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Agri-Food Marketing in Developing Countries: The Micromarketing and Macromarketing Perspectives, but What about the Mesomarketing Perspective?

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ABSTRACT

Agri-food marketing in developing countries is usually seen from a micromarketing perspective, and to a relatively lesser degree, from a macromarketing perspective. However, there is also another perspective within agri-food marketing that is mesomarketing. In this regard, the research attempted to further research the realm of agri-food mesomarketing and attempt to better ascertain, assess and diagnose mesomarketing in agri-food marketing in developing economies. The findings from the research provided that agri-food mesomarketing has an important role to play, not only as per its conduit between micromarketing and macromarketing, but for its importance per se. In fact, the research findings provided that a more holistic approach to agri-food marketing is important i.e. the combination and integration of micromarketing, mesomarketing and macromarketing. The research also found the importance of agri-food mesomarketing in terms of, for example, further developing regional and/or provincial agri-food marketing systems within a country; developing city, town and village agri-food marketing systems; developing networks of local vertical, horizontal and facilitating marketing systems; developing markets in both rural and urban areas; facilitating and enhancing community agri-food marketing systems, community and non- autochthonous community-based enterprise marketing practices and group collective marketing practices ; fostering growth poles and economic corridors as well as in-country regional and rural development policies. However what also emerged from the research findings was the evident lack of research specifically on agri-food mesomarketing, a lack of research conducted taking a specific agri-food mesomarketing perspective in particular and also a lack of research on agri-food mesomarketing practices.

Keywords: Marketing, micromarketing, mesomarketing; macromarketing, agricultural marketing, food marketing, agri-food marketing.

1. Introduction

Many developing countries, following the global financial crisis of 2007-2008, were undergoing structural weaknesses such as: ‘a slowdown in investment, productivity, employment, and growth; slower progress on poverty reduction and shared prosperity; rising debt levels; and limited fiscal buffers; as well as an overall accelerating destruction of natural capital’ (World Bank, 2021e). This situation was aggravated further as a result of the pandemic, and the ‘associated containment measures, that plunged the global economy into a severe contraction’ (World Bank, 2021a). Along with rising armed conflict and climate change, this all determined ‘job losses and deprivation worldwide which hard hit already-poor and vulnerable people, this also changing the profile of global poverty by creating millions of what are termed as the ‘new poor’, estimated to be circa 100 million and rising’ (World Bank, 2021d; World Bank, 2020). The impacts, in particular, on the informal sector have been particularly acute as in developing economies the ‘informal sector accounts for about a third of GDP and more than 70 percent of employment’ (World Bank, 2021a). The impacts also provided for a global output reduction of four percent in 2020 and ‘with output in emerging markets and developing

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economies shrinking by about five percent, the first annual contraction in more than sixty years, creating recessions in over 80 percent of emerging and developing countries' (World Bank, 2021a; World Bank 2021c). Consequently, this situation impinged on the progress of sustainable development in terms of impacting on 'the interlinkages between human, natural, physical, and social capital' (World Bank, 2021e), and in specific on 'economic prosperity, human development, social equity, freedom, human values, environmental quality and cultural diversity' (Rabie, 2016).

Many economies in developing countries depend, to a lesser or greater degree, on the agricultural and food sector, and as such the sector has considerable implications for macroeconomic, mesoeconomic and microeconomic levels of developing economies (Perkins *et al.*, 2013), as the agricultural and food sector can be 'an engine of economic growth and a force for poverty reduction' (Junankar, 2016). In fact 'an integral part of economic expansion is the transformation of agriculture and the food system, particularly through diversification, specialization, and commercialization' (Argade *et al.*, 2021) as, for example, agricultural commodity markets in developing countries play a critical role in economic and developmental outcomes (Argade *et al.*, 2021). The agri-food sector provides employment to over 1.3 billion people, this in developing countries accounting for about 64.4 percent of employment and at the global level for about 26.8 percent of employment, coming in second after the service sector, as the largest global employer (ILO, 2020; FAO, 2019). The agri-food sector is diversified in terms of the global economy: ranging from farming to food processing, wholesaling, retailing and food service; parts being devoted to very local trade, others largely being devoted to international trade, and some parts being well documented with data and information, while other parts, especially in developing economies, being less documented (Dorfman, 2014).

Often, the agri-food sector in developing economies, operates in the informal food economy¹ and in particular what are termed bottom of the pyramid -subsistence markets² (BOP-SM)³. About 570 million small-scale farmers provide the majority of food for the circa 7.7 billion global food consumers (World Bank, 2021b), of which about 40 percent live and work in BOP-SM contexts (World Bank, 2018; 2016a). As such the agri-food sector and the inherent agri-food marketing within is thus too big to ignore in terms of working population (input dealers, farmers, traders, processors, wholesalers, retailers, etc.), food consumers and agri-food marketing systems⁴.

The BOP-SM, in terms of food, represents about US\$3 trillion or 60 percent of all BOP-SM consumer spending (Chege *et al.*, 2019; Kacou, 2011) and there are an estimated one billion entrepreneurs worldwide who run micro-enterprises to meet life's basic consumption needs (Venugopal *et al.*, 2015). However, in many BOP-SM contexts, agri-food markets have 'poor communications and transport infrastructure, restricted access to commercial finance, limited rule of law, unclear property rights, imperfect contract monitoring and enforcement, high transactions costs, and binding liquidity constraints' (Barrett & Mutambatsere, 2005).

Economic development 'provides the impulse towards more sophisticated and more efficient agri-food marketing systems' (FAO, 1997a) as agricultural markets 'play a crucial role in the process of economic development'⁵ (Barrett & Mutambatsere, 2005). As countries develop⁶, the rate of urbanization usually increases and rural areas need to feed such populations over larger distances (FAO,

¹ The informal food economy refers to activities of food production, transport, and retailing, for example, that are not under the direct purview of national governments (FAO, 2003). It includes small producers, manufacturing enterprises, traders and service providers, involved in legal as well as unrecognized activities related to food (FAO, 2007). The sector is mainly characterised by: low capital investments, absence of specialization, strong relationships between sellers and buyers, little accounts and taxes and permeability with the formal food sector (FAO, 2003).

² The BOP refers to the poorest in the economic human pyramid (Prahalad, 2010) and SM consists of 'consumer and entrepreneur communities living at a range of low-income levels' (Viswanathan & Rosa, 2007a).

³ Samli (2004) also refers to the BOP-SM as the 'forgotten majority' and the 'marginal markets of the world.'

⁴ Malcom *et al.*, (2005) refer to a marketing system as a the 'entire 'vertical slice' of an economy involved in the creation of a category of output for consumers in society at large and the 'market levels' within as stages in such a system where changes in ownership (exchange) occur'.

⁵ It should be noted though that 'markets are neither given or natural as they emerge as a product of an ongoing history of social events, forces, and practices, and hence none of which can be considered as inevitable' (Chaudhuri & Belk, 2020). Consequently in this regard markets are 'not universal entities but exhibit socio-temporally distinct discursive forms and material practices'(Chaudhuri & Belk, 2020).

⁶ Development not only meaning a change over time of 'growth or expansion, but changes in people's standards of living' (Norton *et al.*, 2010).

1997a). This implies that the marketing of agricultural and food products and related agri-food marketing systems play a pivotal role in economic development as well as the intended outcomes of providing, for example, improved nutrition, food safety and quality, social wellbeing, and overall increased standards of living. As such, the marketing of agricultural and food products, in terms of economic development, is thus ‘a fundamental threshold’ (Padberg, 1997).

Marketing, but its very nature, ‘is a form of constructive engagement: a societal function and a systemic set of processes for creating, communicating, and delivering value to customers and for managing customer and societal relationships in ways that benefit local and global stakeholders of these processes’ (Shultz & Shapiro, 2014). Distribution, is a core element of marketing, and in particular, the distribution of agricultural and food products is a basic activity of marketing that enables and facilitates transformations in terms of form, time, place, space and ownership utilities (Kohls & Uhl, 2015; Dorfman, 2014; Meulenberg, 1997). Indeed, for example, Barker (1989) provides that marketing is one of ‘the most crucial aspects of farm management’ as in the marketing of commodities, distribution can be considered a central marketing activity: it varies according to the type of commodity, the stage of market development and primarily concerns ‘market transparency and the efficiency of physical functions’ (Meulenberg, 1997). Lesser (1993) provides that, for example in the case of the livestock and meat sub-sector, without an effective and efficient marketing system, livestock ‘would have remained on or near the farm’. Indeed markets are the ‘provisioning technology of societies, in that they provide for the needs of a society whatever form the market may take, and there are many possibilities as the institutions of the dominant social paradigm in a country, partially determine the structure and nature of markets in that country’ (Kilbourne, 2019). In fact, marketplaces among many communities were one of the ‘earliest forms of market system to emerge’ (Layton & Daun, 2015) and marketing is mainly concerned with ‘the discrepancies associated with market exchanges’ (Dixon & Wilkinson, 1982). Indeed, ‘marketing began because it added value to societies, and markets and the systems of which they were part emerged and thrived, because, though not flawless, they were superior to most other social institutions as a provisioning mechanism’ (Schultz, 2007).

Usually agri-food marketing systems are the most developed among the variety of consumer goods systems available. Agri-food marketing systems ‘are established early in economic development, and expand as national economies grow, manifested in production, supply, demand, trade and national policies, and are composed of specialized institutions; have growing coordination and integration; exchange arrangements are guided usually by demand and supply; and great diversity is found in the structure of the distribution channel, pending the level of consumer income’ (Padberg, 1997; Farris, 1997).

However, markets in subsistence contexts ‘function in fundamentally different ways than high-income markets’ (Ingenbleek, 2014). In BOP-SM contexts there is a lag between production and marketing of food as it is not just sufficient to increment food production. What is required in parallel is incremental investments in agri-food marketing systems, for example, in marketing hard and soft infrastructure, wholesale and retail markets, as well as legislation and other institutional aspects governing exchange (Tollens, 2010). Such investments, should commonly be focused on local assets so as to provide for benefits to the local economy and consequently to local communities (Poole, 2010).

Consequently, marketing policies need to be considered as integral to overall national economic policy, as also in consideration of the fact that agri-food marketing systems can substantially affect other economic sectors in a country (Farris, 1997). Agri-food marketing systems improvement thus seemingly implies a micromarketing⁷ and macromarketing⁸ approach, in particular, for example, competent government services, training, develop better packing, transport and storage, quality standardization, plan and construct better markets, strengthen marketing organization, and provide for more equity (FAO, 1984). Thus, Hunt (1981) provides that ‘micromarketing focuses on the internal marketing interests of firms, whereas macromarketing focuses on the interests of society concerning marketing activities’. Further agri-food marketing has, by its very nature, strong natural environmental,

⁷ This refers to a taking a perspective of marketing that considers a particular set of participants, such as for example, individual consumers and enterprises and all that relates to their exchanges (Dixon & Wilkinson, 1982)

⁸ This refers to the ‘study of marketing as a whole, including all the work done by all participants in a society and the repercussions of such activities on society as a whole’ (Dixon & Wilkinson, 1982). Mick et al., (2009) provide that macromarketing is largely the ‘function of many micromarketing decisions’.

societal and quality of life intended outcomes: for example in terms of, improved distribution and access to nutritious foods, food safety, health, less environmental impact and so forth (Lacal, 2019). Layton (2019) argues for the integration of both micromarketing and macromarketing in practice as a ‘response to the micro and macro challenges facing managers and policy makers in most human communities’. Akaka *et al.*, (2021) provide that macromarketing and micromarketing require integration as ‘micro-actions and interactions of humans that result in trading, innovating, choosing, and coordinating’ result eventually at the macro-level i.e. the micro to better understand the macro and vice versa. Peterson (2020) goes further and suggests that enterprises in the ‘marketplace must go beyond a micro focus and to a focus on both the enterprise and the macro dimensions’.

Thus as per the above, agri-food marketing is one of the keys to development and growth in economies in developing countries. Agri-food marketing in developing economies, commonly, and as provided previously (and below) often takes both a micromarketing as well as macromarketing perspective. However, and within this perspective, what about the ‘meso-level’, in other words mesomarketing in agri-food marketing in developing contexts.

Research aim

The main aim of the research was to attempt to ascertain, assess and diagnose mesomarketing in agri-food marketing in developing economies.

