Sustainable Consumption and the Quality of Life: A Macromarketing Challenge to the Dominant Social Paradigm

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This article argues that micromarketing cannot examine the relationship between sustainable consumption and the quality of life critically because the essence of the relationship lies in the dominant social paradigm. Only macromarketing can address this relationship effectively. It is within the intellectual purview of macromarketing to expand the domain of inquiry to include technological, political, and economic benefits and costs of consumption, thus challenging the paradigm itself.

RISE OF THE DOMINANT SOCIAL PARADIGM

Two statements illustrate the necessity for the macromarketing approach to the analysis of the quality of life (QOL) in contemporary Western society.

There are, indeed, tendencies inseparable from the ethos, activities and aspirations of modern societies that necessarily act to depress the quality of life. These tendencies, however, have been given shape and direction by the primary force of science and technology, on the one hand, and, on the other, and more particularly to the West, by the institutions of liberal democracy and the market economy. (Mishan 1993, p. 121)

In a world undergoing enormous technological, economic, and political change, many of the established ways we have of living together are not working well. Some of them are not working as they were intended to. Others are having alarming and unintended consequences that affect not only people but the natural environment.... But even to begin to solve these daunting problems, let alone problems of emptiness and meaninglessness in our personal lives, requires that we greatly improve our capacity to think about our institutions. (Bellah and others 1991, pp. 4–5)

The macromarketing approach entails three dimensions—technological, economic, and political—that are implicated in and inseparable from the decline in the QOL in Western industrial societies. We argue here that the basis of a long-run decline rests in the ideology of consumption, the prevailing belief within industrial societies that the sure and only road to happiness is through consumption (Hetrick 1989). Furthermore, consumption practices in these societies are embedded within the dominant social paradigm (DSP) that forms their worldview.

Milbrath (1989) defines the dominant social paradigm as “a society’s belief structure that organizes the way people perceive and interpret the functioning of the world around them” (p. 116). Perlmuter and Trist (1986) add that it is a social construction so widely held that individuals are only vaguely aware of its underlying logic and the direction it gives to their behavior. It provides both legitimization and justification for the institutions of society and, as such, functions as an ideology (Cotgrove

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The quality of one's life will be defined and assessed through the lenses of the DSP, and to the extent that exponentially increasing levels of consumption are a focal component of that definition, its sustainability, both social (Hirsch 1977; Mishan 1983) and environmental (Daly 1991; Durning 1992), is problematic.

The ideology of consumption prevalent within the DSP directly affects the environmental sustainability of present consumption practices, and this article focuses on this aspect of the problem. Insightful critiques and arguments with respect to the ideology of consumption and its social limits have been increasing in recent years (Hirsch 1977; Kilbourne 1991; Scitovsky 1976; Wachtel 1989), which will not be specifically addressed herein.

Fisk (1973) argues that a transformation to responsible consumption requires both a new attitude toward the meaning of consumption (its role in the QOL assessment) and a new social organization to implement this new attitude (transformation of the DSP). This entails a fresh examination of needs and the consequences of their satisfaction within industrial societies. The marketing concept, in its microdefinition, takes no account of needs and wants that can be satisfied via nonconsumption (Abratt and Sacks 1988; Dixon 1992), but these are intimately related to QOL. Bauman (1992) also suggests that consumers are led to forget that other means for self-assertion than consumption exist. As Dixon (1992) comments,

If wants cannot always be specified, if specific goods and services are not always necessary to the satisfaction of wants, and buyers are easily manipulated, perhaps production need not simply respond to demand. It might be more efficient to mass produce goods and services and manipulate demand to match the assortment produced. (p. 122)

For the purposes of this discussion, consumption should be construed as a process, not as an act. It thus entails activities of search, use, and disposal of any good or service that has an effect on the environment. We are not advocating any particular definition of QOL, although we suggest that certain factors must be considered in any definition: basic needs, health care, education, political participation, community, freedom from harm, aesthetics, and so forth. The aggregate of one's experience in each of these domains reflects overall life satisfaction (Sirgy 1991). Furthermore, a livable, aesthetic environment is assumed to be a necessary condition for any selected definition of QOL.

The questions addressed herein relate to the dominant role of the material conception of QOL in many Western industrial societies and its prospects for sustainability. By sustainability, we mean that whatever form of QOL is chosen and whatever the role of consumption in it, that form should be reproducible for succeeding generations in all indefinite future periods. Sustainable consumption minimizes environmental effects, considers the needs of future generations, and is for the satisfaction of needs that produce a better QOL. The thesis examined here can be summarized briefly in the following way. The DSP in Western industrial societies informs the prevailing conception of QOL and provides its justification. This is manifested through the ideology of consumption, which maintains that increasing material well-being provides the basis for QOL. The quest for increasing well-being for a growing world population poses the fundamental issue of sustainability: consumption cannot increase infinitely in a finite world.

The ideology of consumption as the main means for achieving QOL is promoted by marketing. Marketing activity perpetuates the ideology of consumption, which has negative environmental consequences.

How Did We Get Here?

The conception of material progress has pervaded Western thought since the mid-nineteenth century and has been the "mainstay of the general belief in Progress prevalent today" (Bury 1932, p. 325). It is also the general doctrine of the marketing academy, which relies upon the satisfaction of consumers' needs and wants and the generation of profits for organizations. Most definitions of the marketing concept focus on profits, although initially the focus was on human wants (Dixon 1992).

Transmogrification of consumption values from consuming to live into living to consume is
the mainstay of the marketing academy, and the sacred cow of the discipline, the marketing concept, is based on living to consume. As a result of reliance upon neoclassical economics, laissez-faire politics, and uncontrolled technological growth, micromarketers have seldom questioned the implications (Day and Wensley 1983). They continue to assert that QOL and consumption are synonymous. Bellah and others (1991) argue that virtually no one, citizen or politician, visualizes the necessary transformation from a definition of progress that maintains the proliferation of consumer goods as its essential element.

