Marketing as Constructive Engagement

Clifford J. Shultz, II*

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*Clifford J. Shultz, II, is Professor and Marley Foundation Chair at the Arizona State University Morrison School of Agribusiness and Resource Management, and is Editor of the Journal of Macromarketing; 480 727 1242 (fax 1961); atcjs@asu.edu. Thanks are owed to Roger Dickinson, Sanford Grossbart, Greg Gundlach, Morris Holbrook, Tony Pecotich, Stan Shapiro, Bill Wilkie and the anonymous reviewers for thoughtful comments on earlier iterations of this article. The author acknowledges the support of the Marley Foundation. Readers should contact the author for an unabridged iteration.
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Abstract

The purpose of this essay is to provoke a more comprehensive, historically accurate, and meaningful definition of marketing. Toward that outcome a framework for marketing is introduced. That framework argues for constructive engagement with a complex, conflicted, and increasingly interdependent world in which marketing can and should play an important role. It offers a new synthesis commensurate with ideals generally espoused in macromarketing. An illustration based on longitudinal study of Vietnam is shared, with implications for current global affairs and with new directions for meaningful marketing research and practice.

Key words: Macromarketing, Constructive Engagement, Marketing Definition
Marketing as Constructive Engagement

The two most recent definitions of marketing, as posited by thoughtful members of the AMA in 2004 and 2007, have generated considerable discussion about the nature, scope and foci of marketing. The 2004 definition was not fully embraced by the AMA membership, nor has it been uniformly adopted by other marketing organizations and associations around the world, where some of the most compelling marketing activity now unfolds; hence the proposed 2007 revised definition. My own take on both definitions -- while believing they are useful to the practice of marketing management, with some orientation to societal issues -- is that they are too microscopic, do not coincide particularly well with historical interpretations of marketing, and ultimately (tragically?) limit the potential impact of marketing on the most pressing challenges that confront us. In this essay, therefore, I briefly remind readers of some historical roots and foci of marketing, while introducing a conceivable alternative definition, and a (Macro)Marketing Synthesis for Constructive Engagement. A brief application of this Synthesis is provided, using historical and evolving US-Vietnam relations, and Nike’s involvement in Vietnam. I conclude with some discussion of broader implications.

If one accepts the premise that the current definition is too microscopic, one must also conclude that it is not sufficiently macroscopic. But what exactly does it mean to orient toward (macro)marketing? At the request of Greg Gundlach, Lauren Block and Bill Wilkie, I spent a substantial amount of time trying to answer that question, as I prepared to write a chapter on

1 For anyone who missed them: “Marketing is an organizational function and a set of processes for creating, communicating and delivering value to customers and for managing customer relationships in ways that benefit the organization and its stakeholders (2004);” “Marketing is the activity, conducted by organizations and individuals, that operates through a set of institutions and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging market offerings that have value for customers, clients, marketers, and society at large (2007).” This article furthermore was largely written prior to the wide dissemination of the most recent definition, and while that definition is more in line with ideas expressed here, the author still believes the latest definition limits marketing’s potential impact and falls short of other potentially more macro and societal-centric definitions, for reasons articulated in the text.
“Macromarketing” for their new book, *Explorations of Marketing in Society* (2007). It soon became apparent that the long history of markets and marketing has been a largely macromarketing narrative; only recently has marketing become more micro and perhaps even atomistic (see also, for example, Wilkie and Moore 1999, 2003, 2006). This observation begs other questions. For example, why does (macro)marketing include the prefix “macro”? Why does the current definition shared by the AMA not include “micro”? Given marketing’s roots and its long history, shouldn’t macromarketing be viewed simply as marketing; at the very least, shouldn’t any definition of marketing more clearly delineate a macro agenda? In light of possible answers to those questions, and with consideration for the systemically complex and global challenges before us, one plausible and useful definition of marketing might read:

> Marketing is a form of constructive engagement; a societal function and a systemic set of processes for creating, communicating, and delivering value to customers and for managing customer and societal relationships in ways that benefit local and global stakeholders of these processes.

My rationale for this alternative definition, or some similarly expansive definition, follows.

