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What is This?
Envisioning a Future for Macromarketing

George Fisk

The author reflects on the early years of macromarketing, the evolution of the field, and shares new visions for the discipline and the journal. Four developments already visible are believed to be important to future welfare. Macromarketers and macromarketing furthermore are encouraged to be more expansive and inclusive, engaging empirical research and studying topics that reach out to other academic disciplines and to practitioners.

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What new visions could further enhance the field of macromarketing after thirty years of conferences and twenty-five years of publication of the Journal of Macromarketing?

In the 1970s when Charles Slater sent his graduate students to study marketing in African and Latin American nations, he was hoping to grapple with problems of aid to developing nations. Should we settle for anything less for our own posterity? Working toward a globally sustainable society is as appropriate a vision for twenty-first-century macromarketing scholars as marketing as an aid to development was for Slater’s graduate students in the twentieth century.

When the Journal of Macromarketing began in 1981, few were aware that the struggle between humans and their habitat was building toward environmental crisis. Today, sustainability of human societies is slowly but inexorably becoming the highest priority in all nations. Impacts of local activities are spreading globally because whatever happens in any one society affects others, and local impacts of any event can no longer be contained.

Trade globalization in particular yields social costs as well as social benefits. As trade globalization spreads into emerging nations, concern in the United States focuses heavily on the benefits and cost impacts of export and import trade as reflected in current accounts deficits. International trade arrangements are producing many benefits by increasing trade, but at the same time, price rivalries are generating economic disruptions, particularly job outsourcing to lower cost countries. In India, China, Ireland, and elsewhere, all countries benefiting from outsourcing, the gains from economic opportunity are lifting the burden of poverty for many while at the same time costs of environmental deterioration are rising alarmingly. However, secondary impacts such as peasant riots in China and the spread of disease like avian flu and HIV-AIDS are producing tertiary impacts such as social disorder and reduced longevity. Such social costs weigh heavily against social benefits that follow the introduction of new technologies. As a result of these disruptions, nations are losing irreplaceable resources including clean air, forest cover, and species diversity.

Lower import prices disrupt business firms and reduce export trade, but they induce benefit impacts such as higher level mass consumption lifestyles. These changes lead to further spillover costs including culture conflicts resulting in wars and social disorder. Benefit-cost assessments require tracing the chain of related consequences. Current practice often stops short of tracing these cycles. Before settling on a benefit-cost evaluation, the entire cycle of consequences needs to become known.

Long-range consequences give strong impetus to refocusing marketing studies away from the maximization of consumer satisfaction and toward the maximization of sustainable consumption. Government regulation of use of the public commons came under international discussion in the Montreal climate change deliberations because of the need for slowing global warming—a sustainable consumption goal (The New York Times 2005). Such discussions are driven by environmental quality decline that is generating pressures on planetary habitability. It is none too soon for macromarketers to focus on a mission of developing globally sustainable trading practices as one helpful step toward the vision of a globally sustainable society. Current developments in globalization, consumerism, and innovations ensure that the future of macromarketing is being reshaped even if macromarketers do nothing.
THE VISION CHALLENGE

A vision of life in which human survival is a goal superordinate to all others argues for a shift in macromarketing analytic focus to sustainability of global consumption and away from maximization of entrepreneurial profit or individual want satisfaction as the end we seek. As pressures for changing marketing goals become more intense, all marketing functions and consumption supply systems warrant reexamination through the lens of their contribution to sustainable consumption and sustainable supply chain analysis.

To understand more fully where we could go from here, we need to know where we are now. What is the focus of present-day macromarketing thought? The boundaries of macromarketing are far clearer now than when the Journal of Macromarketing was initiated. Experience has enlarged our vision during the past twenty-five years since the first issue appeared. Then, my trumpet had an uncertain sound. When I first encouraged manuscript submissions for the Journal of Macromarketing, I was often asked, “What is macromarketing?” Few of us were confident of our answers in 1981.

Now, owing to the special interests of participants in macromarketing groups and preparation of papers for the journal, the June 2005 issue lists section editors for Competition and Markets; Marketing and Development; Marketing Ethics and Distributive Justice; Global Policy and Environment; Quality of Life; and Marketing History (Journal of Macromarketing 2005). Special macromarketing interest groups have organized their own associations in most of these areas. Furthermore, scholarly cooperation between macromarketing interest groups is increasing. It has taken thirty years to get this far.

