Abstract
Though flattered by the invitation to comment on Laczniak and Shultz’s seminal piece, the author did not feel qualified to evaluate either the specifics of the arguments advanced or the conclusions reached. What they said was essentially accepted as a given though the case was made for an accompanying, more reader friendly version of their material. That being so, and after some minor editorial observations are made, much of the remainder of this Commentary focuses on two related issues that seemed especially relevant: (1) Socially Responsible Marketing’s role, along with that of Socially Responsible Consumption and Socially Responsible Public policy, both in and of themselves and within a micromarketing Utopia and (2) the fact that after years of relative neglect the concept of macromarketing management seems finally on its way to being resurrected. Four examples of how the complexities of Socially Responsible Marketing could be highlighted using a controversies approach are then presented.

Keywords
socially responsible marketing, socially responsible consumption, socially responsible public policy, macromarketing management, distributive justice metrics

Reflections on a Long Needed Seminal Contribution
It was flattering to be invited to write this Commentary on Gene and Cliff’s “breakthrough” conceptual piece (Laczniak and Shultz 2021) on Socially Responsible Marketing (SRM). It was even more flattering to be publicly acknowledged by the authors for what were really relatively minor observations and suggestions on an earlier version of this paper. And while I don’t recall doing so, I might well have, and certainly should have, insisted that in this case a considerably longer than usual paper was more than justified. It takes time to spell out how one can bring intellectual order to any cluttered academic topic and Socially Responsible Marketing was previously one such topic.

Though I obviously approve of both what the authors attempted to do and how they did it, I must confess I do not know enough about the underlying disciplines on which they have drawn—institutional economics and moral philosophy—to take issue with the conceptual framework that underlies their analysis or their conclusions. I must leave any major “head on” intellectual evaluation to others far more qualified than I to challenge, or endorse, either the authors’ philosophical foundation or the structure they built on that foundation. Prior to my reading any such assessments, especially the ones published alongside in this special section, and given my high opinion of Laczniak and Shultz, I am prepared at this time to accept with just a few reservations all that they have said and set forth as regards Socially Responsible Marketing.

But whatever differences of opinion that might exist among others as regards the arguments advanced, I think all concerned would recognize this paper as, first and foremost, an incredibly informative piece of research upon which others can, should and will build. The authors provide readers with a wide ranging and most useful, albeit intellectually challenging, summary immersion in each of the components of their approach to defining Socially Responsible Marketing.

There are some editorial comments related to specifics I can make but they are by no means earth shaking observations. First and foremost, it should be noted that Howard (1957) and McCarthy (1960) preceded Kotler (1967) as important textbook authors during the period when academic marketing shifted from a macro “Marketing in the American Economy” (Vaile, Grether, and Cox 1952) focus to an uncontrollable context, 4Ps and target marketing one. I, and I believe others as well, would also have liked a simplifying schematic that would help readers visualize, step by step what was being advocated as the authors set out their approach. I also believe Layton and Domegan (2021) have made it clear that the term Aggregate Provisioning (rather than Aggregate Marketing) System would now be a more appropriate one. The distinction

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being made is not a trivial one. Much of what the members of any society require is provided by prescriptive, “top down” systems rather than through market exchange. These are the only observations I consider worth making as a narrowly focused manuscript assessor.

However, I think a very strong case could be made for the authors now preparing what some decades ago would have been known as a “Reader’s Digest” version of their paper, one that spends less time on exploring the intellectual origins of the position taken but rather limits itself to presenting their underlying SRM formulation in “textbook” rather than “learned journal” English. The authors have already provided the building blocks for such a version in their numbered summaries of what they obviously consider the key intellectual “take homes” from each section. That being so, repackaging in an easier to read “pop” version would not be that difficult and would meet a real need. And who better than the original authors to do this repackaging?

