The Marketing Future beyond the Limits of Growth
Richard J. Varey
Journal of Macromarketing 2012 32: 424 originally published online 9 August 2012
DOI: 10.1177/0276146712454883

The online version of this article can be found at:
http://jmk.sagepub.com/content/32/4/424

Published by:
SAGE
http://www.sagepublications.com

On behalf of:
Macromarketing Society

Additional services and information for Journal of Macromarketing can be found at:
Email Alerts: http://jmk.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts
Subscriptions: http://jmk.sagepub.com/subscriptions
Reprints: http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav
Permissions: http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav
Citations: http://jmk.sagepub.com/content/32/4/424.refs.html

>> Version of Record - Nov 22, 2012
OnlineFirst Version of Record - Aug 9, 2012
What is This?
The Marketing Future beyond the Limits of Growth

Richard J. Varey

Abstract
This review constructs a broad and deep appreciation of what marketing scholars need to understand about economic growth, consumption, and quality of life, not as a problem of how to enhance marketing effectiveness and extend its reach, but rather one of how to focus (or limit) within the specific context of a better-not-more life goal and finite resource budget. The essay synthesizes concise reviews of recent books and finds implications for revisions to marketing and macromarketing principles and practices.

Keywords
macromarketing, marketing systems, consumer society, sustainable marketing, transformative purpose, well-being, future thinking, new society

Preview
Marketing as a managerial discipline continues to be largely inward looking, despite a mounting challenge to its raison d'être to competitively bring about market exchanges in the form of goods distribution and service organization. Market research is almost fully focused on finding even more opportunities for commercialization and competitive selling, and marketing research mostly focuses on improving proficiency. Only a minority of marketing scholars, including those in macromarketing, look to understanding of the power of marketing outside the managerial, interfirm competition mind-set, even much of the area of social marketing assumes the rightness of firm-driven influence over consumers.

What if marketing had a nobler purpose to ensure that markets are efficient and collectively and publicly beneficial, not limited and biased to private wealth accumulation? This is, of course, not an economic demand–supply problem, but given the infrastructure and skills base of marketing a social process for improving quality of life.

A review of consuming and marketing phenomena (see, e.g., Varey 2010) raises some pivotal issues that are not substantially addressed within the orthodox logic/ideology of the marketing discipline. What do marketers—as citizens—need to know about marketing, consumption, and society? Can consumption become sustainable and what would marketing be in a sustainable society?

The goal of sustainability comes to the fore when we recognize the contradiction of modern society’s provisioning system. There is a common expansive purpose in population growth and higher material standard of living that assumes infinite resources available and that only more not less is good. This ignores the truth of a finite balanced habitat and the capacity of the environment to renew and restore material sources that are used up and degraded, consumed, damaged, and taken out of circulation, and to repair the damage caused by the exploitation of those natural systems and resources when the natural and the public are made private and for sale and thus exploited and constrained, resulting in eroded productive capacity.

This essay reviews recent books in search of contextual updates and revisions for the managerial perspective still dominant in the Marketing discipline. What was once “not the concern of marketers/marketing scientists” is increasingly being heard, perhaps still somewhat heretically, in such a forum. However, most practitioners and researchers remain in the “business as usual, getting more proficient” mind-set; they continue promoting old wine in new bottles, but this is no longer a sufficiently healthy purpose. The rules must change, because the circumstances for human flourishing are no longer based in the assumed abundance.

Industrial Civilization as Problematic, and Society’s Values
The big problem facing the world’s population is the persistence and domination of “industrial civilization” and how to

1 The Waikato Management School, University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand

Corresponding Author:
Richard J. Varey, The Waikato Management School, University of Waikato, Hamilton 3240, New Zealand
Email: rvarey@waikato.ac.nz
organize society in the face of sustainability challenges of global ecological crisis. These are primarily challenges of political order that must be faced in the return of affluent societies to ecological scarcity and the necessity of individual wants subordinated to collective needs.

William Ophuls’ (2011) latest book, *Plato’s Revenge: Politics in the Age of Ecology*, begins with a call to reassess and challenge common tacit belief in society and nature as mechanisms, and quickly asserts that “sustainability” is impossible! Ophuls, a long-time political commentator on the ecological crisis, envisions social and political transformations, finding natural law within the realities of ecology, physics, and psychology. He seeks a necessary alternative to the basic social, economic, political, and moral assumptions of the science/technology/free market mindset in which economics is presumed to be the master science.

Ophuls presents an outline for a Platonic politics of consciousness dedicated to inner cultivation of the person, not perpetual growth of the economy. This supports a culturally and spiritually rich way of life that is materially and institutionally simpler and humbler than industrial society. In this, humanity flourishes on a human scale in harmony with nature, organized in “little republics” of people in direct unmediated contact with ecological, economic, social, and political reality. This is necessitated by the shift from abundance to scarcity, although as Ophuls points out, contemporarily “apparent abundance is really scarcity in disguise” (p. 29). The widespread selfish casual destructiveness of the consumption/accumulation way of life is both morally obnoxious and ecologically blind, driving choices and behavior into competition for a larger share of what is finite, instead of improvement that can benefit all. Ecological exploitation and military aggression are adopted to treat economic inequality and political oppression—such a spiritual malaise is the other great ill of our so-called civilization. Citizens feel demoralized, but this has two meanings. Morals are corrupted and undermined, and society suffers confusion.

