

Sustainability marketing research: past, present and future

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Abstract This paper provides a synthesis and critical assessment of the sustainability marketing literature, from the period 1998–2013, building on a previous assessment from 1971 to 1998. It details research within major marketing journals and critically assesses this research in relation to the on-going conversation which focuses on marketing's relationship with the natural environment. Differences in the content and depth of sustainability coverage in marketing journals are considered. Potential avenues for future sustainability marketing research are proposed, with a particular call for theoretical and managerial reflections which tackle broader systemic and institutional issues within the discipline.

Keywords sustainability; sustainability marketing; literature review; critical marketing

Introduction

In 2010, Lubin and Esty suggested in *Harvard Business Review* that sustainability is a megatrend. We have finally recognised that at our current levels of consumption the planet cannot sustain us or its carrying capacity for humanity ad infinitum. As marketing has been criticised for being the 'ministers of propaganda of the consumer culture' (Adorno, 1991 in Saren, 2009), this has obvious implications for our discipline. We have acknowledged that we live in a carbon constrained world, and the ever-increasing global population, surpassing the seven billion mark in 2011, acted as a 'wake-up call' in our recognition that our way of life is simply not sustainable; humanity itself is endangered. The sustainability discourse is both multifaceted and has multiple and contested voices. Governments at Supra level, such as the European Union, and at national and local levels have long ago recognised the sustainability challenge, and we now have a plethora of environmental legislations, regulations and various public policy measures to address the sustainability problem. At the same time, industries are collectively tackling issues, such as the Sustainable Apparel Coalition, for instance. Indeed, leading executives of

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major corporations (signatories included those from Marks and Spencer, GE, O2, Pepsico, Morrisons, Sky, Asda and Aviva) operating in Britain wrote an open letter to *The Guardian* newspaper in 2011 stating that:

the UK will enjoy a healthy, long-term recovery only if business leaders put the environment at the heart of corporate strategies. In the past, UK plc has too often regarded 'sustainability' as an optional add-on, rather than an essential element of corporate and national economic success.

(The Guardian, 2011)

Similarly, individual companies are taking a stand within their industries; Marks and Spencer recently introduced its second round of its 'Plan A' commitments taking their environmental policies forward to 2015 (Marks & Spencer, 2014). Consumers believe they can make a difference and are changing their consumption practices accordingly. Terms such as downshifter, voluntary simplifier, sustainable consumer and ethical consumer are now commonplace, as are terms such as carbon footprint and carbon neutral. All the while, investors have begun to recognise the importance of sustainability for the financial bottom line. Environmental pressure groups have become more sophisticated in their campaigning, aided by the rise of social media, and have also engaged in significant collaborations with business to instigate sustainable change; for instance, McDonalds and Greenpeace worked together to end soya bean farming in the Amazon (Greenpeace, 2010). From a marketing perspective, we have acknowledged that sustainability plays a role in so far as its impact on value creation for consumers, marketing's *raison d'être*, is now deemed significant. What then does all this mean for sustainability marketing research within our academy?

In the 30 years since the launch of the *Journal of Marketing Management* (JMM), sustainability marketing research has been considerable. First publications appeared in the journal in 1990 (Peattie, 1990; Prothero, 1990); there have been some 28 publications in total, and two special issues, Prothero (1998) exploring sustainability marketing and McEachern and Carrigan (2012) focusing on sustainability and ethical marketing. What has been happening in JMM is mirrored by both the marketing and management literatures generally. There are theoretical and empirical papers covering a broad gamut of marketing issues; many of these are empirical in nature – with both positivistic and interpretive research represented; some have a specific managerial focus, others focus on bigger picture macro and institutional issues; similarly both critical and 'how to be better' research perspectives are presented. There have been special issues within mainstream marketing journals, such as the *Academy of Marketing Science* (2011) and the *Journal of Advertising* (2012), and journals with an institutional, macro focus, such as the *Journal of Macromarketing* (Kilbourne, 2010; McDonagh & Prothero, 2014, *in press*). Mainstream and more specialist conferences in the broad marketing sphere have seen a proliferation of sustainability papers and special session topics, with subsequent journal publications also materialising (Phipps et al., 2013; Prothero et al., 2011). It is safe to say that 2014 and beyond will bring further polyphonous research in the sustainability marketing arena, and we will discuss potential avenues for future research later in this paper. In the meantime, a more detailed assessment of previous research is warranted.

Within the broad management literature, sustainability research has mushroomed over the past 30 years. With initial research questioning the role of business in the mid-1990s (Shrivastava, 1995), to authors focusing on the fundamental issue of what business is, how it needs to address the sustainability challenge (Gladwin, Kennelly, &

Krause, 1995; Macnaghten & Urry, 1995; Shrivastava, 1995), and the challenges which hinder sustainability integration (Shepherd, Patzel, & Baron, 2013; Sonenshein, DeCelles, & Dutton, 2014; Starik & Marcus, 2000). Areas of research have also focused on specific sub-disciplines, in diverse areas as supply-chain management (Pagell & Wu, 2009; Srivastava, 2007), accounting (Unerman, Bebbington, & O'Dwyer, 2010), finance (Soppe, 2004), information systems (Melville, 2010) and sustainable innovation (Hellström, 2007; Larson, 2000).

A review and critical assessment of the sustainability marketing literature

In 1998, in the first special issue on *Sustainability Marketing*, Kilbourne and Beckmann provided a review of sustainability marketing research by analysing publications in 12 English-speaking, major marketing journals, covering the period 1971–1997. Since the publication of this work, Leonidou and Leonidou (2011) provided an analysis of sustainability marketing and management literatures covering 1969–2008; there was also a review by Chamorro, Rubio, and Miranda (2009). Leonidou and Leonidou (2011) criticised the Kilbourne and Beckmann piece for not covering enough journals, its limited time period, for only summarising the broad topic covered in each paper, for not delving into enough detail into methodological and author details and for excluding management-based articles. The Leonidou and Leonidou paper focused on both marketing and management articles by adopting a keyword search of various sustainability terms in leading search engines. The resulting review focused on 530 papers published between 1969 and 2008. While providing a detailed review of the literature, the search engine approach adopted meant that a significant number of sustainability marketing articles, including seminal pieces, were excluded. For example, Shultz and Holbrook (1999) and Dobscha and Ozanne (2001) in the *Journal of Public Policy and Marketing*; Fuller and Ottman (2004) and Clemens and Douglas (2006) in the *Journal of Business Research* and Dolan (2002) and Schaefer and Crane (2005) in the *Journal of Macromarketing*. One other review by Harper and Peattie (2011) provided an interesting citation analysis of the first special issue on sustainability marketing, published in JMM in 1998, and mentioned above. The authors conclude that sustainability marketing within the marketing academy is affected by ‘conservatism’ and the ‘inward-looking tendencies’ of marketing academics.

