Sustainable Communication and the Dominant Social Paradigm: Can They Be Integrated?

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Sustainable communication and the dominant social paradigm: can they be integrated?

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Abstract. The relationship between marketing and the environment has been examined since the early 1970s but began to focus on advertising in the early 1990s. Environmentally related ads were frequently analyzed for content, and then a framework for green advertising was developed, expanding the domain of inquiry to the level of paradigms. This article expands on both of these areas of research by examining both green advertising and sustainable communication and positioning them within the dominant social paradigm of western industrial society. It is argued that achieving sustainable consumption is problematic for both areas because their goal contradicts the basic elements of the paradigm. For meaningful change to occur over time, it is necessary to develop the theory of sustainable communication further and expand knowledge of the functioning of the dominant social paradigm of western industrial societies. Key Words • capitalism • dominant social paradigm • green advertising • liberalism • sustainability • sustainable communication

Introduction

The role of advertising in society has been an issue in marketing for many decades. In recent years, one stream of the advertising/society relationship has narrowed to focus on the environmental consequences of advertising. However, we must recognize that advertising is not a one-dimensional construct but is diverse in its structure and function. The focal point in this article is product advertising, but it is recognized that other types, such as social issue advertising, are not unrelated to the advertising/environment relationship. Different types of advertising can have very different environmental consequences, and Kilbourne (1995) has argued, for example, that there are at least five different types of environmental advertising...
ranging from minimally environmental to ecocentric. More recently, McDonagh (1998) began the development of sustainable communication that is more comprehensive and more oriented toward sustainable consumption than green advertising.

At the same time these streams of advertising research were developing, another approach to the society/environment relationship was developing in which the notion of a dominant social paradigm (DSP) was the focal point (Dunlap and Van Liere, 1984; Kilbourne et al., 1997; Pirages and Ehrlich, 1974). The purpose of this article is to integrate these two streams of research and to develop an assessment of the potential for green advertising and/or sustainable communication in engendering sustainable consumption as the prevalent mode of consumption within western industrial societies. Each of the constructs will be defined and explained and then the potential for integrating sustainable communication into the DSP will be assessed.

**Marketing and the environment**

The potential for environmental decline has been recognized and commented upon since before the Industrial Revolution. Locke (1980) and Mill (1872), for example, alluded to potential resource shortages and the limitations to economic growth. Mill theorized on steady state economics and Locke recognized that his 'enough and as good' criterion would not last forever. The environment was not problematized until 1962, however, with the publication of Carson’s (1962) *Silent Spring*. This book resulted in two major conceptual outcomes. The first outcome was a demonstration that human interaction with the natural environment was both negative and significant. Second, it showed that a substantial portion of the negative consequences could be specifically attributed to economic activities. The marketing academy did not incorporate these consequences into its agenda until a decade later, however.

Kilbourne and Beckmann (1998) reviewed the environmentally related marketing literature from 1970 to 1997 and concluded that there were two developed research streams and an emerging one. The first stream of research related to the conceptualization of green marketing in several aspects. In the first, environmental target markets; green products; the demographic, psychological, and behavioral characterizations of green consumers; and socially conscious consumers were investigated. No common conceptualization was developed in this research. Another stream related to conservation behavior, legislative initiatives, and strategic implications of the environment for the firm. Here again, no conclusions regarding effective strategies were developed. The emerging research stream related to the general area of sustainability and its relationship to marketing activities. In this stream, the level of analysis was shifting from the strictly managerial perspective to a more macro level, incorporating such concepts as environmental values and the dominant social paradigm.

Stern et al. (1995) developed a more comprehensive model than that used in traditional marketing approaches that have focused primarily on attitudes and
behavior. They argued that social structures and value systems were an integral part of the process of environmental decline, suggesting a more macro focus than marketing provided. This expanded view developing outside of marketing was accompanied by more comprehensive views of the process within marketing. More recent marketing studies have been expanded to include more comprehensive and multidisciplinary views of the environmental process including such factors as technology (Fisk, 1998), values (Grunert and Juhl, 1995), and politics (Kilbourne, 1997).

Among the changes that had been taking place within the marketing discipline was an increased interest in the role of advertising from a public policy perspective. The interest here was primarily in the area of deceptive environmentally related advertising. Kangun et al. (1991), and Carlson et al. (1993) examined the content of environmental claims in advertising and Carlson et al. (1996) examined ad content from an international perspective. These studies did not develop a conceptual model for the role of advertising in the process, but a substantial part of their contribution was in bringing advertising into the environmental arena within the marketing academy, stimulating further research and conceptual development. A special issue of the *Journal of Advertising* was, for example, devoted to environmental advertising in 1995.

Because the research in environmentally related advertising suggested that a substantial portion of such ads made claims that could be inaccurate or misleading, the research was assuming a critical stance. This critical position is not unusual for the advertising discipline, which has been subject to much criticism over the years (Fromm, 1976; Pollay, 1986; Skolimowski, 1977), and the environmental critique has added another dimension to the criticism. The discussion within advertising has been far less critical and has generally failed to address the mounting disapproval developing outside of advertising. Grove and Kilbourne (1994) addressed this issue and developed a framework to help explain the apparent lack of concern over this growing contentiousness. This sociological perspective will now be examined as it provides the starting point for the development of a conceptual model of advertising’s role in the environmental arena.

