

# A Nonprofit Perspective on Business–Nonprofit Partnerships: Extending the Symbiotic Sustainability Model

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## Abstract

Using the symbiotic sustainability model as a framework, this research investigates how many and with which businesses top nonprofit organizations report partnerships. We examined the websites of the 122 largest, most recognizable U.S. nonprofits. These websites included information about 2,418 business–nonprofit (B2N) partnerships with 1,707 unique businesses. The results suggest key differences with previous research on how U.S. Fortune 500 companies report B2N partnerships. Leading nonprofits report more B2N partnerships than U.S. Fortune 500 companies do. Furthermore, nonprofits do not maintain industry exclusivity in reporting B2N partnerships, like their business counterparts do. Finally, social issue industries do not exert the same isomorphic pressures on B2N partnerships that economic industries do. New propositions that extend the symbiotic sustainability model are presented to account for nonprofits' unique goals for capital accumulation in B2N partnering and the industry characteristics.

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Partnerships between nonprofits and businesses, B2N partnerships hereafter, have become a preferred strategy to address social issues, enhance brand value, and gain economic and social advantages (McIntosh, 2007). B2N partnerships allow the strategic interests of businesses to become aligned with societal expectations defined by nonprofits (Austin, 2000a). Through B2N partnerships, the identities of the partnering organizations become connected (Selsky & Parker, 2005). Seitanidi and Crane (2009) suggest that B2N partnerships are typically “seen by both sets of institutions as instantiations of ‘doing’ CSR” (p. 414). The 21st century dominance of B2N partnerships (Austin, 2000a) suggests that this type of relationship strongly influences social issue problem-solving (Seitanidi & Ryan, 2007). Trends suggest that partner selection is becoming more focused and strategic, with businesses making larger contributions to fewer nonprofits (Giving Standard, 2012), rapidly expanding co-branding efforts (Besharat & Langan, 2014), and embracing a mutual goal perspective to solve issues important to both partners (Heller & Reitsemá, 2010).

In keeping with these trends, B2N partnership research has increased rapidly (Laasonen, Fougère, & Kourula, 2012). However, most of this literature is focused on *how* businesses and nonprofits descriptively do (Rivera-Santos & Rufin, 2010; Simpson, Lefroy, & Tsarenko, 2011) and normatively should partner (Austin & Seitanidi, 2012a, 2012b; Bryson, Crosby, & Stone, 2006) and on the *consequences* of such partnerships (Baur & Schmitz, 2012; Laasonen et al., 2012; Schiller & Almog-Bar, 2013). This research has focused mostly on the corporation (see AL-Tabbaa, Leach, & March, 2014; Harris, 2012) and only partially addresses variations between businesses and nonprofits. Seitanidi and Ryan (2007) identify this focus and note that more consideration should be given to nonprofits’ position in B2N partnerships and why such relationships may be asymmetrical (see also Farrelly & Quester, 2005).

Moreover, research has less commonly focused on identifying *with whom* nonprofits and businesses partner (Branzei & Le Ber, 2014). This oversight is notable for two reasons. First, the selection of partners has important implications for the types of corporate social responsibility (CSR) that is enacted and the social issues that are given primacy. Put another way, when B2N partnerships are formed with popular social issues, such as education or youth, and neglect other issues, such as elder care or domestic violence, the real consequence is that some social issues are magnified and others obscured. Second,

the selection of partners is an important issue because the formation of B2N partnerships are not independent actions, as implicitly suggested when one focuses on the partnership as the level of analysis. Instead, B2N partnerships form an interorganizational network, in which interdependencies exist at the organizational and industry levels of analysis. Researchers have noted these limitations. Specifically, Selsky and Parker (2005) call for “theory building by way of large scale empirical research” (p. 866) and to strengthen the conceptual underpinnings of the multidisciplinary CSR field (p. 865).

To answer the calls by Selsky and Parker (2005) and Seitanidi and Ryan (2007), this study extends theorizing about B2N partnerships. Specifically, we offer a macro-level quantitative analysis (see Branzei & Le Ber, 2014, for a call for quantitative research on the network of cross-sector partnerships) to determine *how many* and *with which* businesses nonprofits report as partners. The symbiotic sustainability model (SSM; Shumate & O’Connor, 2010b) provides the framework for our inquiry. The SSM is a macro-level model that focuses on institutional positioning (McPhee & Zaug, 2000) communication of B2N partnerships. The SSM exposes the network of relationships among nonprofits and businesses, thereby allowing researchers to explore B2N partnerships at the organizational and industry levels of analysis. As a macro-level model, the SSM offers six nested propositions that uniquely address nonprofit and business agency in the formation of B2N partnerships (including number and choice of partners), nonprofit and business stakeholders’ roles in the valuation of the B2N partnerships, and nonprofits and businesses’ risks and rewards from cross-sector partnerships. Despite the fact that the SSM suggests that nonprofits and businesses differ, the model’s propositions suggest parallel behaviors from both parties. We interrogate the parallel behavior assumption by examining the websites of 122 leading (identified by their revenues and/or brand value) U.S. based nonprofits to determine *how many* and *with which* businesses nonprofits report relationships.

This article makes two contributions to the study of B2N partnerships. First, we extend the SSM to account for nonprofits’ unique goals for capital accumulation in B2N partnering and the industry characteristics that make mimetic isomorphism in partner selection more likely for businesses than for nonprofits. Second, this article presents a rare empirical analysis of nonprofit behavior in B2N partnerships (AL-Tabbaa et al., 2014; Harris, 2012; Hoffman, 2009) and an even rarer interrogation of the cross-industry and organization patterns of B2N partnering. Through the analysis, we demonstrate that the parallel behavior assumption made by most B2N partnership research is not valid.

To begin our inquiry, we situate the current study within the B2N partnership literature in general, and the SSM (Shumate & O’Connor, 2010b)

specifically. Then, we use a combination of content and network analysis to determine which and how many businesses nonprofits reported as partners. We conclude this article with a set of propositions and directions for future B2N partnership research.

## **B2N Partnerships**

The literature on B2N partnerships has ballooned in the past decade (Laasonen et al., 2012). Scholars have categorized these partnerships in a variety of ways (Austin, 2000b; Galaskiewicz & Colman, 2006; Rondinelli & London, 2003), including the level of interaction, strategic value, and scope, but all tend to move from low engagement (e.g., traditional philanthropy) to deeper engagement (e.g., joint venture). In this research, we define B2N partnerships, following Selsky and Parker (2005), as relationships “formed to explicitly address social issues and causes that actively engage the partners on an ongoing basis” (p. 850). Such partnerships may be transactional, short termed, and self-interested or more integrative and common-interest oriented (Selsky & Parker, 2005). To this end, we use a broad definition of B2N partnerships that includes philanthropic, strategic, commercial, and political collaborations (Galaskiewicz & Colman, 2006).

Despite the growing interest in B2N partnerships (Laasonen et al., 2012), scholars have given greater attention to businesses and introduce the nonprofit as a secondary, less powerful agent (AL-Tabbaa et al., 2014; Harris, 2012). The lack of attention given to the nonprofit as an agent is particularly troubling because the literature has long recognized that nonprofits and businesses have different motivations for entering B2N partnerships (AL-Tabbaa et al., 2014; Pedersen & Pedersen, 2013; Simpson et al., 2011). Businesses form B2N partnerships for a variety of reasons including reputation enhancement (Falck & Heblich, 2007), to appease stakeholders (Vogel, 2005), and to recruit and retain employees (Basil, Runte, Easwaramoorthy, & Barr, 2009). In contrast, nonprofits seek B2N partnerships predominantly for financial reasons (Hoffman, 1999), including diversification of income streams (AL-Tabbaa et al., 2014). However, larger nonprofits are more likely to seek partnerships that improve their capacity and brand, rather than just generate income (AL-Tabbaa et al., 2014).

We classify scholarship on B2N partnerships into four categories: (a) research about the antagonistic and/or cooperative relationships between environmental activist groups and businesses; (b) research focusing on collaborative practices, once partnerships have been established, that create maximum social and economic value; (c) marketing research focusing on the effects of B2N brand pairings; and (d) the SSM, which focuses on the capital

made available to partners by communicating the existence and character of the B2N partnership to varied stakeholders. In the subsequent review, we describe each category of scholarship and then focus on the two shortcomings we see throughout: a lack of attention to the nonprofit perspective and failure to consider the important question of partner selection.

