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Social interactions for economic value? A marketing perspective

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Preface

Thinking of all those I would like to thank for accompanying me on this four-year journey made me reminiscing about how I ended up at the Amsterdam Business School in the first place, conducting research on corporate social responsibility. My interest in societal issues has strongly been shaped during my years in Vienna, where I volunteered for nonprofit organizations concerned with raising consumer and business interest in fair trade products. My passion for fair trade resulted in memorable experiences, such as walking through Vienna dressed up in a life-sized banana costume, meeting coffee farmers from the South, and introducing fair trade coffee to the vending machines at university. I also remember the ambivalence I felt in those times with regard to large supermarket chains wanting to introduce fair trade products. On the one hand I understood why some consumers and nonprofit organizations rather preferred to keep fair trade separate from mainstream outlets. On the other hand I started to realize the potential impact that for-profit organizations could (and wanted) to have in the process of mainstreaming and thus boosting fair trade. This ambivalence triggered my interest in societal issues, and how to best approach them, even more.

During my master's studies I also discovered my interest in academic research. I would like to thank August Österle who triggered this interest by involving me in a research project on the care for the elderly. August, your passion for research, your unconventional way of teaching (especially the lectures in Sagya) and your affirmative feedback on my master's thesis encouraged me to seek a Ph.D position, for which I would like to thank you!

Yet, it took another one and a half years after my relocation to the Netherlands, before I finally started with my Ph.D. I was very excited when I found a job opening for a Ph.D. position on business-nonprofit partnerships at the Amsterdam Business School, a research project in the intersection of marketing and strategy. Without a degree from a Dutch university, having written my master's thesis in the field of social politics rather than on a marketing topic, and speaking with a slightly strange Dutch accent, I was wondering about the odds of getting the position. However, my worries disappeared after the first meeting with my (back then still potential) Ph.D. advisors Ans Kolk and Willemijn van Dolen, whom I experienced as surprisingly open and amicable. I consider myself very lucky

that I had not just one, but two motivating and very committed Ph.D. advisors. Ans, thank you for your outstanding and continuous efforts and dedication with regard to supervision and guidance! Despite a full agenda you always had an open door (and e-mail account) for my questions and requests, and you always replied in no time, even if it was late in the evening, during the weekends or holidays. I have benefited greatly from your expertise, ambitious way of working and your eye for detail, and I look forward to many more years of fruitful collaboration. Willemijn, thank you for your inspiring and helpful ideas, which put me on the right track when most needed. I greatly appreciate all your efforts, and that you always view things from the bright side of life. I enjoyed the numerous interesting discussions we had during the past few years, and look forward to having more of them in the future!

This dissertation would not exist in its present form without the important contributions of many others. In particular, I would like to thank Nanet Stoelwinder, Sabine Feirabend and Astrid Huijssoon for their valuable contributions to various studies of this dissertation, particularly for their help with data collection. Furthermore, I would like to thank Ko de Ruyter for the pleasant and productive interactions we had while working on a paper together. Ko, it was a great pleasure and a very instructive experience of high social and – potentially even economic – value! I also enjoyed discussing my research with Charles Weinberg and Zeynep Gürhan-Canli, and would like to thank them for their encouraging feedback and suggestions. Certainly, my gratitude also goes out to the anonymous reviewers, whose feedback on manuscripts submitted to conferences and journals have helped to improve the quality of the papers included in this dissertation.

Following a Ph.D. trajectory has not only been rewarding because of the nature of the work itself, but also because of the inspiring and challenging environment, and most importantly, because of my colleagues, whom I would like to thank for their friendship and collegiality, their advice, help and encouragement, or simply for taking my mind off from work every now and then. Meg and Karianne, thank you for being my friends, neighbours, former roommates and paranymphs, and for the invaluable distractions from work in Oost, The Hague and Athens! Our discussions about research, Ph.D. life, but especially those about the more important things in life have been very enriching throughout the years. Karianne, I also would like to thank you for proofreading parts of my thesis. Rene, Liselore, Hella, Pawan, Mark, Marc and Oscar, sharing various offices with you has been a joy! Your

company and the many breaks we had for coffee and sweets provided a pleasant and productive working environment. My appreciation also goes out to many other (former) Ph.D. colleagues, post-docs and 'young researchers' from various sections of the Amsterdam Business School. I did (and still do) enjoy our drinks, lunch breaks, dinners, Chinese New Year celebrations and billiard games, and look forward to many more to come. Jonatan, thank you for introducing me to the ABS and all its peculiarities when starting my Ph.D., and for the tons of advice I received from you throughout the years.

I kindly acknowledge the efforts of the members of my Ph.D. committee, Louise Fresco, Deanne Den Hartog, Adam Lindgreen, Ko de Ruyter and Jozef Tettero. Thank you agreeing to be part of the committee in the first place, and especially for the time you put into reading and evaluating my thesis.

Finally, working on a dissertation can at times be a balancing act between work and private life. I would like to thank my family and friends in Austria, Belgium and the Netherlands for their support throughout the years, for their understanding, and for always being there. Your distractions, online (your nonsensical and witty postings sometimes really made my day) and offline, including a trip to the best chocolate factory in Austria, cosy meals in the 'Leuvense' park and at the 'Westelse' pool in Belgium, memorable nights in The Hague and Delft and a spontaneous bachelor party in Amsterdam, made me forget about my Ph.D. thesis for a while. There are too many close friends to name here in person, but I would like to thank Marie, Julia, Chiaki, Rosi, Raff, Michael, Kathi, Johanna, Karin and Veronika in particular – your long-term, unconditional friendship, which has survived (partly vast) geographic distances, is invaluable to me! Vika, thank you for your help with the cover. Hanne, thank you for proofreading.

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