**Mertonian perspective**

Over the years, there have been few institutions that have achieved both the accolades and the notoriety that advertising has. It has been praised by advertisers and business in general and subject to critiques ranging from the rational to the vitriolic from outside the business community. The subject of the differences has generally been the role of advertising in society. This has been characterized as a ‘mirror or modeling’ debate with the mirror perspective suggesting that advertising merely reflects the values already found in society and the modeling perspective suggesting that advertising molds society into the desired image of industrial society (Holbrook, 1987; Pollay, 1986).

While little has been resolved in this controversy, it has been argued that a
better feel for the debate could be developed by providing a sociological framework within which to examine the various positions. Grove and Kilbourne (1994) suggested the framework developed by Merton (1968) as a mechanism that would be useful in framing the advertising debate. This framework, shown in Table 1, provides a four-way classification of social phenomena into manifest or latent character and functional or dysfunctional consequences. For the character of the phenomenon, manifest refers to intended consequences and latent refers to unintended consequences (Elster, 1990). Functional results are positive outcomes and dysfunctional results are negative outcomes. This is also a useful framework for the purposes of the present article because it allows us to examine the environmental consequences of advertising specifically.

Within this framework, the series of studies on environmental advertising content falls within the manifest dysfunction quadrant of the Mertonian framework. It is manifest because the deception, when it occurs, is either intentional or remiss and it promotes the use of products that may not contain the attribute described in the ad. The term ‘greenwashing’ is frequently applied to such approaches that appear to lack sincerity because they suggest an environmentally benign product that may not be benign (Ottman, 1993; Wasik, 1996).

As suggested by Kangun et al. (1991), such advertising transgressions can be made subject to policy constraints. Because they are manifest, or intentional, effective policy regarding their use can be developed provided the motivation among policy makers is sufficient to do so. Within the domain of latent dysfunction, however, the problem is not so easily dealt with because it is much less evident that a problem exists, and it is more difficult to control when it does exist. Elster (1990) also suggests that the more protracted the causal chain leading to the dysfunction, the more difficult it is to initiate remedial behavior as is the case with environmental problems. Grove and Kilbourne (1994), for example, suggest that advertising promotes materialistic values that have a negative effect on society. This is difficult to establish within the bounds of normal science that the traditional micromarketing establishment requires. Within the framework of neoclassical economics, materialism is considered good because it promotes eco-

### Table 1

**Mertonian assessment of advertising**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character of phenomenon</th>
<th>Functional</th>
<th>Dysfunctional</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Manifest</td>
<td>Facilitates flow of products to consumers</td>
<td>Generates demand for products detrimental to consumers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latent</td>
<td>Contributes to free press, lower prices, social integration</td>
<td>Engenders materialism, preoccupation with sex, and greed</td>
</tr>
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nomic growth, the *summum bonum* of progress. Because the foundations of the marketing discipline are firmly rooted in the neoclassical paradigm, it follows that, within the traditional marketing framework, materialism might not even be bad. This type of question is not as easily dealt with as an intentionally deceptive ad. However, the process through which the consumption lifestyle is engendered has been addressed in detail in recent years. Ewen (1976) and Featherstone (1991) both examine the process by which the consumption ideology is generated and maintained, and Ewen does provide substantial evidence of the transition to the consumption lifestyle.

What is required here is a more extensive framework within which to look at environmentally related advertising and its consequences. A deceptive ad might be characterized as an event that occurs at a single point in time and can be easily captured for analysis. If, however, we try to examine the latent dysfunctions of advertising, these are better described as situations of complex connectivity because they do not occur at a single time or in a defined space. If we take materialism as an example, the connections between advertising and environmental problems are distant and opaque. The sequence suggests that advertising leads to excessive materialism, resulting in increased consumption of material goods. This requires more production, resulting in more resource use and pollution of various types. This leads to resource depletion and global warming. At each phase of the process, the link must be established to the satisfaction of the marketing academy if it is to be motivated to engage in self-examination. It is evident that this is a formidable task because the conceptual models of the process are not sufficiently comprehensive. There have been, for example, no notably successful inquiries into the sales effect of advertising even within the micro-marketing discipline. Even this direct link is too complex to establish proof of the effectiveness of advertising. One need only recall the admonitions of advertisers going back to the 1950s in the statement, 'Fifty percent of all advertising is wasted. I just don’t know which fifty percent it is'.

It is the purpose of this article to begin the development of a framework within which to examine the role of advertising in the development of sustainable consumption. The working definition of sustainable consumption, provided by the International Institute for Sustainable Development, is ‘the use of goods and services that respond to basic needs and bring a better quality of life, while minimizing the use of natural resources, toxic materials and emissions of waste and pollutants over the life cycle, so as not to jeopardize the needs of future generations’ (McDonagh, 1998).

Why sustainable consumption?

This issue of sustainability is infrequently addressed within the marketing discipline with the exception of the macromarketing and public policy frameworks. And even here, examinations are limited. The issue of sustainable consumption has become more viable as the globalization process expands and the consumption lifestyle expands with it (Kilbourne et al., 1997). Its importance is pointed out

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The DSP and sustainable communication
William E. Kilbourne
most directly by Daly and Townsend (1993) and Georgescu-Roegen (1993) who argue that infinite growth in a finite system is prima facie impossible. This is referred to as the impossibility theorem. The initial impetus for the impossibility theorem was the (P, A, T) model (Ehrlich and Holdren, 1971) stating that the ecological impact of human behavior is a function of population, affluence (consumption), and technology. The Ehrlich Equation (Ekins, 1994) demonstrates that all three variables must be stabilized simultaneously if sustainability is to be achieved. This article addresses only one of these variables, affluence, but recognizes that it alone cannot achieve sustainability on a global basis.