Methods

The research method provided was qualitative and abductive in nature. It was based on a longitudinal time horizon⁹ and involved four systematic in-depth literature and sources of secondary data and information researches and reviews, these being exploratory, historical and descriptive in nature. The research also involved five open peer review¹⁰ processes focused on: reviewing the key research terms used in first instance of the research process¹¹ and in second instance on the findings of the research from each of the following research phases¹². The research, as provided by Sekaran & Bougie (2016), referred to the characteristics of: purposiveness, rigor, testability, replicability, precision, confidence, objectivity, generalizability and parsimony.

Literature and sources of secondary data and information were selected on defined quality criteria: the direct and indirect relevance to the research subject matters; value (methodological rigour, quality of the reasoning or arguments, references, etc.); research evidence in terms of either or both primary source-based (credibility; reliability; ecological validity) and secondary source –based information; derived from an identified and reliable source (author(s), scientific journal publisher, reputation of publisher, etc.); date of publication (not older than 120 years); references used; and peer review conducted (Saunders *et al.*, 2016; Adams *et al.*, 2014; Fisher, 2010).

The first stage of the research was exploratory in nature and focused on finding key research terminology via using nine online databases of AGRICOLA, AGRIS-FAO, AgEcon search, Google Scholar, FAO e-library, FAO corporate document repository; ResearchGate, ScienceGate and World Bank e-library. This initial research generated 87 key research terms which were then submitted for open peer review and feedback. The results of this peer review process provided for 53 key research terms that were agreed upon. The key research terms were: marketing; micromarketing; mesomarketing; macromarketing; micro marketing; meso marketing, macro marketing;

⁹ The research was provided between September 2019 and December 2021

¹⁰ Peer reviewers identified initially were nine, but only three peer reviewers were available for the entire study period. Peer reviewers carried out open peer reviews on the key research terms in the first stage of the research and in the later four stages of the research, provided peer reviews on the research findings of each stage. The three reviewers were two field practitioners working on agri-food marketing in developing economies and an academic involved in agri-food marketing. All peer reviewer feedback provided was compared and triangulated.

¹¹ This first research period was conducted between September 2019 and February 2020 and involved a one month open peer review period of the key research terms found and an online feedback meeting with the peer reviewers.

¹² The subsequent three research periods lasted roughly six months each, with a one month open peer review process of the research results at the end of each period, including an online feedback meeting with peer reviewers. One final peer review and feedback, as well as an online peer review and feedback meeting, was provided on the final comprehensive research results following final analysis. This last peer review process and online meeting was conducted between September and November 2021.

micromarketing system; mesomarketing system; macromarketing system; micro marketing system; meso marketing system; macro marketing system; community marketing; community marketing system; community marketing systems; community-based enterprise marketing; group marketing; group marketing system; group enterprise marketing; village marketing; village marketing system; village enterprise marketing; collective marketing; collective marketing system; agricultural marketing; food marketing; agri-food marketing; agro-food marketing; agricultural micromarketing; food micromarketing; agri-food micromarketing; agro-food micromarketing; agricultural mesomarketing; food mesomarketing; agri-food mesomarketing; agro-food mesomarketing; agricultural macromarketing; food macromarketing; agri-food macromarketing; agro-food macromarketing; agricultural micro marketing; food micro marketing; agri-food micro marketing; agro-food micro marketing; agricultural meso marketing; food meso marketing; agri-food meso marketing; agro-food meso marketing; agricultural macro marketing; food macro marketing; agri-food macro marketing; agro-food macro marketing.

The following three stages of the research based on literature and sources of secondary data and information were systematic, exploratory, historical and descriptive, and involved using all the identified 53 key research terms, and for each stage of the research a set number of number of online databases were used. For the second stage of the research, the following nine online databases were used: AgEcon search; AGRICOLA; AGRIS-FAO; Business source complete (EBSCO); CORE; Emerald full text; FAO corporate document repository; FAO e-library; and Google scholar. The third stage of the research involved using eight online databases as per: JSTOR business collection; Microsoft academic; Oxford University Press Journals; Proquest; Refseek; Research Gate; SAGE journals online; and Science direct. The third and final phase of the research used seven online databases of: ScienceGate; Scopus; Social science research network; Springerlink; Taylor and Francis online journals; Wiley online library; and World Bank e-library. This process resulted in the use of a total of 24 online databases for the entire research process. At the end of each stage, preliminary results were peer reviewed, including an online feedback meeting for each stage and the results of this process were compared and triangulated. Each stage of the research and its resulting findings and peer reviews, provided for guidance for the next stage of the research.

The research process generated in total 214 publications, mainly concerning journal articles, technical reports, books, and online articles. The publications that were selected for review were set against the set quality criteria and resulted in a review of 176 publications. The findings from the sources of secondary data and information were analysed using thematic analysis, and as the results were coming in, as per each stage of research, were analysed. Such results were provided at the end of each research period for peer review and feedback. This process of analysing results as they were coming in and the peer feedback provided on these, allowed for iteration in the research and guidance for the following stage of the research. The findings from each stage, so as to assess for research quality of reliability and validity, were provided via a qualitative stance, hence trustworthiness (truth value, applicability, consistency, neutrality) and credibility (good research practice, peer review of findings) criteria were used as per Bryman & Bell (2011). The final stage of the research, provided for the comprehensive findings from the research to also be peer reviewed. The results of the final peer review were compared and then triangulated. This provided for a further layer of validation of the research results.

Findings

The context of agri-food marketing in developing countries

Some of the main characteristics of developing economies are: the prevalent young age of populations; low incomes, cash flows and saving rates; market fragmentation, shortages and informality; lack of literacy and more in general consumer literacy; the social structure and its effects on purchasing; emigration to foreign countries and rural to urban migration; reliance on remittances; weak infrastructure; weak distribution systems; lack of access to and availability of the internet and ICTs; and underdeveloped legal frameworks (Sinha & Oburai, 2008). In particular in BOP-SM contexts there is an overall characteristic of continuing uncertainty, this not only 'in basic infrastructure, but also

in services and income, and more widely there is a lack of control over many aspects of daily life' (Viswanathan, 2020a), including 'high degrees of deprivation of basic needs' (Gau *et al.*, 2014). In specific, such BOP-SM are characterized by 'resource scarcity, adverse socioeconomic context, unequal distribution of wealth, and poor quality of life' (Figueiredo *et al.*, 2015), and high degrees of informality. Such markets though are 'highly visible and connected to global trade networks' (Mason *et al.*, 2017), but even though having external trade networks, such markets are 'relatively closed systems' (Gau *et al.*, 2014). The implication is that these 'individual subsistence communities are relatively separate, closed systems, where individual interactions largely revolve around those who live in close proximity' (Gau *et al.*, 2014). This 'closure' is also characterized by 'violence, forced displacement, material deprivation, and day-to-day uncertainty' (Upadhyaya *et al.*, 2014), which also contributes to such contexts being so very much different from more affluent markets in developing countries, not to mention markets in developed countries.

Consumers in BOP-SM contexts have low incomes and low literacy rates, have 'low self-esteem, and continuously negotiate uncertainties that can be increased by transient shocks and the lack of a cushioning mechanisms for facing such regular uncertainties' (Viswanathan, 2020b). However in such BOP-SM contexts, consumers can also be sellers and sellers can also be consumers: the duality of the consumer-entrepreneur (Viswanathan, 2020a), where a consumer can buy food items for family, for example, and then sell part of the food items to other consumers. Such a subsistence consumer entrepreneur micro-enterprise¹³ is 'essentially a response to the life uncertainties faced by the entrepreneur' (Viswanathan *et al.*, 2014).

In BOP-SM contexts, the culture found within, has a large influence on consumption and as such 'consumers will invest more meaning in products and services that are more bound to cultural interpretation' (Usunier & Lee, 2013). Culture 'bonds or gives rise to connections in a number of ways, in relation to both the consumption situation and product attributes' (Usunier & Lee, 2013) as cultural bonds are 'strong for products or services that are consumed in a cultural and national context as the product or service, consciously or unconsciously, is more than a simple utilitarian purchase, resulting in a preference for products made in home country as in fact consumption is still largely a local reality' (Usunier & Lee, 2013). Indeed 'far from being uniquely culture related, local reality also reflects the economy, climate and customs' (Usunier & Lee, 2013). In fact and as a result of this, the marketing of farm produce is 'highly contextual and subject to unique local situations' (Argade *et al.*, 2021).

In terms of urban BOP-SM contexts, these tend to be relatively easier to access, then rural counterparts, as they provide ready markets of consumers and are more concentrated (Mathur *et al.*, 2018). However such urban BOP-SM contexts are inhabited by 'the economically and socially marginalized, commonly located on land over which the inhabitants do not hold legal title, as the inhabitants, typically have migrated to the slums from rural areas in order to exploit actual or perceived economic opportunities and such slums have inadequate access to safe water; inadequate access to sanitation and other infrastructure; poor structural quality of housing; overcrowding; and insecure residential status' (Anderson *et al.*, 2010).

Rural areas commonly, but not always, provide for 'heterogeneity in culture, languages, dialects and social customs; dependence on agriculture; clustered demand scattered over large areas; uneven development; irregular and seasonal demand as well as a narrow consumption basket; a growing number of youth in the rural population; an ongoing trend of rural to urban migration as well as emigration to foreign countries; heterogeneity in lifestyles; lack of social mobility; low and non-regular income

¹³ A micro-scale enterprise diverges usually from a small-scale enterprise as enterprises are commonly defined by the number of people employed, but can also be defined as per the 'field of activity, form of organization, use of production factors, and property owned' (Drobin, 2015). Bloem (2012) provides that enterprise 'definitions vary between countries depending on geographic location and the size and scope of the country's economy'. However, most often, enterprises are usually defined by their size, based on the number of employees, the annual turnover or the value of assets of the enterprise (ILO, 2015). For example, the World Bank (2022) provides that 'there is no international standard definition of enterprise size, but employment numbers are used by many institutions that collect information and use the following size categories: micro enterprises have 0-9 employees, small enterprises have 10-49 employees, and medium-size enterprises have 50-249 employees'. Further to employment numbers, what defines also micro-scale enterprises 'is their limited ability to generate significant profits as entrepreneurs who devote personal effort to such ventures receive a profit that essentially compensates them for their time' (Longenecker *et al.*, 2017).

streams; reliance of remittances; low savings rate; lack of steady consumption; diversity of occupations; low literacy levels; limited accessibility; limited awareness and acceptance of products and services; differences in the macro and micro-environment of consumers; the creative use of products; fragmented markets; and lack of marketing infrastructure. (Kashyap, 2016; Modi, 2012; Krishnamacharyulu & Ramakrishnan, 2011; Ramkishen, 2009; Vachani & Smith, 2008; Velayudhan, 2007; Rao & Tagat, 1985).

In specific, in terms of rural BOP-SM contexts, in developing countries, 'nearly 3.2 billion people live in rural areas, equal to about 44 percent of the global population, and most still depend to varying degrees on agriculture and food systems for their livelihoods' (IFAD, 2021; World Bank, 2021c). Modi (2012) further provides that 'most of the developing economies in the world are mainly rural in nature and in their characteristics and rural markets play a significant role in economic growth'. In fact, the rural context differs from urban context as Singh & Pandey (2005) provide that 'typically consumers are spread over wider areas, are highly diverse, have low literacy rates, are traditional, both religion and community play a large role in buying and purchasing behavior, have generally low incomes, and usually have preferred retailers where to purchase.' This is much in line also with what is provided by Krishnamacharyulu & Ramakrishnan (2011), in that 'in rural areas there is low income, small savings, low literacy levels, mainly self-employed in agriculture as well as being casual labourers'. Also Kripanithi & Ramachander (2018) provide that rural consumers are different from urban consumers and the needs and perspective of the consumer is distinct. 'What is not effective in rural markets is assuming that the rural consumer is price sensitive enough such that they would purchase stripped down products with inadequate features. In fact, the rural customer has more specific requirements for features to suit their more challenging living conditions' (Naidu, 2017). Indeed rural markets tend to be, as a segment, heterogeneous (Kripanithi & Ramachander, 2018).

