

Introducing System Zero: The Drive for Marketplace Dignity

December 2020

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ABSTRACT

Behavioral social science has been largely dominated by dual system models that discriminate between fast, automatic modes of processing, often referred to as “system 1” and more reflective and effortful processing modes, often referred to as “system 2”. This paper proposes a third system specific to consumer behavior, the drive for marketplace dignity, which we refer to as “system 0.” We articulate a nomological net for the drive for marketplace dignity, arguing for its distinction from the systems described in prevalent dual-system models and highlighting its usefulness in understanding marketing-relevant constructs. Further, we propose three components of marketplace dignity, the absence of which determine whether system 0 is activated: recognition, equality and agency. We close with an overview of hypotheses that could help us substantiate the characterization of system 0 and a preliminary “System 0 checklist” that may be used to assess a firm or government agency’s system 0 strengths and weaknesses. Though the empirical exploration of system zero lies ahead, we hope that a cooperative effort can refine and correct our initial ideas, such that the drive for marketplace dignity can be rigorously respected, to the greater flourishing of consumers, firms, policy design and the marketplace it serves.

Keywords: Dignity, Respect, Dual-System Models, Public Policy

In Summer 2020, George Floyd’s murder at the hands of US police sparked worldwide protests. Under-represented minority consumers experienced new levels of psychological and physical threat during these times. Their allies, similarly, suffered deepening levels of stress over the unrest and injustice in their policy and economic environments. Retailers, already reeling from COVID-19-related losses, sustained insurable financial damages reaching into the billions. Longer-term damages related to local market disruption, lowered property values, and decreased economic opportunity are also inevitable, though harder to quantify (Polumbo 2020).

Given the disruption to consumer well-being and the market caused by these events, we might hope that marketing scholars could offer some kind of ameliorative tools to policymakers. We might begin by analyzing these behaviors in terms of one of two systems of processing: behaviors that are fast and efficient, reliant on cognitive shortcuts and emotional cues (e.g., “system 1”), and a slower, more resource-demanding means of processing that leans more heavily on logic and utility-maximization (e.g., “system 2”; Kahneman 2011). We would then prescribe interventions that matched the system in use. Indeed, this type of analysis emerged quickly, but with equivocal results. Protests were both interpreted as outpourings of unreflective emotion (Cora 2020) and described as coherent, organized acts. (Radburn and Stott 2019; Gunderson 2020). Similarly, the biases underlying police violence were sometimes characterized as the result of automatic implicit attitudes (Spencer, Charbonneau and Glaser 2016), and at others, as intentional and systematic efforts (Human Rights Watch 2020).

But such analyses seem to be missing something: If system 1 drives behavior, social scientists should have been able to use tools that speak to the automatic processing systems, such as implicit bias training, to change behavior. If system 2 did, we would expect correction via persuasive, logical reasoning. However, system 1 tools have been shown to be inadequate to this

task (Forscher et al. 2019), and system 2 efforts not only show only short-term or null effects, they can create greater animosity toward stigmatized groups (Paluck and Greene 2009).

We propose that the inadequacy of dual-system models may be similarly evident for a wide range of policy-relevant consumer behaviors. For example, characterizing anti-vaxxers as simply irrational (Boot 2019) has led to little persuasive power, but so has the belief that they may be scrupulously and effortfully trying to making the “right” choices for their children (Khazan 2020). Despite a wealth of behavioral work applied to recycling, gross recycling tonnages have flattened since 2010 (EPA 2020), and attitudes toward recycling as a norm still vary widely (Pew Research Foundation 2016) perhaps because we label non-recyclers as mindless, “Earth haters who take orders directly from Skeletor,” (Schiller 2010). Firms that can only consider actions in terms of rationality or irrationality may be quick to dismiss consumer behavior changes as “overreaction,” to marketplace threats (Rosen 2020), and thus, find themselves without tools to formulate an effective, consumer-centric response.

To offer a new approach to such challenges, we propose a systematic examination of the drive for *marketplace dignity*, defined as *respect for a person’s recognition, equality and agency, as manifest during the exchange of economic value*. We argue that the drive for marketplace dignity – a specific type of human dignity in general - takes its place as the third component of the psyche, distinct from but working in concert with system 1 and system 2 (Lamberton 2018). Importantly, we suggest that recognizing “system 0,” may allow us to analyze marketplace experiences that take us beyond labels related with rationality or irrationality, understanding what can be done to create better grounds for intervention and prevention design.

Further, we believe that firms that systematically address consumers’ system 0 can find sustainable competitive advantages by doing so – but that to make this possible, we need to study

dignity in a way specific to the marketplace and the consumer role. Different from development economists who have made important contributions to dignity-related concerns in their context (e.g., Banerjee and Duflo 2019; Wein 2018, 2020; Thomas et al. 2020), marketplace constituencies face pressures specific to firms' needs, need to address consumers' marketplace goals, and possess tools specific to the market. Further, our system 0 label suggests a systematic re-centralization of dignity in the marketplace and policy development. Rather than being the last concern for marketers and leaders, we propose that respect for marketplace dignity should be our first.

What is dignity, and what is its relationship to the market?

It would be difficult to find anyone who disagrees with the general worth of dignity¹. As the world began to come to terms with the scope of World War 2's violence, the UN drafted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). This document states that "recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world." In making this declaration, the UN also levied a responsibility: "every individual and every organ of society...shall strive to promote respect for these rights and freedoms and by progressive measures, national and international, to secure their universal and effective recognition and observance." The 1945 UN Charter, the 2000 Charter of Human Rights of the European Union and the Helsinki Accords, similarly, situate human rights in inherent dignity.

¹ For a comprehensive and relevant review of dignity as a concept and as applied in numerous development and microeconomic contexts, we recommend <https://dignityproject.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Wein-Dignity-Literature-Review-291120.pdf>.

