

Toward a Doctrine of Socially Responsible Marketing (SRM): A Macro and Normative-Ethical Perspective

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Abstract

In this conceptual article, the authors use a macro-level analysis and normative ethical theory to delineate and to explicate a doctrine of socially responsible marketing (SRM). Applying a theory-in-formation approach, we postulate a literature-informed definition of SRM. We discuss why a macro and normative-ethical rather than a micro and positive-descriptive perspective is essential to justifying the elements of SRM. We explore and explain why the roots of an authentic doctrine of SRM can be discerned from the literatures of marketing history, corporate social responsibility, institutional economics and moral philosophy. In so doing, the mandate to engage in socially responsible marketing is shown to be anchored in a social contract. This conception offers three essential elements of SRM—corporate citizenship, stakeholder orientation and social/ecological sustainability—each of which augers a pro-social rather than instrumental-financial approach to marketing practice. We recommend a specific normative-ethical standard, embodied in distributive justice, to best evaluate SRM. We counsel adopting a macromarketing perspective of constructive engagement for those seeking responsible marketing for a better society and world. Finally, we offer a short research agenda for advancing Marketing's embrace of SRM.

Keywords

socially responsible marketing (SRM), corporate social responsibility (CSR), marketing ethics, macromarketing, distributive justice, constructive engagement, stakeholder theory, corporate citizenship, sustainability, better-world marketing

Introduction

Companies that fulfill their purpose and responsibilities to stakeholders reap rewards over the long-term. Companies that ignore them stumble and fail.

Larry Fink, CEO Blackrock (Letter to corporate CEOs, 2019)

If marketers are to create a better world through socially responsible marketing, they require a comprehensive roadmap of what that means and where it leads. The enlightened proposition that community, country and global betterment is an abiding goal of Marketing (e.g., Wilkie and Moore 2014) demands a conscious social awareness and responsiveness on the part of marketers, including marketing academics. Our analysis and discussion help demarcate the latitude and longitude of a doctrine of *socially responsible marketing* (SRM) by proposing a comprehensive normative *definition*. Historically, the idea of marketing being in sync with societal expectations has long been expressed in the idea of marketing practice being *socially responsible* (Lavidge 1970; Patterson 1966). Writing in the *Journal of Marketing*, William Lazer (1969, p.3) opined, “Marketing is not an end in itself. . . Marketing must serve not

only business but the goals of society. It must act in concert with broad public interest.”

Both a major theoretical and practical problem regarding the idea of SRM is that there never has been a significant consensus about exactly what the *definition* of socially responsible marketing includes (Langan 2014; Waddock 2008). As a result, in practice, the obligations of marketers to discharge their social duties, and indeed even what duties those precisely consist of, has been a debatable muddle. At the extreme, we still find a rigid interpretation and dogmatic embrace of some views expressed by Milton Friedman (1962); essentially, the only social responsibility of business (and its marketing units) is to maximize profit within the law. This narrow conception is a dubious and counter-productive notion to which we shall return.

Given the uncertainty about the nature and scope of socially responsible marketing, one chief purpose of this article is to

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bring greater definitional clarity to the concept of SRM. In constructing a literature-informed and theoretically defensible definition of *socially responsible marketing*, this ordered exercise specifies and elucidates the content domain that appears most fertile for framing testable propositions concerning SRM; this explication also provides a standard to judge responsible marketing from a societal standpoint. *Without a rigorous normative standard of what constitutes socially responsible marketing, the discipline of Marketing is without the ability to evaluate whether social progress regarding the contributions of marketing toward a more ethically responsible world is even being contested.*

The point: When the meaning and properties of concepts (such as SRM) are more commonly understood and accepted, subsequent examinations are likely to reflect those understandings and integrate their implications into future analyses (Cooley 1922/2012; Segerstedt 1957). Therefore, the main purpose of this article is to articulate *and justify* a comprehensive definition of SRM that marketing managers and academic researchers can utilize to evaluate and to improve ethical and socially compatible marketing.

General Considerations: Why Macro? Why Normative-Ethical?

As this treatise involves explicating a *definition*—i.e., bringing clarity to meaning—we should initially comment on the denotation and import of two key terms utilized in the title of this analysis, “Macro” and “Normative-Ethical”.

This examination will be *Macro* because understanding the nature of responsible, “better world” marketing necessarily involves taking a *societal* perspective. To this end, the lens of *Macromarketing* is employed because this line of academic inquiry examines the interaction of markets, marketing and society (e.g., Hunt 1981; Moyer and Hutt 1978; Peterson 2013). Dissecting socially responsible marketing implies that the strategies marketers select in administering their marketplace actions can shape potent societal outcomes, both good and bad. Such examinations of market-system dynamics are the central wheelhouse of *Macromarketing* inquisition (e.g., Layton 2015; Mittelstaedt, Kilbourne, and Mittelstaedt 2006) and have been since the formation of the marketing discipline itself (Hunt, Hass, and Manis 2021).

Prior to the mid-1960s, looking at marketing questions usually involved examining both system-level (macro or meso) and firm-level (micro) considerations. Bartels (1976) in his *History of Marketing* describes how the Marketing discipline began by investigating institutional level issues such as the flow of agricultural products or the aggregate costs of distribution. And, while the precise moment when *macro* analysis began to wane in academic marketing research cannot be established, the initial publication of Kotler’s *Marketing Management* textbook (1967), with its micro-focus on the efficiency of marketing decisions at the company level, seemed to elevate *micromarketing* to the ascendant concern. Most marketing issues were subsequently viewed through the prism of

organizational comparative advantage (Porter 1980; 1985). To be clear, social questions were still regularly raised and debated in marketing inquiry—consumerism (Aaker and Day 1971), social marketing (Lazer and Kelley 1973), green marketing (Henion 1976)—but most often they centered on how such issues affected firm-level marketing operations.

To address marketing issues at the *systems* level, recognizing that existing networks of exchange might not be optimum, such scholarly labors fell to fewer (macromarketing) academics (Fisk 1967; Holloway and Hancock 1964), who eventually published in the *Journal of Macromarketing* (est. 1981). Although the *micro*-managerial perspective still recognizes the presence of exogenous [macro] variables, it treats them as relatively uncontrollable factors to be managed and adapted to as best firms are able (Sheth, Gardner, and Garrett 1988). While macro analysis has declined in popularity for many academic marketing researchers (Wilkie and Moore 2014), we posit that successfully addressing the holistic nature of socially responsible marketing (SRM) requires a renewed systems-level emphasis (Lusch 2017; Webster and Lusch 2013).

This examination of SRM is also *Normative-Ethical* because value judgments must routinely be made regarding whether particular marketing campaigns, practices and policies incrementally contribute to the common good (Laczniak and Murphy 2018; Murphy and Sherry 2014), i.e., When does Marketing truly help create a *better* world? Does a particular marketing practice aid the general welfare? Is a specific marketing action socially benevolent? Alternatively stated, some ethical standard of evaluation must be selected and applied before specific marketing practices can be judged to be “responsible” for society—i.e., *socially responsible marketing* (SRM). To argue the counterpoint—that academic marketing research should be “value neutral”—is itself a moral claim (Laczniak and Murphy 2018). In 2014, Ferrell et. al. reviewed the full domain of corporate social responsibility (CSR) in marketing, citing over 100 marketing-centric papers, and reached the following conclusion about SRM (p.61):

... many of the social issues, consumer protection issues and sustainability concerns are equated with ethics. Therefore, the assumption could be that the entire domain of CSR and marketing deals with marketing ethics. This means that both a normative and descriptive understanding of ethical decision-making that influences CSR outcomes is important.

The explications of elements that are discussed below will dive deeper into the indispensable application of both a *macro* and *normative-ethical* perspective in order to understand the nature of socially responsible marketing (SRM).

Conceptual-theoretical Approach: The Methodology of Defining and Delineating SRM

We utilized a conceptual theory-in-formation method to positulate a normative definition of *socially responsible marketing*.

Consistent with Yadav (2010), who classified all conceptual articles appearing in the *Journal of Marketing* 1978-2007, this analysis falls into the realm of “the context of discovery”; specifically, into the category of “switch[ing] the level of analysis to explore a . . . phenomenon” (p.4). This commentary takes a *macromarketing* (versus *micromarketing*) perspective; it also proposes a *normative* definition of SRM that is literature-supported, philosophically grounded and ethically robust (i.e., it tells what *ought* to comprise socially responsible marketing (SRM) and *why* that perspective is well-supported in the literature). This requires deconstruction of current micro *beliefs* and a reconstruction of historical and contemporary macro *insights* concerning marketing’s abiding social objectives. This whole effort can be characterized as *philosophically validating an authentic definition of socially responsible marketing* (SRM). We describe the general *process* implemented, and how this approach helps theoretically justify our postulated definition of SRM, in an Endnote. We encourage readers to review this process at this time, in order to better understand the various facets of our definitional construction. In summary, by following the progression described therein, we gauge that our definition of SRM is grounded in a rigorous conceptual approach.

The challenge in following such an approach is to show how the definition of SRM we postulate convincingly describes what normative SRM *ought to be* based on a logical and defensible analysis of assorted literatures, frameworks and theories found in macromarketing, institutional economics, management history and business ethics. *Our referenced sources will necessarily include many book-length publications and social-issues related journals because these outlets have allowed the deeper exploration of big-picture topics that command our speculative inquiry.* This technique is also prudent because, as Wilkie and Moore (2011) contend in their meticulous analysis of “the eras of marketing thought”, coverage of broad, systemic “marketing and society” issues in A-level marketing journals has not been significant since the mid-1980s, to the possible detriment of the marketing theory and, ironically, the Marketing profession.

Presently, as noted, there is little consensus about the nature and purview of socially responsible marketing (SRM). If this fact is not shocking, it certainly should be considered deeply problematic. For example, Langan (2014), reviewing 151 articles on CSR in marketing, identifies multiple (and sometimes contradictory) economic, ethical and philanthropic conceptions about the character of the SRM. Thus, following Langan’s *general* classification, an observer could argue (a) from an *economic efficiency* standpoint, CSR-Marketing is “a discretionary business practice” that should be undertaken when such actions are likely to contribute incrementally to marketing objectives (e.g., Kotler and Lee 2005, pp.3-18). Or (b), one might assert that SRM is an *ethical* predisposition best reflected in the company mission statement, to be consulted when formulating marketing policy (Robin and Reidenbach 1987). Alternatively (c), some would contend that SRM is best implemented by external and carefully targeted corporate

philanthropy or voluntarism, which then might improve company/brand reputation among customers and public (Lichtenstein, Drumwright, and Braig 2004; Smith 1994). Each of these disparate views about SRM has had its proponents as indicated by the citations.

But absent an agreed upon conceptualization of *socially responsible marketing*, one is at a loss when trying to specify whether SRM has even occurred. To take a simple example, if a large energy company, with a stated commitment to responsible behavior in its corporate mission statement, spends millions of charitable dollars to support, promote and develop the performing arts but denies in its promotional literature that the company’s resource extraction processes can degrade the physical environment, *is that organization a practitioner of SRM?* In response, one could sarcastically quip, “It depends upon where in the company one looks, whom one asks, and what one seeks from SRM.”

In sections below, the *social contract*, *distributive justice* and *constructive engagement* will be examined specifically as they vitalize a doctrine of SRM. Drawing upon Kuhn (1970) regarding the basic content of conceptual paradigms, we envision this SRM definition as an epistemology that will help inspire, clarify and assess future propositions about the dynamics of SRM. And consistent with Kumar’s (2017) advocacy about the development of theory in Marketing, this effort utilizes concepts, extant theory and the relevant literature to refine conceptual thinking about the nature of socially responsible marketing. Therefore, our discussion is intended to compellingly portray what SRM consists of, so that its key elements (i.e., *corporate citizenship*, *stakeholder orientation* and *social/ecological sustainability*) can be more confidently integrated in future studies and further debated regarding their efficacy in capturing the nature of responsible marketing. Expressed another way, the specification of SRM elaborated below should be a conversation starter in future discussions of “. . . whether existing marketing approaches are being applied to their maximum potential, whether turbulent environments call for new approaches for doing good, whether any harm that marketing creates can be more effectively minimized. . .” (Moorman et al. 2018, pp.1-2).

The upshot of the above discussion: The definition of *socially responsible marketing* (SRM) that is offered below is premeditatedly a normative-ethical *ideal*. Moreover, we recognize neither most marketing firms nor most meso-level exchange systems will conform perfectly to that ideal (Layton 2015). For instance, people are told to work diligently, maintain healthy diets, regularly exercise, attend to family obligations, contribute to their community, along with assorted other *desirata*. But it is difficult for most folks to do all those things, consistently and well. So too, every marketing program does not (and will not) contribute responsibly to a better world, *but*, on the balance, marketing actions must be understood, designed and measured to help achieve that ideal; otherwise the marketing profession will be held in public contempt, further regulated, and could be found on the wrong side of history (Ghoshal 2005; Sheth and Sisodia 2005). In this sense, high

Table 1. The Order of Definitional Development.

Section I: We register our *normative* definition of socially responsible marketing (SRM). While definitions have evolved (e.g., Matten and Moon 2008), a majority are *ephemeral*, descriptive and ad hoc; they merely reflect the hypotheses-focused investigations of contemporary practices, which are *knowingly* not intended to describe the totality of SRM. In contrast, *normative* definitions can be more enduring; they represent a broader, relatively unchanging standard—an ethical “ought” that implies a morally “correct” approach across a broad swath of situations; they serve as an ideal and are grounded in a systematic logic rooted in the philosophy of science (Caplin and Schotter 2008; Hunt 1991).