As per the predominance of agricultural and food trade in BOP-SM, marketing of agri-food products occurs in urban, peri-urban and rural and remote areas. Relative to other sectors, the 'agriculture and food sectors are unique in their scale of employment and their scale of reliance' (IFAD, 2021) on micro, small and medium-scale enterprises. In fact as provided by Venugopal *et al.*, (2015) the most common type of enterprise found is the microenterprise, estimated at about one billion worldwide. These are usually referred to, as seen previously, as consumer-entrepreneur micro enterprises. Further, Alderson (2018) provides that the most common form of enterprise found is the family enterprise and Ramdani *et al.*, (2020) provide that circa 80 to 98 percent of all enterprises globally are family enterprises, and such enterprises dominate the agricultural and food sector i.e. micro-sized family run enterprises in BOP-SM contexts. Many 'turn to entrepreneurship, prevalently subsistence entrepreneurship, and in particular family micro-scale enterprises (usually called household enterprises), as a major means of generating subsistence' (Webb *et al.*, 2015) and in attempts to overcome daily hardships. However in BOP-SM contexts 'enterprise is seen as an abstraction, as what is primarily understood intuitively is exchange and expertise in survival' (Viswanathan, 2020b).

In terms of entrepreneurship what emerges in BOP-SM contexts are prevalently two types of entrepreneurs: 1) transformational or opportunity-based entrepreneurs who start businesses because they spot an opportunity in the marketplace; 2) subsistence or necessity-based entrepreneurs who start businesses because they cannot find work any other way (Scarborough & Cornwall, 2016). So in uncertain contexts, there are prevalently subsistence entrepreneurs: 'those individuals who are pushed into starting a business because of circumstance, for example, lack of job availability and the inability to find a job (Neck *et al.*, 2018). Subsistence entrepreneurship is defined as 'entrepreneurial actions undertaken by individuals living in poverty' (Viswanathan *et al.*, 2014). Subsistence entrepreneurs are 'entrepreneurs needing to think and act differently to other forms of entrepreneurs and are also referred to as subsistence consumer-merchants because they both consume and operate small businesses' (Ratten *et al.*, 2019). In BOP-SM contexts, entrepreneurship is 'fundamentally about survival as means to resolve their life uncertainties and wrest control of their lives' (Viswanathan *et al.*, 2014). In such contexts 'entrepreneurs often lack practice in deploying cognitive skills to discern, evaluate and exploit growth-oriented opportunities and mostly operate in informal economic settings' (Viswanathan *et al.*, 2014).

The other type of entrepreneurship found in BOP-SM contexts is transformational - 'opportunity-based entrepreneurs, those who make a decision to start their own businesses based on their ability to create or exploit an opportunity' (Neck *et al.*, 2018). Transformational entrepreneurs are commonly far

smaller in numbers than subsistence entrepreneurs in BOP-SM contexts and ‘strive for growth, are generally larger businesses, and provide relatively secure employment opportunities for others, are catalysts of innovation, job creation, productivity, and competitiveness’ (Seja, 2013). However, ‘subsistence and transformational entrepreneurship and entrepreneurs are very distinct in nature and only a negligible fraction of the entrepreneurs transition from one type to the other’ (Schoar, 2010).

Marketing’s role in economic development and the development of the agri-food sector

In developing economies there is, generally, the ‘inability to organize economic efforts and energies, to bring together resources, wants, and capacities’ (Ifezue, 2005). Hence so as to attempt to convert such ‘a self-limiting static system into creative, self-generating organic growth is where marketing comes in’ (Ifezue, 2005). Marketing, as provided by Drucker (1985), is an important ‘multiplier of development as it contributes to mobilizing latent economic energy, enables economic integration, and resource and asset utilization to capacity’. Marketing can provide to be a catalyst; a stimulus; a facilitator; is versatile; adaptable; offers practical diagnostic tools, which can be used, for example at the micro and macro level of the economy; and considers people’s want and needs within social systems; and can also provide to be responsive to economic growth (Kinsey, 1982).

Marketing ‘enables the matching of heterogeneous demand and supply via the allocation of scarce resources’ (Wooliscroft & Ganglmair-Wooliscroft, 2018) and as such provides consumer utilities, develops risk-takes (entrepreneurs), and fosters facilitation with the public sector (Wood & Vitell, 1986). Marketing activities contribute to an economy via ‘the direct utilization of resources which provides the generation of sales revenues, user inventories and other impacts on other aspects of economic and social life’ (Kaynak, 1986). In fact marketing is ‘the catalyst for the transmutation of latent resources into actual resources, of desires into accomplishments, and is the most effective stimulus of economic development, especially in its ability to develop entrepreneurs and managers’ (Appiah-Adu, 2014). In terms of poverty, it can be ‘better understood and partly alleviated through the application of methods of marketing analysis and planning’ (Kotler *et al.*, (2006). This requires poverty being tackled also on the local ground i.e. a bottom up perspective, so as to better understand the highly heterogeneous and cyclical nature of the matter. It is in fact at this local level ‘where poverty market segments can be identified and appropriate social marketing¹⁴ steps taken to motivate poverty-escaping behaviour’ (Kotler *et al.*, 2006).

Economic growth is mainly based on ‘favourable institutions and knowledge accumulation as well as specialization, which implies trade and overtime, where there is trade there will also emerge the specialized roles and market structures needed to handle trade efficiently and these specialized roles and market structures, identified as marketing systems, together with institutions and technology, constitute the three essential sets of factors needed for growth to occur’ (Layton, 2009). Hence marketing systems play a prominent and key role in economic development (Redmond, 2018).

Consequently, marketing clearly occupies a critical role in respect to the development of developing countries as these countries cannot rely on ‘a production system alone, as a sophisticated marketing system is necessary to achieve the goal of economic development’ (Oudan, 2008). Further marketing can adapt to developing economies, but there is a ‘need to combine the economic and social roles it can play’ (Holsey & Wee, 1988). In terms of the social role, marketing has the ‘potential to stimulate and foster social development via social goals and values, as for example, innovativeness, entrepreneurship, reduction of pollution, reduction of waste and so forth (Holsey & Wee, 1988).

In this regard, marketing can support economic development via a micromarketing approach, for example individual entrepreneurs as well as from a macromarketing approach, for example, via marketing policies at the national level (Cundiff, 1982). In the context of economic development, macromarketing can support micromarketing initiatives and vice versa as for example ‘market reforms alone without entrepreneurial micromarketing innovations cannot provide for development’ (Cundiff, 1982). Still Cundiff (1982) provides that for economic development to be encouraged, macromarketing should facilitate and enable micromarketing initiatives via, for example investments in market support facilities, improvement in market infrastructure, and policies to support not just export, but also and

¹⁴ Social marketing is the ‘systematic application of marketing concepts and techniques to achieve specific behavioural goals, for a social or public good’ (Eagle *et al.*, 2013)

importantly national local markets. Layton (1985), interestingly, goes further, in the micromarketing and macromarketing aspects of economic development, and considers the meso-level of economic development, for example, mesomarketing and its roles within regional economic growth, which can be provided for example, via community-based marketing systems. Hence, and seemingly, marketing requires not only a micro and macro role, but also a meso role approach for enabling economic development and to make such development sustainable. This implies, however, and seemingly a 'shift from a free-market approach to a more guided market approach of active policy intervention' (Sheth & Parvatiyar, 2020) and requires overall efficient marketing as this is a 'prerequisite for the development of an economy' (Ramkishan, 2009).

In terms of agri-food marketing in particular, and as provided previously, marketing of agricultural and food products, in terms of economic development, is 'a fundamental threshold' (Padberg, 1997). Usually agri-food marketing systems development path goes from an initial 'primitive version (peasant exchange) to some form of 'modern' marketing (fully-fledged commercial system)' (Kaynak, 1986) and, as provided previously, are typically 'established early in economic development, and expand as national economies grow, manifested in production, supply, demand, trade and national policies, and are composed of specialized institutions; have growing coordination and integration; exchange arrangements are guided usually by demand and supply; and great diversity is found in the structure of the distribution channel, pending the level of consumer income' (Padberg, 1997; Farris, 1997). But, usually, in BOP-SM contexts there is a lag between production and marketing of food as it is not just sufficient to increment food production. What is required in parallel is incremental investments in agri-food marketing systems, for example, in marketing hard and soft infrastructure, wholesale and retail markets, as well as legislation and other institutional aspects governing exchange (Tollens, 2010). Such investments, should commonly be focused on local assets so as to provide for benefits to the local economy and consequently to local communities (Poole, 2010). Thus and overall in terms of economic development, agri-food 'marketing can be conceived as an instrument to deliver a standard of living rather than a process of exchanging goods and services to satisfy human needs and wants' (Rao & Tagat, 1985).

Agri-food marketing and the agri-food marketing system

In the nineteenth and early twentieth century, organizations involved in production, commonly viewed distribution and selling as separate entities from production, but only when taking a 'closer look' at distribution and selling was it realized that this also effected decisions on what was being produced¹⁵ (Malcom *et al.*, 2005). But, in fact, marketing as a practice 'has a long history, and can be traced back to ancient times' (Tadajewski *et al.*, 2019). Markets have in reality 'been around for centuries'¹⁶ (Chaudhuri & Belk, 2020) and in this regard Layton (2017) provides that '40,000 years ago, trade between often widely dispersed human communities had begun to form: tools, ornaments, clothing, ochre and food were exchanged'. Rabie (2016;2013) adds to this and provides that food was produced in sufficient quantities to satisfy producer needs and hence enabled trading food surpluses, affecting not only economic, social, political, and technological matters, but most importantly culture¹⁷. Further, Schaffner *et al.*, (1998) provide that, for example in ancient China, agri-food marketing occurred over large distances within national boundaries and further that international marketing of food is nothing new as it has been going on for centuries. Further, Hilmi (2021b), for example in early Mesopotamia, found that agricultural marketing had specialized marketing enterprises, for example storage enterprises, trading and transport enterprises, food retailer enterprises, as well as food management enterprises mainly publicly owned for food storage and distribution.

¹⁵ In other words 'marketing concerns what bundle of characteristics are being produced, as well as what other desirable characteristics are being added, to try and keep customers happy' (Malcom *et al.*, 2005) and as such each marketing activity 'requires very specific knowledge and insight' (De Veld, 2004).

¹⁶ However markets in ancient times were 'significantly different institutions than modern markets of today as economic exchange generally constituted a minor part of these historical institutions' (Fuat Firat, 2020).

¹⁷ Rabie (2016) provides that in fact it was 'cultural change that began to influence societal and civilizational change' and thus 'causing structures of society to change in ways that made them very different from the tribal ones' (Rabie, 2013). However once the culture of agriculture was fully developed, 'the pace of change slowed, causing life conditions to become steady and seem perpetual' (Rabie, 2013).

Further Ritson (1997) also provides an interesting historical perspective specifically of how agricultural marketing, in the first half of the 20th century, evolved as an applied branch of agricultural economics and only relatively recently ‘fused’ in the later decades of the second half of the 20th century with the modern marketing concept¹⁸. Ritson (1997) also provides that agri-food marketing is not a specialization, like services marketing, for example, that budded out of the modern marketing concept, but in fact that it preceded it, in terms of agricultural marketing having ‘a much longer pedigree than mainstream business marketing’ (Ritson, 1997). In fact, Ritson (1997) provides that for most of the history of mankind, the main agricultural marketing activity was storage, as per the prevalent subsistence nature of agriculture and consequent local consumption, and only developed further, with more marketing functions, activities, organization and value addition in the wake of the industrial revolution and the increasing distances between rural agricultural production areas and growing food consuming urban centres. However, the marketing evolution ‘has led to the explicit recognition that anything and everything an enterprise does may impact on sales and thus should, ideally, be undertaken with a sound understanding of relevant customer preferences’ (Malcom *et al.*, 2005) and focus. Further marketing should also focus on what Kotler *et al.*, (2021) provide as ‘human centricity: value creation tackling long-term problems that profoundly affect people’s lives’.