For this paper, we build on the initial review by Kilbourne and Beckmann (1998) and provide a follow-up review of the literature in 13 major English-language marketing journals from 1998 to 2013. We have excluded the *Journal of Economic Psychology* and included contemporary journals introduced since 1997 – *Consumption, Markets and Culture*, the *Journal of Consumer Culture* and *Marketing Theory*. The *Journal of Marketing Research* is not included in the table as it had no sustainability marketing publications from the period 1998–2013. This assessment adds to the Kilbourne and Beckmann piece by allowing us a detailed assessment of the literature covering the period 1971–2013. The criticisms provided by Leonidou and Leonidou (2011) still apply, but the authors felt that for this special issue we should focus on building up an assessment of marketing discourse in the sustainability marketing field in the first instance; a detailed meta-analysis would not

be fruitful here. It is also important to stress that we are providing a critical assessment of the streams of research covered and not individual articles themselves. It should be noted that each of these reviews are limited insofar as they only cover English-speaking journals and exclude monographs, textbooks and book chapters, as well as various conference pieces, which have produced excellent contributions over the years. We will refer to some of these in our later discussion (Table 1).

Research streams 1998–2013

Building on the initial categories utilised by Kilbourne and Beckmann (1998), we have identified five streams of sustainability marketing discourse and explore each below. We offer suggestions for future research within each stream. As with Kilbourne and Beckmann (1998), we have identified broad streams which allows us to conduct an assessment of the principal concepts explored within the literature. The original category of symptoms of sustainability which focused on various conditions of the sustainability problem, such as pollution, recycling and deforestation that contribute to environmental degradation, has been eliminated and papers which focus on these various conditions of sustainability have been categorised within the remaining five streams. We have categorised each paper only once by determining what we felt was the major topic being examined, as with the previous paper this assessment runs the risk of including erroneous categorisations, which others may have categorised differently. Each author reviewed each issue of each journal over the 1998–2013 period, independently categorised the papers, utilising the initial Kilbourne and Beckmann criteria, and then worked together to develop the updated categories and decide under which category each article should be classified.

Individual consumer concerns, behaviour and practices

Our first stream of research covers a broad range of literature which considers consumer attitudes, behaviour and preferences and examines various characteristics of the individual, building on previous work identified in the 1971–1997 period. The early work discussed in Kilbourne and Beckmann focused on various categorisations and profiles of the green consumer and how these were developed into environmentally conscious behaviours such as recycling behaviour (Meneses, 2010; Trudel & Argo, 2013). We see this research stream continuing, although, as with the earlier work, there are inconsistencies in the findings (Follows & Jobber, 2000; Kidwell et al., 2013; Lin & Chang, 2012; Luchs et al., 2010; Minton et al., 2012).

As well as individual consumer characteristic research, there have been significant developments in the field focusing on consumer *values* and how *consumers themselves* are engaging in various acts of voluntary simplicity, sustainable consumption and/or anti-consumption (with a sustainability focus) behaviours (Alexander & Ussher, 2012; Cherrier, 2009; Cherrier et al., 2011; Iyer & Muncy, 2009). While some of this research has focused specifically on individual characteristics, within the general framework of consuming less, there is also research which focuses on questioning the very definition of marketing ideology and consumption (Dolan, 2002; Kilbourne et al., 2002; Kilbourne & Carlson,

Table 1 Categorisation of literature 1998–2013.

	Journal of Marketing	Journal of Business Research	Journal of Consumer Research
Individual consumer concerns, behaviour and practices: e.g. consumer attitudes, consumer behaviours, consumer preferences, consumer values – (sustainability) anti-consumption, sustainable consumption	Luchs, Naylor, Irwin, and Raghunathan (2010); Lin and Chang (2012); White and Simpson (2013)	Kilbourne, Beckmann, and Thelen (2002); Kilbourne and Pickett (2008); Iyer and Muncy (2009); Cherrier (2009); Weidner Rosa, and Viswanathan (2010); Menezes (2010); Banbury, Stinerock, and Subrahmanyam (2012); Cho, Thyroff, Rapert, Park, and Lee (2013); Phipps et al. (2013); Achabou and Dekhili (2013); Grimmer and Bingham (2013)	Kidwell, Farmer, and Hardesty (2013); Trudel and Argo (2013)
Organisational sustainability strategies and sustainability markets: e.g. marketing communications, market orientation, branding, NPD, product design	Banerjee, Iyer, and Kashyap (2003); Kronrod, Grinstein, and Wathieu (2012)	Slater and Angel (2000); Banerjee (2002); Pujari, Wright, and Peattie (2003); Aragón-Correa, Matías-Reche, and Senise-Barrio (2004); Fuller and Ottman (2004); Menguc and Ozanne (2005); Clemens and Douglas (2006); Clemens (2006); Dibrell, Craig, and Hansen (2011); Öberg, Hüge-Brodin, and Björklund (2012); Rivera-Camino (2012); Chien and Peng (2012); Ko, Hwang and Kim (2013)	Goldstein, Cialdini, and Griskevicius (2008)
Reframing sustainability – institutional, societal and systems perspectives: e.g. dominant social paradigm, marketing ideology, theory	Kotler (2011)	Rothenberg (2007); Polonsky (2011);	
Environmental laws, regulations and policies Including social marketing and environmental labelling policies		Peattie and Peattie (2009); Shang, Basil, and Wyrmer (2010); Low, Tang, and Medhekar (2012)	
Literature review and assessment of sustainability			

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Table 1 (Continued).

