACELET AND/ I NEED MORE STUFF!!!" On Feb 15, 2007 at 12:09 am, KatyStewart wrote: "I hope everyone's man got them an ado(red) shirt for valentines day!!" And on Nov 25, 2007 at 11:02 am, abs-n-bran commented: "NEED MORE COMPANIES 2 PARTICIPATE! MY KIDS AND MYSELF ARE STOCKED ON CLOTHES AND SHOES. NEED MORE MORE MORE! MORE PRODUCT RED PLEASE." These comments have nothing to do with (RED)'s goal to provide treatment to Africans suffering with AIDS. They seem to indicate that (RED)'s consumerist message has been taken to heart and that (RED)'s advertising and products capture people's attention.

Despite a focus on material products, several of the comments do refer to a larger goal. PLACEBO, on Sep 10, 2007 at 1:23 am wrote, "Love my (RED) nano...I am a generally a very practical person and put off getting an ipod for ages...but once I saw the (RED) nano...I had to dish out the dough. So glad that my cash not only lets me listen to music, but also goes to a good cause." And others spoke of wearing their shirts or shoes and fielding questions about them, thereby raising more awareness of (RED). It seems like this last type of comment is (RED)'s goal – getting people to want and purchase the products, becoming walking advertisements for (RED) so that others might also decide to buy into the campaign.

The third most common category is the "cause" or the "good work" (RED) is doing: two hundred ninety-nine different comments, 18.73% of all comments in 2007, focused primarily on the cause. On May 26, 2007 at 10:03 pm, !Brownnn wrote, "its nice to know; people care./ greatcause; keep it up." And rebecca left the following comment on May 4, 2007 at 4:29 pm: "people tell me that i'm naive - that i should be more realistic, less idealistic. but then i see a group of people doing what they can to promote a worthy project like this, and can't help but believe in the good." Comments about the cause imply that people are contemplating more than t-shirts or sunglasses. Instead, some aspect of overall goals of the (RED) campaign seem to be their primary concern. However, it is interesting to note that when folks wrote about a cause, they were not speaking specifically about treatment for Africans with AIDS, the actual purpose for the money spent. We may be justified in questioning whether true awareness is occurring when people speak of a nebulous "cause" rather than specifics. Nevertheless, because so many people were specifically concerned about the cause, it seems that (RED) has been successful in creating, or tapping into, a moral issue, encouraging people to connect (RED) with solving a problem.

A mere eight people wrote about Africa specifically, and only thirty-five wrote specifically about AIDS. When I include every *mention* of Africa and AIDS, even when it was not the actual purpose of the comment, I found that there were eighty-five references (5.38% of all comments) to AIDS and fifty-eight references (3.67% of all comments) to Africa. When we consider (RED)'s website and recall how few specific references there are to Africa and/or AIDS, the lack of comments makes sense. (RED) provides countless images of its products. Advertising is glossy and attractive. But the end result is often mentioned only tangentially. It does not seem surprising that users of MySpace would think more about products or a great cause than about Africa or Africans specifically.

Despite the paucity of specific comments, when folks did write about Africa, they tended to use "stock scripts," to borrow Amsterdam and Bruner's term. On Jul 28, 2007 at 11:53 am, Lizzie wrote, "Very cool. i think what you have done is awesome. Some people out there are still ignorant of these diseases. Ignorant because of the lack of knowing. Like in Africa. I think red is a great Cause." And on Oct 7, 2007 at 2:40 am, Gina Bobina wrote:

MY FATHER LIVED IN SOUTH AFRICA[50] AND MY MOM WENT THERE AFTER HE PASSED AWAY AND THE STORY'S OF HOW POOR IT IS OVER THERE IS AWFUL JUST HEARTBREAKING. I SUPPORT THIS CAMPAIGN FULLY AND THANK YOU FOR ALL YOUR SUPPORT TO HELP OUT.. THANK GOD THERE ARE STILL PEOPLE WHO CARE...