The implications of this transformation are critical, because consumption behavior in industrial societies has had a profound effect on the present QOL and even more so on the prospects for the QOL of future generations. This effect is twofold, since the ideology of consumption is complicit in both social and physical limits to growth. The sustainability of consumption practices has only very recently been challenged. Durning (1992) offers an explanation as to why this is the case. Suggesting that the two most important variables in environmental decline are population growth and consumption, he adds,

At least population growth is now viewed as a problem by many governments and citizens of the world. Consumption, in contrast, is almost universally seen as good—indeed, increasing it is the primary goal of national economic policy. (p. 21)

Consumption is the neglected variable in the global environmental equation. (p. 58)

Even a casual reading of mainstream marketing literature confirms that the name of the game is to sell more this year than last year. To do otherwise is considered abject business failure. Marketing’s focus on consumption comes from consideration of issues from a managerial and firm perspective (Alvesson 1994), which tends to ignore macromarketing issues (Dixon 1992). Issues are not considered from the point of view of society or the natural environment.

It is important to question the satisfaction of personal needs and wants. It is not apparent that an increase in consumption in First World societies leads to improvement in QOL; the consumer is, rather, striving for more. Alvesson (1994) notes that the “ideal of consumption in itself” is never questioned, despite consumers’ being in a state of perpetual dissatisfaction or ephemeral satisfaction (see also Wolf 1990). Understandably, Hirsch (1977), Bauman (1992), and Gabriel and Lang (1995) suggest that consumerism promises a universal happiness that it cannot deliver. Disconfirmed expectations impoverish individual and societal QOL.

In marketing, the assumption that actual patterns of consumption are clearly connected with needs, wants, and satisfaction is crucial. To Alvesson and other proponents of critical theory (CT), this assumption appears unfounded and deeply problematic.

One would expect to find categories such as needs and wants at the centre of scrupulous conceptual and empirical investigations by marketing scholars. The fact that this is so seldom the case seriously undermines any scientific pretensions the enterprise might have. That marketing is practically oriented and popular with a social elite (executives) is not sufficient for academic legitimacy. (Alvesson 1994, p. 297)

The desire for constantly increased consumption may not only decrease the QOL of the consumer, but also have deleterious effects on the natural environment. There is value in considering the two, particularly when one realizes it is the ecologists who have been criticizing consumption patterns in recent years. Since the end of the Cold War, the Green movement has become the greatest ideological adversary of global capitalism. The Greens are fashioning a vocabulary deeply critical of consumerism and economic globalization (Gabriel and Lang 1995). As the issues have been largely ignored by the mainstream marketing academy, they should be discussed by macromarketers.

Another explanation for the reluctance of scholars to examine the root causes of environmental crisis is the nature of the crisis itself. It is possibly the first crisis of Western society that was precipitated by the success of the industrial system, rather than its failure; it is most difficult to orchestrate a critique of
something tacitly “good” (Kassiola 1990). This is similar to Schumpeter’s (1942) criticism of capitalism—that the success of the system will undermine the very institutions that were required for its development. Thus, just as the ideology of consumption must be considered, so the issues surrounding sustainable capitalism must be explored (O’Connor 1994).

The limited critique of the environmental consequences of marketing practices has focused, not on root causes, but on symptoms. From the standpoint of root causes, virtually all the research in marketing to date falls short of the mark. The notable exception is the early environmental critique by Fisk (1973, 1974), who specifically examines the role of both the character and level of consumption in this process. This prescient work has been virtually ignored.

The immersion of marketing academics in the DSP makes it unlikely that they can react to the environmental crisis in time to limit further irreversible external costs. While the examination of energy conservation, recycling, and green products evidenced within the marketing literature is critically important in developing sustainable consumption, these factors do not address the root causes of the crisis. Mainstream introductory textbooks discuss marketing from the assumption that consumers get what they “want” (including the social and environmental costs), although articles in micromarketing journals do not always confirm this (see, for example, Brownlie and Saren 1992; Dixon 1992; Smith 1987).

Where Do We Need to Go?

To explore underlying causes, the domain of inquiry must be expanded. This requires a micromarketing approach, which can offer a believable critique of the DSP. In this article, we examine the dimensions of the DSP that are directly involved in the evolution and perpetuation of the ideology of consumption and its environmental consequences. If the solution to the crisis cannot be found within the DSP, a new paradigm is required in order for truly sustainable consumption to become a reality. Implementing such a paradigm will be problematic, since this would require a transformation of the economic, political, and technological institutions that form the DSP and, consequently, a long-term sacrifice on the part of consumers and producers.

Consumerism stands for production, distribution, desiring, obtaining, and using of symbolic goods. Symbolic goods: that is very important. Consumption is not just a matter of satisfying material greed, of filling your stomach. It is a question of manipulating symbols for all sorts of purposes. On the level of the life-world, it is for the purpose of constructing identity, constructing self, and constructing relations with others. On the level of society, it is in order to sustain the continuing existence of institutions, of groups, structures and things like that. (Bauman 1992, p. 223)

This and similar analyses suggest that the critique entails an unveiling of the opaque contingencies of the “commodification of life,” in which an imperious market absorbs traditionally nonmarket areas of life (Heilbroner 1985). The expansion of the commodity form that has prevailed for the last three centuries is leading to environmental disaster. The environmental damage is not yet irreversible, but continued expansion under the DSP may negate the possibility of sustainable consumption in the future.

If the environmental crisis were only a product of specific individual behaviors, then remediation would require only a transformation of those behaviors, through market incentives, legal action, or technological fixes. This, however, does not seem to be the case (Cotgrove 1982; Milbrath 1984; Ophuls 1977). These DSP solutions only result in a transformation of the environmental manifestations of the problem from one type to another. Specifically, such symptoms can be transformed in space, time, or form, but not eliminated (Ophuls 1977).

A simple example makes this apparent. When factory-produced air pollution became a “problem,” the immediate solution was to build taller smokestacks. This space transformation spread the same volume of pollutants over a larger geographic area. The next technological fix was to develop equipment to remove pol-
lutants before they entered the air through the stacks, which converted visible air pollution into less visible solid waste pollution. The problem was transformed but not eliminated. When this alternative is removed, as with hazardous waste materials that cannot be left in a landfill, the next technological fix is to deposit pollutants in deep wells: a transformation in time that shifts to a future generation the burden of our environmental folly. These technological fixes only deal with symptoms. The problem is linked to the "liberal" conception of property rights established within the DSP, which allows industry to consider the atmosphere a free good by tradition; the right to pollute is secured by always having polluted (Swaney 1987).