Global sustainability requires successful transformations of both global population control and global production processes. The population problem has been examined extensively since the 1960s, and the production problem has been addressed at length by Leff (1995) and O’Conner (1994). The political implications of both problems have been addressed at length by Dryzek (1987). However, discussion of both population and production are beyond the scope of this article. The necessity of sustainability generally and sustainable consumption specifically have become almost axiomatic outside of the micromarketing discipline which has failed even to address them within its own context. As stated earlier, it is the purpose of this article to expand the domain of marketing communication to include sustainability as an integral part of it.

### Expanded models of green marketing communications

#### Green advertising

One of the first attempts to develop a more comprehensive model of environmentally related, or green, advertising was Kilbourne (1995) who argued that the relationship was a much more complex phenomenon than the traditional marketing literature suggested. Kilbourne hypothesized a two-dimensional construct that more closely paralleled the environmental literature. The dimensions established were political and positional. The political dimension was anchored by reformism on one end and radicalism on the other. Reformism suggests that all environmental problems can be solved by new legislation or better enforcement of existing legislation. Radicalism suggests that problems can be solved only by institutional changes because it is existing institutions that initially lead to the problems. This is the characterization of political change that is frequently used within political theory (Dolbeare and Dolbeare, 1976).

The positional dimension referred to the perceived position of humans with respect to the rest of nature. The anchors for the dimension were anthropocentrism, which suggests that humans are separate from and superior to the rest of nature, and ecocentrism, which suggests that humans are a part of nature on an equal footing with other species. Within this framework, Kilbourne (1995) argued that there are at least five different levels of green advertising. The least green is environmentalism, which advocates technological solutions to problems with
political reform as the process. The greenest is ecocentrism which requires radical change in political processes and respects the inherent value of nature. Between the extremes are conservationism, human welfare ecology, and preservationism. To characterize advertisements as green requires that they be positioned within this continuum from more to less green depending on where they fall. It is argued in this description that one’s position might appear ambiguous because correct placement within the model is based on the motivations behind the act rather than the act itself. Thus, what appears on the surface to be conservationism might actually be preservationism if the actor is using legislative changes to achieve longer term goals not apparent in the action taken.

Sustainable communication

In another examination of advertising’s relation to the environment that expands the domain of inquiry, McDonagh (1998: 600) develops a model for sustainable communication. Sustainable communication is characterized as ‘... working towards a world where humankind can preserve rather than dominate nature’. It is argued that the development of sustainable communication is different from social marketing in two important ways. Whereas social marketing intends to influence the individual behavior of target audiences to improve both their well-being and that of society, sustainable communication has ecological sustainability as its focal point. From the Mertonian perspective presented above, McDonagh’s characterization of sustainable communication represents a fundamental shift in the position of advertising.

As presented earlier, the materialism aspects of advertising were positioned as latent dysfunctions. If ecological sustainability becomes the focal point of advertising, engendering sustainable communication, then the shift is from latent dysfunction to manifest function. Elster’s (1990) assessment of latent dysfunction suggests that this first requires recognition of the latent consequences of advertising and then recognition that the consequences, from the perspective of sustainability, are dysfunctional. One of the purposes of both McDonagh (1998) and Kilbourne (1997) is to transcend the present green discourse within the marketing academy and bring sustainability into play. This is tantamount to the shift from latent dysfunction to manifest function within the advertising field.

Such manifest functions are not unknown in marketing communications and McDonagh (1998) argues that they can be useful for sustainability. During the 1980s, for example, significant research was carried out on the promotion of energy conservation, and the Journal of Consumer Research devoted a special issue to the topic. Some energy suppliers have promoted energy conservation as well. It is clear then that, while sustainability has not been the focal point, existing communication practices are not necessarily antithetical to it. This alone is not, however, sufficient from a sustainability perspective because it requires transformation of both practices and institutions.

In addition to changing practices, sustainable communication has been moving society from hyper-consumption to sustainable consumption as one of its goals.
(McDonagh, 1998). This represents a challenge to the accepted way of doing things and must be grounded in how issues of sustainability are presently constituted. It is argued that restructuring society might be necessary in order to make the environment culturally significant and engender the ecocentric perspective. The social, organizational, and marketing barriers to this are significant, and the introduction of sustainable communication requires a restructuring of business, the government, and the economy in general. This is considered necessary because the environmental crisis is rooted in the established institutions of industrial society. Because it is these institutions that are deficient and complicit in environmental decline, radical political and economic change at fundamental cultural levels is required. Consequently, the DSP of industrial societies requires closer examination so that the root causes of decline can be understood. Without such an analysis, the viability of green marketing or sustainable communication is problematic. This is supported by Kilbourne (1995) in that sustainable communication corresponds to ecocentrism (the most green perspective) in that framework. But this suggests that the similarities only begin with the most radical and ecocentric forms of green advertising. Sustainable communication is a radical, ecocentric political approach to marketing communications and should be analyzed as such. More typical green advertising of the type discussed by Kilbourne (1995) is within the bounds of the DSP and does not require radical changes in business practice.

