

# Creating the Responsible Consumer: Moralistic Governance Regimes and Consumer Subjectivity

MARKUS GIESLER  
ELA VERESIU

Responsible consumption conventionally stems from an increased awareness of the impact of consumption decisions on the environment, on consumer health, and on society in general. We theorize the influence of moralistic governance regimes on consumer subjectivity to make the opposite case: responsible consumption requires the active creation and management of consumers as moral subjects. Building on the sociology of governmentality, we introduce four processes of consumer responsabilization that, together, comprise the P.A.C.T. routine (personalization, authorization, capabilization, and transformation). After that, we draw on a longitudinal analysis of problem-solving initiatives at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, to explore the role of P.A.C.T. in the creation of four, now commonplace, responsible consumer subjects: the bottom-of-the-pyramid consumer, the green consumer, the health-conscious consumer, and the financially literate consumer. Our analysis informs extant macro-level theorizations of market and consumption systems. We also contribute to prior accounts of responsabilization, marketplace mythologies, consumer subjectivity, and transformative consumer research.

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I just loved the meeting we had yesterday where we gathered a group of creatives together, people from a wide variety of backgrounds to really think through how can we encourage people to think about their health as a sustainable resource in the same way that we think about our ecological environment as a

sustainable resource. So can we really engage people in appreciating that health is a treasure, that it's something that we can't take for granted and that if we invest in it properly it will grow and become more and more valuable throughout our lifespan. We also talked about health not just as a personal resource but as a community resource and one that we might be able to connect through gaming or through electronic measurement or through other ways that people can come together to create a whole greater than the sum of its parts. (Julie Gerberding, president, Merck Vaccines, World Economic Forum 2012)

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Markus Giesler (mgiesler@schulich.yorku.ca) is an associate professor of marketing, Schulich School of Business, York University, 4700 Keele Street, Toronto, ON M3J 1P3, Canada. Ela Veresiu (everesiu@me.com) is a visiting doctoral student at the marketing department of the Schulich School of Business. The authors acknowledge the support of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) and the European Research Council (ERC). For their constructive comments and feedback, the authors thank *Journal of Consumer Research* editor Laura Peracchio, associate editor Søren Askegaard, and three anonymous reviewers, Russ Belk, Robin Canniford, Eileen Fischer, John Sherry, Craig Thompson, Alladi Venkatesh, and the marketing faculties of the University of California, Irvine, SKEMA Business School, the University of Southern Denmark, HEC Montreal, the Marketing Center Münster, and the Wisconsin School of Business.

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Julie Gerberding's statement captures a fairly recent phenomenon. In the 1950s, the idea that health is a "sustainable resource" that "we can't take for granted" would have been a very strange idea. Consumers were firmly embedded in the Welfare State and the New Deal—political arrangements that approached them as citizens with universal rights. The idea that politics is enacted "in identification, group sanctioning, and community championing of brands" that are deemed by consumers to be "the best vessels of alternative politics" (O'Guinn and Muniz 2005, 266; see also Friedman 1999; Kozinets and Handelman

2004; Thompson 2004), that retirement is about “identity renaissance” and the “freedom to engage exclusively in consumption and the availability of attractive consumption options” (Schau, Gilly, and Wolfenbarger 2009, 263), or that credit/debt is not a burden but an entrepreneurial playing field to be actively managed in an effort to accumulate wealth, establish independence, and show patriotism (Peñaloza and Barnhart 2011)—such ideas would have been utterly foreign to the spirit of the time.

How is the responsible consumer created? Previous consumer research has theorized responsible consumption as a moralistic identity project based around an increased awareness of the impact of consumption decisions on the environment, on consumer health, and on society in general (Schor 1998). Following Thompson and Coskuner-Balli (2007, 138), for instance, community-supported agriculture consumers “understand their food choices in relation to a broader palette of concerns, such as ecological sustainability, biodiversity, energy conservation, worker safety, living wages, and, most important, the preservation of small farms and a rural way of life”—values that they feel have been attenuated by the industrial-scale, globally distributed commercial food system and agribusiness companies like Monsanto. Although this conventional approach offers one useful perspective on responsible consumption, it has very little to say about the ways in which responsibility is itself created and sustained as a market-based consumption system (Humphreys 2010). What rhetorical and material strategies of intervention are involved in shaping and governing consumers as free and economically rational, moral market actors?

To answer this question, we theorize the formation of the responsible consumer subject as a governmental process, one that focuses on markets as fundamentally moral projects (Weber 1904–5/1999) and that understands the responsible consumer subject not as a “natural” of the capitalist market but as functional to its development and stability. In order for capitalism to perform in an effective and orderly way, its constraints must be reflected in the moral capacity of individual consumers, who must then adhere to norms that reinforce the social structures upon which it is built (Amable 2011). From this perspective, Gerberding’s urge to “encourage people to think about their health as a sustainable resource” is not on the outside of governmental control, at its limits, but rather presents an integral part of its strategy to morally reshape the choice sets that mediate individual consumer behavior in relation to changing historical conditions.

Several consumer researchers have outlined the need for understanding the ways in which the consumer subject is constituted. For example, Askegaard and Linnet (2011, 389) have demonstrated how consumer researchers’ tendency to prioritize consumers’ lived experiences has operated at the cost of understanding the “context of context”—the institutional framework consumers face. In this article, we shed novel light on the role of the political economy in shaping the responsible consumer subject rather than on the experiences of responsabilized consumers. Likewise, Karababa

and Ger (2011, 738) have called for “more research . . . on the conceptualization of the consumer and the context in which such a subject is formed in order to better understand the relationship between consumer subjects and their environments.” Like Karababa and Ger’s, our analysis responds to Borgerson’s (2005) fundamental contention that the theoretical underpinnings of the concept of the actively self-identifying consumer have not sufficiently been interrogated. Just as, during the Ottoman Empire, Turkish subjects moved from being sultan’s subjects to becoming active consumer subjects (Karababa and Ger 2011), members of the contemporary generation may now be similarly constituted as responsible consumers in ways that are still not properly registered.

To theorize the formation of the responsible consumer subject, we draw on sociological theorizing on governmentality. Foucault (1978–79/2008) has outlined a fundamental shift from direct government through legalistic, centralized, top-down structures to indirect market-based structures of governance through “technologies of the self”—practices by which agents represent to themselves their own ethical self-understanding. For Shamir (2008, 4), one such “technique of the self that sets into action a reflexive subjectivity deemed suitable to partake in the deployment of horizontal authority and one which willingly bears the consequences of its actions” is responsabilization. Shamir describes corporations as one target of responsabilization and some of the economic freedoms deriving from the encouragement of self-reliance rather than direct interventionism.

The different processes of responsabilization have received far less theoretical attention, however. In the context of consumption, we found that responsabilization occurs through four distinct but interrelated processes through which responsibility is shifted away from the state and corporations and the responsible consumer subject is shaped: personalization, authorization, capabilization, and transformation. *Personalization* redefines the solution of a focal social problem in terms of the development of a particular morally enlightened agent, the responsible consumer, and contrasts this consumer’s individual desires, aspirations, and choice capabilities with an immoral other: the irresponsible consumer. *Authorization* draws on available economic, psychological, and other scientific expert knowledge to render the development and adoption of the responsible consumer subjectivity both economically and morally legitimate. *Capabilization* develops a market (products and services) for ethical self-management. And finally, during *transformation*, individual consumers adopt their new moralized self-understanding.

In this article, we theorize the formation of the responsible consumer subject as a governmental process. Building on Ronen Shamir’s (2008) analysis of responsabilization, we introduce the P.A.C.T. routine. We define P.A.C.T. as a four-fold process of consumer responsabilization (*personalization, authorization, capabilization, and transformation*) through which consumers are reconstructed as free, auton-

omous, rational, and entrepreneurial subjects who draw on individual market choices to invest in their own human capital, such that the need for top-down intervention into the market is rendered obsolete. This formulation offers a useful theoretical perspective for investigating how contemporary problem-solving discourses and practices have been historically inscribed in a neoliberal mythology of shared responsibility that formulates a moralistic mandate for the development of strategies and initiatives that frame social, financial, and environmental problems as matters of individual market choice.

To illustrate the creation of the responsible consumer subject, we investigated problem-solving initiatives at the World Economic Forum (WEF). Originally founded in 1971 by Geneva business professor Klaus Schwab as the European Management Forum, the WEF has established itself as “one of the most influential agenda setters” in the contemporary political economy (Burdick, Oxhorn, and Roberts 2009, 23). For one week in January of each year, the forum gathers leaders from the top 1,000 transnational corporations, representatives from 100 of the most influential media groups, key policy makers from national and regional governments and from international organizations, and select academics, experts, and activists from political, economic, scientific, social, and technological fields for their so-called “annual meeting” in the exclusive ski resort Davos, Switzerland. “Committed to improving the state of the world” (<http://www.weforum.org>), these economic elites then develop multilateral, economic policy visions that “shape global, regional, and industry agendas” on a vast array of larger social issues, including poverty, global warming, financial security, and health care (Pigman 2007).

