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## **A Framework for Sustainable Marketing.**

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## **A Framework for Sustainable Marketing.**

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## **A Framework for Sustainable Marketing.**

### **Abstract**

This article examines how sustainable marketing could be achieved through the contribution of three existing marketing sub-disciplines; green marketing, social marketing and critical marketing. Green marketing facilitates the development and marketing of more sustainable products and services whilst introducing sustainability efforts into the core of the marketing process and business practice. Social marketing involves using the power of marketing to encourage sustainable behaviour amongst individuals, businesses and decision makers whilst also assessing the impact of current commercial marketing of sustainability. This links into the critical marketing paradigm which entails analyses of marketing theory, principles and techniques using a critical theory based approach. This analysis can help to guide regulation and control, development of marketing theory and practice, and to challenge the dominant institutions associated with marketing and the capitalist system, encouraging a marketing system in which sustainability is a key goal. The article concludes by offering a framework for sustainable marketing and a way forward for how this might be achieved.

**Keywords: Sustainability, consumption, social marketing, green marketing, critical marketing**

## **A Framework for Sustainable Marketing.**

### **Introduction: Sustainability on the Agenda**

Sustainability has been defined as “the consumption of goods and services that meet basic needs and quality of life without jeopardizing the needs of future generations” (OECD 2002). As Cooper (2005) indicates, this may be interpreted in a number of ways, but principally sustainability is about limiting the throughput of resources, while making the best use of those resources available. Sustainability is now a mainstream issue, evidenced by the growing interest shown in sustainable issues (Bandura, 2007; Fitzsimmons, 2008). This conceptual paper examines how three dimensions of marketing; green marketing, social marketing and critical marketing, contribute to a framework for sustainable marketing.

Sustainability appears to have entered the mainstream political agenda. However, consensus around issues such as climate change, pollution and sustainability is not universal, - evidenced by the failure to reach a climate deal at the Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in Copenhagen 2009. The deep divisions around how to tackle climate change while sustaining economic growth, are indicative of how action is perceived as contrary to the infinite economic growth theory that underpins capitalist economics and western consumerism. Nevertheless, we live on a finite planet, presenting major challenges. These include climate change, production and consumption, energy and resources, population demographics and human behaviour. Marketing has a central role to play in tackling these because it can influence behaviour. Marketing provides a tool for change agents such as the government or the third sector. The purpose of this paper is to outline how sustainable marketing could be achieved through the contribution of three existing marketing sub-disciplines; green marketing, social marketing and critical marketing which are analysed in

turn to develop a proposed framework for sustainable marketing. To inform the analysis it is worth considering how marketing and sustainability have coexisted heretofore.

## **Marketing and Sustainability?**

As economies implode, and nefarious business decisions are exposed, there has been, considerable criticism that marketers have been complicit through their encouragement of unsustainable patterns of consumption (James 2007; De Graaf *et al.*, 2005;). Nor has the environmental cause been helped by dubious environmental product claims (Crane, 2000). It is evident that “extensive environmental damage has been caused by continuous consumption, marketing, manufacturing, processing, discarding and polluting” (Saha and Darnton, 2005, p117), leading to suggestions that “a sustainable future is not achievable while disregarding the key contributors to ecological degradation – population growth and high consumptive lifestyles” (Bandura, 2007, p32).

However, marketing is central to global society, and when harnessed responsibly can encourage us to recycle, reuse, buy Fairtrade, eat healthily, drink sensibly, save energy and support good causes. Marketing serves an important function in promoting economic development around the world, raising living standards in many countries (Fisk 2001). The commercial potential following the recent economic crisis to further the goals of sustainability and provide ethical products and services remains considerable (Carrigan and de Pelsmacker, 2009). In the race for economic development governments, society and business have created environments in which marketing has flourished to serve consumer and societies’ needs. Marketing ‘negatives’ are an effect of wider societal and structural conditions and not necessarily a direct cause of unsustainable practices, just as consumption

is a collection of social practices that influence, and are influenced by, lifestyle choices, social norms, societal structures and institutions (Connolly and Prothero, 2005; Jackson, 2005).

While historically governments have been reluctant to curb the material consumption of their citizens (Cohen, 2001), there is growing impatience with the less sustainable outcomes from marketing activity. For example, India's government has levied a 114% tax on luxury goods to address conspicuous consumption (Bendell and Kleanthous, 2007). While arguments about wealth disparities are not new, engendering good relationships with developing markets are critical to the future of the consumer industry, while the credibility of products becomes increasingly linked to their ability to advance well being rather than harm (Charles, 2010; Nair, 2008). It appears the hegemony of a dominant social paradigm (DSP) and the role of marketing within it has played a part in environmental decline (Kilbourne and Carlson, 2008). Herein lies the crux of the marketing problem. Currently marketing does exactly what it is supposed to do, selling more goods, encouraging consumption and making profits. It is not inherently managed to deliver sustainability, thus its potential to do so is often overlooked.