	Journal of Public Policy & Marketing	Journal of Advertising	Journal of Consumer Policy
Individual consumer concerns, behaviour and practices: e.g. consumer attitudes, consumer behaviours, consumer preferences, consumer values – (sustainability) anti- consumption; sustainable consumption	Pieters, Bijmolt, Van Raaij, and De Kruijk (1998); Biswas, Licata, McKee, Pullig, and Daughtridge (2000); Ewing and Sarigöllü (2000); McCarty and Shrum (2001); Dobscha and Ozanne (2001); Prothero et al. (2011); Brosius, Fernandez, and Cherrier (2012)	Fowler and Close (2012); Minton, Lee, Orth, Kim, and Kahle (2012)	Thøgersen (1999); Stern (1999); Neuner (2000); Imkamp (2000); Thøgersen (2000); Reisch (2001); Kasa (2003); Høyer and Holden (2003); Thøgersen (2003); Grankvist, Dahlstrand, and Biel (2004); Thøgersen (2005); Heiskanen (2005); Fuchs and Lorek (2005); Cohen (2006); Schrader and Thøgersen (2011); Berg (2011); Pape, Rau, Fahy, and Davies (2011); Wolff and Schönherr (2011); Muster (2011); Zundel and Stieß (2011); Schäfer, Jaeger-Erben, and Dos Santos (2011); Thøgersen and Schrader (2012); Wahlen, Heiskanen, and Aalto (2012); Paetz, Dütschke, and Fichtner (2012); Heinzle (2012); Schäfer, Jaeger-Erben, and Bamberg (2012); Markkula and Moisaner (2012); Luchs and Mooradian (2012); Csutora (2012); Kallbekken, Sælen, and Hermansen (2013)
Organisational sustainability strategies and sustainability markets: e.g. marketing communications, market orientation, branding, NPD, product design	Griskevicius, Cantú, and Vugt (2012)	Chang (2011); Do Paço and Reis (2012); Xie and Kronrod (2012); Royné, Martinez, Oakley, and Fox (2012); Bickart and Ruth (2012); Ku, Kuo, Wu, and Wu (2012); Kareklas, Carlson, and Muehling (2014); Tucker, Rifon, Lee, and Reece (2012); Cervellon (2012)	

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Table 1 (Continued).

	Journal of Public Policy & Marketing	Journal of Advertising	Journal of Consumer Policy
Reframing sustainability – institutional, societal and systems perspectives: e.g. dominant social paradigm, marketing ideology, theory	Shultz and Holbrook (1999); Press and Arnould (2009); Phipps and Brace-Govan (2011)		Ibenholt and Lindhjem (2003); Thøgersen and Crompton (2009)
Environmental laws, regulations and policies Including social marketing and environmental labelling policies	Dhanda (1999)		Wilhelmsson (1998); Frey (1999); Nyborg (1999); Mathios (1999); Uusitalo (1999); Bamberg and Schmidt (1999); Micklitz (2000); Hedemann-Robinson (2000); Tonner (2000); Godt (2000); Aasness and Larsen (2003); Røed Larsen (2006); Christensen, Godsken, Gram-Hanssen, Quitzau, and Røpke (2007); Klintman (2009); Gandenberger, Garrelts, and Wehlau (2011); Koos (2011); Csutora and Zsóka (2011); Vanclay et al. (2011)
Literature review and assessment of sustainability			

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Table 1 (Continued).

	Journal of Consumer Culture (2001 onwards)	European Journal of Marketing	Journal of Marketing Management
	Consumption, Markets & Culture (1997 onwards)		
Individual consumer concerns, behaviour and practices: e.g. consumer attitudes, consumer behaviours, consumer preferences, consumer values – (sustainability) anti-consumption; sustainable consumption	Connolly and Prothero (2008); Gram-Hanssen (2011); Hargreaves (2011); Alexander and Ussher (2012); Buscher and Igoe (2013) Connolly and Prothero (2003); Kjellberg (2008); Cherrier (2010); De Burgh-Woodman and King (2013); Kadirov and Varey (2013)	Follows and Jobber (2000); Thøgersen, Haugaard, and Olesen (2010); Cherrier, Black, and Lee (2011); Hartmann and Apaolaza-Ibañez (2013)	Leonidou, Leonidou, and Kvasova (2010); Canning and Szmigin (2010); Wells, Ponting, and Peattie (2011); Moraes, Carrigan, and Szmigin (2012); Moons and De Pelsmacker (2012); Polonsky, Vocino, Grau, Garma, and Ferdous (2012); Sudbury, Kohlbacher, and Hofmeister, (2012); Thøgersen and Zhou (2012); Krystallis, Grunert, De Barcellos, Perrea, and Verbeke (2012); Cherrier, Szuba, and Özçağlar-Toulouse (2012); Rettie, Burchell, and Riley (2012); McDonald, Oates, Alevizou, Young, and Hwang (2012); Smith and O'Sullivan (2012); Chatzidakis, MacLaran, and Bradshaw (2012)

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	Journal of Consumer Culture (2001 onwards)	European Journal of Marketing	Journal of Marketing Management
	Consumption, Markets & Culture (1997 onwards)		
Organisational sustainability strategies and sustainability markets:	Lindeman (2012); Reijonen and Tryggvæstad (2012)	Kärnä, Hansen, and Juslin (2003); Daub and Ergenzinger (2005); Rivera-Camino (2007)	Polonsky and Ottman (1998); Crane (1998); Lord and Putrevu (1998); McDonagh (1998); Walker and Hanson (1998); Chan and Lau (2004)
e.g. marketing communications, market orientation, branding, NPD, product design			
Reframing sustainability – institutional, societal and systems perspectives:			Kilbourne (1998); Fisk (1998)
e.g. dominant social paradigm, marketing ideology, theory			
Environmental laws, regulations and policies			
Including social marketing and environmental labelling policies			
Literature review and assessment of sustainability		Leonidou and Leonidou (2011)	Kilbourne and Beckmann (1998)

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Table 1 (Continued).