**(Macro)Marketing**

As suggested above, the ideas of the (macro)marketing discipline, if not necessarily the name, have existed for Millennia. Indeed, *marketing* essentially seemed to be what many scholars would now largely view as *macromarketing*. At this juncture, it might be helpful to address briefly the alleged micro-macro dichotomy. First, I do not believe a dichotomy actually

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2 Many scholars interestingly have struggled and still struggle to define macromarketing. In the previously cited chapter I shared several popular definitions (e.g., Bartels and Jenkins 1977; Fisk 1981; Hunt 1981; Dixon 1979; Shawver and Nickels 1979; Meade and Nason 1991), as well as perspectives on historical development of the field and its formative conceptualizations (e.g., Alderson 1957; Bartels 1965; Breyer 1934; Ely 1903; Fisk 1967; Grether and Holloway 1967; Holloway and Hancock 1964; Jones and Moniesen 1990; Schmupeter 1934; Shaw 1916; Sheth and Gardner 1982; Slater 1968; Vaile, Grether and Cox 1952. Westling 1967; Wilkie and Moore 1999; 2003). I also included some interpretations and literature beyond marketing (e.g., Danziger and Gillingham 2004; McMillan 2002; Polo 1958; Thucydides 1972 (circa 431–424 B.C)).
exists – precisely because all micromarketing activities occur within and thus derive meaning from some larger marketing system (see also for example, Hunt 1981; Lusch 2006) – though the extent of broadly meaningful impact from any particular marketing activity could be reasonably debated. Therefore, I have deliberately chosen to use the word “Marketing” rather than “Macromarketing” in the title of this paper, and – to reinforce some shortcomings of the current definition – readers will note that I occasionally use the parenthetical attachment “(macro)” prior to “marketing.”

So, while “macromarketing” is a relatively recent academic discipline and remains a somewhat nebulous construct, the essence of markets and marketing and their impact on societal welfare are old as humanity. Indeed, our species perhaps should be described as Homo Marketus (Shultz 2005). We are the marketing animal. From the moment our ancestors crawled from the primal ooze and learned that cooperation and division-of-labor would abet survival, markets and marketing soon thereafter must have been integral to the processes of societal development. Entire societies and civilizations were organized accordingly. From the Fertile Crescent to Madison Avenue we have been marketing, for better and worse, ever since. This long history is not adequately represented in the current definition – suggesting that the definition may remain too focused on “micromarketing,” despite the inclusion of “and society at large” at its end.

(Macro)marketing in a World of Dilemmas

Readers will recall that (macro)marketing fundamentally is concerned with the context of market(ing) problems and with solutions vis-à-vis the welfare of the stakeholders of a marketing system or systems over time; the system in which marketers function moreover is increasingly

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3 I thought I had cleverly coined this term and also the less elegant, Homo Marketicus, but a quick Google search revealed several references to “him” (us), including entries in French, Polish and Russian.
global, thus rendering everyone a stakeholder. The suggestion of a temporal dimension of this articulation draws attention to social traps: we know that marketers and consumers often engage in selfish activities that provide short-term benefits, sometimes with long-term harmful consequences to others and, tragically, even to themselves (e.g., Fisk 1981; Hardin 1968; Nason 2006; Shultz and Holbrook 1999). Thus, at least two (macro)marketing objectives are (1) to examine tradeoffs required to overcome the sirens’ song of immediate gratification; (2) to optimize outcomes for the largest number of stakeholders in a marketing system – not only now, but also for future generations.

Distillation of the broad and varied literature reveals (macro)marketing as an amalgam of markets, marketing practices, and marketing systems; aggregations in the forms of units, consumers, firms, governments or other organizations, societies, regions, countries, and global alliances; social traps and commons dilemmas; and, now, sub-specializations that address competition and markets, development, ethics or distributive justice, global policy, the environment, history, quality of life, and relevant ideas from myriad other disciplines. Upon reflection, “macro” may understate the orientation; perhaps Übermarketing is more fitting. Nevertheless, comprehensive, eclectic, and inclusive conceptualizations, methods, practices, and definitions are useful in the complex world of dilemmas in which Homo Marketus now dominates.