Research on the antagonistic and/or cooperative relationships between businesses and nonprofits has predominately focused on environmental nonprofits that have power and influence as stakeholder groups (Bertels, Hoffman, & DeJordy, 2014; den Hond, de Bakker, & Doh, 2015; King, 2007). This research has given the corporation, and its response to these nonprofits, primacy over the actions and agency of the nonprofits themselves. For example, in King's (2007) work on the structure of relationships between businesses and environmental nonprofits, he hypothesized about which organizations engage in partnerships. In that hypothesis, he focused on nonprofits' reputation for fair dealing and whether businesses' environmental reputation was considered an important asset. In short, according to King (2007), partner choice depends upon businesses' motivation to partner (i.e., they consider their reputation an important asset) and the attractiveness of nonprofits (i.e., they are considered by the business to have a reputation for fair dealing). Thus, the nonprofit is afforded limited agency in the choice to partner, and their perspective in forming the partnership is not taken into full consideration. In contrast, Hoffman (2009) takes the environmental nongovernmental organizations' (NGOs) perspective and differentiates strategies for working with corporations. Based on the number of partnerships and the diversity of sector ties, Hoffman (2009) classified environmental nonprofits into mediators, bridges, independent, captive, and isolate. Although Hoffman takes a nonprofit-centric and macro-level approach, his model is largely descriptive and does not attempt to develop theory about the patterns of these partnerships.

A related but somewhat different pattern emerges from research focusing on the process of B2N partnerships (Austin, 2000b; Le Ber & Branzei, 2009; London, Rondinelli, & O'Neill, 2005; Rivera-Santos & Rufin, 2010). This research focuses on ways that businesses and nonprofits can work together to have meaningful outcomes that they could not have achieved by working alone. In one of the most extensive frameworks published on this topic, the collaborative value creation model, Austin and Seitani (2012a, 2012b) discuss how value creation can be enhanced in each stage of the partnership for maximum economic, social, and environmental impact. This framework is normative, positing that "right choices," based on resource complementarity and orientation, will result in value creation. It is not a descriptive framework, in that it does not describe which patterns of B2N partnerships are

likely to be created. As such, it provides little guidance into the circumstances in which nonprofits would choose to partner with a particular business.

A similar pattern is evident in the marketing research about B2N brand pairings (for a notable exception see Basil & Herr, 2003). This research generally focuses on the fit between nonprofits and businesses in cause-marketing campaigns and the results for the corporation. Key findings include that good fit results in better corporate image/identity (Alcañiz, Cáceres, & Pérez, 2010; David, Kline, & Yang, 2005), purchase intentions (David et al., 2005; Pracejus & Olsen, 2004), and corporate credibility (Lafferty, 2007). This research makes important contributions to understanding why businesses may try to align their brands with particular nonprofit brands, but again, it does not address why some nonprofits select particular B2N partnerships.

The SSM (Shumate & O'Connor, 2010b) conceptualizes the set of B2N partnerships as a representational communication network. Shumate and Contractor (2013) describe four different types of communication networks: flow, affinity, semantic, and representational. At the interorganizational level, flow networks describe the transmission of messages, information, or resources among actors. In contrast, affinity networks emphasize enacted relationships. Alliances are the most frequently studied interorganizational affinity relation (Powell, White, Koput, & Owen-Smith, 2005). Semantic networks emphasize shared meaning or symbol use among actors. Organizational mission statements have also been studied using this approach (Grbic, Hafferty, & Hafferty, 2013). Finally, representational networks refer to affiliation-related messages about relationships among actors that are communicated to a third party or to a public. No message is exchanged between the actors that are connected in representational relationships. Instead, actors communicate about the existence and character of the relationship to a larger audience (Pilny & Shumate, 2011). Examples of interorganizational representational networks include cross-sector co-branding relationships, hyperlink networks, and public endorsement networks. By conceptualizing B2N partnerships as representational communication, the primary focus turns from the interworkings of partnerships to the ways that the existence and character of the affiliation is made known to stakeholders.

B2N partnerships, as representational relations, rely on the functional differences between businesses and nonprofits. Nonprofits differ from businesses in several ways. At the most basic level, they distribute profits to stakeholders and exist without clear lines of accountability as nonprofit organizations are not owned but are governed by a board acting as fiduciary (Frumkin, 2002). In addition, nonprofits tend to be more mission focused (Lewis, 2005), rely more on voluntary contributions (AL-Tabbaa et al., 2014; Rivera-Santos & Rufin, 2010), and have more difficulty measuring their

results (Rivera-Santos & Rufin, 2010) than businesses. Finally, nonprofits often serve societal interests “by focusing on advocacy/or operational efforts on social, political and economic goals, including equity, education, health, environmental protection, and human rights” (Teegen, Doh, & Vachani, 2004, p. 466). Through B2N partnerships, both nonprofits and businesses expand their functional identity and “fulfill ancillary roles” (Astley, 1985, p. 236) that are not necessarily derivative of their core functions.

The SSM (Shumate & O'Connor, 2010b) defines B2N partnerships as “interorganizational communication relationships that are symbolized to stakeholders in order to influence the mobilization and creation of capital” (p. 578) and highlights how communication about B2N partnerships activates stakeholders' schemas about legitimacy (Suchman, 1995) and source credibility (Hovland & Weiss, 1951), thereby mobilizing capital. Due to organizational differences, the SSM points out that businesses and nonprofits are likely to gain different benefits, understood as capital, from the communication of the existence and character of the partnership to various stakeholders.

The SSM relies on Bourdieu's (1986) theory of capital accumulation to understand how various forms of capital are mobilized. The SSM and its inclusion of Bourdieu's work is in alignment with Bourdieu's call that researchers pay attention to how objects, including organizations, are socially shared and historically produced (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Scholars have identified the applicability of Bourdieu's work, originally an individual level framework, to organizations (Everett, 2002; O'Connor, 2007; van Aaken, Splitter, & Seidl, 2013). Everett (2002) argues that Bourdieu's work gives organizational scholars a framework to investigate the symbolic structures that bind organizations to their institutional field and the social realm. The extension of Bourdieu's work to organizational contexts, in particular CSR, highlights the interconnectedness of economic and noneconomic motives that undergird CSR (van Aaken et al., 2013).

As an overview, the SSM describes three types of capital that may be mobilized or restricted: economic, social, and cultural. Economic capital describes financial resources and is the root from which other forms of capital are grown. Social capital is the sum of the organizations' relationships with stakeholders and other organizations that is best conceptualized as a network. Cultural capital describes positive associations with knowledge or admired values or traits, including positive brand associations that increase the organization's standing in society. Capital accumulation is at the heart of all social interactions because the different forms of capital can enhance field position and provide a buffer from attacks (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Following Bourdieu's logic, the SSM contends that B2N partnerships increase capital through diversification. Specifically, the partners are able to

unlock capital that was previously unavailable in existing relationships and/or capital that was unable to be grown organically. The cross-sector partnership provides distinct forms of capital and may expand existing forms of capital thereby realizing the benefits described by Bourdieu and Wacquant noted above.

The SSM includes six propositions that describe the importance of the communication of B2N partnerships to stakeholders, the various forms of capital sought through the partnerships, factors influencing partner choice, and the risks and rewards of B2N partnerships (see Table 1 for a complete list). However, even though the SSM states that nonprofit and business differences explain the reason for and the impact of their alignment, the model's propositions suggest parallel behaviors from both parties.

In sum, while the literature suggests a variety of ways that B2N partnerships differ from B2B partnerships, and suggests that nonprofits have different motivations for forming these partnerships than their business counterparts (Austin & Seitani, 2012a, 2012b; Bryson et al., 2006; Schiller & Almog-Bar, 2013; Simpson et al., 2011), the research has yet to take up the question about how these different motivations effect nonprofits' choices including whether to partner with businesses, how many partnerships to form, and with which businesses. This article extends the SSM to address these questions.

