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Seeking sustainable futures in marketing and consumer research

Abstract

Purpose Seeking ways towards a sustainable future is the most dominant socio-political challenge of our time. Marketing should have a crucial role to play in leading research and impact in sustainability, yet it is limited by relying on cognitive behavioural theories rooted in the 1970s, which have proved to have little bearing on actual behaviour. This paper interrogates why marketing is failing to address the challenge of sustainability, and identifies alternative approaches.

Design/methodology The constraint in theoretical development contextualises the problem, followed by a focus on four key themes to promote theory development: developing sustainable people; models of alternative consumption; building towards sustainable marketplaces; and theoretical domains for the future. These themes were developed and refined during the 2018 Academy of Marketing workshop on seeking sustainable futures. MacInnis's (2011) framework for conceptual contributions in marketing provides the narrative thread and structure.

Findings The current state of play is explicated, combining the four themes and MacInnis's framework to identify the failures and gaps in extant approaches to the field.

Research Implications This paper sets a new research agenda for the marketing discipline in our quest for sustainable futures in marketing and consumer research.

Practical Implications Approaches are proposed which will allow the transformation of the dominant socio-economic systems towards a model capable of promoting a sustainable future.

Originality/value The paper provides thought leadership in marketing and sustainability as befits the special issue, by moving beyond description of the problem to making a conceptual contribution and setting a research agenda for the future.

Keywords
Marketing theory, consumer research, sustainability.

Article classification
Conceptual paper

Introduction

This paper calls for greater debate *within* the marketing discipline and *between* marketing and other disciplines regarding how we might best contribute to a more sustainable future.

Intentionally provocative in orientation, the paper takes as its starting premise that the domain of marketing sustainability is siloed and fragmented and therefore restrained from moving forward in a coherent way. This argument is based on exploring the literature through the lens of MacInnis's (2011) framework for conceptual contributions in marketing. The paper is not a systematic review of the extant literature (as per Dangelico and Vocalelli, 2017; Leonidou and Leonidou, 2011; or Chabowski et al., 2011), but a response to the overarching themes and assumptions underpinning much of marketing and sustainability literature, which we believe is limiting its efficacy. Our intention is not to suggest that contributions from marketing and consumer research have been insubstantial or insignificant. Rather, we demonstrate how *inter alia* reliance on a small number of specific behavioural theories, an overly isolationist and rational view of the consumer, and a persistent desire to explore niche movements as opposed to more general theories of habitual change, have led to a situation where debate is stifled. This is not to suggest work outside of these cores of marketing and sustainability research do not exist, and we highlight a number of important contributions in the wider pantheon of marketing and sustainability literature (although by necessity not exhaustively). However, the paper considers the conditions that have led to the dominance of these approaches and proposes that an openness to new theories and methods (particularly phenomenological and socio-anthropological) together with reigniting an appetite for discussion and debate, can begin to readdress this situation.

All these challenges are unpicked within the context of conceptualising the problem of marketing and sustainability. Multiple systematic reviews of both the sustainability challenge (Kilbourne et al., 1997; 2018) and sustainability work in marketing (Dangelico and Vocalelli, 2017; McDonagh and Prothero, 2014; Prothero et al., 2011; Gordon et al., 2011; Leonidou and Leonidou, 2011; Chabowski et al., 2011; Varey, 2010) underscore that as a discipline we

fall short in guiding practice and realising sustainability for society. These works question amongst other things whether marketers can in reality deliver Sustainability[1] as value. *Sustainability* is a complex and context specific term, which is difficult to define and capable of being interpreted in multiple ways through different theoretical lenses (Connelly et al., 2011). We also acknowledge that sustainability in organisations is either embedded or 'bolted-on'. In environmental economics, this differentiation is termed strong sustainability and weak sustainability (Roper, 2012). Weak sustainability is dominant in literature and practice, focused on economic growth, eco-efficiency and the business case for sustainability, whereas strong sustainability acknowledges the ecological limits to growth and the need for radical and fundamental change (Roper, 2012; Milne et al., 2006). A recent systematic review of sustainability in the marketing literature reveals a lack of unanimously accepted definitions of this concept, allied with an over-reliance on three definitions, each with shortcomings (Lunde, 2018). Two of them capture the holistic nature of sustainability, notably the Brundtland Commission definition of sustainable development to "meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (WCED, 1987) and Elkington's (1998) "triple bottom line" which highlights the intertwined economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainability. The main weakness of both of these holistic definitions is that they are not rooted in the marketing discipline's central tenet of the exchange of value (Alderson, 1957). For example, the notion of needs in the Brundtland Commission definition is vague and may result in marketing managers creating "false", "artificial" or "socially created" needs to influence demand or encourage "the tendency to give priority to economic over ecological goals" (Alvesson, 1994, p.303), this obviously promotes a weak form of sustainability. The third form of definition is narrower and focuses specifically on environmental concern, which has led to privileging