Marketing's functionality emanates not only from structural conditions but from features within the discipline's fundamental principles and practices. The dominance of a managerialist, functionalist theoretical approach to marketing often means less focus on the effect of marketing as a social institution of significant importance and impact, with undoubted implications on sustainability. Yet recent concerns and pressures have begun to shift the landscape. While Porter's (1985) value chain has been used to conceptualize the positive value created by a firm for its customers and, through complex exchanges, for a range of organizational stakeholders, Polonsky *et al.*'s (2003) 'harm chain' considers how those exchanges may also result in the generation of harm. These often unintentional harms

or ‘moral externalities’ (Gowri, 2004), as they are defined, have received only limited attention within the marketing literature (cf. Desmond and Crane, 2004; Fry and Polonsky, 2004a). Fry and Polonsky (2004b, p.1209) identify that while typically firms engage in marketing activities with outcomes beneficial to both the firm and its stakeholders, an increasing number of situations occur where successful marketing activities impact on society in an “unanticipated negative manner.”

This has generated reviews of marketing in order to allow it to play a viable role in sustainable development (Desmond and Crane, 2004; Peattie and Peattie, 2009; van Dam and Apeldoorn, 1996). To achieve this it has become clear that marketing itself needs to become sustainable. Several marketing academics have begun exploring a sustainable marketing paradigm (Peattie and Peattie, 2009; Cooper 2005; Fuller, 1999). Sustainability would therefore become a central component of all marketing thought and practice, one that carries a convincing business case from a consumer perspective. Consumers report an increased disposition towards ethical behaviours; a recent Boston Consulting Group (BCG) study of 9,000 consumers in nine countries (Manget *et al.*, 2009) concluded that green and ethical issues are a significant factor influencing where consumers shop and what they buy.

### *Breaking down barriers*

However marketing has another role to play - marketing sustainability. There is still a lack of awareness, understanding, trust, and in some cases apathy about sustainability issues amongst consumers (Szmigin *et al.*, 2009; Connolly and Prothero, 2008; Chatzidakis *et al.*, 2007). Only one in three Americans believe humans are responsible for climate change (Pew Research Center, 2009). Furthermore most initiatives promoting sustainability have been implemented upstream, aimed at altering structural conditions that embed consumer behaviour, and encompass incentives, legislation, environmental design, technological

development and norms; the stronger the habits the bigger the need for upstream interventions (Verplanken and Wood, 2006). Primarily, these have focused on techno-fixes, developing new technology and getting industry and businesses to become more sustainable, for example, the ‘choice editing’ strategies for white goods to eliminate energy inefficient household appliances and light bulbs (Mayo and Fielder, 2006). Until now, governments have been reluctant to target individual behaviour, or have focused upon large numbers of individuals making small changes. Thøgersen and Compton (2009) argue that although governments are constrained through resistance from the electorate, “the impasse between government, business and individuals must, somehow, be broken...[to achieve]..the kind of public intervention that will make a difference” (Hale, 2008, p.12). This reluctance and the complexities of the political/environmental interface have been explained elsewhere (Dryzek, 1996), and for some governments, there a view that sustainability is electorally unwise, or could threaten relations with commerce, but this is not universal. Telling people they can no longer drive everywhere, consume as they see fit, or take frequent flights is undoubtedly unpopular. Yet an important message to deliver to firms and consumers’ is that seeking more resource-efficient ways of meeting our needs and aspirations does not have to mean a reduction in wellbeing (Connolly and Prothero, 2003). Dryzek (1996) posits a rather more sophisticated reason for political inaction, citing collusion with big business and political inertia, arguing that for governments to do otherwise would mean challenging the dominant political and economic systems in place.

These factors influence the sustainability agenda across the globe. In the case of some of the developing countries in the world such as India, China and Brazil sustainability does not fit easily with economic development, yet they are increasingly proactive on issues such as greenhouse emissions and excess materialism (Bendell and Kleanthous, 2007). The role of the third sector is crucial here as NGOs and organisations like the United Nations and

Greenpeace, are well placed to utilise their global reach and competence to promote and support a sustainability agenda. However relevant stakeholders can do more to improve their working relationships in this area (Church and Lorek, 2007). There has been some movement on these issues – for example the ‘No Dirty Gold’ campaign (Global Witness/Amnesty International, 2007) championed by Earthworks and Oxfam, in partnership with luxury retailers such as Cartier, Piaget, and Van Cleef & Arpels – but there is still much to be achieved.

The question of whether responsible organizations can help change society also implies an overall belief that change is difficult not only to initiate, but also to sustain. Indeed, the challenges related to behavioural change have been extensively analyzed within the extant literature. Two central issues related to behavioural change is the gap between consumers’ professed desire to change and their actual behaviour (Carrigan and Attala, 2001; McEachern *et al.* 2007) and the need to interrupt habitual actions (Jackson, 2005). To reduce these ‘coherent inconsistencies’ (Moraes *et al.*, 2010) and habitual behaviour (Jackson, 2005) consumers must understand and become sensitized to the linkages between production, consumption and disposal systems, and to the environmental impacts caused by such structures (Peattie and Collins, 2009). Above all, organizations interested in advancing sustainable lifestyles must bring such environmental impacts into consumers’ everyday discursive consciousness (Jackson, 2005), and facilitate change through the implementation of targeted and effective ‘downstream plus’ and ‘upstream’ interventions (Verplanken and Wood, 2006).

To address these complexities, this article will examine three ways in which sustainable marketing can be achieved:

1. Green Marketing – Developing and marketing more sustainable products and services whilst introducing sustainability efforts at the core of the marketing and business process.
2. Social Marketing – Using the power of upstream and downstream marketing interventions to encourage sustainable behaviour.
3. Critical Marketing – Analysing marketing using a critical theory based approach to guide regulation and control and stimulate innovation in markets with a focus on sustainability, but moreover challenging some of the dominant institutions of the capitalist and marketing systems, to construct a more sustainable marketing discipline.

