

# *Moving the stakeholder journey forward*

Article

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## MOVING THE STAKEHOLDER JOURNEY FORWARD

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### Abstract

Though the customer journey (CJ) is gaining traction, its limited *customer* focus overlooks the dynamics characterizing *other* stakeholders' (e.g., employees'/suppliers') journeys, thus calling for an extension to the *stakeholder journey* (SJ). Addressing this gap, we advance the SJ, which covers *any* stakeholder's journey with the firm. We argue that firms' consideration of the SJ, defined as *a stakeholder's trajectory of role-related touchpoints and activities, enacted through stakeholder engagement, that collectively shape the stakeholder experience with the firm*, enhances their stakeholder relationship management and performance outcomes. We also view the SJ in a network of intersecting journeys that are characterized by interdependence theory's structural tenets of stakeholder control, covariation of interest, mutuality of dependence, information availability, and temporal journey structure, which we view to impact stakeholders' journey-based engagement and experience, as formalized in a set of Propositions. We conclude with theoretical (e.g., further research) and practical (e.g., SJ design/management) implications.

**Keywords:** Stakeholder journey (SJ); Customer journey (CJ); Stakeholder engagement; Stakeholder experience; Interdependence theory.

## INTRODUCTION

In the last decade, the *customer journey* (CJ), defined as “the process a customer goes through, across all stages and touchpoints, that makes up the customer experience” (Lemon and Verhoef 2016, p. 71), has gained prominence among managers and researchers. Though understanding the CJ has long been of interest (e.g., Howard and Sheth 1969), current developments, including the rise of *omni-channel* retailing, have revitalized attention to the concept (Shavitt and Barnes 2020). For example, the Marketing Science Institute’s (2020) *Research Priorities* state: “A top priority for marketers is to understand and map the CJ” (p. 2), warranting further study in this area.

The literature, to date, boasts important contributions, including the development of CJ conceptualizations (e.g., Novak and Hoffman 2019), the CJ’s classification into particular (e.g., *pre-purchase*, *purchase*, *post-purchase*) stages (e.g., Van Vaerenbergh et al. 2019), exploration of the CJ’s interface with the customer experience (e.g., Lemon and Verhoef 2016), and investigation into the effect of specific (e.g., contextual/cultural) contingencies on the CJ (e.g., Vredeveld and Coulter 2019), among others. However, despite these advances, important gaps remain, as outlined below.

First, owing to its focus on the *customer* as the central stakeholder, the CJ literature is largely limited to the buyer’s dynamics in his/her journey (e.g., Santana et al. 2020; Li et al. 2020). However, service ecosystems contain not only customers but myriad *stakeholders*, defined as “any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of [an] organization’s objectives” (Freeman 1984, p. 46), including directors, managers, employees, suppliers, owners, strategic partners, collaborators, competitors, policymakers, community organizations, the media, etc. (Hillebrand et al. 2015). These stakeholders are on their *own* role-related journey, which has, however, received little attention to date. To address this gap in the

literature, a broadened, *omni*-stakeholder perspective of the journey, *beyond* the CJ alone, is, therefore, needed (Bradley et al. 2021). Correspondingly, we extend the CJ to the *stakeholder journey* (SJ), defined as “*a stakeholder’s trajectory of role-related touchpoints and activities, enacted through stakeholder engagement, that collectively shape the stakeholder experience with the firm.*” The SJ comprises – but transcends beyond – the CJ to cover *any* stakeholder’s role-related journey with the firm (Lievens and Blažević 2021), thus ushering in a new phase of journey research (Hannay et al. 2020).

By offering the firm an enhanced understanding of its *different* stakeholders’ needs, goals, activities, and challenges through their respective journeys, firms’ consideration of the SJ (vs. the CJ) allows them to better understand, plan, and orchestrate their stakeholders’ journeys in mutually beneficial ways, in turn improving their stakeholder relationships (Venkatesan et al. 2018). For example, though Tesla’s CJ focus has gained the attention of prospects, expanding its focus to the SJ would allow the company to explicitly recognize its *multiple* stakeholders’ journey-based dynamics, helping it to more effectively coordinate, leverage, or authorize its relevant SJs and improve stakeholder processes, interactions, and relationships (Kumar and Ramachandran 2021).

Second and relatedly, the literature has traditionally viewed the CJ in isolation, that is, by considering only the customer through his/her journey (e.g., Tax et al. 2013). While emerging recognition exists of clients journeying *together* (e.g., on family holidays/in massively multiplayer online games; Hamilton et al. 2021), little is known about *different* stakeholders’ (vs. merely customers’) intersecting journeys (Ortbal et al. 2016), exposing a second gap in the literature. Addressing this gap, we posit that the SJ traverses or intersects with that of others at relevant touchpoints (Lemon and Verhoef 2016), in turn impacting both these stakeholders’ journeys, positively or negatively. For example, a customer’s purchase based on a supplier’s recommendation transpires at the junction of the customer’s *and* the

supplier's journeys (vs. in isolation), revealing these journeys' mutual influence on one another. Specifically, the customer's (e.g., car) purchase is expected to facilitate his/her (e.g., transportation) goal fulfilment, while also contributing to the supplier's financial performance (Mish and Scammon 2010), thus positively impacting *both* these stakeholders' journeys. However, a stakeholder's journey can also hinder or complicate that of another (George and Wakefield 2018). For example, Apple's decision to keep its factories open during the pandemic would likely challenge its employees' journeys. Overall, the firm's recognition of its different ecosystem-based stakeholders' journeys, which may intersect with one another, is pivotal, as it permits it to better understand, plan, and manage its activities in line with their respective journeys (Lievens and Blažević 2021).

To explore these issues, we adopt an *interdependence theory* perspective, which posits that a stakeholder's journey is likely to impact and be impacted by that of his/her interaction partner(s) (Kelley and Thibaut 1959; Scheer et al. 2015). Our analyses rest on interdependence theory's assumptions that (i) interpersonal interactions are key in fostering stakeholder interdependence, and (ii) stakeholders' interdependence defines their relational journey (Kelley and Thibaut 1978). We argue that, by fostering more coordinated, improved stakeholder interactions and relationships, a firm's consideration of its stakeholders' traversing journeys will not only help it attain superior financial performance (e.g., through revenue/profitability growth), but will also enhance its double- and triple bottom-line performance, which reflect the firm's contribution to its stakeholders and to the environment, respectively (Chabowski et al. 2011). For example, by switching to more affordable, easily disposable lithium iron phosphate batteries (Frith 2021), Tesla not only facilitates the CJ, but by raising the public perception of its efficiency and environmental responsibility, also aligns its journey with that of stakeholders including employees, managers, lobby groups, the government, and the media, thus supporting its development of value-laden relationships with these stakeholders (Freeman

et al. 2010). Consequently, Tesla's stock price reportedly soared in the days following this announcement (Dir 2021). Our extension of the CJ to the SJ is, therefore, expected to offer paramount stakeholder relationship management and performance benefits to firms, in turn boosting their triple bottom-line performance (Chabowski et al. 2011). In other words, marketers cannot afford to ignore the SJ.

Addressing these gaps in the literature, this conceptual paper's objectives are to: (i) advance and explicate the SJ concept, and (ii) explore and map the notion of intersecting SJs using interdependence theory, yielding the following contributions to the marketing-based journey-, engagement-, and experience literature. First, we move the nascent SJ concept forward based on a thorough review. While pioneering authors have coined the SJ (e.g., Ortbal et al. 2016), a dearth of research has explored the concept in the marketing literature to date (Lievens and Blažević 2021), warranting the undertaking of this research. Extending the CJ literature, the proposed SJ concept covers *any* firm stakeholder's role-related journey with the firm, thus equipping the company with an enhanced understanding of its different stakeholders' journeys. Relatedly, firm-based recognition of the SJ will allow it to better manage or coordinate its own and its relevant stakeholders' journeys for mutual benefit, thus yielding improved stakeholder relationship management and performance outcomes (Hannay et al. 2020).

For example, understanding its customers', suppliers', and competitors' journeys helps companies like McDonald's stay abreast of, influence, and/or suitably orchestrate these journeys in rapidly changing environments (e.g., consumers' growing demand for healthy food, rising ingredient shortages, and/or rivals' fast-food innovations), in turn boosting their performance (Tax et al. 2013). Overall, by progressing the SJ's development, our analyses reveal MacInnis' (2011, p. 146) *integrating* purpose of conceptual research, which implies "the creation of a whole [i.e., here, the SJ] from diverse parts" (e.g., the CJ, customer experience,

and engagement). Our work also exhibits MacInnis' (2011) *envisioning* role of conceptual research, as by generalizing the CJ to the SJ, we cover novel theoretical ground.

Second, we map the SJ in a mosaic of intersecting (e.g., manager/supplier) journeys, thus offering more systemic SJ-based insight (Bradley et al. 2021), as outlined. For example, the SJ captures issues including Starbucks' and Barnes & Noble's strategic partnership, which sees these firms' regularly traversing journeys that are also likely to intersect with those of their respective stakeholders (e.g., customers/employees). That is, by offering enhanced acumen of a stakeholder's intersecting journey with that of another, our analyses permit the development of novel (e.g., managerial) understanding regarding how to better manage or coordinate relevant SJs, in turn yielding improved firm-based stakeholder relationships and performance. To frame our analyses, we adopt interdependence theory, which posits that stakeholder relationships are defined by interpersonal interdependence or "the degree to which [a stakeholder] relies on an interaction partner, in that his [her] outcomes are influenced by the partner's actions" (Rusbult and Van Lange 2003, p. 355).

As stakeholder interdependence tends to be dynamic (vs. static) through the journey (Kumar et al. 2009), we broaden the SJ beyond the CJ's typical discrete, *single* role-related (i.e., purchase) cycle (e.g., Voorhees et al. 2017), to comprise the focal stakeholder's *trans*-role cycle relationship with the firm (Novak and Hoffman 2019). Correspondingly, we view an employee (supplier) journey to cover a worker's (vendor's) *entire* experience with the firm (Parida 2020), respectively, as discussed further in the section titled *Conceptual Development*. Specifically, our interdependence theory-informed view maps stakeholders' structural interdependence in terms of their relevant control, covariation of interest, mutuality of dependence, information availability, and temporal journey structure in their journey with the firm (Kelley and Thibaut 1978; Rusbult and Van Lange 2003), thus overlaying the CJ's traditional discrete view with a more relational SJ perspective (Hamilton and Price 2019). We

summarize our findings in a set of interdependence theory-informed Propositions of the SJ that offer novel insight and serve as a springboard for further research.

The paper is organized as follows. Next, we review key literature addressing the CJ and stakeholder engagement, the latter of which emerges as a vital SJ-shaping catalyst. We, then, propose our SJ conceptualization and set forth an interdependence theory-informed SJ map that depicts several stakeholders' transpiring and at times, intersecting, journeys. We proceed by analyzing stakeholders' interdependence theory-informed structural interdependence tenets through the SJ, as formalized in a set of Propositions. We conclude by discussing key implications that arise from our analyses.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Below, we review pertinent CJ- and stakeholder engagement literature, on which we draw to inform our SJ-based theorizing in the next section.

### **Customer journey research**

Though the CJ has received extensive attention (e.g., Kuehnl et al. 2019), the SJ, which covers any stakeholder's (e.g., employee's, customer's, manager's, competitor's, etc.) journey with the firm (Lievens and Blažević 2021), remains under-explored in the marketing literature to date, despite its importance for understanding marketing- or service ecosystems (Varnali 2019). We, therefore, review the CJ literature below, which offers an important foundation for our SJ-based analyses.

**Insert Table 1 about here.**

To understand the CJ, we first review existing CJ conceptualizations (see Table 1), from which we derive the following observations. First, the CJ describes the customer's progression through a traditionally sequential trajectory of steps in completing his/her goal of making a purchase (Siebert et al. 2020), which collectively capture the customer experience. The CJ,



thus, covers a customer's *entire* experience in making a purchase from the firm, from start to finish (e.g., ranging from the individual's initial product information search to his/her *post-purchase* evaluation; Lemon and Verhoef 2016). The CJ, therefore, offers a process-based view of a customer's purchase cycle (Edelman and Singer 2015), rendering time an important factor in the CJ. For example, different journeys will tend to vary in length, and different time intervals may exist in between purchase cycles. Here, a customer's repurchase of an item is typically modeled as a separate journey (Voorhees et al. 2017; Siebert et al. 2020), revealing the CJ's iterative nature. However, we assert that the SJ – and thus, its constituent sub-concept of the CJ – should extend beyond a single role cycle, as outlined. Specifically, we advocate a more relational, *trans-role* cycle view that maps customers' evolving interdependence through their journey with the firm (Kelley and Thibaut 1978), as generalized to the SJ in the section titled *The Stakeholder Journey: An Interdependence Theory Perspective*.