However, as pointed out by legal and policy scholars (e.g., Rawls 1999), this consensus about dignity's theoretical importance did not dissolve disagreements about what dignity meant in practice. Authors of the UN declaration would variously argue that dignity should look as it did in Confucianism, as discussed in Aquinas' thought, in Zionism, or in the pro-Arab experience. Meanwhile, declaration signatories included South Africa, which persisted in apartheid's overt discrimination and racism, India, criticized for pervasive dignity-deprivation via the caste system, and Communist nations that had expelled millions of non-native people after 1945 with no respect to their well-being. Given such divergence, the UNDHR's good intentions were unlikely to diffuse far or change practice in any recognizable way. Indeed, some have argued that as such, dignity is, "a useless concept," suggesting that it is not distinguishable from "autonomy." Rather, such theorists argue, dignity has been integrated into policy discussions, by both the right and the left, as a religiously-rooted idea that has no meaningful use in public discourse (Macklin 2003; Pinker 2008).

Similar objections arose when the US's President Barack Obama released Executive Order 13,563, which authorized agencies to incorporate "human dignity" in cost-benefit analyses (Bayefsky 2014). To many, the suggestion that human dignity should be quantified and weighed alongside more economically-tractable costs and benefits simply introduced a massive "fudge factor," that could be used to sway decisions with little hard evidence (Jackson 2011). To others, such an inclusion called for new ways to analyze costs and benefits as a whole – though the longstanding question of the degree to which difficult-to-quantify values such as dignity can and should be monetized in such analyses has not been answered. As one example, consider Sunstein and Hahn (2002), who recommend that "soft variables" (p. 8) be considered qualitatively in concert with quantitative analyses. Such an analysis would imply that firm actions that yield a

positive cost-benefit analysis would be presumed to be advisable unless they are challenged by clear dignity-based arguments to the contrary. However, lacking a framework by which to evaluate dignity's presence or absence in a marketplace transaction, such arguments are extremely difficult to evaluate.

Further, some would argue that any capitalist market member could not have signed any agreement to promote dignity in good faith. Since in capitalism, workers' surplus labor is extracted, to the sole benefit of the dominant capitalist classes, a capitalist system could be said to inherently disrespect the dignity of many (Healy and Wilkowski 2017). Further, the argument that workers consent to this relationship volitionally may highlight the structural denial of dignity – because workers have no access to the means of production, and thus survival, they have no choice but to assent to exploitation. This denial of choice is then more evidence that capitalist markets are simply not designed to respect dignity (Friedman 1991).

At the same time, there are voices stridently arguing in favor of the concept of dignity, particularly as connected to the marketplace. Such arguments would be consistent with the “capabilities” conceptualization of dignity (Nussbaum 2006). Nussbaum argues that dignity is heavily-contingent: it is only respected inasmuch as individuals have the opportunity to actualize key capabilities: life, bodily health; bodily integrity; senses, imagination and thought; emotions; practical reason; affiliation; other species; play; and control over one's environment (Nussbaum 2006, 76–78). Allowing people many ways to fulfill these capabilities, then, is a way of respecting dignity. To the extent that the market offers many ways to fulfill these capabilities in ways that harmonize with our personal, social and environmental surroundings, it can respect dignity (Sen 1992, 19–21, 26–30, 37–38).

Finally, we may find that some thinkers are willing to boil dignity down to an omission of bad behavior. For example, Luban argues that people respect dignity simply by not humiliating one another (1999). Drawing on Talmudic writings, such scholars argue that humiliation does not only harm the person whose dignity is not respected, it harms the humiliator, as “one who shames his fellow person in public has no share in the World to Come.” (Luban 2009, 214). In such thinking, even relatively minor acts that can humiliate represent serious violations of dignity: bringing food to the home of a mourner on a fancy plate or serving funereal beverages in fancy glassware may humiliate those whose contributions are less grand. As such, the wealthy face eternal peril if they do not refrain from ostentatious displays of their material goods. Since few firms would believe that their actions regularly humiliated consumers, this omission-based criterion may be more appealing for having a low bar than for its potential to change marketing practice.

Three key suggestions emerge from this brief overview of dignity conceptualizations. First, to avoid falling into the trap where dignity means both nothing and everything, we need a definition and nomological net for marketplace dignity as distinct from other constructs. Second, any conceptualization of marketplace dignity should *only* be accepted if it can be determined to be theoretically veridical and practically useful, helping us to revisit previously-studied theories in ways that shed new light on their anatomy and potential. Otherwise, we run the risk of simply adding more muddiness to a consensus that already obscures disagreement. Finally, we propose that marketplace dignity may involve both acts of omission and commission. To give guidance about what should and should not be done, we need to be able to identify the components of marketplace dignity, such that they can be monitored and managed. We undertake each of these challenges in turn.

Nomological Net for System 0

Often, dignity has referred to one's title, station or achievements, considered under a "merit-based" frame. Consistent with work in development economics (Wein 2018, 2020), however, we propose rather that marketplace dignity is inherent, not earned. What firms and consumers do, or fail to do, is to respect that dignity. System 0's role is therefore to first, monitor environmental cues that indicate whether one's dignity is being respected, and second, to take marketplace actions to protect or restore respect for one's dignity.

In being an inherent quality, "dignity is closely related to, but conceptually distinct from, phenomena such as respect (and disrespect)." (Grover, 2014; Rogers and Ashforth, 2014). That is, rather than being a set of beliefs or attitudes based in the observation of another's achievements, respect for marketplace dignity is evidenced in behaviors that are evoked simply in response to a human's inherent value. Further, respect for marketplace dignity differs from civility, which is governed by norms, for example, "behavior involving politeness and regard for others" (Andersson and Pearson, 1999)." If dignity is inherent, its respect is always normative, and will not vary by context.

We also wish to distinguish between marketplace dignity and the affirmation of self-esteem. Self-esteem is defined in the psychological literature as, "an individual's overall sense of self-worth or how good they feel about themselves." (Rosenberg 1965). Unlike dignity, which we argue exists regardless of social affirmation, self-esteem's delicacy is driven by its dependence on external cues (Baumeister et al. 2003). Thus, self-esteem fluctuates quite easily – rather than being an inherent characteristic, it may be largely determined by one's social setting.

How does System 0 differ from system 1 and system 2?