The suggested framework builds upon existing ideas about how the marketing system needs to change to be more sustainable (Peattie 2007), the concept of sustainable life marketing (UNEP 2005) which seeks to recognise that current consumption patterns are unsustainable, and that changes in consumer behaviour are required to support the introduction of new technologies or sound consumption patterns.

Sustainable marketing seeks a solution in which commercial goods can be marketed in a responsible way that does not adversely impact upon sustainability. Essentially, in terms of marketing consumption, this can be boiled down to a case of wants and needs (Peattie 2007). That we change the “over-arching goal” of capitalist society and shun “ever higher levels” product consumption (Etzioni, 1998, p. 619) towards a position where only items that are considered as ‘needs’ are marketed and those that are simply ‘wants’ are not, is a well documented argument (e.g. Musgrove, 1974; Schor, 1998). While possibly a simplistic and utopian construct, it has intuitive appeal given the current marketing system, in which the

goals of upward consumption and profit, is proving unsustainable. However rather than offering marginal changes to the current marketing system, which Thøgersen and Crompton (2009) suggest delivers only marginal improvements in sustainable impact - this model goes on to offer some solution to the tensions that exist around the very core of the existing marketing system.

## **Green Marketing**

The first way in which marketing can become more sustainable is through the development and use of green marketing. Peattie (1995) describes green marketing as: “the holistic management process responsible for identifying, anticipating and satisfying the requirements of customers and society, in a profitable and sustainable way.” In other words, marketers use their skills to encourage sustainable consumption by influencing all the components of the marketing process.

A considerable literature on green marketing has been developed (e.g. Thøgersen and Crompton, 2009; Connolly and Prothero 2008; Peattie, 1995, 1999). Green marketing is about companies applying sustainable thinking holistically, from production to post purchasing service, aiming to balance the company’s need for profit with the wider need to protect the environment. This provides examples such as the ‘Prius Model’ in which marketing uses sustainable practices in product development and design resulting in the hybrid car described in box 1. It also includes using, bio-degradable, recycled or reduced packaging, such as Marks & Spencer’s ‘Plan A’; designing a washing powder with less harmful chemical additives such as Ecover; manufacturing using less resources and

producing less waste, more ethical supply chains such as Fairtrade, through to more responsible ways of promoting products and services.

## **INSERT BOX 1 HERE**

A green marketing approach has several benefits. First of all from a business perspective it is potentially profitable. While the organic sector is suffering, other green and ethical choices, such as local produce, fairtrade and animal welfare are gaining ground (Carrigan and de Pelsmacker, 2009). Forty-two percent of UK adults would like more retailers and manufacturers to reduce food miles and source products locally, and 28 percent are willing to pay more for locally produced food (Traill, 2006). Consumer research has indicated that in markets in which differences between the leading brands are marginal eco-performance can act as a decision-maker (Christensen, 1995; Peattie, 1999). This creates the potential for win-win situations in which the companies can pursue strategies that benefit both the environment and the company (Elkington, 1994). This approach can make a difference. The development of fuel efficient CFC free fridges has resulted in an improvement in the outlook of ozone depletion and contributes to energy conservation efforts. Also it appeals to growing consumer demands for “product traceability, supply chain standards, product authenticity and quality” (De Beers, 2008. p.7), reflecting a consumer transition to more considered consumption that businesses can serve (Carrigan and de Pelsmacker, 2009). Finally green marketing, if performed with integrity (e.g. Café Direct), is brand and corporate image enhancing, and likely to engender goodwill for public and media relations.

However there are several issues and concerns to consider when considering green marketing. Firstly, green marketing often needs to be incentivised by the government, or the regulatory or business environment, such as the UK government’s boiler replacement scheme, or Tesco’s low energy bulb campaign. However, such initiatives are limited both in

scope and impact (Thøgersen and Crompton, 2009). Furthermore consumer doubts still persist about green product performance, exacerbated by the competing views expressed around the benefits of organic food (Food Standards Agency, 2009; Ginsberg and Bloom, 2004). There is also an issue with exaggeration and over estimation of the impact of green marketing efforts (Saha and Darnton, 2005); one third of UK consumers think companies exaggerate their environmental credentials (YouGov, 2007). For example Virgin Atlantic airlines generated much publicity about their efforts on sustainability and the idea of towing aeroplanes prior to take off (an idea that was retrenched due to operational difficulties) and the use of bio fuels (i.e. one short publicity flight) that has been criticised for merely being a PR stunt. Even bio-fuels present tensions; despite being marketed as ‘green’ they can be inefficient, currently generate a carbon footprint higher than fossil fuels, and their production has been criticised for undermining food supplies and increasing prices (Crutzen *et al.* 2007).

Many of these issues have caused the initial enthusiasm towards the approach to dissipate and have generated what some refer to as a green marketing consumer backlash (Crane, 2000). Critics have cited examples of green ‘puffery’ as some businesses and industries mislead people with their ‘Green-Wash’ (Monbiot, 2007). Despite being able to make some difference there is arguably limited impact that green marketing can have on the state of the environment (Hartmann and Ibáñez, 2006) without more fundamental global change. Reliance on superficial behavioural changes by firms and consumers serves to “deflect pressure for governments to adopt ambitious and potentially unpopular policies and regulations”, while allowing companies to claim they are making meaningful contributions through minor gestures (Thøgersen and Crompton, 2009, p. 159). A robust and collective green marketing effort is required to generate the necessary consumer response to environmentalism that will overcome the cynicism that surrounds green marketing. Until now, the limited, sometimes misconceived contribution it has made to sustainability has

caused much of the initial enthusiasm surrounding the concept to dissipate (Peattie and Crane, 2005).