Previous research grounded in the SSM examines the number and type of NGO partners identified on the websites of 155 U.S. Fortune 500 corporations from the following industries: chemical, tobacco, petroleum-refining, mining-crude oil, utilities: gas and electric, general merchandisers, specialty retailers, motor vehicles and parts, telecommunications, hotels, casinos and resorts, and commercial banks in 2005 (Shumate & O'Connor, 2010a). The study codes the names of nonprofit organizations from the "about us," "community," and "corporate social responsibility" sections of the businesses' websites. There are 695 unique nonprofits identified and 813 cross-sector partnerships reported. This previous research tests two of the SSM's six propositions. The current study continues this inquiry by similarly examining the two propositions in previous research, specifically Propositions 3 and 4.

We surmise that as stakeholder preferences explain the B2N partnership patterns in the prior SSM test (Shumate & O'Connor, 2010a), each of the differences in how nonprofits relate to external stakeholders highlighted above is likely to have important implications for the number and pattern of B2N partnerships reported by nonprofits. We investigate the patterns of B2N partnerships across social issue and economic industries, paying attention to the number of partners and the resulting pattern of relationships between

**Table 1.** The SSM's Propositions.

	Proposition
1	The existence, character, and valuation of B2N partnerships are communicatively co-constructed by B2N partners and stakeholders.
2	B2N partners and stakeholders' communication and co-construction of the existence, character, and valuation of the partnership mobilizes and/or restricts various forms of capital for NGOs and businesses.
3	B2N partner choice is influenced by the partner's perceived ability to mobilize stakeholders and their associated capital, as evidenced by the partner's already accumulated capital and their current position in the symbiotic network. <sup>a</sup>
3a	Organizations are more likely to seek B2N partners in an economic or social issue industry if competitors within their industry have sought similar B2N with partners in that industry and have achieved gains. <sup>a</sup>
3a1	Industry level isomorphic pressure constricts partnership choice among organizations in industries that share stakeholders. [NEW]
3b	Organizations are less likely to seek partners that have an existing relationship with another organization in their industry.
3c	Organizations are more likely to seek partners who have had a prior cross-sector that led to capital accumulation for another partner outside of their industry.
4	As the number of B2N partners increases, the communication of such alliances results in a diminishing return from stakeholders; conversely, the communication of a limited number of alliances increases perceptions of value. <sup>a</sup>
4A	Nonprofits that seek to demonstrate their competency to gain economic and social capital will report a greater number of B2N partnerships than businesses that seek to demonstrate their caring to gain cultural and social capital. [NEW]
4B	Nonprofits that seek to demonstrate their competency to gain economic and social capital will report a greater number of B2N partnerships per economic industry than businesses that seek to demonstrate their caring to gain cultural and social capital. [NEW].
5	B2N partners risk a loss of legitimacy from their own stakeholders and criticism from the partner's stakeholders.
6	B2N partners will be more buffered from and less vulnerable to disturbances in their environments than organizations not in enduring B2N partnerships.

Source. Adapted from Shumate and O'Connor (2010b).

Note. Some of the language of these propositions was modified for clarity, but the substance of the propositions remains the same. Propositions followed by [NEW] were newly derived from this study. SSM = symbiotic sustainability model; B2N = business–nonprofit; NGOs = nongovernmental organizations.

<sup>a</sup>Indicates a proposition that is partially tested in this study.

nonprofits in social issue industries and businesses in economic industries. As such, we propose the following research question that parallels the prior study of U.S. Fortune 500 corporations (Shumate & O'Connor, 2010a).

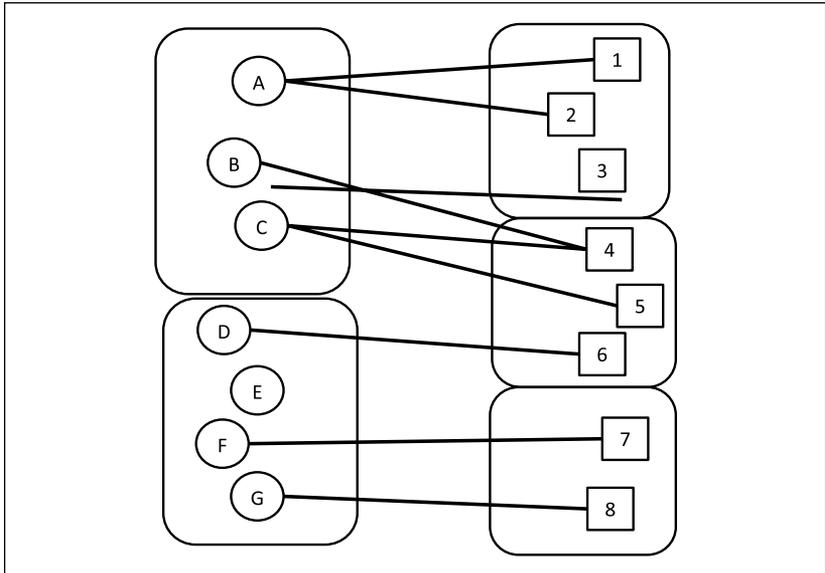
**Research Question 1 (RQ1):** How many and with which businesses do top nonprofits report partnerships?

In the prior test of the SSM (Shumate & O'Connor, 2010a), nonprofits in some social issue industries are preferred B2N partners. The term *social issue industry* is derived from the social movement research, wherein social movement industries are defined as “clusters of movement organizations and individuals working for a particular social change goal” (Smith, 1997, p. 46). Social issue industries describe the set of nonprofit establishments addressing a common social issue. In Shumate and O'Connor’s (2010a) previous study, the social issue industries in which the most nonprofit partners operate were generalist foundations and funds (i.e., the United Way, Volunteer Match) and child welfare (i.e., UNICEF, Big Brothers Big Sisters, Boys and Girls Clubs). Other first tier social issue industries include environmental conservation, hospitals, and disaster relief. The prior test examines U.S. Fortune 500 corporations’ websites and most of the B2N partnerships reported are with local nonprofits operating in the communities where these corporations are headquartered. In contrast, the current research examines the B2N partnerships reported on top U.S. nonprofit websites. We comparatively ask,

**Research Question 1a (RQ1a):** In which social issue industries do nonprofits report the greatest number of B2N partnerships?

For illustrative purposes, Figure 1 is offered. In Figure 1, the social issue industry containing nonprofits A, B, and C has the most B2N partnerships because it has six partnerships indicated by three nonprofits, in comparison with the three partnerships indicated by the four nonprofits in the other social issue industry.

Furthermore, the prior test of the SSM finds differences in the number of B2N partnerships reported by businesses in economic industries that are not due to the number of corporations in each industry, but are due to other differences *between* economic industries. Economic industry refers to a set of business establishments that are engaged in the same type of economic activity. Various government agencies use different economic industry classification systems (e.g., U.S. Office of Management and Budget uses the North American Industry Classification System, the United Nations uses the International Standard Industrial Classification of All Economic Activities), but each is focused on economic activity. In Shumate and O'Connor’s (2010a)



**Figure 1.** Illustrative figure to demonstrate B2N patterns of relationships. Note. The circles with letters on the left indicate nonprofits. The squares with numbers on the right indicate businesses. The lines between the circles and squares indicate B2N partnerships as reported by nonprofits on their websites. Nonprofits in the same rounded shape are in the same social issue industry. Businesses in the same rounded shape are in the same economic industry. B2N = business–nonprofit.

research, specialty retailers and commercial banks report more B2N partnerships than would be expected by chance. They speculate that the lack of product differentiation and diverse consumer profiles in these industries explained their propensity to report B2N partnerships. Extending this logic, we ask,

**Research Question 1b (RQ1b):** With which economic industries do nonprofits report the greatest number of B2N partnerships?

In Figure 1, the economic industry that contains Businesses 4, 5, and 6 has the most partnerships because there are four B2N partnerships indicated to those businesses in comparison with three and two B2N partnerships reported with businesses in the other economic industries, respectively.

In the previous test of the SSM, U.S. Fortune 500 companies report relatively few B2N partnerships (*Mdn* = 5). Shumate and O’Connor (2010a), drawing on Cialdini’s (1993) scarcity principle, argue that because U.S. Fortune 500

companies are attempting to unlock social and cultural capital associated with social issues, reporting a few partnerships is more persuasive.