Our definition also allows us to differentiate system 0 from system 1 and system 2, which we will discuss as characterized by Kahneman (2009). In Table 1 we provide a simple comparison of the difference between marketplace dignity, system 1 and system 2. A crucial difference between system 1 and system 2 lies first, in their automatic (system 1) as opposed to reflective (system 2) nature. We propose that the driver for dignity may be characterized instead as chiefly responsive, in that it is latent until acted upon by an external circumstance. System 0's uniquely responsive nature is consistent with findings that individuals monitor and protect respect for their dignity even when all system 1 or system 2 markers of power or status are absent. For example, despite slavery, economic hardship and changes associated with urbanization, Black men have consistently monitored and asserted their dignity (Hunter and Davis 1994). As another example, patients in healthcare settings where they lack the typical system 1 or system 2 markers of dignity (e.g., not wearing white coats, not having professional expertise), monitor and respond to a lack respect for dignity, reporting poorer adherence to treatment, experience less optimal preventive measures, and lower satisfaction with their care (Beach et al. 2005).

This argument is also consistent with Lucas (2017), who suggests that “dignity tends to be understood and experienced by its absence rather than its presence”. This is reflected in past attempts to characterize dignity in policymaking, as, for example, rules about prison rapes refer to “loss of dignity,” and standards about air pollution refer to, “prolonged suffering and loss of dignity,” that is experienced when individuals are exposed to toxins for extended periods. Just as

the law is designed to detect and respond to threats to dignity, we propose that the psyche is attuned to potential threats and options for responses as well.

Next, system 1 is often referred to as the “irrational,” and system 2 as the “rational,” aspects of processing, in the sense that system 2 is more likely than system 1 to maximize utility. We propose that system 0’s goal is not to maximize utility in the sense that an individual experiences the most possible benefit, but rather, to motivate actions that restore the dignity-respecting norms– that is, to restore the behaviors and cues that *should* occur if the inherent worth of humans is respected. Whether or not that motivation translates into “hot” or “cool” responses depends on the nature of the context in which system 0 is triggered. Consistent with classic theories of elaboration likelihood (e.g., Petty and Cacioppo 1987), if ability and opportunity are available, system 0 will lead to effortful, deliberate enactment of dignity-building actions, such as planmaking, organized collective action, and clear assertions of worth. If either ability or opportunity are not available, system 0 will lead to more reflexive, automatic responses, such as violence or other uncontrolled engagement.

Finally, whereas system 1 tends to relate to affect and system 2 to cognition, we propose that system 0 may draw from both, allowing consumers to form expectations about their likely future treatment in a situation or with regard to a product or service. As such, system 0 focuses on interpreting behaviors that signal a respect or lack of respect of dignity in terms that inform a consumer’s engagement with or withdrawal from a given interaction. In short, system 0 both draws from the behavior of others and determines our own future actions.

Table 1: Proposed Distinctions between System 0, System 1 and System 2

System 0: Marketplace Dignity	System 1	System 2
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Responsive	Automatic	Reflective
Low-Effort in Activation High-Effort or Low-Effort in Action	Low-Effort	High-Effort
Normative	Irrational	Rational
Behavior	Affect	Cognition

How would recognizing system 0 change our interpretations of recognized phenomena?

If we are correct in this, we can see that multiple literatures have identified processes that may be awkwardly-categorized as system 1 or system 2 phenomena, but that will fall clearly into system 0’s domain. In addition, if viewed through a system 0 lens, we may be able to make more sense of processes that, to date, have not been highly responsive to interventions.

For example, system 0 would play a critical role in sensitivity to identity threats. Identity threat research explicitly invokes dignity, defining identity threats as, “any overt action by another party that challenges, calls into question, or diminishes a person’s sense of competence, dignity, or self-respect.” (Aquino and Douglas 2003). As a system 0 phenomenon, identity threats would be mischaracterized if we were to say that the subsequent actions taken to reaffirm one’s self-worth were either “rational” or “irrational.” Rather, consistent with our characterization, such processes are intended to help one redefine or reconstrue an event – to make meaning of a situation or the self.

Taking this approach may allow us to understand which identities may be more or less central to a person’s view of self without taking direct measures of their self-perceptions. We would expect that identities that are more as opposed to less central will be those whose violation

most strongly activates system 0. For example, though one may claim that their nationality-based identity is most central to them, we may observe no activation of system 0 or subsequently, actions to restore dignity, when people who share their citizenship are perceived as misrepresented. By contrast, we may see that when people of their gender are denied agency or voice, the same individual will respond to such actions and take steps to restore both.

As another example, past experiences of stigmatizing racism may have led members of minority groups to have particularly fine-tuned system 0 systems, such that even praise can be experienced as an identity threat (Kunstman and Fitzpatrick 2018). In such cases, beliefs about White consumers' motives drive both greater perceived threat and, indeed, greater accuracy. Note that such responses would be mischaracterized if one attempted to construe them in terms of only one portion of the dual-system model. Such perceptions may be rooted in rational assessment of correlations, and driven by reflection as much as automaticity, or they may be rooted in system 2, having rich affective components. Rather, understanding such sensitivity as a system 0 function allows us to appreciate its nature, and to realize the meaning-making processes that are cued when system 0 is triggered.

Similarly, psychological reactance (see Steindl et al. 2015 for a review) may depict system 0's operation. Reactant individuals are sensitive to restrictions on their freedom, and experience these as normatively unacceptable. Further, they are likely to be willing to go to substantial lengths to restore this freedom. As has been pointed out (Strack and Deutsch 2004), the form this mechanism takes neither fit universally into system 1 (hostility, aggression; Berkowitz 1973, Rains 2013) or system 2 (derogating the threat source, reinforcing the importance of the freedom that has been restricted, or cognitively reframing the forced behavior; Brehm 1966; Silvia 2006). Recognizing psychological reactance as a system 0 phenomenon

allows us to accommodate both the responsive aspects of the experience and the highly deliberate efforts that may be taken to restore freedom.

