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# Crafting the Humanitarian Narrative: Development Organizations and Cause-Marketing Campaigns (abstract)

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## **The Social Practice of Human Rights: Charting the Frontiers of Research and Advocacy**

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**Research Panel:** Humanitarian Concerns

**Presenter:** Alexandra Cosima Budabin, Human Rights Center, University of Dayton

**Title:** Crafting the Humanitarian Narrative: Development Organizations and Cause-Marketing Campaigns

**Abstract:** Development organizations have begun to follow corporations in launching CSR initiatives such as cause-marketing campaigns. Private aid for causes is increasingly tied to branded products and celebrities, an alliance described as Brand Aid (Richey & Ponte 2011). However, scholars have found that the promotional aspects of these corporate partnerships were more important than the actual materials benefits (Hawkins 2012). The puzzle remains: if brand aid humanitarian fundraising through cause-marketing is not for the funds, then what purpose does it serve?

Using the brand aid conceptual model (Richey and Ponte 2013) and the lens of CSR, this paper will explore cause-marketing of development organizations. While NGOs are not corporations, their adoption of branded goods to promote causes serves an additional social purpose that lies outside of other organizational objectives: to solidify donor identities, construct recipient subjectivities, and link existing institutions (NGOs, states, businesses) in new ways. Distance causes are turned into products while private citizens are urged to take the place of public aid processes. Brand aid humanitarian fundraising by development NGOs exemplifies new trends in the privatization of help and the commodification of humanitarianism. I argue that cause-marketing by NGOs creates a humanitarian narrative that is simplified and packaged for the Western consumer, with the potential to distort the understanding of the everyday practices of development.

**Keywords:** brand aid, development, humanitarianism, cause-marketing, business, consumption

**Biography:** Alexandra Cosima Budabin is a Human Rights Center Research Fellow at the University of Dayton (USA). She holds a PhD in Politics from the New School for Social Research (USA). Her work focuses on non-state actors such as NGOs, social movements, diasporas, and celebrities in human rights, humanitarianism, and conflict resolution.