

# Social Control Theory: Toward a Unifying Framework for Channel Governance

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Cite as:

Gilliland David (2020), Social Control Theory: Toward a Unifying Framework for Channel Governance. *Proceedings of the European Marketing Academy*, 49th, (53273)

Paper from the 49th Annual EMAC Conference, Budapest, May 26-29, 2020.



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## **Abstract**

Marketing channel control considers how channels of distribution are governed and coordinated. Despite the existence of mature, robust theories in the marketing channels literature such as transaction cost economics, agency theory, organizational control theory, and the theory of relational exchange, questions of control remain. For instance, two areas not addressed by extant channels theory are self-control (control by and of the actor) and third party control (control of a non-dyadic constituent). Because more and creative channel structures rely on self-control and third party control, we contend that channels' existing frameworks are suboptimal for moving channel scholarship forward. Social control theory is a general theory of control that offers a framework to examine issues of control and governance in a channel. This framework considers control systems (self-, dyadic, and third party control) and control modes (formal and informal control). This paper explicates a social control framework and demonstrates its use in marketing channel governance. Social control is explained and research propositions are offered.

**Keywords:** *Channels; Governance; Control*

**Track:** Business-To-Business Marketing & Supply Chain Management