Though the CJ is traditionally viewed to comprise a predetermined sequence of typically company-designed steps (Santana et al. 2020), scholars are increasingly recognizing the need for a more fluid view that accommodates different potential sequences of CJ steps. For example, clients may co-design their own journey (vs. following a company-orchestrated CJ), offering them greater control over their journey and shifting the company's role from journey director to -facilitator. Here, customers may decide to skip, skim, alter, or repeat specific journey stages (Hamilton et al. 2021), illustrating the CJ's potential fluidity. For example, a prospect's reading of product reviews may alter the course of his/her planned journey if (s)he decides against purchasing the item (Halvorsrud and Kvale 2017).

Second, the journey comprises multiple *touchpoints*, defined as “points of human, ... communication, spatial, and electronic interaction collectively constituting the interface between an enterprise and its customers” (Dhebar 2013, p. 200), revealing the CJ's *multi-* or *omni-*channel nature (Herhausen et al. 2019). Touchpoints may also allow customers to interact

with other firm stakeholders (e.g., fellow customers), exposing potential touchpoint-based stakeholder heterogeneity (Baxendale et al. 2015). Relatedly, touchpoints can be brand-, brand partner-, customer-, or externally owned (Lemon and Verhoef 2016; Becker and Jaakkola 2020). For example, a firm's (i.e., brand-owned) interfaces include its physical retail stores and its digital touchpoints (e.g., website, social media pages), yielding a potentially hybrid *phygital* (i.e., physical/digital) CJ (Mele and Russo-Spena 2021). Through the CJ, customers may primarily interact with the firm via a single touchpoint (e.g., its call center), or use multiple touchpoints (Richardson et al. 2010).

Third, as noted, the CJ is inextricably linked to the *customer experience* (CX), defined as “a multidimensional construct focusing on a customer's cognitive, emotional, behavioral, sensorial, and social responses to a firm's offerings during the customer's entire purchase journey” (Lemon and Verhoef 2016, p. 71). Jaakkola and Alexander (2018) suggest that the customer's journey-based experience is driven by customer engagement, defined as “a customer's ...volitional investment of operant [e.g., cognitive/emotional] and operand [e.g., equipment-based] resources in [his/her] brand interactions” (Kumar et al. 2019, p. 141). Therefore, while the customer experience depicts a customer's role-related responses (i.e., role *outputs*; Brakus et al. 2009), it is also important to understand how the individual's role investments or *inputs* (i.e., engagement) drive these responses, which, however, remains nebulous to date (e.g., Vredeveld and Coulter 2019). Correspondingly, we next explore stakeholder engagement's role in shaping stakeholders' journey-based experience.

### **Stakeholder engagement research**

As noted, authors including Venkatesan et al. (2018), Jaakkola and Alexander (2018), Demmers et al. (2020), and Mele and Russo-Spena (2021) identify customer engagement as a vital CJ-shaping conduit. Analogously, we infer stakeholder engagement's fundamental role in

the transpiring SJ (Lievens and Blažević 2021). In what follows, we, therefore, review the stakeholder engagement literature, as applied to the SJ.

**Insert Table 2 about here.**

Key stakeholder engagement conceptualizations are listed in Table 2, which reveal the following observations. First, the concept's definition and indeed, its ideology, are debated (e.g., Harmeling et al. 2017). In its home turf, the strategic management and business ethics literature, authors typically address stakeholder engagement from a *company* perspective (see Table 2: e.g., Greenwood 2007), as also adopted in this article. Correspondingly, our analyses offer particular value to firms wishing to understand, plan, manage, or coordinate their different stakeholders' journeys, which primarily transpire *through* the focal stakeholder's and his/her interaction partner's role-related engagement (e.g., Venkatesan et al. 2018).

Second, despite its definitional dissent, broad consensus exists regarding stakeholder engagement's interactive nature (Viglia et al. 2018), in line with customer engagement research (e.g., Meire et al. 2019). Citing Merriam-Webster's Dictionary, *interaction* has been defined as "mutual or reciprocal action or influence" (Vargo and Lusch 2016, p. 9). Interactive stakeholder engagement *can* be mutually beneficial for the involved stakeholders (e.g., customers helping each other; Fassin 2012). However, if stakeholder interests diverge, we expect stakeholder engagement to either be far less reciprocal (e.g., competing firms each optimizing their own goal pursuit) or to display a level of calculated (vs. true) reciprocity (Amici et al. 2014). For example, a co-worker may only do another a favor with the expectancy of it being reciprocated in the future.

Stakeholder engagement is pertinent in the SJ, which sees stakeholder-to-stakeholder interactivity at its relevant touchpoints (Venkatesan et al. 2018; Lemon and Verhoef 2016). We, however, argue that stakeholder engagement's interactivity not only transpires in

stakeholders' touchpoint-based interactions, but also, *outside* their role-related touchpoints (Storbacka 2019). For example, amidst their work meetings, employees will privately work on their assigned tasks, revealing their continued (e.g., cognitive) engagement *beyond* their role touchpoints alone (Schaufeli et al. 2006).

Third, in marketing, stakeholder engagement is commonly viewed as a stakeholder's *resource investment* in, or *contribution* to, his/her role-related interactions (Kumar and Pansari 2016; Hollebeek et al. 2019). This view posits that the more of their resources stakeholders invest in an interaction, the higher their engagement, leading us to equate the notions of engagement-based *resource investments* (Brodie et al. 2016) and *-contributions* (Pansari and Kumar 2017). Stakeholder engagement, thus, reflects those tangible (e.g., equipment-based) and intangible (e.g., cognitive) resources that stakeholders endow in their role interactions (Kumar et al. 2019). For example, though managers may invest their cognitive/behavioral resources in performing their jobs (Schaufeli et al. 2006), suppliers contribute financial resources to their role interactions (e.g., by purchasing stock). Moreover, though these contributions can be voluntary (e.g., an employee choosing to do a good job at work), they may also transpire less volitionally through the journey (e.g., employees executing undesired tasks; Hollebeek et al. 2022).

Fourth, our review reveals stakeholder engagement's multidimensionality. Extending the customer engagement literature, most authors view stakeholder engagement to comprise cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and/or social facets (Brodie et al. 2019). For example, Viglia et al. (2018, p. 405) note that stakeholder engagement reflects a stakeholder's "emotional and cognitive ... engagement [to] trigger... behavioral activation" through his/her journey. Based on our review, we adopt Hollebeek et al.'s (2020) recent conceptualization that acknowledges the outlined stakeholder engagement tenets (see Table 2), as applied to the SJ below.

## CONCEPTUAL DEVELOPMENT

### Extending the customer- to the stakeholder journey

Our review highlighted three core CJ tenets that we generalize to the SJ below. First, the SJ portrays a focal stakeholder's progression through a trajectory of fixed or more fluid role-related steps (Ortbal et al. 2016; Hamilton et al. 2021), starting with the individual's initial firm-related information search (Santana et al. 2020). For example, while the employee journey commences with a prospective worker vetting the firm as a potential new workplace, a policymaker's journey begins with a public servant's inception of new firm-impacting regulation. The SJ proceeds to cover all the focal stakeholder's interactions, and relationship, with the firm, and concludes upon his/her final experience with the firm (e.g., owners selling their stake in the company or customers' *post*-purchase evaluation of the firm's offerings; Novak and Hoffman 2019). Further, the SJ will often run a more adaptable (vs. fixed) course (e.g., as stakeholder sentiment/needs or external factors change; Vakulenko et al. 2019), as outlined. For example, a competitor's journey may be altered by COVID-19.

Second, the SJ features multiple *touchpoints*, which we define as the (e.g., physical/digital) stakeholder-connecting (e.g., meeting-, email-, or phone-based) interfaces, which, as noted, can be brand-, brand partner-, customer-, or externally owned (Lemon and Verhoef 2016). These touchpoints bear particular relevance to our analysis, as they permit the intersecting of a stakeholder's journey with that of another (Ortbal et al. 2016; Jaakkola and Alexander 2018). For example, an employee's and a manager's journey coincide during a meeting at the office, or a customer's and a firm's journey coalesce through the client's order. However, we argue that stakeholders' engagement extends beyond these journey-based touchpoints *alone*, as outlined. In other words, *outside* their role-related touchpoints, stakeholders may *still* engage, but here, they do so privately with their role and its requirements,

responsibilities, and activities (vs. via touchpoint-based interactions with others; Venkatesan et al. 2018).

Third, in line with the CJ literature, we view the SJ to holistically depict the focal stakeholder's role experience (e.g., Siebert et al. 2020) or his/her cognitive, emotional, behavioral, sensorial, and social role-related responses (Lemon and Verhoef 2016; Brakus et al. 2009). Based on our assertion that stakeholder engagement transpires both at *and* outside of stakeholders' journey-based touchpoints, we posit that stakeholder engagement, *like* the stakeholder experience, pervades the entire SJ. However, the two differ as follows: While stakeholder engagement denotes the focal stakeholder's role-related resource investment or contribution (i.e., role *inputs*) through his/her journey, the stakeholder experience represents the individual's journey-based (e.g., cognitive) responses (i.e., role *outputs*), as outlined. That is, by virtue of its role investments, stakeholder engagement is instrumental in shaping or enacting the SJ, in turn affecting the stakeholder experience (Lievens and Blažević 2021). Drawing on these tenets and in line with our first contribution, we define the SJ as:

*“A stakeholder's trajectory of role-related touchpoints and activities, enacted through stakeholder engagement, that collectively shape the stakeholder experience with the firm.”*

An overview of the CJ and the SJ, including their respective definitions, hallmarks, and theoretical associations (e.g., with customer/stakeholder engagement and experience), is provided in Table 3.

**Insert Table 3 about here.**

### **The stakeholder journey: An interdependence theory perspective**

In line with our second contribution, we observe that the SJ does not occur in isolation, but transpires in a network of intersecting journeys, necessitating a more systemic view (Bradley et al. 2021). That is, though prior research suggests that interacting stakeholders (partners) exhibit some level of interdependence (Kelley and Thibaut 1978; Scheer et al. 2015),

the CJ literature, to date, largely overlooks customers' potential symbiotic role-related interactions through their journey with the firm (Edelman and Singer 2015). Extending this observation to the SJ, we adopt an interdependence theory perspective to glean further insight.

Interdependence theory posits that interpersonal interactions are a function of interacting partners' engagement, characteristics, and context (Kelley et al. 2003; Kelley and Thibaut 1959), which forge a level of stakeholder *interdependence*, defined as "the process by which interacting [stakeholders] influence one another's experiences" (Van Lange and Balliet, 2014, p. 65). Interdependence, thus, implies that "every move of one [stakeholder] will ...affect the other[s]" in their respective journeys (Lewin 1948, pp. 84, 88), in turn continually shaping stakeholders' interdependence with one another.

In other words, rather than each running their own individual course, different stakeholders' journeys affect and are affected by one another (Thomas et al. 2020), exposing SJ-based interdependence (Hamilton et al. 2021). Consequently, not only the focal stakeholder's engagement, but also, that of his/her interaction partner(s), will mutually shape one another's journeys, both at *and* outside of their role-related touchpoints. For example, in addition to a manager's touchpoint (e.g., store)-based interactions with his/her customers, the former's engagement in adjusting product specs (i.e., *outside* their touchpoint-based interactions) is *also* likely to impact both their journeys (e.g., by altering the client's purchase behavior). Therefore, the term "stakeholder engagement" in our SJ conceptualization refers not only to the focal stakeholder's engagement, but also, to that of his/her interaction partner(s) (Kelley and Thibaut 1978), revealing their interdependence.

**Insert Figure 1 about here.**

Figure 1 depicts a *stakeholder journey map* (Lievens and Blažević 2021), as informed by interdependence theory. Extending the notion of a CJ map, which depicts a customer's

interactions with a firm (Rosenbaum et al. 2017), SJ maps are “a visualization tool used to gain insight about [stakeholder interactions]” through their journey with the firm (Ortbal et al. 2016, p. 250). In Figure 1, we depict a focal stakeholder’s engagement (i.e., role *input*-based resource contributions; Pansari and Kumar 2017) on the x-axis, and stakeholder experience, viewed as the stakeholder’s role *output*-based (e.g., cognitive/sensorial) responses (Lemon and Verhoef 2016), on the y-axis. Our illustrative mapping portrays three SJs, including a manager’s journey (black), an employee’s journey (blue), and a customer’s journey (red), respectively. Additional (e.g., supplier) journeys can also be added as required (Ortbal et al. 2016). As shown, the SJ sees a fluctuating stakeholder experience over time (Lemon and Verhoef 2016).