	Journal of Macromarketing	International Journal of Research in Marketing	Marketing Theory (2001 onwards)
Individual consumer concerns, behaviour and practices: e.g. consumer attitudes, consumer behaviours, consumer preferences, consumer values – (sustainability) anti-consumption; sustainable consumption	Dolan (2002); Schaefer and Crane (2005); Kilbourne and Carlson (2008); Thøgersen (2010); Chatzidakis and Lee (2013); Claudy, Peterson, and O'Driscoll (2013); Hutter and Hoffmann (2013)	Cornelissen, Pandelaere, Warlop, and Dewitte (2008); Strizhakova and Coulter (2013)	
Organisational sustainability strategies and sustainability markets: e.g. marketing communications, market orientation, branding, NPD, product design	Samli (1998); Mitchell, Wooliscroft, and Higham (2010)		
Reframing sustainability – institutional, societal and systems perspectives: e.g. dominant social paradigm, marketing ideology, theory	Prothero and Fitchett (2000); Crane (2000); De Coverly, McDonagh, O'Malley, and Patterson (2008); Varey (2010); Burroughs (2010); McDonagh and Brereton (2010); Prothero, McDonagh, and Dobscha (2010); Assadourian (2010); D'Souza and Taghian (2010); Lewin, Strutton, and Paswan (2011); Kadirov and Varey (2011); Peterson (2012); Reppel (2012); Hunt (2012)		Kilbourne (2004); Littlefield (2010); Gordon, Carrigan, and Hastings (2011)
Environmental laws, regulations and policies Including social marketing and environmental labelling policies			
Literature review and assessment of sustainability			

2008), a topic which is explored in other contexts both within and outside the marketing academy. While we witness some research which continues to consider how we can understand consumers with a concern for the environment (Luchs & Mooradian, 2012; Pieters et al., 1998; Stern, 1999); in terms of developing products which target this consumer segment (Lin & Chang, 2012; Trudel & Argo, 2013), there is a growing body of research which focuses on the role the individual plays within a wider systemic recognition of the global environmental crisis (Assadourian, 2010; Dobscha & Ozanne, 2001; Dolan, 2002; Kilbourne et al., 2002; McCarty & Shrum, 2001; Prothero et al., 2011).

Further explorations which focus on individual concerns, attitudes and behaviours are still crucial, as are explorations of sustainable consumption practices. What happens at the individual level will always remain important. Within this field however, it is imperative to consider the (im)possibility of both sustainable consumption and consumption practices, and not just amongst voluntary simplifiers or anti-consumers, but at a broader societal level. For instance, can we get everyone to consume less and/or differently? We need to further explore what conditions are required for society to engage with the 'less is more' philosophy. Also, we are curious as to how we can begin to understand *why* we engage in unsustainable behaviours when so many of us realise that these behaviours are not sustainable? Hedonism and fatalism as consumer values need to be better explored in this sense. Why, after all these years is there still such a large sustainability attitude/behaviour gap? We need research which examines the *what, why* and *how much of* consumption and consumption practices (Kilbourne & Mittelstaedt, 2012), as well as a focus on sustainable consumption practices becoming central and not peripheral to individual consumer actions. How can marketing play a role in promoting changes to individual consumption practices, via the green commodity (Prothero & Fitchett, 2000)? As well as gaining insights from voluntary simplifiers and anti-consumers what more can we learn from those who engage in bartering, sharing and communal consumption (Botsman & Rogers, 2010); what does society need to do to mainstream such consumption activities? And, as Kilbourne and Beckman recognised in 1998, research which utilises the same techniques to explore individual attitudes and behaviours, over and over again, will not provide us with any lasting solutions. Such research endeavours, by their very nature, will require inter-disciplinary research and engagement with other disciplines, including our colleagues in sociology, cultural studies and anthropology.

Environmental laws, regulations and policies

Not surprisingly, as the number of environmental laws and regulations at supra, national and local levels has mushroomed in recent decades, we see examples of these being debated in our discipline (Frey, 1999; Klintman, 2009; Koos, 2011; Wilhelmsson, 1998). Of the 21 papers published in this broad area, all but 5 (Bickart & Ruth, 2012; Dhanda, 1999; Low et al., 2012; Peattie & Peattie, 2009; Shang et al., 2010) are published in the *Journal of Consumer Policy*. Specific areas examined include a focus on consumer laws (Wilhelmsson, 1998); environmental labelling (Bickart & Ruth, 2012; Koos, 2011) and environmental taxes (Aasness & Larsen, 2003). Topics explored focus on the role public policy and social marketing policies could play in alleviating environmental problems (Peattie & Peattie, 2009; Shang et al., 2010). Given the increase in laws, regulations and public policies and the

impact these have on so many different aspects of marketing, it is surprising that outside of the *Journal of Consumer Policy* more is not written in this area.

Future research which continues to explore how we can utilise public policy and marketing tools to affect meaningful cultural change is warranted. How can we learn from the sustainable consumer, voluntary simplifier and anti-consumer literatures? Are there public policy measures which can be used as a carrot rather than a stick to enact change? An emphasis on how marketing can positively help with the 'buy-in of environmental laws' and regulations is a fruitful avenue for future research. Interdisciplinary research with environmental lawyers and public policymakers could prove to be particularly beneficial.

Literature review and assessment of sustainability

There have been two major reviews of the sustainability marketing literature between 1998 and 2013 (Kilbourne & Beckmann, 1998; Leonidou & Leonidou, 2011) and both of these have been discussed above.

Organisational sustainability strategies and sustainability markets

At a time when the evidence from industry, as briefly discussed in the introduction above, clearly shows that business is embracing the notion of sustainability, it is surprising the issues have not been explored in greater depth in the marketing journals examined since 1998. Despite advertising, for example, being criticised at length by NGOs for their various greenwashing campaigns, the *Journal of Advertising* had only one paper (Chang, 2011) between 1997 and 2011 specifically exploring marketing communications strategies from a sustainability perspective. There was a special issue in 2012, but it is surprising that sustainability, which is of significant interest in the general media environment, has been largely silent in one of our major marketing communications journals. Similarly the *Journal of Marketing* has only published two papers which focus on the sustainability strategies of organisations; Banerjee et al. (2003), who explored the antecedents to corporate environmentalism, and Kronrod et al.'s (2012) examination of environmental marketing communications. No articles on this topic were published within the *International Journal of Research in Marketing*. There were a larger number in the *Journal of Business Research* and a few in the *European Journal of Marketing* and the *Journal of Marketing Management*. Topics covered varied hugely, and explored, for instance, marketing planning (Kärnä et al., 2003), marketing strategies (Rivera-Camino, 2007; Slater & Angel, 2000), environmental marketing claims (Chan & Lau, 2004), marketing communications (Cervellon, 2012; Do Paço & Reis, 2012) and new product development (Pujari et al., 2003).