However, nonprofits may be less selective in reporting B2N partnerships because they seek to primarily influence donors, who differ significantly from customers, despite their demographic similarity (Lee & Chang, 2007). The primary psychosocial reason why donors give is based upon empathy (Eveland & Crutchfield, 2004; Lee & Chang, 2007). Although the final decision to donate to a particular nonprofit is based upon several reputational factors (Bennett & Gabriel, 2003), it is grounded in an overall positive feeling toward the nonprofit. In contrast, the public is wary of businesses and their claims of compassion (Kim, Sung, & Lee, 2012). According to Kim and colleagues' research, when a business reports a partnership with a less familiar nonprofit that does not seem to be a logical extension of its operations, consumers tend to view the business as manipulative. In contrast, when a nonprofit reports a partnership with a business that is lesser known or that does not have a logical connection to its social issue, there are fewer negative consequences. Overall, donors evaluate nonprofit messages as being credible at face value and do not evaluate nonprofit messages with the same scrutiny as business communication. In combination, these factors may lead nonprofits to be *less* selective than their business counterparts in reporting their B2N partnerships. As such we ask,

**Research Question 1c (RQ1c):** How many B2N partnerships do nonprofits report?

In the previous test of the SSM (Shumate & O'Connor, 2010a), businesses report partnerships with one nonprofit per social issue industry (e.g., environment, violence prevention). Thus, their B2N partnerships are industry exclusive. Shumate and O'Connor argue that this is because businesses are able to reap more rewards by tapping into different social issues with which customers would respond, rather than investing in multiple nonprofits addressing the same social issue.

However, we might expect a different pattern from nonprofits that seek economic and social capital from reporting their B2N partnerships. The public perceives nonprofits and businesses differently. Nonprofits, by and large, are seen as more caring and less competent than their business counterparts (Aaker, Vohs, & Mogilner, 2010). As such, the primary reason for choosing to publicly communicate their relationship with businesses may be to access legitimacy related to the competency of the business (AL-Tabbaa et al., 2014). Both Herlin (2015) and Boenigk and Schuchardt (2015) have recently found that internal nonprofit stakeholders tend to perceive poorly fitting B2N

partnerships negatively. However, Boenigk and Schuchardt also demonstrate that the partnership positively influences external stakeholders' willingness to donate. If the purpose of B2N partnering for nonprofits is to influence external stakeholders, then it makes sense for a nonprofit to report relationships with multiple successful businesses, even within the same economic industry. Competence is not necessarily related to economic industry, and industry exclusivity does not enhance associated competence claims. In contrast, businesses may communicate their association with a nonprofit to enhance cultural and social capital related to characteristics such as caring and trustworthiness. As such, reporting relationships with more than one nonprofit working on the same social issue does little to enhance businesses' claims that they care about that social issue. Because of these differences, we ask,

**Research Question 1d (RQ1d):** Do nonprofits report multiple relationships with businesses in the same economic industry?

This question looks for the prevalence of patterns, highlighted in Figure 1, where nonprofits have multiple business partners in the same economic industry (i.e.,  $A \rightarrow 1$ ,  $A \rightarrow 2$ ) versus where nonprofits only report relationships to one business partner per economic industry (i.e.,  $B \rightarrow 3$ ,  $B \rightarrow 4$ ).

Finally, the previous test of the SSM (Shumate & O'Connor, 2010a) demonstrates that businesses in the same economic industry are likely to report partnerships with different nonprofits in the same social issue industry. While institutional theory relies on organizations as the target of mimetic behavior in interorganizational networks (Powell et al., 2005), the SSM (Shumate & O'Connor, 2010b) suggests common stakeholder expectations lead businesses in the same economic industry to engage similar social issues. The results of Shumate and O'Connor's (2010a) study suggest that common stakeholders, including customers, potential employees, and government regulators, influence business choice about preferable social issues to engage.

However, nonprofit organizations exist in social issue industries that differ significantly from economic industries. As such, their relationship with other nonprofit organizations in their social issue industry, a type of external stakeholder, differs from businesses' relationship with other businesses in their economic industry. The social issue that nonprofits address does not fully reflect its revenue engine or the market in which it competes. This is because, with the exceptions of those that rely on program revenue, nonprofits must address a double-bottom line (i.e., focus on the performance of their mission and their revenue engine as separate activities; Dart, 2004). The social mission of the organization does not necessarily describe the desires of donors that fund the nonprofits' operations (Sanders, 2012;

Sanders & McClellan, 2012). Although the term *social issue* may be used to describe and differentiate groups of nonprofits, as done in the National Taxonomy of Exempt Entities, social issue industries do not reflect market competition in the same way that economic industries do. Nor does social issue industry describe the same type of competitive marketplace that economic industry does. Although there is competition for donor resources and funding, nonprofits in the same social issue share related social missions and commensurate goals (e.g., eradication of hunger). Furthermore, social issue industries may not have the same institutionalizing pressure that for-profit economic industries do because they are not subject same industry-based regulation. Because businesses experience this type of regulation, they often mimic the CSR moves of others in their industry (see Vogel, 2005, for more on this business strategy). Lacking similar industry level pressure, nonprofits may act differently than others in their social issue industry. As such, we ask,

**Research Question 1e (RQ1e):** Do nonprofits in the same social issue industry report partnerships with different businesses that are in the same economic industry?

As an illustration from Figure 1, this question examines if F reports a partnership with 7 then G is more likely to report a relationship with 8 in comparison with businesses in another economic industry.

## Method

This study investigates B2N partnerships, as reported on the websites of a sample of nonprofits. In this study, we employed a combination of content analysis and network analysis to answer the five research questions posed. Content analysis (see Neuendorf, 2002) was chosen, as opposed to interviews or surveys, for two reasons. First, content analysis of websites provided a complete set of comparable responses across top nonprofits that have a website. In contrast, interviews and surveys were subject to biases based upon which nonprofits consented to participate in the study. Second, content analysis captured the actual communication of B2N partnerships to stakeholders, the focus of this study. Content analysis provides a systematic method to classify observed patterns of communication, rather than rely on individuals' incomplete recollection of such reporting. Network analysis (see Wasserman & Faust, 1994) was chosen because it allowed for a macro-level perspective on the patterns of B2N partnering. Network analysis simultaneously allowed us to answer three related questions about the data: (a) How many B2N

partnerships did various nonprofits report? (b) With which businesses did they report them? and (c) In comparison with random networks with a similar number of nodes and ties, what patterns occurred above and beyond what one would expect by chance alone?

## Sample

This study used a purposive sample of 122 nonprofit websites. We chose websites to provide a comparative sample to the study of U.S. Fortune 500 organizations (Shumate & O'Connor, 2010a). Furthermore, this study was interested in how B2N relationships are communicated and marketed to external stakeholders. Websites are one vehicle for such communication (see Bullis & Ie, 2007); despite being a newer vehicle of communication, as opposed to printed annual reports, there is little evidence that annual reports provide more systematic accounts of nonprofit activity (see Brody, 2002; Lampkin & Boris, 2002).

We derived the sample of top nonprofits by examining the 2012 Philanthropy 100 and Cone Brand 100, which yielded 122 unique nonprofits. We used these sources to capture top nonprofits based upon revenues and brand valuation. We located and printed the websites of these nonprofits between January 12 and 18, 2013. We carried out this task in 1 week to garner a set of comparable documents, less likely to be influenced by differences in fund-raising seasons, specific issue month foci, or current events. Two independent coders examined four locations on nonprofit websites for information about B2N partnerships. These included the home page, donors/sponsors/partners, programs/events, and volunteers/donation solicitation sections. Coders did not examine the websites of local chapters, press releases, or PDF files found on the websites. Coders only archived webpages within an immediate subdirectory of the aforementioned sections that contained the partnership information. These requirements were used to generate a comparable set of materials for each nonprofit for the subsequent analyses.

## Procedures

The two aforementioned coders were unaware of the hypotheses being tested in this study. They were trained to extract all the businesses identified by the nonprofit from all the printed webpages ( $N = 259$ ) using NVivo (NVivo: Qualitative data analysis software, 2012). The coding of archived webpages yielded a total of 1,727 businesses. One of the aforementioned coders and another two additional coders were instructed to categorize the businesses based on the industry information from the U.S. Fortune 500 website, the

North American Industry Classification System (NAICS), and the business descriptions. We employed a two-step process to generate the coding scheme for classifying economic industries. We created an initial detailed list of industries by adopting the NAICS and the industry categorization from the U.S. Fortune 500 website. The initial list maintained the distinction at the subsector level of the NAICS.