My remaining comments will fall into two major categories. The first will deal with the “add on” or “drill into” matters that came to mind as I first read, and then slowly reread, a paper which both required and more than deserved that much attention. The issues in question are ones I have labeled, perhaps too glibly, “Toward Macromarketing Utopia?” and “Resurrecting Macromarketing Management?” This will be followed by a brief discussion of how SRM could be taught within currently offered marketing courses using short controversy-generating scenarios.

Toward Macromarketing Utopia?

As suggested above, I have accepted the approach to defining and clarifying the topic of Socially Responsible Marketing laid out by Laczniak and Shultz. Sometimes my reaction was a quiet nod of agreement as I kept reading, while on other occasions an expression of admiration for a proposed formulation or statement that threw new light on long-standing issues. (That admiration was from time to time accompanied by a sense of personal disappointment that I had not earlier come to the same conclusion.) Nevertheless, I ended my reading with the feeling that, while the authors had delivered all they promised and then some, I still needed more. What I now eagerly await is a correspondingly perceptive discussion, either by the same authors or others, of an obviously related issue of at least equivalent importance to SRM: the nature of Socially Responsible Consumption (SRC).

The authors pay their respects in the manuscript to the entire set of the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals and, more specifically and in much greater detail to Goal 12, “Sustainable Production AND (capitals added) Consumption” (United Nations 2015). Yet their focus, understandably, is almost exclusively on the seller or supply side of provisioning or, in their terms, the Aggregate Marketing System. What would an equivalent examination of SRC involve? What is that concept’s intellectual origins? What would be its key components? Would a central tenet of Socially Responsible Consumption have to be Deconsumption or “doing more with less”? Is “constructive engagement” a term that has any relevance either to individual or, for that matter, communal or even national acts of consumption? To what extent is it true that an exclusive marketer focus on consumer wants and needs at the expense of everything else is another form, a very undesirable form, of Marketing Myopia (Smith, Drumwright, and Gentile 2010)?

Further, is there an equally important third element that also deserves attention, one that might be called Socially Responsible Public Policy (SRPP)? What would constitute SRPP is, of course, an even far more controversial topic than either SRM or SRC, one involving a wide range of issues over which opposing political parties take directly contrasting positions and elections are periodically fought. On the other hand, I personally heard Cliff Shultz once include public policy as a fourth definitional component of macromarketing, along with our now long-sacrosanct focus on markets, marketing and society. But what SRPP means in a macromarketing context still remains to be explored. What, for example, are the now so often discussed post-Covid “Build Back Better” policy options that marketers should most strongly support? Are there any they should consider of less importance?

This line of thought then led to what in retrospect seemed an inevitable final question. What would a truly Utopian macromarketing society be like? Would all that we might hope for, in terms of the universal acceptance of concepts like SRM, SRC and SRPP be a characteristic of such a utopian society? Could such a society really exist or is it rather a conceptual ideal toward which we should all strive? If the latter, how should and could we measure progress in that direction? Does Nordic capitalism (Kotler 2020) provide us with a route to a, more or less, free market macromarketing Utopia? Are there any other routes that should instead be followed? Finally, how far along that road would efforts at “Better Marketing for a Better World” bring us?

One of the requirements of “marching toward Utopia” or “Better World Thinking” is, of course, having some way of telling both how fast you are going and how far you have already gone. Laczniak and Shultz do a brilliant job of exploring this issue toward the end of a seminal discussion of Distributive Justice, one I would make required reading, perhaps presented as a free-standing document in its own right, for all prospective managers.

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. (Laczniak and Shultz 2021, p. 217)
The above summarizes the Lacznia and Shultz position as far as Distributive Justice metrics are concerned. Though the measuring techniques mentioned above are earlier discussed in a little more detail, the specifics of how exactly one would use them in any given case are, understandably, left to be learned from another source. It is worth noting, however, that while Socially Responsible Marketing is primarily a micro activity, corporations considered individually, the most generally used metric that Lacznia and Shultz discuss, Quality-of Life, is very definitely a macro, “the nation as a whole”, measure. The same seems likely to be true as well of Socially Responsible Consumption with the focus being on aggregate reductions and would certainly be the case whenever Socially Responsible Public Policy initiatives are being evaluated.