What the foregoing suggests is that the ideology of consumption, or the identity of consumption and QOL, has been in development for three centuries. Beginning with Enlightenment science, the material conception of progress migrated to both liberal politics and liberal economics, with their focus on individual, material needs. Marketing practice, as the handmaiden of economic liberalism, still supports and perpetuates this conception of the QOL. In the Figure, we argue that lack of knowledge about the DSP has led to a little understood condition of hyperconsumption.

Hyperconsumption, a product of the commodification of life, exists when consumption has no referent to the natural law of value (Fitchett, Brownlie, and Saren 1996). There is no logical connection between the thing consumed and the consumption act itself—it is consumption for its own sake. As a result of this disjunction, two environmentally related conditions ensue. The first, suggested by Baudrillard (1968), is that consumption becomes limitless because it has no "objective" end. The second outcome is the total separation of the object of consumption from nature: the image is being consumed, rather than the object. Within the natural law of value, the purpose of consumption is need satisfaction from use value in nature. The object consumed is from and a part of nature and is recognized as such. Within hyperconsumption, a "crisis of sign value" (Goldman and Papsen 1996) exists, in which the sign value, or image, eclipses the commodity referent and simultaneously negates the ecological referent of the commodity as a product of nature. The commodification of life processes insinuates itself deeper into everyday life, resulting in a culture of consumption without end and, from an environmental perspective, without effect. Within micromarketing, increasing consumption is considered the sine qua non of effectiveness. According to the prevailing concept of progress within the DSP, consumption is good, and more is better. What is needed, instead, is an expansion of the domain of inquiry to include the political, technological, and economic institutions of the DSP.

To get at the root causes of a declining environment and QOL, we must delve deeper into the DSP and examine its relation to the ideology of consumption. Only then can it be seen that remediation proposed from within the DSP will only perpetuate the crisis, since it proffers the cause of environmental decline, and through it a decline in the QOL, as the solution. The problems of technology cannot be solved with higher and more complex technology (Winner 1986). Higher economic growth cannot solve the problems created by economic growth (Daly 1991). Further political atomization cannot solve the problems of atomized liberalism (Kassiola 1990). We will examine these propositions in more detail, noting the deficiencies of the DSP, then examine the role of macro-marketing in the critique of the ideology of consumption and its implications for QOL.

BASIC ELEMENTS OF THE DSP

The Economic Dimension

While a complete analysis of the relationship between neoclassical economics and the environmental problem is beyond the scope of this study, its essential aspects, in both micro and macro dimensions, will be addressed.

Micro Dimension

With the transformation from classical to neoclassical economics in the 1800s, the ethical and political aspects were eliminated from the discipline (Mirowski 1988, 1989; Kassiola 1990).
From Hyperconsumption to Sustainable Consumption

Hyperconsumption
- Micromarketing under the Dominant Social Paradigm

Low Knowledge of Environmental Effects by Existing Institutions

1. Present Situation
   - Economic Growth
   - Quality of Life
   - Environmental Concerns

2. Mechanisms and Relationship for Action
   - Indicators
   - Information
   - Participation
   - Political Support
   - Government/Business

3. Desired State of Sustainability
   - Economic Welfare
   - Quality of Life
   - Environmental Limits

Critical Macromarketing: Towards NEP

Source: Adapted from Macnabhten and others (1995).
Adam Smith argued that, with atomistic individuals each pursuing self-interest in impersonal markets, the greatest good would accrue to society through the operation of an invisible hand. Questions of morality and wealth distribution that had occupied the classicists were expunged from economic discourse. As the abstract concept of utility replaced production and consumption of material goods, economics was effectively separated from nature. Pursuit of economic growth became the summum bonum of progress, through which the needs of society could be met. The meaning of life was "desacralized" and became the pursuit of material gain. How to effect this process in the most technically efficient way became the province of marketing as we find it today. The overarching goal of marketing remains, as suggested earlier, to maximize consumer welfare (consumption) as efficiently as possible, suggesting that it still follows the direct track of the neoclassical paradigm.

That neoclassical economic premises motivate and direct marketing activity can be seen in a casual reading of any principles text. From the marketing concept to the four Ps, economic reductionism is written on every page. Though seldom openly acknowledged, traditional marketing also accepts continuous growth in consumption as its superordinate goal. Because of space limitations, of the many economic constructs that might be considered herein, only two will be examined: (1) free markets as the medium of market exchange and (2) individual self-interest as the motivator of exchange. We will examine each briefly in relationship to the environmental crisis.

**Free Markets**

The entire neoclassical foundation is built upon the existence of free markets in which atomized individuals, unconstrained by political forces, exercise their preferences for goods. Marketing plays a considerable role in trying to influence these preferences (Brownlie and Saren 1992; Dickinson, Herbst, and O'Shaughnessy 1986). Left to their own devices, individuals will pursue their self-interest and, in so doing, will benefit society despite their lack of concern for society. This is predicated on the assumption that the sum of individual utilities yields the common good, a dubious proposition to which we will return in the political section.

The common good does not always result, for reasons beyond the control of markets; in such cases, market failures are said to exist. From the environmental perspective, pollution and resource depletion are examples of market failures. These so-called externalities, it is argued, can be internalized using the appropriate combination of economic policy instruments, such as taxes or credits. This is seldom done effectively, however, and Dietz and van der Straaten (1992) argue that offending industries, despite their appeals to the market, do not desire market initiatives. This would effectively undermine the political power used in protecting their position.

There are practical difficulties, as well as political imperfections. Primary among these are the practical and logical difficulties in effecting economic policy instruments in the case of environmental externalities. Contingent valuation methods to arrive at prices for unpriced resources have been subject to numerous practical criticisms (Hull IV and Stewart 1992; Sagoff 1988a; Spash 1993; Swaney 1987). As for Pigouvian taxes designed to increase private costs up to true social cost, arriving at the appropriate tax to achieve the result is highly problematic. A third area of criticism is that the rights of future generations cannot be reasonably included in the analysis, and the discounting methods generally employed to do so are inappropriate for very long term projections, such as those required in environmental evaluations. In the very long term, every discount rate, no matter how small, reduces posterity to zero value. Finally, there is the logical criticism that such methods violate their own premise. The essence of free-market transactions is that they are free. Such methods as contingent valuation must assume, a priori, that all resources are, in fact, for sale. This entails a wanton disregard for property rights, the essence of the liberal tradition upon which the neoclassical system is predicated. Contingent valuation methods force individuals to sell even if they desire not to.
These issues beg an even larger problem with the free market argument. While the methods mentioned above may be appropriate for limited situations in which existing markets function (or fail to function), this is not the case for environmental problems. These are not cases in which markets have failed; they are cases in which markets do not exist. As Sagoff (1988a) states,