The depicted SJs also intersect at relevant *touchpoints*, defined as stakeholder-connecting (e.g., meeting-, email-, or phone-based) interfaces (Becker and Jaakkola 2020). Though theoretically, the minimum number of intersecting SJs is two, the yellow (vs. white) touchpoints in Figure 1 illustrate the intersecting of the three depicted SJs (i.e., manager-, employee-, and customer journeys). For example, a manager, employee, and customer may collaborate to resolve the client’s complaint. Overall, dyadic (triadic) interactions feature two (three) intersecting SJs, respectively, etc. In general, the greater the number of intersecting SJs, the higher the inherent complexity in meeting each of the involved stakeholders’ needs, goals, and wants, particularly under clashing stakeholder interests (Freeman et al. 2010).

The SJs shown also contain *multiple* of each stakeholder’s role cycles, thus extending beyond the CJ’s typical single-purchase cycle view to reflect the SJ’s more relational fabric (Hamilton et al. 2021), as outlined. For example, for the CJ, three purchase cycles are shown in Figure 1, which would traditionally be viewed as three distinct CJs. However, our more relational, *trans*-role cycle view of the SJ (and thus, the CJ) permits assessments of the focal stakeholder’s *cross*-role cycle (e.g., interactional) dynamics. In other words, we argue that the SJ is best viewed as the *totality* of a stakeholder’s role cycles (vs. a single cycle), thus offering



insight into his/her *cumulative* experience with the firm. Correspondingly, Figure 1 shows multiple role cycles for the three depicted stakeholders' journeys (e.g., for the CJ, three purchase cycles are shown that are separated by short, vertical black lines). For the manager- and employee journeys, three and two role cycles are shown, respectively, with the aggregate of their particular role cycles reflecting their respective journey with the firm. The SJ may, in turn, contain different phases (e.g., relationship initiation, development, maturity, or decline; Siebert et al. 2020).

To fuel the SJ's unfolding, the focal stakeholder's engagement, or his/her (e.g., cognitive/emotional) resource investment in his/her role-related interactions (Hollebeek et al. 2022), is pivotal, as discussed. That is, stakeholder engagement incites or maintains the SJ (Demmers et al. 2020; Venkatesan et al. 2018). Take the employee (or customer) journey, which covers a worker's (buyer's) engagement throughout his/her entire journey with the firm, ranging from the individual's initial job (product)-related information search to his/her *post-employment* (*post-purchase*) evaluation of the firm, respectively (e.g., Novak and Hoffman 2019; Lemon and Verhoef 2016). We next explore stakeholders' structural interdependence in their intersecting journeys (Kelley and Thibaut 1978).

### **Stakeholders' structural interdependence through the SJ**

Below, we outline the role of interdependence theory's structural interdependence tenets of stakeholders' control, covariation of interest, mutuality of dependence, information availability, and temporal journey structure (see Table 4) on the SJ's unfolding (Kelley et al. 2003). We focus on stakeholders' structural (vs. more transient) interdependence facets, given their relative stability across interactions and situations (Kelley and Thibaut 1978), thus offering more generalizable insight. For example, illustrating stakeholder control, a fiduciary lawyer-client relationship contains an inherent control imbalance, given the former's specialist knowledge that the latter requires (but lacks), thus systematically impacting both these

stakeholders' journeys. From our analyses, we develop a set of interdependence theory-informed Propositions that outline the effect of stakeholders' control, covariation of interest, mutuality of dependence, information availability, and temporal journey structure on their overall engagement and experience, as illustrated in Figure 2. In the figure, we include stakeholder engagement on the x-, and stakeholder experience on the y, axis, as outlined, which are viewed to exhibit differing degrees of valence-based positivity through the SJ (Bowden et al. 2017), depending on the particular structural interdependence tenet observed (e.g., stakeholder control). Thus, while Figure 1 presents the *big picture* of stakeholders' potentially intersecting journeys, Figure 2 illustrates the effect of specific structural interdependence tenets on stakeholder engagement and experience through the SJ.

**Insert Table 4 about here.**

**Insert Figure 2 about here.**

### ***Control***

Control, which reflects the balance of power among stakeholders (Grimes 1978; see Table 4), is an important factor in stakeholders' journey-based interdependence (Varnali 2019). For example, if a business partner can unilaterally cause a firm pleasure (vs. pain) or govern its choices, the former is said to have high control over the latter. Interdependence theory distinguishes three types of control, including stakeholder-, partner-, and joint control (Kelley and Thibaut 1978), as discussed further and applied to the SJ below, in line with Hamilton et al.'s (2021, p. 75) suggestion to explore the "dynamics and relative power structures" characterizing interdependent journeys.

***Stakeholder control.*** Extending Lemon and Verhoef's (2016) notion of customers' journey-based control, we explore the role of interdependence theory-informed *stakeholder control*, defined as "the impact ...of [a stakeholder's] actions... on [his/her] own [journey-based] outcomes" (Rusbult and Van Lange 2003, p. 354). High stakeholder control implies a

stakeholder's ability to choose his/her own engagement relatively independently from that of a focal other through his/her journey, exposing his/her comparatively low reliance on the other (Kelley et al. 2003; Rusbult and Van Lange 2008).

For example, leading companies like Apple tend to possess high stakeholder control (vs. their competitors), allowing them to remain relatively unaffected by their rivals' (e.g., promotional/product launch) activity, both at and outside of their respective journeys' touchpoints (Shavitt and Barnes 2020). Apple is, therefore, able to choose its own course largely irrespective of Samsung's actions, revealing its relatively autonomous engagement (Hollebeek et al. 2021). In other words, high stakeholder control enables Apple to determine or adjust its journey's course comparatively independently from that of Samsung (e.g., by adopting a highly inimitable/legally protected R&D strategy), allowing its SJ to proceed in an array of desired directions, as shown in the sample scenario depicted in Figure 2: P1a. Here, we portray Apple's random base journey, shown by a solid black line. The dashed lines reflect the company's ability to deviate off its base course, which Apple, given its high stakeholder control, has the power to command, determine, or implement, revealing its relatively autonomous or sovereign (i.e., positive) engagement and illustrating Halvorsrud et al.'s (2016) notion of journey-based *deviation*.

Consequently, high stakeholder control is expected to spawn a range of potential SJ paths, as selected or driven by Apple. Though the SJ's alternate (dashed) paths *can* yield a diminished stakeholder experience, theoretically (as shown by the downward sloping path in Figure 2: P1a; Bradley et al. 2021), an enhanced, upward sloping experience is more likely to transpire under high stakeholder control, given its inherently elevated stakeholder power and influence (Kelley et al. 2003). Therefore, individuals' increasingly autonomous engagement, as afforded by high stakeholder control (Benford et al. 2021), progressively liberates or frees

their role experience, as illustrated by the two upward sloping alternate journey paths in Figure 2: P1a. Formally,

**P1a:** *A stakeholder's rising stakeholder control will see his/her more autonomous engagement in the SJ, increasingly liberating the stakeholder experience.*

**Partner control.** Partner control refers to the degree to which a stakeholder's interactional "outcomes [are] controlled by [his/her partner's] unilateral actions" (Rusbult and Van Lange 2003, p. 355) at or outside their journey-based touchpoints (e.g., Kranzbühler et al. 2019). For example, if a manager (or small firm) is dependent on a director's (or competitor's) processes, actions, or decisions for a positive result, the latter is high in partner control. At a journey touchpoint (e.g., a meeting), a stakeholder (e.g., a manager) may steer another's (e.g., an employee's) role-related journey (e.g., by instructing him/her to work on specific tasks; Parida 2020), revealing the former's elevated partner control. Moreover, outside the journey's touchpoints, the manager can *also* influence the employee's journey (e.g., through decision-making behind closed doors; Hollebeek et al. 2022). High partner control, thus, implies the less powerful stakeholder's journey-based engagement and experience resting, to a significant degree, in the hands of his/her more powerful partner.

As high partner control exposes a stakeholder's power over another, it will tend to direct or prescribe the other's journey, thus typically disempowering his/her role engagement (Li and Feng 2021). For example, under high partner control, stakeholders (e.g., employees) can be ordered to perform undesired tasks, which they – given their comparatively low power – are typically required to execute (e.g., to minimize their partner's implementation of sanctions; Dawkins 2014).

The sample high partner control scenario in Figure 2: P1b depicts the less powerful stakeholder's (e.g., small firm's) base journey by a solid line. As its engagement is disempowered (i.e., negatively affected) by its more powerful partner (e.g., leading firm; Li

and Feng 2021), the dashed lines in the figure reveal the small firm's limited ability to pursue alternate courses in its journey, as directed by the leading firm (e.g., by setting industry price levels). In turn, the small firm's disempowered engagement curbs or curtails its role experience (i.e., rendering it less positive), as its partner has the power to determine its SJ's course to a significant extent (Halvorsrud and Kvale 2017). For example, by offering low prices based on economies of scale, leading online retailers (e.g., Alibaba) have a level of control over locally owned stores by pushing them to also reduce their prices to stay in business, though these retailers typically lack the resources to do so long-term. As shown in Figure 2: P1b, we postulate:

**P1b:** *A stakeholder's rising partner control will see his/her more disempowered engagement in the SJ, increasingly curtailing the stakeholder experience.*

**Joint control.** Joint control implies that a stakeholder's role experience is "controlled by the partners' joint" engagement (Rusbult and Van Lange 2003, p. 355), revealing interacting stakeholders' interdependence in achieving an auspicious outcome through their journey (Kelley and Thibaut 1978; Hamilton et al. 2021). For example, high joint control exists when a manufacturer's (e.g., Huawei's) outcomes depend on the interplay of its engagement with that of its retailers, including Target or Amazon (Kelley et al. 2003; Lievens and Blažević 2021).

Under high joint control, the involved stakeholders' goals may exhibit differing degrees of alignment, in turn affecting the unfolding of their respective journeys, both at and outside of their touchpoints (Richardson 2010). For example, while joint CJs (e.g., family holidays) may see clients' high journey-based goal alignment (Thomas et al. 2020), an employee's journey-related (e.g., pay rise) goal may not fully align with that of his/her manager. Therefore, the more stakeholders' goals differ, the greater the need for joint control-based bargaining and

negotiation to streamline their respective journey-based engagement (Wilson and Putnam 1990), in turn impacting the stakeholder experience.

For example, joint venture partners' differing objectives raise a need for the parties to agree on the appropriate course of action. This negotiation process is likely to see a level of stakeholder compromise, rendering stakeholders' engagement more concessional and thus, less positive, under rising levels of compromise in their journey (Schwartz et al. 2002; Hamilton et al. 2021). For example, to ensure its shelves remain well stocked, Walmart engages with its suppliers to reach a suitable compromise (e.g., by agreeing on product quality/pricing), as shown in the sample high joint control scenario in Figure 2: P1c. Given high joint control, these stakeholders may decide to meet in the middle by negotiating a satisfactory but suboptimal solution, thus foregoing each party's preferred strategy (e.g., for Walmart, high product quality at a low price) in favor of a mutually agreed one (e.g., standard quality at an average price; Hamilton et al. 2021).

While the left side of Figure 2: P1c depicts Walmart's less concessional (i.e., more positive) engagement to reach a compromise with its supplier, rightward movement along the x-axis reveals its progressively more concessional (i.e., less positive) engagement to realize a mutually acceptable compromise in its journey (Hollebeek et al. 2022; Shavitt and Barnes 2020). The company's less concessional engagement, in turn, yields its relatively positive, less *satisfied* (i.e., superior) experience that contains a higher *satisfy* (vs. sacrifice) component (Winter 2000), as depicted by the elevated y-values on the figure's left side. Thus, if Walmart *gets its way* in its supplier negotiations, its engagement should be less concessional, generating an exalted experience, as shown (left of Figure P1c). Conversely, if Walmart *gives* (vs. *takes*) more in the bargaining process, its more concessional engagement triggers a less positive, more satisfied experience that features a higher *sacrifice* (vs. satisfy) aspect (Schwartz et al. 2002), as shown on the right side of Figure 2: P1c. That is, the higher stakeholders' joint control, the

greater their typical need to negotiate to move forward, yielding their more concessional engagement and satisficing the stakeholder experience. Formally,

**P1c:** *A stakeholder's rising joint control with another will see his/her more concessional engagement in the SJ, increasingly satisficing the stakeholder experience.*

### ***Covariation of interest***

Next, we address the effect of stakeholders' *covariation of interest* through their journey, which denotes "whether the course of action that benefits [stakeholder A also] benefits [stakeholder B]" (Rusbult and Van Lange 2003, p. 356; see Table 4). For example, manufacturers (e.g., Bosch) may prioritize their distributors' (vs. retailers') interest by offering the former price discounts or by over-supplying product, even though their retailers lack shelf space, revealing these stakeholders' (partially) diverging journey-based interests. Theoretically, covariation of interest ranges from stakeholders' perfectly corresponding interests (known as *coordination*) to completely conflicting interests (i.e., *competition*; Deutsch 1949), as explained further and applied to the SJ below.