Returning to our opening discussion of protests and riots sparked by the murder of George Floyd, system 0 allows us a path toward deeper understanding. Mr. Floyd's murder activated system 0, signaling that police interactions were not contexts in which Black people's dignity would be respected. In response, people who felt they had the ability and opportunity to organize meaningful protests did so, creating, "well-oiled machines," that gained substantial press attention, and in some cities, led to new policies that focused on enhancing respect for dignity. However, people who felt that they lacked a real opportunity to ability to restore accurate representation, equal participation or clear agency were more likely to respond with less systematic, more emotionally-driven responses. In either case, system 0 was driving behaviors – dignity was always at issue. What differed was the sense that different people had of the context in which they could act to restore dignity's respect.

If we wished to come into harmony with system 0, what would we need to do? We propose three main components of marketplace dignity, each of which was violated in the case of George Floyd, but which may also be violated or affirmed in many marketplace experiences. By attending to these components of dignity, we can systematically design respect for dignity throughout our customers' experiences.

Proposed Components of Marketplace Dignity²

² As noted by Wein (2020), few rigorously-verified, universally useful measures of dignity exist in the literature; on review, we would hesitate to apply any of these to the marketplace context without verification. Thus, we offer propositions rather than hypotheses related to these three components of dignity. Future conversations about the optimal way to measure dignity, building on past work as well as our marketplace-specific conceptualization, would be welcomed by the authors.

Recognition. We first propose that to the extent that firms recognize consumers as they wish to be recognized, they respect their dignity. To be more specific, this entails two factors: being seen (representation), and being heard (having voice).

System 0 is sensitive first, to the way that an individual or group is represented in the marketplace. This may first mean that one is seen at all by a company or organization, that is, their needs are recognized and their accomplishments acknowledged. Famously, Pepsi violated this in their replacement of a Black woman by Kendall Jenner in an advertising campaign (Quenqua 2017). By replacing a member of one community with a member of a more privileged community, Pepsi occluded the presence and contributions of Black women to activist movements. Similarly, recent studies show that only 19% of individuals are in minority groups, and .06% of individuals depicted in advertising are identified as members of the LGBTQ community, despite making up nearly 1.7% of the British population. This bias is particularly acute with regard to lesbian representation, such that industry executives now voice concern about potential alienation of this group (Roderick 2017). Another extreme example may be seen in the phenomenon of the “invisible people”; (<https://id4d.worldbank.org/missionbillion>) – the billions in the Global South who often lack a digital identity, and thus, are not considered in generalizations made about technological needs and experiences. Collective failure to “see” these individuals has real consequences, as their invisibility places them outside the realm of any social welfare programs.

System 0 is also likely to sense violation when one is *misrepresented* – depicted in a way that one feels is inaccurate. An example of such misrepresentation may be evidenced among the poor in Western cultures, where despite the fact that poverty does not fundamentally alter one’s sociocultural needs, desires, or inherent value, they are continually represented as, “blemished,

defective, faulty and deficient – in other words, inadequate consumer manques or flawed consumers,” (Hamilton et al. 2014). Other work has noted that individuals facing poverty are characterized as ‘good for nothing and incompetent’ (Fiske, 2011; Kerbo, 1976). Having this experience, these people may lose the aspiration to better their lives (Appurdaï 2001). On the other hand, misrepresentation can also sometimes seem more positive in nature – but this does not make it any less a denial of dignity. For example, people experiencing poverty are sometimes depicted as more entrepreneurial than others because of the high rates of entrepreneurship in developing economies (Chang 2010). In reality, scholars point out that entrepreneurship may not be a preference or innate drive, but may instead simply be the only available option. Indeed, people experiencing poverty have the same desire for stability and reliable benefits as are people who are not experiencing poverty (Mudede 2013). From all of this, we may agree with those pointing out that forcing all people to believe in a single story about their lives or their history constitutes a denial of dignity (Adichie 2009).

Conversely, system 0 will also detect situations where an individual is seen who does not wish to be. Such failure to respect dignity emerges in marketplace violations of privacy (Bloustein 1964). As a tangible example, marketplace dignity may be respected when individuals who are undergoing medical procedures have been shielded from public view in ways that the feel corresponds with their dignity (Killmister 2010). As a more ubiquitous example, consumers may feel that their dignity is not respected when their online data is shared without their permission. Such visceral feelings of violation act as strong cues that a given platform or merchant has not invested in dignity-respecting technology (or, in fact, has decided to profit from the denial of dignity.)

Being heard is also a critical component of representation. Here, marketers need to consider carefully the way they sample and interact with their research participants. Largely due to reliance on convenience samples, lab data collected largely in Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich and Democratic (WEIRD) countries, or low-cost but non-representative online panels, voice is systematically given to some individuals and not extended to others. To the extent that research based on these samples is taken to be representative of the larger population, the dignity of those not given voice is denied. As Busara Center leaders Amy Shipow and Anisha Singh write, the failure of many marketplace actors to inclusively offer voice, in turn, deprives researchers of the richest possible insights and fosters the continuation of past errors (2020):

“When field and lab-based research fails to consider the structural factors that influence participation in a study, vulnerable populations (e.g. children, sex workers, people living with HIV, displaced people, people who are unhoused or incarcerated, members of the LGBTQI community and people who are differently abled) are frequently excluded from research as they are difficult to reach or face substantial risks to being identified. When these people are excluded, researchers perpetuate a vicious cycle whereby findings preclude — or may not apply to — the people with both the greatest needs and the most apt insights.”

Even when heard, the way in which we handle participants’ responses may trigger system 0. Specifically, system 0 will be sensitive to violations of epistemic justice. Epistemic justice refers to the extent to which an individual’s statements are accepted as a basis for knowledge (Fricker 2007), as evidenced by respect for the speaker’s capacity as a knower. Further, epistemic justice can be further considered in terms of two types: testimonial justice, wherein

individuals' recounting of events is respected, and appraisal or hermeneutic justice, wherein individuals' interpretations of information or events is respected. Marketplace dignity will only be respected when epistemic injustice is avoided – when consumers' capacity as knowers and interpreters of situations are recognized.