In the past twenty-five years, the macromarketing community has progressed from an informal collegial association into a formally organized global network of scholars. Our community has built the Journal of Macromarketing into a source of information about spillover impacts of marketing activity. These are strengths on which we can build for the future in ways I will discuss below, but first it is useful to look at current world developments missing from this picture of what macromarketing has achieved to date.

Four developments already visible are very likely to become more significant in the future of macromarketing:

1. Provisioning technology is changing rapidly. Modern economies are characterized by specialization and division of labor by means of which people are fed, housed, clothed, sheltered, and maintained at health levels that society can afford. Recent changes in provisioning technologies include emergency supply support in natural disasters by helicopter delivery of emergency supplies to populations affected by natural disaster. In crises, Internet searching for needed supplies by nonprofit relief agencies is substituting as a surrogate for individual demand.

2. Shortages are threatening sustainability. An increasing frequency of shortages is due to population growth, economic development, and disasters caused by acts of nature or human action. Sudden shortages are creating the need for such emergency supply chains. Disasters whether natural or induced by human action accentuate the need for crisis marketing organization. Tsunamis, floods, earthquakes, and hurricanes share with terrorist attacks the power to demand emergency supply chains. Unforeseeable demands arise for support of large populations of affected people, particularly along seacoasts and in the large urban concentrations now appearing globally (Kaplan 2005).

3. Internet market searching by buyers and sellers is transforming transaction routines in high-consumption-level countries and in global markets. Long-established distribution networks are yielding to location-independent market transaction flows, particularly via the Internet.

4. Knowledge production, storage, distribution, and application are streaming across disciplinary boundaries. Global communication is accelerating the speed of innovation-based knowledge across disciplines as well as across national boundaries (Friedman 2005). Protection of intellectual property rights is becoming a precondition for technological and economic advance as intellectual property protection by international law lags behind design piracy practices.

There is not space in this brief essay to examine each of these current developments in detail, but the absence of marketing systems analysis and the critical role of crisis marketing supply management in our current literature on shortages warrant a discussion of their relevance here.

Macromarketing is about process and consequences. The process is market matching or equalization of supplies and demands through market transactions. In the macromarketing society, organization of present supply-demand equalization issues are embedded mainly in studies by macromarketing historians, by scholars concerned with competition and markets, and by those interested in marketing and development. Are marketing systems performance issues so subordinate to these other interests that they warrant no section of their own in the Journal of Macromarketing?

A long series of macromarketing studies on marketing effectiveness and marketing efficiency and productivity followed the publication of Does Distribution Cost Too Much? (Stewart and Dewhurst 1939). Since the 1980s macromarketing interests have turned elsewhere. Refocusing on marketing systems performance could attract people working on productivity improvement in other disciplines.

Many now regard marketing as a cost of capitalism rather than as an essential service without which there would be no supply support available to consumers. Could the world’s 6.5 billion people survive if they go back to hunting and gathering? The world needs provisioning technologies because in societies organized around the division of labor, the marketing process provides supplies needed for survival. Macromarketers can use this reasoning to gain the attention of others concerned with sustainability issues. We can assert our knowledge to advise and guide government and business
policy makers toward the most effective business and public policy.

To illustrate the problem of ignorance of the marketing process by well-trained sophisticated analysts, I will use as an example the table of contents of State of the World 2005, the annual publication of the Worldwatch Institute (2005). Although published in many languages and distributed internationally, this research monograph makes no mention of marketing. To learn about “trade,” the reader is told to “see economy.” Despite concern for sustainability throughout State of the World 2005, it does not examine marketing impacts on consumption; instead, it identifies record-breaking gains in economic strength of China, India, and Ireland. In this report, these gains are associated with influences other than marketing. Also acknowledged as causes of environmental decline are decreasing raw materials’ availability, escalation of oil prices, and the global spread of polluting technologies.

While globalization is recognized as “harmful to poor people and to the environment” (Worldwatch Institute 2005, 165), there is little recognition of positive and negative impacts of trade globalization on the environment, on unemployment, or on quality of life. Although sustainability is the central topic of this State of the World 2005, marketing is nowhere employed as an explanatory variable affecting either sustainability or the habitability of our planet. The importance of marketing to a sustainable world for this research group appears to be nil. Yet if sustainable consumption objectives were recognized as an urgent priority for a world facing social disintegration, macromarketing analysis could address the range of issues arising from the current developments enumerated above.