While these approaches expand our ability to understand environmentally related advertising, they do not allow us to get at the root causes of the environmental crisis. Both approaches suggest we must examine the DSP of western society so that we can see its relationship to greener communications more clearly and better judge the likelihood of transformation to sustainable consumption through sustainable communication. To do this, we must unravel the DSP to better understand how advertising fits into it and is affected by it.

**The nature of paradigms**

Before examining the DSP of industrial societies as suggested above, the general nature of paradigms will be examined. The DSP is then a specific case that can be deconstructed to determine its relationship to advertising. In doing this, it will become evident why advertising takes the form that it does and why this form is problematic within the environmental context.

The concept of a paradigm was popularized by Kuhn (1996) in the context of the evolution of modern science. The context of paradigms was later expanded by Pirages and Ehrlich (1974) who used the term ‘dominant social paradigm’ to mean ‘the collection of norms, beliefs, values, habits, and so on that form the world view most commonly held within a culture’ (1974: 43). Paradigms then contain the symbolic generalizations readily accepted by the members of a community, models of the relationship between objects of interest, and evaluative criteria by which effectiveness is judged, i.e. their ability to produce the ‘good’.
Cotgrove (1982) further states that a paradigm is not dominant because it is held by a majority but because it is held by dominant groups who use it to legitimate prevailing institutions supporting their interests. Thus the paradigm functions as ideology, and its guiding principles become self-evident to members of the community and require no justification.

When operating within the DSP, objects of interest, relationships between them, and evaluative criteria are all provided and become axiomatic. In this instance, members draw the conclusion that what ‘is’ is what ‘ought’ to be and thereby commit the naturalistic fallacy (Moore, 1903). Members come to believe that no other outcome than the one that did occur, could have occurred. Myrdal (1954) argues that this was an error committed by the classical liberals who accepted existing social institutions such as private property as natural.

In the development of the DSP, conventional priorities of the dominant class, such as economic growth, are taken as given and the ultimate end is derived from them. This insures that the ends are consistent with the means, and the legitimacy of the status quo is assured. Within capitalism, for example, economic growth is a necessary condition for the accumulation of capital, and this is the immediate interest of capital. The superordinate goal of society must, therefore, be consistent with and produce economic growth. One natural choice for this goal is the material conception of progress, or the accumulation of material wealth. The evaluative criterion for the effectiveness of the system must then be consistent with both economic growth and the superordinate goal. Thus, both the superordinate goal and the evaluative criterion must be consistent with the immediate need of the dominant groups whose interest is maintained by the paradigm.

Because capitalism does not produce high levels of social justice, for example, this possible criterion is removed from the choice set. It plays no part in capital accumulation and would undermine the interests of capital if it did.

This process consistently reproduces the prevailing institutions, and they become effectively self-justifying. This is the ideological function of paradigms. When anomalies appear within the paradigm, adherents reconcile them within the paradigm by using the prevailing form of rationality that is also determined by the paradigm. For the DSP of industrial societies, this is technological rationality (Habermas, 1971; Marcuse, 1964) because it is also consistent with the production of material wealth and the accumulation of capital.

The DSP of western industrial society

With the ideological function of paradigms in hand, we now turn to the character of the DSP of western industrial societies. While all such societies are not identical in their adherence to a single DSP, Kilbourne et al. (2002) demonstrate that the differences between them are more in degree than substance. The dimensions of the DSP are similar, while the degree to which individuals hold specific beliefs varies somewhat. The model proposed here contains three dimensions. They are the political, economic, and technological, and they form the socio-economic
domain of the DSP. The technology dimension pertains less than the others to advertising, and for space considerations it will not be examined here. Each of the remaining two dimensions will now be discussed briefly.

Political dimension

The political dimension of the DSP has its origins in the works of Locke (1980) during the 17th century. There are three primary constituents of Locke's theory of government that are directly relevant here. The first is what MacPherson (1962) refers to as possessive individualism. In this characterization, individuals are considered to be atomistic because they are not submerged in the society of which they are a part. Ullmann (1963) considers this separation of the individual from society to be one of the most significant achievements of the human mind in its importance. These atomistic individuals are also considered to be in possession of themselves rather than subservient to a higher authority.

As a result of possessive individualism, all of nature that is transformed through the efforts of one's labor becomes rightfully one's own. This ultimately leads to the sanctification of private property characterized by exclusivity. Private property as used here refers not to mere possessions which have always existed, but to the institutions surrounding possessions. Private property is thus a collection of rights that attach to possessions. Locke also succeeded in removing the prevailing sanctions against excess accumulation of possessions, arguing that property was natural and subject only to practical constraints regarding spoilage and resource limitations. By justifying the release of these constraints as well, the door was open for the unlimited accumulation of private property as a virtue rather than a vice as it had been in the past.

Finally, to maintain the orderly association of possessive individuals accumulating property, Locke proposed a limited democratic government. The limitations constrained the government to two primary functions. These were the protection of private property and the enforcement of contracts arising in the accumulation and exchange of property, i.e. business contracts. These three elements constitute the framework for political liberalism and form the background against which the economic dimension of the DSP developed through the Scottish Enlightenment almost a century later.