We analyze the process of consumer responsabilization on two mutually constituted analytical levels of moralistic governance. First, we develop a theoretical model of consumer responsabilization—the P.A.C.T. routine—by synthesizing previous sociological scholarship thematizing the neoliberal mythology of shared responsibility and the moralistic governmental practices that it motivates. After that, we illustrate our model by exploring some of the WEF’s recent problem-solving initiatives in greater empirical detail. In the conclusion section, we will discuss the implications of consumer responsabilization for previous scholarship on marketplace mythologies and consumer subjectivity, as well as recent arguments about the responsibility of marketing and consumer researchers to develop critical research and programs aimed at empowering consumers (Mick et al. 2012).

### **THEORETICAL DEVELOPMENT: THE P.A.C.T. ROUTINE**

A fundamental conflict redressed by the neoliberal mythology of shared responsibility is that between responsibility and participation. The liberal tradition celebrates the free market as a naturally liberating force that fosters good moral conduct and individual responsibility. In this framing, “markets constitute the best possible arrangement

for the satisfaction of individual needs and the efficient allocation of resources” (Fourcade and Healy 2007, 286). A social-protectionist perspective that views the market like the proverbial fire—a useful servant but a terrifying master—has challenged this view. Here, the unregulated market is a dangerous force that systematically undermines any sense of participation by playing on a debased instinct of competition. This model favors the welfare state that assuages, through its binding rules and regulations, the negative consequences of capitalism, such as social rivalry and ecological damage. Historically, Polanyi (1944/2001) has provided the most forceful rendering of the idea that the market thrives on formal equality combined with brutal inequities in practice.

The enduring democratic conflict between the Left’s commitment to participation and the Right’s commitment to responsibility is held to be resolved when perfect competition is not understood as a natural state but as an ideal scenario, thereby rearticulating all socio-moral responsibility onto individual market actors rather than on the market as a system. In sharp contrast to the dualistic perspective (Bourdieu and Wacquant 2001), neoliberalism therefore regards the market and capitalism as anything but given by nature (Amable 2011). Because neoliberalism understands them as artificial and historical constructions, their existence and sustenance require a particular institutional framework. Thus, rather than assigning responsibility to the state and corporations, neoliberalism postulates an increased ethical responsibility of individuals.

In the neoliberal logic, all responsibility must thus be shared within a society of economically rational actors “whose moral quality is based on the fact that they rationally assess the costs and benefits of a certain act as opposed to other alternative acts. As the choice of options for action is, or so the neo-liberal notion of rationality would have it, the expression of free will on the basis of a self-determined decision, the consequences of the action are borne by the subject alone, who is also solely responsible for them” (Lemke 2001, 201). Consequently, morally prescriptive, top-down regulations are rejected in favor of freedom-of-choice models supported by a host of moral guidelines, codes of conduct, and nonbinding rules. A horizontal “market of authorities” (Shamir 2008) is envisioned that negotiates these moral guidelines through “a shared problem-solving process coded by notions such as ‘multi-party cooperation,’ ‘constructive dialogue,’ ‘multi-stakeholder consultation,’ ‘task sharing,’ and ‘democratic participation’” (Shamir 2008, 7). Rather than through partisan compromise, an enlightened elite guided by ethical considerations preserves the common good from populist temptations by reaching a consensus through deliberation.

In this “government of competence and ethics” (Amable 2011, 19), institutions traditionally mandated to *protect* consumers as citizens with universal rights such as parliaments, unions, and political parties are not rendered obsolete. Rather they are placed on par with nongovernmental organizations, charities, and corporations in *facilitating*

and *nurturing* responsible consumption by competing over the development of responsibility-enhancing market regulations, policies, guidelines, and standards “both intrinsically and in their relations with each other” (Shamir 2008, 4). The neoliberal mythology of shared responsibility valorizes the solution of social problems through morally responsible market actors. Hence, larger problems in society (e.g., poverty, illness, natural disaster) will set a moralization process in motion through which responsibility is shifted away from the state and corporations and reassigned onto the individual agent.

Previous sociological scholarship on moralistic governance regimes (e.g., Amable 2011; Fourcade and Healy 2007; Hamann 2009; Lemke 2001; Shamir 2008) has outlined four distinct but interrelated processes involved in creating responsible subjectivity. First, the positioning of the responsabilized subject as the central problem-solving agent requires a particular social, ecological, or financial problem to be shifted from the systemic to the level of individual decision making (Humphreys and Thompson, forthcoming). Committed to preserving the common good from the dangers of populism, economic elites may diagnose a morally deprived capitalism that neglects the diversity of individual aspirations and emphasize how a heightened moral responsibility by individual stakeholders is the key to the solution of the social problem at hand. We call this process *personalization*. Personalization exercises normative power over individuals by redefining the solution of the social problem at hand as a matter of developing a more ethical individual conduct rather than one of collective protection and redistribution.

Redefining the social problem in ways that necessitate the responsible subject for its solution is an important first step in the process of *responsibilization*. However, since this moralistic problem definition must still compete with other problem definitions, including protectionist and liberal alternatives, it must be further legitimized and substantiated. Knowledge from economics, psychology, medicine, and other disciplines may therefore be mobilized to position (the encouragement of) responsible self-conduct as a dual moral and economic deed (Hamann 2009). We refer to this process as *authorization*. Authorization entails a variety of legitimational moves ranging from the linking of the proposed moral behavioral ethos, to fundamental psychological constructs such as overall well-being, happiness, and self-esteem (Lemke 2001, 201), to the use of neoclassical economics to establish the indispensability of a multi-stakeholder involvement to the solution of system-level social issues (Read 2009, 28).

Third, responsabilization requires not only a formal problem definition that is shared by all involved stakeholders but also a concrete material infrastructure, technologies, and practical regimes or, in short, a moralized market, through which the desired ethical subjectivity can manage its responsibilities (Read 2009). For instance, Rosanvallon (2008) has described how a homogenous mass of unemployed populations can be turned into a “society of particularity.” This entails making undesirable activities, such as being on wel-

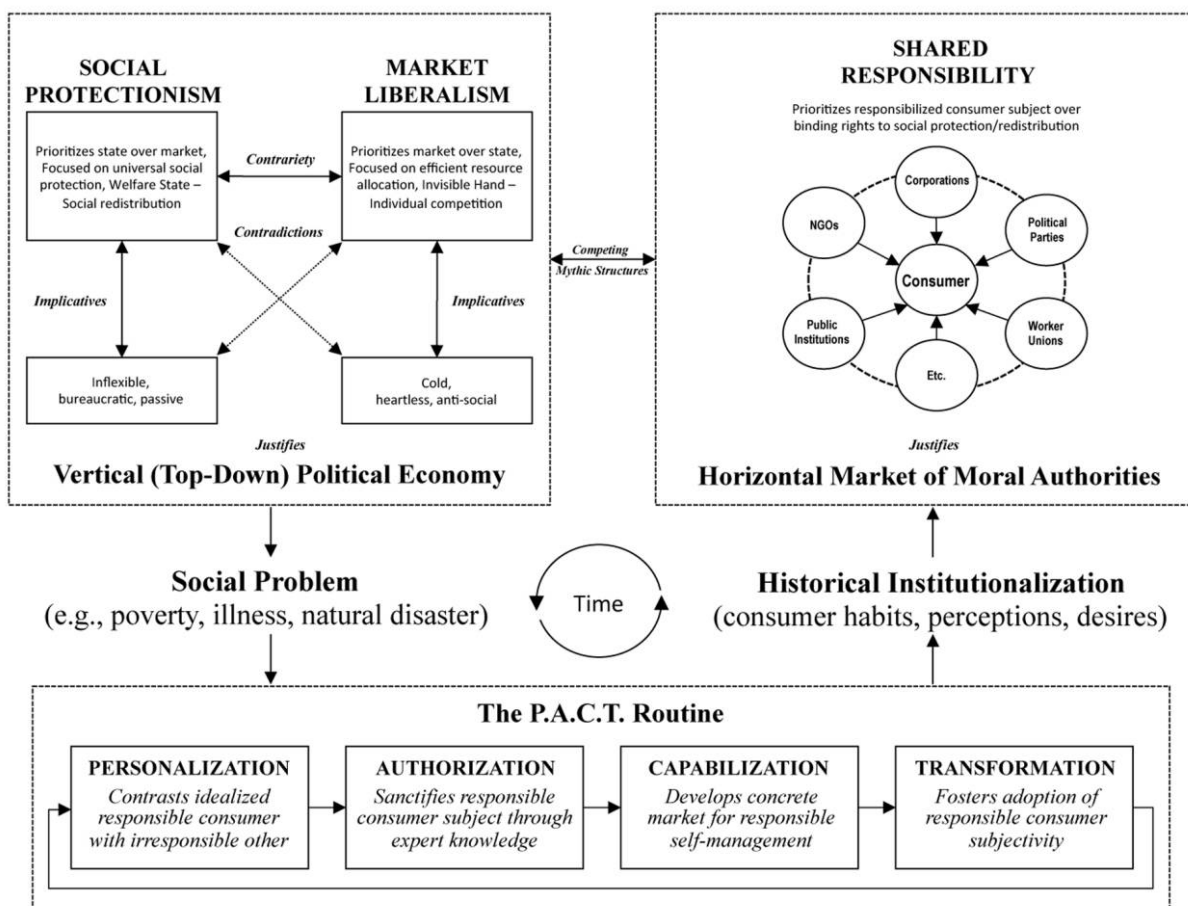
fare, costly and desirable activities fostering concrete self-management and monitoring, such as job databases, advice literature, and individualized empowerment workshops, inexpensive. The creation of these measures and techniques is necessary not only because they help individuals “dynamically manage their lives” but also because they render the new contract between the individual and the community based on responsibilities rather than universal rights materially possible (Giddens 1994). We refer to this process of individual responsabilization as *capabilization*—the creation of an infrastructure of products and services that support the individual’s active self-management.