Ophuls has brought forth a political perspective on ecology (see also his previous works on ecology and the politics of scarcity 1977, 1992). His argument for the need for ecological politics is pretty much laid out in the 8-page Prologue of this 230-page discussion: actually the central argument sits in pages 13 to 193. This is supplemented afterward by a very helpful bibliographic note identifying links to a set of related literatures that forms the basis for his analysis and argument.

Ophuls seeks natural law for humane prudent governance to transcend the failing secular, rational, amoral way of life. This is a “politics of consciousness” concerned with “expanding human awareness rather than extending human dominion” (p. 9). Humans may not long survive if civilization is merely concerned with accumulating wealth and power and dominion over nature, without the central pursuit of betterment and ennoblement.

The industrial destruction of nature is a consequence of moral failure or our “irrational rationality” (p. 27) in which nature is treated as a “lifeless world machine to be exploited” (p. 174). Going back to Cicero, Ophuls finds that natural law is right reason in agreement with Nature and is universal and eternal, thus truly sustainable. In modern society, legislation has been put in place of morals such that we have lots of rules but we are “living legally rather than morally” (p. 18).

In applying a heuristic method, Ophuls extracts and constructs a political argument for societal natural law on a scientific basis. He seeks fundamental moral principles to be found in biological, physical, and human nature—ecology, physics, psychology—to provide philosophical meaning and political guidance. In ecology, he finds reconciliation of human and nature to escape the collective folly that society and polity should be governed the same as market economy. Indeed, ecology contradicts modern political economy, seeking balance within limits and nothing in excess, essentially interdependent, mutual, symbiotic organic embeddedness. In physics, “the new physics is fundamentally ecological” (p. 60), again emphasizing interconnection. On reviewing current thinking in psychology, Ophuls finds a consistent pattern in the three disciplines, as the ethical basis in “natural laws”—humility, moderation, and connection: summarizing in the view that “We need to be humble about our limitations, both external and internal; we need to moderate our behavior to avoid imbalance, both physical and mental; and we need to honor our intimate connection to all of life, both material and spiritual” (p. 93). These moral, spiritual principles are common knowledge, but not commonly observed until ecology is taken to be the master science, recognizing the centrality of consciousness in the life process, and personal and social evolution.

Since pursuing the Enlightenment project of material and moral liberation, we have tried to live lawlessly in seeking freedom, mistakenly believing this can bring individual happiness and collective well-being. Yet, it can do neither, only bringing us to the brink of societal foundering. Real freedom, argues Ophuls, comes only by obeying higher law. We need to understand and commit to the new rules for the ecological (postindustrial) civilization—humankind in harmony with nature, conscious living that is wealthy in spirit, in a polis founded on liberty, equality, and fraternity.

Perhaps, societal development can be characterized in terms of our relationship with nature—first as dependent child, then adolescent destroyer, and now becoming the wise loving spouse. Such metaphor implies caring, respect, mutuality, reciprocity, and interdependence.

Ophuls’ scholarly product is an outline for a politics for people, not property, power, profits. Society will not be improved by expanding and extending power, aggression, exploitation, abstraction, and alienation. Such hypercivilization is self-destructive. Instead, he envisions a way of life materially and institutionally simple, and culturally and spiritually rich—better, nobler, happier, based on frugality and fellowship.

**The Emerging Reality for Marketing and Markets**

Ophuls’ analysis is based on the profound need to abandon our assumption of abundance to recognize scarcity. In *End of
Economic growth has ended is necessary, arguing from a large set of data sources that Heinberg (2011) provides the economic evidence that this is necessary, arguing from a large set of data sources that economic growth has ended! The world’s population has collectively outgrown general economic growth due to resource depletion, proliferation of negative environmental effects, and the incapacity of the globalizing financial system to adjust to simultaneous resource scarcity and escalating environmental costs. These are all related consequences of an accelerating increase in human population, the members of which increasingly strive for higher personal consumption within a finite planet system. We have created economic systems that require perpetual inherent growth when it is not possible now.

The first part of this book revisits the orthodox economic thinking and then presents the data. Heinberg then considers the plausibility of several proposed fixes for what appears to be another recession, but is profoundly different to that condition, finding that all presuppose the desirability of “business as usual,” that is growth-derived enrichment.

In five detailed chapters, Heinberg demonstrates the crisis and explains causes. Two chapters are then devoted to what to do to prepare for different ways of life less dependent on fossil fuels. Action is needed to build communal resilience, for example in the Transition Initiative, based on learning together, and mutual and social action in intentional communities. The final chapter suggests ways for policy makers, communities, and families to build a new economy that can operate within the available budget of energy and other resources.