Based upon a preliminary round of coding, we discovered that some of the industries were not discernible by the coders. More importantly, we found that many businesses engage in cross-subsector operations, offering products or services across various industries. We then iteratively generated the final coding scheme by accounting for the differences and similarities in the market niches of products and services provided by various industries. We created “farming industries, food products and services” category by combining agricultural and fishing industries with food product manufacturing and food service industries. We adopted the “hotels, resorts, and casinos” classifier from the U.S. Fortune 500 list in our coding scheme rather than using the “accommodation and food services” class from the NAICS. Furthermore, we created a “financial service” category, including commercial banks, insurance companies, real estate companies, and security and trade firms. In addition, we combined the industries that manufacture and/or retail home equipment, appliances, furnishings, and other household and personal products as a single category. We also created a “consumer products” category to describe industries that manufacture toys, jewelry, office supplies, sporting goods, and other specialty consumer items. Worthy of note is that our final coding scheme (see below) is not an exhaustive list of industry classification as we only included the categories that contained our business population. Each coder indicated the economic industry in which the business was primarily engaged. Eleven percent of the business population ( $n = 200$ ) were subjected to intercoder reliability. The results demonstrate good reliability, suggesting that our coding scheme was used by multiple coders to classify businesses into economic industries consistently (Krippendorff’s  $\alpha = .75$ ; see Krippendorff, 1980).

## Measures

This study used four measures in the analyses: the social issue industry of nonprofits, the economic industry of businesses, the B2N partnership, and the centrality measures of the B2N partnership network.

*Social issue industries.* Social issue industry describes the set of nonprofits that commonly address the same social issue. Eight social issue industries were

identified by the first and second authors based on the National Taxonomy of Exempt Entities: (a) animal welfare; (b) education, arts, and culture; (c) environment; (d) charitable foundations; (e) health; (f) human services; (g) religious; and (h) women, children, and youth organizations. We chose to utilize this categorization system, as opposed to the International Classification of Nonprofit Organizations (ICNPO; Salamon & Anheier, 1997), so that we could rely on the nonprofit's self-classification, rather than coders' imposed classification. Specifically, coding was based upon nonprofits' self-made identification on their U.S. Internal Revenue Service Form 990 filing. As indicated in Table 2, the health and human services organizations combined make up approximately half of the nonprofit sample, followed by the nonprofits providing services for women, children, and youth (11.5%).

*Economic industries.* Economic industry refers to a set of business establishments that are engaged in the same type of economic activity. Twenty-two economic industries were identified by the coders in the second wave of coding (see Table 3). Economic industries were derived through the aforementioned iterative coding scheme, which accounts for the distinction in the existing classification systems and the market niches of products and services provided by the businesses. Twenty cases were coded as missing because of lack of information about their business activities, leaving a total of 1,707 businesses with a valid classification for the measure of economic industry. The 20 missing cases, which are treated as such throughout the analyses, represent 20 ties from 11 nonprofits. Only 2 nonprofits (i.e., Catholic Relief Services and The Conservation Fund) reported more than 2 ties to businesses that we were unable to classify.

*Business partnerships.* A partnership was identified when a business was mentioned on the nonprofit's website in either text or by including an image of the business logo. Throughout this article, we use a broad definition of B2N partnerships that includes philanthropic, strategic, commercial, and political collaborations between nonprofit and business partners (Galaskiewicz & Colman, 2006). Moreover, the nature of B2N partnerships was not consistently described by the nonprofit (e.g., some simply listed the name or logo without remark, whereas others provided lengthy descriptions). As such, we operationalize the B2N partnerships as any mention of a relationship.

*Degree centrality.* Degree centrality was defined as the number of nodes (e.g., organizations) that are linked to a node (see Wasserman & Faust, 1994, for a detailed description of other network centrality measures). In this study, degree centrality denotes the number of businesses with which a nonprofit

**Table 2.** The Number of Nonprofit Organizations in Each Social Issue Industry.

Industry	Number of nonprofits	%	Examples
Animal welfare	5	4.10	1. ASPCA 2. Wildlife Conservation Society 3. World Wildlife Fund
Education (including arts and cultures)	7	5.74	1. Academy for Educational Development 2. Public Broadcasting Service 3. Project HOPE
Environment	8	6.56	1. National Audubon Society 2. Conservation International Foundation 3. The Conservation Fund
Foundations	9	7.38	1. Greater Kansas City Community Foundation 2. Pew Charitable Trusts 3. Rotary Foundation of Rotary International
Health	34	27.87	1. Susan G. Komen for the Cure 2. American Cancer Society 3. National Kidney Foundation
Human services	33	27.05	1. Doctors Without Borders USA 2. American Red Cross 3. World Emergency Relief
Religious	12	9.84	1. Combined Jewish Philanthropies 2. Campus Crusade for Christ International 3. Lutheran Services in America
Women, children, and youth	14	11.48	1. Girls Inc. 2. YWCA USA 3. Children International
Total	122		

Note. ASPCA = American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals; YWCA = Young Women's Christian Association.

reported partnerships or the number of nonprofits that indicated partnerships with businesses in an economic industry.

### Analysis

The research questions were answered using bipartite social network analysis techniques. Bipartite social networks describe networks where there are two

**Table 3.** The Number of Businesses in Each Economic Industry.

Industry	Number of businesses	%	Number of ties	%	Examples
Advertising, marketing, and Internet services	63	3.69	72	3.00	1. Google 2. Ogilvy 3. Deluxe Drissi Creative
Aerospace	5	0.29	13	0.54	1. Boeing 2. Lockheed Martin 3. Northrop Grumman
Apparel	92	5.39	113	4.67	1. Adidas 2. Chrome Industries 3. Life Uniform Company
Arts and entertainment	106	6.21	137	5.67	1. Disney/ABC Television Group 2. WWE 3. Zynga
Chemical	9	0.53	15	0.62	1. Avery Dennison 2. Dow Chemical Company 3. DuPont
Communications, information, and publishing	48	2.81	70	2.89	1. CNN 2. Comcast 3. New England Golf Monthly
Computer software, equipment, and electronic products	73	4.28	115	4.76	1. IBM 2. RadioShack 3. Symantec
Consumer products (toys, jewelries, sport goods, office supplies, etc.)	82	4.80	97	4.01	1. BIC USA 2. Fisher-Price 3. Kay Jewelers
Farming, food products, and services	167	9.78	229	9.47	1. Agropalma 2. General Mills 3. Starbucks
Financial services (commercial banks, diversified financials, insurance, real estate, security)	223	13.06	337	13.94	1. Bank of America 2. Metlife 3. Ryland homes
General and specialty retailers	72	4.22	128	5.29	1. Amazon 2. Costco 3. Dollar General
Health care services	71	4.16	105	4.34	1. Ansell Healthcare 2. Liberty Dialysis 3. Sanofi Aventis
Hotels, casinos, and resorts	27	1.58	37	1.53	1. Atlantis Resort 2. Hilton 3. Norwegian Cruise Line

(continued)

**Table 3. (continued)**

Industry	Number of businesses	%	Number of ties	%	Examples
Household and personal products	70	4.10	99	4.09	1. American Standard 2. Home Depot 3. Procter and Gamble
Machinery and equipment	20	1.17	25	1.03	1. GE 2. Illinois Tool Works 3. J. D. Irving, Limited
Medical products and equipment	83	4.86	123	5.09	1. Baxter International 2. LensCrafters 3. Novartis
Metals, minerals, energy, and oil	84	4.92	117	4.84	1. BP 2. DuPont 3. Revett Silver Company
Motor vehicles and equipment	27	1.58	43	1.78	1. Boeing 2. Jiffy Lube 3. Toyota
Pharmaceutical	170	9.96	276	11.41	1. Bayer 2. Johnson & Johnson 3. Sappo Hill Soapworks
Professional services (legal, accounting, architectural, etc.)	177	10.37	193	7.98	1. CEMEX 2. Marakon Consulting 3. Neilson Company
Transportation and logistics	35	2.05	71	2.93	1. Avery Dennison 2. FedEx 3. Southwest Airlines
Wholesalers	3	0.18	3	0.12	1. BJ's 2. DollarDays International 3. LF USA
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,707</b>		<b>2,418</b>		

Note. WWE = World Wrestling Entertainment, Inc; CNN = Cable News Network; GE = General Electric; BP = British Petroleum; LF = Li & Fung USA.

types of actors that have ties to each other, but not among the same type (Wasserman & Faust, 1994). In such networks, many traditional network analysis techniques are not applicable because they are based on networks where all of the nodes are the same type and can have relationships with one another.