Economic dimension

The political philosophy of Locke created the necessary conditions for the development of economic liberalism in the work of Adam Smith (1937). The focal elements of economic liberalism are atomistic individuals governed only by their own interests, limited government intervention, and resource allocation through the operation of free, impersonal markets. It is evident from this characterization that economic liberalism arose through political liberalism because it established the necessary conditions for the conceptualization of free markets.

With unconstrained individuals behaving in their own self-interest to satisfy
personal preferences in impersonal market mechanisms, it was argued that the most efficient allocation of societal resources would automatically result. The government and other institutions were to remain neutral with respect to the satisfaction of personal preferences, and thus they could not privilege any one preference over others. With all restraints on the accumulation of property removed and the mechanisms in place that allowed all to pursue property accumulation, the stage was set for the development of neoclassical economics in the late 19th century.

In this economic turn, abstract utility was substituted as the object of inquiry and nature and ethics were effectively removed from economic inquiry. Hirschman (1977) argues that the subordination of ethics and politics to economics was one of the significant achievements of Adam Smith. Economics ascended to become the dominant social force in western industrial societies and remains so today. Within western capitalism, the superordinate goal of capital is, ipso facto, the accumulation of capital. Therefore, the immediate interest of capital is economic growth because this is the necessary condition for the continued accumulation of capital. In order to achieve this goal, it is necessary for society as a whole to participate in the process, and this entailed a transformation in the definition of progress.

While vestigial Protestantism was evident in the late 19th century, its hold had been significantly mitigated by the development of political and economic liberalism. With all constraints, material or ethical, removed from the pursuit of material gain on the individual level, the meaning of life was becoming secularized. Ewen (1976) argues that capitalists were able to take advantage of this situation and transform the definition of progress in American society to one of continuously increasing consumption. It has also been suggested that this definition of progress had already been developing for decades (Bury, 1932). Thus, within capitalist society, the definition of progress was transformed into material progress. This fundamental belief then satisfies the immediate needs of capital, i.e. economic growth follows directly from the material conception of progress.

One factor, however, remains before the paradigm of liberalism is completed. That is the criterion by which the effective operation of the system is judged, and this must be consistent with the other constituents of the paradigm. Thus the criterion must test positive if economic growth is occurring and negative if it is not. The neoclassical mechanism by which this condition is justified is Pareto optimality, the criterion of efficiency within economic liberalism. Exchanges in the market are considered efficient if they meet the Pareto criterion, which requires that no one can be made better off at the expense of someone else. This is based on absolute gains rather than relative gains. But the only way this can happen consistently without political intervention is under conditions of continuous economic growth. With growth, the accumulation of capital is unabated so long as it comes from the marginal increase and not from someone else’s existing share of the pie. This justifies the limitless increases of some because others have not been made worse off absolutely. And again, this is in the immediate interest of capital. This completes the economic dimension of the DSP.
Economic and political liberalism combine to form the basis of the DSP of western industrial societies. Thus, as suggested by MacIntyre (1988), despite its claims to be beyond paradigms, liberalism has become the new paradigm. The superordinate goal is material progress, and this leads to economic growth that satisfies the need of capital expansion. Pareto optimality is the evaluative criterion, and it requires economic growth to fulfill its mission in the paradigm, i.e. justifying the prevailing institutional arrangements of economic liberalism. It is within this context that advertising’s role will be examined. Because of the self-justifying nature of paradigms, the institution of advertising must be consistent with the other elements of the paradigm and serve its interest, or, at least, not be contrary to it.

Advertising in the paradigm of liberalism

It was argued earlier in this article that a Mertonian framework for examining the advertising debate provides a useful mechanism for understanding why the debate seems interminable. This suggested that critics of advertising were examining latent dysfunctions that are hard to establish or manifest dysfunctions that can be reframed as issues of public policy. The conclusion in this perspective is that critics and advocates talk past each other and, as a result, fail to achieve closure (Grove and Kilbourne, 1994).

The perspective taken here suggests further difficulties in the debate that would require a more extensive framework than that developed by Merton. This is because Merton categorizes different perspectives but offers no explanation as to why one places an outcome in one category or another. The paradigm perspective is more fruitful in this regard because it offers an explanation for why an outcome such as excessive materialism is considered by some to be a dysfunction, by others a function, and by still others to have some attributes of both. The economic development perspective consistently touts the advantages of increased consumption, and in some cases, nearly defines development as increased capacity to consume (Hosley and Wee, 1988; Mullen, 1993; Taylor and Omura, 1995). Mick (1996) and Burroughs and Rindfleisch (2002), on the other hand, see materialism as ‘dark’ and as conflicting with family values respectively. When examining the construct in this light, the paradigm perspective provides more information because it gives the criteria by which one judges materialism and then classifies it. It does this by positioning the construct within the DSP and ascertaining its role. Thus, it is not the quality of the outcome itself that is critical but whether or not it supports the DSP and contributes to its self-justifying mechanisms. The role of advertising in the DSP will be examined now followed by an examination of green advertising, sustainable communication, and their prospects.