I turn now to the shortages that imperil sustainable consumption. Among shortages examined in the Human Development Report 2005 are energy reserves (United Nations Development Programme 2005). I will use energy shortages to identify sustainability issues that warrant more attention from macromarketers: substitution, conservation, and consumer lifestyle change.

What are the potentials for substituting alternative fuels that could meet energy demands of a larger population? The answer lies in large measure on the speed of innovation, social as well as technological. Changes in a broad range of variables from environmental protection legislation to changes in zoning requirements can affect the kinds of fuel consumption patterns that follow such changes. Marketing accelerates innovation adoption. Diffusion of innovation is one means for increasing availability of supply. Numerous energy alternatives are currently being tested against the criterion of market acceptance, some with government subsidy, others with market pricing inducements. Still others are being market tested by furnishing hybrid vehicles at market prices consumers will accept. Substitution of alternative fuels, alternative engine technologies, and alternative highway access regulation are being tested for feasibility via consumer acceptance. Even such distant alternatives as telecommuting are being tested as alternatives for solution to the current energy shortage problem.

On the demand side of the market, macromarketing analysis could also explore opportunities for changing consumption patterns to conserve resources. More sustainable intermediate and final consumption lifestyles could be examined to determine sustainable consumption levels that could substitute for maximum consumer satisfaction as a marketing goal. Few consumers today act as if their behavior is reducing consumption options so severely that human species survival is in question. Consumerism, formerly a prized goal of development, is now preeminent among influences threatening a sustainable future. “Consumption” used to be a fatal disease; cynics claim that global goods consumption is worse for planetary sustainability.

For example, with more than a billion Chinese and another billion Indian consumers, growing middle classes in Asia are clamoring for automobile transportation. What sources of sustainable energy can be found during the life times of these new consumers already living in a smog-enshrouded atmosphere? Extending this question to all goods consumable by anticipated future global population of more than nine billion people could help to guide our vision toward assuring that we will find means for supplying new energy sources for more sustainable societies. Developing a vision of the role of marketing in a sustainable future world economy must be one that other concerned communities can also accept because macromarketing knowledge will otherwise remain unused.

A FUTURE ROLE FOR MACROMARKETING

My purpose in this section is to examine issues that coming generations will face in extending macromarketing knowledge beyond present limits. This blueprint for the future focuses on two elements: first, an internal focus on developing metrics and analytic skills with which to explore macromarketing phenomena and second, an external focus on developing working relations with people in disciplines not directly related to macromarketing.

We can begin by applying knowledge developed elsewhere to macromarketing issues. Reciprocally, we can more aggressively communicate existing macromarketing knowledge to business and public policy decision makers. On this subject, unless macromarketing writers attempt to communicate to the scientific and policy-making communities the fact that provisioning technology is not a slogan but an effective means for eradicating poverty, disease, and environmental degradation, it will remain difficult for macromarketing investigators to influence the path of sustainability research.

We need to penetrate the thinking of think tanks, the halls of government, and the boardrooms of business. Whatever vocabulary we develop or adopt, we need to address the
issue of multidisciplinary communication. Workers in other disciplines can learn to recognize that marketing has contributions to make to the sustainable society issue if we reach out to inform them.

By the same reasoning, developing analytic skills and developing metrics appropriate for macromarketing analysis will be easier if macromarketing analysts become more familiar with cognate disciplines such as social psychology, economics, and demographics. Since innovation, conservation, and recycling are key elements in developing globally sustainable consumption, shared analytic measures and performance standards should be available to all who guide business and public policy efforts to promote sustainable consumption practices. Just as measures of consumer confidence are now used by government and business planners, measures can be developed on both the supply and demand side of markets confronting scarcities and those facing innovative change.

As an example, scales for evaluating innovation adoption, conservation, and recycling practices can be applied to time-series consumer panels or to cross section studies of different demographic groups at points in time. If published regularly in financial journals and government publications, or in the *Journal of Macromarketing*, experience could be accumulated to test their usefulness for decisions.

If published in such journals, scales, ranking order of importance of either recycling or conservation practice, could be related to amounts of effort required for adapting innovation to new ways to achieve sustainable consumption levels in disparate cultures. Other kinds of metrics such as demographic characteristics associated with different levels of consumption and life-cycle consumer behavior could be tested for usefulness in guiding quality of life and life-cycle consumption practice because we need to discover sustainable practices that are most feasible under differing lifestyle and life-cycle circumstances.