Consider a brief list of public policy topics relevant to marketing: globalization; environmentalism; energy; trafficking of weapons, people, drugs, and nuclear materials; cartels and malevolent alliances; religious and cultural intolerance; intellectual property rights; economic transition and/or development; public health crises (e.g., poverty, malnutrition,

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4 The purpose of this essay is not to recount the origin, evolution, foci and various definitions of the academic field of macromarketing; readers interested in those topics are directed to the review and discussion in Shultz (2007).
contaminated water, homelessness, malaria, and pandemics such as HIV/AIDS, avian flu, cholera, and ebola); genetic engineering; societal angst and anomie; historical lessons (both learned and not learned); poor/despotic governance; and war. These topics are replete with dilemmas. Macromarketers understand that many of these topics interact with other forces; they are parts of broader systems and systemic failures. They require difficult choices. One choice is a decision to engage them -- and factors that predict them -- in our scholarship and practice, with all the richness that is (macro)marketing.

In a finite global biosphere shaped by political and economic interests, all of us are affected by one or more of the aforementioned problems. Governments, managers, and citizen-consumers wittingly or unwittingly face dilemmas and regularly make choices that compound or help to ameliorate them (see also Hunt and Vitell 2006). The current definition of marketing does not readily draw our attention to them; yet, ironically, failure to engage them without the eclectic toolkit of (macro)marketing may lead to disastrous results for Homo Marketus. The following text offers a macromarketing synthesis as one possible framework to re-orient marketing activities toward broader societal outcomes, to the benefit of multiple global stakeholders of markets, marketing, and policies that affect and are affected by them.

**A Macromarketing Synthesis**

The Synthesis shared here requires us to envision marketing beyond the current definition; that is, to construe marketing as constructive engagement. Here, I borrow from the literature in law and diplomacy (e.g., Forcèse 2002) and social psychology (e.g., International Center for Cooperation and Conflict Resolution 2006). The theory and subsequent policy of constructive engagement argue for pro-social interactions between individuals, groups, firms, communities, and/or nations that are enmeshed in polarized and frequently intractable or
destructive conflicts. Parties to the conflict can clash over any number of issues, though I submit that conflicts typically arise over resources and their management – who controls them, how and where they are marketed and consumed, and the extent to which some super-ordinate authority justifies the chosen methods for marketing, consumption, and control. Constructive engagement, by definition, rules out ostracism and destructive engagement. Conversely, negotiation, cooperation, and exchange are important components to its process. Forsese (p. 3) suggests that policy decisions and marketing activities must be “responsible” if they are to be truly constructive; that there are costs attached to parties who violate the generally agreed upon tenets intended to make engagement constructive. The quest for responsibility can be viewed as an effort to meld material interest and moral principle, with a broader objective to abet the largest number of stakeholders in the process of engagement. Constructive engagement furthermore is a step toward eliminating or at least reducing the allocation of mind-numbingly large sums of money for war-expenditures and the concomitant opportunity costs to pro-social endeavors (e.g., Bilmes and Stiglitz 2006; Documents Center 2006).

Interestingly, constructive engagement parallels sentiments espoused by macromarketers. For example, Alderson (1965), Layton and Grossbart (2006), and Shultz et al. (2005) contend that trade, commerce, and mutual prosperity facilitate peace and broader societal welfare. Arndt (1981) offers a political economy framework for examining marketing systems; a concentration on societal institutions and the balancing of politics, hierarchies and markets, and their stakeholders. Taylor and Omura (1994), building on Arndt’s (1981) work, suggest that the efficacy of engagement should be assessed using several criteria, including behavioral interdiction, historical perspectives, apoliticalness, non-universality, and internal and external forces.
The preceding body of work from several disciplines provides an impetus for a possible synthesis of ideas and practices. The Figure below illustrates a plausible Macromarketing Synthesis for Constructive Engagement in a Global Marketing System. It certainly is not intended to be exhaustive, given the extraordinary complexities of history, culture, politics, people, and the innumerable filters through which we view them. Nor is it intended to serve as a linear protocol for decision making. Rather it is presented here simply to demonstrate the relevance of macromarketing and its academic sub-specializations to seemingly intractable dilemmas relevant to the survival or possible demise of *Homo Marketus*. I use the dilemma of war vs. constructive engagement to illustrate one possible application of a Macromarketing Synthesis. War is of course an extreme example, inherently destructive, with global high-stakes repercussions for marketers and citizen-consumers. Note too that many other societal problems listed above degrade humanity and exacerbate tensions and thus foment hostilities that can spiral into war, causing still more destruction and suffering.
Political Considerations