Agricultural marketing ‘is often a topic on its own as per its unique characteristics, such as for example bulk products; low value; physical, financial and price risks; low cost logistics for transportation and storage; contracts; and future markets’ (Schaffner *et al.*, 1998). Fundamentally agricultural marketing considers underlying risk management in terms of the trade-off between risk and return (Schaffner *et al.*, 1998) and traditionally covers, for example such aspects as storage and price stabilization, marketing margins, industrial organization of agricultural processing and distribution and spatial pricing (Vercammen & Schmitz, 2001). Agricultural marketing refers mainly to the unprocessed or minimally processed commodities that are handled and marketed in large quantities and commonly require regulations, for example, related to grades, market information, food safety, etc., so as to be marketed in an orderly manner¹⁹ (Padberg, 1997). However, agricultural marketing in developing contexts commonly occurs in ‘an environment of primitive institutional arrangements’ (Padberg, 1997), commonly with direct and short marketing channels targeted at low-income consumers, and accompanied, usually, by public rules. Typically such marketing channels ‘attract little investment in modern facilities or business practices’ (Padberg, 1997) as in general marketing failures can be caused by, for example, high transaction costs, inadequate infrastructure, oligopolistic and monopolistic elements as well as imperfect information (Farris, 1997).

Agricultural marketing is defined by Purcell (1995) ‘as all the economic activities that are required to put the farm product in the hands of the consumer’. Ramkishen (2009) and Singh & Pandey (2005) provide that agricultural marketing has two types, one referred to as input marketing, marketing required inputs to farmers so they can produce, and output marketing, marketing the outputs of farm production. Thus agricultural marketing ‘comprises all activities involved in the supply of farm input to farmers and movements of agricultural products from farms to consumers’ (Ramkishen, 2009). Marketing agricultural products involves three main stages: pre-harvest, harvest and post-harvest operations and various functions taking place within each of the three stages (Ramkishen, 2009). The complexity of agricultural marketing is owed to numerous and diverse factors, of which, some for example are: the perishability of produce, the seasonality of production vis-à-vis the constant demand for food throughout the year, the riskiness of production at the small-scale farm level, timely collection and distribution of produce, etc., (Ramkishen, 2009).

Food marketing refers to semi to highly processed commodities being marketed, for example, in small packaging with brands, to final consumers and is accompanied by ‘public regulation that changes from deterministic requirements to disclosure’ (Padberg, 1997) in a ‘special pattern of economic activity’ (Padberg, 1997) that furnish perishable consumer products that are bought on a regular and continuous basis, ‘requiring special handling and a rapid inventory turnover’ (Schaffner *et al.*, 1998). Food marketing, as defined by Khols & Uhl (2015), is the ‘performance of all business activities

¹⁸ The marketing concept as defined by Kotler & Armstrong (2018) is providing ‘greater customer value and satisfaction’ so as ‘to satisfy consumer needs at a profit’ (Schaffner *et al.*, 1998).

¹⁹ Barker (1989) provides that a marketing function is ‘a major specialized activity performed in accomplishing the marketing process’.

involved in the flow of food products and services from the point of initial agricultural production until they are in the hands of consumers'. Schaffner *et al.*, (1998), define food marketing as the 'activities needed at all stages in the food system to facilitate the exchange of food products and services which satisfy the needs and wants of individual consumers and organizations'. Commonly such food products are referred to as fast moving consumer goods (FMCG).

The 'fusion' of agricultural marketing and food marketing is termed agri-food marketing and refers to 'the series of services involved in moving a product (or commodity) from the point of production to the point of consumption' (FAO, 1997a) and can be defined as the 'buying and selling, the economic incentive structure, and goods handling system for food, from point of production through processing and distribution to the final sales to consumers' (Padberg, 1997). It includes both agricultural marketing and the application 'of mainstream marketing management' (Ritson, 1997), in other words the marketing concept. In fact, and commonly, agri-food marketing includes both the micro level view of the individual enterprise and individual food consumer (Scaffner *et al.*, 1998) as well as the macro-level view of 'aggregation at the level of the market' (Ritson, 1997). Barker (1989) provides much the same approach in terms of agri-food marketing 'taking distinct standpoints' of what Barker (1989) termed as marketing policy (macromarketing) which for example covers market infrastructures, and marketing management 'which is largely related to issues confronting individual businesses' (Barker 1989). However, the micromarketing view cannot exclude, for example 'the behaviour of markets and wider social implications of an enterprise's policies' (Ritson, 1997). Hence there is a convergence between micromarketing and macromarketing even at the enterprise level within agri-food marketing and also as provided by Barker (1989) 'to a certain extent the two aspects are interrelated' and Kohls & Uhl (2015) provide that 'the two marketing worlds are closely related'. Further, and importantly, Shawver & Nickels (1981) provide that 'the distinction between micro and macro depends upon the perspective of the researcher: the dividing line between micromarketing and macromarketing is the perspective of the researcher and the objectives of the units under investigation—not the number of units being investigated or the level of aggregation'. Hence, agri-food marketing implies taking both a micromarketing as well as macromarketing perspective, this being especially the case in developing economies.

The 'work of marketing in society is performed by the marketing system' (Dixon & Wilkinson, 1982) and is intended as a whole 'for the individual to match their resources and needs via market transactions' (Dixon & Wilkinson, 1982). The marketing system is 'a sub-system of the economic system, which in turn is a sub-system of the overall social system of a society' (Dixon & Wilkinson, 1982). A marketing system can have many typologies that often co-exist in differing layers or levels of economic activity: horizontal systems (for example retail chains); vertical systems (for example distribution channels); facilitating systems (for example logistics structures); combination systems (for example horizontal, vertical and facilitative systems); hybrid systems (for example public and private); social marketing systems (for example community concerns); and post consumption marketing systems (for example, recycling) and such structures can arise in formal, informal and 'grey area' market settings (Layton, 2015). While there are similarities in terms of structural and functional elements in marketing systems, 'each individual marketing system differs in detail, these reflecting differences in specific circumstances of system evolution, together with the choices made by participants, interactions within and between adjacent or related marketing systems, and many other cultural, economic, historic and locational factors' (Layton, 2015). The interplay of 'processes linking the micro level of individual transactions with meso level market structures and with macro level patterns establishes the dynamics of the marketing system both at each level or layer and as a whole' (Layton, 2015). Marketing systems, 'each bounded in time and space, are inherently complex multi-layered networked structures in which a dynamic, evolving tension between growth and diversity on the one hand and stability and control on the other can be observed at macro, meso and micro levels' (Layton & Duffy, 2018).

Marketing systems are 'complex social networks of individuals and groups linked through shared participation in the creation and delivery of economic value through exchange (Layton, 2015). Typically a marketing system offers an assortment 'of goods, services, experiences and ideas to provide buyers with choice, responding to heterogeneous preference structures' (Layton & Duan, 2015). Hounhouigan *et al.*, (2014) provide that marketing systems, via the distribution of products and services 'contribute to the quality of life of the general public'. A marketing system can be defined as 'a network of individuals, groups and entities, embedded in a societal context, linked directly or indirectly through

sequential or shared participation in economic exchange, which jointly and/or collectively creates economic value with and for customers, through the offer of, assortments of products, services, experiences and ideas, that emerge in response to or anticipation of customer demand' (Layton & Duan, 2015). One main feature of marketing systems 'involves repeated and systematic exchange among members, as opposed to one-off transactions in specific, which implies shared participation and predictability of exchange partners' (Redmond, 2018). Marketing systems are adaptable, but depend, for example, on social, economic, cultural, political and physical characteristics.

In specific, an agri-food marketing system 'comprises all of the functions, and agencies who perform activities, that are necessary in order to profitably exploit opportunities in the marketplace and each of the components are independent of one another, but a change in any one of them impacts on the others as well as upon the system as a whole' (FAO, 1997a). The use of the word system in agri-food marketing is provided as it 'consists of interrelated component parts that contribute toward overall enterprise, industry and social goals' (Kohls & Uhl, 2015). The agri-food marketing system has three major activities 'physical handling, exchange and price setting processes' (Kohls & Uhl, 2015). Within the agri-food marketing system there are four subsystems: production, distribution, consumption and regulatory and can be seen from a functional, institutional, behavioural, product and consumer point of view.

The functions in agri-food marketing systems are of three types: exchange (buying and selling); physical (storage, transport, processing); and facilitating (standardization, financing, risk bearing and market intelligence) (FAO, 1997a; Schaffner *et al.*, 1998). The institutions in food marketing systems are, for example, farmers, food processing enterprises and middlemen/women traders, retailers, etc., and can be private or public or both as well as not for profit enterprises. There are also facilitative institutions, for example banks and transport firms and regulatory agencies concerned with food quality and labelling (Schaffner *et al.*, 1998). Such marketing institutions are 'the variety of business organizations which operate the marketing machinery' (Barker, 1989). From a behavioural perspective, this considers the actors involved and related institutions, and for example, the why and how, of behavioural patterns may come about (FAO, 1997a). From a product point of view, agri-food marketing systems considers for example, branded and commodity food products and how and why, for example, they are sold and bought by consumers. The consumer approach to agri-food marketing systems considers, for example, consumers' needs and wants, nutritional requirements, food safety and quality desired, etc.

Each country has an agri-food marketing system 'that moves and transforms products from producers to consumers' (Kohls & Uhl, 2015). Agri-food marketing systems evolve within the confines of social, economic, cultural, legal, political, technological, institutional, customary, demographic, natural environment, institutional, policy and climate elements particular to countries (Kaynack, 1999; Farris, 1998). What accompanies such elements, that also define agri-food marketing systems of a country, is the marketing infrastructure, for example roads, water systems, storage facilities, communications, etc. Such infrastructure typically requires, as commonly per the size of investments needed, a public and private collaboration (Farris, 1998). Typically an effective agri-food marketing system will provide and expand the range of products provided to consumers as well as being able to serve more consumers (FAO, 1984). Indeed, usually over time, within marketing systems, there is 'an underlying tendency for assortment diversity to increase' (Layton & Duan, 2015).

In terms of agri-food marketing, the digitalization revolution or what is commonly termed industry 4.0, can affect the way, for example, 'that input providers, processing and retail companies market, price and sell their products as well as management of resources towards highly optimized individualized, intelligent and anticipatory management, in real time, hyperconnected and driven by data' (FAO, 2019). In other words, agri-food systems will be more predicative, adaptive and mitigative to climate change, more productive, provide for better food safety and security, be more profitable and overall more environmentally sustainable (FAO, 2019). Hilmi (2021a) provides that effectively agri-food marketing in the BOP-SM and digital marketing have fertile ground on which to amalgamate. In fact the amalgamation, agri-food digital marketing in the BOP-SM, having a physical and online world presence can only but increase and foster further the intended outcomes of agri-food marketing in BOP-SM. This is important, as seemingly, agri-food marketing to date, in some instances and unfortunately, in developing and transition economies, has not provided for the required in terms of regular, cyclical, intensive, effective, efficient and appropriate spatial distribution of food. Moreover and interestingly,

as per Hilmi (2021a), in digital marketing there is the triple role of marketing being at the micro, meso as well as at the macromarketing level, fostering 'inclusive and social communities of consumers and partners for co-creation, this being based on human values of trust and service to others, with an intended outcome of human to human benefits' (Kotler *et al.*, 2021; Kotler *et al.*, 2017).

*Agri-food micromarketing in developing economies*²⁰

Agri-food micromarketing is commonly provided as the marketing performed by the 'individual decision maker in the agri-food marketing system, for example a farmer and an agri-food enterprise manager, and uses the principles of marketing management' (Kohls & Uhl, 2015). However agri-food micromarketing needs to consider within BOP-SM contexts the 'multitude and diversity of cultural factors and the chronic uncertainty, that gets exacerbated by transient shocks that may occur with untoward emergencies or calamities' (Viswanathan *et al.*, 2019; Viswanathan & Sreekumar, 2017) and consequently agri-food micromarketing needs to tender with the required variability and flexibility (Pels & Sheth, 2021) as well as the implied adaptability.

Consumers in BOP-SM contexts tend to have lack of access to clean drinking water, affordable energy, transport, 'have little in terms of material possessions and as per the limited income on top of this all tend to be value conscious, purchase decisions are made carefully and are complex, as for example habitual products, that are bought like food, are not bought in a routine manner, and reassurances on the reliability and worth of what is bought is a must' (Benninger & Robson, 2015). Further, typically such consumers pay what is termed the 'poverty premium' this commonly being due to factors like 'an inability to access retailers with lower prices, limited time to compare prices, or reduced or inefficient distribution to poorer neighbourhoods' (Benninger & Robson, 2015). But consumers in BOP-SM will purchase and pay higher prices than commonly found in BOP-SM 'if they are provided with a satisfactory solution to their needs and are reassured about the level of risk involved' (McGrath *et al.*, 2021). Consequently marketing in BOP-SM can be defined as 'the process of developing, pricing, promoting and distribution of specific goods and services to the poor which satisfies the poor demand and also achieving organizational objectives' (Chee Seng *et al.*, (2015).