Our failures to make the right decisions in these matters are failures in arithmetic, failures in wisdom, failures in taste, failures in morality—but they are not failures in markets. There are no relevant markets to have failed. (p. 45)

Self-interest and Preferences

In the neoclassical tradition, self-interest is considered the sole motivator of economic, and indeed all, behavior. While this notion is almost universally attributed to Adam Smith, it represents a significant bowdlerization of his thought. The self-interested, amoral individual of the neoclassical system is the individual of Mandeville’s Fable of the Bees. In The Theory of Moral Sentiments, Adam Smith’s (1976) other book, he vilifies Mandeville’s characterization. He argues that self-interest can be quite ignoble.

The wise and virtuous man is at all times willing that his own private interest should be sacrificed to the public interest of his own particular order. (p. 235)

It does not follow that a regard to the welfare of society should be the sole virtuous motive of action, but only that, in any competition, it ought to cast the balance against all other motives. (pp. 304–5)

This suggests that Smith recognized competing interests within the individual: the public interest and the private interest must be balanced in individual decision making. Contrary to prevailing economic thought, there is not a single set of exogenous preference functions within each person. The individual is simultaneously consumer and citizen—the private interest and the public interest. In this regard, Marglin (1963) states, for example,

The preferences that govern one’s unilateral market actions no longer govern his actions when the frame of reference is shifted from the market to the political arena. The Economic Man and the Citizen are for all intents and purposes two different individuals...The market and political maps are inconsistent. (p. 98)

In a more censorious mode, Sen (1977) remarks that

The purely economic man is close to a social moron. Economic theory has been much preoccupied with the rational fool decked in the glory of his one all-purpose preference ordering. (p. 336)

The traditional economic approach confuses preferences with judgments; what I want with what I think ought to be. Similarly, marketing focuses (as with the economic approach) on what the consumer wants, disregarding (or directing) who the consumer wants to be. Assuming that consumption addresses both issues is a logical error. While there certainly is a private interest through which consumers exercise preferences for products, they are also interested in social objectives, ideals to which they think society ought to conform (Myrdal 1954). According to Sagoff (1988a),

We may also be concerned, as citizens, with education, the arts and sciences, safety and health, and the integrity and beauty of the natural environment. These concerns cannot be assimilated to the personal, arbitrary preference maps of consumers. (pp. 56–7)

Focusing exclusively on preference satisfaction provides the greatest support for the ideology of consumption; consequently, it is here that the environment suffers its greatest setbacks. In achieving a quality life based in consumption, all decisions are reduced to wanting principles; the marketing mentality suggests that whatever consumers want ought to be provided. Ideal-regarding principles are concerned with the value and origin of preferences and reflect a political mentality that has been expunged from individual decision making. This places individuals in an unrecognized dilemma regarding environmental policy. In any consumer decision, the dilemma ought to be whether to act as a self-interested consumer and get what one wants, or to act as a responsible citizen and do what ought to be done in consideration of what one wants. This dilemma never
arises in the economic process, however, because the decision has been reduced, through the ideology of consumption, to the private realm of self-interest alone. Consumption wins out over the environment because the decision is never recognized as a trade-off. As indicated in the first box of the Figure, economic well-being goes up at the expense of environmental conditions and QOL.

**Macro Dimensions**

**Continuous Exponential Growth**

The primary macro aspects of the economic contribution to environmental degradation are derivatives of the micro dimension. It is generally assumed within economics that the maximum social good is achieved as the sum of individual utilities—it is a product of the neoclassical assumptions. This further justifies continuous economic growth, since it is assumed that the more we have, the better off we are. The environmental consequences of this strategy are never questioned because, as suggested earlier, economics has been separated from nature. Nature's resources and waste storage capacity have traditionally been considered free goods in the pursuit of growth. Economic transactions do include extraction costs, but the appropriate payment to nature for low entropy matter—energy is not part of the equation. This effectively underprices goods and results in inefficient allocations that appear efficient. Whether it is possible to price resources appropriately is problematic in itself and will not be addressed further here. (For more information see Gray 1992.)

The problem of continuous growth was recognized even by classical economists, more than a century ago; Mill (1985) devoted an entire chapter to the steady state economy that will inevitably arise out of capitalism. Schumpeter (1942) argues that, by its very nature, capitalism cannot be stationary and, thus, contains within it a self-destructive logic. He also argues that, within capitalism, it is not its failures, but its very successes, that undermine the institutions that make success possible. These two taken together prompt Heilbroner (1985) to argue that the nature and logic of capitalism compels continuous economic growth. Here, again, the larger question of sustainable capitalism arises.

**Distribution of Wealth**

A second aspect of the macro dimension is the distribution of wealth within and between countries. All aspects of the neoclassical model are predicated on a given initial endowment, and efficiency can only be addressed for this particular endowment. Within this context, Pareto optimality (an action is justified if at least one person can be made better off with no one being made worse off) is offered as a value-free criterion of efficiency and becomes a justification for the status quo, which is manifestly unjust. Under this criterion, vast inequities in the distribution of wealth are justified. Thus, no consideration is taken of dissatisfaction in the unserved market (Dixon and Diehn 1992). Choice is not evenly distributed, and those who cannot consume become oppressed and disillusioned because they feel they are judged by what they consume (Gabriel and Lang 1995). There needs to be a recognition that consumer choice has negative as well as positive effects on consumers (Bauman 1992; Gabriel and Lang 1995). Pareto optimality offers a political solution, disguised as an economic criterion. As a justification for inequitable distribution, however, it can only be maintained under a condition of continuous economic growth.