***Coordination.*** Coordination occurs when stakeholders seeking to achieve outcomes in their own best interest simultaneously advance outcomes in the best interest of their partner (Rusbult and Van Lange 2003, p. 356), implying the existence of stakeholders' compatible journey-based goals (Van Lange and Balliet 2014). For example, career-minded graduates will typically work hard, both at and beyond their touchpoint-based interactions (Rosenbaum et al. 2017), to enhance their career prospects, thereby also benefiting their employer. In coordination, one's partner's own goal pursuit, therefore, also benefits the focal stakeholder, given stakeholders' aligned journey-based goals (Deutsch 1949), akin to Thomas et al.'s (2020, p. 9) CJ-based "fields of alignment." For example, the above employer's training program that is designed to advance the organization will also benefit the hired graduates (e.g., by gaining valuable skills/experience).

As full coordination (i.e., stakeholders' *completely* corresponding journey-based goals) remains relatively rare in practice, intersecting SJs tend to be characterized by *partial* coordination, revealing individuals' partly converging interests with those of their partner (Hillebrand et al. 2015). Correspondingly, we expect the partial coordination of a stakeholder's journey-based interests with that of another to boost his/her positive engagement *to the extent* that it fulfils his/her interests (Wolf et al. 2021; Thomas et al. 2020). For example, Ph.D. students' joint publications with their adviser tend to advance both these stakeholders' careers, exposing the apparent coordination of their respective journeys. However, while the adviser may agree to referee in the student's job applications (i.e., revealing his/her positive engagement; Hollebeek et al. 2022), (s)he may also feel threatened by the student's achievements (e.g., concerns of the latter overtaking him/her on the career ladder), which can render his/her engagement more negative (e.g., by understating the candidate's abilities to prospective employers), illustrating these stakeholders' partial (vs. full) coordination through their respective journeys (Gnyawali and Charleton 2018; Tax et al. 2013).

Extending this rationale, we posit that stakeholders' coordination-incited positive engagement allies or brings together their respective journeys (Lievens and Blažević 2021; Thomas et al. 2020). For example, researchers in related topic areas may decide to join forces, thus aligning their respective engagement, as shown in the sample scenario in Figure 2: P2a. In turn, these stakeholders' allied SJ-based engagement is expected to harmonize or unify their respective role experience (Hänninen et al. 2019), as depicted by both stakeholders' upward sloping journeys in Figure 2: P2a. We propose:

**P2a:** *A stakeholder's rising coordination with another will see their more aligned engagement in the SJ, increasingly harmonizing their respective stakeholder experience.*

**Competition.** Competition transpires when the interactional outcomes that are positive to one stakeholder are negative to his/her partner (Kelley and Thibaut 1978; Rusbult and Van Lange



2003). Given its inherently diverging stakeholder interests, competition may see a festering level of stakeholder antipathy or enmity toward one another (Freeman et al. 2010; Gnyawali and Charleton 2018), rendering the involved stakeholders' engagement more negative. For example, employees competing for a promotion, or petrol companies (e.g., Chevron) contesting the same set of scarce (oil) resources as their competitors display clashing interests, which can raise their oppositional engagement through their journey (Parmar et al. 2010). While this negative engagement can manifest at stakeholders' journey-based touchpoints (e.g., through bullying/extortion), it can also transpire outside these (e.g., a stakeholder defaming another behind his/her back; Hollebeek et al. 2022).

In other words, as competition features the focal stakeholder's (e.g., Chevron's) clashing interest with that of others (e.g., its competitors; Wolf et al. 2021), it can arouse one partner's or both partners' antagonistic journey-based engagement toward the other (i.e., by instigating a price war to drive the competition out of business). In turn, this rivalrous, adversarial engagement will tend to separate these stakeholders' journeys (e.g., by reducing/removing their journey-based touchpoints), as shown in the sample scenario in Figure 2: P2b. For example, faced with a Chevron-instigated petrol price war, B.P. may decide to diversify its business (e.g., by shifting to supplying electricity for hybrid/electric vehicles), thus divorcing their SJs and individuating their respective stakeholder experience (Klein et al. 2020). Even if stakeholders (e.g., those high in stakeholder control) choose to confront their partner regarding their opposing interests (e.g., through litigation), *post*-this intervention they are expected to each go their own separate ways, thus isolating or individuating their role experience from one another. We postulate:

**P2b:** *A stakeholder's rising competition with another will see his/her more antagonistic engagement toward the other in the SJ, increasingly individuating the stakeholder experience.*

### ***Mutuality of dependence***

Mutuality of dependence describes “the degree to which two people are equally dependent on one another” (Rusbult and Van Lange 2003, p. 355; see Table 4), akin to the notions of *relative dependence* or *dependence (a)symmetry* (e.g., Kumar et al. 1995). High (low) mutuality of dependence reveals stakeholders’ relatively equal (unequal) dependence on each other, respectively. Under low mutuality of dependence, the less dependent partner (e.g., a director) is likely to exercise greater (e.g., decisional) power at or outside his/her journey-based touchpoints with the more dependent partner (e.g., an employee; Vakulenko et al. 2019). The latter, by contrast, typically carries the greater burden of interaction costs (e.g., by making sacrifices) and is more vulnerable to possible journey-based oppression, abandonment, exploitation, threats, or coercion (Rusbult and Van Lange 2008). Under low mutuality of dependence, the more dependent partner’s journey-based engagement is, thus, likely to be more negatively valenced (Hollebeek et al. 2022).

Interactions characterized by high mutuality of dependence tend to feel safer (Kelley et al. 2003), as both partners rely on each other to a comparatively equal degree, rendering stakeholders more likely to display (relatively) positive, benevolent engagement toward one another through their respective journeys (Bowden et al. 2017). For example, though IKEA’s weekly sales will, to some degree, be impacted by its competitor’s (e.g., sales) promotion offered in this period, the latter’s sales are equally likely to suffer from IKEA’s (e.g., future) promotion, leading the competitor to behave in a more supportive (vs. opportunistic) manner toward IKEA (e.g., by limiting its discount period/amount). Through these relatively sympathetic actions, the discounting firm exhibits positive, benevolent engagement toward IKEA, which may, however, be primarily driven by its desire to minimize IKEA’s future retaliation, rather than genuine concern for it *per se* (Amici et al. 2014; Voorhees et al. 2017). Correspondingly, the sample scenario in Figure 2: P3 depicts two mutually dependent SJs featuring relatively benevolent stakeholder engagement (Hamilton et al. 2021), in turn

triggering the depicted stakeholders' comparatively agreeable, pleasant journey-based experience (Rather et al. 2021). We posit:

**P3:** *A stakeholder's rising mutuality of dependence with another will see his/her more benevolent engagement toward the other in the SJ, rendering the stakeholder experience increasingly agreeable.*

### ***Information availability***

*Information availability* refers to a stakeholder's level of access to interaction-related information (Rusbult and Van Lange 2003; see Table 4), including objective (e.g., factual) and subjective (e.g., hearsay-based) information, through his/her role journey (Hollebeek et al. 2019). Information availability is an important structural interdependence tenet, as stakeholders typically value being informed about such issues as their partner's interactional motives, goals, agenda, circumstances, etc., both at and outside of their journey-based touchpoints (Rusbult and Van Lange 2003; Rosenbaum et al. 2017).

Interdependence theory posits that while low information availability is typically plagued by interactional issues including ambiguity, misunderstandings, or fallouts (Rusbult and Van Lange 2008), high information availability tends to enhance interactional transparency and effectiveness through the SJ. For example, if a retailer (e.g., Costco) holds salient information about its distributor's self-interested goals (e.g., by limiting its supply to Costco to non-leading/B-brands, while supplying leading brands to other retailers), Costco's actions are likely to differ (vs. in the absence of this information; Kelley et al. 2003). That is, the availability of this information will tend to affect Costco's engagement with its merchant (e.g., by negotiating better terms/switching distributors). Information availability can also differ across stakeholders, which is known as *information asymmetry* (Bergh et al. 2019). For example, managers are likely to have access to more information about their employees than vice versa.

We argue that greater information availability will typically see partners feel more confident to invest (i.e., engage) in their journey-based interactions, owing to elevated interactional clarity and certainty. That is, the rising availability of high-quality information progressively informs stakeholders' journey-based engagement, as it enables partners to assess the situation and plan their desired course of action (Kuehnl et al. 2019). In turn, a more placid, less volatile stakeholder experience is anticipated to result, as shown in Figure 2: P4. Here, Costco's base course is again represented by a solid line, with the dashed line exposing high information availability's volatility-reducing effect on the SJ. As another example, long-term employees or relationship marketing implementing firms are likely to hold extensive information about their partner (i.e., employer/customers, respectively), fostering their understanding of, and trust in, their partner's needs, motives, and preferences (Palmatier et al. 2006), in turn stabilizing their journey-based experience (Kim et al. 2018). We postulate:

**P4:** *A stakeholder's rising information availability will see his/her more informed engagement in the SJ, increasingly stabilizing the stakeholder experience.*

### ***Temporal journey structure***

Interdependence theory's final structural interdependence tenet of temporal journey structure rests on the notion that interactions and relationships are evolving, dynamic (vs. static) phenomena, requiring an understanding of stakeholder interdependence in terms of its timing and process through the SJ (Kelley 1984; Rusbult and Van Lange 2008; see Table 4). In this vein, we highlight the importance of SJ duration (De Pourcq et al. 2016): The longer an SJ, the more role cycles and/or touchpoints it will typically contain (Shavitt and Barnes 2020), affording the focal stakeholder an enhanced opportunity for role-related learning (e.g., by repeating, revisiting, or modifying specific role tasks/steps; Mena and Chabowski 2015). For example, since its inception in 1892, Coca-Cola's journey contains millions, if not billions, of role cycles and touchpoints, thus progressively training its (e.g., managers'/employees')

journey-based engagement, including by teaching them regarding the optimal resource type(s) and quantity to invest in specific role-related interactions (e.g., manufacturing/hiring activity).

Stakeholders' progressively trained engagement, therefore, exposes their rising role proficiency, including through a growing capacity to leverage their journey-based resource investments (Hollebeek et al. 2019), as shown in the sample scenario in Figure 2: P5. For example, more (vs. less) skilled Coca-Cola stakeholders' (e.g., employees' or contractors') engagement can see a constrained set of resources *go further*, thus enhancing firm relationships and/or performance. In turn, this progressively trained engagement is expected to yield a more efficient, streamlined (i.e., more positive) stakeholder experience, as shown by the upward-sloping curve in Figure 2: P5. We theorize:

**P5:** *Longer journeys will see more trained stakeholder engagement in the SJ, yielding an increasingly efficient stakeholder experience.*

In sum, this section explored the effect of interdependence theory's structural interdependence tenets of stakeholders' control, covariation of interest, mutuality of dependence, information availability, and temporal journey structure on SJ-based stakeholder engagement and experience, as summarized in the Propositions. That is, the Propositions offer insight into interdependence theory's stakeholder engagement and experience-impacting dynamics through the SJ. Next, we discuss pertinent implications that emerge from our research.

## **IMPLICATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH**

### **Theoretical implications**

Despite its contribution, the CJ literature adopts a limited *customer* focus, which we – following authors including Kumar and Pansari (2016), Hannay et al. (2020), and Lievens and Blažević (2021) – extended to an *omni*-stakeholder focus that incorporates not only customers', but *any* stakeholder's, journey with the firm, thus achieving broader, more generalizable

journey-based acumen that we expect to boost the firm's stakeholder relationships and performance (Trianz 2022). We conceptualized the SJ as “*a stakeholder's trajectory of role-related touchpoints and activities, enacted through stakeholder engagement, that collectively shape the stakeholder experience with the firm,*” yielding a wealth of implications for journey-, engagement-, and experience research.