Most marketing exchanges within many poor communities in developing countries falls outside the formal market economy (Viswanathan *et al.*, 2012) and thus most agri-food marketing occurs in the informal agri-food economy, that pervades BOP-SM contexts. In this regard, the majority of marketing activities within the BOP-SM are carried out by what are termed consumer-entrepreneur family microenterprises. This implies as per the BOP-SM context and consumers within as well as the size of such enterprises being micro, differing marketing practices as those commonly associated with larger enterprises, marketing as carried out in developed contexts and according to the marketing management paradigm.

In most BOP-SM contexts, 'billions of subsistence consumers are commonly served by the millions of subsistence consumer entrepreneur (family) microentrepreneurs' (Upadhyaya *et al.*, 2014). Commonly located in rural areas and usually urban slums, subsistence consumer-entrepreneurs can be found 'running small neighbourhood stores, selling from homes and on street corners, offering goods door-to-door, and in thousands of bazaars' (Upadhyaya *et al.*, 2014). As such subsistence consumer-entrepreneurs fulfil a 'diverse collection of market functions, facilitate exchanges via entering voluntary partnerships with producers and their intermediaries and provide the delivery of goods' (Upadhyaya *et al.*, 2014). Each subsistence consumer-entrepreneur 'performs a small part of the provisioning function of a marketing system by bringing together upstream producers or aggregators, fellow subsistence consumer-entrepreneurs, and downstream consumers'(Upadhyaya *et al.*, 2014) i.e. subsistence consumer-entrepreneurs together as a network provide many and ample marketing functions.

'Subsistence marketing systems in different regions of the world will vary based on the cultures and societies involved, but all have one thing in common: subsistence consumer-entrepreneurs' microenterprises '(Upadhyaya *et al.*, 2014). Subsistence consumer-entrepreneur family

²⁰ As provided previously, but important to note again, Shawver & Nickels (1981) provide that 'the distinction between micro and macro depends upon the perspective of the researcher: the dividing line between micromarketing and macromarketing is the perspective of the researcher and the objectives of the units under investigation—not the number of units being investigated or the level of aggregation'.

microenterprises operate with 'negligible resources, and operate in contexts marked by debilitating formal institutional voids, uncertain institutional environments, and the relative lack of market-based institutions and facilitating rules' (Viswanathan *et al.*, 2014). Typically subsistence consumer-entrepreneur family microenterprises 'use their families as resource buffers in sustaining their entrepreneurial activities, they live in densely networked social communities giving rise to constant face-to-face meetings and social exchanges and by virtue of their social embedding inside the subsistence communities and by living in poverty themselves, the lives of subsistence consumer-entrepreneurs are intertwined quite heavily with those of their customers leading to the development of intense interpersonal relationships and affective commitments' (Viswanathan *et al.*, 2014).

Usually in BOP-SM contexts, consumer-entrepreneurs have an 'inability to participate in marketplaces effectively and beneficially as effective participation entails the knowledge and skills of what to buy and sell, how to participate in the marketplace as both a consumer and an entrepreneur, and a deeper understanding of why marketplace activities occur' (Viswanathan *et al.*, 2021). The lack of literacy and marketplace literacy provides for 'difficulties in abstracting pieces of information between price and size and synthesising that information' (Viswanathan, 2020b). Typically there is a use of pictographic thinking, in other words 'just looking at a word and remembering it as an image' (Viswanathan, 2020b) and consequently there is a pervasive use of orality. So as to attempt to cater for their lack of 'consumer illiteracy', consumers 'leverage their social networks to gather as well as interpret various significant symbolic cues in the market' (Singh *et al.*, 2017) and have relational networks with other consumers, family and vendors (Viswanathan *et al.*, 2010). Hence, in such contexts there is pervasive interdependence not only between buyers and sellers, but also with family, friends and others in their social and relational network (Chikweche & Fletcher, 2012).

Further consumers tend to be more sensitive, expect quality and reasonable prices, a better shopping experience, are attracted by discounts and gifts, and are supported by family and friends (Sharma & Gupta, 2021). Moreover 'despite resource constraints, people do not make decisions based solely on the immediate and the economically beneficial, but consider conflicting motivations at different spatial distances. But they are often only able to act at the immediate level due to bare survival necessities and lack of control over further distances' (Viswanathan *et al.*, 2014). Consumers in BOP-SM 'understand the importance of their relationships with others and the environment in order to bolster their survival both in the short- and long-term and they also grasp the importance of growth to improve quality of life for themselves and the next generation. However, given imminent threats to survival, they often make trade-offs among survival, relatedness, and growth, engaging in behaviours that erode community and employ resources unsustainably' (Viswanathan *et al.*, 2014).

There are also other characteristics of BOP-SM consumers in terms of: enduring relationships; a high degree of trade-offs being made regularly; much of consumers' income being spent on food; a high degree of vulnerability, complexity and lack of control; and there is a high degree of networking (Viswanathan, 2020a). One to one interactions are usually the norm, there is interactional empathy, a high degree of social interdependence, and retailer preference is based on products and credit availability, and within such buyer-seller relationships there is constant customization, and transactions (exchanges) are highly personalized via quantity and price being negotiated for the advantage of both the consumer and the seller (Viswanathan, 2020a). Hence and overall in BOP-SM contexts there is a general lack of what are termed consumer skills (Viswanathan, 2020a).

Culture plays a large role in the BOP-SM, as provided previously, and the culture found within, has a large influence on consumption and as such 'consumers will invest more meaning in products and services that are more bound to cultural interpretation' (Usunier & Lee, 2013). Cultural bonds are 'strong for products or services that are consumed in a cultural and national context as the product or service, consciously or unconsciously, is more than a simple utilitarian purchase, resulting in a preference for products made in home country as in fact consumption is still largely a local reality' (Usunier & Lee, 2013). Indeed 'far from being uniquely culture related, local reality also reflects the economy, climate and customs' (Usunier & Lee, 2013). As a result of this, the marketing of farm produce is 'highly contextual and subject to unique local situations' (Argade *et al.*, 2021).

In BOP-SM the main focus is on exchange as it plays a central role in the work and lives of poor consumers and entrepreneurs (Venugopal & Viswanathan, 2017) as 'what is primarily understood intuitively is exchange and expertise in survival' (Viswanathan, 2020b). 'Exchange ecosystems are governed by norms such as empathetic exchange, orality, and relational exchange' (Venugopal &

Viswanathan, 2015). Importantly though, such exchange systems do not only focus on basic wants and needs as may be presumed, but also, and importantly, on aspirational wants and needs (Barki & Parente, 2010).

The micromarketing of agri-food products in the BOP-SM is also carried out by agri-food small, medium and large enterprises. For example, many large agri-food enterprises partnership with consumer-entrepreneur family microenterprises, in what is termed the 'last mile' to market agri-food products within BOP-SM. Barki (2015) provides that distribution for large enterprises in BOP-SM can be full of challenges, even for those large enterprises which have intensive channels of distribution. This has provided that, for example, many large enterprises as well as small and medium enterprises, in one typology of distribution strategy, create relationships, cooperate and partnership with embedded BOP-SM consumer-entrepreneur family microenterprises, not bypassing them, for the distribution of products (Viswanathan, 2020a). This type of distribution strategy decentralizes and externalizes marketing activities for large, medium and small-scale enterprises, provides for co-creating value and also fosters 'the trust and patronage of local consumers' (Viswanathan, 2020a).

However, traditional or classical marketing is mainly considered for large enterprises and has characteristics, for example, related to segmentation, planning, being strategic, and integrated (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018). As seen previously, marketing carried out by consumer entrepreneur family microenterprises is somewhat different. In terms of microenterprise, Pitt & Kannemeyer (2000), provide that the 'typology of marketing conducted is influenced by the necessities of such enterprises to be flexible and adaptive as well as the characteristics of the entrepreneur, such as for example, personality traits, internal locus of control, and moderate in terms of ambiguity as well as in risk taking'. Such marketing thus seems to be a personalized type of marketing as by the very nature of such microenterprises are usually owner-centric, have a lack of capabilities in key business areas and are growth averse (Gherhes *et al.*, 2016).

Consequently, there is seemingly a strong interface between marketing and how it is practiced in microenterprises and entrepreneurship. It seems that microenterprise marketing and its characteristics are in reality entrepreneurial marketing at the micro level. In fact classic or traditional marketing operates in a 'stable environment, where market conditions are continuous, while entrepreneurial marketing, operates in an uncertain environment, where market conditions are discontinuous and the needs of the market are as yet unclear' (Hills & Hultman, 2013). Further, and on the same lines, Collinson & Shaw (2001) provide that entrepreneurial marketing commonly is most apt for a fluctuating and changing environment and hence on par with the creative logic for both subsistence and transformational entrepreneurship as found in BOP-SM contexts. In this regard, Cacciolatti & Lee (2015) provide that entrepreneurial marketing 'entails the proactive identification and exploitation of opportunities for acquiring and retaining profitable customers through innovative approaches to risk management, resource leveraging and value creation'.

In developing countries agri-food marketing occurs both in urban and rural areas. For example in Asia and Africa, most of the BOP-SM context 'is dominated by rural markets, while urban areas are largely dominant in Latin America and in rural areas consumers tend to be very dispersed, while in urban areas consumers tend to be densely populated in defined urban areas' (Mathur *et al.*, 2018). Further as provided by Kripanithi & Ramachander (2018) rural consumers are different from urban consumers and the needs and perspective of the customer is distinct from the Middle of the Pyramid (MoP) (Purohit *et al.*, 2021).

Rural marketing can be defined as 'a process of delivering a better standard of living and quality of life to the rural environment, taking into consideration the prevailing rural milieu' (Rao & Tagat, 1985). In this regard rural marketing 'encompasses social interactions between the rural and urban as well as within rural areas, which may be spontaneous or planned and the process involves the entire socio-economic activity network aimed at rural development' (Rao & Tagat, 1985). Thus the focus of rural marketing is not just marketing in the rural and urban interface, i.e. urban to rural marketing, but also rural to rural marketing, as well as rural to urban marketing (Jha, 2012; Ramksihen, 2009) and further rural marketing can have various orientations: commercial, quasi-commercial, developmental and holistic (Jha, 2012). Thus rural and urban marketing have separate disciplinary areas based not only on geographical location, but far more on 'variation in consumer behaviour and income levels as well as by the considerable differences in the macro- and micro-environment of consumers' (Velayudhan, 2007). Moreover, rural marketing also focuses on 'producer empowerment within the marketing context

of rural areas and in rural urban linkages, in other words providing a bigger share of consumer spending on rural producers' products' (Vaswani *et al.*, 2005). As such rural marketing, 'through its developmental impact, has the potential to deliver a better standard of living in rural areas' (Modi, 2009).

Consequently as per the particular nature and context of BOP-SM, agri-food marketing needs to consider social, economic, political, physical, geographic, technology, cultural, psychological as well as ethical factors (Chee Seng *et al.*, 2015), including the high levels of uncertainties faced in terms of economic, social, natural environmental and technological aspects (Viswanathan *et al.*, 2019). As such BOP-SM agri-food marketing there is an inherent 'high customization, focused on one-to-one relational and interactional nature of markets, and which goes beyond the market context alone. This further leads to a far more social, relational and community focused nature of marketing' (Viswanathan *et al.*, 2008; Viswanathan *et al.*, 2007). This implies not only an agri-food micromarketing approach, but also a macro as well as a meso level approach to marketing within BOP-SM. In this regard, for example, FAO (1999b) provides for considering the management and marketing management of wholesale markets. This takes a micromarketing perspective, but has macromarketing implications, in terms of, for example, the policy and regulatory framework. However this implies also some mesomarketing aspects as for example wholesale markets can represent a meso level of aggregation within local provincial agri-food marketing systems and can also be considered an aggregation of product categories. Further at the micromarketing, mesomarketing and macromarketing interface level, Viswanathan *et al.*, (2014), provides that it is the 'community marketing systems that arise out of micro-level interactions between subsistence entrepreneurs and their customers that form the glue holding the informal economy together in subsistence economies' (Viswanathan *et al.*, 2014) as well as the implied macromarketing aspects of improving social well-being and quality of life. Thus and as provide previously, agri-food marketing in BOP-SM tenders with not only the micro, exchanges between individual consumers and enterprises, but also with the meso, community-level exchanges as well as the macro level, national-level exchange systems. In other words the agri-food micromarketing view cannot exclude, for example 'the behaviour of markets and wider social implications of an enterprise's policies' (Ritson, 1997).