For much of the analysis, we use a method called bipartite exponential random graph modeling (Handcock, Hunter, Butts, Goodreau, & Morris, 2008). The method allows researchers to examine propensities in the network that occur more often than would be expected based upon chance. To establish a baseline for comparison, the method simulates a population of

**Table 4.** Results of Bipartite Exponential Random Graph Model.

Parameter name	Model 1	Model 2
Edges	-4.07 (0.08)**	-4.69 (0.13)**
BIFactor.Animal Rights	-1.09 (0.18)**	-0.96 (0.63)
BIFactor.Education	-1.20 (0.19)**	-1.43 (0.59)*
BIFactor.Environment	0.83 (0.10)**	0.86 (0.16)**
BIFactor.Foundations	Base	Base
BIFactor.Health	0.21 (0.93)*	0.37 (0.18)*
BIFactor.Human Services	0.27 (0.09)**	0.37 (0.16)*
BIFactor.Religious	-0.67 (0.16)**	-0.44 (0.22)
BIFactor.Women, Youth, and Children	0.05 (0.10)	0.16 (0.23)
BIstarmix.2.Animal Rights		0.39 (0.63)
BIstarmix.2.Education		0.45 (0.94)
BIstarmix.2.Environment		0.09 (0.01)**
BIstarmix.2.Foundations		0.15 (0.01)**
BIstarmix.2.Health		0.14 (0.01)**
BIstarmix.2.Human Services		0.09 (0.01)**
BIstarmix.2.Religious		0.20 (0.01)**
BIstarmix.2.Women, Youth, and Children		0.11 (0.06)**

Note. Estimate include first, followed by standard error in parentheses. BIFactor indicates the propensity of nonprofits in the social issue identified to report ties in comparison with the base category. BISTarmix.2 indicates the propensity of a nonprofit to report ties to businesses in the same economic industry.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

networks with the same number of nodes and same number of relationships between the nodes. Then it compares the propensity of ties in the observed network with the number of similar ties in the simulated network. For example, in this research, we are interested in how prevalent partnerships are between particular economic and social issue industries. The model compares the observed number of relationships between a particular economic and social issue industry with what is found in the simulated population of networks.

## Results

This research focuses on the question of how many and with which businesses top nonprofits report partnerships. To answer this question, several aspects of the B2N partnership network were investigated. RQ1a asked about

the number of businesses with which nonprofits in each social issue industry reported partnerships. To answer this research question, we calculated the number of B2N partnerships that nonprofits in each social issue industry reported (see Tables 4 and 5). Furthermore, we included a *bifactor* parameter for seven of the eight social issue industries in a bipartite exponential random graph model (Handcock et al., 2008), using “foundations” as the base category. Foundations was chosen as a base category because it had a median number of B2N partners in the sample ( $n = 64$ , 16.0%). The results indicate whether nonprofits in a social issue industry were more or less likely to report relations with businesses in comparison with the other social issue industries. Model 1 (see Table 4), which includes only the parameters measuring the propensity of nonprofits in social issues to form ties with businesses, is used for interpretation. Animal rights, education, and religious nonprofits were less likely to report ties with businesses. Environmental, health, and human service nonprofits were more likely to report ties with businesses. Excluded from the bipartite exponential random graph model because they were isolates, but included in the network data overall, 67% of religious nonprofits reported no relationship with a business.

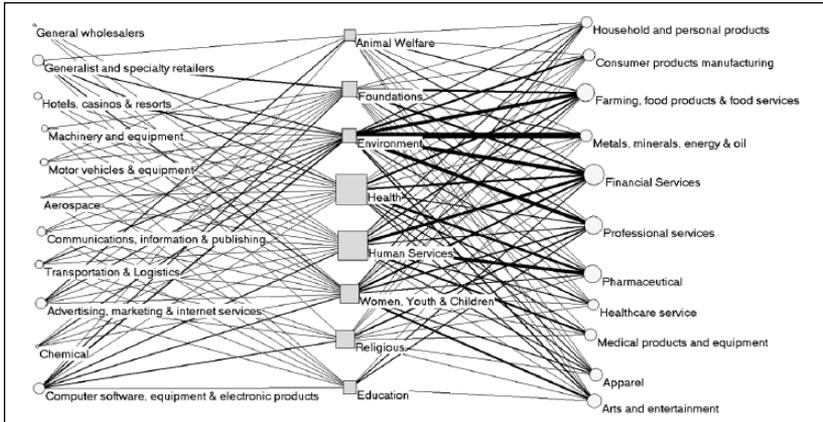
RQ1b asked which economic industries would have the greatest number of ties with social issue industries. To answer this research question, first we compared the distribution of reported ties with businesses with a uniform distribution. The results confirm that there were significant differences in the number of reported relationships across economic industries,  $\chi^2(21, 2418) = 1,394.29$ ,  $p < .01$ . The economic industries with the most ties (see Table 3 for full results) were financial services ( $n = 337$ , 13.94%) and pharmaceuticals ( $n = 276$ , 11.41%).

We further examined the prominent pairings between nonprofits and businesses (see Table 5). Table 5 identifies the number of nonprofits in each social issue industry that reported B2N partnerships, the number of B2N partners that those nonprofits reported, and the most prominent economic industries in which the named businesses were located. We illustrated the network of partnerships between social issue and economic industries (see Figure 2). We highlight five pairings here, for brevity. First, the financial services industry (e.g., Bank of America) was aligned with the greatest number of social issue industries, including human services (e.g., Doctors Without Borders USA), health (e.g., Susan G. Komen for the Cure), and environment (e.g., National Audubon Society). Second, the pharmaceutical industry (e.g., Bayer) was most prominently aligned with the human service and the health issue industries. Third, medical products and equipment industry (e.g., Baxter International) were also notably aligned with the human services issue industry. Fourth, apparel (e.g., Adidas), food products, and farming (e.g., General

**Table 5.** Overall Macro-Level Pattern of B2N Partnerships, at Both the Individual Organization and Industry Levels of Analysis.

Social issue industries					
	Reported partnerships		Business partners		Economic industries of business partners (number of businesses)
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	
Animal welfare	4	80	39	9.8	Miscellaneous (8) Financial services (6) Food product and farming (6)
Education, arts, and cultures	4	57.1	35	8.8	Financial services (8) Minerals, energy, and oil (5) Professional services (5)
Environment	5	62.5	324	64.8	Metals, minerals, energy, and oil (62) Financial services (42) Professional services (39)
Foundations	55	55.6	64	16.0	Food product and farming (13) Miscellaneous (12) Professional services (6)
Health	20	58.8	706	35.3	Pharmaceutical (95) Financial services (73) Miscellaneous (57) Food product and farming (56)
Human services	21	63.6	750	37.5	Pharmaceutical (143) Financial services (109) Medical products and equipment (76)
Religious	4	33.3	59	14.8	Professional services (12) Computer software, equipment, and electronic products (6) Medical products and equipment (5) Financial services (5) Apparel (5)
Women, youth, and children	11	78.6	333	30.3	Financial services (46) Arts and entertainment (43) Professional services (34)
Total	74	60.7	2,424	—	

Note. From left to right, the table identifies the social issue industries in which top U.S. nonprofit reside, the number and percentage of nonprofits in that social issue industry that reported any B2N partnership, the number of B2N partnerships (businesses) they identified, the mean number of B2N partnerships per nonprofit, and the economic industries in which those businesses most commonly were located. B2N = business–nonprofit.



**Figure 2.** B2N partnership network between economic and social issue industries. Note. Squares indicate nonprofit social issues. Circles indicate economic industry. The size of the shape indicates the number of organizations in the group. The thickness of the line indicates the proportion of total ties from that social issue industry to a particular economic industry. B2N = business–nonprofit.