Newer accounts also argue that epistemic justice involves individuals' ability not only to have their expressions taken as the basis of knowledge, but also the ability for individuals to participate in an inquiry process (Schmidt 2019). That is, epistemic justice is preserved when individuals are allowed to ask questions that matter to them – not only to passively receive information that is offered. Firms and policymakers certainly have the ability to allow or constrain this ability, for example, through decisions about the design of more constrained “chatbots” as opposed to human interlocutors. Taken together, we therefore propose that marketplace dignity is respected to the extent that:

Proposition 1a: Consumers perceive that they are accurately recognized and represented in the marketplace,

Proposition 1b: Consumer are able to control their visibility in the marketplace, and

Proposition 1c: Consumers are afforded both testimonial and hermeneutic justice in marketplace experiences.

Equality. Like “dignity,” equality seems to be a universally-accepted term, and as such, somewhat suspect in its usefulness. However, we propose that in the case of marketplace dignity, equality takes on two distinctive characteristics. First, we propose that when consumers are treated as equals, their importance as a full participant is respected to the same extent as is the marketer or policymaker's. This treatment as an equal participant protects against violations of system 0.

While equality is often thought of in policy or legal terms, its importance also arises in many marketplace contexts. Historically, inequality in the marketplace was crystallized in the imposition of “Jim Crow,” laws in the Southern US, which barred members of minority ethnic groups from accessing marketplace goods and services. While the law generally, “cannot deny equal access to goods and services under a neutral public accommodations law,” the Supreme Court’s 2018 decision was seen to defend the rights of a Colorado baker to deny to sell a wedding cake to a same-sex couple (Wolf 2018). At the same time, Justice Kennedy tacitly acknowledged the danger of such policies, making clear that further legal development would be necessary to avoid, “subjecting gay person to indignities when they seek goods and services in an open market.” Funeral homes have refused to perform services for victims of certain diseases, and properties have skirted anti-discrimination laws by preferentially renting to members of some groups rather than others. More recently, body-positive activists have pointed out the lack of protection for airline passengers who may be more likely to be bumped from flights because they are too obese to fit into ever-shrinking airline seats (Marcus 2020), despite prior arguments that obesity constituted a disability and thus, that individuals with obesity should be protected from discrimination (Lynch 1996).

To systematically attend to the management of marketplace dignity through respect for equality, we may also need to re-think our marketing research practices. Note that the Belmont Report (1979), the document written to articulate the basic ethical principles followed in biomedical and behavioral research in the United States, does not directly mention dignity (Wein 2018), in contrast to research ethics statements from other nations and groups (such as the Norwegian National Research Ethics Committee, the Canadian Council of Ethics in Human Research, and the World Health Organization, all of which draw attention to dignity as a key

component of ethical research.) However, we propose that not only is it ethically important that researchers treat respondents as partners rather than data “sources,” or “subjects,” doing so will yield more useful data and promote the long-term health of the research community.

A lack of respect for dignity in research is most often connected with high-profile investigations such as Milgram’s obedience studies and questionable medical trials in low and middle-income countries (e.g. Perry 2013; Weigmann 2015). However, industry sources suggest that a lack of respect for research participants in more mundane contexts is widespread, and that it may be damaging. For example, platform moderators decry “rudeness” among researchers – frustrating surveys, a lack of empathy for the participants’ experience, and inappropriate inquiries – leads to poor data (Van Susteren 2019). Similarly, Amazon’s Mechanical Turk platform has been called a “poorly-paid Hell.” This moniker is not only driven by low wages, but by dishonest representations of time requirements and the imbalance of power between requesters and workers (Semuels 2018). Perhaps it should be unsurprising, then, that data quality on the site has declined over time (Chmielewski and Kucker 2019.)

Such practices are as prevalent in the world of social media, where, consumers are certainly not seen as equal participants in a conversation, but rather, sources from which goods may be extracted. Just as extractive economic growth tends to leave behind a rash of used-up landscapes and dysfunctional pathologies, we may expect that long-term lack of respect for marketplace dignity may create widespread damage in the information ecosystem. Indeed, in response to news about Facebook’s unethical data practices, consumers have responded by providing only false data to the social media giant, knowing that in doing so they may “pollute another database” (Vogt 2018). Thus, failing to respect consumers as equal partners can activate

system 0. Further, consumers' system 0-drive responses can undermine entire business models, leaving behind only the wreckage of a lack of dignity.

Second, equality is signaled by the extent to which we treat others as having *equal humanity* as ourselves. This idea also comes from a Kantian conception of dignity, such that we should, "act so that you use humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means" (G, 4:429).

Such thinking recognizes that consumers are, inescapably, "means," for firms in some sense. To respect their dignity, however, firms need to *also* consider them always also as "ends," that is, as intrinsically valuable and entitled to the enjoyment of life. Research suggests that such recognition is routinely violated among consumers, as consumers in low socioeconomic groups are judged harshly for spending money in ways that reflect their moral and aesthetic values (Olson et al. 2016). That is, while it is acceptable for a consumer at a higher socioeconomic status to prioritize organic purchases, the lower socioeconomic status consumer's human desire to pursue the same values is not accepted. By contrast, the human desire for beauty and pleasure is sometimes fully respected, and reflected in product design decisions. For example, the World Central Kitchen, run by elite chef Jose Andres, prioritizes both the sensory and visual attractiveness of the 250,000 meals served daily in the US, sourcing not only utilitarian staples, but also purchasing from higher-end restaurants (Wofford 2020).

Thus, we propose that marketplace dignity is respected to the extent that:

Proposition 2a: Consumers are given equal levels of service, regardless of their characteristics, beliefs and group membership;

Proposition 2b: Consumer are treated as equal participants with firms in both marketplace interactions and as providers of information;

Proposition 2c: Consumers' rights to prioritize higher level needs are recognized as valid, regardless of their socioeconomic status or resource level.

Agency. Finally, we propose that system 0 is sensitive to the provision or denial of agency. This is generally consistent with a Kantian view of dignity, which places the locus of dignity in individuals' ability to make choices about technical, practical and moral matters.

Agentic beings, "influence intentionally one's functioning and life circumstances." (Bandura 2006, 164). As such, agency has four key properties, each of which can be supported or undermined in the marketplace. First, agentic beings have intent; they form action plans and develop ideas about how they may reach their goals. Second, human agency involves forethought; they envision possible futures and move toward or away from such potentialities. Such an ability helps people to take action that they believe will lead toward a meaningful life. Third, agency is self-reactive; they regulate their own behavior in response to changes in their own goal progress or lack thereof. Finally, agentic beings are self-reflective; they have the metacognitive ability to consider their experiences, thoughts and actions in ways that lead toward greater understanding of themselves and the world. We would argue that to the extent that marketplace experiences allow consumers to form their own intentions, take actions related to those intentions, and interpret their experiences in ways that improve their future prospects, marketplace dignity is respected.