Although there are a few comments from Africans, the majority of Africa comments revolve around the poverty that exists or simply referred to helping the continent. Africa is yet again seen as a one-dimensional, monolithic place of degradation. Poverty is part of the fundamental schema most westerners use to consider the continent. (RED)'s MySpace comments demonstrate the ideas about Africa that many westerners hold, its ignorance, its poverty, its need of help. As further evidence, (RED) does not address issues of poverty, but eight comments referenced poverty in Africa. On Nov 4, 2007 at 12:27 pm, J.J. wrote, "Buy (Red) Products, and help the world get rid of poverty!" This confusion may be due to the fact that Bono works on campaigns to erase third-world debt, but it may also be because we are so accustomed to hearing about poverty in Africa that any mention of Africa brings poverty to mind.

Table 1—Purpose of Comments on (RED)'s MySpace Page

RED	AIDS	Africa	Personal Story	Products	Photo	Other	Cause/ Work	MySpace	Shout-Out	More Than One	Totals
403	35	8	7	345	26	60	299	78	186	149	1596
25.25%	2.19%	0.50%	0.44%	21.62%	1.63%	3.76%	18.73%	4.89%	11.65%	9.34%	100%

Discussion

(Product)[RED] heavily promotes its goods, both on its website and in advertisements. The goal of providing AIDS treatment to Africans living with the disease seems far more understated than information about the products. Yet (RED)'s lack of significant information about Africa or AIDS may not undermine people's awareness of (RED)'s goals, because by incorporating *any* reference to Africa, (RED) is able to mobilize common western schemas that posit the entire continent as poor, disease-ridden, and war-torn. With even minimal allusions to Africa and Africans suffering, (RED) can use people's socially constructed understandings of the continent as a basis for its support. Because (RED) does not need to devote much space to information about AIDS in Africa, it can devote much more space to its product line and convincing consumers that buying stuff is enough to change the world.

Virtually every aspect of (RED)'s message is simplistic and the result of such simplicity is visible in comments about the organization. Africa, when discussed, is portrayed as a monolithic continent whose people are in peril, but whom we can save as long as we buy the right products. So lacking in centrality to (RED)'s advertising and messaging, Africa is the subject of only one half of one percent of all comments left at (RED)'s MySpace page. Only fifty-eight people mentioned the continent at all. Instead, the majority of comments were focused on the greatness of (RED), its fine products, or the general, unspecified cause. Finally, consumerism is touted as the means by which we can save Africa, without acknowledging the inherent inequalities existent in the global economy, some of which have helped to impoverish many Africans on the continent. The volume of comments related to (RED)'s products, people's desire for more products, and even comments related to using products to inform others, demonstrate that this particular aspect of (RED)'s message is very strong. While Africa and/or AIDS do not seem to take precedence in people's minds, (RED) as an organization, and the goods associated with it, clearly resonate. (RED)'s capitalist Manifesto seems a model for the ways in which consumers view (RED).

The absolute simplicity of (RED)'s message may play a significant role in why (RED) is well known and supported by consumers, many of whom are young, though undoubtedly, the ever-changing products and emphasis on their trendiness also must have a significant effect. Without cool stuff, we would ignore (RED)'s message, no matter how much it appealed to our emotions or fit within our socially constructed categories. The positive aspects of (RED) seem fairly obvious: (RED) has raised money for African AIDS programs and encouraged corporate social responsibility; it has provided drugs for some people, prolonging their lives; and its simple, consumerist message has captured the attention of a large western audience. We must question, though, whether there could be unintended consequences as a result such simplicity. Does (RED) uphold stereotypical ideas of Africa and Africans in the minds of westerners? By suggesting that we, through our purchases, can save Africans and eradicate AIDS, does (RED) yet again undermine the agency of Africans and depict the west as the great savior? In portraying AIDS as a disease we can stop by shopping, does (RED) help prevent us from seeing underlying causes of the AIDS epidemic and other issues on the continent? Will people grow tired of (RED)'s message and products? If so, will AIDS in Africa stop being a trendy cause, leading to a decline in funding? Or, on the other hand, will the (RED) campaign and embedded giving in general actually raise people's awareness of world issues and encourage greater civic or philanthropic participation? This paper has sought to examine the ways (RED) uses previously held social constructions of Africa, AIDS, and western benevolence to construct its heavily consumerist message and the ways this message effects consumers. Further research might address the aforementioned questions, probing the deeper economic, social, and cultural ramifications of (RED).