The model generally flows from top to bottom. The United States and Vietnam are provided as examples for “External Stakeholders” and “Country,” respectively. Though they are used to make key points, the framework is applicable to relationships among other countries, or among factions and organizations within countries. Afghanistan, Sudan, India, Pakistan, the Koreas, the Caucasus, Sri Lanka, and other actual or potential flashpoints certainly also capture attention. I considered focusing only on the Iraq War and stakeholders of it throughout the Mid
East and beyond, especially in light of current events and an earlier reference to marketing’s possible emergence in the Fertile Crescent (artifacts of which are found in present-day Iraq), but the Vietnam War – unlike the Iraq war at this moment in time – provides tangible lessons about macromarketing’s role in recovery, peace, and prosperity.

Interpretation for most readers will begin from the perspective of external stakeholders and their options for engagement with the foreign country; Vietnamese of course would begin their interpretation more toward the center of the model. Isolation, ignorance, antipathy, myopia, historical clashes, extant conflict, or other factors could give pause to countries about ways to engage each other. This certainly was the case in US-Vietnam relations for more than half a century (e.g., Fitzgerald 1972; Karnow 1997; Shultz, Dapice, Pecotich, and Doan 2006). Among many external stakeholders are the American government, companies, NGOs, and citizens of the US; other external stakeholders include countries bordering Vietnam, and in fact the ripple effect of American involvement in Vietnam was/is felt globally.

The Vietnam War or the American War, as Vietnamese call it, was itself a systemically complex historical event. Nuanced analysis reveals that it was several conflicts. In some ways, it was the continuation of numerous invasions, wars, and occupations over the span of 2000 years, which have profoundly affected the Vietnamese psyche and their perceptions of outsiders. It was in many respects a continuation of the French-Vietnam war, essentially a struggle for independence from colonial occupation (including resource and market exploitation) that officially ended in 1954 and that resulted in a north-south partition of the country. It was a kind of post-colonial war, with manifestations of civil war (north vs. south, communist vs. capitalist, ethnic minorities vs. dominant Kinh) and religious war (Roman Catholics vs. Cao Dai vs. Hoa Hao vs. Buddhists vs. atheists vs. others). Geo-politically, it was a client war in which two super
powers, the United States and the Soviet Union, used this country and other countries to influence ideology and alliances. The Vietnam War, similar to all wars, clearly and greatly affected markets and marketing; assortment, allocation, and availability of resources; and, of course, quality of life. The Vietnam War also ended the lives of 2 million Vietnamese and more than 58,000 Americans.

Motives for engagement principally would include economic gain (e.g., access to physical goods, human resources, and markets) and/or societal welfare. Official policy would be driven by interests in outcomes affecting both, but perhaps in unbalanced or dysfunctional proportions. Tuchman (1984) writes eloquently of the dysfunctional path, or “march of folly,” often chosen by policy makers, from Troy to Vietnam, whereby leaders made poor decisions resulting in inevitably poor outcomes. Conversely, a macromarketing orientation toward constructive engagement would begin with a concern for ethical decision making and distributive justice; it also would attend to historical narratives (Jones and Shaw 2006; Taylor and Omura 1994), including cultural sensitivities. Laczniak and Murphy (2006) share an ethical position that hints at broad spatial and temporal considerations for the stakeholders of the system, with important implications for the conduct of marketers; they also suggest that their position may not be favored by many marketers, an issue to which I return below.

The crooked line, “Political,” is used to indicate that American policy makers (circa 1945-1995) essentially opted for a non-macromarketing orientation and either circumvented

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5 Tuchman, a historian, shares ideas remarkably parallel to those espoused by macromarketers discussing commons dilemmas and social traps.
6 Vietnam has a rich, complex history. Having spent much of the past 15 years studying Vietnam’s history, culture, and evolving policy and marketing system, I am struck by the tragic level of ignorance, indifference and/or hubris evinced by powers that have interacted with Vietnam over millennia. America’s policies revealed little apparent understanding of or interest in recent history and extant agreements, or in a complex history and sophisticated culture that can be traced back at least to the 7th Century B.C. (e.g., Taylor 1983) and by some archeological accounts a contiguous and distinct Vietnamese history that can be traced back 4000 years or longer (e.g., Hoang and Bui 1979).
these issues or did not understand them, resulting in the Vietnam War and subsequent
devastation to much of the Vietnamese marketing system (as well as adjacent marketing systems
in Cambodia and Laos). The War also came at considerable cost to American society and
continues to affect the collective American psyche, US foreign policy, and marketing activities.