Section II: SRM is shown to be “non-discretionary” as well as part of the necessary DNA of accountable, professional marketing practice; if SRM can be shown to be societally *required* via the social contract, its practice in marketing becomes a *categorical imperative*—an ethical action that must be taken (Boylan 2000; Laczniak and Murphy 1993).

Sections III to V: The core *definiens* of SRM, corporate citizenship (CC), stakeholder orientation (SO), and social/ecological sustainability (SES) are shown to be *essential* to the total understanding of SRM. For each element, a thumbnail history is presented, with some key literature from marketing and other disciplines (e.g., economics, management, and ethics) that help add gravity to each concept. Consistent with the development of definitions, the goal is to make the “primitive” (i.e., undefined) elements—the *definiens*—less primitive and more amenable to eventual theory integration (Hunt 1991; Kyburg 1968).

Section VI: Explicates a specific macro, normative-ethical perspective rooted in *distributive justice*; it provides a standard to measure the gap between marketing practice and its societal ideal. Without this, evaluating the social contribution of marketing becomes a piecemeal and issue-bound debate centered on the frequency and social impact of “questioned” marketing practices. “Fairness” is judged by the allocation of benefits and burdens to stakeholders (Piderit 1993; Rawls 1971).

Section VII: Expands the Macromarketing perspective by showing that *constructive engagement* can serve as a purposeful tool for making marketing decisions that augment social responsibility (Shultz 2007). Here, our explication further establishes that any systematic theory of SRM must also be *macro* in order to address institutional and systems level factors (e.g., *externalities*) as well as to mitigate micro-level impediments (e.g., *self-interest*) to socially responsible marketing (Fisk 1973; Gundlach and Murphy 1993).

Section VIII: Specifies an abridged agenda of future scholarship and education to advance a firmer foundation for understanding the publicly expected role of marketing in society (Wilkie and Moore 2012).

ideals for marketing practice are indispensable. Thus, the definition of SRM offered below is by necessity a *macro* and *normative-ethical ideal*, against which sets of actual micro-behaviors by marketers (in various segments and sectors) can be compared and analyzed.

In Table 1 we summarize what each section of our article is designed to contribute from a perspective of theoretical, definition construction. Interested readers are asked to consult this Table—a synthesis of our selected approach and its literature-anchored background—which allows proceeding immediately to the formal postulation of our normative definition of *socially responsible marketing* and its conceptual context.

Socially Responsible Marketing Defined: Its Context and Composition

Socially Responsible Marketing (SRM) consists of practices and perspectives mandated by an implicit *social contract* (SC), which requires marketing policies, actions and outcomes to adhere to a *corporate* [“good”] *citizenship* (CC) that is proactive and non-discretionary. It is informed by a *stakeholder orientation* (SO) that recognizes an authentic consideration of stakeholder claims, especially those of the customer/consumer and vulnerable stakeholders. Further, SRM seeks *social and environmental sustainability* (SES) in all its actions. The manifestation of SRM should be evaluated by a normative ethic of *distributive justice* (DJ) and coordinated with a macromarketing disposition for *constructive engagement* (CE), when addressing the marketing/society interface.

In this instance, returning briefly to the language about definitional construction utilized in the Endnote (Hunt 1991; Rudner 1966), SRM is the *definiendum*—the central concept in

our explication—and CC, SO and SES are the core of the *definiens* (or primitive group of terms) comprising the *definiendum*. The social contract (SC) as well as distributive justice (DJ) and constructive engagement (CE) are the other (to be) explicated dimensions of the unabridged *definiens*. We now address the “context” and “composition” for our proposed definition of SRM.

Context: Firstly, because our delineation of SRM is a *normative* construct that portrays a comprehensive ideal, it has its own set of advantages (Werhane 1994). Because of its idealized (i.e., normative) form, this definition of SRM is more expansive than narrow ad hoc definitions of SRM that might be formulated in empirical studies investigating finite research questions of social/ethical marketing practices (e.g., *Do consumer goods companies regularly “green wash” their product claims? Do sports apparel sellers appropriately audit the practices of their supply chain partners? Are airline fees transparently reflected in price-to-consumer offers?*). In these cases – to reflect the research issue at focus – SRM is conceptualized more narrowly as in the *amount* of “green-washing” or the *extent* of social auditing in the supply chain or by comparing advertised versus actual airfares. Statistical linkages are then explored with other variables (often in the form of hypotheses testing). Furthermore, because of the narrow marketing purview of some companies, one would *not* logically expect all individual firms to address or reflect every element of the idealized SRM definition we postulate. However, we would still assert, and do argue below, that *all* marketing firms are ethically bound by the full scope SRM elements in the proposed definition.

Second, socially responsible marketing (SRM) is part of the broader domain of *corporate social responsibility* (CSR) in business. Thus, there are issues and literatures that address not

Table 2. Elements of Normative-ethical Theory Formulations (cf. Bishop 2000).

1. **Recommended Values:** Herein, these Values are the *definiens* elements of SRM: corporate citizenship (CC), stakeholder orientation (SO), and social/ecological sustainability (SES). These complex, values-based concepts are the essentials of socially responsible marketing, broadly and normatively defined. If a marketing organization claims to aspire to SRM, these Values must at least be considered in their decision-making.
2. **Grounds for theory acceptance:** These consist of the *commentaries* below concerning each of the *definiens* elements in the definition of SRM; the worth of the definition is dependent on the quality of our conceptual explication.
3. **Decision principle for users:** Primary here is the concept *distributive justice* (DJ), which will be offered as a critical normative-ethical standard for assessing the societal contribution of SRM activities. Secondary are the various theoretical and ethical observations made about the elements of SRM, i.e., other ethical imperatives (e.g., do not deceive customers) are still operative, but DJ is the guiding perspective. Tertiary here is the helping macromarketing perspective of *constructive engagement* (CE); CE can pragmatically aid marketers to focus on the potential beneficial outcomes from marketing activity.
4. **Agents to whom the framework applies:** The definition is intended to inform analysts of the marketing system (including marketing academics) and all marketing practitioners supportive of SRM.
5. **Interests to be considered:** All company *stakeholders* are at focus, especially consumers, with an eye to their economic and social well-being.
6. **Context of Application:** All exchange transactions in the marketing system (Bagozzi 1974), with primary emphasis on marketers operating in the **for-profit sector**, are the central focus. *Why is the for-profit sector of main concern?* Many marketing organizations in the non-profit sector (e.g., charities and foundations) or those engaged in social marketing (e.g., healthcare NGOs, social service agencies, Benefits or B-corporations) already have social goals built into their mission statements. It is the for-profit sector of marketing, with its competitive climate and ROI orientation, that engenders the most controversy regarding socially responsible behaviors (Brenkert 2008; Murphy et al. 2005).
7. **Legal-political structure being assumed:** The contemporary capitalistic system is our forum; however, as will be made clear, the market system itself may be in flux and can be influenced and shaped by the amount and type of SRM activity being practiced or institutional intervention.

only CSR in Marketing but also CSR-Human Resources, CSR-Operations, CSR-Finance, etc. (Moon 2014). Much of what has been observed about CSR in general is also applicable to marketing issues (e.g., Carroll 2015; Kang, German, and Grewal 2016; Murphy, Laczniak, and Harris 2017). Note too that academic research regarding social responsibility in business has been more popular in European circles than in the USA and elsewhere (e.g., Burchell and Cook 2008; Homburg, Stierl and Bornemann 2013; McCormick and Olsen 2014; Vaaland, Heide, and Gronhaug 2008). Thus, those exploring future CSR-Marketing questions should incorporate European journals into their search ambit.

Third, we would expect (and so find) that positive (i.e., descriptive) definitions of business social responsibility (and SRM) found in the literature would be numerous (Dahlsrud 2008; Smith 2003) and would vary considerably in their description (see also Matten and Moore 2008). Why? CSR is a broad umbrella term; it reflects collective social expectations for business, and so, the issue-specific emphasis of that expectation shifts over time and over topics (Carroll 1999). For example, *environmental sustainability* is a SRM research focus of growing importance and current popularity (Ferrell, Ferrell, and Sawayda 2014). Given that climate change could overwhelm and devastate earth's ecosystems, some analysts plausibly argue that *sustainability* might be the overarching nomenclature for investigating and debating all socially responsible policy (Mittlestaedt et al. 2014). However, with regard to the definition here postulated, [we assert] our normative and macro-level specification captures the full domain of SRM concerns (including *sustainability*), as explained below. Again, since our definition is a macro *ideal*, its scope and

durability should be greater than issue-specific definitions used in most micro-empirical studies of SRM or case studies describing CSR-marketing campaigns to evaluate situational quality-of-life and societal/terrestrial well-being.

Composition: Two compositional observations about the fundamental *nature* and *rigor* of our SRM explication are now put on the record. We begin by referencing the *process* proposed by Bishop (2000) about constructing normative formulations in moral philosophy. Bishop contends that specification of normative-ethical concepts is far more complex than simple moral suasion. Instead, every normative formulation (such as a rigorous definition of SRM) ought to address certain essential parameters that provide justifications and restrictions to the core idea posed. *One might think of this procedure as similar to the "statement of study limitations" found in many empirical investigations.* Concerning our proposed definition of SRM, we note in Table 2 the requisite elements of theoretic ethical formulation as well as an abridged comment regarding its presence and conformity within our SRM conceptualization.

Besides adhering to the Bishop (2000) process, there is additional face validity to our approach in dissecting SRM. Carroll (1979), perhaps the best-known academic analyst of CSR theory, remarks that coming to grips with the social performance of business requires (a) a clear *definition*, (b) an understanding of the *issues* for which social responsibility (SR) exists and (c), a specification of the *philosophy* or pattern of responsiveness to the issues. In our definition of SRM, the *definiens* elements (CC, SO and SES) express the categories of SRM issues, and *distributive justice* (DJ) is the essential evaluative philosophy; *constructive engagement* (CE) embodies the proposed pattern

of responsiveness. The *social contract* (SC)—the seminal element—is the origin and foundation of SRM.

Thus, we contend that our explicated, comprehensive definition may be considered a descriptive *doctrine of SRM* because a doctrine represents “a set of beliefs about governing principles” (*Oxford American Dictionary* 2005). We propose that the explicated SRM definition supplies the core concepts for describing and understanding a normative doctrine of socially responsible marketing. The “governing principles”—the beliefs—behind SRM will become clearer below and, hopefully, will serve as a reference point when researchers conduct future empirical studies about SRM.

What now follows is the formal and systematic explication process of essential SRM *terms*. Reflecting on each element of the SRM doctrine ought to yield a deeper understanding of the concept.

The Social Contract (SC): The Genesis for Socially Responsible Marketing

At its root, striving for marketing that is socially responsible and that improves the world raises the question of *why* such aspirations are desirable, noteworthy or even required. The answer to such inquiries lies directly in the concept of the *social contract* (SC). The social contract is the explanation and justification for caring about and engaging in SRM. The core of a social contract is that there exists an *implicit* but deducible understanding between collective members of society and business organizations, including marketers. This understanding involves the nature of what social obligations the public expects from business/marketing practice and what benefits in turn are granted to corporations (i.e., marketing organizations). As Eells and Walton (1961) wrote in their classic *Conceptual Foundations of Business* (p.471):

The large business corporation . . . is an indispensable instrument for getting done some of the things that people want done. It is neither the exclusive instrument of one class of interests [shareholders] nor an indiscriminate roster of “social” interests . . . [t]he corporation has to be tempered to the times, and as a viable instrument, it must adapt to the changing requirements of our free, complex and interdependent society.

Many interested parties subsequently have asked: “Where are these various societal adaptations and requirements for business written down? Where is the *signed* social contract?” To which other skeptics have sympathetically added, “The social contract isn’t worth the paper that it *isn’t* printed on.” This hypothetical Q&A evokes an important conclusion: *The social contract is not a black-letter document but rather a supra-legal understanding that embodies implicit ethical obligations; it flows from deducible societal expectations, which businesses accept in exchange for their right to operate and seek profit without unnecessary regulatory restriction.* These dynamic expectations of society were long realized by business

philosophers, including the venerable Peter Drucker (1970, p.42) who remarked 50 years ago:

Management will increasingly be concerned as much with the expression of basic beliefs and values as with the accomplishment of measurable results. It [Business] will increasingly stand for the quality-of-life of a society as much as for its standard of living.

Marketing undoubtedly plays a tremendous *economic* role in provisioning the goods and services that all communities need to flourish and grow. Most of us accept – indeed, embrace – the aggregate marketing system (AGMS) as a powerful economic engine for accomplishing society’s provisioning goals; the AGMS functions via markets with great and laudable distinction, most of the time (Mittlestaedt, Kilbourne, and Mittlestaedt 2006). As Wilkie and Moore (1999; 2014) and numerous others (e.g., Alderson 1957) have detailed, marketers innovate, bear risk, provide critical information, assemble/disaggregate, distribute, transact and perform a host of other necessary functions that make possible a high standard of living. In exchange, the reward of profit fittingly accrues to successful and contributing marketing organizations. But from a *Macro* standpoint, the unitary facilitation of successful exchange alone is not sufficient. Even if exchange is satisfying to both sellers and buyers, certain market transactions can create ancillary problems for society, such as social dysfunctions (e.g., nicotine addiction), the depletion of critical resources (e.g., water scarcity/impurity) or the generation of pollution (e.g., smog). These problems have collectively been referred to as *negative externalities* (Laczniaik 2017; Mundt 1993).