It is interesting that research on what happens within an organisation, from a sustainability marketing perspective, has not mushroomed in the same way that sustainability business practices have. Research which continues to explore various marketing strategies and the role of sustainability therein are to be welcomed, but following this we must continue with research which considers the reframing of sustainability and the role of the organisation and the marketing function in wider society. Again, interdisciplinary research is vital here.

Pauchant and Fortier (1990) stressed 'codes of ethics towards nature' are based on anthropocentric ideals, and we need to shift away from these ideals. While capitalistic

principles and economic returns remain the universal value of companies, because of the Dominant Social Paradigm (DSP) in which companies exist, the political economy constructs of economic and socio-political forces have an influence in deciding the external and internal determinants of institutional change. Consequently, the macro phenomena embedded in the DSP means companies have an almost universal emphasis upon economic returns, with consumption as the root towards profit maximisation. There has been significant research in the organisation space since the 1990s (Shrivastava, 1994), which have focused on the need for sustainability to be at the centre of organisation's activities. Thus, more research which builds on this notion, while being cognisant of wider institutional, political and societal factors (Bookchin, 1980, 1988; Macnaghten & Urry, 1995; O'Connor, 1994), is required. Similarly, Porritt (1984) called for a move away from a politics of industrialism to one of ecology. These are not new ideas; Fisk recognised the need for us to consider the institutions which allows us to focus on the ideology of consumption in 1973! Criticising capitalistic tendencies and the continuous pursuit of growth is not new, but research within the marketing academy which focuses on these issues has, for the most part, remained on the margins. This needs to change. Ironically, the financial crisis might be our friend here. The age of austerity has forced many of us to consume less, and in doing so we have recognised that this might actually be good for our well-being and quality of life, as well as more beneficial to the natural environment. At the same time there has been a fundamental debate within society and across various academic disciplines (Amin, 2010; Posner, 2009) on the failings and failure of market capitalism, and thus the sustainability movement is not the only group seeking change. These conversations call into question how organisations operate, and indeed what organisations are for, and we see this manifest not only in conversations which focus on sustainability in organisations, but also in discussions around organisations which focus on, for example, the triple bottom line (Savitz & Weber, 2006) or doing business differently by adopting a social enterprise model, for instance (Nyssens, 2007). These conversations are taking place in mainstream management disciplines (Seuring and Gold, 2013; Shrivastava & Berger, 2010; Starik & Kanashiro, 2013), and we need the same for marketing. As the nature and role of organisations change, so too will the nature and role of both marketing theories and practices, marketing academics therefore have no choice, but to further explore these issues.

Reframing sustainability: institutional, societal and systems perspectives

Kilbourne and Beckmann (1998) used the categories of values, the DSP and sustainability in their original article, and we have re-classified these and brought them together under the one heading, where we consider articles which focus on the issue of reframing sustainability and consider this through institutional, societal and systems perspectives, as well as exploring the theme from theoretical and marketing ideology viewpoints. In their article, Kilbourne and Beckmann (1998) called for further research which moved away from a 'narrow, managerialist focus' with more of an emphasis on research where 'marketing must be willing to examine its own premises' and critically examine marketing's relationship with the natural environment. Up to 1998, the authors argued, that there was some, but very limited, research which tackled the fundamental issue of the ideology of marketing and how it is at odds with the environmental crisis. During the time period

1998–2013, there have been considerable strides to address these issues, but these have for the most part been in specialist journals such as the *Journal of Macromarketing* (Assadourian, 2010; Hunt, 2012; Prothero & Fitchett, 2000) and the *Journal of Public Policy and Marketing* (Press & Arnould, 2009; Shultz & Holbrook, 1999); the issue has been largely missing from leading mainstream journals and can be perhaps attributed to the ‘conservative’ and ‘inward-looking’ comments suggested earlier by Harper and Peattie (2011). Kotler did address this issue in the *Journal of Marketing* in 2011, although he failed to mention any existing research which has been examining this issue since the 1970s (c.f. Fisk, 1973). There have been significant attempts to address marketing’s relationship with the natural environment since 1998, and these have been both critical of the role of marketing and forward looking in terms of future directions (Kilbourne, 2004; Press & Arnould, 2009; Prothero & Fitchett, 2000; Prothero et al., 2010; Shultz & Holbrook, 1999; Thøgersen & Crompton, 2009).

It is within this theme that we see the most promise for critical research which further considers the questions ‘what is sustainability marketing’ and ‘what is marketing for?’ How then do we do this? First, we consider the ‘what is sustainability marketing?’ question.

What is sustainability marketing and how can we achieve it?

While both our own assessment and the assessments of Kilbourne and Beckmann (1998) and Leonidou and Leonidou (2011) clearly illustrate considerable research in the sustainability marketing literature, one question which remains unresolved is exactly what is it that we mean by ‘sustainability marketing’. If it is to be a micro, managerialist focused domain, then this does not tackle the more fundamental issue of how can we effectively address marketing’s relationship with the natural environment. This asks us to consider the very definition of what marketing is and what marketing is for – what are the basic premises of marketing, and what impact do these have upon the natural environment? To do this, we focus on two textbook definitions of sustainability marketing. Sustainable marketing according to Martin and Schouten (Martin & Schouten, 2014, p. 18) is:

Sustainable Marketing is the process of creating, communicating, and delivering value to customers in such a way that both natural and human capital are preserved or enhanced throughout.

Belz and Peattie (2009, p. 31) give a two-part explanation of sustainability marketing:

planning, organizing, implementing and controlling marketing resources and programmes to satisfy consumers’ wants and needs, while considering social and environmental criteria and meeting corporate objectives.