Finally, the previous three processes of personalization, authorization, and capabilization inscribe the responsible individual not only as one among many others subjectivities. They actively rechannel the flow of interests and desires in terms of this desired subjectivity, thereby fostering behavioral change (Read 2009). The resulting institutional framework discourages welfarist subjectivity and instead empowers individuals to actively self-govern, calculate their own interests, and navigate the moralized landscape of choice, not as a malediction, but as a captivating identity project ripe with freedom, growth, and an opportunity to lead within and fundamentally enrich their respective communities. Because this fourth process of responsabilization entails concrete behavioral change as opposed to philosophical (personalization), scientific (authorization), or material (capabilization) structure, we refer to it as *transformation*.

From our discussion of the theoretical relationship between the neoliberal mythology of shared responsibility and the moralistic governmental practices that it motivates, we develop a process model of consumer responsabilization: the P.A.C.T. routine (see fig. 1). The model theorizes the formation of the responsible consumer subject as a governmental process. The top level represents the competing mythic structures within which the contemporary political economy operates. The bottom level represents four distinct but interrelated processes of consumer responsabilization. The two oppositional arrows of “Social Problem” and “Historical Institutionalization” represent our proposed dynamic between mythic and practical levels of consumer responsabilization. Neoliberal capitalism moves through phases of perpetual structural instability. In each phase, tensions between opposing democratic standpoints following a major social crisis may motivate economic elites to initiate a moral reform process. In the personalization phase, these elites may establish the responsible consumer as the chief problem-solving agent. During authorization, expert knowledge may be presented to show how the cultivation of a more responsible consumption ethos contributes to the solution of the given problem. Capabilization makes responsible consumption materially possible in terms of moralized products and services. The resulting moralized landscape of consumer choice urges consumers to adopt their new responsibilities (transformation). While this production of the responsible consumer effectively relieves socio-moral duties from the state and corporations, new crises can destabilize consum-

FIGURE 1

CONSUMER RESPONSIBILIZATION AS A GOVERNMENTAL PROCESS



ers’ ethical self-understanding and necessitate another moral intervention into society on behalf of the market. To explore this process in greater empirical detail, we will now turn to our analysis of the World Economic Forum.

**PROBLEM SOLVING ANALYSIS**

Previous sociological research has characterized the World Economic Forum as one of the most influential “agenda setters” in the contemporary political economy (e.g., Burdick et al. 2009; Robinson and Harris 2000; Sklair 2002). Hence, one reliable path toward investigating the creation of the responsible consumer subject is to analyze how the WEF’s policy visions have transferred to decisions made about marketing strategy. To pursue this goal, we used an institutional approach that, similar to Karababa and Ger’s (2011) historical approach, involves both discursive and practical levels. At the discursive level, we investigated the countervailing discourses about the proper management of

social problems operating in the contemporary political economy. At the practical level, we focused on the nonrhetorical structures within which these political discourses exist and are supported: institutional action, changes, and continuities and the changes and continuities in implementation.

Table 1 presents a summary of our data sources. We collected all materials published by the WEF between 2004 and 2013, including annual reports, task force recommendations, statistical analyses, agenda council reports, white papers, case studies, press statements, and video materials. These online and offline materials totaled approximately 490 gigabytes of digital information. To contextualize this data set, we conducted in-depth interviews with 15 corporate participants between 2004 and 2012. We used a longitudinal study approach to conduct up to four interviews per informant ( $M = 3$ ). These interviews totaled approximately 5 gigabytes of audio material, transcribed to 764 pages of single-spaced text. Delegate interviews were conducted in

**TABLE 1**  
TYPES OF DATA SOURCES

| Source  | Type   | Purpose of usage   |
|---|--|--|
| World Economic Forum (online and print materials)   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Annual reports</li> <li>• Task force recommendations</li> <li>• Task force recommendations</li> <li>• Statistical analyses</li> <li>• Industry-specific policy reports</li> <li>• Agenda council reports</li> <li>• Case studies</li> <li>• Press statements</li> <li>• Videos</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand the WEF's policy visions and narratives</li> </ul>   |
| Interviews (in-depth, semi-structured)  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 15 corporate WEF delegates, up to four interviews per informant (<math>M = 3</math>) overtime at WEF annual meetings</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand individualized interpretations of the neoliberal mythology of shared responsibility</li> </ul> |
| Field notes   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participant and nonparticipant observation at WEF annual meetings</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand the creation and negotiation dynamics of policy consensus</li> </ul>                           |
| International government bodies (World Bank, International Monetary Fund, United Nations, European Union) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Statistical reports</li> <li>• Policy statements</li> <li>• Laws</li> <li>• Videos</li> <li>• Press statements</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trace the adoption of WEF narratives in international government policies</li> </ul>                      |
| National governments (74 countries participating at the WEF)  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Annual reports</li> <li>• Laws</li> <li>• Policy statements</li> <li>• Statistical reports</li> <li>• Press statements</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trace the adoption of WEF narratives in national government policies</li> </ul>                           |
| Global corporations (1,000 WEF foundation member companies)   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Annual reports</li> <li>• Sustainability reports</li> <li>• Governance reports</li> <li>• CSR reports</li> <li>• Case studies</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trace the adoption of WEF narratives in corporate policies</li> </ul>                                     |

Davos, and in a select few cases, over the phone, by Skype, and via e-mail.

Data collection was finished in March 2013, when additional data were unlikely to alter our interpretations. The move from a single data point toward a more systematic understanding of consumer responsabilization involved a threefold application of Thompson's (1997) hermeneutic analysis approach. First, an intratextual analysis was conducted to examine each narrative for its moralistic content. Second, we undertook an intertextual analysis to elicit consumer models within clusters of delegate narratives. Here we unpacked the most prominent moralistic meanings as expressed across the totality of institutional WEF materials as well as throughout our delegate interview data. Finally, we conducted an intertemporal analysis to link our interpretations to different phases of a historical process (Giesler 2008).

Our empirical findings characterize the WEF's activities between 2004 and 2012 in terms of the creation of four, now commonplace, responsible consumer subjects: the bottom-of-the-pyramid (BoP) consumer (e.g., Varman, Skålén, and Belk 2012), the green consumer (e.g., Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007), the health-conscious consumer (e.g., Thompson 2004), and the financially literate consumer (e.g., Peñaloza and Barnhart 2011). Each consumer subject was created to carry responsibility for the solution of a particular historical problem (severe poverty,

environmental degradation/global warming, chronic illness, and financial instability/debt) and imbued the adjustment of public and private policies to the exigencies of shared responsibility with heightened moral significance while rendering social-protectionist calls for legalistic intervention into unrestrained economic practice inherently immoral. Next, we use institutional practices and delegate interviews to elaborate on the creation of each consumer subject in greater empirical detail.

### The Fight against Severe Poverty: Establishing the Bottom-of-the-Pyramid Consumer

Consumer responsabilization begins with a process of personalization—the contrasting of the idealized responsible consumer subject with an irresponsible other. Such a process was also empirically manifest at the WEF after the United Nations' (2001, <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>) shocking revelation that roughly 4 billion people in the world were actually forced to live on less than \$1 a day not only put new pressure on the development community to address the many manifestations of severe poverty, such as poor labor conditions, malnutrition, poor energy infrastructure, and sanitation conditions, but also significant demands among poverty activists, poor consumers, development experts, and socialist politicians to curb market freedoms in service of better social protection and redistribution.