To protect against such broader negative outcomes, the safeguards of societal interests come into play (Laczniaik and Murphy 2014). For example, in the USA, business firms receive a charter of operation from the state and, in exchange, the sanctity of their contracts as well as private property is protected by federal and state law. In fact, from its origin and according to the U.S. Constitution (Article 1 Section 8), the US federal government (representing society) always reserves the right “to regulate commerce” in the public interest. Thus, the license to operate as a (hopefully) profitable provider of goods and services comes *from society*, along with a set of presumed rights and duties. One finds similar arrangements in most developed countries around the world (Redmond 2012).

To be balanced, many marketing managers with oversight of firm-level strategic units might respond to the above contentions by retorting: “I don’t think I received the memo concerning the extra-organizational responsibilities of marketing.” Micro-marketers have understandably long believed that the market is best served when company operations are structured to cater *to the customer* in a satisfying and profitable manner (Keith 1960; McKitterick 1957). At the firm level, individual managers are mostly rewarded on unit level performance—ROI, sales growth and customer retention (Aaker 2001; Day 1986). And, consistent with classical economics (Buchanan 1988), micro-markets of consumer-focused, mutually-agreed-to exchanges among sellers and buyers lead to benefits for the

many; such approaches typically provide a rational *and efficient* method for the allocation of resources (Anderson 1982).

Plus, it should be on the record that the guiding *vision* for many marketing professionals is *customer orientation* (Kane and Kelly 1994). Marketing organizations tout their customer-attentive marketing by using research based algorithms to make operational decisions about products, prices, distribution and the like. A major theme that pervades the marketing literature is the ambition to be customer-centric. This view is embodied in core marketing ideas such as the *marketing concept* (McNamara 1972), *relationship marketing* (Ravald and Grönroos 1996) and even *co-creation* with customers (Vargo and Lusch 2004; 2008). The clear thematic is that satisfied customers are the primary focus of marketing activity and serving them well is the ultimate service to society. But it is here, once again, that the *Macro* perspective comes into play by adding a less dyadic, less instrumental outlook. At this broader (non-micro) level, a *systems* perspective appends another stratum of concerns to the societal goals of marketing activity. Indeed, a historical analysis of marketer conceptions of the consumer suggests that genuine customer orientation has been but a limited fragment of marketing's legacy (e.g., Kennedy and Laczniak 2015).

Marketing as a discipline had its roots in early 20th Century *institutional economics* (Bartels 1976). The PhD students of these early economists established the first academic departments of marketing. In this primal stage, the original marketing scholars concentrated on understanding aggregate retail transactions and the distribution of agricultural products. And from the outset, "[early] writers emphasized marketing's economic role, its broader than technical management role, and its social responsibility" (Bartels 1976, p.32). John Maurice Clark, one of those early institutional economists, sagely warned of the dangers of too great a firm-level focus in guiding economic decisions (Haase 2017). Clark (1916, p.210) wrote: "*we have inherited an economics of irresponsibility . . . We need an economics of responsibility, developed and embodied in our working business ethics.*" For Clark, all of economics needed to be understood from the lens of society because every market decision had a societal ramification (Clark 1936, p.56). Howard Bowen (1953), thought by many to be the father of corporate social responsibility, echoes a similar theme when he originally defined *social responsibility* as (p.6), "*the obligations of businessmen to pursue those policies, to make those decisions or to follow those lines of action which are desirable in terms of the objectives and values of society.*" Such foundational perspectives suggest that SRM is anchored in a moral imperative—a *social contract*—that flows from society itself.

But what are the terms of this contract? If its details are implied, what can we know of it? Business ethicist Donaldson (1982), in *Corporations & Morality*, provides an enlightening and multi-faceted picture of the social contract. Donaldson posits that profit seeking organizations receive recognition in the eyes of the law along with the right to use and own capital resources—land, employees and money—for their individual and comparative advantage. In exchange, citizens (i.e., the collective of society) expect to have certain economics interests satisfied in an efficient and effective manner. This includes their well-being via

access to needed/desired goods and services, employment opportunities and the *protection* from unwanted side-effects (e.g., hazardous working conditions, pollution) for themselves and their communities. The social contract gives companies the right to create and retain capital but in exchange for a mandate to shield consumers, workers and other stakeholders from substantial harms. This "trade-off" between business and society is effectively an *ethical* partnership of "duties exchanged" that imparts to business and its marketing agents assorted social obligations in exchange for their established rights.

The precise nature of the ethical obligations flowing from the social contract will be further addressed when the *definiens* element of *distributive justice* (DJ) is discussed later. But for the moment, we encourage readers to consider the words of Kenneth Arrow (1973), Nobel laureate in economics, who eloquently wrote about these unseen workings of the economic system:

There is another set of institutions, if that is the right word, we call to attention and make much of. These are invisible institutions: the principles of ethics and morality. Certainly one way of looking at ethics and morality, a way that is compatible with this attempt at rational analysis, is that these principles are agreements, conscious or, in many cases unconscious, to supply mutual benefits . . . the fact that we cannot mediate all of our responsibilities to others through prices, though paying for them, makes it essential in the running of society that we have what might be called "conscience," a feeling of responsibility for the effect of one's actions on others (p.309).

What are the takeaways for marketers from this discussion of the *social contract* (SC)?

1. The SC is the underlying rationale that supports the importance of engaging in socially responsible marketing (SRM). It is the apparatus that supplies the transactional logic behind SRM, while also providing a coherent motivation for engaging in it.
2. The social contract is *implied* but its cultural effects are very real. Its deducible implications result in *rights* for marketing organizations along with *responsibilities* to marketing's stakeholders.
3. While faithfully serving customers (at a profit) is part of Marketing's social contract, the social obligations of marketers are far more expansive than only economic functions.
4. The general imperatives of the SC, only some of which are embodied in the law, involve taking actions that protect and improve the collective of society; such actions are the requisites of SRM and, as indicated below, the specifics of the SC are more fully captured in the elements of corporate citizenship (CC), stakeholder orientation (SO) and social/ecological sustainability (SES).

The Core Elements of SRM: A Preamble

As ventured in our definition, from a macro and normative-ethical standpoint, socially responsible marketing (SRM) is

the summation of *corporate citizenship* (CC), *stakeholder orientation* (SO) and *social/ecological sustainability* (SES). Or, put symbolically, $SRM = fn(CC + SO + SES)$. Again, the definition is *normative* because it specifies the domain of what SRM *ought to* ideally include. It is *macro* because the requirements concerning societal expectations for marketing can be best discerned from a *systems* standpoint rather than induced from the micro scrutiny of individual firms preoccupied mainly with their financial targets and only secondarily with social impacts.

In the sections below, CC, SO and SES will be more fully described, especially in their marketing manifestations. But it is important to recognize that each of these terms, at various times in the academic literature, has been individually defined as being *equal to* corporate social responsibility (CSR), including in its marketing dimensions. That is, it has been argued at some point that $SRM = CC$ by marketers, or $SRM = SO$, or $SRM = SES$. To briefly illustrate that point, business ethicist Waddock (2004) conceives of *corporate citizenship* (CC) as encompassing all of CSR, although, she readily admits that many scholars might disagree. Freeman (1984) first articulated *stakeholder theory* as the systematic network of business relationships that sheds light on *how* (ethically and economically) business ought to be managed for the benefit of interconnected parties. Building on Freeman, the network of stakeholder claims has been an often-used method to fully structure and oversee the implementation of CSR in organizations (Donaldson and Preston 1995; Phillips 2003) including marketing issues (Hoeffler, Bloom, and Keller 2010; Maignan and Ferrell 2004). And in recent years, *sustainability* has been portrayed as totally encompassing CSR because all commercial activity (marketing included) can be imagined as positively or negatively impacting human and ecological systems (Dahlstrom and Crosno 2018). The presence of all these terms in our delineation of SRM adds *scope* and *richness* to our definition—two attributes deemed desirable to useful marketing theories (Sheth, Gardner, and Garrett 1988). We do not advocate that any one element of our definition is supreme or most important; rather depending upon the situation at focus (e.g., protection of wetlands during production, consumption and distribution), one or more of the SRM components may temporarily become more prominent (i.e., ecological sustainability).

Also of interest here is a content analysis of assorted codes of business conduct (Laczniak and Kennedy 2011). *Codes of conduct* are typically idealized “values” statements that outline the legal, moral, social or cultural expectations according to some organizational group (Messick and Tenbrunsel 1996). One can look at such corporate codes as an embodiment of what particular firms understand the *social contract* to be (Murphy 1998). In 2011, Laczniak and Kennedy reviewed seven such prominent codes (*incl.* OECD guidelines for multinational corporations; Caux Roundtable (CRT) Principles of Business Behavior, the UN Global Compact). But what was novel here was that each of the codes investigated was formulated by a different constituency—government regulators, business executives, academics, environmental advocates, etc. The

expectation was that each formulating group would skew their concerns to their own interests—i.e., environmentalists would focus on ecological issues, bureaucrats on regulation, managers on deregulated markets, and so forth). To an extent, this supposition was borne out, but more tellingly, *all* of the different codes included three common “Hyper” (or super) norms: *stakeholder orientation*, *sustainability* and authentic compliance (which essentially could be translated as legal conformance plus proactive *corporate citizenship*). Compilations of societal and ethical expectations for business conduct *ought to* reflect the dimensions of SRM defined and, in consonance, the referenced survey so finds. We now explicate *corporate citizenship* (CC), the first element of normative SRM.

Corporate Citizenship

It is hard to imagine a socially responsible marketing firm that would not embrace good *corporate citizenship* (CC). U.S. law, as well that of other countries, attributes *personhood* to corporations; thus, the expectation of good citizenship by companies is hardly an illogical stretch. While corporate personhood itself might be an artificial construct, this conception has vast pragmatic significance because corporations persist over time, can enter into contracts and, since they control assets affecting economic well-being, can be held financially liable when appropriate (Arnold 2006). Plus, because organizations also exhibit *intentionality* for their actions via their written policies, they can be construed as having moral *agency*, as famously argued by French (1979). Also, owing to their importance as economic actors (69 of the 100 largest global economic entities are corporations [World Bank 2019]), the notion of “good” corporate citizenship as vital to SRM is not only sensible but indispensable.

Votaw (1961), in a seminal article, reasoned that corporations must be viewed as significant political actors given their (oftentimes) substantial size, influence and power. Possessing such economic authority, these citizen-corporations should anticipate being called on to play a positive social role. Thus, consistent with the discussion of the social contract already highlighted, “rights and responsibilities” appear to be obligatory to the corporate license of personhood; that is, because corporations (as artificial persons) have rights, as citizens do, and they would be *expected* to demonstrate their imputed responsibilities just as citizens are called on to defend their country, participate as jurors in the legal system and vote.

While Friedman (1962) in a narrow construction of social responsibility—to maximize company profits—did not specifically invoke citizenship, even his notion was not inconsistent; his approach was simply an attenuated and (arguably) misinformed consideration of citizenship. According to Friedman (1970), corporations (like citizens), should obey the law; but corporations, like some less civic-minded, less caring citizens, should not be *forced* to sustain ancillary social outreach. This is a view that has been increasingly rejected since the 1970s, owing to the growing public expectation that, as powerful players in the social fabric, “good” citizenship from corporations is

demanded (Carroll 1979, 1991, 2015; Garriga and Melé 2004). Some of these manifest expectations have been enshrined in law (e.g., various environmental protections), many are ethical imperatives (e.g., treating customers and employees with respect) and others are *discretionary* (e.g., corporate philanthropy). But always, it seems, *some* level of demonstrated, proactive social engagement by most corporations is supposed (Orts and Smith 2017). Moreover, the public inherently understands not all business firms have the same level of responsibility. People recognize (for instance) that smaller start-up businesses struggling for survival may not (and should not) be predominantly concerned about society-enriching actions, even as they still must honor the basic social contract (Spence et al. 2019). For larger, robust organizations, the ethical mandate of “good citizen” contributions beyond the law is very real (Laczniak and Murphy 2006).

As far back as 1960, Keith Davis, another CSR theory pioneer, proposed his now famous *iron law of social responsibility*. Davis’s “law” was neither enshrined in the regulatory code nor an inviolate scientific principle, but as a general tendency, it neatly reflected societal expectations about corporate citizenship. The Iron Law stated: *Company social responsibility needed to be proportionate with company social power* (Davis 1960). Thus, for the most part, large (i.e., more powerful) corporations were expected to exhibit greater social responsibility than smaller (less powerful) firms. In a marketing context, firms such as Wal-Mart, Starbucks, Facebook and Alphabet would have high expectations thrust upon them. Furthermore, according to Davis, Frederick, and Blomstrom (1980), a corollary to the iron law also could be discerned from history: *If an organization did not use its power appropriately, its influence would eventually be reduced or constrained by society in some fashion*.

Some skeptics in the Marketing discipline still remain regarding corporate citizenship needing to *exceed* the law (Gaski 1999); they typically parrot Friedman (1962) and contend the only SRM required is to conduct marketing and conform to the extant law. However, the vast majority of Marketing VPs and CMOs now rebuke such thinking, in part, because it has been so effectively debunked by logical refutation and public opinion polls (e.g., Smith 2001). It would be a rare CMO who would relish publicly professing, “The only social responsibility of my marketing campaigns is to maximize shareholder gains. That’s it.” Even Adam Smith (1776/2001), the grandfather of unfettered markets, in his “other book”, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759/2002), which he continued to revise until his death, recognizes *and encourages* the altruistic tendencies of human nature. Consider these two passages:

How selfish so ever man may be supposed, there are evidently some principles in his nature, which interest him in the fortune of others, and render their happiness necessary to him, though he derives nothing from it except the pleasure of seeing it . . . (Smith 1759, p. 11), [and]

Man ought to regard himself, not as something separated and detached, but as a citizen of the world, a member of the vast commonwealth of nature and the interest of this great community, he ought at all times to be willing that his own little interest should be sacrificed (Smith 1790, p. 140).