The new economic reality is that further growth in consumption is impossible as we have already hit limits—we have reached the end of the ever-expansive “great balloon race”! The prospect of the consequences of continued ignorance of environmental limits is profoundly disturbing. Thus, a radically different challenge is faced by business and citizens, with a consequent need to assess this context and reassess key performance indicators for “good” marketing. If an ennobling contribution rather than driving overconsumption is the necessary way forward, then this change of purpose requires different values, just at a time when, and helping to explain why, value cocreation is to the fore in the Marketing field.

The current burst overinflated balloon is the evidence for the change imperative—both in a shrinking “pie” and in a market response to scarcity. This is not merely another cycle of recession to be ridden out into further boom. We are entering a new economy and geopolitics, with attendant population stress, in which not more life, but better life makes sense. This requires that we redefine progress as a pattern of culturally and psychologically rewarding life—progress without growth. The challenge is to transform from growth-based systems and endeavors to managing contraction and steady state. Such has been called a system reset, into a postgrowth way of life—a sustainable society in a finite world, including a variety of coordinated market-based but cooperative, nonprofit ventures, with strong government leading.

**The Necessary Revolution in Thought and Purpose**

Peter Senge and colleagues (2010) also use the bubble/balloon metaphor and consider life beyond in *The Necessary Revolution: Working Together to Create a Sustainable World*. Doing nothing about the harm we are doing to our home is not an option for prosperity—to survive and thrive! We are already experiencing a new, very different context for human lives, including business, recognizing that the economy is part of society, in turn part of the “environment” that physically supports and sustains us. Rapidly growing population clashes headlong with diminishing resources and growing waste and toxicity, producing damaged, compromised eco services, and dangerous system imbalance. The imperative is to join in the challenge to taken-for-granted institutional power and privilege so that necessary change for the better is enabled and supported.

Until this takes required effect, modern assumptions endure: humans are most important; there is infinite apparently cheap energy and enough space for waste disposal forever; human action does not disturb weather patterns; basic resources are unlimited or limits can be overcome through market reallocations and technology; and economic growth based on standardization and productivity are key to prosperity. Beyond the bubble, however, life will have a different basis: living within renewable energy source capacities, net zero waste, responsibility to leave a healthy biosphere for future citizens, recognized dependence on nature, ecosystems understood as precious, health in harmony amid diversity, and mutual security and well-being dependent on respect and care for all.

For the required systemic change, we need special learning capabilities: a systems perspective, collective systems intelligence constructed in collaboration, and creation beyond problem solving. Such innovation will bring the new era of human flourishing in a regenerative economy—beyond the industrial age—into reality. We are reviewing business as a living system adapting for harmonious relation to the changing situation, fit for life on Earth.

We are beginning to reduce overall consumption and increase economic efficiency by less harmful and more beneficial resource use, investing in regeneration, innovation, and adaptation that nurture the real life-sustaining wealth of social and natural capital. We can build a regenerative economy by reversing our long-established industrial process: using abundant physical and financial capital to build natural and social capital.

This book connects with Ophuls’ “natural law” (and with Cunningham’s “re-wealth,” as we will see), with Senge and colleagues pointing out that democracy is an innovation in its infancy, and business is no more than the product of mental models. Conditions will require that change will be made in our sense of purpose. The book collects together a wide range of stories of people doing just this transformation—making a better future in the next stage of human development.
(How) Does Marketing Contribute to the Crisis?
Neal Lawson’s (2009) discussion in All Consuming: How Shopping Got Us into This Mess and How We Can Find Our Way Out is largely inspired by sociologist Zygmunt Bauman’s conclusion that citizens, once primarily producers, have themselves been produced/consumed, as consumers. Lawson sets out to understand what kind of consumers we are in our consumer way of life.

On realizing this centrality of consumerism, Lawson’s book is a personal attempt, in his UK situation, to recognize that “turboconsumerism” has been built on consumer society with grave consequences that go against our best desires for wealth-derived happiness. Nowadays, not only are our culture, institutions, laws, and values organized around consumption, but this in itself is systematically using up what surrounds and supports us on an industrial scale and at an accelerating rate, and now we have gone so far that the whole system of selling us everything has come off the rails. Consumer society is already both dysfunctional and unsustainable.

How well do we realize that the commercial complex consumer society cannot allow us to become happy or that our satisfaction would erase further demand for satisfaction-bearing purchases? Yet, there is a breakdown of consumption happiness causality—more does not equate with happiness, once we are affluent.

Lawson discusses and illustrates in the past tense. For him, this is history that we must understand whether we are to make right choices in making our future. Production (work) gave way to consumption (shopping), a competitive, seductive experience, fraught with the fear of being excluded, and the result was the great consumer crash of 2008. Politicians have persisted in trying to fix this by encouraging more shopping. Lawson likens this to burning the house down to keep the family warm!

What went wrong? Britain became a nation of shoppers, encouraged by the corporate drive to expand and intensify the influence of the shopkeepers that Emperor Napoleon had so astutely ascribed to the character of nineteenth-century Britains. They succeeded in turning their lives into shopping addiction with unrealistic expectations supported by a vast expansive consumer complex. The bubble burst, yet the desire remains even though the means have largely gone for most people.