In the face of this growing tension between protectionist and liberal agendas, WEF deputy chairman Klaus Schwab and the WEF shifted the debate about poverty alleviation from the traditional systemic level to the level of bottom-of-the-pyramid consumption. From this moralistic perspective, merely focusing on the simple oppositions between rich and poor or the world of social compassion and the world of business, as had been conventionally the case for decades, could never account for the diversity of desires and aspirations among the poor. In sharp contrast, ending poverty required everyone to understand poverty as a problem of individual consumer behavior and participation. This moralistic formulation not only redefined severe poverty from a complex systemic problem involving multiple economic, social, and political levels to a moralistic problem of individual consumer choice. It also morally mandated a broad array of stakeholders related to severe poverty, including poverty activists, development agencies, politicians, and corporate CEOs, to assist in the realization of this ideal BoP consumer:

The microloan partnerships we develop are firmly rooted in the conviction that we really need antidotes to the paternalism that is inherent to traditional poverty alleviation approaches. . . . We strive for a radical change of minds. The old mindset was that all poor consumers are inherently vulnerable, weak, and unable to decide for themselves. This is a really patronizing and arrogant standpoint that has long stood in the way of poverty eradication because it pretends that there is no potential whatsoever. But there is a lot of potential. . . . So in sharp contrast to the old view, let's instead build on the idea that all the decision power lies actually with the poor, not with government or higher-order stakeholders. I believe that poor consumers have what it takes to empower themselves, that they can be creative and flexible decision makers, and that the problem is the lack of opportunities to perform rather than a lack of willingness. (Matthew [61, CEO, global bank])

The contrast between a patronizing and arrogant capitalism that does not let poor consumers decide for themselves and a morally enlightened poverty eradication logic through the market that empowers consumers from the ground up and gives them opportunities for self-realization not only transforms Matthew into a noble development worker. It also blames defenders of the welfare state for dismissing otherwise "creative and flexible decision makers" as passive citizens who are "inherently vulnerable, weak, and unable to decide for themselves" (Matthew). The reduction of poverty to individual conduct, in turn, renders microloans a magic device for individual empowerment, while all structural inequality is ultimately owing to the individual's unwillingness or inability to carry out his or her decision power.

To sanctify the (creation of the) desired bottom-of-the-pyramid consumer as a dual moral and economic deed, the WEF also engaged in processes of authorization. On the institutional level, we found evidence of authorization at the

WEF in expert formulations, most notably those delivered in Prahalad's (2004) neoclassic economic scholarship about "wealth at the bottom of the pyramid." For example, Prahalad tirelessly argued in Davos sessions that severe poverty could only be resolved if businesses, governments, and donor agencies stopped thinking about the poor as victims and instead began to nurture and support "resilient and creative entrepreneurs and value-conscious consumers" (Prahalad 2004, 1).

This mobilization of expert knowledge not only validated the cultivation of the BoP consumer as the only solution to the problem of severe poverty but also allowed corporations to present the service to a diverse community ripe with entrepreneurial consumers eager to have more and better choices as a scientifically legitimized enterprise. Another example of authorization can be found in Maximilian's (37, CEO, energy company) techie rendering (pseudonym upon request) of the consumer-health and overall community benefits of solar lamps:

There are approximately two billion people on this planet who live without access to reliable and affordable power. Most of these consumers are living in villages so it's very difficult to reach them. . . . Governments [in countries with poor energy infrastructure] often subsidize low quality energy through environmentally damaging kerosene lanterns, which puts people's health at risk. . . . So we created an affordable solar lamp that allows these consumers to enjoy energy at a low cost. . . . We serve markets in India, China, and Africa. In these markets, we have empowered over 10 million consumers.

By mobilizing a powerful contrast between dirty and backward-oriented energy infrastructure and clean and forward-looking technological innovation, Maximilian not only disqualifies public energy solutions as expensive and dangerous, but through his linking of geographical and progressive-technological rhetoric, he also renders poor communities as progressive innovation hubs ripe with opportunities for creativity and empowerment rather than the locus where the welfare state's polluting and life-threatening effects become manifest.

The WEF also organized multiple task forces (e.g., WEF 2005a, 2005b) developing scalable marketing initiatives that could serve to capabilize poor consumers to exercise the desired resilience, creativity, and entrepreneurship. Our field notes reveal a shared enthusiasm among delegates about pioneers of microlending, such as Grameen bank CEO Muhammad Yunus, who showed how encouraging social entrepreneurship could bring prosperity to local communities. Such initiatives, in turn, encouraged interviewed WEF delegates to contribute to the capabilization of the bottom of the pyramid in their own respective marketing contexts:

By giving poor consumers new roles, we are also a veritable source of economic development. The secret is that we don't view our consumers as helpless victims. . . . Taking microfranchise seriously as a sustainable and scalable solution to eradicating poverty means understanding the true power of social entrepreneurship. So we don't view our consumers as

passive recipients of welfare. To us they are resilient entrepreneurs and value-conscious consumers who work very hard to help improve public health and wealth. They are healthy and productive individuals who serve their villages. They act as mothers, friends, market researchers, businesswomen, and sometimes even as nurses. We provide them with the basic resources, for which they are responsible, and it's their choice how much they want to sell. (Michael [44, CEO, cosmetics company])

Michael's quote renders social entrepreneurship in the positive light of a market-based feminism (Scott 2005, 2014). From this perspective, by reducing poor citizens to welfare recipients, public infrastructure is blind to, and thus reinforces, some of the existential struggles poor women are facing in traditionalist settings, whereas his initiative offers an opportunity for emancipation by combining multiple identity projects, such as mother, friend, market researcher, businesswoman, and nurse. In sharp contrast, public social infrastructure not only reinforces the contradiction between business and social goals, it cannot assist consumers in managing their entrepreneurial talents and innovative capabilities. How this emphasis on awakening latent entrepreneurial capabilities adds up to an intriguing utopian image of market-based poverty alleviation when combined with personalization (reducing complex structural poverty to a lack of healthy snacking options) and authorization (linking market development to health and nutritional benefits) is evident in Danone CEO Franck Riboud's narrative:

Grameen Danone is a social business we started in 2006. Our objective is to bring health through nutrition to as many children as possible and to have a positive social impact on poor local communities by creating employment, income, and skill. . . . The problem is that children in Bangladesh didn't have many healthy snacking options. . . . Through the Grameen-Danone initiative, we contribute to local development by offering a product that has high nutritional value and is affordable to the poorest of individuals. . . . Shokti Doi [that which builds strength] is a huge success-story for everyone since it is a local development story. The yoghurt is locally sourced and sold, and contains zinc, iron, vitamin A, and iodine. It is distributed either through local shops or through Grameen Danone ladies—a network of micro-entrepreneurs who are trained by our staff.

A memorable clash between U2 singer Bono and Riboud during the WEF 2002 (field notes) served to illustrate how wide the gap between social-protectionism and market-liberalism agendas actually was. In 2007, this democratic deadlock seems to have disappeared in favor of a moralistic approach to severe poverty that allows both Bono and Riboud to appear in the same category of enlightened moral agents working hand in hand to improve the state of the world. Assigning the responsibility for health and nutrition to individual consumers in affected communities is not only a way of "doing good." Danone is also relieved from paying taxes and contributing to formal health regimes as Shokti Doi discourages the poor to see themselves as recipients of

formal health care and instead encourages them to view themselves as entrepreneurs making an investment in their human capital, either through the quest for healthier choice options or by serving their community. Whereas a bureaucratic solution forces consumers into accepting whatever humanitarian intervention higher-order authorities deem right, Danone is giving consumers the freedom to shape their own destiny.

By legitimizing "the overall aim . . . to ensure that markets work better for the poor as entrepreneurs, wage employees, and consumers" (United Nations 2007, 4), these and other consumer responsabilization activities have transformed poor consumers' interests and desires away from social support and into the realm of entrepreneurial conduct and value-conscious consumption. Whereas these consumers could previously approach poverty through the lens of social rights and protection, such a conduct has been made costly and undesirable. Rather, bottom-of-the-pyramid markets actively encourage poor consumers to strategize for themselves among various market options, ranging from microcredits, mobile capital plans, microfranchise regimes, and low-cost energy solutions, while, at the same time, discouraging their traditional subjectivity of citizens who can enjoy a universal right to social protection.

### The Battle against Ecological Degradation/Global Warming: Creating the Green Consumer

Another responsible consumer on the agenda and of interest at the World Economic Forum was the green consumer. Around 2003, climate experts began announcing a panoply of shocking environmental developments, such as melting ice caps, rising sea levels, skyrocketing carbon emissions, and a growing number of extreme weather events, such as hurricanes, monsoons, floods, and dire heat waves. Not only did these reports emphasize a new scientific consensus that climate change was in fact occurring and that human activities were the primary driver, but they also documented the existence of a strong discrepancy between rich and poor countries, with the latter category being hit hardest by the consequences of climate change.