However, consumers do not live in a vacuum – our intentions, progress and interpretations of the world are often shaped by others. In some cases, this is not a denial of dignity, but rather, the nature of living in a shared marketplace with other human beings, each with their own agency. As such, the firm desiring to promote agency in the marketplace should seek to allocate agentic capacity fairly across individuals – suggesting that equality and agency are likely to move together in the preservation of marketplace dignity.

Importantly, agency can come in multiple forms. We propose that direct individual agency provides the strongest evidence of respect for dignity; in an era of mass-customization and personalization, designing customer experiences to include agency becomes increasingly feasible. However, in some marketplace contexts direct individual agency will undermine economies of scale and scope, thus altering firms' ability to provide goods at affordable prices or to make services widely accessible. In such cases, proxy agency, such as that created in a representative context, or collective agency, such as that created when knowledge, skills or resources are pooled across consumers, can also be used to satisfy system 0. This may explain why efforts to protect democracy are supported by individuals across the political spectrum. In the marketplace, consumers experience proxy agency when they assign surrogate buyers. Dignity is respected when these surrogates preserve the consumer's agency to the degree preferred, and not respected when surrogates overstep or make choices in their own self-interest. However, we also sometimes see violations of proxy agency, as famously seen in Wells-Fargo's "cross-selling" practices, which involved fraudulent practice of opening fake accounts or credit cards in customer's names, signature forging and unapproved money transfers (Flitter 2020).

We can connect this idea to the marketplace further by incorporating ideas from Nussbaum and Sen's capabilities-based conceptions of dignity discussed earlier. Recall that this framework argues that the opportunity to enlarge one's abilities to meet their needs and care for those around them – building abilities to flourish - is inherent in dignity. Thus, we respect agency when we use marketplace exchanges and tools to increase the number of ways in which people can meet their needs. Importantly, we need to do this in ways that doesn't only increase short-term agency, but that also preserves agency in the long-term. Such a consideration helps us see why predatory lending, long-term loans and high-interest debt can in fact deprive individuals of

dignity, while appearing to offer agency (for interesting new discussions on the relationship between debt and dignity, see www.dignityanddebt, a network incubating work related to our understanding of perceived dignity and fairness in the financial services domains.)

One interesting application of this thinking has come in the consideration of the use of artificial intelligence to provide services to consumers (Sharkey 2014). For example, we may ask whether using robots to provide healthcare enhances or detracts from respect for dignity. Under this framework, robot-driven service shows respect for dignity to the extent that the consumer's set of capabilities is expanded and the consumer retains their right to choose among means of achieving desired outcomes. However, robot-driven service may reduce dignity if the interaction with the robot constrains consumers' ability to decide for themselves what they are to do and be.

What does this mean in marketing? We argue that preserving this aspect of dignity would involve creating ways for consumers to avoid locking consumers into a single identity or pattern, allowing multiple ways to meet a given goal as appropriate for consumers in different situations or life stages, offering learning opportunities as part of the consumption process. Indeed, as Nussbaum argues (2006), it may tell us when personalized service is critical to designing a consumer experience that respects dignity, for example, when we serve non-neurotypical consumers. Similarly, we should seek, in as many situations as possible, to try to empower our consumers to access the full range of capabilities – even if it creates costs for us to do so, or if traditional wisdom suggests that a given target segment is simply incapable of benefiting from our good or service.

Recognition of the importance of agency also helps us understand responses to prior interventions. If dignity is respected when individuals' agency is preserved, we may be able to understand why system 0 may be activated by the widespread use of system 1 “nudges.” Though

nudges are not designed to curtail choice, some have argued that they can become “manipulative and coercive,” such that the nudger’s concern for utility overrides their concern for the nudgee’s liberty (Saetra 2019). By contrast, when interventions respect dignity by providing narratives that emphasize the agency of aid recipients, people show both greater belief in their own ability and motivation to dedicate effort to improving their own conditions (Thomas et al. 2020).

We can also identify some efforts that showed respect for dignity by recognizing peoples’ agency. For example, the World Food Programme’s collaboration (2019) with Mastercard provided automatic, pre-paid credit cards to individuals living in refugee camps, such that they could select their own goods and services independently. By preserving peoples’ agency, the program respected their dignity.

Taken together, we therefore propose that marketplace dignity is respected when:

Proposition 3a: Consumers are empowered to engage in the development and planning for their own intentions, based on their personal forethought, and as guided by their personal self-reactiveness and self-reflectiveness;

Proposition 3b: Consumer perceive that proxy and communal agency are managed in their best interests, and,

Proposition 3c: The means among with which consumers may choose to achieve their capabilities are enlarged rather than restricted.

Critical initial tests

Though outside the scope of this initial paper to undertake this exploration, we hope that this discussion lays the groundwork for a shared program of research that may help to substantiate or challenge the foregoing characterization in productive ways. In this section of the paper, we identify key questions that we believe would allow us to refine and deepen our conceptualization, while also connecting system 0 to other constructs and phenomena in explored consumer research.

An important first step would be to substantiate the relationship between the three systems. We propose that System 0 operates as an amplifier of other systems' processing. For example, if a consumer is currently processing in system 1, the denial of dignity creates a visceral, automatic response that will likely cue additional emotional responses. However, if a consumer is in a system 2 state, reflection can allow us to realize that a given situation respects or affirms dignity, and prompt us to assess different opportunities in light of their capacity for dignity preservation. Formally, we may test whether:

Hypothesis 1: System 0 activation raises the arousal level associated with both system 1 and system 2 behaviors.

Hypothesis 2: When multiple systems are activated, negative activations of system 0 (dignity denial) will strengthen system 1's operations and undermine system 2's.