We rarely question our all-consuming way of life, so Lawson tries to answer the question “why did turboconsumerism happen?” Consumer society was not the endpoint, but just the beginning in the exponential increase in the “desire to desire, which translates as the need to want.” This is not what the textbooks set out as the basis for the marketing response in fulfilling needs and wants—giving consumers what they want. To consume is to exercise freedom in choice, but this demands excess capacity, so again not the model market efficiency of clearing supply in careful response to demand.

Increasingly driven by fanned emotions, and always with something hot to buy, and money to burn, the expansion of consumption has persisted on the assumption, presumption, and promise of superabundance. The consequences of overheating the system can be experienced in emotional and physical costs to ourselves and to our habitat: shopping costing the Earth, flawed consumers behaving badly in not conforming, in getting it wrong, and creating inequality and poverty. Much of the public realm of citizenship is lost, and the tyranny of choice is a daily challenge, leading to excess, and the commercialization of childhood and relationships. Society based on shopping is the problem, with lives out of control, and the capacity for collective decision making lost.

The alternative is to seek more compelling ways to live the good life, with less, not more. Free market values and the consumerization of society are now the problem, not the solution. In the wake of the consumer collapse, another profound cultural, social, economic, and political societal transformation is upon us. So, asks Lawson, what future will we create through our present actions? Turboconsuming is ending, so the book ends with a 10-point “shopping list” for life beyond “all consuming” which would prove rather challenging to most marketing managers: put the needs of society before those of the market by restricting advertising; tax luxury goods to ensure that status comes from other than high-end goods; ration key goods and services; promote ethical consumption of goods so that those that are good for living and habitat are chosen; tax waste to promote eco-friendly action; create a public realm by protecting commons and taxing income and wealth to promote public consumption; make work as important as shopping; redistribute time and money for a citizen’s income for all; measure happiness with a well-being index; and return decisions from private consumption choices to collective deliberation.

In Consumed: Rethinking Business in the Era of Mindful Spending, Andrew Benett and Ann O’Reilly (2010) cover similar territory from their US/international perspective of consumer survey data in raising issues around rethinking business beyond hyperconsumerism. For them, relationship marketing, Lifestyles of Health and Sustainability (LOHAS), consumer experience management, and social media are merely symptoms of a far more significant profound shift in attitudes to material possessions, wealth, shopping, and damaging excesses of growth-driven consumerism. Theirs is a compelling account of the growing portion of the population becoming dissatisfied with hyperconsumerist life—worried about the ubiquitous and daily obsession with consumption. For them, the unhealthy imbalance of artificiality, bottomless greed, and grotesque excesses is being consigned to the dustbin of history, as the “Great Recession” has marked the transition from hyperconsumerism to smart buying of smart brands.

This permanent shift in values is emerging is a social transformation now that what made consumerism possible has waned—as lines of “invented credit” evaporate, some of us can no longer afford the continued pursuit of “more is more,” while others are opting out in favor of meaningful and sustainable living. The limits of persuasive marketing are revealed when consumerism is no longer everything in life, and things are not making us joyful as promised by advertisers. For the affluent, the cost to well-being of becoming wealthier is just
too high, and the conscious and intelligent manipulation of unconscious impulses becomes socially undesirable. Humans flourish as citizens when not reduced cruelly to the role of market resources and “happiness machines” in need of market-derived, and often transitory, satisfactions.

More and more of us are dealing with the profound effects of the global financial meltdown and reset by looking beyond the hedonic treadmill of “see-buy-consume-discard-what’s next?” mindless accumulation. We want more in our lives, but less of it in material form. The authors’ phrase “purposeful pleasure” echoes the limited aspiration to a life of pleasure, the notion of serious purpose, common cause, something bigger than “me,” and more substance with less material is both evident and appealing. Mindful consumers realize their consumption in political, moral choice. When citizens choose to consume corporate brands, they will increasingly be going “co-,” or else they will be going “anti-,” either partnering or resisting.

This book provides extensive survey evidence in support of the authors’ argument that we are approaching a tipping point beyond which that “more is more” does not make people any happier becomes mainstream understanding, and different sources of “pleasure” will be sought from consumption choices. About to become mainstream is the radically different attitude to shopping and accumulation of “stuff” and recognition that corporate-driven consumerism exerts a huge toll on the health of the mind and habitat.

The authors argue that we are becoming more mindful and sustainable in what they call “conscious consumption” and business, first explaining consumerism, and then defining sharply contrasting mindful shopper traits and behaviors. This leads to an optimistic discussion of principles and illustrative practices of marketing response to this fundamental shift. Champions of mindful consuming are shown to be applying alternative enterprise and wealth models to create authenticity, community connections, causes, and substantive participatory brand partnerships.