Secondly, emphasising the long-term relationship ‘... building and maintaining sustainable relationships with customers, the social environment and the natural environment’.

Belz and Peattie prefer the use of the word ‘sustainability’ as they infer the adjective sustainable can be interpreted as marketing which builds long-lasting customer relationships effectively without any particular reference to sustainable

development or consideration of sustainability issues and they state this is a subtle but important distinction.

What is clear from both definitions is that sustainability is not considered in the broad definition of marketing:

Marketing is the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large.

(American Marketing Association, 2013)

Both definitions of sustainable/sustainability marketing call for creating sustainable customer value, and this is missing from the AMA definition. While the AMA definition recognises various stakeholders, it does not go far enough; future research must therefore focus specifically on how might we achieve value for our customers, while ensuring ‘both natural and human capital are preserved or enhanced throughout?’ The wider sustainable management and ecology literatures make it clear that anthropocentric views of the world, as the AMA definition clearly is, will not allow us to adequately address sustainability problems. Kilbourne (1995, p. 18), when discussing green advertising in 1995, concluded:

Marketers, consumers, and Greens have failed to consider the complex nature of the crisis confronting them. Consequently, little progress has been made by marketers in developing Green marketing programs, by consumers in developing Green values, or by Greens in effectively presenting their position to prospective targets. At least part of this problem can be attributed to divergent perceptions of the nature of the problem. In failing to recognize the positional and political dimensions as interrelated parts of an integrated whole, each group has failed to achieve its potential. The framework offered here represents a first step in reconciling the pieces of the ecological puzzle and providing a common ground for ecological discourse within the discipline of marketing.

In 1995, Kilbourne called for a move towards ‘ecologism’ while recognising the mainstream marketing academy are still at the level of considering sustainability as ‘environmentalism’. In today’s language, we would argue it is the difference between considering sustainability with a small ‘s’, from a managerial perspective, or Sustainability with a capital ‘S’, from a more critical and macro perspective. This has resonances with the critical marketing literature where it has been argued that mainstream marketing focuses on marketing from a ‘naive managerial orientation’ (Hackley, 2009), via a neo-liberal lens (Witkowski, 2005), as opposed to more critical research which has a ‘critical social scientific orientation’ (Hackley, 2009). The mainstream marketing academy seems happy to take a more conservative stance and view sustainability as a micro, managerial issue, not a macro one, and most certainly not *the pressing issue*. This lessens the role for marketing as a positive force for sustainability in society and is equally at odds with industry initiatives to lead the way as sustainability solution providers. This might be symptomatic of a wider issue in society that people who suggest everyone *should* be sustainable are likely to antagonise mainstream society as they are seen as pushing people away from what they like (‘consuming’) and being perceived as being very evangelical or moralistic and knowing better than everyone else. Desmond’s (2013) ‘modest proposal’ partially addresses this concern with respect to the population question within sustainability; he uses marketing’s pragmatism in favour of the co-producing

customer to reflect on Jonathan Swift. The Sustainability subject rather than bringing people together has seen the mainstream unconvinced. In one sense, the more radical critic such as Zizek (2011) would see mainstream marketing academics as being in denial of the sustainability challenge. Kilbourne's proposals have been further elaborated by Belz and Peattie (2009, 2012), who consider the future scope and focus of sustainability marketing. The authors propose that sustainability marketing focuses on market/society and planet issues, with an emphasis on relationships. Both these suggestions emphasise the need for a fundamental rethink on what marketing actually is; and this is clearly evident in discussions which focus on the ideology of consumption.

It has long been discussed that consumption does not always make us happy or satisfy our needs and wants (Alvesson, 1994; Yiannis & Lang, 1995). Our current neo-liberal economy though has consumption at its core, and our mainstream marketing philosophy is centred around creating consumer value. Consequently, research which focuses primarily on environmental attitudes and behaviours will not lead to a significant change in the way we live. It is research which addresses this thorn in marketing's side which is required in the future. We need research which fundamentally explores marketing's *raison d'être* and considers how we change the consumption ideology (Kilbourne, McDonagh, & Prothero, 1997; Prothero & Fitchett, 2000). As Prothero and Fitchett (2000) maintain, we do not need to have either the commodity or capitalism as the root of all evil, and it is possible to appropriate a green commodity form. How then can we utilise various marketing tools and techniques (Peattie & Peattie, 2009; Prothero et al., 2010) to reframe this commodity form?

While there is research which currently focuses on the ideology of consumption, both within and outside of the marketing academy, more research is still warranted, and again inter-disciplinary research is a must. Within the marketing academy we continue to write about the latest trend, be it market orientation, relationship marketing or S-D Logic, while for the most part ignoring sustainability within these conversations. Indeed as marketing becomes more and more fragmented, one could argue that our marketing theories will simply become even more incremental and all that marketing theory will achieve is 'tweaking marketing strategies, concepts, or refining the minutiae of consumer behaviours' (Dholakia, 2009, p. 826). Until we address this issue, the elephant in the room remains the elephant in the room, and our academy's focus will be on creating consumer value and not on creating sustainable consumer value or value which has sustainability as its focal point. Dholakia (2009) argues that research which explores 'contemporary context-shaping phenomena' must be transformational and not incremental; we would argue that sustainability is the defining context-shaping phenomena of this century, and as such we must engage in transformational research to explore its further impact on marketing – at axiological, methodological and practical levels. At a time when both management academics and business practitioners are discussing the very reasons why organisations exist, with resulting changes to organisational strategies, structures and processes, we must engage in more widespread discussion which focuses on what marketing is, why it exists and how changes to its *raison d'être* will impact on marketing theories and practices. Our review of the literature shows that this has begun to happen in specialist marketing journals, but is, for the most part, missing from our major mainstream journals.