Hypothesis 3: The affirmation of marketplace dignity interacts with rational and non-rational influences in decision-making, such that:

- a.) If rational and irrational factors are combined with dignity affirmation, their value is preserved, but;
- b.) If rational and irrational factors are combined with dignity diminution, their value is negated.

Empirical work should also establish whether a firm needs to – or even can – actively design all three components of marketplace dignity (recognition, equality and agency) into their operations. Some may not suit all products, services or communications – layering them all on at maximum levels may, in fact, be ham-fisted. For example, while a healthcare system may naturally integrate all three aspects of dignity throughout its practice, given long-lasting and intimate relationships with patients, a business that engages in one-time, transactional exchanges with consumers may have less opportunity to do so. In addition, given the burdens that can be created by choice overload, maximizing agency in all phases of a journey may not lead to high levels of satisfaction or good decisions. Thus, what may be necessary for firms to do is to ensure

consumers do not have *negative* perceptions of these three aspects of dignity, even if not all three should be maximized at all places in the consumer journey.

Specifically, we may propose that:

Hypothesis 4: The effect of dignity drivers on total felt dignity is interactive and asymmetric, such that:

- a.) Positive perceptions of dignity drivers are additive, but
- b.) Negative perceptions of dignity drivers are multiplicative.

We also have a great deal to learn about what will make a firm's system 0 design credible. Because the term "dignity" has such high normative force, we expect that there will be virtually no firm that does not claim to affirm marketplace dignity. This can be seen in the proliferation of corporate statements made after the 2020 protests against police violence in the United States. As reported by the BBC, "Black Lives Matter" statements came from a wide range of companies, including finance, fashion and entertainment (Duarte 2020). However, given that only 4 of the US's top 500 companies have a Black CEO, such statements rang hollow for many consumers. Further, firms that have historically benefited from discrimination have little credibility when trying to make dignity-respecting statements. For example, when President Donald Trump banned the entry of citizens from Muslim-majority countries, tax-drivers in New York City went on strike. This strike was found to directly benefit Uber – and though Uber denied trying to benefit from the denial of dignity for Muslim individuals, consumers reacted with mass switches to Lyft, their largest competitor. So what will make a firm's efforts to address system 0's drive believable?

Fortunately, past theory suggests a simple criterion by which this judgment may be made. That is, we may test whether consumers will evaluate actions related to dignity drivers in terms of their likely validity, following costly signaling theory (e.g., Zahavi and Zahavi 1997). This

theory would predict that the more costly – in economic, social, or reputational terms – a dignity-respecting action by a firm is – the more credible it will be to consumers. What we do not know is which costs matter most. On one hand, changes in the associations relevant to a given brand may be seen as less credible than direct alienation of a target market, as a brand may have a host of associations that vary in strength without becoming discordant with many customers. But on the other hand, a firm’s willingness to incur direct economic damage – perhaps by removing products from certain outlets or ceasing production of goods that do not show respect for dignity – may be seen as far more credible than effects relative to target market’s perceptions, as new target markets may gain from the action, making it less costly. Thus, we may test whether:

Hypothesis 5: Costly efforts to respect dignity will vary in their credibility depending on whether they are most directly related to:

- a.) Brand associations
- b.) The alienation of the firm’s existing target market
- c.) The firm’s profitability

Last, we have a huge amount of work to do in understanding the effects of marketplace dignity on consumers. As firms begin redesigning consumer journeys in ways that are intended to address system 0, we may benefit if they also plan to monitor responses to such initiatives. For example, if a firm integrates new elements of choice in the deliver of its service, they might subsequently monitor social media for prosocial language between consumers. If a firm were to change its representation of marginalized consumer groups in marketing materials, they might plan to capture effects on loyalty as these marketing materials diffuse across communications channels. As initial questions, we might ask whether:

- Are consumers who have dignity affirmed more likely to affirm dignity of others?
- Are consumers who have dignity affirmed are more prosocial?
- Does a greater sense that a firm has respected dignity lead to greater reciprocity in response to a firm’s actions?

- Will consumers show greater loyalty toward firms and brands that have affirmed their dignity, even when system 1 and system 2 elements of a firm’s value proposition are disrupted?

Likely, the answer to all of these questions will be, “it depends,” as multiple cultural, social individual and economic factors may change consumers’ responses to the affirmation of dignity. Understanding, therefore, not only the main effects of dignity but the differences in its effects across the market, offers a wide-open ground for important future inquiry.

CONCLUSION: TOWARD A DIGNITY ARCHITECTURE ACROSS THE MARKETING MIX

How can we design our marketing in ways that systematically satisfy the drive for marketplace dignity? Throughout this paper, we have highlighted specific examples of places where marketplace factors can be said to respect or fail to respect marketplace dignity. We have captured these examples, as well as others, in Table 2 – a matrix where we examine the role of each dignity factor across the marketing mix, and in marketing or policy research. We have also connected these actions to potential firm or organizationally-relevant outcomes in the far right-hand column.

Table 2: Proposed Elements for a Dignity Scorecard, with Examples

Touchpoint	Representation (seen, heard)	Equality (treatment as an end, not only a means)	Agency (free to make choices)	Predicted Marketing Result
Market Research	Inclusive data collection Easy, accessible privacy and	Shared participation in research Explanations for research procedures	Clear opt-out & consent processes Asking people for their preferences	Data accuracy Interpretational guidance

	<p>confidentiality options</p> <p>Representative sampling</p>	<p>and purposes</p> <p>Monitoring of felt dignity, in addition to other typical metrics</p>	<p>about research and incentive approaches</p>	<p>Lower future recruiting costs</p> <p>Reputational benefits</p> <p>Competitive advantage via system 0</p>
Product Design	<p>Design in recognition of heterogeneous consumer needs and abilities</p>	<p>Responsive design updates when consumers' needs change</p>	<p>Designing machines to replace "degrading" labor (e.g sanitation replacing manual scavenging)</p> <p>Tech as a "gateway"</p> <p>Customization options</p>	<p>More successful innovation</p> <p>Lower rate of market failure</p> <p>Stronger consumer-product relationships</p>
Pricing	<p>Creation of bundles that maximize economic utility for consumer groups</p>	<p>Nondiscriminatory pricing</p>	<p>Tiered pricing without stigmatization</p>	<p>Greater value perceptions</p> <p>Higher perceived price fairness</p>
Promotion	<p>Inclusive representation in marketing communications</p> <p>Non-stereotypical portrayals, particularly of marginalized groups</p>	<p>Multi-lingual promotional communications</p>	<p>Consumer-tailored recommendation engines</p>	<p>Higher ROMI</p> <p>Broad appeal and non-alienation of groups</p>
Place	<p>Accessibility w/o stigmatization</p>	<p>Distribution – reducing food deserts – consideration of equality in choosing locations</p>	<p>Omnichannel marketing that facilitates switching back and forth across devices based on consumer preference and need</p>	<p>Larger consumer base</p> <p>Longer dwell times in more accessible stores</p> <p>Frictionless purchases offer retail leadership position</p>