Barry Smart’s (2010) Consumer Society: Critical Issues and Environmental Consequences provides two particularly striking explanations in regard to the almost universal belief that a “good life” comes from the pursuit of a “goods life” in a so-called free market economy. A crisis of distribution since the late nineteenth century—in the separation of production and consumption—is a social disconnection that remains necessary to maintain the enchantment of consumers who don’t produce with buying and to obscure the realities of what is produced for sale, how and in what conditions, and at what costs to workers and others, as well as the real costs compared with the “market” price of goods. There are implications for the burgeoning field of Relationship Marketing in this, since coming closer together might reveal some aspects of the way business is conducted that those enticed into consumerism and customers might find disturbing and disappointing, even unpalatable. Alternatively, in this intimate engagement, sellers might have to clean up their act to maintain their “license to operate.”

Second, the history and extent is revealed of the intentional and extensive efforts to influence demand by cultivating desire, to nurture and direct for corporate benefit. Much so-called marketing is to produce as well as attract consumers, thus ensuring the market. An early example discussed is the advent of the shop window display to create and foster desire for purchasable goods.

Smart helpfully points out the (mostly unspoken) limitations of the consumerist vision of the world. Markets are not free, despite experts’ continued assertion to business students and the nonexpert public, and because there are various active contributors to the consumerist way of life, consumers can be understood as active, but not autonomous. Market choice is not free, but influenced; consumption is strenuously promoted; and many dollars are invested in fabricating customers. Back in early 1900’s North America, historian and social critic Thorstein Veblen spoke of “publicity engineering” (we might now call it marketing) as the newly emerging profession that now spends more on promoting things for consumption than in making them. Smart illustrates the power of this consumer cultivation with examples of cigarettes, fast food, alcohol, and deodorants, all pointing to the invention of wants far beyond any authentic and natural needs. In a time when a staggering US$ 600 billion is invested (diverted?) into advertising/branding, it is sobering to retake Galbraith’s point that such marketing shifts consumption control from consumers to the firms; so much for free choice.

Starkly, as the advertising industry has flourished, the provision of an ever-growing range of goods and services is accompanied by a decline in the number of people declaring happiness or contentment with the consumption-driven way of life. In Baudrillard’s consumer society of the 1960s, he observed “enforced happiness” in the effects of the promotion of consumption and buying. Merely a diminished market or contrived simulation of happiness was the result. Whereas the promise was, and still is, beneficial exchange, choice, and thus competition, for many the outcome is inequity, adversity, discontent, waste, and atomistic breakdown of community and family. Such are the undesirable outcomes of consumer lifestyles. Smart’s analysis provides an international perspective on conditions and effects of consumer capitalist forms of life, revealing that worldwide the wealthiest 20 percent of the total population are responsible, but largely not accountable, for 76 percent of private consumption. Smart raises important serious questions over the quality of life of a consumer society. What seems to be undermined and diminished is the desirable equity, trust, sufficiency, sharing, conservation, and collectivism of a community founded on interaction, commitment, and cooperation.

The rich–poor divide is widened as the economy is grown. The global-scale way of life is locked in to unrestrained and uncritical (blind) consumption growth by forces outside the control of individuals (quoting Tim Jackson). Responsibility for correction cannot be left with consumers exercising market choice. There is a primary role for government in protecting the social good, to ensure better lives for all, within ecosystem habitat limits.
Having drawn attention to diagnoses of the ill-health of society, and hinting at major shifts in the consumer mind-set, it is helpful to consider what prospects can be seen in recent marketing textbooks. Are the following books an early outcrop in the discipline in recognition of, and response to, a new era in society’s development?

**Marketing for Sustainability**

Our ways of living and doing business in debt-fuelled over-consumption is both economically and environmentally unsustainable, endangering future welfare. A sustainability orientation is needed as mainstream to build on the strengths of marketing process. Frank-Martin Belz’s and Ken Peattie’s (2009) corporate and product brand marketing management textbook, *Sustainability Marketing: A Global Perspective*, provides such a historically situated and future-oriented vision for Marketing to reposition it from a major driver of global crises to a positive contributor in the new realities.

The authors point out that Marketing is not an amoral tool; it is explicitly values driven, accepting and promoting the sanctity of markets, consumer sovereignty, and customer need satisfaction. They then explore the systematic integration of sustainability principles into marketing theory and the practical decision making of marketing managers in light of the convergence of the transactional-relationship marketing “paradigm” shift with accountability and accommodation to multiple stakeholders, often with incompatible eco/ethical interests. This is to be accomplished without the assumption of the necessity of trade-offs, obtaining alignment in the sustainable value-based relationships of firms and customers.

This requires an update to marketing principles, such that consumer research is extended with socioenvironmental priorities, marketing strategy development accounts for social, ethical, and environmental values, and programs and campaigns are designed with a consumer-oriented marketing mix (see also the 4As of Sheth and Sisodia 2012). Marketing, then has impact beyond merely responding to social change, and thus takes on a transformational role in society.