As global warming became a more widespread cultural concern, it also reinvigorated demands for more rigorous environmental laws. Traditionally environmental protection had been linked to public policy and development strategies. From this top-down, "command and control" perspective, corporations were legally mandated by the state to subjugate their business activities to larger goals of environmental protection and safety. Paying environmental taxes, upholding environmental standards, and paying for environmental damages had been routine elements in the environmental policy mix. The global warming crisis increased the political pressure to curb extant market freedoms, which stood in an uneasy relationship with corporate agendas admonishing greater fidelity to the competitive logic and warning of the impact on extended environmental protection on economic productivity. Furthermore, the Kyoto Protocol, thus far the



only global regulatory instrument, was soon expiring, and some countries' hesitancy to ratify the treatise foreshadowed the difficulty of finding a new democratic compromise.

Once again, the responsabilization of the green consumer began with WEF executive chairman Klaus Schwab, who initiated a process of personalization by shifting the problem of global warming away from the level of the state and public institutions toward that of individual consumer decision making. This moralistic reformulation not only rendered problem solving battles along democratic fault lines of "devise much stricter environmental laws" versus "do not sacrifice economic growth" decidedly irresolvable and, thus, useless. It also made the problem of global warming "everybody's business" (Schwab 2004, field notes), thereby drawing multiple environmental leaders, including national and regional ministers of the environment, Greenpeace activists, and large groups of climate experts, advocates, and ecologically active celebrities to the summit. From Schwab's moralistic viewpoint, improving the state of the world meant that public representatives and representatives of the world of environmental protection should work with (rather than against) representatives of the business community.

No longer about partisan-driven political quarrels, fighting global warming was now about developing a shared commitment to nurturing individual consumer values such as innovation, creativity, flexibility, and entrepreneurial spirit (Fourcade and Healy 2007). Accordingly, the WEF's promoted spirit of partnership and multilateral collaboration could only materialize around a particular problem-solving protagonist, the green consumer. From this perspective, political disagreements between opposing public and private agendas sustained themselves mainly on the basis of both sides assuming an anonymous mass of citizens, thereby neglecting the diversity of consumer abilities and ambitions to contribute to the solution of global warming. Instead of wasting valuable time by defending their respective partisan interests, opposing camps had a profound moral obligation to help foster these individual ambitions, thereby creating a "revolution in green consumption" ([http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8qsoY7T7j\\_k](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8qsoY7T7j_k)):

People here understand the need to drill deeper, on a psychological level. That's the spirit of Davos. That's what makes this gathering so special. . . . We're all passionately committed to implementing absolute sustainability. Absolute sustainability in the sense of nurturing an entirely new set of water consumption habits and attitudes in people, in short, creating a fundamentally new generation of water consumers who readily connect environmental issues with their personal water lifestyles and what they aspire to as individuals. (Jeff [56, sustainability manager, soft drink company])

Note how the rhetorical shift from viewing water security as a passive and superficial state-level concern to the pursuit of individual-level sustainable consumption as a "deeper" and individual attitude-shifting enterprise imbues Jeff's call for "absolute sustainability" with heightened moral significance. In their adaptations of the WEF's green consumption

myth, WEF delegates like Jeff not only portray themselves as mind-set-changing heroes who partner up with other leaders to help consumers make more sustainable decisions but also encourage consumers to see themselves no longer as protected citizens who have something to gain from stricter environmental laws but as environmental stewards for whom every action—from installing a green thermostat to buying energy-saving light bulbs—is an investment in their own and the planet's future.

According to our proposed P.A.C.T. routine, the dual moral and economic validation of this framing entails a process of authorization. Consider, in this context, the academy-award winning documentary "An Inconvenient Truth" (Gore 2006) by former US presidential candidate and long-time WEF member Al Gore. What allowed Gore to claim that climate change was "really not a political issue, so much as a moral one" and that we need a passionate commitment from all involved stakeholders to become a society in which "each one of us is a cause of global warming, but each of us can make choices to change that with the things we buy, with the electricity we use, the cars we drive" was a reference to cutting-edge environmental, economic, and psychological science that substantiated the link between global warming and individual consumer decision making.

Gore's discussion of market-based initiatives fostering the green consumer, in turn, inspired a process of *capabilization*—the creation of a concrete market structure supporting the green consumer. Multiple agenda councils were organized to translate the need for green consumption into a number of scalable market solutions. Each report (e.g., WEF 2009a, 2009b, 2009c, 2010a, 2010c) not only emphasized the need to move outside of static policy mechanisms, the "failed" Kyoto protocol being the most prominent example, and instead foster green market partnerships. It also encouraged corporations to nurture peoples' green consumption skills. Consider, in this context, again Jeff's and Tina's (both 28, business students, young global leaders) narratives:

Let me take you through one of our current initiatives. . . . With the [Aquameter], for example, we give South-African consumers a technology that they can use to take stock of the amount of water they have saved each time they run the tap or take a shower. We also provide cool facts and tips, like here. So this one says . . . purified bottled water contains ten times more minerals than regular tap water. (Jeff)

I'm focused on the millennials, that's my generation. I feel very responsible for helping create my generation's sustainable legacy. . . . I'm proud in terms of the progress we've made so far. . . . Together with [a US energy company] we have created a program to get students to take greater care of their own ecological footprint on campus by sending phone alerts to them at bedtime. . . . In colleges participating in our program, heating costs in dorms have gone down by almost thirty percent. . . . Next, we want to develop a mobile phone app that people can use not only to monitor their own energy consumption but also to sign up with more sustainable energy providers. (Tina)

In the contexts of water consumption and energy consumption, respectively, Jeff and Tina present themselves as caring environmental protectors who save the planet by developing cutting-edge technology, such as water meters, energy-saving programs, green light bulbs, and cell phone apps, and by teaching consumers on how to use these technologies to reduce their own ecological footprint. This techtopian move not only discredits defenders of stricter environmental laws as bestowing a dangerously anti-creative, anti-innovative, and iniquitous Luddite position but also portrays them as lazy bureaucrats who do not understand that regulating corporations only stifles their motivation to show environmental care through innovation.

Steve (48, chief sustainability officer, IKEA Group) demonstrates how this emphasis on green consumption capabilities adds up to a seemingly powerful market-based movement against global warming when combined with personalization (linking the ease/difficulty of ending global warming to the absence/presence of sustainable consumer options) and authorization (linking individual CO<sub>2</sub> emission reduction to full environmental recovery):

People want to act on climate change, but it needs to be easy for them to do so and they also need to feel that others are doing something too. People feel their actions only make a difference if they are part of something much bigger. . . . With Prime Minister Tony Blair and a wide group of NGO and corporate partners in the UK, and later beyond, we launched the “Together” campaign. Each partner made commitments to help customers reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions—a phone tariff without the need to buy a new phone, discounted loft insulation, and affordable energy saving light bulbs. The campaign itself was successful, saving an estimated 1 million tons of CO<sub>2</sub> at the same time as helping billions of consumers collectively save 200 million pounds off their energy bills.

Steve leaves no doubt that solving global warming is no longer about regulating IKEA Group’s CO<sub>2</sub> emissions but about regulating IKEA less so that the corporation is more motivated to help consumers reducing theirs. Not only has this focus led powerful national and international institutions and corporations to implement policies “stressing that consumption habits had to change if people really wanted to address the growing environmental crisis, civil society representatives called on all sectors of society to use more responsible and sustainable consumption and production practices” (United Nations 2011, 1). The resulting green market has also rechanneled consumer interests and desires away from systemic environmental protection through market-curbing legal mechanisms toward the accomplishment of green goals through the management and monitoring of one’s individual green consumption projects. Global warming would thus continue, not because capitalism would be inherently unsustainable, but only because continuing environmental bureaucracy or individual ignorance prevented the blossoming of a green consumption lifestyle.

## Combating Chronic Illness: The Creation of the Health-Conscious Consumer

A third responsible-consumer type on the WEF’s agenda was the health-conscious consumer. Here, the watershed event was the World Health Organization’s (2006) announcement that the global war against disease, long appearing to be on the road to victory, had brought a dangerous comeback. In addition to infectious diseases, the rapid rise in noncommunicable diseases such as cardiovascular disease, chronic respiratory disease, cancer, diabetes, obesity, and mental health was of particular concern. Adding additional pressure on national and international government bodies was a growing dissatisfaction with the health-care system, pitting welfarist demands for better protection against corporate agendas admonishing greater fidelity to competitive solutions.