Finally green marketing puts the onus on the commercial world and environmental factors to foster sustainable development, largely neglecting individual consumer behaviour. While companies may do all they can to pursue a green marketing effort to contribute to sustainability, if consumers do not change their own behaviour to become more sustainable then little will be achieved. Green marketing is not a panacea, and may cause unintended harm or ‘rebound effects’ if not properly monitored (Hertwich, 2005). Driving a Toyota Prius may be more sustainable than driving a Hummer, but not if consumers increase their car usage under the misapprehension that the vehicle has no impact upon the environment. Similar contradictory green consumption behaviour has been identified; for example spending the savings from energy reduction on more electrical appliances (Hertwich, 2005). Therefore a conclusion can be drawn that green marketing needs to be complemented by other activity to achieve the goal of sustainable marketing.

## **Social Marketing**

Given the limitations of green marketing, particularly its inability to target individual behaviour, it becomes apparent that by itself it is insufficient to achieve sustainable marketing. However, when combined with green marketing strategies, social marketing can be an effective “pathway” to encourage more sustainable marketing solutions (Peattie and Peattie, 2009, p. 260). Social marketing has been defined by the UK National Social Marketing Centre as:

‘the systematic application of marketing concepts and techniques, to achieve specific behavioural goals for a social or public good’ (French and Blair-Stevens, 2006, p4)

Essentially social marketing is about marketing social change. Like commercial marketing it is still concerned with changing human behaviour but rather than looking to increase market share, consumption or profits it is about changing people’s behaviour for the benefit of society as a whole. The aim may be to foster a change in health behaviour, social behaviour or sustainable behaviour. An important feature of social marketing is consumer orientation, which can be effective at winning people over, engaging them, motivating them and empowering them as individuals or within communities (McKenzie-Mohr, 1999). In doing so behaviour change can be achieved that can be of benefit to the individual and to society, such as the Bristol Cycle City project where social marketing has been used to encourage less car use and double cycling rates in Britain’s first ‘Cycle’ city. Citizens will benefit from better air quality, less traffic congestion, safer roads, and cheaper transport, as well as improved health and well-being,

While social marketing aims to deliver social good, not everyone will necessarily welcome attempts by government departments or others to impose their agenda on populations who resist change and what they see as social engineering (Kotler and Zaltman, 1971). Furthermore the source of social marketing initiatives is an issue as commercially sponsored social marketing can be treated with scepticism (Hastings and Angus, 2008). Re-tooling marketing to promote reduced consumption is not the contradiction in terms it might seem, and as Peattie and Peattie (2009) suggest, there are pathways through this resistance. Thus a campaign such as Bristol Cycle City moves people away from an intensive form of consumption (the car) both materially and economically, to a much lower intensity behaviour to meet the same need (Peattie and Peattie, 2009). In the same way that green marketers are working to dispel the perception of eco-friendly behaviour as a ‘colder, darker place’

(Connolly and Prothero, 2003 p.282), social marketers can tackle resistance by positioning social good supportively and persuasively. This also applies to the involvement of commercial organisations in social marketing initiatives – for example in partnership with NGOs which has proved successful in the past (Kotler and Lee, 2008).

To help inform the design and implementation of social marketing interventions Andreasen (2002) constructed a set of benchmark criteria for a social marketing intervention which were further developed by the UK National Social Marketing Centre to include eight benchmarks. The benchmark criteria are outlined in box 2 below:

## **INSERT BOX 2 HERE**

Systematic reviews assessing the effectiveness of social marketing health behaviour interventions suggests the approach can be effective (Gordon *et al.*, 2006; Stead *et al.*, 2007). Others are recognising that these principles and practice could be transferrable to promote sustainable behaviour (Geller, 1989; Altman and Petkus, 1994; Shrum *et al.*, 1994, Peattie and Peattie, 2009). Maibach (1993) explains that the principles and practices of social marketing form a useful approach for developing solutions to environmental problems that can be used to assist campaigners and policy planners to translate growing global concern over sustainability issues into effective action.

Social marketing and sustainability offer a good fit given the focus on voluntary behaviour change and the fact that many of the behaviour change theories and psycho-social variables that influence sustainable behaviour are similar to those found in other social marketing approaches, for example, public health interventions to prevent substance misuse (McKenzie-Mohr, 1999). Until recently, governments have been reluctant to engage with individuals on the sustainability issues, preferring to work upstream, for example emissions targets for the

motor industry, as it is viewed as less risky in electoral terms. Social marketing provides a behaviour change tool that stakeholders can use to target individual behaviour change to promote sustainability. Further, delivery agents such as the third sector could be crucial in helping to engage with people on sustainability issues by using social marketing.

The evidence base is growing. A number of social marketing programmes to promote sustainability have been implemented in range of countries including the UK, US and Canada, targeting areas such as recycling (Herrick, 1995), composting (McDermott *et al.*, 2004), sustainable transport use (Thøgersen, 2007), energy efficiency (Kennedy *et al.*, 2000) and sustainable mining (Bendell and Kleanthous, 2007). In the UK the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs commissioned research into using social marketing for promoting sustainable lifestyles (Barr *et al.*, 2006), while in the USA, the Centre of Excellence in Climate Change Communication Research at George Washington University has been set up with the aim of using social marketing to tackle climate change issues. An example of a social marketing intervention designed to encourage sustainability is given below in box 3.