The industrial order is wedded to infinite progress through technology and believes in the possibility of achieving harmony between self-interest and general welfare. This value system is increasingly outmoded, requiring a reframing of marketing. Based on this book as well as Grönroos (2007), we can conclude that marketers will become much more concerned with the appreciation of macro-level social and ecological problems and will understand socioecological impacts of products at the micro level, conscious of marketing assumptions, norms and values beyond amoral concern for competitively responding to consumer needs, growth, and exploitative profiting. Mainstream marketing will refocus on value creation in the total consumption process, away from individualistic purchase behavior, and will substitute promotion for the creation of exchange transactions with trust and commitment in service relationships. The purpose will shift from outputs (products) to benefits understood as satisfying solutions (service) and will account for the total cost of consumption.

Martin and Schouten’s (2012) textbook, *Sustainable Marketing*, sets out the view that marketing is a powerful force for shaping a sustainable society. Their primary readers are students studying marketing with the intention of pursuing a meaningful career.

Human sustainability is helpfully defined as “the opportunity for all people to maintain fulfilling, productive lives while preserving or replenishing the natural and economic systems that make their well-being possible” (p. 3). A brand is sustainable when it is “economically enduring, and its associations in the minds of customers and other stakeholders rightfully include social justice and ecological sustainability” (p. 140). In setting out the need for sustainability, two challenges for business managers are identified—to make marketing (i.e., business) sustainable, and to market the value “sustainable” so as to make it mainstream in society—as a source of innovation-based competitive advantage as well as a morally desirable way of life.

In order to incorporate sustainability into business and marketing, it is necessary to integrate business and marketing into sustainable society, since marketing is the “communicative interface” of business and society. To accomplish this requires a whole-system understanding rather than the reductionist micro focus of orthodox managerial marketing, to see sustainable marketing as part of sustainable society—a part of the way to that desirable future.

Particularly effective, given the purpose of the authors, is that they have not reproduced the orthodox managerialistic micro-economic view of marketing as competitive profiting, with sustainability issues supplanted, as challenge and/or opportunity. Instead, the book is founded and structured on sustainability principles, and key aspects of marketing management are explicated and formed in that context, for the societal purpose of the betterment of well-being in preserved and replenished life support systems. In this regard, the text is refreshing as an alternative to the usual commercialized textbook tomes that celebrate marketing’s positive effects with little regard for the negative effects, and as a call to action in the rethinking of marketing practice, in purpose and actions, as a noble force for good. In a changing world in which we are becoming more conscious of sustainability in its broadest sense—and the majority are now rethinking our relationship with Nature and Society—marketing is changing in both sense of what it is for and how it can accomplish worthy goals in a culture of sustainability.

This is one of only a handful of textbooks to address sustainability of human, natural, and economic capital from, and to, the marketing perspective (see also Fuller 1999; Grant 2007; Ottman 1993, 2011). This book stands out because it is not managerialistic—it is not about how to make marketing fit into sustainable society (through reformist adherence to rules) but rather how to understand marketing’s purpose and form from the viewpoint of sustainable society.
The Natural Step framework is adopted to structure the analysis from both personal and corporate perspectives, setting out system conditions for sustainability in regard to what we take from the Earth, what we make, what we do to the Earth, and how we meet human needs. In this perspective, the Earth (environment) is not part of the economy but the life-supporting suprasystem within which all life operates. A sustainable product does not pollute or poison the habitat, does not degrade ecosystem services. Instead, it increases natural capital and does not undermine our ability to meet our own needs and it builds human capital, enriching experience, rather than exploiting human “resources.” Market-based economies have created great affluence, which in itself seems to be a great obstacle to sustainable living since our very wealth creates habits and expectations of both individual people and institutions. This constitutes a pathway to social disintegration, even eventual collapse. Historically, many instances are recorded in which a society’s response to affluence exhibits an irrational lack of care about usefulness or waste. Marketing can contribute in the sustainable form of society by educating people in sustainable consumption behavior, by ensuring better products, by communicating honestly, by offering clear value propositions, and through more effective and efficient distribution.

For me, the book’s main strength is that it does not try to weakly fit sustainability to the conventional marketing mindset in a limited reformist way. Rather, it succeeds quite well in strongly and concisely adapting the conception of marketing to the purpose of well-being for all in a sustainable society. This text is part of a vanguard that is breaking through to a post-industrial conception of business and marketing.

A New Common Sense? Marketing’s Straight A’s Value Focus

In light of Jagdish Sheth’s various initiatives—for example, consumer behavior theory (1969), marketing schools of thought (1988), relationship marketing (1995), customer behavior theory (1999), marketing reform (2007), and conscious capitalism and the rise of ecoconsciousness and the service logic for marketing (2007)—Sheth and Rajendra Sisodia’s (2012) The 4A’s of Marketing: Creating Value for Customer, Companies and Society was eagerly anticipated. Did we now have a textbook for educating Marketing students on their contribution to the future sustainable society way of life?

First, this book is offered as setting out a novel customer-oriented framework and planning tool as a translation of the long-in-the-tooth managerial marketing mix toolset, synthesized with Peter Drucker’s management-by-objectives. The purpose is to see the business of buying and selling goods and services from the customers’ perspective instead of only the managers,’ with an appreciation of customer values understood in the roles of seeker, buyer, payer, and user in which people interact and relate with firms and their people, processes, and products.