[1] This is capitalised to emphasise strong Sustainability (see McDonagh and Prothero, 2014).

environmental over social and economic concerns. Drawing on the AMA (2013) definition of marketing, Lunde (2018) defines sustainable marketing as "the strategic creation, communication, delivery, and exchange of offerings that produce value through consumption behaviours, business practices, and the marketplace, while lowering harm to the environment and ethically and equitably increasing the quality of life (QOL) and well-being of consumers and global stakeholders, presently and for future generations" (p.10). This definition explicitly places sustainability in the context of the exchange of value mentioning the processes and actors involved.

To enable us to provide a clear and explicit conceptual contribution to the field of marketing and sustainability, we take MacInnis's (2011) framework as a structure for the paper, which also provides a narrative thread to ensure coherence and relevance. Her typology identifies four general conceptual goals and eight related specific conceptual goals (Table 1).

Table 1 here

Drawing on MacInnis's (2011) conceptual goals the paper explicates the existing fragmentation of the sustainability and marketing field by investigating the dominant theoretical and methodological traditions of the discipline. In particular, we highlight the over production of *Delineating* and *Differentiating* type contributions drawing on traditional theory, without either the antecedent *Envisioning* (*Identifying* or *Revising*) contributions being explored, or much emphasis on *Debating* (*Advocating* or *Refuting*) or *Integration* of theories drawing multiple paradigms together. This leads to an exploration of three themes that provide potential to enhance conceptual developments towards stronger and more pragmatic theoretical domains: 1) greater levels of *Debating* existing paradigms regarding the role of marketing scholarship in developing more sustainable people (not necessarily consumers). 2) *Envisioning* potential of alternative modes of consumption research, when it is *Integrated* into more encompassing

meta-theories. 3) And the *Envisioning* and *Relating* contribution potential of exploring marketing systems for sustainability, as opposed to sustainable consumption. We then conclude with an overarching discussion of the role of marketing scholarship in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, and suggest a future research agenda.

Present Theoretical and Methodological Domains

In this section, we review theoretical assumptions and methodological standpoints embedded within the extant marketing sustainability research space. We highlight the effects of conceptual and contextual constraints on the development of marketing and consumer behaviour research on sustainability. We discuss how the *Delineation* and *Differentiation* of borrowed theories have given rise to the divide between schools of thought in marketing research (Davies and Gutsche, 2016; Schaefer and Crane, 2005). Within this conceptual landscape, we examine contextual constraints that have fostered particular methodological norms. We highlight the potential reasons for such norms, such as following micromarketing thought (see, for example, Mittelstaedt et al., 2014), and how they might be contributing to slowing conceptual advancement. We *Debate* the need to extend both the Critical and Developmental Schools of thought and theoretical assumptions and methodological standpoints which have dominated sustainability research in marketing and consumer behaviour to date.

Conceptual Constraints

Marketing and consumer behaviour are not traditional disciplines in the sense that they have evolved as distinct areas of enquiry, which have their own theories and methodological norms. Like other applied disciplines, marketing has evolved as a site for enquiry out of a practical interest in a set of actions that affect the flow of human and economic capital. As such, they