Here we see the political complicit with the economic in justifying the DSP. It is well established, however, that one of the greatest contributors to environmental degradation is poverty, and it is in the logic of capitalist development in the First World that poverty in the Third World is perpetuated. As Heilbroner (1985) suggests, an integral part of the logic of capitalism is that it exerts a centrifugal force on capital, resulting in capital accumulation in the First World at the expense of the Third. Thus, consumption of material superfluities by the wealthy industrial nations is at the expense of consumption of necessities in the Third World. If, for example, consumption patterns in the latter were to rise to the same levels as those in
the West, then one could expect manufacturing to increase between 5- and 10-fold (Elkington and Hailes 1989). Such an increase in consumption is not sustainable. Therefore, we can conclude that the current emphasis on increasing consumption in the First World is inequitable and improves the QOL marginally, for relatively few people. Any set of sociopolitical institutions such as these, which result consistently in the exploitation of the poor and disadvantaged, cannot be compatible with long-term sustainability. This is particularly true when the means for increasing the capacity to consume is through technological advancement, particularly the transfer of inappropriate, large-scale technologies to the Third World. This link between the economic and technological domains is critical to an assessment of the effect of the DSP.

The Technological Dimension

Since its development, the ultimate purpose of science has been, according to Bacon (1944), the elimination of the “inconveniences of man’s estate,” not science for its own sake (which is a uniquely Aristotelian view). Whether science preceded technology, as Heidegger (1977) suggests, or technology preceded science, as White (1967) suggests, is moot at this point. Since the nineteenth century, they have formed an indissoluble unity, forced into the service of industry and becoming the means for the economic ends of perpetual growth and increasing efficiency. While many negatives can be attributed to technological change, within the logic of the DSP the sum of the achievements has far overshadowed the problems. Perhaps the one-eyed prophets of technology are conditioned to see only the benefits and to define progress as increases in consumption of material goods (Postman 1993). So long as the evaluation of technology takes place within the logic of the DSP, advancing technology will be judged beneficial to society, since its primary purpose in the DSP is to increase the flow of material goods in society.

The common criticisms of the DSP regarding technology are well known to those in the field and generally revolve around the arrogance of humanism (Ehrenfeld 1978) and a general condition of technological optimism within the DSP (Winner 1977). The more recent critiques suggest the inadequacy of technology to solve the problems it has created. The optimism within the DSP is predicated on a linear logic leading to the conclusion that, because technology has historically solved problems, it will do so indefinitely into the future. DeGregori (1985), for example, argues that natural resources do not exist, in the literal sense. Technology defines what is a resource. While there is certainly a sense in which this is true, it also is predicated on a linear logic. Such analyses fail to consider the natural limits imposed by entropy laws, which require that matter-energy be transformed from low to high entropy when it enters the economic process (Georgescu-Roegen 1971; Rifkin 1980). All technological transformations are subject to this process, including recycling and Green products. Porritt (1984) and Dobson (1990) argue that, while these approaches are necessary, they could be regarded as potentially destructive illusions when their proponents tout them as solutions.

It is only through arrogance and lack of foresight that the vision of economic growth has not been transformed by the technological limitations imposed within the entropy laws. While Daly (1991) argues that a sustainable society with zero economic growth can be envisioned, Georgescu-Roegen (1975) maintains that even a nongrowth economy with a stable population is not indefinitely sustainable. It is clear, however, that the number of sustainable years is far greater for a nongrowth than for a high-growth society.

The technological question is reduced to one of level. Ekins (1994) demonstrates through the Erlich Equation that to maintain the current consumption path in both North and South would require a 91% increase in the “efficiency” of technology over a 50-year period. This is a fairly clear indication that the technofix is no longer a viable solution. While technological development has, in the past, been able to increase the material standard of living in Western societies, this was not without social and environmental costs. Freedom from harm
must be considered one element of QOL. In addition, the freedom to choose particular courses of action has been precluded in the advancement of technology.

Because technology has the capacity to diminish QOL in significant ways, each important application of technology should be examined, in a more comprehensive and ecologically sensitive way than is offered by the prevailing technological assessment methods, for its capacity to both promote and detract from QOL. Prevalent methods typically confirm what one wants to do, not what one ought to do (Winner 1986). Technology, particularly on a large scale, has an embedded political nature, through which it leads toward certain decisions and away from others. Some technologies, such as solar power, have the capability to produce democratic institutions because they are amenable to small-scale, individual, decentralized control. Others, such as nuclear power, produce centralized, authoritarian institutions because of their inherent danger and large scale. Some are more destructive of the environment than others (Winner 1986; Postman 1993). Some are appropriate for a given level of cultural development; others are not (Schumacher 1976). These represent political choices made by the authority of technocratic rationality and expertise. Again, the conflation of technology, economics, and politics in the DSP, and the effect of the DSP on QOL, are evident.

The Political Dimension

A predominant characteristic of the political structure of Western industrial societies is hierarchical social organization, in which authority flows from the top, down. To facilitate this flow, bureaucratic administrations have developed with the criterion efficiency, much like the economic and technological dimensions. A second characteristic of concern is that when a political organization is highly centralized, a great deal of control is exercised, mainly by the authority of expertise (Habermas 1970). This effectively raises the organizational level of political decision making, which undermines the institutions of participatory democracy. The citizen of political society is overtaken by the consumer of economic society. The result is the demise of republican virtues and the triumph of the procedural republic (Sandel 1996).

The underlying purpose of the liberal political structure, stemming from Lockean liberalism, is the protection of individual rights, primarily property rights (Kassiola 1990). This leads directly to one of the fundamental aspects of the DSP. With the rise of possessive individualism (MacPherson 1962), the right to unlimited accumulation of property has become virtually equated with the notion of freedom in liberal democracies (Bellah and others 1991). This has translated into the political equivalent of laissez-faire economics (Ophuls 1977). In this political form, the state must remain neutral in competing conceptions of the good (O’Neill 1993). This is the value-neutrality assumption of liberal democratic theory (Sandel 1996). In the economic reductionism described earlier, the essence of the political is absorbed into the economic, as questions of who we are (political) are reduced to questions of what we want (economic). Within the existence of material abundance that characterized the historical periods during which the liberal tradition was established and prospered, the individualistic, laissez-faire assumptions were unsuccessfully challenged.