First, by considering their different stakeholders' journeys (vs. the CJ alone), SJ-implementing firms should be better able to design, manage, or coordinate their respective stakeholders' journey-based engagement and experience for mutual benefit, yielding the firm's enhanced stakeholder interactions and relationships, as outlined. For example, stakeholders' coordinated engagement in open innovation ecosystems has been shown to yield improved collaborative outcomes (Randhawa et al. 2020), in turn lifting firm performance. Building on this insight, we encourage scholars to explore issues including the relative impact of different stakeholders' engagement, individually and collectively, on specific stakeholders' journey-based experience. We also recommend future empirical investigation of different stakeholders' journeys in shaping the firm's bottom-line, double- and triple bottom-line performance (Mish and Scammon 2010), their success factors, and potential inhibitors. That is, though we envisage SJ (vs. merely CJ)-adopting firms to attain superior returns, as outlined, quantification of their respective results remains paramount. Related research questions include:

- How do a focal stakeholder's journey-based role engagement and experience affect the firm's bottom-line, double- and triple bottom-line performance?
- What resources, capabilities, and skills are required in transitioning from the CJ to the SJ?
- What challenges may be expected in this process, and how can they be overcome?

Relatedly, we propose stakeholder engagement as a pivotal conduit in shaping the SJ's course, thus extending Demmers et al.'s (2020), Vredeveld and Coulter's (2019), and Venkatesan's (2017) CJ-based analyses and raising scholarly awareness of the need to

optimally design and manage different stakeholders' engagement through their respective journeys. A plethora of implications arise from this observation. For example, is stakeholders' cognitive, emotional, and/or behavioral engagement core in facilitating their respective journeys' unfolding, and in optimizing the stakeholder experience, in particular contexts? How do changing levels of the identified structural interdependence tenets affect stakeholders' journey-based engagement, and what is their respective impact on the stakeholder experience?

Moreover, we noted that not only a focal stakeholder's (own) engagement impacts his/her journey, but that of his/her interaction partner is also likely to do so, and vice versa. For example, Facebook temporarily banned its Australian users from accessing or sharing news stories on its platform due to a dispute over proposed legislation that would compel it to pay news publishers for content, thus impacting these users' journeys. We, therefore, also advocate the undertaking of future (e.g., empirical) research on the effects of specific interaction partners' engagement on the focal stakeholder's engagement and experience, and their interplay (Hollebeek et al. 2022). Related research questions include:

- How do stakeholders best position themselves to leverage their partner's positive journey-based engagement, while insulating themselves against their potential negative engagement, and how does this affect their respective role experience?
- How do SJ-based stakeholder engagement/experience pan out under high combined levels of partner- and joint control (e.g., though from an employee's perspective, a manager has high control over him/her (i.e., high partner control), the manager is also reliant on the employee's contributions, revealing high joint control)?

**Insert Table 5 about here.**

Second, we view the SJ to transpire in a network of intersecting journeys that mutually affect one another, as shown in Figure 1. In this mosaic of traversing ecosystem-based SJs, we explore the effect of interdependence theory's structural interdependence tenets of stakeholders' control, covariation of interest, mutuality of dependence, information availability, and temporal journey structure on SJ-based stakeholder engagement and

experience, as summarized in the Propositions and shown in Figure 2. These analyses serve as an important catalyst for further research. For example, though the CJ has been predominantly viewed to comprise a customer's single role (i.e., purchase) cycle (e.g., Voorhees et al. 2017), we extend the SJ's scope to a more relational, *trans*-role cycle perspective (Hoffman and Novak 2019), as outlined, where stakeholders' role cycles are likely to reveal differing interdependence levels with the firm. For example, while a new supplier's interdependence with the firm is still forming, that of a long-term vendor will tend to be more established and/or trusting.

These observations also raise myriad implications for future journey research. For example, scholars are encouraged to assess how the identified structural interdependence tenets impact specific stakeholders' engagement and experience throughout their respective journey-based role cycles (e.g., by comparing key dynamics for new vs. more mature relationships). We also recommend further research on the deployed structural interdependence tenets' levels *relative to one another* through stakeholders' journeys. For example, under what conditions may specific levels of particular stakeholders' structural interdependence tenets complement or advance (vs. thwart or impede) one another in boosting the firm's stakeholder relationships and performance?

In Table 5, we offer additional future research avenues organized by our Propositions. For example, P4 states: "*A stakeholder's rising information availability will see his/her more informed engagement in the SJ, increasingly stabilizing the stakeholder experience,*" leading us to develop the following sample research question for this Proposition in Table 5: "To what extent does information availability inform SJ-based stakeholder engagement, and stabilize the stakeholder experience, for particular stakeholders?" Further investigation of this and related issues is warranted. For example, does high (vs. low) information availability train different stakeholders' (e.g., customers'/employees') engagement to an equal (vs. differing) extent



through their respective journeys? How may stakeholders' role engagement and experience differ across roles characterized by higher (vs. lower) informational needs and/or information availability? How might these processes be impacted by stakeholder-perceived information asymmetry (Bergh et al. 2019)?

### **Managerial implications**

This research also yields pertinent managerial implications. Specifically, by understanding, managing, and orchestrating multiple SJs (vs. the CJ alone), firms are expected to boost their stakeholder relationship management and performance outcomes (Mish and Scammon 2010), as noted. First, in terms of bottom-line or financial firm performance, organizational recognition of multiple stakeholders' journeys can facilitate the design and development of more coordinated stakeholder interactions and relationships, enabling cost savings and/or enhancing the liquidity of firm assets (Srivastava et al. 1998). For example, by harmonizing their customer- and supplier journeys, companies like Walmart can fine-tune or synchronize their just-in-time-based stock ordering and selling activity, allowing them to rapidly free up cash tied up in inventory.

Second, in terms of double bottom-line or social firm performance, companies' SJ focus stands them in good stead to optimize different stakeholders' role experience (Chabowski et al. 2011). For example, by understanding workers' (customers') role aspirations, challenges, and interactions and by minimizing pain-points through the employee (customer) journey, companies like Google can boost employee (customer) satisfaction, engagement, and retention, respectively, thereby benefiting these stakeholders *and* the firm (e.g., through reduced hiring/acquisition costs). Moreover, firms' SJ-based acumen can help them better understand their stakeholders' (e.g., suppliers') interactions with *others* (e.g., strategic partners/customers), offering important strategic insight. For example, car insurance customers' experience with their car's service, maintenance, and warranty depends not only on

the insurer's actions, but also on those of the workshop, mechanic, administrator, etc., which SJ mapping can illuminate (Ortbal et al. 2016).

In other words, by visualizing their different stakeholders' journeys and understanding their respective needs, goals, and dynamics, firms are able to synchronize their journey with that of relevant stakeholders, creating a win-win for those involved (e.g., through smoother SJ-based interactions and relationships; Trianz 2022). Correspondingly, the above insurance customer's positive experience results from multiple stakeholders' (e.g., the distributor's, manufacturer's, and the insurance company's) *coordinated* journeys. Therefore, those firms that can orchestrate their journey with that of relevant stakeholders are expected to excel. In this vein, BMW has aligned itself with its customers' journey, which commonly sees clients wishing to replace their car after approximately three years. By instigating a buy-back arrangement that allows customers to sell back their vehicle to the company after this period, these customers' experience tends to receive a boost. In turn, after refurbishing these vehicles, BMW is also able to influence its second-hand customers' journeys.

Third, in terms of triple bottom-line or environmental firm performance, companies' SJ-based acumen helps them assess the impact of their (e.g., resource allocation) decisions and actions on the environment, while also enabling them to shape their stakeholders' journeys in more sustainable ways (Moretti et al. 2021). For example, by minimizing its pollution and waste and by communicating these values to its customers (Ryan 2017), The BodyShop helps develop buyers' demand for responsible cosmetics, thus impacting their CJ and, in turn, also affecting its distributors', suppliers', and competitors' journeys. Therefore, by adopting an SJ focus, firms can raise the extent to which they *do good* in society (e.g., by meeting customer needs in more resource-efficient ways), while abating any adverse effects, thus contributing to the achievement of their triple bottom-line objectives and building stakeholder trust (Chabowski et al. 2011).

**Insert Table 6 about here.**

To help achieve the outlined SJ-based stakeholder relationship management and performance gains, we next offer actionable guidelines for SJ-based stakeholder engagement/experience design and management (Teixeira et al. 2017), as organized by the Propositions, in Table 6. For example, addressing stakeholder covariation of interest, P2a and P2b state, respectively: “*A stakeholder’s rising coordination (competition) with another will see their more aligned (antagonistic) engagement ...in the SJ, increasingly harmonizing (individuating) the... stakeholder experience.*” By designing journey-based interactions for coordination (vs. competition), the emergence of any antagonistic effects can be softened or minimized, thus benefiting firm performance, as companies like Shell recognize (see Table 6). For example, we recommend limiting employees’ assigned team members to those that are conducive (vs. detrimental) to their respective role engagement as much as possible (e.g., by matching their personality profiles; De Haan et al. 2016), in turn enhancing their role experience. Overall, we advise firms to adopt relevant SJ prerequisites, guidelines, standards, and checkpoints to lower competition, while also adhering to pertinent institutions (e.g., legislation). For example, many countries have outlawed price fixing, where suppliers collude by overcharging consumers for their products, forcing them to pay elevated prices (Hay and Kelley 1974), thus illustrating governments’ adoption of legal bounds to protect consumers from firms’ unfair pricing practices and revealing these stakeholders’ competing interests in this regard.

As another example, P3 reads: “*A stakeholder’s rising mutuality of dependence with another will see his/her more benevolent engagement toward the other in the SJ, rendering the stakeholder experience increasingly agreeable,*” offering further SJ-based stakeholder engagement and -experience design implications (see Table 6). Under high mutuality of

dependence, partners rely on each other to a relatively equal degree (Kelley and Thibaut 1978), as noted, stimulating their positive engagement while deterring their negative engagement (e.g., to minimize their partner's potential retaliation; Scheer et al. 2015; Li et al. 2018). For example, Disney's strategic partnership with Hewlett-Packard fosters their respective mutuality of dependence, thus producing both parties' more benevolent engagement toward the other, as illustrated in Table 6.

We recommend boosting partners' mutuality of dependence where possible, particularly in less interdependent relationships, given its expected stakeholder engagement- and experience-boosting effect. For example, though firms tend to be less reliant, long-term, on contractors (vs. permanent staff), raising these stakeholders' mutual dependence (e.g., by expanding the contractor's range of tasks/responsibilities) can be conducive to both stakeholders' performance (e.g., for the firm: reduced contractor turnover/enhanced operational efficiency; for the contractor: greater income security/income growth). We, however, caution against mutuality of dependence levels at the top end of the spectrum, which can trigger co-dependency (i.e., where one partner constrains or undermines the other; Morgan 1991) or limited development of stakeholders' individual identity, capabilities, or performance. We, therefore, advise maintaining stakeholder mutuality of dependence at higher, but not excessive, levels.

### **Limitations and future research**

Firms limiting their focus to the CJ, while ignoring the broader SJ, run a serious performance sub-optimization risk. In this article, we, therefore, conceptualized the SJ and developed a set of interdependence theory-informed Propositions of the SJ, thus placing the SJ on the map for marketers, given its expected role in lifting firm performance. However, despite its contribution, this study is not free from limitations, from which we derive additional research avenues.

First, the purely conceptual nature of our analyses renders a need for their empirical testing and validation, which may – for instance – establish that our proposed associations hold more strongly for some stakeholders (vs. others), or in some contexts (vs. others). For example, P1c reads: “*A stakeholder’s rising joint control with another will see his/her more concessional engagement in the SJ, increasingly sacrificing the stakeholder experience.*” While in some settings, a focal stakeholder may view his/her high joint control with another as agreeable, in others it can be seen as a hindrance, which warrants further attention. Specific research questions include:

- What are the factors that give rise to stakeholders’ acceptance (vs. dislike) of specific structural interdependence tenets (e.g., high joint control/mutuality of dependence) across their role (e.g., customer/employee) journeys?
- How stable are focal structural interdependence tenets (e.g., joint control) through the SJ and what factors trigger their potential fluctuation?

Second, while we used interdependence theory to inform our analyses, alternate theoretical frames can also be deployed to further explore stakeholders’ journey-based engagement and experience, including organizational justice theory, social exchange theory, network theory, game theory, equity theory, goal-expectation theory, or assemblage theory, to name a few. For example, while social exchange theory can be used to assess stakeholders’ perceived costs/benefits derived from specific SJ-based interactions, equity theory can be deployed to explore the perceived fairness of partners’ respective resource access and contributions, thus affecting journeying stakeholders’ engagement and experience.

Moreover, while assemblage theory can be adopted to examine fluid, *multi*-functional assemblages of SJ-based stakeholders, tasks, and activities and their respective engagement and experience (Epp and Velagaleti 2014), further exploration of the theoretical interface of Hillebrand et al.’s (2015) *stakeholder marketing* perspective and the SJ is also warranted. For example, how might a firm’s prioritization of one stakeholder’s interests affect the unfolding

of its other stakeholders' journeys? Researchers are also encouraged to examine the role of network externalities, which recognize the dependence of stakeholder engagement and experience on the number of stakeholders adopting specific solutions (Frels et al. 2003), and their effect on particular stakeholders' journeys. For example, in India, Maruti cars command a 49% market share, despite intense competition. Therefore, a customer's experience of owning a Maruti vehicle depends not only on product quality, but also on the extensive number of other users, enabling convenient access to the brand's dealer/repair shop network.