Agri-food macromarketing in developing economies

Macromarketing can be defined as 'the study of exchange activities and exchange systems from a societal perspective' (Shawver & Nickels, 1981) and is the activity of 'creating and adapting an economic infrastructure to the needs of ultimate consumers, be they individual or institutional' (Kaynak, 1986). It considers 'marketing within the context of the entire economic system, with special emphasis on aggregate performance' (Oudan, 2008). It looks at marketing from a 'systems level, and in its largest sense as a provisioning technology, the function of which is to deliver quality of life' (Kilbourne, 2008), and deals with the 'interactions between (multiple and perhaps aggregated) firms and (multiple and perhaps aggregated) consumers, governments, regulatory bodies, pressure groups and all manner of citizens, in one country and in international markets' (Wooliscroft, 2016), and considers the 'interplay between marketing and society' (Peterson, 2013) in other words macromarketing as a system of societal life support and provision (Kadirov, 2011). This implies that the scope of macromarketing includes: 'the effects of exchange and exchange systems of societies at the regional, national and global level; environmental influences on individual exchanges and exchange systems; public policy related to exchange and exchange systems; the effects of exchange systems on economic and social development; the productivity and equity of exchange systems; poverty alleviation; sustainability; ethics; the comparative study of exchange systems from a social perspective; and the overall quality of life' (De Quero-Navarro *et al.*, 2021; Peterson, 2013; Shawver & Nickels, 1981). Macromarketing in particular refers to 'marketing systems²¹: the impact and consequence of marketing systems on society, and the impact and consequence of society on marketing systems' (Hunt, 1981). Consequently macromarketing 'deals with big-important issues, beyond comparatively simple exchanges between buyers and sellers, or even relationships between companies and customers' (Schultz, 2007).

²¹ De Quero-Navarro *et al.*, (2021) provide that generic marketing systems 'encompass all actors, actions and transactions within the subsystems of consumption'

In specific in terms of the agri-food sector, Kohls & Uhl, (2015) provide that agri- food macromarketing gives the ‘big picture of how the food system is organized, how well it performs its economic and social tasks, and how the food system is changing over time’. Rhodes & Dauve (1998) consider macromarketing as the ‘performance of all business activities involved in the forward flow of goods and services from producers to consumers’. Farris (1997) provides that agri-food marketing systems are guided and shaped by ‘numerous individual country characteristics, such as natural resources, size, climate, people and cultural heritage’. Ramkishen (2009) provides that the agricultural marketing system is ‘the link between the farm and the non-farm sectors’. The agri-food marketing system considers such aspects as how such a system is organized, its performance in economic and social terms, and how the system is transforming and changing over time (Kohls & Uhl, 2015). Rhodes & Dauve (1998) provide for the agri-food marketing system in terms of the flows of agri-food products and their assembly, transport, storage, processing, pricing and distribution to customers.

In developing economies, the agri-food sector is pervaded by agri-food macromarketing matters, such as for example: poor communications and transport infrastructure in particular and overall a weak infrastructure; weak distribution systems; lack of access to and availability of the internet and ICTs; underdeveloped legal frameworks and thus a limited rule of law and consequently unclear property rights (Sinha & Oburai, 2008; Barrett & Mutambatsere, 2005), all these matters, being prevalent especially in rural and remote areas, where the majority of agricultural activities take place. In fact, and for example, Dani (2015) provides that as the majority of the producers live in ‘rural areas of developing countries, the development of logistics infrastructure is key to the growth of the food sector’ as this infrastructure is required to create ‘efficiencies of scale and to reduce the excessive post-harvest food loss’ (Dani, 2015). Indeed a good deal of food losses in developing countries occurs as a result of ‘too few warehouses (to store the harvest), lack of road/rail (to deliver the harvest to the next stage of the chain) and a lack of cool chains’ (Dani, 2015). These infrastructural matters being all related to agri-food macromarketing.

Still in terms of agri-food macromarketing, FAO (2005b) considers for example some macromarketing constraints in terms of agri-food exporting as, for example, inadequate and inappropriate infrastructure, lack of competition in national markets, sanitary and phytosanitary measures, and international transport constraints. FAO (1998) considers another macromarketing matter in terms of market information services as, for example, ‘market information can be regarded as a public good, particularly where there are numerous small farmers who are unable to pay for information’. Schiefer (1997) also considers marketing information systems at the macromarketing level, but also considers such information systems at mesomarketing and micromarketing levels. FAO (2008) considers road infrastructure as another macromarketing matter and the importance of such for achieving greater market access and for facilitating trade. Schaffner *et al.*, (1998) consider commodity grading according to quality standards set by the industry, hence relevant to macromarketing, as for example trading grains at the national and international level, but also has a mesomarketing as well as a micromarketing components to it, as grading facilitates and enables trade also within a country at regional level and at the market level. Schaffner *et al.*, (1998) also provides for future markets that can be international, national and local and hence covering the macro, meso and micro levels of agri-food marketing. Kohls & Uhl, (2015) provide for the macromarketing aspects of government intervention and policies within the agri-food sector, for example, and how these inevitably affect the mesomarketing and micromarketing of agri-food products. FAO (2005a) also considers rural and urban linkages from an infrastructure perspective in terms of markets and transport. This mainly focusing on macromarketing aspects. However FAO (2005a) does also considers the inherent mesomarketing aspects, for example regional and rural development policies focused on ‘intermediate market towns’ and also considering in terms of clustering ‘growth poles’ and ‘economic corridors’ as well as local economic development. Further, FAO (2005c) considers urban food distribution from a macromarketing point of view, in terms of, for example, communication and transport infrastructure, but also here, FAO (2005c), considers mesomarketing in terms of, for example assembly markets, where farmers sell on to traders in rural areas and also considers urban assembly, handling and packaging facilities. Moreover, FAO (2006) considers national programmes to improve food safety and quality. This mainly focusing on macromarketing aspects of agri-food marketing, but also considering micromarketing in terms of for example post-harvest handling and packaging as well as mesomarketing factors such as, for example wholesale and retail markets.

As per the above and the literature on agri-food macromarketing, there is an evident emphasis on integration of micro and macromarketing approaches in general and in specific to agri-food marketing. In fact, for example Akaka *et al.*, (2021), Peterson (2020) and Layton (2015) all provide for the need for an integration of micromarketing and macromarketing as the ‘marketplace must go beyond a micro focus and to a focus on both the enterprise and the macro dimensions’ (Peterson, 2020). With this emphasis on the micro and macromarketing approaches though there is seemingly a lack of focus and emphasis on a mesomarketing approach to agri-food marketing in developing economies. However and as per the above, see for example FAO (2006; 2005a; 2005c), what has been found is some evidence, though minor, on the mesomarketing level aspects of agri-food marketing in developing economies. This evidence though derives from both a micromarketing and a macromarketing perspectives: for example, Layton (2015) considers a community marketing system, a mesomarketing aspect, but from a macromarketing point of view and Viswanathan, (2016); Venugopal & Viswanathan, (2015); and Viswanathan *et al.*, (2014) consider a community marketing system, still a mesomarketing aspect, but from a micromarketing point of view.

Agri-food mesomarketing in developing economies

Hunt (1981) provides that marketing systems are ‘provided at various levels of aggregation: the micro, the meso and the macro level. Layton (2015) considers mesomarketing in terms of a community marketing system (community wide exchange networks), that is part of a multiple level of marketing systems and that the interactions between these micro, meso and macro level are important. Indeed it is the interplay of ‘processes linking the micro level of individual transactions with meso level market structures and with macro level patterns that establishes the dynamics of the marketing system both at each level or layer and as a whole’ (Layton, 2015). Marketing systems, ‘each bounded in time and space, are inherently complex multi-layered networked structures in which a dynamic, evolving tension between growth and diversity on the one hand and stability and control on the other can be observed at macro, meso and micro levels’ (Layton & Duffy, 2018).

More in specific in terms of mesomarketing, Akaka *et al.*, (2021) provide that ‘marketing requires observation of the same phenomena through multiple-micro and macro, as well as meso- levels of granularity’. In fact and in this regard ‘marketing systems operate at levels ranging from the micro behaviours of customers, producers, and traders, to the meso-level emerging structures that self-organize over time in the form of marketplaces, trade centres, wholesaler and logistics organizations, business to business networks such as supply chains and distribution channels and to the macro community’s worries about effective provisioning for all levels of the concerned communities’ (Layton, 2019; Layton & Duffy, 2018).

At the mesomarketing level, ‘different actors enact a variety of social roles, as value is cocreated and is not fixed within producer or consumer categories, but networks of relationships form and norms that guide them and emerge as higher-orders of structure’ (Akaka *et al.*, 2021). Such ‘institutions’ are not ‘exogenous to marketing systems, they are woven together through value cocreation practices, which establish and potentially institutionalize solutions to a variety of problems, for example markets’ (Akaka *et al.*, 2021). Inherently micro-foundations are ‘interconnected with meso- and macro-structures and change in micro-foundations and macrostructures are often revealed through observed changes in meso-structures-where collections of actions reveal the institutionalization (or not) of potential solutions, such as markets’ (Akaka *et al.*, 2021). Further at the meso level where ‘micro level systems are aggregated into complex sequences of offers and acceptances, each contributing to an end-user assortment through the creation or co-creation of value, assortments arise wherever sellers and buyers interact’ (Layton, 2011).

Indeed Layton & Duan (2015) refer to the marketing system, at the meso level, as an assortment of goods, services, experiences and ideas. Typically at the meso level, a marketing system may ‘form around groups or clusters of sellers (firms) offering similar or mutually supporting products-services to groups of buyers; or a number of firms may cooperate for example in creating supply chains or global commodity chains; or sellers congregate in a market-place (Layton, 2011). For example, for the community served by the ‘meso level system, the assortment of heterogeneous set of goods, services, experiences and ideas offered to ultimate customers is a direct indicator of the success or failure of the system to perform’ (Layton, 2011). Indeed, ‘micromarketing activities will create systems that will

connect with each other, creating emergent networks of vertical, horizontal and facilitating meso level marketing systems, for example villages, networks of villages and then the city and then the region and then the national level' (Layton, 2015).

Interestingly, Akaka *et al.*, (2021) provide that so as to better understand micro and macromarketing, the meso perspective can be used, which is 'conceptually nestled between micro-actions and macrostructures in differing levels of aggregation'. The focus is provided on 'how markets emerge as institutionalized solutions, markets being constructed through micro-actions and macrostructures' (Akaka *et al.*, 2021). Further Shawver & Nickels (1981) point to one of the scopes of macromarketing including the effects of exchange and exchange systems of societies at the regional, national and global level. The regional level within a nation state, presumably focusing on the meso level of marketing systems and hence mesomarketing. As such, an understanding of meso level marketing systems will 'typically turn on an analysis of the interactions between and among systems at higher and lower levels of aggregation' (Layton, 2011). For example, Layton (1985) considers a marketing system's role in regional meso-level economic growth, via for example community-based marketing systems, and hence provides for a mesomarketing perspective to marketing and economic development.