Mills), and food services and hotel industries (e.g., Hilton) were each aligned with health issue industry. Fifth, metal, minerals, energy, and oil industry (e.g., BP) were aligned with environmental nonprofits (e.g., National Audubon Society). In addition, some social issue industries, such as education, arts and cultures, religious, and animal welfare nonprofits did not indicate a prominent relationship with any particular industry, but were aligned with many economic industries. Similarly, some economic industries, such as general wholesalers, transportation and logistics, and machinery and equipment industries, only exhibited weak relationships with a few social issue industries.

RQ1c asked how many B2N relationships nonprofits would report. Nonprofits reported many B2N partnerships ( $n = 74$ ;  $Mdn = 16$ ). Two nonprofits with exceptionally high number of partnerships, AmeriCares Foundation and the Conservation Fund, were excluded from the analysis (187 and 219 partnerships, respectively), given that their values were 3 standard deviations away from the mean ( $M = 32.67$ ,  $SD = 42.34$ ).

RQ1d asked whether nonprofits would exclusively partner with businesses in an economic industry. Table 3 reports the number of B2N partners in each of the 22 economic industries. To answer this research question, we used bipartite exponential random graph modeling (Handcock et al., 2008). In particular, controlling for the overall propensity of nonprofits in a

particular social issue industry to report ties with businesses, we examined the prevalence of the *b1starmix* parameter for 2-stars. This parameter estimates the prevalence of 2-stars, or structural signatures in which a single node connects to two other nodes, where the two nodes selected are homophilous. In this case, we examined homophily based upon the same economic industry. For example, in Figure 1,  $2 \leftarrow A \rightarrow 1$  and  $4 \leftarrow C \rightarrow 5$  are *b1starmix* parameters with businesses in the same economic industry. Estimates are reported for the overall prevalence of these structures for each social issue industry. Industry exclusivity would be supported if the parameter estimates were negative, demonstrating that these structures were less likely to occur than would be expected based upon chance, given the other parameters in the model. All of the significant parameter estimates were positive, indicating a positive propensity for nonprofits to form ties with more than one business in an economic industry. In particular, environmental, foundation, health, human service, religious, and women, youth, and children were likely to form partnerships with more than one business in an economic industry. A descriptive inspection of the data reveals that 11.41% of B2N partnerships reported ( $n = 276$ ) were exclusive to an economic industry.

RQ1e asks if nonprofits in the same social issue industry would report relationships with different businesses that are in the same economic industry. To answer this question, we created two co-membership matrices (see Wasserman & Faust, 1994). The first matrix was ordered business by business ( $n = 1,707$ ), where 1 represented that the two businesses were in the same economic industry and 0 denotes otherwise. The second matrix was also ordered businesses by business, where 1 in this matrix indicated that the two businesses had partnerships with nonprofits in the same social issue industry and 0 denotes otherwise. We then employed Quadratic Assignment Procedure (Hubert & Schultz, 1976) with the simple matching option for binary matrices to investigate the correlation of these two matrices. There was not a significant relationship between these two matrices ( $QAP_{SM} = .001$ ,  $p = .21$ ,  $n = 1,707$ ). This means that nonprofits in the same social issue industry were not likely to report partnerships with businesses in the same economic industry.

## Discussion

This research sought to answer the question, “How many and with which businesses do top U.S. nonprofits report partnerships?” In particular, we suggested that nonprofits have different relationships with stakeholders than businesses do and that different patterns of B2N partnership reporting were likely as a result. As such, we sought to compare the number and pattern of

B2N partnerships that nonprofits reported with a similar study (Shumate & O'Connor, 2010a) of B2N partnerships reported by a sample of U.S. Fortune 500 companies. To begin, the results of this research found several consistencies with the previous study of B2N partnerships (Shumate & O'Connor, 2010a), particularly at the industry level of analysis.

RQ1a focused on how many B2N partnerships nonprofits in various social issue industries reported. Environmental, health, and human services nonprofits reported the greatest number of B2N partnerships and nonprofits in these social issue industries were more likely to be reported as partners by U.S. Fortune 500 corporations in Shumate and O'Connor's (2010a) study. In addition, the nonprofits in social issue industries that were less likely to report B2N partnerships in this study were the same social issue industries in which businesses were less likely to identify nonprofit B2N partners in Shumate and O'Connor's (2010a) study. These social issues included animal rights, education, and religion.

RQ1b focused on with which businesses nonprofits reported those partnerships, by focusing on the economic industries of those businesses. The economic industries that were central, as indicated by the number of cross-sector partnerships with businesses in those economic industries, were financial services/commercial banks and gas and electric utilities. In addition, and consistent with previous research, we found that some economic industries were *not* well represented. Tobacco and chemical businesses did not appear as partners in either study. However, this finding does not necessarily mean that these industries fail to provide funding to nonprofits. Rather, we speculate that these B2N partnerships are either mediated through foundations or not publicly communicated, thereby limiting their utility to economic resource exchange.

Although similarities to previous research exist, the results of this research suggest several differences when compared with the results of a similar study of U.S. Fortune 500 businesses (Shumate & O'Connor, 2010a). These differences serve as the basis for extending the SSM to account for the differences between nonprofits and businesses. Below we unpack these differences and offer a new set of propositions. These propositions are incorporated into the appropriate section of Table 1 for easier synthesis with the prior SSM propositions.

### ***Differences Between Nonprofits and Businesses in B2N Partner Selection***

At the organizational level of analysis, we find that nonprofits report significantly more partnerships (RQ1c), approximately three times as many, as their business counterparts in Shumate and O'Connor's (2010a) study.

Although the SSM suggests that both businesses and nonprofits seek social capital, or advantageous relationships with their B2N partner's stakeholders, we argue that the differences in reporting patterns have to do with the types of accumulated capital that nonprofits have in comparison with businesses. First, nonprofits more readily accumulate social and cultural capital through carrying out their missions and, as noted earlier, rely on outside entities to secure economic capital. In contrast, businesses organically produce economic capital through their core business activities. Whereas Bourdieu (1986) and corporate-centric models of CSR (Carroll, 1991; King, 2007) begin with economic responsibility/capital, we suggest that nonprofits begin with social and cultural capital that is then converted into economic capital. When capital is accumulated in a different order, it likely influences how donors and consumers evaluate nonprofits and businesses. When businesses communicate a partnership with a nonprofit, their motivations are considered to be economically driven; cause-marketing research suggests that businesses that communicate relationships with nonprofits that are perceived as incompatible with their core business are viewed as manipulative and penalized by consumers (Kim et al., 2012). In contrast, nonprofits are generally given the benefit of the doubt in low-fit partnerships although partnering with a business with a negative reputation can hurt nonprofit brand valuation (Heller & Reitsema, 2010).

These perceptions have implications for the number of partnerships likely to be reported by nonprofits and businesses, respectively. Businesses must pay close attention to the cultural dimension of their association with nonprofits to reap benefits; as such, scarcity of value (Cialdini, 1993) is likely to play a significant role in restricting the number of partnerships reported. In contrast, if nonprofits primarily report business partnerships to gain economic capital associated with professionalism, the cultural dimensions of B2N partnerships should not similarly restrict the number of partnerships reported. Previous research has demonstrated that donors use fund-raising competency as an overall indicator of the professionalism of a nonprofit, a key signal that donors use to decide to which nonprofit to donate (Reinhardt, 2009). In this case, indicating more business partners to stakeholders signals greater professionalism in fund-raising and, therefore, a more competent nonprofit organization. Based upon these findings and the arguments presented above, we propose the following addition to Proposition 4 of the SSM.

**Proposition 4A:** Nonprofits that seek to demonstrate their competency to gain economic and social capital will report a greater number of B2N partnerships than businesses that seek to demonstrate their caring to gain cultural and social capital.

Not only did nonprofits report more partnerships, there were differences in the patterns of with which businesses they reported partnerships at the organizational level of analysis. RQ1d focuses on whether nonprofits offer industry exclusivity in communicating B2N partnerships. In contrast to Shumate and O'Connor's (2010a) research wherein 73% of businesses reported industry-exclusive B2N partnerships, only 11% of nonprofits in the current study maintained industry exclusivity in their B2N partnerships. For example, the American Cancer Society reported partnerships with seven different pharmaceutical companies. Continuing the logic set out above, by reporting multiple partnerships within an economic industry, the nonprofit offers evidence that many businesses consider their mission to be worthwhile and legitimate.