Third, the SJ may be viewed as a firm's *multi*-stakeholder goal optimization issue, which – when successfully implemented – facilitates a win-win for the firm and its stakeholders, as outlined, thus also meriting further research. Sample questions include:

- How do firms optimally align their relevant stakeholders' journeys for mutual benefit, while minimizing any tension in this regard?
- How do firms ensure that their stakeholders' journeys are consistently progressing in an efficient, effective manner?
- How do firms simultaneously optimize their different stakeholders' journeys?

Relatedly, (how) may firm stakeholders benefit from adopting an SJ perspective (e.g., of *their* partners' journeys and their respective activities, goals, and dynamics that may, in turn, impact the former's journey)? For example, in the case of a delivery delay from Amazon, customers may initially blame the supplier. However, if closer inspection reveals that the delay is due to a lapse in the U.S. Postal Service's (e.g., pandemic-imposed) mail distribution journey, this helps the customer assess and appropriately resolve the issue (e.g., by locally purchasing a substitute product), thus keeping his/her relationship with Amazon intact.

Fourth, though we assessed interdependence theory's structural interdependence tenets individually, in practice, these tenets will often *jointly* affect SJs (Kelley and Thibaut 1978), yielding additional interactional subtleties that warrant further enquiry. For example, coordination featuring high (vs. low) information availability, or high mutuality of dependence coupled with high (vs. low) stakeholder control, are expected to see unique interactional

dynamics. We, therefore, encourage the undertaking of further research that explores the concurrent effect of *multiple* structural interdependence facets on the SJ, thus more holistically depicting journeying stakeholders' interdependent realities. Relatedly, scrutiny of stakeholders' potentially *changing* journey-based interdependence is warranted. For example, despite the initial coordination in Duracell selling its batteries through Amazon, Amazon's subsequent launch of its Basic (e.g., batteries) private label introduced competition into their relationship, thus impacting these stakeholders' interdependent journey-based engagement and experience. Therefore, further investigation of the potential drivers of these shifting dynamics, and relevant best practices toward their resolution, is recommended.

Finally, while we explored the effect of interdependence theory's structural interdependence tenets on SJ-based stakeholder engagement and experience, interdependence theory extends to incorporate additional elements that also merit further research. For example, a stakeholder's *comparison level*, which reflects his/her expectancy regarding current relational outcomes (vs. those attained in past relationships/one's observation of others' present relationships; Thibaut and Kelley 1978), may also affect the SJ. For example, an employee's work engagement is not only contingent on his/her current working conditions, but also on those in his/her previous position(s), as well as the individual's perception of other workers' present conditions in similar positions, warranting further scrutiny. For example, what is the relative perceived importance of each of these factors in driving the individual's job-related engagement and experience?

Summing up, the suggested research avenues are expected to spawn a vibrant niche of future marketing-based journey research that extends existing CJ-based acumen, thereby ushering in a new era of SJ research and contributing to firm performance.

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**Table 1: Customer Journey Conceptualizations**

Author(s)	Approach	Definition
Zomerdijk & Voss (2010, p. 74)	Empirical (qualitative)	The <i>customer journey</i> comprises “a series of touchpoints that “involves all activities and events related to the delivery of a service from the customer’s perspective.”
Richardson (2010, p. 1)	Practitioner	The <i>customer journey</i> is “the steps... customers go through in engaging with [a] company, whether it be a product, an online experience, retail experience, or a service, or any combination” (Venkatesan 2017).
Tax et al. (2013, p. 456)	Conceptual	The <i>customer journey</i> includes “all of the touchpoints ... from the customer’s perspective ... [that are] required to help them achieve their goals.”
Edelman & Singer (2015, p. 90)	Practitioner	“In the <i>classic</i> [customer] <i>journey</i> , consumers engage in an extended consideration and evaluation phase before either entering into the loyalty loop or proceeding into a new round of consideration and evaluation that may lead to the subsequent purchase of a different brand... The <i>new journey</i> compresses the ‘consider’ step and shortens or entirely eliminates the ‘evaluate’ step, delivering customers directly within the loyalty loop and locking them within it.”
Lemon & Verhoef (2016, p. 71)	Conceptual	The <i>customer purchase journey</i> is “the process a customer goes through, across all stages and touchpoints, that makes up the customer experience.”
Anderl et al. (2016, p. 457)	Empirical (quantitative)	The <i>online customer journey</i> includes “all touchpoints over all online marketing channels preceding a potential purchase decision that lead to a visit of an advertiser's website.”
Voorhees et al. (2017, p. 230)	Conceptual	The <i>customer journey</i> details “a customer’s journey with a firm over time during the purchase cycle across multiple touchpoints.”
Rosenbaum et al. (2017, p. 2)	Practitioner	The <i>customer journey</i> is “the sequence of events through which customers may interact with a[n] ... organization during an entire purchase process.”
Kuehnl et al. (2019, p. 1)	Empirical (quantitative)	<i>Effective customer journey design</i> is “the extent to which consumers perceive multiple brand-owned touchpoints [to be] designed in a thematically cohesive, consistent, and context-sensitive way.”
Van Vaerenbergh et al. (2019)	Review	The <i>service recovery journey</i> is “the outcome of a service failure that is composed of three phases: pre-recovery, recovery, and post-recovery.”
Kranzbühler et al. (2019, p. 308)	Empirical (quantitative)	The customer journey comprises “touchpoints ... that consumers [may] perceive as [satisfying or] dissatisfying.”
McColl-Kennedy et al. (2019, pp. 8-9)	Review (data mining)	The <i>customer journey</i> “is “comprised of multiple touchpoints over time... The journey [runs from] end to end.”
Siebert et al. (2020, p. 46)	Empirical (qualitative)	The <i>customer journey</i> is “the ongoing customer experience across the phases of a service cycle.”
Shavitt & Barnes (2020, p. 41)	Conceptual	The <i>customer journey</i> contains “a series of touchpoints that involves all activities and events related to the delivery of a service from the customer’s perspective.”
Sudbury-Riley et al. (2020, p. 237)	Empirical (mixed)	The <i>customer journey</i> comprises five stages: (i) Pre-arrival: Details the CJ up to the point of [the customer] experiencing the service’(ii) Arrival: Illustrates those touchpoints a customer may come into contact with as they first begin to experience the service; (iii) Care & Support: Illuminates the core service aspects provided by frontline staff; (iv) The Little Extras: Those augmented service aspects; and (v) Final Processes & Aftercare: Depicts the completion of the core service and the aftercare experience.”
Hamilton et al. (2021, p. 68)	Conceptual	The <i>social customer journey</i> is the customer’s “path to purchase [that] explicit[ly] integrat[es] the important role that social others play throughout the journey.”

**Table 2: Stakeholder Engagement and Related Conceptualizations**

Author(s)	Discipline	Definition
Greenwood (2007, p. 315)	Business ethics	SE involves “the practices an organization undertakes to involve stakeholders in a positive manner in its activities.”
Maak (2007, p. 340)	Business ethics	“SE [is] a weaver of social ties, as an embedded and engaged networker who makes sure that her [network] is ‘in sync’ with stakeholder expectations, and who is able to mobilize multiple stakeholders in a coalition.”
Hughes & Dann (2009, p. 249)	Marketing	In the political marketing context, SE is “stakeholder influence over the political marketing organization.”
Noland & Phillips (2010, p. 40)	Management	There are “two types of SE: Strategic and moral. Strategic engagement is undertaken with strategic, though not necessarily intentionally dishonest or malicious, motivations. Moral engagement is marked by specific conditions of communication which ensure that the communication is uncorrupted by power differences and strategic motivations. The aim of this type of engagement is agreement for the sake of agreement.... Stakeholder engagement...is neither necessarily positive [e.g., open, honest] nor negative [e.g., deceitful].”
Corus & Ozanne (2012, p. 1729)	Management, Marketing	SE “suggests that the authenticity of a decision rests on the discursive quality of the decision-making process such that general symmetry exists in exchanges and the implicit norms guide the communication.”
Luoma-Aho (2015, p. 8)	Management, Marketing	SE is “concerned with the relationship between organizations and their stakeholders with a focus on dialogue, consultation, and participation.”
Chandler & Lusch (2015, p. 6)	Marketing	Engagement is “the alignment of [stakeholder] connections and dispositions.”
Brodie et al. (2016, p. 6)	Marketing	The authors state (p. 1): “stakeholders or actors,” thus equating these concepts. Thus, SE and actor engagement (AE) are also equivalent. The authors define AE (SE) as “an actor’s disposition to provide investments in practices which extend beyond what is fundamental to exchange transactions, through reciprocal interactions between actors including individuals, groups, networks, and machines/technologies” (p. 6).
Viglia et al. (2018 p. 405)	Marketing	SE reflects “emotional and cognitive... engagement [to] trigger... behavioral activation. [That is], “engagement can... be measured through visible interactions.”
Jonas et al. (2018, p. 402)	Marketing	SE is “a psychological state that occurs by virtue of stakeholder experiences throughout an interactive process within a specific service ecosystem.”
Reinartz & Berkmann (2018, p. 251)	Marketing	Partner engagement is “a partner’s volitional behavior toward any other stakeholder in the value chain.’
Jordan et al. (2019, p. 61)	Management	SE “attempts to develop partnerships ... to assist in problem-solving and decision-making.”
Kleinaltenkamp et al. (2019)	Marketing	Collective engagement is “multiple actors’ [stakeholders’] ...manifested ...interactive efforts toward a focal object.” “Collective engagement has similarities to the discussion on [SE] ...in that [it views] engagement from the perspective of how individual [stakeholders] engage as members of a collective” (Storbacka 2019, p. 5).
Hollebeek et al. (2020, p. 1)	Marketing	SE is “a stakeholder’s state-based, boundedly-volitional resource endowment in his/her role-related interactions, activities, and/or relationships.”
Kumar & Ramachandran (2021, p. 2)	Marketing	“Firms are increasing their depth of stakeholders' focus through efforts aimed at enhancing stakeholders' engagement and wellbeing. The growing emphasis on stakeholder engagement (e.g., customer engagement... and employee engagement) has encouraged firms to leverage new-age technologies and relevant analytics to develop personalized and convenient offerings.”

Notes: Adapted from and extending Hollebeek et al. (2020); SE: Stakeholder engagement; AE: Actor engagement.