For several decades, there has been massive ineffectiveness in marketing programs attributable in large part to a failure in the way managers understand what drives customers. Uncertainty and expenditures have been huge and returns on investments have often poor at best. Marketing has become far too tactical and reactive in many businesses, with too much effort to making sales, and too little effort to relationship development. Customer orientation has been poorly and all too often tactically implemented. Much advertising has been ill-conceived and wasteful and much of the massively increased promotional effort has had little real positive impact on brand loyalty, draining resources that could be expended for greater value gains. Much sales promotion actually lowers profits—some uptakes are less than 3 percent—a colossal misuse of resources, observe the authors.

There is a need to effectively apply the power of marketing in understanding, informing, influencing, and persuading to right effect with customers for customer-centered goals and to organizing the business around customers. This is seen in terms of acceptability, affordability, accessibility, and awareness as the basis of results-focused objectives. Such marketing-by-objectives with a holistic perspective on effective resource allocation can generate value by focusing on why goods and services are desired and what constrains adoption. The effect can be to conserve precious resources and create genuine value in marketing programs that become more effective and more efficient, with better returns on investments, and thus produce more scope to invest more widely in more life-enhancing resources for more people by better aligning what customers need and what businesses can do. This would seem essential to any attempt to make marketing sustainable, not merely enduring but primarily flourishing in supporting better lives.

Firms of Endearment: Repurposing Marketing

Sisodia’s previous book with Wolfe and Sheth (2006), Firms of Endearment: How World-Class Companies Profit from Passion and Purpose, identifies thirty world-class companies that profit well beyond their industry averages by aligning stakeholder interests around higher purpose to create emotional, experiential, social, and financial value. Perhaps, counterintuitively in the managerial mind-set, these companies spend way less than others on conventional marketing activity, yet perform way beyond mere customer loyalty and corporate social responsibility. These companies were identified by asking “which companies do we love dealing with?” and “which companies make the world a better place?”

The cases demonstrate explicit humanness in impassioned striving for a higher purpose—to make the world a better place, with profit as an economic reward for accomplishment. These businesses are intentional agents of public good, creating social value, not only private value for shareholders, holding society as their ultimate stakeholder. As society is evolving, transparency and accessibility enabled by the Internet, and the aging...
of the population, are major forces, bringing forth a value of generativity, that disposition of the elders to assist youngsters to prepare for their stewardship of the common good “beyond their own skins” as Abraham Maslow once said.

Humanistic values can be seen coming to the fore in the maturing of society and thus in the discipline of business/marketing for a humane working and trading environment, in which emotional, experiential, and social value, as well as economic value is created. These “loved” firms are held up as ultimate creators of value, in all forms, committed to working with, partnering with, and investing in all stakeholders to the purpose of the business, and recognizing they are just part of a complex network of interests in a matrix of interdependencies.

These firms do not see marketing as seduction, conquest, and manipulation—a pervasive hucksterism. Many firms have hugely increased marketing spend (mostly in advertising) relative to other functions to build trust and loyalty in the face of ever more competition; yet their results from this increased communication far too often is less trust and loyalty, and more suspicion and resistance. The firms of endearment have, on the other hand, invested in aligned stakeholder relationships in a stakeholder relationship management business model which assumes they will do well by doing good. This is a superior business model for value creation, centering on the day-to-day expression of core values to satisfy higher level needs, and producing an as yet uncommon level of trust. This exceptional engagement then uses market-based changes to create societal value drawing on a communal understanding of well-being. Firms of endearment are easier to work with and valuable partners who help enhance productivity and financial outcomes. They create added value for all stakeholder groups. Loyalty is more pervasive and stronger with the key being alignment not adversity. These firms achieve a huge efficiency gain in not relying on costly promotional campaigns and sales promotions, benefiting all concerned in direct experience and fostering almost-evangelical word of mouth advocacy and reputation.

**Review: Implications for Marketing**

The several books published over the past three decades on environmental marketing, green marketing, sustainable marketing, and so on (Coddington & Florain 1993; Dahlstrom 2010; Ottman 1993; Peattie 1992, 1995; Smith 1998; Winston, Polonsky, and Mintu-Wimsatt 1995; Wasik 1996) have been written from within the industrial–corporate–market logic of private profiting through producing for exchange. Today, we have an alternative sense that this is both incapable of meeting future needs of citizens and being a major contributor to damaging overconsumption and associated unrealistically expansive expectations.

The rules for valuable commerce have changed because the continuing financial crisis is not just another recessionary phase following a burst bubble. This time the crisis is global, not limited to a local company or state overstretch, but the end of the line for perpetual-growth-based ends and means. Infinite growth turns out to be rather finite as well as past history! It seems time to make the transition to a more noble cause, and Marketing may be just too effective—positively and negatively—to leave to micro-level marketers. Its purpose and effects are not only economic, and now a sociopolitical issue for society. Marketing in and for the sustainable future of society needs clarity of both ends and means in facing up to the reality of a postabundance, postgrowth life-enhancement role (Varey, 2010, 2011).