### **INSERT BOX 3 HERE**

Social Marketing is not only well placed to change people's immediate behaviours, but has potential as a tool for changing values that are consistent with prevailing institutions and then recreate this in daily behaviour. For example, within the luxury fashion industry, there are efforts being made to move consumers towards more considered consumption, discouraging disposability and promoting longevity within the fashion sector. During London Fashion week 2009 the UK Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra)

launched SCAP, the Sustainable Clothing Action Plan whose objectives are to reduce the environmental and social impact of disposable fashion, and reduce landfill. An alternative marketing approach emphasising maintenance, repair and recycling, and the pursuit of rewards systems such as heritage and ownership is gaining ground, even among aspirational brands such as Louis Vuitton (Bendell and Kleanthous, 2007).

Several social marketing initiatives have sought to change values and attitudes as a means of influencing behaviours. Achieving a change in values and attitudes is often a pre-requisite for behaviour change efforts; the interest in sustainable fashion is underpinned by a move in social values away from conspicuous (what you wear) consumption, to considered (who you are) consumption (De Beers, 2008; Bendell and Kleanthous, 2007). This can be done by publicising the benefits of a change in values and a shifting in social norms, things that have been achieved by social marketing campaigns in other areas such as, for example, smoking behaviour. The 'Truth' campaign delivered a shift in values and norms in which it was previously seen to be cool and rebellious to smoke if you were a teenager. The campaign used a counter marketing strategy to successfully challenge norms by demonstrating how the tobacco industry was manipulating young people by targeting them with their marketing campaigns and impacting their consumer behaviour. The Truth campaign was effective at challenging norms, changing attitudes and the behaviour of young people, achieving a reduction in smoking rates (Sly *et al.*, 2001, Niederdeppe *et al.*, 2004). Therefore social marketing can potentially dually challenge social norms that may have an adverse impact on sustainability while also delivering behavioural change outcomes.

In addition to the ability to effect individual behaviour change delivered by targeted interventions, social marketing can also be used in the upstream environment. Upstream social marketing seeks to encourage policymakers, communities, regulators, managers and law makers to adopt new policies, or organisations to make improvements to their services

and practice, rather than focusing on individual behaviour change. Traditionally social marketing has adhered to the structuralist-functionalist paradigm focusing on individual level interventions predominantly in the area of public health. This situation drew criticism from many within social marketing calling for more attention on fundamental social structural conditions upstream (Wallack, 1990; Novelli, 1996).

In response a stream of thought has emerged espousing a shift in focus within the social marketing field towards upstream applications (Andreasen 1995; Goldberg, 1995). Wells (1993) and Shimp (1994) have called for greater concentration on life changing options and increased attention to substantive issues such as public policy (Hastings *et al.*, 2000). The idea posits that social marketers should focus on upstream, environmental and policy factors, as well as individual behaviours when structuring their research (Verplanken and Wood, 2006; Polonsky *et al.*, 2003). Upstream social marketing can involve media advocacy, influencing policy change, regulation and law making and building an evidence base. The latter activity often involves research to investigate the impact commercial marketing has on society and can be termed ‘critical social marketing’ (Hastings, 2009). This has roots in Lazer and Kelley’s (1973) definition of Social Marketing:

*“Social marketing is concerned with the application of marketing knowledge, concepts, and techniques to enhance social as well as economic ends. **It is also concerned with analysis of the social consequence of marketing policies, decisions and activities.**”* (p. ix emphasis added)

From this definition and the work of researchers conducting research to inform regulation on the impact of tobacco (MacFadyen *et al.*, 2001), food (Hastings *et al.*, 2003) and alcohol marketing (Gordon *et al.*, in press) on society, it is apparent that critical research is within the

jurisdiction of social marketing. Indeed the upstream approach has been identified as having ties to the critical theory paradigm (Burton, 2001; Lowe *et al.*, 2003). Therefore potential exists for social marketing to contribute towards sustainability efforts through critical research of the unintended consequences commercial marketing has on society and the environment (Goldberg, 1995; Hastings and Saren, 2003; Polonsky *et al.*, 2003), and subsequent upstream efforts such as media advocacy, regulation and policy change. Upstream social marketing in the form of advocacy, influencing policy and regulation addressed to upstream actors, and applied holistically across the whole supply chain is a necessary condition for sustainability. Social marketing has also been suggested as a possible tool in the consumption reduction agenda, a key but often overlooked strategy in the drive for sustainability (Peattie and Peattie, 2009). In promoting low stress, low consumption, and healthy lifestyles social marketing is well placed to help deliver on the sustainability agenda.