have borrowed theories from other disciplines (MacInnis, 2011) in order to examine the success and failure of different marketing practices and consumer behaviours, both generally and within the sustainability domain. MacInnis and Folkes (2010) note, that whether marketing should, and could be an independent discipline is a key foundational issue in the field affecting its development and acceptance of new ideas. As befits the era in which marketing and consumer behaviour evolved into a separate area for academic enquiry, marketers and consumer behaviourists have drawn on many adjoining disciplines including linguistics, psychology, economics, finance, geography, law, history, and sociology amongst others (MacInnis and Folkes, 2010). Two fields that have arguably exerted the most influence on marketing and consumer behaviour research are economics and psychology and in doing so have left significant impressions on the analyses of sustainability issues. From economics, we have inherited the notion of individuals as rational analytical decision makers, weighing available information and striving for optimal decisions (Carrington et al., 2010; 2014). Despite long running debates of the validity of many of the assumptions in this approach (Bagozzi, 1975; Foxall, 1993), it is largely, although not exclusively, dominant in the exploration of sustainability, consumer behaviour and marketing (see Dangelico and Vocalelli, 2017; Leonidou and Leonidou, 2011; or Chabowski et al., 2011 for reviews highlighting this). From psychology, we have learned to focus on how we process information internally and turn that into actions, termed the Information Processing and Rational Approach by Schaefer and Crane (2005). Recent methodological movements towards the use of psychological experimentation seeking a deeper understanding of sustainability are largely underpinned by similar economic assumptions that regard consumption as an individual, rational, cognitive choice (Edinger-Schons et al., 2018; White et al., 2012).

It is clear that from economics and psychology we have taken an implicit assumption that the individual is the most relevant unit of analysis, with consumers playing a central role in marketing theory and practice, resulting in a micro level dominant perspective (Thomas, 2018). Alongside the theories we have borrowed, we have inherited a preference for quantitative, positivistic research approaches (Iyer and Reczek, 2017; Thomas, 2018). Taken together these underpinning assumptions have greatly affected the approach, and created analytical blind spots (Thomas, 2018), we as marketers and consumer behaviourists take towards studying sustainability. Research projects have tended to focus on *Differentiating* between individual aspects of an assortment of individual behavioural psychology theories, and how they *Delineate* customer responses to (often informational) stimuli. However, decades of this style of work have failed to provide a significant positive shift in our understanding of marketing, consumer behaviour and sustainability. One of the most popular focuses has been on the role of pro-environmental attitudes and their expected positive influence on pro-environmental behaviours. Models from psychology such as the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 2002) and ethical decision-making, such as Values, Beliefs and Norms (Stern et al., 1999), have dominated intellectual enquiry, however, this work has failed to demonstrate consistent evidence that attitudes can bring much explanatory power to how individuals behave (Sheeran, 2002), and tell us little about how to change the majority of people in society (who may not share these attitudes) towards more sustainable behaviours (Varey, 2010). Indeed, some research has suggested that behaviour change can happen without a change to either attitudes or intentions and that even those with weak sustainability attitudes or values can become more sustainable with the right intervention (Dixon et al., 2015), while White et al. (2019) present a psychological framework to encourage pro-environmental behaviour change. Nevertheless, even when our conceptual choices have failed to explain sustainability behaviours we have soldiered on, *Differentiating* new combinations of variables, *Summarising* models, *Delineating*

variables and examining different kinds of behavioural phenomena, rather than *Debating* our own assumptions, or *Envisioning* new theoretical lenses. As MacInnis (2011) notes, while constructs are critical (and advancement cannot happen without them), without conceptualising new constructs, studying the popular or established constructs again and again (incremental development) limits our perspective on the problem. These repetitive studies look for confirmation of robust, causal links to factors, which we have actually come upon through a combination of prevailing fashions and happenstance. Additionally, the attitude (or intention) behaviour gap is an established problem within many areas of enquiry and is of particular relevance here. First highlighted in ethical consumption almost 20 years ago (Carrigan and Attalla, 2001) this continues to be a significant approach to examining (un)sustainable behaviours. Carrigan (2017) describes the gap as intractable, and notes that we need to "develop and refine approaches to better identify, understand and predict the needs of the ethical consumer" (p.16). Many extant studies repeatedly come to the similar conclusion that greater flows of better information can facilitate a significant shift in sustainable behaviour, but rarely agree on what this information should be. They also largely ignore the substantial body of evidence *Refuting* the idea that increasing levels of information can have a major impact outside the research environment (Auger et al., 2008; Prothero et al., 2011).