**Table 3: The Customer Journey, Stakeholder Journey, and Key Related Concepts**

The Customer Journey (CJ) & Related Concepts		The Stakeholder Journey (SJ) & Related Concepts	
<b>Customer journey (CJ)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ CJ: “The process a customer goes through, across all stages and touchpoints, that makes up the customer experience” (Lemon &amp; Verhoef 2016, p. 71).</li> </ul> <p>Core CJ hallmarks include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The CJ describes the customer’s progression through a traditionally sequential trajectory of steps in completing his/her goal of making a purchase (Siebert et al. 2020). It starts with the customer’s initial search for the firm’s products, and ends with the individual’s <i>post</i>-purchase product/service evaluation. The CJ, thus, takes a process-based view of a customer’s purchase cycle (Edelman &amp; Singer 2015) that is increasingly recognized to comprise a fluid (vs. fixed) sequence of steps/stages.</li> <li>2. The CJ comprises multiple <i>touchpoints</i> that enable customers to interact with relevant firm stakeholders (e.g., employees; Kranzbühler et al. 2019), revealing its <i>multi-</i> or <i>omni</i>-channel nature (Herhausen et al. 2019).</li> <li>3. The CJ is inextricably linked to the <i>customer experience</i> (Lemon &amp; Verhoef 2016), as discussed further below.</li> </ol>	<b>Stakeholder journey (SJ)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Comprising <i>any</i> firm stakeholder’s journey (vs. the customer’s alone), the SJ broadens the CJ’s scope (i.e., the CJ exists as a particular SJ sub-set).</li> <li>○ We define the SJ as: “<i>A stakeholder’s trajectory of role-related touchpoints and activities, enacted through stakeholder engagement, that collectively shape his/her role-related stakeholder experience.</i>”</li> </ul> <p>Extending the CJ literature, core SJ hallmarks include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The SJ portrays a firm stakeholder’s progression through a trajectory of fixed or more fluid steps toward his/her role-related goal fulfilment (Lievens &amp; Blažević 2021; Hamilton et al. 2021). It starts with the stakeholder’s initial role-related information search (e.g., a prospective employee seeking info about the firm’s employer profile; a potential supplier looking up the firm’s financial performance/credit history), and covers all the stakeholder’s interactions and his/her relationship with the firm (Novak &amp; Hoffman 2019). The SJ ends with the stakeholder’s (e.g., an employee’s/owner’s) final experience with the firm (e.g., through termination of a worker’s employment contract with the firm; shareholders selling their stake in the firm).</li> <li>2. The SJ features multiple <i>touchpoints</i> that permit the intersecting of a stakeholder’s journey with that of another (e.g., Hannay et al. 2020).</li> <li>3. The SJ holistically depicts a firm stakeholder’s role experience (Ortbal et al. 2016), or his/her cognitive, emotional, behavioral, sensorial, and social role-related responses (Lemon &amp; Verhoef 2016).</li> </ol>
<b>Customer engagement (CE)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Though CE does not feature in most CJ definitions, authors including Venkatesan (2017), Venkatesan et al. (2018), Demmers et al. (2020), and Wang &amp; Lee (2020) recognize CE’s critical role in the CJ’s unfolding, as also advocated in this research.</li> <li>○ CE, which is defined as a customer’s “investment of focal operant resources (e.g., cognitive, emotional, [and] behavioral ... knowledge/skills) and operand resources (e.g., equipment) ...in [his/her] brand interactions” (Kumar et al. 2019, p. 141; Hollebeek et al. 2019, p. 166), denotes the customer’s role <i>inputs</i> in his/her journey-based interactions.</li> </ul>	<b>Stakeholder engagement (SE)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Extending the rationale presented for CE, we view SE as a vital SJ-shaping conduit (Lievens &amp; Blažević 2021).</li> <li>○ SE, which is defined as “a stakeholder’s “boundedly volitional ...endowment of [operant (e.g., cognitive, emotional, and/or behavioral knowledge/skills) and operand (e.g., equipment-based)] resource[s] ...in his/her role-related interactions, activities, and/or relationships” (Hollebeek et al. 2020, p. 1), denotes a focal stakeholder’s role <i>inputs</i> in his/her SJ-based interactions.</li> </ul>
<b>Customer experience (CX)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The CX is “a multidimensional construct focusing on a customer’s cognitive, emotional, behavioral, sensorial, and social responses to a firm’s offerings [in] the customer’s entire purchase journey” (Lemon &amp; Verhoef 2016, p. 71).</li> <li>○ The customer’s CX-based (e.g., cognitive/sensorial) role <i>responses</i> reflect his/her CJ-based role <i>outputs</i> (Brakus et al. 2009).</li> <li>○ The CX comprises the following facets (Lemon &amp; Verhoef 2016, p. 70): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <i>Cognitive CX</i>: A customer’s think response.</li> <li>○ <i>Emotional CX</i>: A customer’s feel response.</li> <li>○ <i>Behavioral (physical) CX</i>: A customer’s act response.</li> <li>○ <i>Sensorial CX</i>: A customer’s sense response.</li> <li>○ <i>Spiritual CX</i>: A customer’s spirit-based response.</li> <li>○ <i>Social CX</i>: A customer’s response (related) to others.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<b>Stakeholder experience (SX)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Extending Lemon &amp; Verhoef’s (2016) CX, we define the SX as: “<i>A multidimensional construct focusing on a stakeholder’s cognitive, emotional, behavioral, sensorial, and social responses to his/her role-related interactions, activities, and/or relationships.</i>”</li> <li>○ Stakeholders’ SX-based role <i>responses</i> denote their (e.g., cognitive/sensorial) SJ-based role <i>outputs</i> (Brakus et al. 2009).</li> <li>○ Extending Lemon &amp; Verhoef (2016), the SX comprises the following facets: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <i>Cognitive SX</i>: A stakeholder’s role-related think response.</li> <li>○ <i>Emotional SX</i>: A stakeholder’s role-related feel response.</li> <li>○ <i>Behavioral (physical) SX</i>: A stakeholder’s role-related act response.</li> <li>○ <i>Sensorial SX</i>: A stakeholder’s role-related sense response.</li> <li>○ <i>Spiritual SX</i>: A stakeholder’s role-related spirit-based response.</li> <li>○ <i>Social SX</i>: A stakeholder’s role-related response (related) to others.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

**Table 4: Overview - Interdependence Theory’s Structural Interdependence Tenets**

<b>Structural Interdependence Tenet</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b>Control</b>	The balance of power among stakeholders (Kotter 2010; Grimes 1978).
Stakeholder control	“The impact ...of [a stakeholder’s] actions... on [his/her] own outcomes” (Rusbult & Van Lange 2003, p. 354).
Partner control	The degree to which a stakeholder’s interactional “outcomes [are] controlled by [his/her partner’s] unilateral actions” (Rusbult & Van Lange 2003, p. 355).
Joint control	Implies that a stakeholder’s “outcomes are controlled by the partners’ joint actions” (Rusbult & Van Lange 2003, p. 355).
<b>Covariation of interest</b>	“The degree to which partners’ [interactional] outcomes correspond [vs. diverge],” that is, “whether the course of action that benefits [stakeholder A also] benefits [stakeholder B]” (Rusbult & Van Lange 2003, p. 356).
Coordination	Occurs when stakeholders seeking to achieve outcomes in their own best interest simultaneously advance outcomes in the best interest of their partner (Rusbult & Van Lange 2003, p. 356), implying the existence of compatible stakeholder goals (Van Lange & Balliet 2014).
Competition	Transpires when the interactional outcomes that are positive to one stakeholder are negative to his/her partner (Kelley & Thibaut 1978; Rusbult & Van Lange 2003), implying diverging stakeholder interests.
<b>Mutuality of dependence</b>	“The degree to which two people are equally dependent on one another” (Rusbult & Van Lange 2003, p. 355).
<b>Information availability</b>	A stakeholder’s level of access to interaction-related information (Rusbult & Van Lange 2003).
<b>Temporal journey structure</b>	Rests on the notion that interactions and relationships are evolving, dynamic (vs. static) phenomena, requiring an understanding of stakeholder interdependence in terms of its timing and process through the SJ (Kelley 1984; Rusbult & Van Lange 2008).

*Note - SJ: Stakeholder journey.*



**Table 5: Future Stakeholder Journey Research Avenues Derived from the Propositions**

Structural Interdependence Theory Tenet	Sample Research Questions
<b>Control</b>	
<b>P1a:</b> <i>A stakeholder's rising stakeholder control will see his/her more autonomous engagement in the SJ, increasingly liberating the stakeholder experience.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ To what extent does autonomous SE (through high stakeholder control) liberate or free particular SJs?</li> <li>○ Which factors may facilitate or impede stakeholder control through the SJ?</li> <li>○ To what extent does high stakeholder control foster positive (vs. negative) SE and SX through the SJ?</li> <li>○ Under what conditions and how will stakeholders possessing high stakeholder control choose to change their SJ's course?</li> </ul>
<b>P1b:</b> <i>A stakeholder's rising partner control will see his/her more disempowered engagement in the SJ, increasingly curtailing the stakeholder experience.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ To what extent does disempowered SE (through high partner control) curtail particular SJs?</li> <li>○ What level of partner control do focal stakeholders deem (un)acceptable through their SJ, and how do its varying levels affect the SX?</li> <li>○ To what extent does high stakeholder control foster negative (e.g., resentful) vs. positive SE and SX through the SJ?</li> <li>○ What coping strategies do less powerful stakeholders use in executing their role-related tasks?</li> </ul>
<b>P1c:</b> <i>A stakeholder's rising joint control with another will see his/her more concessional engagement in the SJ, increasingly satisficing the stakeholder experience.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ To what extent does concessional SE (through high joint control) satisfice particular SJs?</li> <li>○ Which (e.g., negotiation) strategies are optimally effective in reaching a compromise, and how do they affect SJ-based SE and SX?</li> <li>○ In give-and-take scenarios, how do focal stakeholders optimize their own "take" (vs. "give") through the SJ?</li> <li>○ Does the hypothesized negative association (see Figure 2: P1c) hold, empirically, across stakeholder types and contexts?</li> </ul>
<b>Covariation of Interest</b>	
<b>P2a:</b> <i>A stakeholder's rising coordination with another will see their more aligned engagement in the SJ, increasingly harmonizing their respective stakeholder experience.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ To what extent does coordination align SJ-based SE, and harmonize the SX, for particular stakeholders?</li> <li>○ How do stakeholders select their partner for optimal goal compatibility, and how do they ensure this is maintained over time?</li> <li>○ How do varying levels of coordination affect SE-based alignment, and what is its effect on focal stakeholders' experience?</li> <li>○ What are the consequences of stakeholders' progressively allied SJs on other ecosystem-based stakeholders' engagement and experience?</li> </ul>
<b>P2b:</b> <i>A stakeholder's rising competition with another will see his/her more antagonistic engagement toward the other in the SJ, increasingly individuating the stakeholder experience.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ To what extent does competition antagonize SE, and individuate the SX, for particular stakeholders?</li> <li>○ Do lower (higher) levels of competition yield less (more) antagonistic SE <i>per se</i>?</li> <li>○ What are the consequences of stakeholders' progressively individuated SJs on other ecosystem-based stakeholders' engagement and SX?</li> <li>○ To what extent does competition raise negative (vs. positive) SE and SX through the SJ?</li> </ul>
<b>Mutuality of Dependence</b>	
<b>P3:</b> <i>A stakeholder's rising mutuality of dependence with another will see his/her more benevolent engagement toward the other in the SJ, rendering the stakeholder experience increasingly agreeable.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ To what extent does mutuality of dependence yield benevolent SJ-based SE, and improve the SX, for particular stakeholders?</li> <li>○ How do more dependent stakeholders cope with their more powerful partner's potential oppression, coercion, threats, etc.?</li> <li>○ To what degree does high mutuality of dependence feature genuine (vs. calculated) positive SE through the SJ?</li> <li>○ Do higher levels of benevolent SE foster a more pleasant SX <i>per se</i>?</li> </ul>
<b>Information Availability</b>	
<b>P4:</b> <i>A stakeholder's rising information availability will see his/her more informed engagement in the SJ, increasingly stabilizing the stakeholder experience.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ To what extent does information availability inform SJ-based SE, and stabilize the SX, for particular stakeholders?</li> <li>○ If available information turns out to be incorrect/outdated, how does this affect SJ-based SE and SX?</li> <li>○ How does stakeholder-perceived information (a)symmetry impact particular stakeholders' journey-based SE and SX?</li> <li>○ How do information availability changes affect SJ-based SE and SX?</li> </ul>
<b>Temporal Journey Structure</b>	
<b>P5:</b> <i>Longer journeys will see more trained stakeholder engagement in the SJ, yielding an increasingly efficient stakeholder experience.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ To what extent do longer journeys train SE, and improve SX-based efficiency, for particular stakeholders?</li> <li>○ At which point in the SJ is the focal stakeholder's engagement optimally trained, and (how) is his/her SE affected thereafter?</li> <li>○ Once SE is optimally trained and the SX is optimally efficient, what is the risk of stakeholders' SJ-based boredom?</li> <li>○ (To what extent) are shorter (vs. longer) SJs disadvantaged by their more limited opportunity for stakeholder training/learning?</li> </ul>

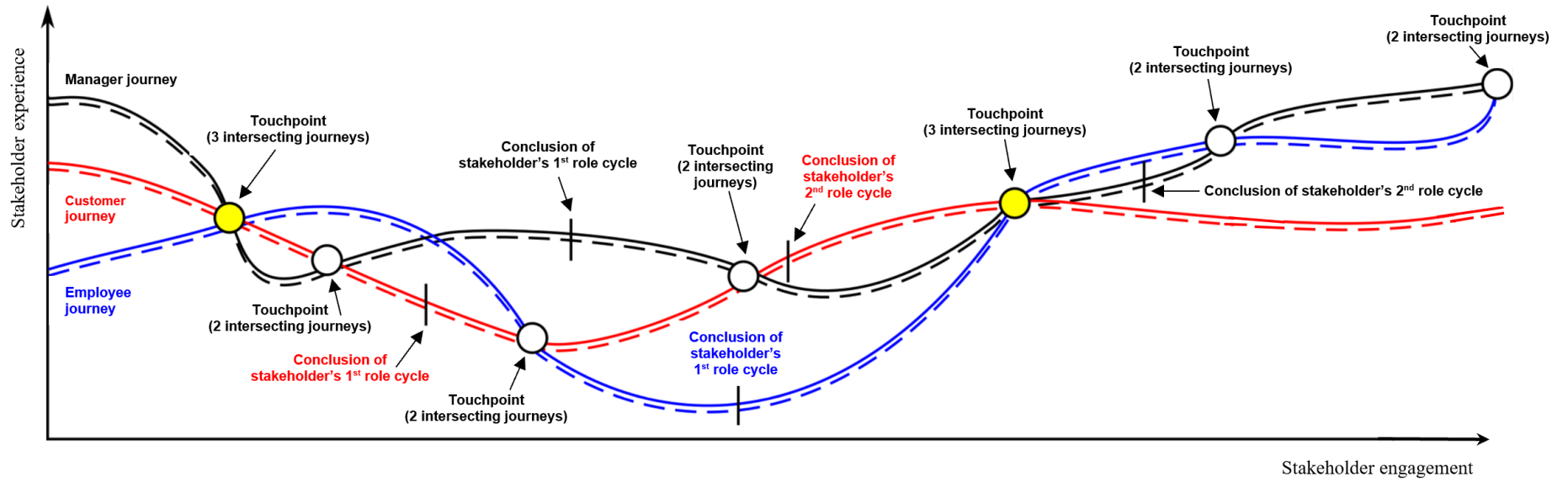
**Table 6: Managerial Implications Derived from the Propositions**