In terms of agri-food mesomarketing in specific, Larson (1985), refers to a rural marketing system that aggregates agri-food products and moves within and out of regional areas. In terms of understanding such a mesomarketing system 'does not depend on an appraisal of geographic and narrowly economic factors alone, but the institutional framework-political, social, economic-within which such a marketing system exists, and thus the political economy as a whole, must also be considered' (Larson, 1985). FAO (2005c) considers urban food distribution also from a agri-food mesomarketing point of view, in terms of, for example assembly markets, where farmers sell on to traders in rural areas and also considers urban assembly, handling and packaging facilities. FAO (2005a) considers the inherent agri-food mesomarketing aspects, for example regional and rural development policies focused on 'intermediate market towns' and also considers it in terms of clustering 'growth poles' and 'economic corridors' as well as fostering local economic development. Schiefer (1997) considers marketing information systems also at mesomarketing level. FAO (1999a) considers agri-food mesomarketing issues of market infrastructure planning, for example via rural primary markets or assembly markets, urban wholesale and retail markets, with the main goal of taking such a mesomarketing approach as a precursor to the 'improvement of fresh produce marketing (fruit, vegetables, meat and fish) focusing primarily on rural assembly markets and urban wholesale or semi-wholesale markets' (FAO, 1999a). However, FAO (1999a) also touches on agri-food macromarketing matters as, for example, 'physical improvement is usually addressed in two ways: by providing improved market infrastructure (both urban and rural) and by improving rural access roads' (FAO, 1999a). Still in terms of rural markets, FAO (2003) provides that 'in some cases new markets or improvements to existing markets in rural areas can help overcome many of the marketing problems faced and formal markets in rural areas play an important role in improving agricultural marketing'. Rural markets can in fact enable 'a place where farmers and traders meet; where farmers can meet with consumers; reduce post-harvest loses; provide for a hub in rural activities; and make marketing a more plausible activity'. This addressing the mesomarketing aspects of agri-food marketing systems. FAO (1984) also considers agri-food mesomarketing matters in terms of still rural assembly markets and wholesale markets. FAO (1999b) provides for considering the management and marketing management of wholesale markets and this considers also some agri-food mesomarketing aspects as for example wholesale markets can represent a meso level of aggregation within local provincial agri-food marketing systems and can also be considered an aggregation of product categories. Schaffner *et al.*, (1998) also considers an agri-food mesomarketing activity that of commodity grading and refers to such as 'the sorting of products into quality classifications according to standards agreed by the industry'. This however can also be a macromarketing aspect. Kindness & Gordon (2001) provide for the role of some meso-level stakeholders in marketing agricultural products, in specific, non-governmental organizations (NGO) and community-based organizations²² (CBOs): a mesomarketing approach.

²² CBOs may be 'quite formally structured, but can equally be loosely structured, informal organizations; farmers' associations are an example of a CBO' (Kindness & Gordon, 2001).

Kindness & Gordon (2001) provide for the role CBOs can have at the meso level in terms of development interventions for ameliorating agricultural marketing in developing countries.

Interestingly CTA & EAGC (2013) consider also another typology of agri-food mesomarketing system, in terms of a structured trading system. This is where ‘farmers, traders, processors, millers, banks and others enter organized, regulated trading and financing arrangements’ (CTA & EAGC, 2013). A structured trading system (STS) can be defined as the process of ‘establishing a market where participants in the grain trade, for example, have a more open and orderly market’ (EAGC, 2011) and such trading is an ‘orderly, organized, trading process where all the players understand the rules and stick to them and it provides transparency, improves efficiency, and reduces transaction costs for all actors in the chain’ (CTA & EAGC, 2013). The main aim of this agri-food mesomarketing system is to establish a market where producers are ‘well organized, rules of trade recognized, the use of contracts enforced and arbitration used to settle simple disputes and as such, the system allows for harmonised free trade of grains from the producer, trader, and processor and eventually to the consumer’ (CTA & EAGC, 2013). The characteristics of such a trading system are ‘good postharvest management, reliable commercial storage and warehousing, efficient trade financing through warehouse receipt systems or collateral management, effective commodity exchanges as well as grades and standards, contract and market information’ (EAGC, 2011).

Further in terms of mesomarketing, exchange and survival on a daily basis in BOP-SM is based on empathy, relational exchanges and a form of community marketing system (Viswanathan, 2016; Venugopal & Viswanathan, 2015; Viswanathan *et al.*, 2014) that attempts to provide also for social and cultural needs over and above those of economic needs. Viswanathan *et al.*, (2014) further consider such community marketing systems as being ‘densely networked social communities’ and provide ‘community social capital and as such social exchanges help construct meso-level community exchange systems, which, in turn, contribute to developing and maintaining the informal economy’. Commonly consumer entrepreneur family microenterprises set up virtually next to ‘each other and sell identical products indistinguishable from one another’ (Viswanathan *et al.*, 2014). Indeed such microenterprises would apparently seem to be bound to economic failure as per the selling of identical products, but ‘a social capital explanation would reveal that the strength of local relationships serves as the differentiator and further such microenterprises at the community level are doing the same as consumers are trying to do: attempting to survive and make ends meet’ (Viswanathan *et al.*, 2014).

Moreover, such ‘community action approaches recognize the importance of perceived legitimacy among multiple entities in the system as these community actions are often formed and led by poor and marginalized groups who have limited access to more official channels, or for whom official channels do not function effectively’ (Hamby *et al.*, 2016). Gau *et al.*, (2014) point also to such community-based initiatives²³ ‘designed to engender sustainable economic growth, all this being based on the fact that social forces bind enterprises from the same community together as the health and welfare of the collective are explicitly considered, even by individuals’ (Gau *et al.*, 2014) and social capital being an important factor to such mesomarketing. Indeed, such community based marketing systems can also be seen as trust-based²⁴ exchange systems as per the inherent integration of the sellers and buyers in such communities as ‘human values of trust and service to others are the foundations of human economic activity’ (Kolter *et al.*, 2021) as for example ‘without trust, it becomes nearly impossible for an enterprise to build a meaningful relationship with the customer on a human level’ (Kolter *et al.*, 2021).

Still in terms of the community enterprise, Peredo & Chrisman (2006) consider it as emerging as a ‘prospective strategy for the sustainable alleviation of hardship, partly because it is holistic and integrates so many different aspects – economic, social, cultural, environmental and political – of the community’. In such enterprises it is the ‘community’s cultural identity, embodied in its cooperative traditions, that can provide to be a driving force, impelling social, economic and environmental initiatives concurrently and at the same time, it is the local culture that may endow communities

²³ A community-based initiative ‘is not meant to describe a specific institutional structure, but rather the organization of business activities within a subsistence-level marketplace wherein individual entrepreneurs are highly motivated to cooperate with one another and to seek mutually beneficial arrangements’ (Gau *et al.*, 2014)

²⁴ Trust is an ‘extremely critical element in marketing relations and mutual trust plays a greater role where asymmetry exists in relative influence among transacting parties and in agricultural contexts, trust in market transactions has often been based on subjective norms or ethnic or religious ties’ (Agarde *et al.*, 2021)

adopting a community enterprise based approach with the flexibility and resources necessary to find their place in a global economy' (Peredo & Chrisman, 2006). Sarreal (2016) provides community-based entrepreneurship to 'satisfy both the social and economic goals of the community, but social goals are emphasized over economic goals with governance structures being collective and management structures, commonly, democratic' and the community enterprise based on an 'aggregation of people in a common geographic location and not solely defined by the sharing of goals or the productive activities of the enterprise' (Sarreal, 2016).

Indeed enterprises at the community level can be seen and also termed as social enterprises. In this regard and considering the main marketing characteristics in BOP-SM contexts, consumer-entrepreneur family microenterprises can also be considered, in a sense, also as social enterprises, as they do provide for vital community services, such as the distribution of food, for example. Hence such consumer-entrepreneur family microenterprises can be considered not only to provide for micromarketing activities, but also mesomarketing activities. Hence such micro and mesomarketing activities can only but contribute and support macromarketing activities. Indeed such community-based enterprises and consumer entrepreneur family microenterprises are clearly there to generate money, but also provide for social purposes (Kotler *et al.*, 2010).

Further, and still in terms of agri-food mesomarketing, Donovan *et al.*, (2008) consider rural community enterprises²⁵ and provide these to be enterprises 'based on the production of agricultural or forest products and services, which are owned by small- and medium-scale producers and pursue multiple objectives, with profit maximization as only one among many goals, the others including community development, improved local safety nets, increased influence over political processes, and member education' (Donovan *et al.*, 2008). In line with such rural based community enterprises can also be considered, for example, as farmers that join together so as to 'increase their income and efficiency to market their goods, purchase their inputs and coordinate their farming techniques' (Robbins *et al.*, 2004). The mesomarketing of agri-food products is also commonly seen as collective or group marketing²⁶ which 'collectively markets their members' produce and/or that collectively supply inputs to their members' (Penrose-Buckley, 2007). Barker (1989) considers cooperative marketing as a form of mesomarketing, where producers pool their resources together, aggregate, to market their produce and Ramkishen, (2009) also provides for cooperative farming a form of mesomarketing at the farmer level as such organizations can aggregate agri-food products from a defined area and market them collectively. In this regard, for example, Abdul-Rahaman & Abdulai (2020) consider farmer organizations and their collective marketing of agricultural products in Ghana, as Shiferaw *et al.*, (2006) do much the same for Kenya. Such collective or group marketing is a mesomarketing approach, and can be seen as a form of institutional response to agri-food micromarketing barriers that each single farmer would have to face. Moreover, in many countries, many such 'organizations collaborate with each other forming a network of collective marketing organizations' (Penrose-Buckley, 2007).

Discussion

Shawver & Nickels (1981), as seen before, provide that 'the distinction between micro and macro depends upon the perspective of the researcher: the dividing line between micromarketing and macromarketing is the perspective of the researcher and the objectives of the units under investigation—not the number of units being investigated or the level of aggregation'. Very much the same, as derived from the research, can be provided in terms of mesomarketing i.e. 'the dividing line is the perspective of the researcher and the objectives of the units under investigation—not the number of units being investigated or the level of aggregation'. Further Larson (1985) provides that in terms of understanding mesomarketing, this 'does not depend on an appraisal of geographic and narrowly economic factors alone, but the institutional framework—political, social, economic—within which such a marketing system exists, and thus the political economy as a whole, must also be considered' (Larson, 1985). In this regard as per the research findings mesomarketing is considered as being:

²⁵ Aggarwal (2018) refers also to rural micro and small village enterprises

²⁶ This can also be seen as a community enterprise as, for example many of its members come from the same geographical area.

- a critical and vitally important component of the aggregation and network in a marketing system between the micromarketing and macromarketing levels (Layton, 2019; Layton & Duffy, 2018; Layton, 2015; Hunt, 1981);
- the aggregation of micro level systems into complex sequences of offers and acceptances, each contributing to an end-user assortment through the creation or co-creation of value (Layton, 2011);
- a system of higher, lower, differing and varying levels of aggregation (Akaka *et al.*, 2021; Layton, 2011);
- an assortment of goods, services, experiences and ideas (Layton & Duan, 2015);
- a formation around groups or clusters of sellers (firms) offering similar or mutually supporting products-services to groups of buyers; or a number of firms may cooperate for example in creating supply chains or sellers congregate in a market-place (Layton, 2011);
- an in country regional and/or provincial and/or city and/or town and/or village level marketing system (Layton, 2011; Layton, 1985);
- regional and rural development policies focused, for example, on ‘intermediate market towns’ (FAO, 2005a);
- a clustering of ‘growth poles’ and ‘economic corridors’ (FAO, 2005a);
- a rural marketing system (Larson, 1985);
- an emergent network of vertical, horizontal and facilitating marketing systems, for example networks of villages (Layton, 2015);
- a structured trading system (CTA & EAGC, 2013; EAGC, 2011);
- a community marketing system (Viswanathan, 2016; Venugopal & Viswanathan, 2015; Layton, 2015; Viswanathan *et al.*, 2014);
- a networked social capital-based community marketing system (Viswanathan *et al.*, 2014);
- a culturally-based marketing system (Peredo & Chrisman, 2006);
- a trust based marketing system (Agarde *et al.*, 2021; Kolter *et al.*, 2021);
- a community and a non-autochthonous -community-based organization /enterprise /collective /group/cooperative typology of marketing practice (Abdul-Rahaman & Abdulai, 2020; Sarreal, 2016; Hamby *et al.*, 2016; Tahkur, 2015; Gau *et al.*, 2014; Ramkishen, 2009; Donovan *et al.*, 2008; Penrose-Buckley, 2007; Shiferaw *et al.*, 2006; Peredo & Chrisman, 2006; Kindness & Gordon, 2001; Barker, 1989);
- a value creation or cocreation system provided where networks of relationships form and norms that guide and emerge as higher-order of structure: ‘institutions’ for example such as markets and other structures like, for example trade centres, wholesaler and logistics organizations, business to business networks such as supply chains and distribution channels (Akaka *et al.*, 2021; Layton, 2019; Layton & Duffy, 2018);
- a network of collective marketing organizations (Penrose-Buckley, 2007) ;
- a marketing system of urban and rural food distribution: rural primary or assembly markets, urban and rural wholesale and retail markets, wholesale market marketing, and grading systems, (FAO, 2005c; FAO, 2003; FAO, 1999a; FAO 1999b; Schaffner *et al.*, 1998).