Growing evidence, often qualitative and not focused on the individual, is challenging a number of these assumptions. Back in 2005 Schaefer and Crane identified the emerging Socio-Anthropological Approach to sustainability research, built on foundations of sociology and broadly interpretive inquiry as the juxtaposition to the more dominant Information Processing Approach. However, there is an emerging consensus of the need for a more blended approach, rather than the bipolar approaches outlined back in 2005. Gordon et al. (2011) developed a framework for sustainable marketing drawing on the sub-disciplines of green marketing, social

marketing and critical marketing, building upon existing ideas about the need for systemic change for sustainability (Peattie, 2007), built from an inter-disciplinary perspective of change rather than isolated within one school of thought. Thomas (2018) too promotes more meso level perspectives in sustainability marketing (those which focus on organisation, structure and culture) also highlighting the need for a systems based approach (bridging micro, meso and macro level perspectives), where she presents her own inclusive metatheoretical framework based on critical realism. This highlights that environmental problems are undoubtedly complex systems where cause-effect relations are diffuse and uncertain and people suffering because of environmental problems are either distant in time (future generations) or in space (other countries) (Geels, 2010). Geels (2002) and the many works to have followed this, similarly promote the need for a Multi-Level Perspective (MLP) for addressing major market change, such as sustainability. In the MLP, niche innovations induce radical change at a micro-level, at a meso-level, sociotechnical regimes dictate culture and norms in markets, and at a macro-level, sociotechnical landscapes affect transition dynamics, including evolving societal discourse and political will for change (Garud and Gehman, 2012). According to Geels all three need to change to transform a market, but changes in any will force changes in the others (Geels, 2010). Beyond studies which focus on sustainability, the need for multiple paradigm research (paradigmatic pluralism) has been proposed via the lens of Critical Transformative Consumer Research (Tadajewski et al., 2014; Gordon et al., 2011). While there is growing support to go beyond the individual and adopt multiple perspectives as shown above, few empirical papers adopting these approaches, or demonstrating their efficacy in practice are appearing in the marketing literature (Dangelico and Vocalelli, 2017). These approaches are often met with denial, made possible by the fragmentation of the evidence and small scale, or purely theoretical nature of the individual studies. These ideas are also criticised due to the use of methods that are poorly understood by business or policy makers, and dismissed with

criticisms of non-generalisable findings based on non-probability samples. However, even in these pockets of alternative thought the conceptual goals of normative and qualitative work are on *Explicating* and to a lesser extent *Relating* theoretical phenomena, with less focus on *Debating* the societal norms underpinning our unsustainable society or *Envisioning* a more sustainable alternative socio-cultural milieu.

Contextual Constraints

It is clear that our discipline has been heavily reliant upon economics and psychology. It is not hard to see how we have arrived at a position where researchers continually focus on *Delineating* theoretical models that can be *Related* quantitatively to other extant constructs. This approach promises a) insight into decisions framed as if individuals act cognitively, rationally and individually; and b) links knowledge, attitudes, intentions and behaviours. This conceptual framing works within some contextual constraints that operate at a practical level across and beyond the discipline. The key to understanding why we do not challenge conceptual frames that have proved unhelpful in explaining (un)sustainable behaviours may lie within the contextual constraints supplied by the boundaries of western higher education norms and practices (McDonald et al., 2016).

The vast majority of research into sustainable practices relies on a deeply flawed notion: self-reported behaviour (Steg and Vlek, 2009; Huffman et al., 2014). Although there are exceptions, especially in waste management (Tucker, 1999; Casey et al., 2019) and energy consumption (Kantola et al., 1984) where behaviour is measured and others where behaviour is observed (Miller, 1998), most of what we (do not) know about how people incorporate sustainability practices into their lifestyles is based on what people think they do, or worse, what they think they should tell researchers they do. Work on the difference between self-reported and actual

behaviour is scant (Hamad et al., 1980; Perrin and Barton, 2001) and it is hard to tell what order of magnitude behaviour is over or under reported by, but it is clear that it is not accurate (Gregory-Smith et al., 2015).

Quantitative experimental approaches have been proposed as one solution to overcome behavioural uncertainty. While experiments allow precise control of variables, the variables chosen for study will still be based on the disciplinary trends and theoretical roots highlighted above. Additionally, laboratory experiments bring problems of artificiality and often rely on student samples (Huffman et al., 2014), raising questions about the transferability of insights. The reason that researchers design laboratory situations to examine and populate them with convenience samples is because true field experiments can be costly, time consuming, and it is harder to isolate the independent variable effects. Academics find that they have neither the time nor the resources to bring more robust designs to fruition.