America’s subsequent withdrawal from Vietnam and greater Indochina in 1975, coupled
with the ascent to power of the Vietnamese Communist Party, led to a series of devastating
Marxist-Leninist policies and precipitated Vietnam’s wars with Cambodia and China. By 1979,
in the wake of decades of war, ineffectual central economic planning, and a US-led trade
embargo, Vietnam had become one of the ten poorest countries in the world (e.g., Karnow 1997;
Shultz et al. 1994). The country was a failed (non)marketing system, unable to meet subsistence
needs for a vast number of the citizenry.

The collapse of the Soviet Union, Vietnam’s largest benefactor, and the geo-political shift
toward market economies forced Vietnam’s transition: the creation of a rudimentary marketing
system intended to enhance the welfare of the people – a central tenet of macromarketing.
(Macro)marketing subsequently, without overstatement, saved Vietnam. The simple but elegant
_Doi Moi_ policy enacted by Vietnamese leaders in 1986 enabled farmers to set prices and to retain
a portion of their profits. In the span of three years, Vietnam was transformed from a net
importer of rice, on the brink of famine, to the world’s third largest rice exporter (e.g., Shultz
1997). This success set the foundation for a sector-wide marketing renaissance. Exponential
increases in trade and export development soon followed, which in turn expedited a trade
agreement with the US and a new era of constructive engagement between the two countries.

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7My example of American involvement in Vietnam or elsewhere should not be construed as anti-American or anti-
West. China also has advanced 19 military ventures into Vietnam, over two millennia. Vietnam has its own history
of military, political and cultural expansion from the Red River to the Mekong, resulting in devastation to Cham
civilization and expropriation of Khmer territories.
The impact on quality of life for the majority of Vietnamese has been dramatic (e.g., Shultz, Nguyen, and Westbrook 2006; World Bank 2006), and some observers have speculated that Vietnam will meet Millennium-Project goals for poverty reduction years ahead of schedule (Foreign Affairs 2005; United Nations 2004).  

Insights from the Macromarketing orientation favor such constructive engagement, which is manifest in Marketing and Development. Possible examples include various forms of aid; Foreign Direct Investment (FDI); mutually beneficial political, cultural, economic, technological, academic, and professional exchanges; eco-tourism. All potentially produce long term benefits by bolstering the indigenous marketing systems and by connecting the elements of “Country” to global marketing systems. Win-win outcomes for external and internal stakeholders are expected to follow, as measured by improvements in QOL.

Critics might contend, first, that most if not all wars occur because constructive engagement fails: despots or despotic systems emerge, forcing military options with the objective of restoring minimally acceptable marketing systems, at least as concluded by external stakeholders. I submit that despots and despotic systems do not emerge in a vacuum; they are created by failures that can be traced to disregard for ethical decision making, lack of concern for distributive justice, and/or historical ignorance. Critics might argue, second, that constructive engagement, however well intentioned, also can produce suboptimal outcomes that must be corrected. This criticism is fair; hence, the inclusion of a feedback loop from QOL measures, back to the external and internal stakeholders, to determine if the various forms of engagement

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8 Further to note 5, an important caveat is the strong motive for war among some stakeholders in, for example, the global military-industrial complex and rank opportunists of all walks and sizes that gain from armed conflict, which can and often does foment circumvention of key elements of a Macromarketing Synthesis. This phenomenon revisits the insidiousness and perniciousness of the march of folly, and social traps discussed by Shultz and Holbrook (1999): in the current illustration it is evinced by profiteering at the long term cost to sustainable peace, prosperity, and QOL.
are indeed *constructive*, thereby encouraging the best possible outcomes for the largest number of people, preferably in ways commensurate with the values of external stakeholders (e.g., Osgood 1962). Readers will see that a similar, “Belated” feedback loop is provided for the non-macromarketing orientation. War, short of Armageddon, eventually necessitates reconsideration of policy, which will result in still more war, isolation, or some form of constructive engagement.