The Marketing discipline has the tools and resources for the transformatory organized processes set out by Senge et al. (2010), which can be used not only as a managerial tool for competitive profiting on the perpetuated assumption of growth but as a social process for cocreating value post hyperconsumption. This presents us with prospects for a much more positively constructive overall effect of marketing: innovative drive, equitable provisioning, efficient resource use, capital enhancement, and so on. What we need now for the new context is holistic transformative design and application of a form of marketing that can be integrated into the making and support of a sustainable society. This may be forthcoming in the humanistic business movement.

Inspired by Ophuls’ (2011) assessment of the moral development of democracy, We can sense Marketing developing from its adolescent origins in the burgeoning industrialization of society, fixated as it has been for decades on control and exploitation of market forces and natural resources, to a currently emergent maturity valuing interdependence and balance. This is a profound shift in emphasis for Marketing to a macro-level understanding of a social process and from an emphasis on a business technology to distribute things and formulate service. Indeed, this fundamental emphasis on service is increasingly manifest today in the notions of value cocreation and social media participation.

In overviewing these books, a further title comes to mind that offers a vision of the agenda for the next phase of marketing toward further maturity. If we reflect on what we mean by “enrichment”—net improvement when all costs are accounted for—then Storm Cunningham’s (2008) reWealth suggests a way forward in revitalization. He argues that actually there is growth potential, but it is in regenerative work, not in the degenerative consumption inherent in “economic growth that undercuts quality of life [and] leads to economic stagnation, and eventually desperation” (p. 364). There is a choice to be made between economic growth that enhances quality of life and economic growth that diminishes quality of life. Such revitalization is rapid, resilient renewal in a process of “enhancing a populace’s quality of life via economic growth that’s based primarily on the renewal of their region’s natural, built, and socioeconomic assets” (p. 371).

Cunningham makes the point that in commonplace thinking about the so-called environment, we do not recognize that a “resource” is a renewable source, thus we continue to use up so-called resources. This is a damaging confusion.
Sustainability is simply about not using a source faster than it can regenerate. Thus, sustainability is not enough! In what Cunningham calls “dewealth-based” communities, economic growth and quality of life usually have an inverse relationship since in ever-expanding there becomes a “pathological disconnect between wealth creation and its effect on the world” (p. 71). He looks beyond development, arguing that “…the primary problem with sustainable development (as currently practiced) is that it attempts to make sustainable all three modes of the development lifecycle: dewealth (industrial consumption), prewealth (conservation), and rewealth (restoration). All three are in need of greening, no doubt, but only the latter two modes are inherently sustainable” (p. 350). He observes that “when environmental groups speak of humankind’s ‘exceeding the carrying capacity of the Earth,’ what they are really talking about is exceeding the ability of the planet to sustain our deconomy. Our reconomy is a completely different story” (p. 55).

Thus, we need to apply our efforts to build capacity for renewal, rather than promote a particular solution, if we are to create the necessary restoration economy in which business does no damage and contributes to undoing existing damage. This is a better than habitat-neutral or “green” strategy in which we will prosper by bettering the environment. There are established positive effects from business here in New Zealand. For example, the Green 50 List identifies those New Zealand companies that prosper the most through improving the environment.

Cunningham observes three trends in response to the three crises of contamination, corrosion, and constraint. These trends are renewal of assets (not more resource use), along with integration of natural, built and socioeconomic environments for efficiency and synergy, and engagement of stakeholder support. Together, these trends accomplish holistic renewal of assets for enhanced function, wealth, status, beauty, health, quality of life, and community spirit—in short, those aspects of life which contribute positively to happiness. So, while “green marketing” is doing less damage, and sometimes merely different damage through substitution, it is inadequate because it does not act restoratively in undoing previous damage and restoring valued assets to make our lives better.

Three of the books reviewed here are for marketers, but all are for citizens who experience marketing and expect it to bring net benefits and minimal costs. We should not imagine that the problem for Marketing is to incorporate sustainability values into policies and practices. That does not go far enough. The real job facing society is to integrate ubiquitous marketing into sustainable society and that is a matter of transformation, in ends and means (Varey 2010, 2011). The drive to do this is coming from citizens and can be seen in prosocial consumption in terms of sharing, participation, and ethically selective choices for deciding and meeting needs and wants, much of which is happening outside the formal market and reopening a public sphere for valuation.

**Declaration of Conflicting Interests**
The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

**Funding**
The author received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

**References**


**Bio**

**Richard J. Varey** is a professor of Marketing at The Waikato Management School. His scholarly project is “Marketing in and for a sustainable prosperous society.” He is a specialist in inquiring about marketing as the interface of people–society–business, the future of marketing, human interaction in commercial situations, and systems of managed communication. He applies philosophy, social psychology, communication theory, anthropology, critical thinking, and ecological principles in his work.