Below we explore what all this means for the development of the field and identify three mechanisms as potential avenues to re-integrate these polarised approaches into more behaviourally meaningful fields of knowledge. We explore the potential for 1) *Refuting* the doctrine of consumer led approaches by *Debating* how to create new discourses on creating more sustainable people. 2) *Envisioning, Debating* and *Relating* the diverse fields of alternative models of consumption, to identify commonalities through phenomenological *Integration,* which may have broader theoretical importance. And 3) expanding beyond individual level constructs into *Envisioning* how sustainable marketing systems can be developed.

Developing Sustainable People

Our first theme is around *Refuting* the canon of the extant literature and *Advocating* potential other avenues for change. In particular, we query the dominant consumerist logic of information based, point-of-sale interventions as the dominant thrust of research into increasing sustainable behaviours. While valuable to the overall understanding of sustainable futures, they are only part of the overall movement towards greater sustainability (Geels, 2010). While informational interventions and eco-labels can reduce asymmetry of sustainability information between producers and consumers, most added-value concepts linked to these labels remain intangible at point-of-sale (Atkinson and Rosenthal, 2014), and there is insufficient research to better understand the impact of information asymmetry on consumer understanding, attitudes and behaviour, potentially limiting the value and consumption of the products (Vecchio and Annunziata, 2015). New concepts such as blockchain technology used on labels by fashion retailers such as Arket, to track and map every step of a garment's production may break down those information asymmetries but the consumer response remains untested. We also *Envision* an important role for marketing scholarship in shaping consumption, not only at point-of-sale, but in human development as sustainable people. As introduced in the previous section, we can see that a focus on sustainable consumers has limited the influence of the marketing discipline in responding to the challenges of developing a more sustainable society. Therefore, in this section, we ask what other sectors of our society we can explore to identify how the field of marketing can address this grand challenge.

Sustainable people, not just consumers or citizens

Over the last decade, authors have considered the merits of changing the rhetoric from referring to sustainable consumers, to sustainable citizens (Horne et al., 2016; Soper, 2007). While Bauman (2009) argues that consumers and citizens are potentially diametrically opposed, others suggest that citizens as consumers have the transformative capacity to create a more

sustainable society (de Bakker and Dagevos, 2012) by, for example, holding organisations and government to a higher level of moral authority (Cohen, 2003). Therefore, de Bakker and Dagevos (2012) argue that there are many ambivalences and mixed motives for contemporary consumption, and that the distinction between citizen and consumer is artificial in regards to everyday consumption choices. Civic virtues and self-interest influence consumer behaviour, as do ethical, emotional, pro-social and long-term perspectives; thus citizens and consumers are interconnected. However, if we accept the existence of the consumer citizen, we must also acknowledge that citizen inspired behaviour can be obstructed by the institutional conditions, which re-affirm the materialistic prevailing order (McDonagh et al., 2014), where government policy, regulations, community, family, education, religion, retail availability, geography etc. all help shape the purchase environment (Jackson, 2014).

Citizenship can have multiple negative connotations in terms of control, obedience, lack of free will and is limited by artificial boundaries (such as country or religion) in an increasingly boundless world (Bauman, 2009). Similarly, the research to date focuses on a sense of citizenship as an antecedent to sustainable consumption (Cohen, 2003; Zhou and Whitla, 2013), with little indication of how to engender citizenship within society. Sustainable citizenship is certainly an alternative to materialistic consumerism which has some merits and is deserving of further exploration. However, in this paper we will refer to how marketing scholarship can be utilized to encourage the development of sustainable *people*. With Pirson and Varey (2014), we view the term 'consumer' as reflective of a restrictive commercial discourse and exchange paradigm that hinders research progress, whilst inflating the perceived centrality of consumption on those we study (Wooliscroft, 2014). The broadened use of the term 'people' allows us to encompass the individual as both consumer and citizen, as well as contexts and identities they may inhabit, such as parent, employee, student, teacher etc. (Saren, 2007). In

doing so, we endorse a more humanistic perspective premised on respect for human dignity (Hirschman, 1986; Varey and Pirson, 2014), and geared towards promoting sustainable development throughout society, rather than only within the consumption space (Prothero et al., 2011). In this context *how* we endeavour to develop more sustainable people requires marketing to revisit scholarship on families, communities and social movements, and the role of education.