Despite these developments there remains much to be done in terms of using social marketing in the area of sustainable development (Takahashi, 2009). More research is required to test the applicability of social marketing to a wide range of sustainability issues such as transportation behaviour, purchasing and consumption, fuel, energy and water use and recycling. The issue of longevity and problems with short-termism also requires examination. Often interventions are implemented, change target behaviours and then stop, and unsurprisingly behaviours often return to their previous form. Tackling sustainability requires long term, enduring solutions. To aid this, the development of a relationship marketing approach within social marketing in which social marketers think in terms of relationships rather than transactions would be welcomed. This would require relationships to be nurtured with customers, suppliers, stakeholders, competitors and employees, and outcome measurement focusing on service quality as well as the bottom line (Hastings, 2003). Sustained efforts could also benefit from a more strategic and long term branding strategy

that (like commercial brands) builds a recognised and trusted brand, develops a good level of brand recognition and fosters lasting relationships with customers (Evans and Hastings, 2008). Nevertheless, the limitations and dangers of a positivist outlook on sustainable consumption have been well documented (Dolan, 2002). Social marketing and green marketing can make a difference at the consumer level and to a degree at the upstream and corporate level. However the third dimension of our framework for sustainable marketing - critical marketing - goes beyond seeking ways to make marketing more sustainable, to challenging current marketing theory and practice.

## **Critical Marketing**

The first two strands of our framework for sustainable marketing – green marketing and social marketing – by themselves cannot cover all eventualities. Another component is required when marketing alone cannot produce the desired outcomes, or indeed may be a major part of the problem. This is where critical marketing - critique of the schema of marketing systems, paradigms and methodologies, and even the existence of marketing itself, influenced by the critical school of thought, comes in.

Commercial marketing and social marketing can lead to competition as well as cooperation yet this competition can be both desirable and productive through the process of critical marketing. Competitive analysis and critical studies of commercial marketing can contribute to sustainable marketing by monitoring marketing and informing social marketing efforts whilst also providing guidance for regulation, control and correction of the market when it's unintended consequences damage sustainability efforts. However critical marketing can go beyond this correcting influence, to challenge and perhaps influence a re-shaping of

the dominant positivist, managerialist construct of current marketing, to a model that focuses less on encouraging unnecessary consumption and more towards encouraging sustainability.

Critical theory is a social theory informed by structuralism, post-structuralism, deconstruction, Marxist theory and several other streams of thought, and is oriented towards critiquing and changing society as a whole, in contrast to goal of traditional theory oriented only to understanding and explaining it (Horkheimer, 1937). An important task of critical theory is to simultaneously offer a critique of contemporary society whilst envisioning solutions to problems. It is a normative theory about values and what ought to occur in the future rather than just focusing on the here and now. As a result of radical social, economic and political change over the years academics have called for a critical appraisal of marketing and marketing theory (Brownlie *et al.*, 1994; Thomas, 1999). Indeed critical theory has been identified as one of the paradigmatic approaches in market and consumer research (Murray and Ozanne, 1991; Lowe *et al.*, 2003).

Some of the environmental and structural factors which feature as issues in the sustainability agenda appear suitable for examination using a critical theory based approach. For example should retailers be selling Fairtrade coffee grown using harmful pesticides (Blanchard, 2007); should supermarkets be selling organic cotton t-shirts manufactured in low-wage factories, or should airlines be selling short-haul flights for extraordinarily low prices? Scholars have begun to consider these issues and how critical marketing can contribute to the sustainable marketing debate, arguing that critical research of commercial marketing could stimulate sustainable marketing practices (Polonsky *et al.*, 2003; Fuller, 1999). Suggested areas for consideration could include, among others, critical studies of the impact of car marketing, travel and tourism marketing, clothing and food marketing on sustainability. Critical studies, such as Polonsky *et al.*'s 'Harm Chain' model (2003) could consider the unintended harms of the whole marketing process on sustainability including

design, production, distribution and communication. The findings from such research would be valuable in informing understanding, regulation and policy, and supporting consumers to make more informed choices that do not detract from societal wellbeing, such as the benefits of buying more local food and less air-freighted produce.

Evidence suggests that critical analysis can also lead to regulation that stimulates innovation and increases competitiveness (Porter and van der Linde, 1995). For example pursuing a clean technology approach, often stimulated through regulation can be very cost effective (Irwin and Hooper, 1992). The development of Boeing's fuel efficient 787 aircraft is yet another example of this 'win-win' effect. Therefore critical marketing can be used as a tool to encourage more sustainable marketing by developing more optimal regulatory conditions (van Dam and Apeldoorn, 1996).

Yet the real impact of doing this on sustainability may be limited, as it would not challenge some of the practices that are considered inherently benign within capitalism and the current marketing system focus on economic development and increased consumption. Given that marketing's aim is to encourage and increase consumption, green marketing, and social marketing may help streamline marketing somewhat, but it is doubtful that the contribution to sustainability would be more than marginal without more systemic change. For example, the ability of acts such as consumer voting through ethical choices (Shaw *et al.*, 2006) to shift the balance of power in marketplace relationships has been questioned since this 'consumption' approach seems to embrace the very market system and spaces that appear so problematic (Carducci, 2006; Heath and Potter, 2004). While it creates consumer choice and employment in developing countries, such actions do little to improve human rights for farmers and workers producing the goods (Micheletti and Follesdal, 2007). Embracing the market through, for example, mainstreaming Fairtrade products (Low and Davenport, 2006), has been argued to place more power in the hands of dominant players, rather than effectively

facilitating sustainable change. A recent report by the Sustainable Development Commission that comprehensively highlights how our current economic system has failed, especially with respect to delivering prosperity, and outlines a framework for prosperity without growth delivered by the transition to a sustainable economy (Jackson 2009). The role of marketing in this system and the negative impact upon ecological development is well documented (Dryzek, 1987).