We suspect only a minority of marketing academics, and fewer practitioners are familiar with this decidedly ethical dimension of the iconic Adam Smith.

But still, we are left with the important question of precisely *what* good corporate citizenship (CC) requires of marketers. Answer: Good CC means being an *ethical* marketer. The *American Marketing Association* (AMA 2008), the world’s largest affiliation of marketing professionals, has endorsed a “Statement of Ethics” (adopted 2004) that embodies *marketing* responsibilities surpassing the law; it articulates SRM standards that “represent the collective perception of what communities find desirable, important and morally proper” (p.1). To this end, *all* marketing professionals are asked to internalize two norms and six core values. The first norm, inspired by the famous Hippocratic Oath of medicine, calls for *never knowingly doing harm* to others via marketing activity. The second norm encourages fostering collective trust in the marketing system by *avoiding deception* in all marketing practices. The articulated values—each defined in the Statement (2004/2008) with specific *marketing* examples—include honesty, respect and transparency. Illustrations of ethical mandates for marketing practice enshrined in the AMA Statement stipulate avoiding predatory pricing, disclosing conflicts of interest, embracing environmental stewardship, acting transparently and protecting customer data.

That the broad acceptance of pro-active corporate citizenship is emergent also can be illustrated by the number of company signatories to the *UN Global Compact* (UNGC)—a set of 10 *ethical* principles that corporations operating in global markets agree to abide by. The principles, first postulated in 2000, are divided into the categories of (1) human rights, (2) labor standards, and (c) environmental protection. As of 2016, more than 8000 corporations with international operations have made a [non-binding] commitment to support and abide by the principles (Logsdon 2018). These principles, each accompanied by a page or more of commentary, have clear implications for marketing practice, such as prohibiting child, slave or exploitative labor in the supply chain, and renouncing bribery in all foreign markets. The growth in subscription to these principles, while voluntary, is further evidence of the strength and importance of good corporate citizenship (CC) to SRM.

To a great extent, marketing academics have willingly embraced being good corporate citizens when their strategies can blend doing “good” with doing well financially (Porter and Kramer 2002). The utilization of cause-related marketing by many organizations is just one case in point (Varadarajan and Menon 1988). To this end, marketing academics have conducted notable research to help guide organizations in their selection of efficient philanthropic and volunteer initiatives that may also elevate the bottom line (e.g., Drumwright

1996; Ellen, Mohr, and Webb 2000). However, it is more challenging for individual marketing firms to exercise the highest level of corporate citizenship when taking the “higher road” of SRM might reduce their financial rewards (e.g., Hess and Kosak 1981). Much of the time, the profit impact on SRM on firm-specific objectives is cloudy (Sen and Bhattacharya 2001), a point further discussed later.

This again evokes the question of *why* marketers and their organizations should embrace duties beyond those that might directly aid the bottom line. For example, marketing executives intuitively understand that volunteerism may smooth public relations in a host community where cooperation is important; they perceive the value of providing job training programs when replacement employees might be in tight supply; they realize that visible philanthropy may be connected to the brand equity of company products. But what about practicing of corporate citizenship for its own sake—because CC is the right thing to do?

Taking a normative and macro perspective provides a plausible answer. Philosopher and economic policy analyst Michael Novak (1996), put forward the idea that management is a “Vocation” or “Calling” encompassing a societal responsibility not only to oversee company resource allocation but to also give back to society in a way that is community affirming. In this vein, *marketing* management also can be seen as a *Vocation*, a noble vocation, to provision society and to do so in manner that adds not only economic value but also enhances the common good by making the world better. Viewing the practice of marketing as a “Calling” that embodies SRM would be a clear demonstration of corporate citizenship as an ethically-inspired ideal.

Ideals aside for a moment, *hundreds* of descriptive (i.e., positive) studies of marketers’ ethical behavior at the firm-level (see Schlegelmilch and Öberseder 2010; Nill and Schibrowsky 2007) have been reported. Some identify factors that seem to impel greater SRM (e.g., Hunt, Wood, and Chonko 1989; Pierce and Snyder 2008) and others paint situations that detract from ethical actions (e.g., Akaah and Riordan 1990; Cain, Loewenstein, and Moore 2010). Marketing academics have also constructed detailed models of the ethical decision-making process that frame such empirical studies (Ferrell and Gresham 1985; Hunt and Vitell 1986). These last two works are among the most cited in the marketing discipline (Hunt 2013). However, these models do not address how socially responsible marketing decisions *should be* made, nor do they specify *how* macro-societal variables inevitably affect decision-making (Brenkert 2008). Until the academic marketing community agrees on the critical macro factors and a guiding ethical code of essential SRM, debate will continue about the implications of empirical findings regarding marketing’s social accountability and what policy modifications they imply (Ferrell, Ferrell, and Sawayda 2015).

Given (a) the discussion of corporate personhood, (b) the link of corporate power to responsibility and, (c) the non-discretionary obligation of Business (and its marketing managers) to the commonweal, we submit that good corporate

citizenship (CC) is the first requisite of *socially responsible marketing* and a compulsory element of SRM. So, to sum up, what have we concluded from this exposition of *corporate citizenship*?

1. Corporations (and their marketing units), similar to citizens, have rights and responsibilities. These include the requirement to follow the law, the obligation to act ethically in a variety of ways (e.g., avoid bribery) and the discretion to undertake philanthropy and voluntarism that benefits the community and, perhaps, their brand reputation.
2. The responsibility to fulfill CC is commensurate with corporate power; repeated failures to engage in responsible marketing will result in legal sanctions, additional regulation, constraints upon offending the industry or other reductions in market power (i.e., the shrinkage of economic freedom of action).
3. Adherence to high ethical standards is a professional requirement for marketers. The *American Marketing Association* Statement on Ethics (and other global codes such as the UN Global Compact) make apparent that specific ethical obligations exist, which all marketers are *expected* to embrace. The notion that SRM, in its fullness, is legally codified and/or discretionary is simply not tenable in today’s (social) media transparent marketplace. Public expectations about the need for *improved* business and marketing behaviors are evident in media and press reports nearly every day (O’Toole 2019).
4. The practice of marketing, when viewed normatively and from a macro standpoint, might be conceived as a “Calling”—a professional *vocation* that seeks pathways to achieve marketing goals while integrating societal contribution into a firm’s activities. Understanding marketing as a vocation that impacts society internalizes the commitment of company managers to good CC and socially responsible marketing.

We now explicate *stakeholder orientation*, the second essential element of SRM.

Stakeholder Orientation

Recognizing a *stakeholder orientation* (SO) with an *authentic* consideration of stakeholder claims is perhaps the element most often evoked as essential to CSR and, by extension, to socially responsible marketing (SRM). Because stakeholders represent the collective of societal parties impacted by marketing actions, it can be difficult to grasp how marketing *is* or *is not* acting responsibly, without analyzing stakeholders and what might be owed to them. One of the ways that SO is different from corporate citizenship (CC) is it shifts the spotlight to the impact of marketing on various parties rather than addressing the imputed responsibilities of marketers. Ferrell, Ferrell, and Sawayda (2014), in their excellent review of CSR-Marketing literature, opine (at p.44): “*In trying to develop a*

framework for corporate responsibility in marketing, the stakeholder framework seems to have the most support.” In actual practice, often leaning on *customer relationship marketing* as well as the *marketing concept*, marketing managers employ contracts, public relations, lobbying, placation, channel power or litigation to smooth communication and negotiation with their various stakeholders, all with an eye to improving customer perceptions, brand equity and, of course, profit (e.g., Day 1986; Peterson and Kerin 2011; Shultz and Holbrook 1999). Thus, we dig deeper into the concept of stakeholder orientation and what it adds to SRM.

Stakeholder is a fairly old term, historically referring to any party with a “stake” in a financial transaction; it dates back to at least 18th century *juris prudencia* (Carlton and Payne 2003). But stakeholder *theory* first came to the fore in business parlance with the publication of Freeman’s (1984), now classic, *Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach*. A stakeholder was “any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of an organization’s objectives” (Freeman 1984, p.46). The central thesis of Freeman’s seminal work was that *companies that could effectively manage their stakeholders will perform better than those which were not as adept*. Obviously, from a marketing theory standpoint, one always primary stakeholder to be satisfied is the *customer* although other important parties—suppliers, distributors, and employees—would also be critical to organizational success (Kumar and Shah 2004). Owner-shareholders are also “primary”. The status of a *primary* stakeholder means exactly that (Clarkson 1995). Their claims and considerations normally have priorities over lesser (*secondary*) stakeholders (e.g., independent franchisees or occasional suppliers).

The essence of a stakeholder approach for an individual firm involves creating a strategic plan that manages the rights and claims of various stakeholders in a manner consistent with the organizational objectives (Smith 2004). Since different stakeholder groups desire different outcomes—i.e., owners want ROI, customers want safe/innovative products and services, employees want good paying jobs, etc.—stakeholder oversight is a difficult balancing act reflecting the apex of managerial complexity. Over the years, even Freeman, the progenitor of stakeholder theory, has been conflicted over how much economic advantage should be sacrificed to honor all significant stakeholder claims (see Freeman 1999 vs. Freeman, Harrison, and Wicks 2007).

Skeptics of stakeholder theory point out the difficulty of determining *who* the most important stakeholders are other than owners/shareholders (Marcoux 2003). Marketers normally elevate the *customer*-stakeholder to a primary level because of the strategic value of customer satisfaction (Anderson, Fornell, and Mazvancheryl 2004; Berry 1995). But what about franchisees, distributors, suppliers—are they primary or secondary? Such designations require careful discernment but this is not an intractable problem. Mitchell, Agle, and Wood (1997), in a now famous article, enumerated the criteria for sorting stakeholders into a primary or secondary status. These criteria are *power* (i.e., the extent to which the stakeholders group can affect the

fortunes of the firm at focus), *legitimacy* (i.e., are there binding contractual obligations involved?) and *urgency* (how immediately salient to the firm are the stakeholder claims?). While Mitchell et al. is not the only possible approach to such delineation, using analytical case studies, marketing academics have illustrated the utility of the Mitchell, Agle, and Wood (1997) approach for both classifying stakeholders and assessing the import of stakeholder theory to marketing strategy (e.g., Inglebleek and Immink 2010). Stakeholders that possess one or more of these three characteristics are owed thoughtful consideration (Carlton and Payne 2003), hence *authentic* stakeholder orientation (SO).

The level of aggregation at which one examines SO—i.e., a *micro* versus *macro* lens—is an even more important factor. From the standpoint of the individual firm, adopting a mostly instrumental and financially focused perspective of stakeholders makes sense. Freeman (1984) originally conceived the stakeholder network as a hub and spoke model, with the firm at the hub, coordinating or co-opting various accommodations to stakeholders arrayed along the figurative rim. Marketers have often embraced this micro-instrumental perspective with varying rationales and persuasiveness (Laczniak and Murphy 2012). Typically, stakeholders are seen as entities to be dealt with, like any other factor that impinges upon competitive advantage (Porter 1985). But an important and sometimes forgotten codicil is that stakeholders have both a strategic value *and a moral claim* upon the organization (Donaldson and Preston 1995). Jones (1995) proposes that it is the moral claim of stakeholders that makes stakeholder theory noteworthy from a CSR perspective. That is, authentic stakeholder orientation requires a type of socially responsible behavior that considers what duties are “fairly” or “justly” owed to articulated stakeholders (Laczniak and Murphy 2006).

From solely a *micro*-strategy standpoint, stakeholders well managed improve the efficiency of the firm. Academic marketing researchers have regularly sought to identify the important levers of such efficiencies. We encourage readers to consider a few *sample* illustrations: Smith and Cooper-Martin (1997), utilizing the empirical support of public opinion surveys, show that certain types of target marketing (i.e., exploitation of vulnerable consumer-stakeholders), especially for controversial products, can result in marketing strategy failure (e.g., consumer boycotts); Antia and Frazier (2001), analyzing over 200 franchisors, finds that network density lessens enforcement of contractual obligations in the distribution channel (i.e., reduces the *compliance* level among distributor-stakeholders); Mish and Scammon (2010), in studying firms that have moved from private to public ownership, conclude that stakeholder orientation is harder to maintain once the publicly-traded transition has been made; Martin and Johnson (2010), using a game-centric experimental design, find manager-participants to be willing to promotionally leverage “positive” treatment of supply-chain stakeholders even when such information cannot be verified.

These investigations improve stakeholder understanding for marketers; and none of them excludes the possibility of making

adjustments such that the economic objectives of the firm *and* the well-being of stakeholders are both satisfied simultaneously. However, the sub-theme of many stakeholder studies reveals that financial objectives for shareholders are to be *maximized* while ethical obligations to other stakeholders are to be merely *satisfied* (Laczniak and Murphy 2012). For example, when thinking about stakeholders only instrumentally, marketers may (and often do) conclude: (a) customer-stakeholders should be treated well *because* retaining customers is less expensive than attracting new ones; (b) product safety should be emphasized *due to* experiences showing that torts litigation by consumers is expensive; (c) the ecological environment should be protected *in order to* forestall additional regulations or consumer boycotts. Such conclusions, while valid, are rooted mainly in competitive advantage.