Structural Interdependence Theory Tenet	Managerial Implications	Practical Examples
<b>Control</b>		
<b>P1a:</b> <i>A stakeholder's rising stakeholder control will see his/her more autonomous engagement in the SJ, increasingly liberating the stakeholder experience.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ P1a suggests rising stakeholder control to yield a focal stakeholder's more autonomous engagement, thus freeing the SX.</li> <li>○ Potential ways to increase stakeholder control include resource (e.g., capital/skill) acquisition, attainment of opinion leader (e.g., influencer) status, impression management (e.g., by showcasing one's strengths while hiding one's weaknesses), manipulation (e.g., by influencing one's partner's choice without full disclosure of all relevant decisional factors) through the SJ, etc.</li> <li>○ Firms will want to balance their own (vs. their stakeholders') autonomous SE and liberated SX, particularly in long-term relationships.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Firms like Apple or BMW help autonomize their stakeholders' engagement by facilitating their role-related self-efficacy and learning (e.g., through stakeholder support programs; Hollebeek et al. 2021).</li> <li>○ Stakeholder <i>onboarding</i>, the mechanism by which stakeholders acquire the necessary role knowledge, skills, and behavior to effectively execute their role, is pivotal in this process (e.g., Facebook's employee onboarding program; Nguyen 2022).</li> <li>○ Firms like Adidas' adoption of influencer campaigns can be used to boost stakeholders' (e.g., employees'/customers') engagement.</li> </ul>
<b>P1b:</b> <i>A stakeholder's rising partner control will see his/her more disempowered engagement in the SJ, increasingly curtailing the stakeholder experience.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ P1b suggests rising partner control disempowers the less powerful stakeholder's SJ-based role SE, curtailing his/her SX.</li> <li>○ Potential ways to reduce partner control include the deployment of codes of conduct, partner switching or by creating a trusting relationship in which more powerful partners choose not to enforce their SJ-based power.</li> <li>○ Disempowered behavioral SE can feature the less powerful partner's adversarial cognitive/emotional SE against his/her partner.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ To manage specific stakeholders' elevated partner control, firms like Amazon adopt control-regulating mechanisms (e.g., stakeholder regulation/codes of conduct).</li> <li>○ To minimize stakeholders' disempowered engagement, firms like Cisco may change their (e.g., strategic) partners or relationships (e.g., by switching suppliers; Pfeiffer 2010).</li> </ul>
<b>P1c:</b> <i>A stakeholder's rising joint control with another will see his/her more concessional engagement in the SJ, increasingly satisficing the stakeholder experience.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ P1c suggests rising joint control to command the focal stakeholder's rising trade-off-based, concessional SJ-based SE, in turn satisficing the SX.</li> <li>○ Potential ways to keep joint control-imposed satisficing at bay include: Choosing one's relationships to feature high stakeholder (vs. joint) control (e.g., arms-length relationships), collaborating with one's partner to reach mutually agreeable outcomes, etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ We advise firms to keep their joint control at bay, if possible (e.g., by choosing to engage with less (vs. more) powerful stakeholders). Firms with high bargaining power or stakeholder control (e.g., Apple) are, thus, expected to display less concessional engagement.</li> <li>○ In cases of inevitable high joint control, firms like Toyota have developed bonded, trusting stakeholder relationships to safeguard themselves from their partners' potential opportunistic behavior (Liker &amp; Choi 2004).</li> </ul>
<b>Covariation of Interest</b>		
<b>P2a:</b> <i>A stakeholder's rising coordination with another will see their more aligned engagement in the SJ, increasingly harmonizing their respective stakeholder experience.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ P2a suggests rising coordination to increasingly synchronize the focal stakeholder's SJ-based SE, in turn unifying or harmonizing the SX.</li> <li>○ Potential ways to increase coordination include selecting one's partner for optimal coordination (i.e., through high goal alignment), partners' mutual transparency and full disclosure of their (e.g., shifting) journey-based goals, needs, etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Firms like Shell focus on coordination (Henry 2016), which is conducive to collaboration, in turn fostering stakeholders' (more) aligned engagement (Castañer &amp; Oliveira 2020).</li> <li>○ Stakeholders' aligned SJ-based SE is likely to spawn their harmonized SX, fostering mutual learning, resource sharing, and trust (Taylor et al. 1973).</li> </ul>
<b>P2b:</b> <i>A stakeholder's rising competition with another will see his/her more antagonistic engagement toward the other in the SJ, increasingly individuating the stakeholder experience.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ P2b suggests rising competition to antagonize SJ-based engagement, in turn separating or individuating their respective SX.</li> <li>○ Potential ways to lower competition through the SJ include partnering with competitors (i.e., shifting competition to co-competition), establishing a (temporary) truce with one's competitor, engaging in (un)related diversification (i.e., by altering one's role-related activities).</li> <li>○ SJ-based antagonistic SE and individuated SX can lead stakeholders to look for (a) new partner(s) (e.g., employees quitting their job).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Amazon Marketplace brought third-party sellers into its own online store, allowing them to compete with its own products and turning competition into <i>coopetition</i> (Gnyawali &amp; Charleton 2018), thus <i>de</i>-antagonizing SJ-based SE and halting the individuation of these companies' respective journeys.</li> <li>○ Mutual gain is expected to result for both firms (e.g., greater economies of scale/scope).</li> </ul>
<b>Mutuality of Dependence</b>		
<b>P3:</b> <i>A stakeholder's rising mutuality of dependence with another will see his/her more benevolent engagement toward the</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ P3 suggests rising mutuality of dependence to benevolize SE (e.g., by deterring negative SE). However, it can also yield a stakeholder's excessive reliance on another.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ By consistently purchasing Hewlett-Packard equipment, Disney's operations become increasingly reliant on the former's product and service (Kamau 2016), thus benevolizing its engagement toward its</li> </ul>

<i>other in the SJ, rendering the stakeholder experience increasingly agreeable.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Potential ways to avoid excessive SJ-based mutuality of dependence include retention of one's independent identity and activities.</li> <li>○ Benevolent SJ-based SE and an agreeable SX can soften stakeholders' potential fear of having a close relationship with their partner.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ partner, and vice versa. To keep this rising reliance in check, Disney may also purchase from other suppliers.</li> <li>○ Both companies' resultant agreeable SX can see their long-term association.</li> </ul>
<b>Information Availability</b>		
<b>P4:</b> <i>A stakeholder's rising information availability will see his/her more informed engagement in the SJ, increasingly stabilizing the stakeholder experience.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ P4 suggests rising information availability to progressively inform SJ-based SE, thus steadying the SX.</li> <li>○ Potential ways to increase SJ-based information availability include engaging in (e.g., networking-based) information sharing (particularly with influential stakeholders/influencers), regular consumption of informational (e.g., media) sources, (in)formally interacting with role-related stakeholders (e.g., through annual general meetings/gossip).</li> <li>○ The more informed SE, the greater its expected SX stabilizing effect.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Spotify and Uber's strategic partnership enables greater information availability for both parties: By sharing their respective (e.g., database) information (while promoting each other's offerings; Kamau 2016), both companies' engagement becomes more informed.</li> <li>○ In turn, these stakeholders' information sharing is expected to stabilize their SJ-based SX (e.g., by fostering a trusting relationship).</li> </ul>
<b>Temporal Journey Structure</b>		
<b>P5:</b> <i>Longer journeys will see more trained stakeholder engagement in the SJ, yielding an increasingly efficient stakeholder experience.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ P5 suggests that longer (vs. shorter) SJs will progressively educate or train SE, in turn producing a more efficient SX.</li> <li>○ Potential ways to stretch the SJ, thus yielding more trained SE, include the development or innovation of long-term stakeholder relationships (e.g., by launching new relational benefits, offering stakeholder relationship marketing rewards), thus ensuring the SJ's ongoing relevance to the focal stakeholder; instilling a perceived need for the SJ's continuance (e.g., through promotional activity).</li> <li>○ More trained SE and a more efficient SX will tend to boost stakeholders' journey-based efficiency and performance.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Firms like Intel have lengthened their product life cycle (i.e., journey) by adding additional journey stage(s) (Potoroaca et al. 2016), thus contributing to their stakeholders' progressively trained SJ-based engagement.</li> <li>○ Product line extensions (e.g., firms' successive generation products like Apple's original iPhone through to iPhone 13 and the forthcoming launch of iPhone 14; Rogerson 2022) are additional tools to elongate the SJ (e.g., that of users, employees, suppliers, etc.), rendering their more trained product-related engagement.</li> </ul>

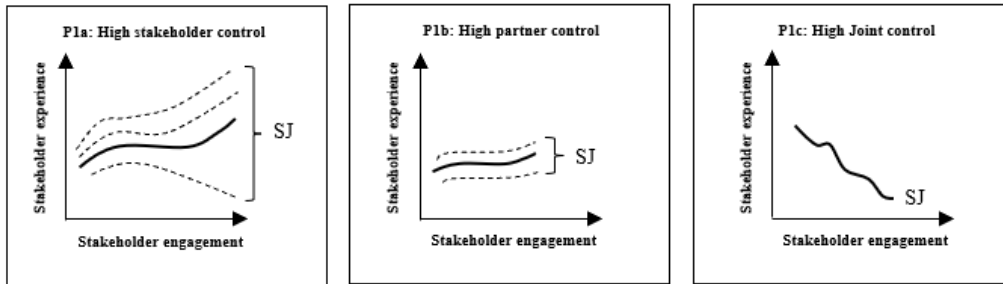
*Notes* - SJ: Stakeholder journey; SE: Stakeholder engagement; SX: Stakeholder experience.

Figure 1: Sample Stakeholder Journey Map

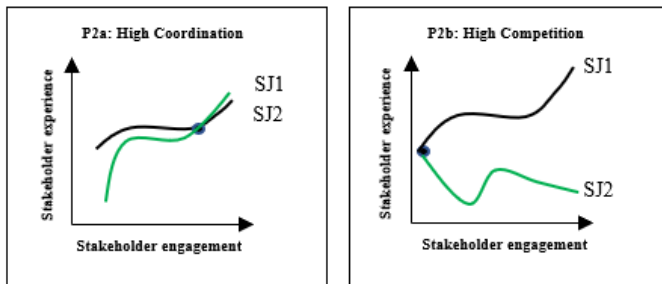


**Figure 2: Sample Effects of Interdependence Theory’s Structural Interdependence Tenets on the SJ**

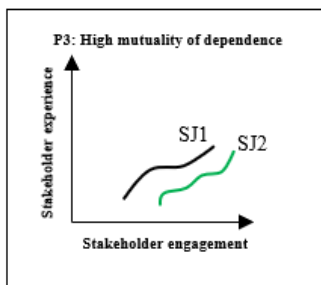
**Control: Stakeholder-, Partner-, and Joint Control**



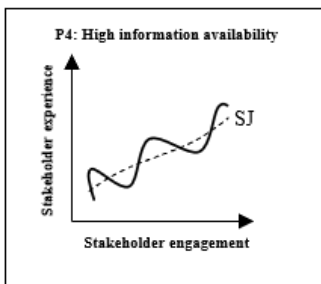
**Covariation of Interest: Coordination and Competition**



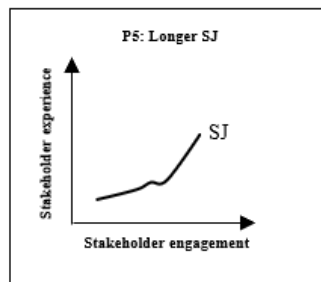
**Mutuality of Dependence**



**Information Availability**



**Temporal Journey Structure**



*Note* - SJ: Stakeholder journey.