**Managerial Considerations**

The public clearly has good reasons to encourage macromarketing, but managerial considerations also support a macromarketing orientation (see also Zif 1980). Here, I diverge from my friend and colleague, Bob Nason (2006), and converge in some respects with another friend and colleague, Shelby Hunt (1981; see also Hunt and Vitell 2006), as well as with the marketers who articulated the current definition of marketing. 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. The artifacts of *Homo Marketus*, his marketing firms (oil companies and consumer-goods companies, as just two examples), arguably have the greatest impact on the global eco-system in which we all have stakes. Whether this reality is good can be debated, but to ignore it is to eliminate an important and possibly fruitful conduit for meaningful research that can improve marketing systems and ultimately enhance QOL. Moreover, including micro or managerial orientations creates opportunities to persuade managers to see their vested interests in desirable macro outcomes. Such inclusion positions the marketing firm as a potential vanguard of constructive engagement, and may also provide one possible antidote to the “little impact” syndrome mentioned by Nason (2006).
Indeed, the growing marketing and business paradigm sweeping the globe would seem to demand the inclusion of marketers and managers into macromarketing discourse. In other words, managerial perspectives must be addressed if engagement is to be constructive. All stakeholders must have a greater appreciation for the amalgamation of consumer interests, government interests, corporate profit motives, and global concerns about sustainability. Conflicting stakeholder interests should be factored into negotiated agreements, otherwise more powerful stakeholders (typically, micromarketers) will have little incentive to engage constructively, reducing the probability for win-win outcomes for the largest number of stakeholders engaged (see also Nill and Shultz 1997).

Firms with this tack in developing/transitioning/recovering markets incidentally are more likely to have sustainable commercial success. A clear understanding and respect for the broad marketing system – its history and cultural ubiquities, regulatory environment, administrative practices, ethical decision making, and tangible concern for the welfare of the people in that system – often are predictors for financial success.

Several companies have experienced problems in Vietnam because their managers did not understand a number of factors in that system. In my chapter for Wilkie et al., for example, I discuss in some detail the problems that Nike encountered during the 1990s. Among those problems were labor difficulties and antagonisms with the Vietnamese government, which became a public relations nightmare that degraded Nike’s global brand image. These problems are represented in the “Commercial” crooked dashed lines.

Similarly to many companies confronted with bad press, Nike initially stonewalled its critics (e.g., Greenhouse 1997). Nike management eventually however interpreted their misfortune as an opportunity to make corrections. A series of interviews with Nike employees,
participants in Nike’s Vietnamese value chain, and Vietnamese government officials indicate that Nike has indeed corrected policies and practices, to the benefit of many stakeholders. Nike and its partners now are among the largest employers in Vietnam; they have among the most favorable working conditions and pays among the highest factory wages. Nike has refurbished local infrastructure, commenced recycling, and environmental preservation programs; it is involved in the welfare of its employees through education advancement, employee assistance, and other HR development programs. Some of these efforts have produced positive, unexpected consequences. Women, thanks to the micro-loan program, have started new enterprises, which create still more jobs and lift still more people out of poverty; we also have discovered that income-generating spouses are subject to less domestic violence (e.g., Ardrey, Pecotich, and Shultz 2006). Incentive-structures and skills-transfer are making Nike employees more valuable in the labor market, which creates options and drives up these employees’ wages. All these outcomes are occurring in work environments that many observers believe can be a benevolent model for the country and perhaps the developing world (e.g., Fair Labor Association 2006). 9

Despite a tangible shift toward a macromarketing orientation another possible dilemma for some readers may be whether the relatively superior working conditions and wages of Nike’s factories in Vietnam, which fall below generally accepted standards in the US or Europe, should remove Nike from criticism. In a country such as Vietnam, which adds 1.5 million workers to its labor force every year and with a historically dominant government sector incapable of providing enough jobs, the Vietnamese people overwhelmingly favor the likes of Nike and support the

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9 Based on the author’s interviews from 2001-2007, with several strata of Nike management in Vietnam and the US, and with Nike factory workers and their families, participants in the micro-loan program, various Vietnamese government authorities at national and local levels, and representatives from the Vietnam Women’s Worker Union. This example and some text in “Meaningful Marketing in the Future” borrow from and expand Shultz in Gundlach et al. (2007).
larger policy of constructive engagement. The world community also is better-off, as it becomes enriched by greater understanding of and experience with Vietnamese culture and products.