Taking a *macro* and *normative-ethical* perspective to stakeholders markedly changes the thinking and dynamics described above. Again the *social contract* (SC)—what business owes to society for its rights of operation—underscores the *societal* purpose of marketing. From the standpoint of the public interest, authentic stakeholder orientation extends beyond customer satisfaction and maximal profitability for shareholders; it ought to include *ethical* as well as strategic considerations; its *macro* view considers the full network of stakeholder relationships not solely the seller-buyer dyad (Laczniak and Murphy 2012). The previously cited authors call this “hard-form” stakeholder orientation because it overcomes the problem of embracing stakeholder theory merely for its instrumental value; that is, firms utilizing stakeholder theory mostly from the perspective of customer fulfillment or shareholder profit may ignore the common good (Moore 2014). For example, buyers and sellers of e-cigarettes both may be satisfied but still create health costs for society; armaments manufacturers that produce anti-personnel mines may enhance military operations (and profits) but contribute to the unintended loss of civilian lives; energy companies that use fracking may lower fuel costs to consumers by increasing supply but add to unforeseen environmental damage.

To better untangle such problematics for society, various business ethicists (Rowley 1997; Werhane 2012) have advocated taking a macro approach to stakeholder relationships that de-emphasizes the seller-buyer dyad and, instead, looks at the macro network of stakeholder connections to better see the full spectrum of societal impacts from market transactions. Bhattacharya and Korschun (2008) were among the earlier *marketing* academics to recognize that socially responsible stakeholder theory needed to be not only financially conceived but “more enlightened” by reflecting pro-social and pro-environmental considerations. Such SRM thinking channeled the then-emergent *triple-bottom-line* formulation of “people and planet plus profit” (Elkington 1998). Bhattacharya, in that spirit (2010, p.1), writes:

...recent realities such as climate change, obesity crises, and human rights violations...are prompting companies to look beyond customers as the sole target of marketing activities and firms as the primary beneficiary... [T]here is an urgent need for

new research that adopts a broader and more inclusive stakeholder orientation.

Ferrell et al. (2010) agree, but point out the typical firm is focused on customers competitive advantage, which they label *market orientation* (MO); that approach is likely at odds with what the public increasingly expects from *stakeholder orientation* (SO). In addition, they go on to speculate that aligning the two orientations (i.e., the “sweet spot” of MO and SO) may be quite difficult, with MO often trumping SO. To be pondered here are not only the questions regarding who the various stakeholders are, and what *primary* claims are to be addressed, but also by which rules and ethical standards those stakeholder claims are to be adjudicated. This fundamental and necessary question of *how* to analyze not only the legitimacy of stakeholder claims but other contingencies affecting stakeholder oriented SRM will be addressed in our explication of *distributive justice* (DJ).

Finally, it is imperative to note that in August of 2019, the Business Roundtable (BRT), an association of many dozens of CEOs from large, multi-national companies signed a statement amending their views on the “Purpose of a Corporation.” They emphasized that the purpose of companies involves “a fundamental commitment to all our stakeholders” (BRT.org 2019). This supersedes the view of BRT (held since 1997) that the primary purpose of the corporation is to protect and accumulate shareholder wealth (Ramey 2019). Interestingly, between 1981 and 1997 the BRT held a *more* stakeholder centric view of company purpose, to which they have now returned (Ramsey 2019).

Is the BRT stakeholder pledge too broad and aspirational to really hold managers accountable? Some parties contend shareholders, and perhaps society itself, are not well served if corporations or their marketing units become too enamored with “stakeholderism” (Bebchuk and Tallarita 2020). Difficult stakeholder trade-offs may inevitably force some managers/executives to choose shareholders over employees or the environment, if only temporarily. That is, sometimes a limb (e.g., employee layoffs) must be painfully sutured or amputated to save the patient (i.e., the financially collapsing firm). However, responsible, authentic SO—an aspiration—requires that such trade-off discussions be transparent and that all stakeholders would have access to the decision-making process and its outcomes. These matters are further discussed in the sections on Distributive Justice and Constructive Engagement.

For the present, what has been distilled from our examination of *stakeholder orientation*?

1. The adoption of a *stakeholder orientation* (SO) appears to be essential to advancement of socially responsible marketing (SRM) because stakeholders are the identified claimants in society owed authentic consideration by marketers.
2. While identifying and ranking stakeholder claims has often been posed as exceedingly difficult, enlightened

marketers have demonstrated a variety of ways in which that can be (imperfectly) done.

3. Managing stakeholder relationships from only a firm's position of self-interest is contrary to many of the pro-social, pro-environmental tenets of "hard-form" stakeholder theory, including the stated opinion of influential groups such as the CEOs of the Business Round Table.
4. The network of stakeholder relationships that constitute SRM is better visualized with a *macro*-systems perspective, rather than from a micro-firm's seller-customer dyad. Customer satisfaction, while always important, does not take into account the full scope of negative externalities of market exchange that a systems perspective uncovers.

We next explicate the element of *social/ecological sustainability* (SES), the third essential piece of socially responsible marketing (SRM).

Social and Ecological Sustainability

SRM always aspires to achieve *social/environmental sustainability* (SES) as part of its provisioning and exchange functions. The concept of "sustainability" is complex and, while marketing's expected contribution to this effort is finite, it is nonetheless imperative and collectively significant. Saiia (2004, p.99) describes sustainability as "the integrated understanding of the interconnection of human activity upon man-made and natural systems." As Benton (2014) has pointed out, there are numerous interpretations of sustainability but a common denominator of all of them involves *thinking holistically* about economic, ethical and environmental interactions (e.g., Cyphert and Saiia 2004). The understandable supposition in SES is that the long-term well-being of society (i.e., the *social*) and the health of the physical environment (i.e., the *ecological*) are inextricably connected; thus, *social and ecological sustainability* (SES). Marketing comes into play because it is the central system of resource allocation/distribution for meeting consumer-citizen needs. Collectively, marketing discharges that duty pretty well (Wilkie and Moore 2014). That noted, marketing organizations are often implicated in driving *over-consumption* and *wasteful* resource usage; that is, marketing is sometimes viewed as an obstacle to or enemy of sustainability (Barber 2007; Gorge et al. 2015; Schlosser 2004). On the flip side, as a transformative institution, ecologically mindful marketing can make an enormous contribution to a healthier planet (i.e., better world) as well as to value creation (Bennett, Freeman, and George 1993; Kotler 2011). SES is the piece of socially responsible marketing that is concerned with marketing's impact on the physical environment. Obviously, an ethic of sustainability in marketing operations can create economic, social and ecological differences (Martin and Schouten 2012) — points we outline below.

The term "Sustainability" as a global *public policy* objective was introduced by the United Nations' Brundtland Commission on Environment and Development (1987). That report

sought to lay out a pathway for further world economic development without compromising the resource inheritance for future generations. Sustainability is part of *environmental ethics and economics* (Passmore 1974), which itself is often historically linked back to Rachel Carson's iconic, *Silent Spring* (1962), and her early warnings about the impact of human interventions (particularly pesticides) upon environmental systems. Other scholars trace environmental ethics back to early 20th Century naturalists (Leopold 1948) or even the ancient Greeks (Benton 2015). But the main point here is normative. A *sustainability* approach (i.e., integrated thinking about economics, markets and ecology) is proposed to be a key solution to the depletion and degradation of earth's resources, and thus, a necessary piece in comprehending marketing's role in society, i.e. its social responsibility.

To this end, in 2015, the United Nations approved 17 "Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for 2030". These goals, each with many pragmatic sub-points, laid-out a comprehensive blueprint to assure the future prosperity of the planet (United Nations 2015). The all-inclusive themes of 17 SDGs include aspirations such as "End Poverty" (SDG #1), "Decent Work and Economic Growth" (SDG #8) and "Climate Protection Action" (SDG # 13). The most marketing focused SDG, #12—"Responsible Consumption and Production"—will be addressed below.

For years, creating sustainable economies has been considered an existential challenge (Daly 1977; Pirages 1977). Recently, even Pope Francis (2015) authored an encyclical, *Laudato Si*, calling for greater stewardship over our common home—Mother Earth. One of the most quoted sentences of that document [at #21] reads, "The earth, our home, is beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth." In amelioration, Francis invokes the principle of stewardship as an ethical guide for environmental decisions. In its most general form, the *principle of stewardship* calls on economic actors to *always respect the integrity and cycles of nature and to fastidiously avoid environmental exploitation* (Pontifical Council 2005). Particularly significant about *Laudato Si* (2015) is that it represents a major shift in moral perspective by religious institutions, not limited to the Roman Catholic Church (Klein and Laczniak 2021). Western religious doctrine—still a substantial cultural and global influence (Putnam and Campbell 2010)—increasingly views the world as *less* anthropomorphic and has tempered its historic view that the planet is a bottomless resource-bank exclusively intended for human benefit (Gottfried 1995).

Also in 2015, mirroring the concurrent efforts of the UN, political elites from around the world gathered in Paris to negotiate a climate change mitigation treaty, intended to alleviate "predicted" life-damaging effects, if environmental practices remained unchanged (e.g., Emmott 2013). In 2018, U.S. President Donald Trump withdrew the USA from the Paris Climate Accord, causing great domestic and international angst. Such events show (among other things) that the enormous marketing system itself is subject to, and enmeshed in, the machinations of other macro systems.

Many factors influence the extent to which the aggregate marketing system (AGMS) can affect the physical environment, but clearly, the activities of marketing are central (e.g., Robert 2002). Marketing decisions impact the materials that are extracted from the earth (e.g., fossil fuels, rare earth minerals), the level of substances that can be reabsorbed by the planet (e.g., carbon emissions, pesticides), degradation of the physical biosphere (e.g., deforestation, water usage) and the ecological footprint of various populations (e.g., per capita consumption levels). From its beginnings, environmental policies and oversights were something that needed to be *analyzed* at the macro level but *fixed* at the micro level (Schumacher 1973). While the scope of such systemic analyses can seem overwhelming, to reduce complexity, business ethicists such as Gibson (2012) suggest managers focus on controllable sustainability within their individual enterprises while still recognizing *macro* trends. Thus, the policy choices individual marketing firms make are vital. *UN Sustainable Development Goal* (SDG) #12 is principally centered on marketing concerns (UN 2015). SDG #12 seeks “to ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns” by committing all organizations to *environ-helpful* marketing practices including “bio-efficient packaging, greater re-cycling and reuse, combating product obsolescence” plus a half dozen other strategies (UN 2015).

Sustainable thinking about economic exchange has included *marketing* themes going back to the ‘70s (e.g., Shapiro 1978). As environmentalism exploded in the public consciousness (Commoner 1971; DeBell 1970; Hardin 1968), academic marketing scholarship was quick on the uptake (Fisk 1973; 1974). Consistent with our discussion of the *social contract*, marketers realized that ecologically benign marketing was an ethical imperative (Laczniak and Murphy 1977), or an attractive profit opportunity (e.g., Ottman 1992) or *both* (Henion 1976). The term “green marketing” was eventually coined and referred to assorted activities by which customer needs could be satisfied with minimal detrimental impacts on the physical environment (e.g., Wasik 1996). “Green washing”, in contrast to green marketing, involved exploitative ecological marketing where false or misleading product claims were made purporting sustainable attributes that were not real (e.g., Carson and Gangadharan 2002). Many helpful academic investigations into various aspects of sustainable marketing continue to the present, including several appearing in the *Journal of Marketing* (e.g., Banerjee, Iyer, and Kashyap 2003; Kronrod, Grinstein, and Wathieu 2012; Lin and Chang 2012; Luchs et al. 2010; White, MacDonnell, and Ellard 2012) and elsewhere (e.g., Apte and Sheth 2017; Mittelstaedt et al. 2014; Sheth, Sethia, and Srinivas 2011; Varadarajan 2014). Marketing’s general recognition of the SRM significance of social and ecological sustainability (SES) seems established.

Years ago, Zaltman, Kotler, and Kaufman (1971, p.7) in discussing the process of social dynamics, noted three approaches that impel major social change, such as the adoption of an SES philosophy. These were: (a) Coercive power (e.g., legal sanctions), (b) Utilitarian evaluations (e.g., advocating benefits vs. costs) and, (c) Normative ideals (e.g.,

internalization of societal values). Marketers, driven by profit payoffs, have typically been motivated by strategy (a) and sometimes (b) in their efforts to become more sustainable (Kotler 2011). But one lesson evident in our abridged review of sustainability is that genuine SRM also requires being more open to (c), the *normative* approach. Benton (2015), scrutinizing the environmental impact of marketing on society, remarks that instead of marketers asking, “Can it be sold?” they ought to first inquire, “*Should* it be sold? Is it worth the [environmental] cost to society?” Once such alternative questions are deemed important, it is a short step to realizing that genuine SRM includes social/ecological sustainability (SES)—a quintessential macro and ethical concept.

What are the key take-a-ways from our brief tour of the SES perspective?

1. Because marketing is embedded in a greater macro, eco-system, thinking holistically about environmental impacts is essential to the concept of social/ecological sustainability and its SRM interface.
2. The public increasingly comprehends the possible influences of marketing activities on the physical world and its societal well-being; thus, SES is an *expected* piece of socially responsible marketing.
3. The *principle of stewardship* calls on economic actors to always respect the integrity and cycles of nature and to fastidiously avoid environmental exploitation; marketers are called on to discern what that means for their practices.
4. UN Sustainable Development Goal #12—responsible production and consumption—is one notable starting point for a global ethic of SES *in marketing*.
5. Thinking normatively with a macro-focus (i.e., people, profit *and planet*) can help marketing managers recognize SRM practices that are both ecologically friendly and profitable.