Once again, the WEF reshaped the political debate through a process of personalization—the redefinition of the given problem from the sociopolitical level to the level of individual consumption. Around 2007, the WEF began propagating that health care should never be redistributive and collective per se, as this would invariably foster passive consumer-citizens who are not actively contributing to their own well-being. It should rather be individualized, taking individual consumers’ health ambitions into account. This solution ethos not only seemed to end the dreaded democratic debate but also fundamentally redefined the roles of health activists, medical and technological experts, gerontologists, health sociologists, and critical celebrities. Representing their traditional democratic interests would be a way to demonstrate inflexibility and lack of vision and thus not present a contribution to ending chronic illness. Good conduct, in turn, would entail the prioritization of the general interest in consumer values of hard work, discipline, and can-do spirit (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ReDWStO6W6E>). This enlightened role of institutions is captured in Julia’s (health officer, insurance company) statement:

Yes, all of this requires governments and public institutions to rethink their roles as well. Definitely! . . . If we all agree that consumers need to be more engaged and if we call on corporations to rethink their business, provide healthier alternatives, and help educate consumers, all of this is only possible if governments understand their role differently as well. . . . So my passionate plea, if you will, my request to governments here is this: governments need to rethink their mandate. Taxes and bureaucratic initiatives do one thing and one thing only, they prevent partnership and collaboration because they create constraints rather than opportunities. Instead be enablers! Create a climate of partnership and collaboration where we can work together to engage consumers. Provide the conditions that are conducive to doing this in terms of tax breaks for those that work hard to develop and provide healthier consumption alternatives, for instance!

Note how mobilizing the health conscious consumer allows Julia to distinguish between good and bad government. Her

preferred government is path-breaking and innovative because it views health not as a matter of “disabling” important market freedoms but as a consumer identity project that can only be “enabled” by providing greater freedom and flexibility for corporations. Julia’s reference to a more health-conscious consumer readily justifies her framing of understanding corporate taxes as a way to reduce rather than increase health and freedom. From this perspective, subscribing to a welfarist, tax-based definition of health as a universal right is immoral because it ultimately produces passive, uninspired, egocentric, and fatigued citizens who, in their total inability to realize their full potential, will automatically become sick. Morally enlightened policy makers, on the other hand, understand that tax breaks and the dissolution of binding health-care regimes are not only an opportunity to demonstrate creative multi-stakeholder collaboration and a revolutionary reach across the aisle but also that they enable innovative and individually empowering market solutions that allow consumers to bring their health ambitions and desires to full realization. It is the moral duty of Julia, Julie Gerberding (see introduction quote), and other leaders “to revive the essence of the market, by betting on a collective re-foundation and a new ethic based not on profit maximization” (Amable 2009, 18) but on responsible consumption.

By circulating and promoting economically inspired medical and psychological studies linking the solution of the chronic illness problem to policy frameworks that stimulate changes in individual consumer behavior, the WEF also engaged in processes of authorization. Such studies were not only widely circulated at the summit, their authors were also regular expert contributors to roundtables on health and chronic illness. For example, for Kevin M. Murphy and Robert H. Topel (2006, 872), whose study “The Value of Health and Longevity” provides one key scientific cornerstone in many WEF reports (e.g., <http://www.weforum.org/pdf/Wellness/report.pdf>), improvements in health and wellness are a function of “individuals’ maximization of lifetime expected utility.” Social improvements, according to this study, thus relied not so much on better treatment regimes but had to be understood preventatively, in terms of initiatives that enable consumers to choose among a broader set of healthy options:

*Marla:* For example, did you know that only 10 minutes of exercise everyday could extend your life by 10 months? (48, corporate health officer, supermarket chain)

*Interviewer:* No, I didn’t.

*Marla:* See, that’s the problem. Neither do more than 90% of people out there. Imagine how this knowledge would allow you to extend your actual life span? Or better, imagine you could plug your life into a mobile app that actually told you these things and link them to your local supermarket shelf. Oh now we’re talking, right? Now you’re creating that balanced meal, now you’re striving to get those extra years.

On the surface level, Marla’s quote could be read as a

simple encyclopedic remark. If interpreted through the lens of shared responsibility, however, her statement raises a smart, self-governing, health-conscious, and tech-savvy consumer who balances his or her caloric equations with the precision of a nutritional scientist. The welfare state, in turn, is rendered obsolete as a decidedly antiscientific system, where “more than 90% of people out there” are left in the dark and deprived of the possibility to take their health and fitness into their own hands.

The logical implication of such authorizations, namely, that increasing corporate freedom to motivate consumer responsabilization was the only legitimate approach to ending chronic illness, in turn set the stage for capabilization. For instance, an array of medical case studies and policy design reports (WEF 2007, 2008a, 2008b, 2011a, 2012d, 2013a, 2013b, 2013c) called on business to lead the fight against global illness, heralded corporations who had already done so as economic and moral leaders, and offered steps on how to make the change. For instance, according to one document (WEF 2011b, 1), “companies also have a moral obligation to fight health problems” by developing “corporate health schemes, public-private partnerships, and a market for healthy products and services,” such as “health checks,” “tools and knowledge on how to improve nutrition, reduce alcohol and tobacco consumption, become physically active, and make use of prevention screenings.” When this emphasis on consumer capabilization is combined with personalization (framing chronic illness not as a structural problem but as a problem of individual behavioral conduct) and authorization (using scientific knowledge to link the solution of chronic illness to changes in individual consumer behavior, etc.), the result is a powerful vision about how the adoption of a greater health consciousness can solve the problem of chronic illness:

Although we are a global company, we are deeply rooted in local communities all over the world. And as such, we have a vested stake in people’s health and wellbeing. . . . Our activities and partnerships mostly revolve around finding ways to instruct consumers, to actively encourage them to engage in more movement and exercise. . . . A number of important initiatives and innovative strategies are on the table at the moment, including better nutrition labels, a global educational website, and a range of television advertisements that tell health and fitness success stories that get consumers to think about living healthy and happy lives and that make more active, healthy lifestyles and a mindful attitude about health and wellness desirable and aspirational. . . . So we urge consumers to work harder and more creatively on their health, we offer the latest scientific perspectives on how consumers can manage their own health and stay fit through low- and non-calorie options. Consumers need to understand how to balance their calories and we provide the resources they need to lead active lives. (Sabine [46, health marketing officer, soft drink company])

Who, following Sabine, still needs the existence of a formal health-care system when she can provide so many resources

to allow consumers to lead a healthy lifestyle ripe with movement and exercise? Overwhelmed bureaucratic health-care apparatuses can never support consumers' healthy lifestyle, encourage more mindful consumer choices and behaviors, and foster health-enhancing public-private partnerships. The emphasis on civilizing values such as hard work and discipline not only morally sanctifies managers like Sabine into virtuous health advisors; it also takes the responsibility away from the state and corporations. No longer is chronic illness a question of preventing unhealthy, sugary market offerings or of regulating work hours and worker conditions. It is the problem of consumers who do not work productively on their own health ambitions and desires.

These and other consumer responsabilization activities have led to a significant shift in the ways chronic illness is understood and managed. Whereas powerful institutions such as the World Health Organization (WHO) used to manage health through the lens of social redistribution from healthy to ill and from rich to poor and through the welfarist framework of universal healthcare, they are now entirely preoccupied with "shaping people's choices, making the healthier choice of foods and regular physical activity the easiest choice (accessible, available, and affordable), and therefore preventing obesity" (WHO 2013). Consequently, this preoccupation has not only led to a significant decline in formal health-care spending as a traditional cornerstone to address chronic illness since 2008 (OECD 2013b) and a burgeoning landscape of therapeutic health and wellness solutions. It also encourages consumers to approach chronic illness no longer in terms of entitlement to care and protection and instead understand the ongoing therapeutic improvement of self through the health market as an expression of freedom and a healthy lifestyle. Curbing these freedoms would be a dual economic and moral delinquency.

### Fighting Financial Debt: The Cultivation of the Financially Literate Consumer

A fourth responsible-consumer type cultivated at the WEF is the financially literate consumer. Since 2008, a seemingly never-ending sequence of economic crises, housing bubbles, credit crunches, corporate scandals, and bailouts had given rise to new tensions and turmoil all over the world as well as a new category of anticorporate and anticapitalism protests. Emphasizing the steadily growing worldwide wealth disparity between rich and poor, activists, public intellectuals, and angry consumers put pressure on the political class to put the brakes on unbridled capitalism and to devise better financial protection and systematic debt relief.