Also to the above points, mesomarketing can be considered, as provided previously, as being carried out by consumer-entrepreneur family microenterprises along with their micromarketing activities. A social capital perspective on such microenterprises ‘ would reveal that the strength of local relationships serves as the differentiator and these microenterprises at the community level are doing the same as consumers are trying to do: attempting to survive and make ends meet’ (Viswanathan *et al.*, 2014). Thus such microenterprises in their activities of marketing food and agricultural products, for example in BOP-SM contexts, are carrying out social and community services via their marketing activities as they are distributing food and can thus be seen as also providing mesomarketing activities alongside their micromarketing activities.

Further mesomarketing is also provided by enterprises that are not necessarily an integral part, non-autochthonous, of local communities in BOP-SM contexts. Such enterprises may want to enter such BOP-SM markets, for example, and thus use as one of their marketing distribution strategies,

mesomarketing, so as to gain access where ‘organisations have limited access and knowledge about an emerging market’ (Tahkur, 2015): what is also termed as the ‘last mile’ to market within BOP-SM (Barki, 2015). This, for example, is further provided by Thakur (2015) in terms of community marketing as being the ‘preferred way of reaching out to large segments of consumers in developing economies for consumer packaged goods, household goods and farm products’. Thakur (2015) defines such community marketing as ‘a channel for distribution through a broad range of partners to provide access and knowledge about an under-served customer segment and build acceptability through the trust they command in that customer community’. This being based on the ability to gain local knowledge, market access, and acceptability via consumer trust using a community marketing system. Moreover in such mesomarketing what is seen also is the ‘creation of a marketing mix which is unique and tailored to the local community market that is both culturally sensitive and economically feasible’ (Chikweche & Fletcher, 2012). This can be provided, for example, by the ‘4 A’s’ framework (Sheth & Sisodia, 2012) of acceptability, affordability, availability, and awareness, as the traditional marketing mix, the 4 P’s of product, price, place and promotion are ‘less useful in emerging market business conditions as under such conditions there is commonly heterogeneous and fragmented demand, resource shortages’ (Dadzie *et al.*, 2017), competition coming from ‘unbranded products or services, and consumption being based far more on make versus buy decision and less about what brand to buy’ (Sheth, 2011), and is also about the ‘distinctiveness of what rural consumers mean, in that something different is required’ (Kashyap, 2016).

As per the points provided previously about mesomarketing, it is clear that it occupies a critical and vital role within the agri-food marketing system, not only as a mid-level point of conjunction between micromarketing and macromarketing activities, but as per its importance per se. Mesomarketing is an aggregation of micro level systems into complex sequences of offers and acceptances, each contributing to an end-user assortment through the creation or co-creation of value and as such is an aggregation, an assortment of goods, services, experiences and ideas as well as a marketing system of urban and rural food distribution: rural primary or assembly markets, urban and rural wholesale and retail markets, wholesale market marketing, and grading systems, for example. Mesomarketing can be a formation around groups or clusters of sellers (firms) offering similar or mutually supporting products-services to groups of buyers; or a number of firms may cooperate for example in creating supply chains or sellers congregate in a market-place. Mesomarketing can also be an emergent network of vertical, horizontal and facilitating marketing systems as well as being both a rural and urban marketing system, a clustering of ‘growth poles’ and ‘economic corridors’ and a value cocreation system provided via networks of relationships that form and the related norms. Mesomarketing can be also seen as a community marketing system, which particularly within BOP-SM contexts, is usually based on culture and social capital and inherent to this a good deal of community trust. This creates a marketing system that not only has important institutional aspects, for example creating workable markets, but also potentially contributes to economic development at the local level. This can be for example at the village and town level in rural areas and for urban areas, cities. Such networks of community marketing can also contribute to local regional and /or provincial development within a country. Further mesomarketing can also be considered in terms of specific regional and rural development policies focused, for example, on ‘intermediate market towns’.

Hence it is clear that mesomarketing is not exactly ‘in the middle’ of the agri-food marketing system, but can oscillate between higher and lower levels of the median position, for example between rural village and urban city. Further, mesomarketing activities can be carried out by community based-organizations, enterprises, collectives, groups, cooperatives and can also be a network of collective marketing organizations. Moreover consumer entrepreneur family microenterprises can also provide for mesomarketing activities and mesomarketing activities can be used effectively by external organizations to BOP-SM context to market products within such communities.

In terms of the literature and sources of secondary data and information there is a focus in the majority of cases on agri-food micromarketing, followed with relatively less literature and sources of secondary data and information on agri-food macromarketing, and relative to both micromarketing and macromarketing, even less literature and sources of secondary data and information being provided specifically on mesomarketing. However, as provided with some clear evidence from the research findings, the mesomarketing level is as important as the micromarketing and macromarketing levels of agri-food marketing in developing countries. Indeed, and for example, Akaka *et al.*, (2021) provide that

'marketing requires observation of the same phenomena through multiple—micro and macro, as well as meso levels of granularity'. This seemingly provides that for agri-food marketing to have far more impact in its intended objectives and outcomes of providing, not only, for far more regular, cyclical, effective, efficient, intensive, and spatially appropriate distribution of food, but also the implied social, cultural, community and quality of life outcomes intended, a micro, meso and macromarketing level perspective is required. As such, and as also provided by Layton (2009) a functioning agri-food marketing system thus 'depends on performance both in a narrow economic sense and in a wider social sense' (Layton, 2009), i.e. a macro, meso and micromarketing approach to agri-food marketing. This approach to agri-food marketing is thus much in line with that of what Kotler *et al.*, (2021) provide in that marketing activity 'has to be aligned with a focus on people-for-people benefits as the creation of human-to-human marketing establishes a new approach that puts human beings at the centre of marketing: marketing should work for the people, not against them'. This is clearly based on human values of 'trust and service to others, which are the foundations of human economic activity rather than the sale of commodities and luxuries' (Kotler *et al.*, 2021).

However, such a multilevel approach to agri-food marketing in developing countries requires the three levels of micro, meso and macro to 'work in unison', be far more coordinated, organized, managed and time bound. This is not an easy task at all, as for example the scheduling of marketing infrastructure interventions, typically provided by the public and private sectors, needs to be in synchronicity with mesomarketing, such as for example, the utility of a rural and remote assembly market, that in turn is in line with local rural micromarketing activities of, for example, horticultural marketing. Also, each level of agri-food marketing will have differing objectives, strategies, implementation, intended outcomes as well as time horizons. For example and inevitably agri-food macromarketing interventions will have longer time horizons as per the nature of the matters contented within, than agri-food micromarketing time horizons. Further, the differing perspectives of stakeholders involved, their differing orientations, for example more business oriented at the micromarketing level, more socially community-oriented at the mesomarketing level and more overall improved standards of living at the macromarketing level, can provide for other challenges. Also overlaps between micromarketing, mesomarketing and macromarketing are inevitable, as for example an agrifood micromarketing view cannot exclude, for example 'the behaviour of markets and wider social implications of an enterprise's policies' (Ritson, 1997). Peterson (2020) provides for much the same, in terms of the 'marketplace must go beyond a micro focus and to a focus on both the enterprise and the macro dimensions'. This provides for further challenges as the 'borders' between, for example micromarketing, mesomarketing and macromarketing cannot be marked very clearly and dissected exactly in agri-food marketing practice. Moreover, taking a single perspective, for example from agri-food macromarketing stand point at public policy level, requires to consider not only the macro level matters of such a policy, but also mesomarketing and the micromarketing levels of such a policy. For example 'market reforms alone without entrepreneurial micromarketing innovations cannot provide for development' (Cundiff, 1982). Clearly, these matters pose further challenges on the coordination, organization, management and timing of agri-food marketing in developing countries. Indeed this factor of agri-food marketing needing a coordinated, organized, managed and time bound micro, meso and macro perspective, could be one of the factors, among many others, that has provided for agri-food marketing not to provide for the required in terms of development in developing economies.

Conclusions

From the research findings, and within its boundaries, what has emerged clearly, is the importance of mesomarketing in agri-food marketing and its importance per se. This is defined not only by its critical role in the marketing system as a conduit between micromarketing and macromarketing, but as a contributor to local development in-country at the regional, provincial, city, town and village levels as well as at the community level within. The research also identified some of its characteristics and its embedded nature in local communities' cultures, societies and economies, based primarily on relational, trust and socio-cultural-economic exchange systems. This implying that the intended outcomes of agri-food mesomarketing are to attempt to improve the standard and quality of life of such local communities, be they in rural and/or urban areas. This being corroborated, for example, as per Viswanathan *et al.*, (2014), in terms of the social capital perspective of economic exchange and as per Fuat Firat (2020) as 'a system of redistribution or reciprocity, where values transferred from one to

another do not have only economic parity, but rather a basis in need or ability, and thus focusing on the needs of human beings in comparison to the material interest of the economy alone’.

The findings also provided for some indication of specific agri-food mesomarketing practices, such as, for example, the need to adapt such marketing practices to a community and non-autochthonous community-based enterprise, in terms of, for example, using a 4 A marketing mix as well as a structured trading system. Further, findings also provided the need to take not only a micromarketing and macromarketing perspective to agri-food marketing in developing countries, even though primarily it is seen from a micromarketing perspective and to a relatively lesser degree, from a macromarketing perspective, but also a mesomarketing point of view. Interestingly a good deal of literature and sources of secondary data and information on agri-food marketing in developing countries take a micromarketing perspective and/or macromarketing perspective, and not, in most cases, a mesomarketing perspective. What also clearly emerged from the research findings is that mesomarketing in the literature and secondary sources of data and information is provided mainly from micromarketing and macromarketing perspectives and not from a mesomarketing perspective per se. However, and over all, this provides that to achieve more effective and efficient agri-food marketing in developing countries, the micro, meso and macro perspectives all need to be considered and provided with the same ‘weight’ of importance and critically integrated. This, for example, being exemplified by Akaka *et al.*, (2021) in terms of marketing requiring observation of the same ‘phenomena through multiple-micro and macro, as well as meso- levels of granularity’.

What has also emerged from the research findings was the lack of mesomarketing definitions in general, and even less so in terms of agri-food mesomarketing, in comparison to definitions on micromarketing, macromarketing and in specific to agri-food micromarketing and agri-food macromarketing. For example Layton (2015), Viswanathan, (2016), Venugopal & Viswanathan, (2015) and Viswanathan *et al.*, (2014) do provide for some characterizations/definitional examples for mesomarketing, but overall in the literature definitions are few and in terms of agri-food mesomarketing in specific are even fewer. Hence, as per the research findings, agri-food mesomarketing can thus be tentatively characterized as follows:

- A regional and/or provincial agri-food marketing system found within a country, which include:
 - City, town and village agri-food marketing systems;
 - Networks of local vertical, horizontal and facilitating marketing systems;
 - Socially and culturally based rural and/or urban community agri-food marketing systems composed of higher, lower, differing and varying levels of agri-food product and service assortments, with institutional structures such as markets and business to business networks, for example;
 - Community and non-autochthonous community based-organizations, enterprises, collectives, groups, and cooperatives, including consumer entrepreneur family microenterprises marketing practices;
 - An implied intended outcome for local community development, well-being and improved quality of life.

Consequently it is clear that agri-food mesomarketing does have an important role in agri-food marketing in developing countries, and as provided before, should carry the same ‘weight’ as the micromarketing and macromarketing perspectives commonly taken in agri-food marketing in developing countries. Clearly a more holistic approach to agri-food marketing is important i.e. the combination and integration of micromarketing, mesomarketing and macromarketing. As such the findings of the research have shed more light on what is agri-food mesomarketing per se and its importance within agri-food marketing in developing countries, but clearly as per the evident lack of literature and sources of secondary data and information that specifically focuses on agri-food mesomarketing, inevitably calls for far more research to be conducted on the subject matter. Further more research should also and importantly be carried out from a specific mesomarketing perspective. Moreover, more research should be provided on the specific agri-food mesomarketing practices that imply, as per the research findings, diversity from agri-food micromarketing and agri-food macromarketing practices.

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