It is axiomatic that mass production and mass consumption form an inseparable set. The development of the system of mass production in the US necessitated a system of mass consumption. Vestigial Protestantism, however,
militated against the development of mass consumption. If capitalism were to succeed, this condition had to be rectified. Ewen (1976) examined the period from 1900 to 1930 in detail and concluded that the captains of industry were aware of this problem and set out, through the institution of advertising, to bring consumption into alignment with the exigencies of mass production. This entailed transforming the mode of consumption in society from one of limited consumption to one of profligate consumption within which all problems could be solved with consumption (Lears, 1983). This was a necessary condition if the ideology of liberalism were to establish itself as the dominant social paradigm. Ewen argues that this project was successful in a period of about 30 years. In the process, advertising established itself as an integral part of the DSP because it provided one of the mechanisms through which supply and demand could be coordinated (Galbraith, 1972).

Because the transition from the Protestant ethic to the ideology of consumption was successful at the turn of the 20th century, no further shifts in the DSP have been necessary as all the elements were brought into alignment at that time. While there have been temporal phases in which minor changes took place in the economic order, liberalism remained intact. The resurgence of liberalism from its temporary slumber during the short-lived Keynesian period has now been renamed neoliberalism. But its essential aspects are those of industrialism of the last century. Thus, there have been no further shifts in the paradigm, and, consequently, no major shifts in approaches to marketing communications save those brought about by technological innovation.

Finally, because economic growth provides absolute increases in material wealth for virtually all its members, Pareto optimality confirms that the system is functioning properly despite the obvious disparities in the distribution of the wealth that are generated. So long as everyone continues to believe that their small, absolute increase in material wealth is progress, the continuous accumulation of capital is exonerated, as are increasing disparities. Economic growth eliminates the need for the politics of distribution, confirming the superiority of market function over political function (Kassiola, 1990).

Advertising is now, of course, an integral part of the marketing strategy of virtually every major corporation that falls within the paradigm of liberalism. Its function is not just to stimulate demand, but also to stimulate and reinforce the consumption lifestyle. Hetrick (1989) argues that this lifestyle is predicated on the ideology of consumption, which suggests that consumption and happiness are coterminous. It is this aspect of materialism that ties advertising directly to the DSP. It is through advertising that the ideology of consumption is developed and reinforced on a continuous basis, and this reinforces the material conception of progress that is the superordinate goal of the DSP.

The basic elements of the liberal paradigm (the DSP of western industrial societies) suggest the role of advertising in the paradigm. The immediate goal that stimulates capital expansion is economic growth facilitating continuous accumulation of capital. To achieve this, it is necessary to engender and maintain an axiomatic belief in progress as the accumulation of material wealth to be obtained
through the operation of free markets. This reinforcement is one of the latent functions of advertising in the DSP. Advertising is, thus, consistent with the DSP and performs a necessary maintenance function. While one of the manifest functions of advertising is to stimulate sales of products, success in this regard is not a necessary condition for the maintenance function of advertising. It is only necessary that the consumption lifestyle endemic to the DSP is reinforced because no paradigm is sufficiently strong to maintain itself independently over time. The DSP of western industrial society is in a constant state of instability, as are all paradigms, and must be reinforced constantly because oppositional movements, such as that represented by sustainable communication, are always attempting to undermine its coherent rationality (Smith, 1999). When such opposition is successful, anomalies appear within a paradigm and their reconciliation with the paradigm is achieved through the marshalling of intellectual resources available within it. All of its elements, including advertising in this case, contribute to this maintenance function. It is only when the maintenance function fails that anomalies are escalated into crises leading to a transformation of the paradigm.

This applies to the construct of materialism as well. Because materialism is an essential feature of the DSP, its reproduction over time is critical in achieving the goals of capital accumulation. Consequently, it must be continually reinforced, and this is particularly true when faced with challenges such as voluntary simplicity movements, boycotts, sustainable communications, or any other threat to the dominant mode of consumption. It should be pointed out as well that advertising as such is not the only mechanism of reinforcement. Because of its essential character, materialism is transmitted through numerous other vehicles in addition to advertising, and their effects combine in forming a culture of consumption (Featherstone, 1991; Wernick, 1991). Thus, even in a society without product advertising, the culture of consumption can be engendered through other resources such as television, radio, or popular literature, all of which transmit the consumption lifestyle in the absence of product advertising. The worldwide popularity of the television series *Dallas* is a case in point here. The profligate lifestyle in this series was as much a character as was J.R. Ewing.

This raises significant questions for the specific cases of green advertising and sustainable communication. Fisk (1973) was one of the first scholars within the marketing discipline to suggest that a limitation on consumption increases might become an integral part of socially responsible consumption for a variety of reasons. It has also been argued from outside marketing that continuous economic growth is not tenable from either simple resource availability issues (Daly and Townsend, 1993; Georgescu-Roegen, 1993) or social limits to growth (Hirsch, 1976). These limits to growth arguments form the major issue in the role of advertising in the DSP and its impact on the development of either sustainable communication or green advertising in its more eccentric form. While both the moral and physical limits to economic growth are significant, they do not position the debate in the context of the DSP directly. The difficulty with each is that if they are context independent, the force of the argument is reduced to agreements to
disagree as suggested in the Mertonian framework. This is because the moral position reduces the individual choices that are already rendered impotent by neoclassical economics, and the physical limits are mired in the liberal demand for scientific certainty.