Having completed our explication of the basic elements of SRM, we now address a prospective ethical standard of assessment—*distributive justice* (DJ). Because DJ is a particularly intricate topic, this discussion is organized with five fundamental questions: (a) Why is distributive justice an indispensable ethical standard for SRM? (b) What is the *nature* of distributive justice? (c) What is the proper *measure* of distributive justice? (d) Is there a surrogate indicator for DJ to be found in market outcomes? (e) What happens to market systems without sufficient distributive justice?

Distributive Justice: An Ethical Standard to Evaluate SRM

Why is Distributive Justice an Indispensable Ethical Standard for SRM?

There are assorted ethical frameworks that can be used to analyze social-ethical questions that present themselves in marketing practice (Laczniak and Murphy 2018). For instance, the Hunt and Vitell (1986) model of marketing ethics is constructed

on the idea that marketing decision-makers, depending on the situation, likely opt for *either* teleological or deontological frameworks of ethical analysis. Distributive Justice (DJ), which focuses on trying to shape fair outcomes for all, is an ethical standard that is particularly suited to evaluating macro or systems-level issues (Laczniak and Murphy 2008). For example, in the current COVID-19 pandemic, the thorny trade-off between protecting public health via social quarantines and its detrimental side-effects of constricting the economy and employment opportunities has been debated rigorously in terms of the distributive justice (or fairness) of social outcomes. These discussions have been less than definitive. Fortunately, most of the time, when it comes to evaluating less novel ethical questions like the use of extortion, blackmail and price-fixing to advance business interests, most ethical frameworks, including DJ, are in consensus about what is fair and proper.

Regarding the nature of socially responsible marketing (SRM), it has been argued that distribution justice (DJ), particularly as conceived by Rawls (1971), holds considerable potential in helping understand the “fairness” of markets and marketing practices. In a marketing systems context, DJ deals with how rewards and penalties are apportioned among the various parties affected by the market exchange process (Laczniak and Murphy 2008, p.5). A distributive justice approach is especially useful at the macro level because the Rawlsian form of DJ includes an inherent *public policy* component. DJ presumes social institutions (e.g., industry associations, NGOs, government) will make adjustments in the market system to increase fairness among all parties. To achieve this, the Rawlsian approach to DJ features an ethical principle (the *difference principle*) that gives special consideration (i.e., greater weight) to vulnerable groups when new social policies are considered. Selecting DJ as the ethical standard as essential to SRM does not dispense marketers from following other ethical dicta; instead it is a primary ethical standard for SRM because it most easily allows analysts of macro systems to parse what is going on in terms of “fair” societal outcomes.

What is the Nature of Distributive Justice?

Just as the *social contract* (SC) is the foundation of socially responsible marketing, *distributive justice* (DJ) is its *moral* measure. Thus, if the social contract is being rightly executed, distributions in a given market sector will be considered “just”. Hence, the question of what marketers “justly” owe society is, by logical deduction, a macro-level inquiry. In other words, in trying to establish if society and its stakeholders are being “fairly” treated by particular market arrangements, one must undertake *ethical* examinations that are macro and systemic because only such measures are able to capture broad societal expectations (Farmer and Hogue 1985). Monieson (1981) advocated that macro perspective (in contrast to firm-centric debates) when he asserted (p.19):

Distributive Justice is a central concept in macromarketing. The subject of distributive justice embraces not only the economic

analyses of rights, but also ethics, morality, religion, and even aesthetics . . . Any macromarketing [i.e., marketing and society] issue worthy of attention will ultimately have to confront these philosophically laden subjects. They simply cannot be avoided.

Ferrell and Ferrell (2008), drawing on a wide swath of marketing and management literature, postulate distributive justice as a vital framework to assess what marketers owe to assorted stakeholders, including customers and society. To fully understand the immense significance of DJ for scrutinizing SRM, some universal comments about *types* of justice and their connection to the marketing system are helpful. Justice is important to marketing practice in all its forms, but distributive justice (DJ) is especially significant when looking at SRM from a societal perspective, as we further elaborate below.

Most marketers probably consider the idea of justice to be a bit different from its distributive-justice variant. *General Justice* (GJ)—justice in its most familiar form—is an ancient concept (e.g., MacIntyre 1984); it addresses *good values* that fair-minded individuals are asked to exercise in order to contribute to the common good. “To act justly” is a universal ethical imperative captured, among other places, in the first lines of the biblical *Book of Wisdom*: “Choose justice, you who govern the Earth.” The most typical embodiment of GJ is the obligation to “treat similar situations similarly.” An obvious example of GJ in *marketing* practice is the duty to avoid price discrimination since it, *prima facie*, treats different buyers differently (Elegido 2011; Xia, Monroe, and Cox 2004).

Yet it is *Commutative Justice* (CJ) that most marketers likely imagine when marketplace fairness is at question. CJ requires equality and reciprocity *in exchanges* among individuals or small groups (e.g., suppliers, vendors) and it is an important facet of understanding ethical marketing transactions (Klein, Smith, and John 2004). But the main focus of CJ is upon *direct-party* exchange—the buyer-seller deals so vital to the marketing function. Klein (2015) remarks that product “merchantability”—safety and fitness of products for purposes claimed—is the most prominent form of commutative justice in marketing. Santos and Laczniak (2009), echoing long-standing “consumer rights” theory (Aaker and Day 1971), remind of (a) access to relevant information, (b) meaningful choice options, (c) freedom from exchange-coercion and, (d) redress from negative outcomes, for their list of CJ fair exchange with consumers. However, *Distributive Justice* (DJ) is broader than CJ because (for marketing) it goes *beyond* direct market exchange and extends to all stakeholders affected by marketing practice.

Laczniak and Murphy (2008) describe DJ as the process by which an organization allocates to its stakeholders the benefits and burdens of economic enterprise according to some ethical standard of fairness. It could be rightly deduced that, in a marketing context, DJ is a sub-set of General Justice and more encompassing than Commutative Justice (Garanzini and Alvarez 2015). Obviously, justice is a multi-dimensional concept (Jackson 2005; Johnson 1956). But from the standpoint of SRM, distributive justice best captures the claims of society on marketing enterprises. Why? Because DJ involves parsing how

the rewards and costs of commercial activity should be “fairly”—i.e., justly—allocated to all stakeholders, not merely customers. Attention to DJ begins to answer the questions: *Is marketing practice “X” fair? Is marketing action “X” good for society?*

What is the Proper Measure of Distributive Justice?

Upon what *basis* should such DJ assessments be made? Herein we find the devilry of detail. The standards of distributive justice can be diverse and complex. Rewards (and penalties) to marketing-affected parties *might be* antecedently apportioned based on effort expended, amount invested, merits of one’s contribution or by pre-negotiated contract (Gerwirth 1978). Or, post hoc, distributions could be made on the basis of need, or to achieve outcome equality or to be consistent with some other socially desirous rule (e.g., profit sharing, universal basic income). Thus, there exist sundry standards of distributive justice, and they may apportion outcomes differently.

So where does one even find the allocation algorithms and evaluation schemes for DJ *in marketing*? While such processes are admittedly difficult, the literature includes several recommendations for applying DJ to marketing issues and questions (Klein 2015). One of the most typical approaches is to identify primary stakeholders (Mitchell, Agle, and Wood 1997) and then apply a cost-benefit approach to the situational outcomes of parties affected by the marketing transaction at focus (e.g., Klein 2008). As cost-benefit analysis is a staple of most MBA programs, the application of such thinking to DJ (and thus SRM) should not be a great leap for marketing managers (Klein 1977).

Detailed attempts to compute the social performance of business have existed longer than many academics likely surmise (Blake, Frederick, and Meyers 1976; Kreps 1940). At minimum, many such measures involve auditing actual business practices (Abbott and Monsen 1979; Hess, Rogovsky, and Dunfee 2002) to determine what steps companies have taken to honestly address assorted social issues (e.g., gender equity; community relations). The perennial *marketing audit* to help establish strategic positioning (Kotler, Gregor, and Rogers III 1989) has also been adapted to ascertain an organization’s *ethical* orientation in their marketing activities (Laczniak and Murphy 1993). The *extension* of such audits to illuminate the SRM components of corporate citizenship, stakeholder orientation and social/ecological sustainability can serve as common-sense building blocks to appraise DJ. Of course, the construction of such SRM measurements still requires making choices about the precise nature of distributive justice measures.

For a defensible DJ standard, Laczniak and Murphy (2008) advocate building on Rawls’ (1971) *Theory of Justice*. This involves the *general justice* (GJ) requirement of “equal access to offices and opportunities” (i.e., Rawls’ *liberty principle*) but also incorporates a further ethical condition that directly reflects DJ. In marketing, this translates to implementing the authentic stakeholder orientation (SO) discussed above. But also added is the Rawlsian *difference principle* for assessing

outcome fairness to marketing’s stakeholders. This supplementation means checking that marketing policies will not further disadvantage those in society who are “least well off”—the poor, minorities, the marketplace illiterate and other vulnerable segments (Mascarenhas 1995; Santos and Laczniak 2009).

Further building on Rawls (1971), but more expansively, economist and Nobel laureate Amartya Sen (2006; 2009) invokes a lofty DJ standard with the concept of “capabilities”. According to Sen’s *capabilities theory*, all persons should have access to the social goods and services that give human beings the ability to live a full life and achieve their potentiality. Philosopher Martha Nussbaum (2011) clarifies this idea by articulating exactly what these capabilities might be—e.g., access to healthcare, educational opportunities, adequate resources to allow personal improvement. To be sure, all of these capabilities would *not* be provided by marketing activities alone. Sen and Nussbaum are speaking to what comprehensive distributive justice should look like in a “good society” but, a key DJ implication *for marketers* is touched on along the way. Both Sen (2006) and Nussbaum (2011) note that genuine citizen well-being must always be judged *not* by the material output of consumer culture but rather by the extent to which individuals have access to the “capabilities” that will allow them to flourish as healthy, happy human beings (Nussbaum 2011). One clear implication here is that the true measure of marketing success according to DJ is much more than financial.

Perhaps the most detailed treatment for *analyzing* DJ in commercial settings can be found in Donaldson and Dunfee (1999), whose approach was tailored for marketing situations by Dunfee, Smith, and Ross (1999). This protocol—labeled *integrative social contracts theory*—is complex and requires a discussion forum (for dialogue exchange) for key stakeholders such that they have sufficient “voice” to negotiate a set of ground rules and/or principles to which *all* would agree. In the abstract, this consensus-directed approach appears exceedingly difficult, but for many small and medium size companies, the *major* social fairness questions they face are often limited, such as pipe-liners assuring the ecological integrity of their projects or HR staffing firms avoiding employee discrimination. Notably, detailed guidelines for comprehending stakeholder claims have been formulated (e.g., Bernhart and Maher 2011) and, over time, will likely be further refined. Even multi-national corporations, after consultation with stakeholders, can be transparent about what society *should* expect from their operations (e.g., Smeltzer and Jennings 1998). On occasion, especially in unstable developing markets, MNCs themselves assume some social-supportive roles (helping assure DJ) in lieu of government actions (Scherer and Palazzo 2011). Nonetheless, promises to stakeholders by marketing firms do not always or necessarily translate to SRM action.

Is there a Surrogate Indicator for DJ to Be Found in Market Outcomes?

Since DJ is about realized outcomes, one productive approach has been to explore how various marketing practices and

arrangements have affected *Quality of Life* (QoL). Sirgy (2001, 2011) has offered complete views of QoL investigations, documenting how such outcomes include not only a system's economic results, but citizen health, leisure options, work opportunities, religious tolerance, political freedom and family time. Not surprisingly, the relationship between markets/marketing practices and QoL is a staple of macromarketing scholarship (Peterson 2013; Sirgy and Lee 2006). A specific example of distributive justice research in macromarketing is to examine how economic systems in different countries affect QoL (Deaton 2008; Peterson and Malhotra 1997). Similarly, macromarketers often study how alternative market constructions (e.g., a particular transportation sector or auction methods to allocate electromagnetic bands) influence QoL (McMillian 2002).

The overall point here is not to instruct concerning the tactical details of applying a particular DJ template to marketing outcomes but to indicate that (a) it can be done; (b) the exact process may need to be customized to the firm or industry at focus; and, (c) that some *distributive justice* standard—because of its focus on societal reward/cost allocations—helps capture the essentials of whether particular marketing arrangements are perceived as “fair” by stakeholders and society. All of this suggests that unless some distributive justice calculations are made (e.g., social audit of capabilities, QoL measurements, and stakeholder surveys of satisfaction), it is difficult to claim that SRM is being delivered in a market sub-system.

What Happens to Market Systems without Sufficient Distributive Justice?

Sporadic failures by business and marketing to assure distributive justice can have catastrophic social consequences (Redmond 2013). The Great Recession (2007-2009) was a case point as big banks, which recklessly over-extended consumer credit, were bailed out by the U.S. government while millions of Americans lost their homes (Stiglitz 2010). The end result from unfair distributions of market outcomes is this: Enduring public perceptions of unmerited inequalities of outcome that will cause citizen-consumers to question capitalism and the basic workings of the market system (Bakan 2004; Schweickart 2011).