Peattie (2007) develops the role of critical marketing in the sustainability debate by suggesting that sustainability requires not the application of a critical eye to the marketing discipline, but an examination and re-appraisal of some of the fundamental principles and concepts underpinning it. Traditionally marketers have shied away from this form of critical appraisal of the impact of marketing upon sustainability issues (Peattie, 2007), or tended to deny or minimize the extent of the sustainability challenge (Thøgersen and Crompton, 2009). There has been a gradual shift in emphasis to a more critical theory based approach to marketing and sustainability among some marketing scholars - challenging some of the aforementioned principles and concepts. Yet the impact upon marketing education and practice has been marginal. Innovative thinking and a strong agenda is required to ensure that sustainability is viewed as an alternative approach to marketing theory and practice and not simply an issue that marketing could choose to respond to. Sustainability considered as part of a critical deconstruction of commercial marketing theory and practice needs to become a core pillar of marketing thought and not remain on the periphery.

The recent economic crisis has generated consideration of economic institutions and systems (Foster and Magdoff, 2009). Should encouraging economic development, growth, increased consumption and profit remain as the predominant goals in the marketing, and indeed wider capitalist system? Events have demonstrated the fallibility of our current framework, and consideration of alternative systemic approaches. Doing so may also involve

challenging the sanctity of the market (Peattie 2007). Dominant political and economic systems are open to challenge and alternatives such as bioregionalism could be explored (McGinnis 1999). The race towards increasing globalisation should be re-examined, while self sufficiency (Bekin *et al.*, 2006) and re-localized economies (McEachern *et al.*, 2010) are to be encouraged, illustrated by the success in Detroit of the urban agricultural movement in which 40 per cent of the land in the city centre is being returned to prairie, growing food for families.

Systemic change might involve the re-construction of economic systems, including marketing, based around self sufficiency, sustainability and sustainable development, quality of life (Lee and Sirgy, 2004), quality of services and products, and consumer satisfaction. A holistic approach to marketing, focusing on consumers as people, and on their welfare, and locating consumption within a social and environmental context could achieve positive outcomes. Marketing should concentrate on delivering benefits, meeting needs, and generating lasting satisfaction, rather than being oriented towards excess materialism, disposability and unsustainable consumption (Cooper, 2005; Bauman, 2007). For these aims to be realised, a significant degree of critical reflexivity is required by all within the marketing discipline (Polonsky, *et al.*, 2003).

Unquestionably, altering the marketing system to be more sustainable will be extremely challenging. Yet the critical reflexivity in marketing and consideration of a social dimension in marketing thought are not new suggestions (Wilkie and Moore, 1999). Indeed the current environment provides an opportunity, not a threat to marketing. A renewal and reconfiguration of marketing principles and practice delivering on a sustainable agenda would provide fresh impetus for the discipline in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## **Sustainable Marketing**

Although at times criticised as a hindrance to sustainable living, this article argues that marketing also holds many potential solutions to some of the challenges around sustainability that society faces. In using the power of marketing through green marketing, social marketing and critical marketing the opportunities for developing sustainable marketing clearly exists. The diagram below (**figure 1**) outlines a schema of how sustainable marketing can be developed through the use of green marketing, social marketing and critical marketing.

### **INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE**

Through green marketing sustainable products and services can be introduced into the marketplace. Although the potential of green marketing efforts has yet to be realised and there has been a backlash and an element of myopia resulting in 'greenwash' there remains utility to the concept. Green marketing can provide the consumer with more palatable and sustainable options, limiting the adverse effects of marketing activity on sustainability. Furthermore embedding more sustainable marketing processes and practices from the product 'cradle to the grave', while building sustainability into the core aspects of marketing efforts and indeed business strategy will fundamentally contribute towards sustainable marketing. Such efforts could ensure that product design and development, manufacturing, distribution and promotion are made sustainable, thus limiting consumption and waste.

The potential for social marketing to use the power of marketing to foster sustainable behavioural change has been outlined. Social marketing could be used across a number of sustainable activities; to encourage public transport use, cut carbon emissions, support local food producers or reduce consumer debt. Furthermore critical social marketing research can stimulate upstream activity such as advocacy, regulation and policy change. Critical

marketing can be used to challenge the dominant marketing theory and practice, shifting the focus from encouraging and increasing consumption to other goals such as quality of life, satisfaction, and sustainability (Lee and Sirgy 2004; Peattie and Peattie, 2009).

Each of the three elements discussed here are not mutually exclusive but complementary and often overlapping concepts. Indeed each of the concepts in the model offered are interdependent, green marketing alone can do harm, social marketing alone cannot compete, critical marketing alone will not do the all important job of changing hearts and minds. For sustainable marketing to become a reality all three must occur in a strategic and multi-faceted effort for marketing to position sustainability at the core of its theory, principles and practices. Indeed this process is vital not only to ensure that sustainable marketing is realised but also to ensure that marketing itself as a discipline is sustainable and can prosper.

The effects of social and critical social marketing applications would help reinforce green marketing by creating a more optimal regulatory environment encouraging green marketing efforts and encouraging a greener agenda. Furthermore critical marketing can challenge the dominant positivist stream throughout mainstream marketing and re-shape and re-form a more sustainable marketing system.