As stated earlier, two of the primary functions of advertising are to match supply and demand and to reinforce the belief in progress as material progress. In each case, the result is to increase the level of aggregate demand in order to achieve continuous economic growth. While any individual advertiser may not have this in mind, the sum of individual wills does, in this case, produce the desired result. It is unimportant here how any individual advertiser approaches the communication function because all successful approaches lead to increased consumption facilitating the accumulation of capital in the end. Within the DSP of western industrial society, this is what is desired. Within this context, it is easier to see the difficulties facing the proponents of green advertising or sustainable communication. We will look first at green advertising and then at sustainable communication within the context of the DSP.

Green advertising and the DSP

Taking first the narrower area of green advertising, it is evident that this is not nearly so radical a position as suggested at its inception. Here, the focus was in identifying green consumer market segments that would be prospects for green products, generally at a premium price. While it would be shortsighted to suggest that green products are not preferable to non-green products from an environmental perspective, it is equally shortsighted to suggest that this approach bares any resemblance to sustainability. Green advertising, as a marketing strategy, falls within the DSP because its primary goal is to sell more products without regard for the limits to growth theses while shrouding itself in the cloak of social responsibility. Smith (1999) refers to this as the myth of green marketing. So long as the ultimate goal of advertising is to sell more products related to immediate needs rather than real needs (Fromm, 1976; Marcuse, 1964), then hyper-consumption will continue in which the link between the product consumed and the consumption act itself is severed (Kilbourne, 1997). This belief serves the self-justifying mechanism of the DSP because it reinforces the belief that needs are limitless, more consumption is progress, and growth is best satisfied through impersonal market mechanisms governed by Pareto optimality. Political questions of redistribution are never raised because the markets have served all well by the accepted standard supplied by the DSP itself. Capital accumulation continues, the less well off have achieved small, absolute material gains, and disparities in wealth continue to increase unabated.

Sustainable communication and the DSP

Within the larger area of sustainable communication, we find new difficulties. McDonagh (1998) provides the most complete assessment of sustainable com-
munication to date and raises some of the critical issues. To understand the role of sustainable communication in engendering sustainable consumption, a critical factor is to understand how organizations are implicated in the environmental crisis and to determine their role in engendering sustainability. Among the difficulties presented are prevailing attitudes about the promotion process, suggesting that the fundamental purpose is still considered to be increasing levels of consumption. This accentuates the difficulty of engendering a 'less is more' approach to communication. To do so represents a radical departure from accepted practices. It is also suggested that there are societal, organizational, and marketing issues that must be resolved before sustainable communication can be incorporated into a marketing strategy. This is problematic because, as McDonagh (1998) argues, radical changes are not easily incorporated when systems of thought are longstanding and embedded in the institutions of industrial society. What this suggests is that the problems to be dealt with in implementing sustainable communication are paradigm-level problems, not strategic ones.

It is also suggested here that sustainable communication is more than a simple pillar in green marketing. While green marketing efforts are laudable and certainly can have positive effects on the environment, they still fall within the dominant social paradigm and its required modes of production and consumption, both of which have economic growth as their essential goal. As long as continuous economic growth is the desired goal and growth in material wealth is coterminous with progress, sustainability will remain illusive. This is not to suggest that green marketing efforts are valueless. But they will be insufficient to achieve sustainable consumption because that requires transformation in marketing and societal institutions (McDonagh, 1998). As Smith (1999: 9) points out, 'even if one makes only subsistence purchases, this act is still embedded in a particular economic, political, and social context'. With this interpretation, green marketing is not, as suggested by Fuller (2001: 77) '... an extension of, not a radical departure from, traditional marketing management practice'. Rather, green marketing is '... a fundamental change in how we do business' (Coddington, 1993: 2). This does not suggest that green marketing should be dismissed. Rather, it must be transformed in such a way that its principles are not embedded in the DSP. This implies a qualitatively different marketing process.

Because the changes required are in the DSP itself, they lack legitimacy within the DSP because its self-defense mechanisms are activated when radical change is proposed. Green advertising might well be incorporated into the marketing strategy because, while its approach may be different from traditional marketing practices, its objectives are not. The purpose is to open new target markets, not to engender a 'less is more' attitude in those markets. But sustainable communication is not traditional marketing in green clothes. It is a radical departure from tradition and, as such, will mobilize the forces of conservatism within the paradigm because sustainable communication represents a threat to the liberal paradigm that green advertising does not.

The threat represented by sustainable communication is clear if it is viewed
through the lens of the DSP, and this serves to explain why it is not and will not be embraced by western industrial society in the near future. Its fundamental premise is the ecocentric view that 'less is more' and this is contrary to the superordinate goal of liberalism, the underlying philosophy of the DSP. Recall that the prevailing definition of progress within the DSP is material progress. We are progressing only when the level of consumption is increasing. If sustainable communication were successful in engendering a new definition of progress that did not relate to increases in material consumption, then the immediate capital accumulation goal would be subverted. Continuous economic growth, the immediate goal of capital, cannot be maintained under a regime of sustainable communication because 'less is more' only applies at the individual level of consumption and well-being. To the forces of capital, 'less is less' and this is contrary to its immediate interests. In addition, the Pareto criterion for market efficiency would begin to fail because continuous economic growth is a necessary condition for the effectiveness of resource allocations through impersonal market mechanisms. Without growth, the only possibility for the continued accumulation of capital is that the increases be taken from others, and this violates the Pareto criterion (Kassiola, 1990).