If we consider Alvesson's (1994) notion that marketing is 'a set of techniques' or an "ideology" rather than a "science", then we have scope to make attempts to change the ideology and its techniques. Research which examines micro firm-based and individual

consumer issues are necessary, but we must, at the same time, explore how organisations become more sustainable and can utilise various marketing strategies to help them achieve this. For this to be successful, our mainstream journals must become less conservative and more outward looking (cf Harper & Peattie, 2011), and this applies not only to sustainability marketing, but ethical marketing (Nill & Schibrowsky, 2007) and critical marketing more broadly (Dholakia, 2009; Hackley, 2009; Saren, 2009). Given these arguments are broadly similar to what Kilbourne and Beckmann called for in 1998, we are not hopeful the mainstream will galvanise in this way. While we are focusing here on the ideology of consumption, and over consumption in particular, we must of course recognise that a problem of poverty also exists and many people are simply not able to consume (Miller, 2012). We must also recognise that previous work has critically explored the notion of the marketing concept and the satisfaction of consumer needs (Dixon, 1992; McDonagh & Prothero, 1996). And, Crane and Desmond (2002) provide a critique which emphasises that a societal marketing concept, as an extension to the marketing concept, will not work (and the same can also be said for Kotler and Keller's 2012 holistic marketing concept), and that what is required is a 'fundamental reconstruction of marketing theory.' As Dholakia (2009, p. 828) emphasised, 'Legitimation in marketing requires the rhetoric of consumer centrality. The consumer, therefore, has been placed in the centre of marketing theory and practice.' If we are to tackle sustainability beyond a narrow, managerial focus, we must recognise that this requires us to reframe what marketing is and what marketing is for. These are not easy questions to address, but they must nonetheless be tackled both within the mainstream of our academy and continued within more critical domains. While Tadjewski and Saren (2008) suggested that both revisionist and interpretive research would likely remain outwith the more mainstream academy, Shankar (2009) suggested that critical marketers and mainstream academics should work more closely together; we would support this call from a sustainability perspective. This would mean that the definitions of Belz and Peattie (2009) and Martin and Schouten (2014) might require re-framing if we are to engage in a 'fundamental reconstruction of marketing theory', as suggested by Crane and Desmond above.

Consequently, future research is required which considers can we fit definitions of sustainability marketing within existing definitions of marketing? Is this radical enough? Do we need to be radical within marketing to help achieve a sustainable society? What are the alternatives? How can we develop sustainability marketing theories which build on a critical assessment of marketing's relationship with the natural environment? What impact will such theoretical developments have on the development of marketing practices? How do these tie in with notions of what is happening within organisations generally (as discussed above)? How can marketing theorists interested in the sustainability issue learn from current sustainability marketing practices? Research within these areas will further help us to frame research which focuses on how we achieve sustainability marketing (even if this means what we mean by sustainability varies) in the future.

Discussion and conclusions

Since JMM's inception in 1984, there have been numerous sustainability conversations and these conversations, as our review clearly illustrates, have continued within the wider marketing academy. Why then, when awareness of

sustainability has never been greater, is the sustainability challenge as great as ever? Despite the combined efforts of institutions, government and society, the problems still persist and it is quite clear that if the planet is to survive we must live differently (Assadourian, 2010). If we, the marketing academy, are serious about contributing to conversations around living differently, we must reflect on how we engage with sustainability marketing research and how our findings and proposals might then be enacted in the marketplace and/or add to further theoretical conversations.

In terms of how marketing has moved on since the first edition of JMM in 1984, we believe that the degree, diffusion and depth of green cultural change (Harris & Crane, 2002) is not as we had hoped; we still do not have a common ground for ecological discourse within the marketing discipline. Not everyone in the marketing academy sees Sustainability as *the pressing issue*; and this is evidenced by the limited, and mostly managerial, research which has been published in our major mainstream marketing journals. Between 1998 and 2013, the top three marketing journals – *Journal of Marketing*, *Journal of Marketing Research* and the *Journal of Consumer Research* – published nine articles on the topic, eight of which were in the deductive, hypotheses testing domain, and one (Kotler, 2011), a rather limited review of the future of sustainability. In their review, Kilbourne and Beckmann (1998) emphasised that the vast majority of research conducted between 1971 and 1997 had a ‘narrow, managerialist focus’ and failed ‘to adequately define the environmental problem’. Our review suggests that within our major, mainstream journals, the same is still true today, and they consider, for the most part, the managerial implications of micro, environmental questions, without paying enough attention to the macro relationships between marketing and the natural environment. Compare this, however, with a combined total of 85 articles from the *Journal of Consumer Policy*, *Journal of Macromarketing* and the *Journal of Public Policy and Marketing*, which contain a mix of empirical methods and topics under investigation, and articles which examine wider systemic and institutional issues, address the very ideology of what marketing is or should be, and move from the micro to the macro. There seems to be a chasm between what the more macro, policy-based journals publish and what is published within managerial journals. Even, the *Journal of Consumer Research* has no article which tackles these wider institutional issues, which have though been addressed in consumer research outlets such as the *Journal of Consumer Policy* and the relatively new inter-disciplinary *Journal of Consumer Culture*. This supports the suggestions of Hackley (2009) mentioned earlier, where there does indeed seem to be ‘parallel universes of social sciences and managerial marketing’ – while Hackley was talking from a critical marketing perspective, the same appears equally true for sustainability marketing.

Kilbourne and Beckmann (1998) argue that the vast majority of research from 1971 to 1998 failed to consider the broad macro relationship between marketing and the natural environment, and suggested two agendas to tackle this – first, an increase in inter-disciplinary research, and, second, research which begins to define the environmental problem within the marketing discipline. We and others (McEachern & Carrigan, 2012) continue to call for greater inter-disciplinary research; although there are some examples of this between 1998 and 2013, Low, Tang and Medhekar’s (2012) study of green power and public policy, for instance, was written by a marketing and a management academic in conjunction with an industry practitioner, and the nine authors on the Vanclay et al. (2011) study exploring carbon labelling policies belong to an inter-disciplinary School of Environmental

Science and Management. The need to storyboard and problematise big business on the big screen has been examined through the collaboration of a film theorist and marketer (McDonagh & Brereton, 2010).