The conflict in the United States dates back to the framing of the Constitution and continued through to the mid-twentieth century in both political philosophy and Constitutional law (Sandel 1996). The conflict was between contrasting conceptions of plurality and its role in society. Jefferson and Madison argued that the role of the republican state was to develop institutions that produced good citizens, and that industrial development of the type found in England was destructive of republican citizenship. Sandel (1996) describes Jeffersonian republican theory as follows:

Instead of defining rights according to principles that are neutral among conceptions of the good, republican theory interprets rights in light of a particular conception of the good society—the self-governing republic... Unlike utilitarianism, republican theory does not take people’s existing preferences, whatever they may be, and try to satisfy them.
stead to cultivate in citizens the qualities of character necessary to the common good of self-government. (p. 25)

This draws the distinction between who we are and what we want very clearly, and it privileges the former. The economic interpretation of liberal theory favors the latter over the former (O‘Neill 1993). This conflict continued for more than a century before republicanism fell, finally, to the procedural neutrality of market liberalism. The consumer ultimately defeated the citizen, and the depoliticization of society was complete (Kassola 1990). The procedural republic asks only how to satisfy consumer preferences, as they are, and abandons its formative ambitions; the transformation from voice to exit as political expression in the market triumphs (Hirschman 1970). The essence of reason is reduced to consumer preferences.

Under the regime of unlimited economic growth from ostensibly unlimited resources, such institutions work well in developing productive capabilities and material well-being, but the cornucopian assumptions under which laissez-faire economics, politics, and technology evolved are rapidly coming to an end. Locke’s primary condition for the justification of unlimited accumulation, or any accumulation, was that there be “enough and as good left for others.” The condition was satisfied for the population and resource base of his time.

It is increasingly difficult to argue that this assumption is still true, and it is impossible to argue that it will remain true for the indefinite future (Daly 1991). The failure of the Lockean assumption to capture contemporary reality must be examined critically (Bellah and others 1991), yet, within the DSP, we refuse to accept this as even a possibility. Locke, Smith, Mill, Keynes, and so forth all explicitly recognized that abundance would not last indefinitely and argued that, when that time came, the institutional structures must change. Individuals pursuing their self-interest must necessarily hurt others, and under this condition, it is completely implausible to suggest that the sum of individual wills bears any relationship to Rousseau’s general will (what each would will for society if their private interest were set aside). Repoliticization of society must ensue when abundance turns to scarcity, since such economic constructs as Pareto optimality can no longer be sustained as a substitute for wealth redistribution.

Since the Pareto criterion is predicated on the distribution of absolute wealth, economic growth hides inequities. Under conditions of scarcity, relative wealth will emerge as the economic criterion central in QOL assessments. Appropriate institutions do not exist for such conditions, however (Thurow 1980), and how the “good” of society is to be distributed becomes a political question, not an economic one (Kassola 1990; Ophuls and Boyan 1992). This suggests a necessary reevaluation of the relative weights assigned to the different dimensions of QOL with less assigned to the economic domain and more to the domain of political participation.

Under conditions of scarcity, the conflict between procedural neutrality and the common good must reemerge. Economic growth and consumption were established as the “good” under conditions of resource abundance, and under that condition, procedural neutrality functioned. As conditions favorable to that regime began to diminish, advancing technology was capable of disguising the damage to nature, and what could not be disguised was defined as the “price of progress.” The conflict that was avoided must inevitably emerge as the old solutions of the DSP begin to fail. As the capacity to perpetuate unlimited growth in consumption diminishes, conflict over distribution must emerge. Growth will no longer serve to hide political and economic inequity, as it has in the past.

Clearly, the political dimension is intimately related to both the economic (Kassola 1990) and the technological dimensions (Winner 1986). This takes us to the heart of the political question. Is political reform sufficient to reverse or even abate environmental degradation? Environmental theorists do not believe so (Dobson 1990; Eckersley 1992; Hardin 1968; Ophuls 1977; Porritt 1984). Thurow (1980) argues that the coming zero-sum society lacks the political institutions necessary to make difficult choices following the failure of the growth mentality. The alternative is radical
political change, which poses the greatest threat to the DSP. The political, technological, and economic elites have a thoroughly vested interest in political reformism, since it serves to maintain their position by not calling into question the basic elements of the DSP. Veblen (1979) observed this phenomenon of institutional conservatism.

If any portion or class of society is sheltered from the action of the environment in any essential respect, ...it will in so far tend to retard the process of social transformation. The wealthy leisure class is in such a sheltered position with respect to the economic forces that make for change and readjustment. (p. 193)

This raises multiple questions regarding the prospect for political change and its effect on the environment. Within the DSP, the preferred mode of change is reformism, since this protects established interests. Reformism suggests, for example, that environmental degradation can be abated through new and better-enforced legislation because it is assumed in democratic theory that all interested parties are equally powerful in effecting change through the political process if they simply pursue their interest. Critics argue that this is a prescription for preserving the status quo. For changes of the magnitude required, a restructuring of the political process is imperative.

True participatory democracy, in which all ideas are equally voiced and equally respected, is required. This has been referred to as discursive democracy (Dryzek 1990; Habermas 1970; Hayward 1994). As presently established, in the form of laissez-faire politics subservient to economics, the market process provides for communication only through exit and not voice (Hirschman 1970); market choices require no justification or rationale. Why we choose (or not) is considered of little or no importance within both the contemporary political process and neoclassical economics. Gutmann and Thompson (1996) argue that, under conditions of scarcity, moral choices are necessary. Political deliberation contributes to the legitimacy of decisions because claims are considered on their merits, not on class, power, or wealth. Decisions on the distribution of scarce resources affecting everyone's QOL then become public, accountable, and reciprocal (a sense of mutuality in civic discourse), and inequality cannot be hidden behind the veil of impersonal market mechanisms.

RECAPITULATION

What the foregoing suggests is that the approach to studying environmental problems in marketing is far too limited. A broader approach that includes the economic, technological, and political cost/benefit trade-offs of the DSP is required. Simply ascertaining who expresses ecological concern and discovering their psychological profiles is inadequate to the task of understanding the consequences of marketing. From an ecological perspective, we must understand individuals' attitudes toward economic growth (consumption), technology (the means by which products are made and disposed of), and politics (how choices are made and what constitutes the good).