Thus we see that if sustainable communication were implemented and succeeded, radical changes in the DSP would be necessary. As was pointed out earlier, however, radical change is anathema to the dominant groups in whose interest the paradigm is maintained. The necessary change from traditional modes of reproduction to capitalism was the depoliticization of society, and this task was undertaken successfully through Locke and Smith as argued earlier (Habermas, 1971). Within classical and neoclassical economics, the political element was removed from the allocation process and replaced by impersonal market mechanisms. It was this absence of compulsion that legitimated the market process and made it an essential component of the ideal liberal society (Wolin, 1960). The ideological benefit of this transformation cannot be overestimated because it masks the contradiction of power relations residing within a putatively powerless system. Habermas (1973) describes the process as the anonymization of class domination by depoliticizing society. Were sustainable communication to fulfill its promise, the outcome would expose the contradiction that has been masked effectively for more than a century. The result would be a repoliticization of society exposing the true nature of power relations extant.

The failure of Pareto optimality is an imminent threat to the DSP, but as long as it is functioning, the contradictions remain opaque. The failure of the Pareto criterion threatens the legitimacy of the entire paradigm, which has liberalism as its foundation. In the limited or no-growth society that sustainable communication implies, impersonal market mechanisms will have to be supplemented by or replaced with political mechanisms, through which resource allocations will be made, because the system shifts from a positive-sum to a zero-sum game in which responsive institutions do not currently exist (Thurow, 1980). If Pareto optimality fails, the liberal paradigm fails. This is why adherents of the paradigm will marshal all their forces in the defense of the status quo. What is demanded is that the
proponents of sustainable communication legitimate their position within the DSP itself by passing the liberal market test (Kilbourne et al., 2002).

The liberal market test suggests that any challenge to the DSP must be played out within the paradigm. But the criteria of acceptability are those that have been established within the DSP, and any challenge, such as that of sustainable communication, must defeat the status quo on these terms alone. Because the criteria have been established as economic growth, material well-being, and Pareto optimality, sustainable communication cannot compete with conventional advertising because it will fail all three criteria, while conventional advertising passes all three. Sustainable communication, if it is implemented effectively, would produce low or no growth, substantive well-being, and social justice, all of which represent failure within the liberal DSP. It has been suggested by Dryzek (1987), however, that repoliticization, even in the form of participatory democracy, is no guarantee that citizens will make the correct choices to engender sustainability. This represents a dual problem for proponents of sustainability. Citizens must first have the power to make choices and then must make the right choices. The forces of liberalism will unite in their efforts to undermine such choices as they are not in the immediate interest of capital. This is the essence of liberal society and the means by which it defends prevailing institutions (Kassiola, 1990; Sandel, 1996). Within this context, McDonagh’s (1998) conclusion that change is anathema to agents of the DSP is well founded, as is the conclusion that sustainable communication is not on the immediate horizon.

Conclusion

Because the DSP is self-justifying and requires all challenges to be carried out within its own intellectual framework, the prospects for any radical conception of advertising to establish itself are highly limited. Because green advertising, in its more limited forms, does not challenge the DSP, it is more likely to be incorporated into the marketing strategy. However, it contributes little to the sustainability of capitalism as the dominant mode of reproduction in western industrial societies. Sustainable communication as conceptualized by McDonagh (1998), would contribute greatly to the development of sustainable consumption, but it offers a direct challenge to the DSP with liberalism as its basis. Because one of the essential features of all paradigms is their ability to deflect radical change, the prospects for sustainable communication are very limited. We cannot expect that the dominant groups will embrace it and incorporate it into the standard marketing strategy.

What is suggested here is that a different approach be developed to engender sustainable communication. Because direct confrontation with the DSP on its own terms is likely to fail, a more fully articulated conception of the DSP and how it functions as ideology within western industrial societies should first be developed. This suggests, consistent with McDonagh, a new critical macro-marketing theory that positions advertising within the DSP to more fully under-
stand its interaction with the different dimensions of the DSP. What is necessary as a long-run strategy is the transformation of the DSP on its own terms. This can only occur under conditions approximating epistemological crisis. Environmental deterioration suggests that such a crisis is unfolding because it appears to be intractable within the DSP. That is to say that the solutions proposed within the DSP have failed to mitigate the evolving crisis. Before radical changes in the DSP can be expected, its adherents must first be convinced that the old solutions are not valid and that the crisis is not simply an anomaly framed as a crisis. This does not appear to have happened yet. We must continuously be reminded that the paradigm provides solutions that are axiomatic to all its adherents. The masking function of ideology hides the power structure from both the masses and its elite beneficiaries (Kassiola, 1990; Mannheim, 1936). The Mertonian framework frequently implies an ‘us vs them’ context which diverts the arguments from substantive rationality to polemics enhancing neither position.

To avoid this contentious situation, a more thorough understanding of paradigms in general and the DSP of western industrial society specifically is necessary. This is the function of critical macromarketing theory because it is here that the political, economic, technological, and anthropocentric elements of the DSP are relevant objects of inquiry. The success of sustainable communication in engendering sustainable consumption rests on three pillars. The first is the development of the theory of sustainable communications that McDonagh (1998) has begun. The second is a thorough understanding of the DSP of Western society and its role in sustainability. And finally, a compelling narrative must be developed incorporating the two.

References


marketing theory 4(3)

articles

The DSP and sustainable communication

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