Sustainability has been truly embraced by the social sciences as an area worthy of extensive study and the Routledge 'Environment & Sustainability' catalogue is a good example of this work, much of which is interdisciplinary based, with a range of 13 themes, including environment and sustainability theory, climate change, environmental management, environmental justice and ethics, environmental policy and politics. This seems to suggest a more themed or 'issues based' approach to scholarship around sustainability within the social sciences rather than a universal ownership to a particular normative viewpoint. In short we now have many 'sustainabilities' (Murphy, 2013) not just one sustainability issue. Within marketing, there is a disconnect within the discipline, where the mainstream sustainability literature continues with its narrow, managerialist focus, leaving more specialist outlets to tackle sustainability marketing from critical, institutional and systems perspectives. This needs to be redressed by editors of the major journals.

We would argue that as with Kilbourne and Beckmann (1998) the most fundamental issue at stake is to further explore the 'environmental problem' from a marketing perspective – and this perspective should be from theoretical and practitioner standpoints. In order to do this, we propose research that seriously engages with the two fundamental questions raised earlier – 'what is sustainability marketing?', and 'what is marketing for?' To some extent, these discussions are already happening, often times outside of the marketing academy, and also without reference to sustainability. They have though been largely ignored within leading mainstream journals, perhaps because, as Harper and Peattie (2011) suggest, they are too 'conservative'. What research then will help us further explore these two major areas. Utilising the themes in our earlier literature review, we have offered some suggestions in the preceding sections. As Wall (2003) though reminds us, a study of sustainability is about recognising the 'connections between things', and while we have primarily explored each theme individually, we recognise that research within and across the themes will be vital.

Key questions still remain; if sustainability is a megatrend, how will it be embedded throughout the entire organisation, and what does this mean for sustainability marketing? Does the business model embedded in a world of neo-liberalism and market capitalism need to change? Is growth sustainable? What are the opportunities and threats for organisations as they embrace the sustainability challenge, and how does this affect marketing strategies and practices, and indeed the very notion of what marketing is and what creating customer value is? What does sustainability become if a business-led agenda pioneers its enactment? Perhaps, as Crane and Desmond (2002) propose, we should be considering 'a fundamental reconstruction of marketing theory', and therefore even examining the notion of creating value sustainability may not be radical enough.

Two important points require reflection here. First, marketing is deemed complicit in the problem definition of, or impossibility of, achieving a sustainable future for us and our planet, especially from other dominant functional areas, and critiques thus abound of marketing academia as a result. This challenges our mainstream journals to create more space for self-criticism and not just in the form of special issues, but also on editorial review boards and by resisting mono-methodological and axiological biases.

Secondly, a number of factors come together which obfuscate interest in Sustainabilities. We suspect that the case is that sustainability within the marketing academy is more ‘megatrendy’ than megatrend and this in itself overlaps with several other issues in the wider academy – (1) The need to publish or perish in ‘ABS rank 4 journals’ which is being perpetuated by the increasingly homogenised (accredited) business school. (2) The desire by faculty to be perceived as being *managerially* relevant is dominating the value creation process and academics are therefore not as concerned with more collective projects such as sustainability or human survival. (3) The cultural and critical theorists that have re-emerged over the past 20 or so years navigate the waves of topicality and may not be that concerned about Sustainability at all. (4) Marketing as a subset of a greater technostructure (following Galbraith, 1967, in Desmond, 2003) will resist attempts to alter its *raison d’être*. Scholarship within leading marketing journals depicts sustainability marketing as a micro managed solution, a checked box, as in so doing it effects what Galbraith (1967) calls a revised sequence and negates any further criticism; an exercise in power. This is endorsed by the view of the DSP discussed earlier. All of these factors conflate to obfuscate rather than illuminate scholarship and, in a research myopic environment, they do underscore the love of sustainability over Sustainability within the mainstream marketing academy. Adding to this consider just one issue of Sustainability, namely, climate change, and how Lefsrud and Meyer (2012) map out the terrain of science fiction and the ways professionals use metaphors and emotionality to frame issues of sustainabilities. For many sceptics, emotionality itself is enough to relegate scholarship to sustainability. At best they are just ‘non-believers’ or at worst they perceive those passionate about Sustainability as some form of ‘eco-fascists’ to be resisted or ignored. Likewise it may well be that the scientism behind information warfare (see MacKay & Munro, 2012) against climate change is as prevalent within the marketing academy as it is within the public relations and political lobbying professions with sponsored research needing to be ‘outed’ or challenged more often than is currently the case. Other Sustainability issues face similar challenges. It would seem apposite that, Brown’s (2012) discussion of leadership, at the intersection of sustainability and advanced adult development, offers new insights into the behaviours and competencies of leaders’ post-conventional consciousness within the academy. This is worthy of further examination. There is a need for editors to hold space for the discussion of interdisciplinary work in this area and other leaders in the academy to facilitate a Special Interest group for Sustainability. That this still has to be formed within either the AMA in the US or the AM in the UK speaks volumes. This is more striking now than 30 years ago, and the academy should seek to redress the issue perhaps through a collaboration of the various sub-divisions which presently co-exist – critical, CCT and TCR – as just three examples, as opposed to being created just outside of them.

As a result, while technological fixes to green products and efforts to persuade consumers to buy greener products are laudable, in and of themselves they are not enough. Certain questions remain. For example, can marketers deliver sustainability as value? How do marketers deliver sustainability as value; how is it co-produced and do those outside the functional space that is marketing trust marketers with sustainability? Should at this stage marketers deliver sustainability as value, or is something more radical required? Such research is required both now and in the future within and outwith our discipline, and this research should be recognised and published in our leading marketing journals. This gives credibility to the function’s role in any solution provisioning. Otherwise, we might run the risk of arrogantly and

blissfully continuing towards Zizek's (2011) end times. Speaking as parents, and from a purely anthropocentric perspective, we do not wish to see this happening! Marketing, as any discipline, constantly evolves. So, there is no reason why our *raison d'être* cannot become one of creating customer value with sustainability as its focal point. Likewise in future a more radical intervention may be required. We again urge marketing academics to further address and problematise research in this space by taking less of an event time approach (focusing on anniversaries or special issues) and adopting more of an integrated time focus (Slawinski & Bansal, 2012). If the marketing academy does this, then it will deliver on its ability to enable and lead change within organisations (Ryan, Mitchell, & Daskou, 2012) and wider society, and suitably impart the competencies we need for prospective marketers in practice. Perhaps it is a case of Back to the Future II.

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