As Perlmutter and Trist (1986) suggest, most individuals, whether they know it or not, reside firmly within the DSP. Consequently, they maintain attitudes toward the environment that little resemble ecological concern. While most people express a high level of concern for the environment, they simultaneously hold anthropocentric opinions about economics, technology, and politics that lie firmly within the DSP and contradict their expressed ecological concern. Previous research suggests that consumers need to be made aware of the environmental crisis in order to respond with appropriate behavior. The argument offered here suggests an alternative outcome. When made aware, concerned consumers will increase their efforts, believing they are doing the necessary thing while they may, in fact, be making the problem worse. Recycling and Green products, while a necessary condition for the abatement of the environmental crisis, will result in too little, too late (Porritt 1984). Fundamental change is required in the transformation from the DSP to a new environmental paradigm (Dunlap and van Liere 1978). Foremost in this transformation is a radical change in the ideology of consumption—a shift from hyper-consumption to sustainable consumption as the economic element in QOL assessment.
FROM HYPERCONSUMPTION TO SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION

Under the present hyperconsumption, quite a large percentage of the population exhibits the tendencies suggested by critics of the DSP. Given such a condition, political and economic attitudes would be consistent with the DSP and negatively related to environmental concern. The more confidence people have in the economic and political institutions of the DSP, the less concerned they are with the environment (Kilbourne and McDonagh 1996). The implication of this faith in the DSP is that solutions for environmental problems will be sought within the paradigm.

If the DSP institutions are, in fact, part of the problem, then the fears of critics may be confirmed. This is depicted in the top left-hand corner of the Figure. The focal part of this diagram draws on the work of Macnaghten and others (1995) and shows a move from the present situation (Box 1) of a diminishing QOL and environmental conditions in favor of economic growth towards a desired state of sustainability (Box 3). The economic, rather than dominating the definition of QOL, is a subset of it. Those authors note that the mechanisms and relationships for bringing about such change rely on indicators of sustainability. This is central to our argument, insofar as we are saying these indicators are being constructed and debated under the constraints of the DSP.

From a policy standpoint, the implications are clear. Increased concern for the environment is not required. Concern already exists among the majority of society. What is needed is increased awareness of the relationship between technological, political, and economic institutions and environmental deterioration. Knowledge of this relationship (shown in the top right-hand part of the Figure) by the general public is currently at a low level. As that knowledge increases, the change required to reach a desired state of sustainability will become more widely recognized and demanded. Macromarketing can make a critical contribution by examining the relationship between the DSP and the environment.

The liberal Enlightenment philosophy of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries pervades the DSP and informs the ideology of contemporary Western industrial society and its desire for hyperconsumption. Indeed, our definitions of success are determined by such consumption. It is not increased concern for the environment that is required, but a critical examination of contemporary institutions that unveils their ideological character and their complicit role in environmental decline (O'Connor 1994). Can marketing's role be to inform society that the institutional emperor has no ecological clothes to wear?! With a firm footing in the realities of a finite system, the growth ideology of the DSP will be exposed as an anachronism maintained by vested interests and supported by a profligate consumer society. Because macromarketing is complicit in this process, it becomes the role of macromarketing to address the issues and convince others of the merits of this work.

It would appear that, in times of ecological crisis, the activities of what Beck (1992) calls new social movements (for example, Friends of the Earth or the Institute for Progressive Communications) take on higher credibility than existing institutions. These new social movements are marketing alternative solutions to the problems. This may well be why these organizations are actively sought out by citizens who want reliable information as to what is really happening in the risk society. The interest expressed in these movements indicates a lack of trust in present institutions and suggests an expanded domain of inquiry.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE MARKETING RESEARCH AGENDA

There appears to be a growing revisionist element of marketing research that challenges the DSP. Some researchers take a macro perspective, others take a micro viewpoint, and some a mixture of the two. Areas covered and issues raised are wide-ranging and include socially responsible consumption (Fisk 1973), marketing and ecological crisis (Fisk 1974), viewing goods from a systems perspective (Stanley and Tschirhart 1993), green marketing...
(Peattie 1995; Peattie and Charter 1994), environmental marketing management (Coddington 1993; McDonagh and Prothero 1993; Peattie 1995), greening the marketing mix (Siminitiras, Schlegelmilch, and Diamantopoulos 1993), new product development (Dermody and Hammer-Lloyd 1995), organizational buying behavior (Drumwright 1994), consumer behavior (Dembkowski and Hammer-Lloyd 1994), Green advertising (Kilbourne 1995), Green marketing communications (Prothero, McDonagh, and Peattie 1994), public policy issues and recycling (Fuller, Allen, and Glaser 1996), and sustainable communication (McDonagh 1994; McDonagh and Clark 1995).

Many marketing academics focus attention on a specific product sector. A selective reading of the literature reveals such sectors as cars (Prothero 1994), cosmetics and toiletries (Prothero and McDonagh 1992; Prothero 1996), chemicals (Peattie and Ratnayaka 1992), detergents (Henion 1972), food (Grunert and Kristensen 1992), and transportation (Kassarjian 1971). While this demonstrates a broadening perspective, there is a much larger scope to be developed by macromarketing in any change process. Micromarketing is not up to the task.

THE ROLE OF MACROMARKETING

The present crisis of industrial society stems from success, not failure. It is up to macromarketers to work out just what their role may be in the process of making the ecological issue culturally significant. As Beck (1995) maintains, the present institutions and systems need to embrace change.

The key to combating destruction of the environment is not found in the environment itself, nor in a different individual morality or in different research or business ethics; by nature it lies in the regulatory systems of the institutions that are becoming historically questionable. Ecological conflict logic is not played out by different agents or different institutions in different arenas but, rather by the same industrial society agents (supplemented by social movements and citizen’s groups). The ecological crisis is a liberating process within and against bureaucracy. (pp. 141–3)

This brings macromarketing to center stage in the change process. Because the problem and the solutions are embedded in the established institutions of industrial society, the radical change required in these same institutions cannot be legitimated. The change required will transform both the institutions and their agents, for whom such change is anathema. Some less radical but significant changes are suggested by Beck (1995).

1) Private insurance for everyone, all industries and all research!

2) Establish correlation standards as the foundation for legal recognition of environmental damage, instead of strict causal proof;

3) Change the burden of proof so that the agents in industry and the sciences become obligated to justify themselves in public;

4) Respond to claims of technical safety with liability for damages;

5) Reformulate the polluter-pays principle by creating regional accountabilities for benefited and harmed business sectors (e.g., coastal regions, with their hotel and restaurant structure, and the chemical and industrial regions which create the pollutant muck that drives away guests);

6) Suggest and negotiate agreements on the recognition of damage and on compensation payments between a region’s industrial plants and its population (as happens in Japan). (p. 130)

Beck concludes that, beneath the surface of conformity, ecological criticism has entered all areas of activity; its characteristic interrelatedness surpasses nationalities, destabilizes routines, splits industrial sectors, and leaves parents to deal with their children’s penetrating questions. Beck (1995) notes that there is one breath of fresh air, so to speak, from the academic viewpoint.