[1] The parentheses, according to RED's website, are meant to indicate an "embrace" (About, accessed 17 December, 2007).

[2] Despite the insufficiency of the terminology, I use the terms west/western/westerners to indicate North American and Western European nations and consumers born and raised there. Lumping the US, Canada, the UK, and other Western European countries together certainly fails to capture vast political and ideological differences between these nations, yet linked by colonial histories and/or contemporary economic strength and consumer cultures, these are populations (RED) has targeted for its campaign. Though nations in the west are far from homogeneous, I argue that historical constructions of Africa and Africans are similar among these nations. As Mudimbe (1988 and 1994) shows, European exploration and colonization of the continent created an ideology of Africa as backward, primitive, and in need of (European) help. When I use the terms west/westerners, I am referring to nations that share certain historical notions about their own supremacy over, and obligations to, Africa and Africans. Born in the United States, I write from this perspective and thus include myself in a western "we" or "us." Again, these labels fail to capture enormous complexities of these populations, but I use the distinction as a tool (albeit an imperfect one) to illustrate my argument.

[3] The Gap Store is a US-based retail chain.

[4] About, accessed 17 December, 2007; emphasis added

[5] FAQ, 2, accessed May 2007

[6] Bono, accessed 17 December, 2007

[7] Update, accessed 17 December, 2007

[8] Alexander, Jeffrey. 2004. *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*. Berkeley, University of California Press.

[9] Bono, accessed 17 December, 2007

[10] Loseke, Donileen R. 1997. "'The Whole Spirit of Modern Philanthropy': The Construction of the Idea of Charity, 1912-1992." In *Social Problems* 44(4):425-444.

[11] Loseke 1997: 440

[12] Stole, Inger L. 2008. "Philanthropy as Public Relations: A Critical Perspective on Cause Marketing." In *International Journal of Communication* 2:20-40.

[13] Lamont, Michele. 1992. *Money, Morals, Manners: The Culture of the French and the American Upper-Class-Middle Class*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

[14] Markus, Hazel and Shinobu Kitayama. "The Social Construction of Emotion." *In Emotion and Culture: Empirical Studies of Mutual Influence.* Washington D.C.: American Psychological Association. 1994. 89-132.

[15] Berger, Peter L and Thomas Luckmann. 1966. *The Social Construction of Reality*. New York: Doubleday.

[16] DiMaggio, Paul. 1997. "Culture and Cognition." In *Annual Review of Sociology*. 23: 263-287

[17] DiMaggio 1997: 269

[18] Amsterdam, Anthony and Jerome Bruner. 2000. "On Categories," 19-53. In *Minding the Law*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

[19] Amsterdam and Bruner 2000: 47

[20] UNAIDS. 2007. *AIDS epidemic update*. Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) and World Health Organization (WHO). http: //data.unaids.org/ pub/ EPISlides/2007/2007_epiupdate_en.pdf, accessed January 2007. P. 7