Eminent historians Will and Ariel Durant, who spent much of their lifetimes producing a massive 10 volume *The Story of Civilization* (1935-1967), subsequently wrote a slim monograph, *The Lessons of History* (Durant and Durant 1968). A theme of the latter is that universal patterns in the sweep of history are surprisingly few, but one of them is described as follows:

Since practical ability differs from person to person, the majority of such abilities, in nearly all societies, is gathered in a minority of men. The concentration of wealth is a natural result of this concentration of ability, and regularly recurs in history (p.55).

The Durants admire the profit motive as a stimulant to economic productivity; but because of the divergent marketplace aptitudes of human beings, *growing inequality* from competitive market systems seems to be the eventual result. The Durants cite, with nuanced approval, the observation of Karl Marx that “history is economics in action” (p.52) and conclude that “the concentration of wealth is natural and inevitable, and is periodically alleviated by violent or peaceable partial distribution (p.57).” Their suggestion here is that the predisposition of social systems to *eventual* distributive justice is part of the pattern of history (Shermer 2015); when that fact is not recognized early enough, detrimental social upheaval may follow. As Martin Luther King Jr. (1964) famously stated: “The arc of the moral universe is long but it bends toward justice.” However, the *process* of arriving at that justice can be messy and anything but serene.

Presently, in one of the more discussed books of recent years, *Capital in the 21st Century*, French economist Thomas Piketty (2014) argues that the long-run rate of return on wealth (e.g., profits, dividends, interest and rents) exceeds the rate of economic growth from wages, i.e., labor. According to the Piketty thesis, since the already affluent classes control higher yielding wealth, the rank-and-file must depend on (lower growing) wages. Thus, it appears (based on three centuries of longitudinal records) that over time, the rich tend to get richer and economic inequality *increases*. Assorted neoliberal and free-market economists have attacked Piketty's assumptions, models and analyses (Boushey, DeLong, and Steinbaum 2017), but data over the past five years since the publication of *Capital* have been supportive of the inequality thesis (Oxfam 2019). Economist Joseph Stiglitz (2013), a Nobel Laureate, warns that “markets have not been working the way their boosters claim (p.xi)” and that current inequality has “reached a stage where it can be inefficient and bad for growth” (p.xv).

Even within the marketing discipline, a sub-area of academic research—Critical Marketing Studies (CMS)—has emerged which indicts the marketing system itself (e.g., Dhoklaka 2012). CMS studies collectively highlight some dysfunctions of marketing, such as exaggerated product benefits, dubious advertising claims, customer manipulations, exploitation of vulnerable segments and other chronic pathologies, many systemic (e.g., Tadajewski and Saren 2009). In recent years, some consumers and other stakeholders often have not received “fair” treatment by *any* standard of justice. *Volkswagen* rigged internal software to under-report the pollution level of its vehicles, *Wells Fargo Bank* churned customer accounts to accumulate fees without customer knowledge, *Facebook* lied repeatedly about the access that app developers had to private customer data and its protection, to name just a few examples (Laczniak and Murphy 2018). Each of these injustices took place on a massive scale and eroded the trust necessary for smoothly operating markets (Pirson and Malhotra 2011); these practices constitute marketing for a *lesser* world. Such socially *irresponsible* marketing practices also represent the all too common market failures (Harris and Carmen 1983; Redmond

2018) that a SRM commitment to distributive justice (DJ) might help to alleviate.

What Are the Lessons to Be Drawn from this Brief Excursion into the DJ Standard?

1. *Justice*, since it is the quality necessary to morally assess resource allocations to participants in society—a point first made by philosopher David Hume (1751/1988)—appears an ethical standard well suited to evaluating SRM.
2. *Distributive justice* in particular, because it can address how economic rewards and penalties are divided among stakeholders, seems an essential normative-ethical framework to help establish the societal contributions of marketing activities.
3. From society's standpoint, the "fairness" of particular marketing policies and practices cannot be judged without scrutinizing the payoffs and tradeoffs among various entities (e.g., citizens vs. corporations), stakeholders (e.g., customers vs. employees vs. owners), or upon the physical environment (people vs. planet vs. profit). These evaluations ought to include the Rawlsian difference principle, which looks to how the most vulnerable stakeholders are being treated.
4. While the manner and methodological process is challenging, measures of DJ to evaluate marketing issues can be constructed (e.g., Sandbu 2011). Quality-of-Life research is one such example with a distinctly macro flavor for assessing the fairness of outcomes deriving from different market arrangements. In general, DJ is a macro ethical standard well suited to evaluating whether the *social contract* between business and society is being properly discharged.
5. Failure to address perceived issues of unfairness stemming from economic/marketing practices can engender systemic turmoil and disorder (e.g., fines, regulation, anti-trust proceedings, and revocation of corporate charters) or even systemic transformations in how markets are allowed to develop and operate (Layton and Duffy 2018).

We now explicate the final *definens* of our unabridged definition of SRM, *Constructive Engagement* (CE).

Constructive Engagement: A Macromarketing Mindset for Improving SRM

Constructive engagement (CE) is a mindset regarding *socially responsible marketing* (SRM), which is born from a *macro-marketing* perspective; it is an amalgam of policy and business practices that help identify and address, via systemic long-run thinking, interventions with marketing problems that create "wins" for both business and society. The idea that CE is fundamental to socially responsible marketing was developed by Shultz and colleagues (e.g., 1997; 1999; 2007; 2012), mainly

for application to developing markets in conflicted geopolitical marketplaces (e.g., the Balkans, Vietnam, Colombia). But because of the ability of CE to manifest a creative "big picture" orientation, it also can be applied to assorted questions and issues concerning SRM in most marketing situations. Constructive engagement can be thought of as macromarketing thinking in action: it represents a re-emphasis on broader systems-level analysis of marketing questions with intentions to enhance individual quality-of-life and societal well-being (e.g., Domegan et al. 2019; Layton and Grossbart 2006; Shultz et al. 2020; Wilkie and Moore 1999). If distributive justice (DJ)—as argued above—is the *moral* measure of SRM, CE can be envisioned as its pragmatic partner, providing direction for marketing managers and policy makers by motivating their focus on SRM while satisfying economic and policy objectives.

Because the application of a macromarketing mindset (via CE) aids managers to better perceive what ethical and *socially responsible marketing* requires, it is helpful to articulate the elements of constructive engagement. Shultz (2015), drawing from prior macromarketing literature, lists the purview of constructive engagement as including systemic understanding (e.g., Layton 2009), recognition of historical lessons (e.g., Shapiro 2012), cultural empathy (e.g., Nill 2003), behavioral interdiction (e.g., Nason 1989), cooperation (e.g., Berger and Corbin 1992) and a preference for market-based solutions while realizing the possibility of market failures (Duffy, Layton, and Dwyer 2017). Space does not allow a full sketch of the possible applications of CE elements, but the brief review of CE *philosophy* below supplies its flavor.

Constructive Engagement usefully channels the fundamentally *ethical* character of the macromarketing perspective; that is, markets and marketing *ought* to improve society (Shultz 2015). CE encourages marketers (and policy makers) to address the *social traps* of "short-termism" in marketing practice and to avoid the easy path of non-action ("acts of omission") when social intervention appears called for. Some terse elaboration is in order.

By "social traps", we mean avoiding "actions, though profitable or otherwise beneficial in the short run, [that] cause harm to society in the long run" (Shultz 2015, p.189). The archetypal example is the overgrazing of land held in community by all—the famously labeled "tragedy of the commons" (Hardin 1968). Social traps are emblematic of the pitfalls to SRM because they reflect a mania of short-term economic results that often lead to market outcomes not in the best interests of society. A vexing result of succumbing to social traps is the generation of *externalities* resulting from marketing actions (Mundt and Houston 1996; 2010). Externalities are costs (or benefits) that fall outside the exchange equation and often accrue to parties (e.g., society) that are not a direct partner in the market exchange (Mundt 1993). Marketers are seen as failing the betterment of society when their actions impose *negative* externalities (Neg-Exs) on society (Laczniak 2017; Nason 1989). Examples of negative externalities flowing from marketing might include the cost of identity theft due to a marketer's poor protection of consumer data, city pollution from the sales of gas-guzzling

vehicles in urban areas better suited to mass transit, the health costs resulting from unanticipated drug interactions when pharmaceutical companies hype new products, and reckless wars that feed the military-industrial complex via weapons marketing and consumption.

The CE approach would hold that with macro thinking about systemic marketing outcomes, marketers will be in a better position to avoid social traps and minimize negative externalities. As Laczniak and Murphy (2006, p.157) have reminded in their portrayal of normative-ethical precepts: *Marketers are responsible for the actions they intend, their means of implementation and their outcomes.* In other words, marketers are ethically mandated to take ownership of the Neg-Exs they generate. And, there are also plenty of case examples when constructive engagement can both improve society and result in economic reward for the marketer (Andreasen 1995; Peterson 2013; Prahalad 2005; Viswanathan et al. 2009).

By “acts of omission”, we refer to situations where marketers “choose not to engage in situations or systems when it is foreseen that because of that restraint the same [negative] result occurs” (Shultz 2015, p.196). In other words, marketers striving to be socially responsible should constructively engage when they find themselves in a position to hasten positive social outcomes as they conduct operations (Zif 1980). The litany of action failures by marketers (“acts of omission”) is as long as the tactics comprising marketing strategy. For example, failure to curb coercion in the channel of distribution, not desisting from predatory pricing practices, and neglecting to terminate controversial promotional campaigns could all be examples of failure to engage. The cynic might well respond, “Such boundless ethical obligation is meaningless.” However, when limited to the confines of an individual firm, the ethical duties of CE are less encompassing. A mechanism to create a focal point for identifying marketing issues to be “constructively” addressed might be generated through stakeholder dialogue. As previously mentioned, a firm’s stakeholders are in good position to know the issues most affecting them. Nill (2003) and Nill and Shultz (1997) offer frameworks to tap stakeholder concern through a formalized communication system, thereby providing a practical way for the key issues facing a given firm and its stakeholders to be identified and discussed. Through such a process, situations where exchange “fairness” is in question can be inventoried.

A helpful illustration of the import for holding a macro mindset to constructively engage societal challenges can be gleaned from two recent lists of “marketing problems”. In 2016, in an effort to sensitize marketers to major disciplinary questions that must be addressed, the *American Marketing Association* released its “first ever intellectual agenda” of the “Seven Big Problems” confronting Marketing (Jaworski, Malcolm, and Morgan 2016, p.1). The list of “big problems” (see Table 3, list A) unquestionably comprises challenges that most marketing firms must grapple with if they wish to become more competitive in the future. And certainly, discerning how to address issues such as “the digital transformation of the modern

corporation” and “dealing with an Omni-channel world” are noteworthy concerns for many marketing practitioners. But as a point of contrast—and as an example of how constructive engagement from a macro, ethical viewpoint can help marketers understand what might increase SRM—consider the list of “7 Wicked Problems of Marketing Systems” introduced at the 2017 *Macromarketing Society* conference (Laczniak 2017). On this list (see Table 3, list B), we find systemic threats such as invasions of consumer privacy, inequality of market outcomes, exploitation of vulnerable consumer segments and obstacles to sustainable consumption. It is not unreasonable to ask, *addressing which list of problems will more likely lead to knowledge and insights that help marketers responsibly shape a “better world”?* For macromarketing scholars, when market segments are encountered that evoke one of these issues, the list can serve as a reminder concerning where CE may be needed to enhance SRM.

Table 3. Comparison of Micro and Macro Views of Problems Facing Marketing.

A. American Marketing Association List of Problems Facing Marketing Industry [Jaworski, Malcolm and Morgan (April 2016), *Marketing News*, p.1.]

The 7 Big Problems of Marketing

- Effectively targeting high value sources of growth
- Role of Marketing in the firm and C-suite
- The Digital transformation of the modern corporation
- Generating and using insight to shape marketing practice
- Dealing with an Omni-channel world
- Competing in dynamic global markets
- Balancing incremental and radical innovation

B. Macromarketing Society List of Problems Facing Marketing Systems [Laczniak 2017, Presidential Address, 41st Annual Macromarketing Conference, Trinity College-Dublin]

The 7 Wicked Problems of Market Systems

- Inequality of market outcomes
- Exploitation of vulnerable consumer segments
- The technological invasion of consumer privacy
- Obstacles to building sustainable consumption
- Recognizing the path dependence of historical actions
- Anticipating and preventing market failures
- Analyzing the weaknesses of a dominant “free market” ideology

Constructive Engagement is decidedly a universal pragmatic that applies to all aspects of SRM. Illustrating the full application of CE to fashion more socially responsible marketing is without doubt a book length manuscript. However, for those interested in theoretical blueprints that address parts of each core element of SRM, conceptualizations can be found for *corporate citizenship* (e.g., Murphy, Oberseder, and Laczniak 2013), for *stakeholder orientation* (e.g., Lusch and Webster 2011; Maigan et al. 2005) and for *social/environmental sustainability* (Apte and Sheth 2017).

While SRM and short-term economic gains can and do occur simultaneously, the expectation for this outcome should

be tempered. There is substantial empirical literature, not addressed in detail here, exploring various SRM strategies and their correlations with profitability (e.g., Langan 2014). Of this research, because of study design differences, variable operationalization, longitudinal parameters, sample composition/size and many other factors, the most that can be said about the meta-relationship between SRM and *improved* financial performance is that it is “unverified”. Certainly there is cause for cautious optimism as socially responsible activities have been linked to increased customer satisfaction and reduced stock volatility (e.g., Luo and Bhattacharya 2006; 2009). But other investigations suggest that SRM activity may have no impact or even negative influence upon product and brand perceptions (e.g., Brown and Dacin 1997; Torelli, Monga, and Kaikati 2012). Scientific findings beyond marketing, and basic logic, suggest that spending fewer short-term dollars on debatable products and endeavors that damage health and involve existential threats—e.g., carbon-based energy, weapons and wars—while allocating those same dollars to advance renewable energy, health care and poverty reduction, would in the long run result in a healthier and safer world (Shultz 2016; Stiglitz and Bilmes 2008).