Macromarketing literature presently offers few comparative analyses among populations of different nations, but measures of behavior or attitude among particular population groups could illuminate choices available to business or public policy. There is a dearth of research on trade-off rewards for shifting to more sustainable consumption practices. Limits to consumption addiction of every kind can be probed experimentally: automobile addiction, junk food addiction, and so on. However, before designing new studies, we need to publish information about existing studies, as a starting point.

Macromarketers can learn about consumption and distribution research being developed in other fields by compiling studies already published by strategic and government planners and economic research organizations. Such a bibliography of available studies in cognate fields could be reviewed in seminars to inform members of macromarketing interest groups. They may indicate gaps in knowledge toward which macromarketers could direct their own future studies. For example, we need to encourage papers suggesting sustain-

ability metrics that measure positive and negative consequences associated with marketing and consumption while tracing the time-series chain of both positive and negative spillover consequences of major developments.

Once a flow of policy-centered empirical macromarketing studies becomes substantial, macromarketing writers can aim to reach wider audiences. One language we can use to communicate to managers and administrators is the language of cost-benefit and impact assessment. Similarly to us, specialists in most disciplines tend to talk to other specialists in the same discipline. Few have the vision to cross their discipline’s boundaries. Since at present there is very little impact assessment research on macromarketing issues, efforts are needed to discover which issues are of most concern. Questions of intellectual property rights, agricultural subsidies, and current accounts deficits stemming from global outsourcing are good examples of high-priority issues that call for collaboration of macromarketers with economists, lawyers, and other specialists.

To collaborate, we macromarketers must learn technical terms about which many of us presently know little. In addition to the lack of shared language, policy makers are not audiences for media in which macromarketing studies are published. Macromarketing students need to find other ways to communicate to business and public policy makers. The Internet is still largely unused to communicate across disciplines (*Business Week* 2005). Internally, the Internet now gives our global network an unparalleled opportunity to communicate globally about macromarketing questions. The *Journal of Macromarketing* also offers a venue where we can begin this task if we share a common vision of the future. Even without adequate funding, the vision that I have suggested can be pursued through meta-analysis.

Dedicated researchers can locate existing studies on which to perform meta-analyses—reviews of existing studies—to gain insight. Their meta-analyses can contribute information on sustainability issues that concern the entire scientific community. Although sustainable consumption parameters remain to be discovered largely through trial and error, enough is already known to call into question marketing practices from Sports Utility Vehicle promotion to marketing of food products designed to appeal to appetite at the expense of health. Meta-analysis of existing studies can give us an entry point to the design of future studies. Meta-analysis is weak for hypothesis testing, but it offers opportunities to rethink the design of studies that advance our discipline.

Finally, to win attention from professionals outside the macromarketing discipline, a powerful potential contribution of macromarketing to business and public policy decision making could be to demonstrate the superior power of reward over “mutual coercion mutually agreed upon,” to borrow Garret Hardin’s (1968) phrase. Hardin’s view is widely accepted in the scientific and environmental communities—but it is a flawed prescription. Hardin, a biologist, won wide
approval for his proposal to halt the “Tragedy of the Commons” by recommending imposition of penalties as the most effective route to a sustainable society. Hardin assumed that mutual coercion is the most effective path to a sustainable world. As current globalization demonstrates, rewards are proving more effective in changing buyer behavior than are penalties.

Future macromarketing literature could test the hypothesis that rewards are perhaps more important than penalties in changing consumer and producer behavior in the direction of sustainable consumption. Mutual gains from market exchange mark an effective path to desired consumer behavior change. Nobody shoots Santa Claus, but the rewards stemming from market transactions need to conform to sustainable consumption criteria to be relevant to a sustainable future. If demonstrable, what a powerful tool we could place in the hands of public administrators and business policy makers alike.

What we know has to be used by business and public policy makers trying to build a more sustainable society. A useful conception of a macromarketing future calls for a proactive vision of spillover impacts as well as cross-disciplinary collaborative studies of institutional change and marketing system effectiveness and efficiency. My ruminations here are simply those of an old campaigner. So where do we go from here?

REFERENCES

George Fisk was a professor of marketing at Syracuse University at the time he served as Founding Editor of the Journal of Macromarketing in 1981. In search of socially responsible marketing behavior practices, he visited Sweden, Norway, and Denmark as Guest Professor. Later, as Georgia Power Professor of Marketing at Emory University’s Goizueta Business School, he studied social benefits and costs of private sector marketing efforts.