In sum, a new synthesis in the form of a macromarketing orientation toward constructive engagement can render adversarial relationships more cooperative, beneficial, and sustainable. Furthermore, one can reasonably conclude that the US, through FDI and other forms of constructive engagement, has won more hearts and minds in Vietnam and throughout Indochina in the last decade than did many other American endeavors that operated in Vietnam during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Net effects of constructive engagement with Vietnam to date include poverty reduction, less authoritarian governance, and greater political transparency; corporate success and Vietnam’s inclusion in the WTO; global customer satisfaction; and measurable improvements in quality of life for most Vietnamese (e.g., Central Intelligence Agency 2006; Shultz, Nguyen, and Westbrook 2006; United Nations 2002). A new era of peaceful, mutually beneficial US-Vietnam relations now enables Americans and Vietnamese to seek new opportunities for cooperation, to the betterment of both countries and the global community; these include active cooperation to effect solutions for global challenges: HIV/AIDS, Infant blindness, drug and sex trafficking, energy shortages, urban decay, waste handling, avian flu, Mekong exploitation, fishery and forest management, technology transfer, and security (e.g., Nguyen 2005; Cao 2006; Hai 2006). Compared to the state of relations between the US and Vietnam only two decades ago, we would seem to be on the cusp of a golden era for mutual cooperation and prosperity.

**Meaningful Marketing in the Future**

As the discussion about the definition – the essence – of marketing continues, we must recognize that the world is confronted with dilemmas of supreme relevance to marketers and
their stakeholders. Yet few scholars and practitioners in “mainstream” marketing – as suggested by the current definition – seem to be engaging them and related “big issues”.

Regardless of one’s position concerning Vietnam or any number of current flashpoints and dilemmas, solutions require constructive engagement, perhaps as illustrated in the Macromarketing Synthesis. As can be seen at both political and managerial levels in Vietnam and potentially elsewhere, the process necessitates greater understanding of historical and cultural forces, coupled with far-reaching systemic analysis. Solutions ultimately require a willingness to invoke polices and practices that will result in some short-term costs, but also better long-term benefits for stakeholders in a particular marketing system/society, as well as the larger global community.

Scholars outside marketing increasingly embrace this perspective (e.g., Sen 2006; cf. Newman, Barabasi and Watts 2006; see also Holbrook 2006 for one marketer’s perspective on complexity). Equally important, corporate leaders, politicians, and pundits embrace it, too. Friedman (2005a, b, c; 2006), for example, now extols “The Geo-Green Alternative,” positing that our most intractable challenges – the Middle East saga, war, global warming, the rise of China, energy shortages and alternative sources, environmentally friendly technology and product development, job creation, terrorism, political repression, religious intolerance, human rights, failed states, rogue states, nuclear proliferation, fuel prices, and taxes – all are interconnected. These are tangible foci for meaningful marketing research and practice, perhaps most efficaciously examined via a New Synthesis. They necessitate a sound integrative policy implemented as constructive engagement, to ensure the best long-term well-being for countries, societies, markets and individual consumers. They demand, in a word, macromarketing.
The markets of the ancient world, for example the Athenian agora, were largely intended to be a benevolent place, integral to society well beyond exchange, buyer-seller relationships, or organizational outcomes (Camp 1986; see also Mittelstaedt, Kilbourne, and Mittelstaedt 2006). Given that the world now is the agora, it is incumbent upon marketers and policy makers to drive constructive engagement as a new marketing synthesis and to make the global agora/market a benevolent place.

Marketing still has so much to offer the world. But without a definition that encourages macromarketing orientation through constructive engagement, the world will remain an unjust, dangerous, and endangered place. It perhaps would be unduly optimistic, even for the editor of the Journal of Macromarketing, to believe that any single research project or publication could solve or mitigate the complex challenges confronting Homo Marketus. A research career dedicated to the interaction of marketing and society, however, could have a positive impact. A macromarketing movement within the academy – including a definition of marketing that more readily captures macromarketing – certainly could reach critical mass to orchestrate research, managerial practice, and policy in ways to invoke constructive engagement, to enhance the quality of our lives, and to ensure our survival.

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10 Sparta, often considered to be among the most warring Greek city-states, interestingly had no such venue (Camp 2006).


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