In both theory and practice, the question of how to democratically defuse the problem of the industrial system’s production of both wealth and destruction remains completely open. (p. 151)

New macromarketing theory may develop around a contemporary response to the
ecological crisis and what marketing's role is to be in the emerging discourse on ecocentrism, sustainable development, and, most recently, sustainable consumption (International Institute... 1996). Marketing research and reporting need to focus more on the role of macromarketing in conveying the deficiencies of the institutions within the DSP and on how it might influence the form of radical ecological change needed to transform those institutions. Academic marketers must question not only the DSP, but also their own existence. This is important, because reliance on the marketing concept by mainstream marketing is firmly anthropocentric and, as suggested earlier, contributes to the destruction of the natural environment. It is also self-evident that without a habitable natural environment, there will be no QOL.

Analysis of Environmental Impacts

We have argued that micromarketing is informed by neoclassical economics and that its methods of analysis are predicated on the same assumptions. As a result, its conclusions about consumption alternatives typically confirm the status quo, suggesting that the economic criterion for QOL ought to take precedence over other possible criteria. To break this cycle of confirmation, methods that are not the product of economic reductionism and technological optimism are required. Traditional cost/benefit analysis (CBA), contingent valuation methods (CVM), and discounting methods are inappropriate, due to the unique character of environmental problems. Because they are multidimensional, irreversible, multisectoral, multigenerational, spatially unlimited, and subject to conflicting interests and ideologies, traditional, reductionist economic and marketing measures cannot capture the complexity of the problems. The analysis required must be holistic and interdisciplinary, which effectively eliminates traditional methods (Soderbaum 1987).

Macromarketing has the capacity to develop and use the necessary types of measures because of its multidisciplinary potential. By incorporating the political, economic, and technological dimensions in its analysis, macromarketing can expand and transform the domain of inquiry in environmental problems, avoiding the "fallacy of unfinished business," which suggests that to solve the environmental problem we must apply the same old methods more vigorously (Shrader-Frechette 1982).

One such expansion involves CBA, which is unidimensional and reductionist in its traditional use. In reducing all costs and benefits to monetary value, the approach reduces political and ethical questions to satisfaction of preferences at the margin (Sagoff 1988b). By reintroducing deliberation over both the options and the method of deliberation itself (Mishan 1980), CBA can be expanded so that both costs and benefits have ecological compatibility, sustainability, and social justice contexts (Swaney 1987). When standards of sustainability are imposed on conventional methods, these are expanded to incorporate an open systems approach that is informed by political and ethical deliberation (Dietz and van der Straaten 1992).

Systems thinking and political and ethical deliberation are also characteristic of positional analysis, which goes beyond the monetary or market values assumed in CBA. Environmental costs must be considered extramarket, in that they are heterogeneous and are suffered by both present and future society. Because different decision makers arrive with different values, their assessments of alternatives must frequently diverge. In positional analysis, consideration is given to both the environmental effects of the alternatives and the ideological profiles or unique interests of the individual decision makers. This is a deliberative process that incorporates ecological thinking; sustainability; and more traditional, growth-oriented perspectives in a single framework.

As we argued earlier, this is precisely the type of analysis that fits the framework of macromarketing and avoids the reductionist, market-based analyses of micromarketing. It reintroduces the political element that Sandel (1996) and Gutmann and Thompson (1996) suggest is missing in liberal democracies and that we suggest is missing in micromarketing analysis. It is within the framework of macromarketing to address both analytical means and social and environmental ends, specifically in light of contemporary environmental and social
realities. Under conditions of imminent resource scarcity, new categories of expression are required to reestablish moral and political discourse, since all choices exist in trade-off relationships that may not exist in conditions of abundance (Winner 1986). Consequently, new ways of thinking about QOL and its relationship to the environment are necessary for, as Einstein once observed, “We cannot solve the problems we have created with the same thinking that created them” (quoted in Dowie 1995).

Analysis of Consumption

The issue of need satisfaction and QOL also must be addressed. Critical studies of this subject tend to be dealt with by those outside the mainstream marketing academy or from other disciplines. Authors from outside of marketing have suggested that “consumption is thus a matter of distinguishing oneself from others in terms of taste, prestige, and, consequently, power” ( Alvesson 1994). If mainstream members of the academy do not address these issues, macromarketing has a crucial role to play in changing the position within the marketing discipline. Meanwhile, mainstream marketers are conducting more research to help them implement such principles as the marketing concept. The spate of articles on market orientation in the early 1990s illustrates this (see, for example, Kohli and Jaworski 1990; Narver and Slater 1990). It is ironic that even the ecologically oriented research in micromarketing has had as its objective increasing consumption through Green target markets. This characteristic search for the solution within the DSP results in perpetuation of the status quo, that is, that the effects of too much consumption can be solved by more consumption.

These issues will be difficult to bring to light. Macromarketing has remained sidelined because of the criticism by micromarketers, ironically, that it is not scientific enough (Tamilia 1992). Citing the work of Monieson (1988) and Dholakia (1988), Tamilia (1992) notes that a reliance upon logical empiricism may have, in fact, contributed to society’s problems. Indeed, it has also contributed, through Enlightenment science and technology, to the destruction of the natural environment.

We have argued here that the principles of micromarketing may have decreased consumers’ QOL and contributed to the deterioration of our natural environment. If the strength of our discipline is its “willingness to re-examine its focus, techniques and goals” (Kotler 1972), then we must call on the mainstream marketing academy to take on board the issues being discussed by macromarketers and others outside the marketing academy. It is unlikely that micromarketers will heed the call, however, because they are firmly rooted in the DSP. The issue for macromarketing is to consider issues, not only from the viewpoint of individual QOL and social welfare, but also from a natural environment perspective, an integral part of the other two. If we continue to ignore the environmental implications of the ideology of consumption and its effect on QOL, then it is reasonable to accept Hirsch’s (1977) conclusion, “To punish mortals for their sins, the gods grant their wishes.”

References