Like before, the creation of the financially literate consumer began with a process of personalization. And it was again WEF executive chairman Klaus Schwab who introduced the financially literate consumer to the political debate. Whereas previous initiatives and summits had traditionally revolved around the same old public versus private and rich versus poor dichotomies, Schwab and the WEF shifted the problem of financial debt away from the level

of better financial regulation to a need for more conscious individual financial decision makers. So, for Schwab, financial debt was not at all about constraining financial markets but about enabling the kind of market freedom that encourages consumers to adopt values of good capitalism such as trust, honesty, dignity, fairness, respect, and modesty (Fourcade and Healy 2007). This vision of a morally "re-designed capitalism" (WEF 2012b) not only rendered all political conflict about opposing protectionist and market-liberal agendas a waste of time. It also responsabilized all leaders—including politicians, regulators, activists, and corporate executives like Xavier (52, executive vice president, Swiss investment group) to participate in its realization:

*Xavier:* It's time to move from a narrowly defined shareholder economy to a stakeholder economy that includes workers, consumers, rights advocates, the environment, and future generations in our economic calculations and decision-making. . . . The cost of food has gone up over the years. There needs to be a radical change in the way this is handled

*Interviewer:* As in allowing governments to intervene into the market's price mechanisms?

*Xavier:* Oh no, in the sense of how values of good financial stewardship are reflected in people's decisions. It's a question of nurturing smarter spending habits that understand scarcity value and the need to adapt. How can we encourage consumers to adjust quicker, to manage their money, and to be more resilient in ways that positively affect their bottom line?

Emphasizing "good financial stewardship" values of resilience, independence, and self-organization not only allows Xavier to reduce all financial problem solving to individual consumer decision making. It also renders the welfare state as a narrow-minded actor unable to appreciate the benefits of asking for a greater moral commitment to adaptability. The legitimacy of such a worldview becomes even greater when solidified through processes of authorization. For instance, one roundtable entitled "The Power of Fear in Times of Uncertainty (<http://weforum.org/summary/power-fear-times-uncertainty>) brought together renowned Yale economist Robert J. Shiller and Nobel prize-winning psychologist Daniel Kahneman, who argued, each mobilizing his own scholarly perspective, that because "emotions help us adapt to life," financial debt could only be resolved through the adoption of new "frameworks organizing the mind" that "foster work-readiness, entrepreneurship and financial literacy skills and use experiential learning to inspire kids to dream big, reach their potential, and contribute to the vitality of their local communities and the world economy." Consequently, solving the financial crisis was not about wrestling over new structural compromises between financial regulations on the one hand versus corporate freedom on the other. In the words of Nobel Prize winner, leading economist, and WEF attendee Joseph Stiglitz, it was rather about fighting the "moral depravity" of a capitalism that "socialize[s] losses and privatize[s] profits" and about

changing a “society in which materialism overwhelms moral commitment” (Stiglitz 2010).

However, these expert formulations not only demonstrated that business could reap moral benefits from creating “a generation that will prevent future crises of this sort through increasing the financial education, financial access, employability, and entrepreneurship skills of children and youth. After all, they are tomorrow’s leaders, entrepreneurs, and economic actors” (<http://forumblog.org/2013/03/will-our-children-prevent-the-next-financial-crisis/>). They also left no doubt about the economic benefits to be reaped from catering to the financially literate consumer through products, education tools, and workshops (WEF 2010b, 2011c, 2012a, 2012c). To illustrate the third process of consumer responsabilization (capabilization), consider next how some WEF-inspired marketing activities seek to nurture consumers’ financial literacy. George (63, president, American bank) has morally reshaped his entire business so that his customers can accomplish greater efficiency, resilience, and self-moderation. Michael (46, customer relationship manager, German bank), in turn, frames himself as a noble volunteer who teaches money management to high school kids, thereby helping to empower the future generation of consumers:

We are deeply committed to inspiring and preparing consumers to succeed in the global economy. . . . Specifically, in terms of understanding financial literacy as a value, you know, we build this value directly into our products. So all key areas of our business, banking, borrowing, and investing, we re-envision them accordingly, making our business more about learning than ever before. . . . So that our products nurture intelligent financial decision-making. By embedding our customers in today’s global economy, these steps will help improve their overall readiness for various unexpected future events, ranging from the next stock crisis to medical emergencies. This is our contribution to financial security. (George)

What needs to be done? We urgently need a moral commitment towards more ethical money management attitudes. . . . Money is a very complex topic and managing money needs to be learned—the earlier the better. That’s why we go into schools and teach basic economics. . . . To help young people learn how to handle money more responsibly, we offer practical economic and financial workshops directly to the schools through our new financial literacy program. . . . With the new initiative, we aim to hone students’ skills in handling money and actively contribute to early understanding of basic economic issues. (Michael)

On the other side of this enlightened elite, legalistic solutions are implicitly rendered as inflexible and uncreative approaches that readily sow the seeds of a morally reprehensible capitalism by forcing consumers into a bureaucratic straightjacket of incomprehensible rules and regulations that invariably turn them into “money wasters” (field notes). Instead of nurturing an ethos of financially literate consumption, these bureaucratic solutions must be rejected be-

cause they systematically undermine any sense of individual responsibility, moderation, and financial smartness. Underlying these and other delegates’ statements is the conviction that the welfare state must no longer be a “static” protection system but must help citizens understand financial decision making as a consumer identity project. Yet this new role of the welfare state calls for a new type of relationship between the individual and the state and naturally implies that the exercise of a right becomes inseparable from an appreciation of a particular form of consumer behavior. As such, George’s and Michael’s initiatives encourage consumers to adopt a kind of “supply-side citizenship” (Plant 1999), according to which citizenship is not a natural right but a status to be achieved through consumption and active pursuit of a smart financial consumer identity is the normal way to qualify as a citizen. Waiting for the state to provide a way out of debt is undesirable while rendering an active attitude toward risk hedging is virtuous (Peñaloza and Barnhart 2011). Consider how Alexander (42, head of financial products, global bank) renders the nurturing of such a “valued individual” as a noble act of giving consumers “a fair chance”:

We have developed a debt management program [called “Strive!”] that offers opportunities for financial and personal growth by actively engaging consumers with debt. The program takes about a year and does two important things. First, it helps nurture financially responsible citizens. So we inspire social growth and inclusion by enabling a fundamental shift away from this unproductive attitude of “may someone please come to the rescue” to “I can use these resources proactively to regain my dignity and strength.” And, second, we stimulate economic growth by creating valued individuals who actively contribute to the greater good by making smart investments.

Alexander’s “Strive!” initiative systematically connects consumers’ desire for social recognition, inclusion, and respect with the cultivation of a proactive financial consumption attitude. Protected citizens who bet on the intervention of higher-order government authorities into the market could never accomplish such a laudable status. Such a mentality (and its potentially negative outcomes) actually warrants categorical rejection on moral grounds. The substitution of collective rights with a contract based on reciprocity between the responsible consumer and society thus not only resolves any sense of contradiction between economic and social goals, but the ethos of financial literacy, with its emphasis on values such as self-control, modesty, economic efficiency, and hard work, justifies the inequality of situations. Conversely, Alexander’s “Strive!” program renders the request for better protection as evidence of inherent moral pathologies such as entitlement, laziness, passivity, and a lack of social solidarity.

As these and other initiatives illustrate, pushing policies that “achieve concrete measurable improvements in consumer protection in financial services” by nurturing individual consumers’ “financial literacy” (World Bank 2013) through “financial education” (OECD 2013a) leads to an institutional framework no longer guided by the question

“How can markets be properly regulated to avoid society-destabilizing economic shocks?” but instead by the question “What information do consumers need in order to choose the best financial service for their needs?” (World Bank 2013). While the resulting moralized landscape of financial consumer choice encourages and motivates responsabilized consumers to no longer view the solution of financial problems in terms of protection and redistribution but in terms of self-adaptation in response to similar financial crises and shocks in the future, emerging political tensions, such as recent conflicts over youth unemployment, may revive long-standing protectionist sentiments, thereby triggering new moral interventions into consumption on behalf of the market.

## DISCUSSION

By bringing theories of responsabilization to bear on a longitudinal ethnographic analysis of the World Economic Forum, we have demonstrated the impact of moralistic governance regimes on the formation of the responsible consumer subject. We have examined dynamic relationships between opposing political problem-solving rationalities (social protectionism vs. market liberalism), social issues (e.g., poverty, illness), and the mythically inscribed preference for general interest policies and solution mechanisms emphasizing responsible consumption. As we have shown, the neoliberal mythology of shared responsibility provides a resilient narrative structure for the “management of populations and things” (Foucault 1978–79/1991) that accommodates a broad range of ideological views and imbues the socialization of consumers into an ethos of responsible consumption with heightened moral significance.

Our analysis significantly extends Shamir’s (2008) theorization of responsabilization by developing four processes employed in the shifting of socio-moral duties from the state and corporations to consumers. By showing how models of economic organization rely on particular understandings of the basis of the moral order, how this moral order gets universalized through hegemonic processes, and how these hegemonic processes motivate particular problem-solving initiatives, that, in turn, shape (and constrain) what consumers can and cannot do, we further extend consumer research on responsabilized consumers, such as Peñaloza and Barnhart’s (2011) credit card consumers, Thompson and Coskuner-Balli’s (2007) community-supported agriculture consumers, or Schauet et al.’s (2009) retired consumers engaging in market-mediated identity renaissance. Several theoretical contributions are made.