To deliver a sustainable marketing agenda it will be important not to become restricted by traditional paradigmatic structures. A sustainable marketing approach requires a break away from the dominant positivist managerialist ideology and consideration of ideas and influences from other areas such as political science, psychology, sociology, anthropology and ecology. Indeed the emancipatory effect of breaking free from such constructs has been frequently highlighted (Arndt, 1985). The role of key actors is crucial: individuals, business, government and the third sector must engage with each other and cooperate in a strategic manner. Given the criticism marketing has faced and the extensive soul searching within the discipline (Wilkie and Moore, 2003) the value that can be extracted from pursuing such an agenda

cannot be underestimated and should be viewed not as a threat, but an opportunity to demonstrate a positive contribution to the sustainability paradigm.

The onus is therefore on all relevant stakeholders to collaborate to ensure that sustainable marketing develops accordingly and delivers on the sustainability agenda. We propose that the pursuit of a marketing strategy for sustainability using green marketing, social marketing and critical marketing that is long term, multi-faceted, research driven with clear, measurable objectives and harnesses the power and potential of marketing can make a positive impact on sustainability efforts.

**7000 words**

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## BOXES AND FIGURES

### Box 1

Consider the Toyota Prius as a prime example of green marketing. The Toyota Prius is a hybrid car – one that runs on both a conventional petrol engine, and an electric battery that recharges during use of the vehicle. In city driving where it is more economical and better for the environment the electric power source is used and when on the open road at higher speeds to petrol propulsion is used when it can be more economical. The Prius was first introduced in Japan in 1997 and was rolled out worldwide in 2001. It is currently the most fuel efficient car sold in the US (USEPA, 2008), and is the 2<sup>nd</sup> least CO<sub>2</sub> emitting car in the UK (Department for Transport, 2008). The Prius has won several awards from the car industry and consumers and by June 2007 an estimated 757, 600 vehicles had been sold. Interestingly enough the Prius was not strongly marketed on its eco-friendliness but more on its fuel efficiency and the likelihood of reduced fuel costs. This highlights that impacts upon sustainability do not need to be the headline act in a marketing effort but can still be made. Other example of green marketing included green energy generated from renewable sources such as wind farms,

shade grown coffee grown under forest canopy thereby protecting bio-diversity, CFC-free energy efficient fridges, or eco-washing powder containing less chemical additives that are harmful to the environment.

## **Box 2**

Social Marketing:

1. Sets behavioural goals – Social Marketing Interventions should have a clear focus on behaviour, based on a strong behavioural analysis, with specific behavioural goals.
2. Uses consumer research & pre-testing – Developing a clear understanding of the audience, based on good consumer research combining data from a variety of sources helps develop a consumer oriented approach.
3. Makes judicious use of theory – Interventions benefit from being behavioural theory based and informed and should draw from an integrated theoretical framework.
4. Is insight driven – Focus should be on gaining a deeper understanding of what moves and what motivates the consumer. Identification of key factors and issues relevant to positively influencing behaviour allows actionable insights to be developed.
5. Applies the principles of segmentation & targeting – Avoiding blanket approaches segmentation and targeting allows interventions to be tailored to specific audience segments.

6. Makes use of the marketing mix beyond communications – Interventions consider the best strategic application of the marketing mix consisting of the four Ps of 'product', 'price', 'place' and 'promotion'. Other Ps might include 'policy change' or 'people' for example delivering training to intervention delivery agents
7. Creates attractive motivational exchanges with the target group – Intervention considers what will motivate people to engage voluntarily with the intervention and offers them something beneficial in return. The offered benefit may be tangible (rewards or incentives for participation or making behavioural changes) or intangible (e.g. personal satisfaction, improved health and wellbeing).
8. Addresses the competition to the desired behaviour – Forces competing with the desired behaviour change are analysed and the intervention considers the appeal of competing behaviours. Strategies that seek to remove or minimise the competition are used.

### **Box 3**

The InMotion campaign is a community based social marketing programme designed to impact upon communities transport awareness and travel behaviour. The intervention was delivered in four neighbourhoods in the King County area of Washington State near Seattle: Madison-Miller, Columbia City, Lake Forest Park and Crossroads. The campaign has been subsequently rolled out in adjacent communities. InMotion aimed to encourage sustainable transport behaviour such as increased use of public transport, cycling and walking and reduced car use. Extensive formative research was undertaken to generate consumer insight and orientation and to identify key barriers and benefits to the desired behavioural outcomes. Barriers identified in order of priorities were personal safety, topography, lack of services and inconvenience. Potential benefits to behaviour change were identified as health benefits, community connection, avoiding parking issues and environmental concerns (Cooper, 2007).

The research findings were incorporated into the design and delivery of the campaign and audience pre-testing of campaign communications was carried out. Barriers such as personal safety issues were addressed by a range of measures including the instillation of improve

lighting and benefits like the health benefits from walking and cycling formed key components of massaging. A campaign launch event was held which included the signing of pledges from participants such as committing to reduced car use during the intervention. An extensive communications campaign was delivered including posters, a website, various events, brand activities and a telephone hotline. The intervention also demonstrated the use of segmentation and targeting by utilising a highly customised, individual marketing approach based on the IndiMark technique (Brog *et al.*, 2002). Incentives including free rides, coupons for local businesses and the benefits of improved health and fitness from increased physical activity were features of the programme delivery. Evaluation data suggests that the intervention was successful at changing attitudes and travel behaviour in the intervention areas (Cooper, 2007).

**Figure 1**

**Figure 1: A Framework of Sustainable Marketing**