Resurrecting Macromarketing Management?

Another matter I pondered as I read this seminal piece is whether the concept of Socially Responsible Marketing bore any relationship to the much older, but only occasionally discussed, concept of Macromarketing Management. And if it does, how so? Could all those making SRM decisions be properly characterized as macromarketing managers?

The concept of macromarketing management was aggressively championed by Jay Zif in a paper published in the Journal of Marketing (Zif 1980). This was a revised version of what he had presented in 1979 at the Fourth Annual Macromarketing Seminar. Zif argues throughout his paper that, contrary to then prevailing macromarketing thought, there was indeed such a thing as macromarketing management. He noted that Bartels and Jenkins (1977) had earlier proposed a concept of macromarketing management, but theirs had been restricted to the administration and enforcement of laws and to the regulation of marketing behavior. Zif accepted no such limitation in his concept of macromarketing management. He argued, rather, that managing any large national or international corporation involves a degree of macromarketing management, this because all such organizations have, due to their size, a very significant societal impact.

Zif’s paper had a very limited intellectual impact both immediately and ever since. Both those of the micro persuasion and macro true believers then and now have focused their research and publication efforts elsewhere. The only immediate response to Zif on the published record was the abstract of a paper, but not the paper itself, written by Philip D. White. It appeared, along with numerous other abstracts of unpublished papers, in 1981, in the second issue of the Journal of Macromarketing (White 1981). Though long overlooked, White’s comments seem quite perceptive in their own right and relevant as well to contemporary macromarketing.

This paper challenges the criterion of size of firm as a basis for determining whether it is engaged in macromarketing management. Instead, it argues for the use of the consequences of managers’ actions for society and trade-off between these consequences. It also argues for using the marketing system, including all marketing-related transactions, as part of the broader social system on which the marketing system impacts. Linking the impacts dimension helps to explain the source of their influence on the social system. These impacts can be further examined from positive or normative viewpoints. The social system also impacts on the marketing system via the sanction power of marketing publics. (White 1981, p. 78)

There is subsequent mention of macromarketing management in a far better-known Journal of Macromarketing editorial Bob Nason wrote shortly after having been appointed that journal’s third editor (Nason 1988). Though Nason’s focus in this brief note was on the difference between micromarketing and macromarketing, he also commented on Zif’s paper. However, the example Nason cited, that of a Marketing Board, a common British Commonwealth governmental entity, was much more in line with the limited regulatory approach to macromarketing management that Bartels and Jenkins had taken a decade earlier.

More recently, there has been renewed interest in the relationship between macromarketing and marketing management. Three treatments of this topic seem especially worthy of mention. One finds, first of all, Cliff Shultz in a further development of the “constructive engagement” concept (Shultz 2007) stressing the importance of actively involving marketing managers in the process.

The public has good reasons to encourage macromarketing, but managerial considerations also support a macromarketing orientation (Zif 1980). … Macro must meld with micro (i.e., managerial marketing) if only for the purpose of understanding that micro decisions have huge impacts on macro interests. … Moreover, including micro or managerial orientations creates opportunities to persuade managers to view their vested interests in desirable macro outcomes. (Shultz 2007, pp. 297–298)

A few years later, Ben Wooliscroft was among a team of authors who persuasively argued for marketing management to be redefined so that the firm’s Market Orientation (MO) would become instead a Sustainable Market Orientation (SMO) (Mitchell, Wooliscroft, and Higham 2010). In fact, though not in name, the authors were making a strong case for marketing management as a function incorporating a very significant macromarketing dimension.

Most relevant, however, was the active promotion of the term “managerial macromarketing” by Mark Peterson in his book, Sustainable Business: a Macromarketing Approach (Peterson 2013). This volume was the closest thing to a macromarketing textbook that had been published in thirty-five years. It was written in a way that encouraged managers to draw repeatedly from the macromarketing literature as they strove to adjust to and manage within a changing world.