First, by exploring the ways in which appeals to a competitive ethos legitimize the institutions of neoliberal capitalism through political action, we contribute to our understanding of marketplace mythologies. Ever since Sidney Levy’s (1981) pioneering foray into the study of myths, consumer researchers have developed highly nuanced accounts on how advertisers, brand strategists, tourist promoters, and other marketing agents mythologize their goods and services and how, in turn, consumers creatively use the mythic narratives and meanings conveyed through

these brands and products as resources to construct their identities and to challenge established market power relations (Arsel and Thompson 2011; Brown, McDonagh, and Shultz 2013; Giesler 2012; Holt 2004; Luedicke, Thompson, and Giesler 2010; Peñaloza 2000, 2001; Thompson 2004; Thompson, Rindfleisch, and Arsel 2006; Thompson and Tian 2008).

Despite its undisputed theoretical value, this conventional myth market model is also prone to neglecting another function of myth aptly summarized in Lévi-Strauss’s (1963) famous contention that it is not man that makes myth but myth that makes man. In our analysis, mythic idealizations of the political economy as a shared problem-solving process enabling responsible consumption did not serve as dramatic resources to be mobilized for identity construction (Holt and Thompson 2004) or in the battle among opposing groups of consumers and producers (Giesler 2012). Rather they were deeply inscribed in a number of institutional logics to make a unifying statement about “how things are” (Barthes 1973) and to convince political actors that moving beyond dreaded democratic divides and encouraging a more responsible consumption ethos is a virtuous act of improving the world. Hence, in addition to analyzing how myths provide meanings and metaphors that serve multiple ideological agendas, the present investigation demonstrates the value of showing how (moralistic) marketplace mythologies serve to naturalize culturally constituted systems of consumption within particular social settings and time periods.

Second, the prospect that marketplace mythology can naturalize particular forms of political rationality is also relevant to a nascent stream of scholarship investigating the formation of the self-constituting consumer subject and its potential to transform market structures (Borgerson 2005). In this domain, the formation of a self-identifying consumer subject has been typically associated with the destabilization of established patterns of power relations. For example, in their pioneering investigation of coffeehouse culture in the sixteenth century Ottoman Empire, Karababa and Ger (2011) have demonstrated how an emerging, active, and self-defining coffeehouse consumer, in his alliance with market institutions, actively transgressed dominant state and religious authorities. Similarly, contemporary consumer research has frequently constructed a defying consumer capable of resisting established authority (e.g., Arnould and Thompson 2005; Firat and Dhoklaka 1998; Firat and Venkatesh 1995; Slater 1997).

The theoretical addendum we make to this growing body of research analyzing the coconstitutive relationships between consumer subjects and various networks of market and political institutions is that the success of consumer resistance is not only a question of what institutional alliances exist (Holt 2002) but also one of what underlying politico-economic rationality structures these alliances. For instance, the Ottoman consumer’s potential to resist and gain a certain level of freedom of choice against the impositions of state and religion relied upon a number of salient distinctions, such as state versus market, constraint versus freedom, and flexible versus rigid—distinctions that are char-

acteristic of the political economy of classic liberalism (Bourdieu and Wacquant 2001). Whereas in the liberal framework the active consumer can indeed serve as a pressure point, in a neoliberal political economy, these distinctions are collapsed to make the market coextensive with all of society, thereby rendering consumers' freedom of choice as a means through which political authority can actively operate rather than falter.

Finally, our findings also carry important implications for consumer research seeking to improve consumer welfare. While focusing on other important theoretical issues, previous consumer studies have provided ample empirical evidence of the many increasingly complex moralized landscapes of choice options, prescriptions, treatment regimes, recommendations, and prohibitions that consumers are expected to navigate today. These include cultivating their own retirement (Schau et al. 2009), organizing local food communities (Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007), designing their own health, nutritional, and wellness regimes (Moiso and Beruchashvili 2010; Thompson 2004, 2005), reducing their ecological footprint (Shaw and Newhome 2002), adapting to changing geographies (Bardhi, Eckhardt, and Arnould 2012), and dragging themselves out of credit card debt (Peñaloza and Barnhart 2011).

Owing to this mounting pressure on consumers, leading consumer researchers have recently argued that merely contributing to scholarly debates is no longer enough (e.g., Mick 2006). With an existential certainty that is reminiscent of the unshakable confidence Davos delegates have in the righteousness of their actions, for instance, the Transformative Consumer Research community (TCR; Mick et al. 2012) has begun to deliver on this moralistic call to action by contributing to some of the most prominent neoliberal social debates, including bottom-of-the-pyramid, financial literacy education, and sustainable consumption. Emerging in historical lockstep with some of the consumer responsabilization initiatives we have analyzed in this article, TCR researchers are committed to leaving theoretical and methodological differences behind: "Transformative consumer researchers are united in their belief that academic researchers have a *duty* [emphasis added by the authors] to use their knowledge and expertise to develop research and programs aimed at increasing societal welfare" (<https://www.7511.sslldomain.com/acrwebsite/assets/PDFs/TCR2013.docx>).

We have no doubt that these and other scholarly initiatives (e.g., Scott 2014; Soman and Zhao 2011) are motivated by a deeply felt moral responsibility. Past TCR and other critical approaches, for instance, have tirelessly emphasized the importance of sustainable consumer empowerment (<http://bit.ly/1cvL2rI>): eating healthier, nurturing financial literacy, fostering mindful consumption, encouraging greener consumption choices, and conveying better self-control techniques, to name just a few from the standard portfolio. We also do not doubt that programs coming out of Davos or TCR scholarship do make some lives better by coordinating powerful actors to prevent death and disease

(Gates 2008). However, like Fredric Jameson (1991, 263), we believe that "'the market is in human nature' is the proposition that cannot be allowed to stand unchallenged; in my opinion, it is the most crucial terrain of ideological struggle in our time." As we have shown, when consumer responsibility is evoked and produced, the responsibility in question is also taken from other political and corporate shoulders.

Consequently, we encourage transformative consumer researchers not to subsume all questions of consumer welfare to the neoliberal mythology of shared responsibility and its associated preference for consumer empowerment through ethical market choice but to instead tackle "the bigger systemic picture" (McDonagh, Dobscha, and Prothero 2012, 278) of how neoliberal capitalism shapes and is shaped by consumption. This entails exploring how marketplace mythologies are institutionally inscribed (Askegaard and Linnet 2011), studying how institutional logics render certain types of consumer behaviors "naturally" virtuous and others reprehensible (Humphreys 2010), and revealing how ethical images of active and self-enterprising consumers frequently efface any sense of social inequality. Tailoring one's own research exclusively to the prevailing neoliberal jeremiad that "market fundamentalism has eroded any sense of community" (Stiglitz 2010) will render these transformative avenues invisible.

## CONCLUSION

In summary, the naturally born consumer—the idea that all human participation in the adventure of living is inherently an act of market-based consumption—may be a comforting but ultimately misleading theoretical fiction. Previous theorizing of responsible consumption as a moralistic identity project (Schor 1998; Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007), for instance, can never take for granted the processes through which ethical consumer subjectivities are themselves created and adapted to changing historical conditions and the rhetorical and material strategies of intervention that are involved in shaping and governing consumers as free and economically rational, moral market actors. While the P.A.C.T. routine that we have developed sheds new light on the creation of four now-commonplace responsible-consumer subjectivities (bottom-of-the-pyramid, green, health-conscious, and the financially literate consumer), the findings of our research are limited to the creation of responsibility as a consumption system.

Previous consumer research has provided theoretically rich and stimulating insights into the identities and experiences of family consumers (Epp and Price 2008), religious consumers (Sandıkçı and Ger 2010), ethnic consumers (Askegaard, Arnould, and Kjeldgaard 2005), and activist consumers (Scaraboto and Fischer 2013), to name but a few. Building on Askegaard and Linnet's (2011, 387) call for "situating acts of consumption, their motivations and consequences in a world that reaches beyond the subjectivity of the agent," we encourage future consumer researchers to shift their analytical focus from asking how cultural value systems structure consumers' identities and experiences to

asking how family, religion, ethnicity, activism, and other institutions are rearticulated as market and consumption systems.

## DATA COLLECTION INFORMATION

The first author conducted all of the interview data and in-person fieldwork from January 2004 until July 2010. Starting in July 2010, the first author supervised the second author's interview and archival data collection. The second author transcribed all interview data. Data were discussed and analyzed on multiple occasions by both authors using both authors' field notes and text files. The final ethnography was jointly authored.

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