Moreover, communicating multiple B2N partnerships with businesses in an economic industry indicates that the mission of the nonprofit is deemed valuable to an entire industry. This may be especially powerful to nonprofits that seek to change industry practices (see den Hond et al., 2015). For example, if an environmental nonprofit reports multiple B2N partnerships with businesses in the metals, minerals, energy, and oil industry, they demonstrate that they have significant influence on environmental policy for these types of businesses. Similarly, a health nonprofit, like the American Cancer Society, having multiple ties to businesses in the pharmaceutical industry may demonstrate that they have the necessary business connections to achieve their mission. Based upon the findings and arguments presented, we propose a second addition to Proposition 4 of the SSM:

**Proposition 4B:** Nonprofits that seek to demonstrate their competency to gain economic and social capital will report a greater number of B2N partnerships per economic industry than businesses that seek to demonstrate their caring to gain cultural and social capital.

### *Economic Industry Versus Social Issue Industry*

Finally, this research returned to the industry level of analysis to understand the factors influencing with which businesses nonprofits report partnerships. RQ1e asks if nonprofits in the same social issue industry would report relationships with different businesses in the same economic industry. In contrast to the industry exclusivity issue pursued in RQ1d, this question focused on whether social issue industry created isomorphic pressure that would lead nonprofits to report the same type of business partner. This study finds that nonprofits within the same social issue industry were not likely to report partnerships with businesses in the same economic industry. The SSM (Shumate & O'Connor, 2010b) suggests common stakeholder expectations lead businesses in the same

economic industry to engage similar social issues. Furthermore, Shumate and O'Connor (2010a) found that businesses in the same economic industry (e.g., electric and gas utilities like Exelon, DTE, PPL) tended to report B2N partnerships with nonprofits in the same social issue industry (e.g., environmental nonprofits like the Nature Conservancy, American Rivers, Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge). In contrast, nonprofits in the same social issue industry (e.g., Susan G Komen for the Cure and the American Cancer Society) are not likely to report partnerships with business in the same economic industry (e.g., motor vehicles and equipment).

Drawing from the SSM, we suggest that these differences are due to differences in the ways that economic industry and social issue industry identify common organizational stakeholders. Put another way, social issue industries are conceptually distinct from economic industries. Businesses in the same economic industry share many stakeholders, including customers, potential employees, activists, and government regulators that influence business choice about preferable social issues to engage. However, nonprofits in the same social issue industry often do not share stakeholders. Social issue industries do not denote shared revenue markets, suggesting that they also do not denote common consumer stakeholders (Dart, 2004; Sanders, 2012; Sanders & McClellan, 2012). In addition, social issue industries are not the basis for industry regulation, suggesting that nonprofits in the same social issue industry do not share the same regulators as stakeholders, whereas businesses in the same economic industry do share the same regulators as stakeholders. Therefore, we amend Proposition 3a of the SSM to include,

**Proposition 3a1:** Industry level isomorphic pressure constricts partnership choice among organizations in industries that share stakeholders.

### *Limitations and Future Research*

This study examined 122 top nonprofits' 2,424 B2N partnerships with 1,707 businesses. Despite the size of this sample, the study's scope is limited in several ways. First, we examined business relationships in one period of time. Future research would do well to examine these relationships over time, examining how environmental factors shape the distribution and configuration of business relationships with nonprofits. Second, we examined top nonprofits. Future research might take a random or stratified random sample of nonprofits to understand the distribution of business relationships in the general nonprofit population. Third, the Philanthropy 400 and Cone Brand 100 are limited to U.S. based charities. An international sample of nonprofits might have yielded different results and a truly international study that compares these trends

across countries is needed. Fourth, we made comparisons between the results of this study and that of Shumate and O'Connor (2010a). Although these studies used similar methodologies and both focused on top organizations, the studies were conducted nearly 8 years apart. During that time, trends in B2N partnerships have changed and such changes cannot be ruled out as an alternative explanation. However, research by the Giving Standard (2012) on the number of B2N partnerships, as reflected by business philanthropy, suggest that corporations are selecting fewer, not more nonprofit partnerships. As such, the contrast between top nonprofit strategies and business strategies for deciding how many and with which organizations to report B2N partnerships are likely to be stronger than we have reported here.

The results of this research also suggest several directions for future research. First, pharmaceutical companies overwhelmingly provide the support for the health and human services, with financial services playing a strong secondary role. More research is needed to understand the implications of these strong relationships. Second, as economic industry does not play a significant role in nonprofit partner selection, future research should pursue the factors that do. Possibilities include interlocking boards of directors, collaborative networks among nonprofits as a form of social influence, and common geographic markets.

## **Conclusion**

In summary, this study sought to fill an important gap in the literature on B2N relationships, the perspective of the nonprofit. This research centered on the question, "How many and with which businesses do top nonprofits report partnerships?" We answered this question by examining the 122 top nonprofits, according to the Philanthropy 100 and Cone Brand 100. The results demonstrate that nonprofits differ from their business counterparts, communicating more cross-sector partnerships, rarely offering industry exclusivity, and presenting distinctive patterns of relationships within social issue industry.

This study makes two contributions to cross-sector partnership research. First, we present three propositions that expand the SSM. Propositions 4A and 4B focus on nonprofits' unique goals for capital accumulation in cross-sector partnership communication; specifically, nonprofits seek economic capital associated with greater perceived competency, whereas businesses seek social capital. Proposition 3a1 focuses on the industry characteristics that make isomorphism in cross-sector partnering more likely. Each of these propositions draws attention to heretofore unexamined dimensions of B2N partner selection and the enacted network of B2N partnerships. As such, it

presents a set of testable propositions about how many and with which organizations businesses and nonprofits form B2N partnerships.

The SSM, tested and developed here, represents a robust and alternative approach to the study of cross-sector collaboration. In particular, the research developed here and in Shumate and O'Connor (2010a) demonstrates the value of the model, namely, that the SSM lends itself to the hypothesis-based, macro-level, quantitative study of cross-sector partnerships. As such, it guides researchers in the investigation of the "dynamic configuration of partners so we can understand networks as they evolve" (Branzei & Le Ber, 2014, p. 255). We are among the first to answer Selsky and Parker's (2005) call for theory building via macro-level empirical research. Macro-level empirical research on B2N partnerships brings into relief the context in which partner selection occurs and the interdependency of partner selection. Drawing from the SSM (Shumate & O'Connor, 2010b), nonprofits and businesses do not simply select partners based upon the fit of the partnership, but also based upon the selections that other organizations have made and the types of capital they seek to mobilize from potential partners' stakeholders.

Beyond the SSM, this research provides intriguing possibilities for additional theorizing about B2N partnerships. A communication-based approach to B2N partnerships places primacy on the source of messages about the partnership, the nature of those messages, the intended and unintended audiences of such communication, the landscape of competing messages, and their persuasive effects. The perspective developed by the SSM has strong connections to two other streams of B2N research: the marketing literature on B2N partnerships (Alcañiz et al., 2010; David et al., 2005; Lafferty, 2007; Pracejus & Olsen, 2004) and research about the cooperative and antagonistic relationships some environmental nonprofits have with businesses (Bertels et al., 2014; den Hond et al., 2015; King, 2007). Both of these streams are also concerned about how B2N partnerships (or antagonistic relationships) are communicated to publics. The current research suggests that the outcomes of such communication are likely to be different for businesses and nonprofits and direct researchers in these two streams to further theorize and test for differential effects.

Second, this article compares and contrasts business and nonprofit B2N partner selection. As such, this research presents a rare empirical extension to previous cross-sector partnership research that focuses predominantly on business perceptions and behavior (AL-Tabbaa et al., 2014; Harris, 2012). This research suggests that nonprofits report more partnerships with businesses, rarely offer industry exclusivity in B2N partnerships, and do not mimic the types of partnerships sought by other top nonprofits in their social issue industry. These findings should be of interest to business leaders and

researchers alike. Business leaders would do well to understand why industry exclusivity is not common among top nonprofits despite the fact that it is sought by top businesses in their reported B2N partnerships. Moreover, businesses seeking partnerships with leading nonprofits might pay attention to how they could bolster the competency claims of their B2N partners while they bolster their own claims of caring.

This research is likely scratching the surface of a larger program of research needed into the B2N partnerships network. Such a program might not only focus on the interdependencies inherent in partner selection, but also the outcomes of such selections at the organizational, B2N partnership, and whole network levels.

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