Given their then recent contributions to the topic, Shultz, Wooliscroft and Peterson were all invited, as were two older contemporaries, Michael Baker and Roger Layton, to speak at the two sessions of the 2014 Macromarketing Conference put together under the track heading, “Revisiting Macromarketing
Management: Is the View Worth the Trip? The papers they presented are a matter of public record as is the related conference presentation which I, the track chair, made in association with a then new, though now frequent collaborator, Christine Domegan (Shapiro and Domegan 2014). More recently, and drawing upon the second edition of his text (Peterson 2021a), Mark Peterson has developed his concept of “managerial macromarketing” (Peterson 2021b).

That brings us back to this Laczniak and Shultz paper. Could their approach with its heavy emphasis on ethical behavior now be utilized to further develop “macromarketing management” (or if you prefer, “managerial macromarketing”? Might there also be some reason when doing so to pay renewed attention to those comments by Phil White forty plus years ago regarding the linkage between the marketing system and the broader social system?

Using a Controversies Approach to Teach SRM

This author is currently part of a team actively promoting the use of a “controversies” approach to develop a fuller student appreciation of macromarketing issues and concerns (Shapiro et al. 2021; Watson et al. 2022). Students are first presented with a variety of options on how a particular matter should be handled or resolved. They then either choose or are assigned the option they must defend, orally, in written form, or both. Such teams can also be charged with critiquing the written submission of another team promoting an alternate course of action. Appearing below are four controversies that would, along with the previously recommended “pop version” of their article, help provide students with a fuller appreciation of Laczniak and Shultz’s seminal piece on SRM.

Do Good, but at a Substantial Cost to the Firm?

Your employer, Superior Stuff, is one of a number of highly competitive suppliers selling industrial equipment to firms that subsequently manufacture items that, because of the methods of production currently used in your industry, generate significant amounts of air pollutants. However, research scientists working for Superior have developed new production processes that could all but eliminate these pollutants. Unfortunately, this new process would double the costs of production for products whose price, because of competition, cannot be raised. Selling at that same price will reduce corporate profits, stockholder dividends and executive compensation. There is no reason to believe the firm’s competitors are aware of the new process and right now it is not known if government would require those competitors to adopt it even if they did know how.

The company must choose among the following courses of action. Which one would you choose? Why is this a better choice than the other options?

1) Keep the new process “on the shelf” for now and keep producing in the usual manner. However, be ready to introduce the new way in case things change.
2) Adopt the new process because, quite simply, it is the right thing to do even if it costs the firm a significant amount of money.
3) Launch a second line of products using the new process with items so produced being priced at a level that provides Superior with the same profit margin and give customers the choice.
4) Make public the specifics of the new approach providing enough detail so competitors could adopt it if they wished.
5) Meet with government in hopes that use of the new process could be required of all those firms competing in your industry. Do nothing if this doesn’t happen.

What Should Life-Saving Pharmaceuticals Cost in the Developing World?

Patent protection is generally considered a necessary component of any effective marketing system, but what if the property rights being protected relate to the sale of life-saving drugs? Such drugs are generally priced too high for consumers and governments in relatively poor countries. Because of that fact, lives are being lost that could have been saved. What should be done about this problem? After considering the questions below, spell out the laws, policies or guidelines that should be established in this area. In doing so, be sure to make clear both why your chosen approach is better than some of the others being considered and what are the risks involved in doing what you propose.

1) Should pharmaceutical firms be required to charge much less for life saving drugs sold in such countries than they do when selling the same product in North America or Europe?
2) Should Western governments or private philanthropists be expected to compensate drug firms for the revenue lost when they do charge much less in poorer countries?
3) Alternately, should generic drug manufacturers serving the third world be allowed, or even encouraged, to ignore the patents held by the firms that originally developed these drugs?
4) Should “price controls” be placed on life-saving pharmaceuticals wherever in the world they might be sold?
5) If prices are controlled or patents ignored, will major pharmaceutical firms be as willing to undertake the very costly, and often unsuccessful, development of new, potentially life saving drugs?