We propose that such a matrix might be created and completed as a type of “dignity scorecard,” for each portion of the consumer journey. This should be done systematically, so that firms avoid activities that simultaneously respect and violate dignity (for example, having positive representations in advertising but excluding consumers through lack of universal design or persisting with discriminatory pricing) that may lead to a lack of trust from consumers and reduce brand authenticity.

A review of the potential outcomes of designing for dignity, in the table’s right-hand column, offers a set of arguments in favor of its systematic management. These outcomes first, suggest that marketers should care about deeply understanding marketplace dignity because it is in their own self-interest to do so, as custodians of profitable and sustainable brands. In a world where information is widely available and shareable, and where advocacy is being made easier (for example, to boycott brands by organizations like Sleeping Giants; see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sleeping_Giants for information), brands are at risk of losing customers quickly if they do not understand the various ways in which dignity can be violated. There are numerous ways in which a lack of understanding of marketplace dignity can hurt brands and firms.

- **Marketing ROI:** Firms lacking a systematic understanding of dignity in the marketplace will invest in ad-hoc efforts that at best, waste money, and at worst, create alienation because of perceived inauthenticity e.g. inaccurate, albeit well-meaning, representation in advertising may lead to backlashes and even calls for boycott for brands.
- **Innovation:** A lack of systematic consideration of dignity leaves untapped potential in our product designs, goods and services to contribute to overall

consumer flourishing. e.g. the lack of universal design systematically excludes the 80 million strong boomer population as well as the 61 million adults who live with a disability in the US alone. On the other hand, well-designed products that allow for consumer fairness, for example, TeamBanks' consumer credit product easyCredit may see growth even in a relatively flat market. (Loch et al. 2012).

- **Market Research & Consumer Understanding:** We fail to design our inquiry in ways that respect dignity, thus reducing the power of our marketing research expenditures. People may reciprocate our own lack of respect for dignity by not giving us thoughtful answers, by misleading or by abandoning surveys. For example, not spending the time upfront to explain to consumers the purposes of a survey (often in a bid to shorten time) may ironically lead to lower completion rates and therefore higher costs for running the survey.

Understanding the drivers of dignity is even more critical to policy makers, researchers and practitioners who work with vulnerable populations. Without an understanding of how dignity may be violated, often in subtle ways (for example, a persistent lack of representation when collecting data) interventions may not work as intended, thereby losing scarce resources. For these reasons, we strongly advocate that both for-profit firms, non-profit and civil society organizations and other institutions take seriously the concept of marketplace dignity across consumer touchpoints (market research, product design, pricing, advertising, distribution).

We may also revisit the consumption-relevant challenges indicated in the introduction of this paper, as test cases for examining the usefulness of considering system 0. For example, consider the issue of non-vaccination. A system 0 analysis would first ask whether the anti-vax

population were being fairly represented in marketing content aimed at discussing their decisions and the context in which they made them. If not, it may be that even the best-designed and well-intentioned forms of system 1 or system 2 outreach would have a null or even negative effect. Second, we would ask whether medical professionals or policymakers were treating these individuals as partners in their decision-making process, or seeing them only as problems. If the latter, we might suggest that a means be developed to identify goals shared by an entire community. For example, marketers and policymakers might first gain agreement about a shared desire to keep communities safe. They would then elicit possibilities that individuals see as moving them toward this shared goal. Third, if full choice were threatening to public health, we would ask whether as much autonomy as possible were incorporated in – and communicated about – with regard to vaccination. For example, if vaccination were mandated, could people uncomfortable with this action be given as much choice as possible about when, by whom and where the vaccination were administered? Could they be invited to research and choose the supplier of the vaccination? Could they be given other choices, in the event that they do not vaccinate, that are consistent with the shared goal of community safety?

Granted, we can anticipate objections to an overarching concept of dignity as System 0. Strong proponents of dual system models may see no need for this third system. We would argue that this would be a mistake for at least two reasons. First, the qualitative experience of the drive for dignity, and the factors that support or violate this drive, is very different from the experience of cognition or emotion alone, as laid out in the Table. Dignity can be fast or slow, emotionally-laden or thoughtfully pursued. Unlike system 1 and system 2 which are constantly operating to different degrees, system 0 is activated when violated. Thus, the phenomenology of the systems is markedly different, and precision in distinguishing them from one another can support better

exploration of all three. Second, conflating system 0 with system 1 and 2 will reduce our clarity with regard to the practical steps that can be taken to respect dignity in the marketplace. For firms, dividing the drive for dignity from the management of quickly-processed, automatic functions and from slower, more labor-intensive reflective functions – both of which need to be preserved as considerations in their own right – offers an additional tool that in some domains may be paramount in importance.

It may also be that for less-applied academic fields, system 0 is simply less relevant. As marketing is inherently connected to the assignment and exchange of value, it may be more concerned with the meaning of such assignment and experience of such exchange across a dynamic, multi-event experience than, for example, decision-making studies that focus on one-time behaviors or macro-level trends where individual experiences are less focal. However, we believe that for marketers, a systematic approach to designing for recognition, equality and agency can not only help the consumers flourish, it can offer a new means of understanding existing challenges, forming meaningful relationships with consumers, and constitute a source of sustainable competitive advantage. We hope that further discussion and collaboration across disciplines and methods can help us develop an even more complete conceptualization of this important – and we think, necessary - construct.

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