Ultimately, the topic of constructive engagement requires some comment about its connection to various institutions (and *institutional theory*) in bringing about marketing outcomes that are socially responsible. Institutional theory has its roots in multiple disciplines including sociology, economics and political science (Meyer and Rowan 1977; Scott 2008). Parsons (1960), an early and well-known institutional thinker, perceived organizations as “legitimated” by their bonds to other societal institutions in a variety of functional contexts. For instance, the earlier mentioned American Marketing Association and its *Statement on Ethics* (2004), is an example of a “helping” institution founded to aid industry practitioners. The FTC, the FCC and the Anti-Trust division of the DOJ are U.S. government “regulating” institutions that are charged with constraining unfair competition and leveling the playing field so that markets are “fairer” (Cohen 1995). Religious organizations are “cultural” institutions, whose precepts (e.g., the *Golden Rule*) help shape the boundaries of social expectations and establish behavioral limitations to dubious marketplace tactics (Murphy, Oberseder, and Laczniak 2013).

Marketers serious about SRM must recognize that their strategic options are both enabled and constrained by institutions; but regardless, working with institutions to improve societal effectiveness is an important part of engaging constructively. As economist Okun (1973) wrote in *Equality and Efficiency*, “the market needs a place and the market needs to be kept in its place” (p.viii). This disposition was similar to the countervailing-power idea that J. K. Galbraith (1952) first explored to temper the power of markets and their unfortunate consequences when they fail. Without countervailing institutions, it would not be in the market interests of an individual firm to make investments that protect the physical environment unless other competing firms were required to do the same.

Without institutional interventions, large firms—to capture monopolistic rents—would always be tempted to drive smaller, less powerful firms from the market. McMahon (1999; 2004) detailed the concept that it is social institutions that provide the power to make distributive justice “transformative”. Stated differently, when SRM is lacking, strong social institutions must provide the necessary remedies. CE, with its *macro* perspective, recognizes that cooperation with societal institutions is essential and inevitable—a point of limited discussion in too many analyses of micro-firm behaviors.

What can we conclude from our primer regarding the integration of CE with socially responsible marketing?

1. Constructive engagement is a state-of-mind that re-introduces macromarketing perspectives into the analysis of marketing issues. It consistently reminds managers that SRM has a *societal* mandate.
2. CE implicitly recognizes that many marketing actions create *externalities*, some of which are negative. When the costs of marketing induced “NegExs” are not internalized, society or a particular stakeholder group bears costs they do not want and/or did not anticipate. This creates “society vs. marketing” conflict.
3. A CE outlook warns against short-term thinking that leads to *social traps*; CE encourages an action-oriented disposition to marketing problems that breeds pro-active SRM.
4. The connection between socially responsible marketing and immediate positive financial outcomes is unclear; whether adopting a CE orientation has an incremental effect on profitability also may be uncertain; however, a CE mindset will help marketing practitioners to anticipate the costs of possible ethical disasters and to avert existential threats in the forms of societal degradation, environmental destruction, climate change, pandemics and apocalyptic warfare.
5. CE involves good-faith engagement with social institutions of various kinds in order to impel SRM actions that otherwise would be spurned as economically inefficient.

Toward a Doctrine of SRM: Observations and Considerations

This completes the formal explication of a *normative* definition of socially responsible marketing (SRM). The previously primitive elements of SRM—corporate citizenship (CC), stakeholder orientation (SO) and social/ecological sustainability (SES)—have been examined and made to be less primitive and more transparent (Rudner 1966). With the fundamental exposition of the social contract (SC) as the rationale for SRM, distributive justice (DJ) as an important ethical measure, and constructive engagement (CE) as its pragmatic compass, we have pulled together an integrated assembly of concepts that

should be crucial to understanding the nature of socially responsible marketing. This comprehensive definition of SRM, while firmly anchored in the literature, is unapologetically macro, normative-ethical and thus, *idealized*. Nevertheless, for scholars analyzing SRM behaviors, these elements ought to help portray a more complete picture of the dimensions that should and must be examined.

The SRM definition we have explicated is a normative social construct—an ideal. When such ideals are further examined, they have the capacity to affect social change. Moore (1963) observed that “. . . the disparity between the ideal and the actual provides the probability of innovation and the probability that some innovations, whether deliberate or by chance, will be acceptable” (p.80). In other words, the pieces of this *explicated* SRM definition (MacInnis 2011) will hopefully help reveal new vistas for SRM as they might affect the marketing system. As Yadav (2010) emphasized, we intend that our “logic of exploration” inspires a future “logic of discovery”. Thus, when marketers want to examine *if* a particular marketing practice is socially responsible or makes for a better world, they need to inspect that phenomenon in light of our normative definition of SRM, and with the fullness of its compositional elements. Academic marketing scholars also should compare the empirical reality of current micro marketing practices with the macro ideals of SRM when carrying out future streams of research.

This exercise of definitional explication does not yet yield a set of systematic, testable propositions about socially responsible marketing—a *theory* of SRM. However, assorted clues and blueprints about building a comprehensive doctrine of SRM can be gleaned from the “take-a-ways” listed after each element’s explication. How these pieces might integrate with one another deserves further thought and research exploration by marketing academics. Such collective exercises can lead to advancements about how basic SRM (i.e., CC + SO + SES) might be better measured and how these dimensions are inextricably moored to the zeitgeist of a *social contract*. Reflection upon whether the [marketing-society] social contract is properly functioning should also result in an appreciation of *distributive justice* as the moral measure of marketing and the cultivation of a macro mindset of *constructive engagement*. We are hopeful that our fellow marketing scholars will embrace the challenge of formulating and developing hypotheses about how SRM is enhanced or diminished.

Finally, since the idea of marketing *practitioners* embracing their work as a “*Calling*” to serve both customers and society was earlier addressed, it seems appropriate to end with a short homily about the professional and ethical obligations of marketing *academics*. As educators, Marketing (and other) academics have several interlocking responsibilities (AAUP 1995). These involve seeking and stating the truth about their subject of study; exercising scholarly competence to enhance the understanding of their discipline; and enlightening and motivating their students to hold before them the best ethical standards of their professions. For business academics, including marketing professors, accreditation standards such as those

of AACSB International (Mangan 2003) also require that ethics and social responsibility be treated *within* the business curriculum. This implies that education about social responsibility cannot be outsourced to other parts of the university. And indeed, as of late 2016, over 650 business programs in 85 different countries have committed to featuring socially responsive education in their coursework by agreeing to teach the PRME approach—principles of ethical, sustainable operations based on the previously discussed UN Global Compact and SDGs (Logsdon 2018). The urgent message here is that serious examinations of SRM cannot be shunned by marketing academics without a charge of dereliction of professional duty.

Almost 70 years ago, Vaile, Grether, and Cox (1952), presciently wrote about Marketing as a “transcendent social institution” and advised (p. v),

We believe that students must be given a clear understanding of why marketing exists as well as how it is carved out in the American [and presumably global] economy’s dynamic mixture of public and private enterprise, and that they must be able to come to some judgment as to how well it discharges both its social and economic tasks.

Recognizing and embracing a comprehensive definition of *Socially Responsible Marketing* (SRM) would appear to be a first step in that process.

Endnote

Our Methodology for Systematically Justifying a Definition

A: Elucidate the payoff of greater definitional explication

Segerstedt (1957) said it well, long ago: “When a word is defined, the meaning of the word is stated. Definitions of scientific terms consequently must be explanations of the meaning of terms . . . we must remember that a word has meaning only within a language system—people using that language behave in a certain way toward the object, as the object is perceived as equipped with certain properties” (p.3).

We cast this definitional development directly within the framework of MacInnis (2011), who, writing in the *Journal of Marketing*, helped classify the *types* of conceptual contributions in Marketing scholarship that advance knowledge. Our discussion of SRM falls squarely into her category of “Explicating,” whereby we will methodically describe the fundamental nature of *socially responsible marketing* (SRM)—its antecedents (i.e., the social contract), its processes (the three essential elements of SRM composition), a theoretical standard of assessment (i.e., distributive justice), and a pragmatic orientation for maintaining a SRM focus (i.e., constructive engagement). We concur with MacInnis (2011), who connected the delineation and explication of significant concepts in marketing to subsequent advances in research:

“Through delineation, complexities are realized that, in turn, require differentiation, which insures deeper thinking. Clarity from differentiation gives way to agreed-on views that are advocated and seem true. Subsequent thought may give way to a revised perspective, with summarized views on the revised perspective giving way to an integrated perspective [and] . . . the identification of novel ideas (p.152)”.

B: Specify the theoretical richness of an improved nominal definition

Following Hunt (1991) and other philosophers of science (Rudner 1966), this development of theory unfolds with a literature-rooted “nominal” definition of SRM that might ultimately lend its conception to operationalization, axiom-formation and empirical testability. Our nominal definition consists of a *definiendum* (in this instance, the main term at focus, “socially responsible marketing” or SRM) and also the *definiens*—its “rules of replacement”—that is, the assortment of other key elements, which if exchanged for the *definiendum*, would maintain the truth value of the term at focus. In our exposition, the elements of *corporate citizenship* (CC), *stakeholder orientation* (SO) and *social/environmental sustainability* (SES) will comprise the basic essence of the *definiens*.

For academic marketers trying to come to grips with the question of *whether* particular categories of marketing practice serve the greater good, a more sophisticated understanding of what dimensions constitute socially responsible marketing seems necessary. As Hempel (1952, p.1) wrote about concept development in social science: “The growth of a scientific discipline . . . always brings with it the development of a system of specialized, more or less abstract, concepts and corresponding technical terminology.” Thus, what needs to be ascertained about whether various practices *in marketing* are responsibly contributing to a better, more ethical world is an enhanced, detailed and theoretically defensible definition of SRM that circumscribes its basic nature. As philosopher of science Rudner (1966) has observed, while definitional systems alone are *not* testable theories, clarifying the *primitive* element that comprise definitions “has probably been an important criterion of the acceptability of theories throughout the history of science” (p.30).

C. Delineate the elements essential to a comprehensive definition of SRM

Concept richness depends on specifying properties or characteristics that are useful, relatively complete and that eventually will aid the operationalization of phenomena under scrutiny (Forcese and Richer 1973; Hunt 1991). To this end, in addition to the three aforementioned *definiens* elements, our explication of SRM also will include (a) its theoretical justification (i.e., the *social contract*), (b) a normative-ethical standard for its evaluation (i.e., *distributive justice*) and, (c) an elaboration of how socially responsible marketing is pragmatically advanced from a Macromarketing standpoint (i.e., by adopting

constructive engagement). These additions greatly strengthen our proposed definition of SRM by supplying its rationale, the rules to assess it and a recommended protocol to improve it.

Returning to MacInnis (2011), “good” conceptual papers in Marketing are those which explicate and delineate—that is, “consider factors that circumscribe the entity’s study or moderating conditions that may affect it” (p. 144). Such contributions, use logical ways of thinking to parse what is micro, what is macro, what is related, what is not, and what is holistic or particularistic (p. 139).

D. Show how the definitional components portray a “bigger picture” and improved understanding of SRM

It should be appreciated that adopting a *normative* point of reference in deciphering social phenomena is *not* advocacy but rather a required step to explore the question of *what* constitutes SRM for helping shape a “fairer” and more just society. It should be recognized that the idea of amending marketing practice to make it more responsible is itself a *moral* claim that necessitates a normative standard of evaluation (Laczniak and Murphy 2018). Thus, the definition of SRM that is posited below is *intentionally* idealized and aspirational. Writing about the theory building process, Berger and Luckmann (1967) have asserted that questions concerning what fully constitutes a social science construct (such as SRM) must surely rest on the “values” and the “value-laden dimensions of its nature” as much as what might be established via empirical study. Relatedly, Searle (1964) has observed that when it comes to larger, institutional (or public policy) level concepts, the normative (i.e., ideal) and the positive (i.e., descriptive/empirical) are necessarily linked in order to understand how the world *does* work in comparison with how society (or societies) maintains it *ought* to work (Hunt 1976; 1978).

E. Position the definitional postulation in the context of extant marketing theory

The notion of SRM that we endorse embodies several “metatheory” attributes argued to be important (cf. Kumar 2017; Sheth, Gardner, and Garrett 1988). In *Marketing Theory*, Sheth, Gardner, and Garrett (1988, pp. 29-33) advocate looking at certain key characteristics when analyzing theoretical marketing frameworks; accordingly and consistent with Sheth et al., the definition of SRM explicated in this paper is particularized in a *structured* fashion, improving its potential to enhance future *testability* and also, (via our commentaries) demonstrates a *richness* in its range of application to SRM.

This definition of SRM is exceptionally robust because it identifies the theoretical anchor of SRM as the social contract (SC), and its three elements—corporate citizenship (CC), stakeholder orientation (SO) and social/environmental sustainability (SES—as a “meaningful” and plausibly complete dictionary of normative SRM. In addition, distributive justice (DJ) is put forward as a pertinent ethical standard of assessment; constructive engagement (CE) is ventured as the protocol for keeping a

SRM focus. *Explicating and justifying* a definition of SRM thus becomes the essential step of theory-in-formation with respect to advancing and understanding a doctrine of SRM.

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