How Much is Enough Customer Privacy?

Nile Distributing has become a surprising successful online competitor of Amazon.com. Recently, Magnum Enterprises,
whose products account for a very large proportion of Nile’s total sales, has offered to purchase, for its own use and at a very attractive price, all of the information Nile has in its customer base. This would include, in addition to all names and addresses, information on every thing that was purchased from any firm whose products are available through Nile. When they were forwarded this offer, Nile’s lawyers said that selling such information would be legal. Nevertheless, there is a real difference of opinion within the firm as to whether Nile should do that. Which of the following courses of action do you recommend Nile follow? Which seem entirely unacceptable?

1) Sell Magnum every thing it wants. After all they are both a major customer of ours and a very reputable firm. What real harm would be done?
2) Agree to sell them all the information they want but only on customers who have previously purchased Magnum products through Nile.
3) Agree to provide the requested information on all customers except those who act to “opt out” when informed of this possibility.
4) Agree to furnish all the requested information but only on those customers who acted to “opt in” after being informed of this possibility.
5) As politely as possible, turn down this request from one of your largest customers because Nile agreeing to sell such information would be Socially Irresponsible Marketing.

Restricting Interests with Respect to Corporate Social Responsibility

The controversy examples illustrate how issues can be used to facilitate student appreciation of the complexities of Socially Responsible Marketing. They also suggest that on many occasions SRM issues are hard to separate either from their Corporate Social Responsibility context or from associated Socially Responsible Consumption and Socially Responsible Public Policy dimensions. Life is complex and macro requires, above all else, “Big Picture” thinking. Laczniak and Shultz have provided us with the definitive exploration of one dimension of that bigger picture. As indicated earlier, theirs has been a major contribution but more remains to be done. We still need additional work on measuring SRM metrics at both the micro and the macro level and, to complete the task at hand, explorations as definitive as theirs of both Socially Responsible Consumption and Socially Responsible Public Policy, efforts which would also include appropriate measuring metrics in these equally important areas.

Reducing Poverty, but at the Expense of Even Greater Income Inequality?

Recent years have seen a steady increase in income inequality throughout the developed world. Wealth is becoming increasingly concentrated in the hands of the top one percent of the population. CEO salaries now are also many times greater than that of the average worker than was previously the case. Many believe action should be taken to reduce the currently existing degree of income inequality. But what if a new form of capitalism was developed that, while it further contributed to income inequality, also significantly improved the average wage level and all but eliminated poverty? Yes, the very rich would get richer still but middle- and lower-income people would be much better off. Would you as a citizen favor laws being changed to make introducing such a system possible?

1) Yes, we should be primarily concerned with helping poor and working-class people get ahead even if this means the already rich get even richer.
2) Yes, but only if in addition the government also introduces an annual wealth tax of 1% on all personal assets of over $10,000,000 and closes other existing tax loopholes.
3) None of the above. Instead, I believe that __________________________.

Final Thoughts

The controversy examples illustrate how issues can be used to facilitate student appreciation of the complexities of Socially Responsible Marketing. They also suggest that on many occasions SRM issues are hard to separate either from their Corporate Social Responsibility context or from associated Socially Responsible Consumption and Socially Responsible Public Policy dimensions. Life is complex and macro requires, above all else, “Big Picture” thinking. Laczniak and Shultz have provided us with the definitive exploration of one dimension of that bigger picture. As indicated earlier, theirs has been a major contribution but more remains to be done. We still need additional work on measuring SRM metrics at both the micro and the macro level and, to complete the task at hand, explorations as definitive as theirs of both Socially Responsible Consumption and Socially Responsible Public Policy, efforts which would also include appropriate measuring metrics in these equally important areas.

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