[21] UNAIDS 2007: 11

[22] Unlike in other world regions, where a variety of modes of transmission are recognized in spreading the disease, heterosexual sex is supposed to be the single significant mode of transmission of HIV/AIDS in Africa (Brewer et al 2003; Stillwaggon 2006). As Seneca Vaught (2007) argues, outsiders' interpretations of African societies are inevitably linked to western racism. There is a long, well-documented, history, in the west, of ascribing deviant sexualities to black people. Black women have been painted as both overtly-sexual temptresses and passive recipients of men's interest or aggression. Black men have been depicted as insatiable, hypersexed beasts who prey on innocent women (Stevenson 1994; Gilman 1985; Hill-Collins 2004; Cohen 1999; Simmonds 1988). These racist schemata have persisted over time and may have prevented unbiased consideration of other possible modes of transmission, such as iatrogenic transmission, or social realities that may accelerate the spread of HIV/AIDS as a result of sex, such as extreme gender inequality and malnutrition (Gisselquist et al 2003; Sidel and Levy 2002; Buve 2002; Marshall 2005). Unfortunately, science is not as "pure" as we might hope: scientists, no less than average people, are influenced by social categories and biases (Epstein 1996; Gould 1996). Instead of taking a wide view of the structural inequalities and social realities that existed in different parts of African countries, scientists ignored evidence of medical transmission, homosexuality, and co-factors of poverty, and insisted heterosexual sex was *the* problem in Africa, which guided social and political policies aimed at combating the disease. Also see Fee, Elizabeth and Daniel M. Fox, eds. 1992. *AIDS: The Making of a Chronic Disease*.

[23] See Hill-Collins 2004; Wainaina 2006; Patton 1990; Fee and Fox 1992; Treichler 1999; Mudimbe 1988 and 1994.

[24] See Rodney 1981; Mudimbe 1988.

[25] For examples of Africans' activity with regard to AIDS, see Patterson 2006, Njiro 2005, Booth 2004, Pithouse 2004, Robins 2004, Webb 2004, and Miller 2003.

[26] For example, I calculated the value of one Vanity Fair magazine and one iPod shuffle. The calculator informed me that these purchases "Provide 117 single-dose (Nevirapine) treatments for mother and baby, to prevent the transmission of HIV from mother-to-child" (Calculator, accessed 17 December, 2007).

[27] At the time of printing, this clip had been moved to the "About" section of joinred.com.

[28] *Home, accessed 3 January, 2008*

[29] Wainaina, Binyavanga. 2006. "How to Write about Africa." In *Granta*, 1992: January 15. http://www.granta.com/back-issues/92?usca_p=t, accessed 15 July, 2007.

[30] Lazarus Effect, not coined by (RED), refers to the Biblical story of the dying Lazarus, whose sisters had begged Jesus to help, but to whom Jesus had come too late: Lazarus had already died. But then, in front of the others, Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. It was "a miracle": the message is that buying (RED) can facilitate this miracle.

[31] Easterly, William. 2006. *The White Man's Burden: Why the West's Efforts to Aid the Rest Have Done So Much Ill and So Little Good*. New York: Penguin Books.

[32] Easterly 2006; Patterson 2006

[33] Patterson, Amy S. 2006. *The Politics of AIDS in Africa*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

[34] Whiteside, Alan, Robert Mattes, Samantha Willan, and Ryann Manning. 2004. "What People Really Believe About HIV/AIDS in Southern Africa." Pp. 127-150 in *The Political Economy of AIDS in Africa*, edited by Nana K. Poku and Alan Whiteside. Burlington, VT: Ashgate Press.

[35] It also seems ironic to me that red, once the color associated with the U.S. fear of Communism, is the color of this very capitalist-based effort and that, in this un-Marxian Manifesto, we are being asked to embrace ( ) it.

[36] Manifesto, accessed May 2007

[37] Manifesto, accessed May 2007

[38] Loseke 1997: 436

[39] Manifesto, accessed May 2007

[40] Manifesto, accessed May 2007

[41] Alexander 2004

[42] Loseke 1997: 435

[43] Manifesto, accessed May 2007

[44] Stole 2008: 28

[45] Moore, Sarah E.H. 2008. *Ribbon Culture: Charity, Compassion, and Public Awareness*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

[46] Alexander 2004: 254

[47] Manifesto, accessed May 2007

[48] Moore 2008

[49] Stole 2008

[50] South Africa is not one of the countries that benefits from (RED) or the Global Fund.

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