Developing more sustainable people: Transference in family units

There has been a long-acknowledged transference of consumption behaviours and traditions within families. Mechanisms responsible for interfamilial transmission remain unclear, but include social and environmental theories about transference, and more recently cognitive theories suggest observation of parental habits contributes to beliefs and expectations about certain modes of consumption (Campbell and Oei, 2010). In Danish households Grønhøj (2006) identifies inter-spousal transference of green practices, Grønhøj and Thøgersen (2011) reveal feedback on performance stimulates energy saving between spouses, and also between teenagers and their parents, and Lazell (2017) demonstrates waste management transference among UK households. This parent-to-child and child-to-parent influence has also been documented in water conservation (Grønhøj, 2006) and sustainable food practices (Athwal et al., 2018). Goldsmith and Goldsmith (2011, p.121) contend that social influence theory about human behaviour has significance for studies of sustainability at the household level, stressing "the importance of people to people" and that understanding social networks is critical to understanding how to improve quality of life. Yet, familial transference is rarely studied in sustainable marketing and consumption.

Transference is embedded in intergenerational caregiving and altruism (Moisio et al., 2004). It can be imbued with sustainability where knowledge, skills and practices are shared either in the form of tangible artefacts such as recipes or tools, or learnt through a gradual, intuitive process evolving from time spent with relatives, passing on craft, cooking, gardening or repair knowledge (Athwal et al., 2018). Time and temporality are central to, and transformative within, consumption practice (Southerton et al., 2011). Transference and the transmission of consumption practices is aligned to the concept of generativity, the "concern for and commitment to the well-being of future generations" (McAdams and Logan, 2004, p.16). Generativity manifests itself in multiple forms, and although not studied extensively, can be intrinsically embedded with sustainable behaviors. Communal generativity involves the transference of intangible elements, and is associated with acts of care and concern for future generations through continuity and stability (Lacroix and Jolibert, 2015). Athwal et al. (2018) demonstrate these attributes in their recent study of shared sustainable food practices and recipes, while Jung et al.'s (2011) deep narrative methodology uncovers sustainability in people's caregiving for cherished heirlooms.

Sustainable family practices are clearly a field of study into which marketing scholarship on sustainability has a role, where we can *Envision* the inter-generational transference of sustainable practices and *Integrate* these into existing theoretical domains of consumption practice. While intergenerational and familial transference of sustainable behaviours are evidenced within the literature, factors that constrain and enable such intergenerational and familial transference, or how generations replicate sustainable function and dysfunction are less well understood, as are possible interventions to encourage sustainable or discourage unsustainable practices. More work is clearly required in this area, including efforts to instil

sustainable practices within households, and understand the challenges to sustainable practices within families (Heath et al., 2016; Longo et al., 2019).

Developing more sustainable people: Thinking of communities and social movements

While families acquire, appropriate and reproduce traditional consumption practices, over time these can also be devalued and divested as family ties weaken and contemporary trends reshape consumption patterns as they pass through generations (Evans, 2018). Even so, emergent community based alternative market arrangements are harnessing shared familial sustainable traditions and practices. Lazell et al. (2018) note how innovative food sharing movements encourage peer-to-peer sharing, as well as pursuing post-materialist aims that are more ethical, sustainable, political or humanist. For example, the *Olio* (https://olioex.com/) food sharing app enables individuals to connect and share food with their neighbours and friends. *Superkitchen* (Cathcart-Keays, 2015) uses exclusively surplus 'good' food destined for waste, to offer shared community social eating and provide education about reducing food waste, responsible buying and cooking. Shared eating is demonstrating how influential transference of practices through community engagement can be (Coveney, 2013). Research suggests communal eating increases social bonding, feelings of wellbeing, enhanced contentedness and helps with embedding within the community (Dunbar, 2017). Shared eating practices have the capacity to improve sustainability by reducing food and packaging waste, energy use reduction, and local growing (Smith, 2017). However, it seems people are faced with uncertainty when they attempt to change the market logic and consider their possible courses of action (Kozinets and Handelman, 2004). Grassroots innovations including community gardens and ecovillages (discussed below) play a critical mediating role in transferring alternative eco-practices from ideologically motivated communities to the mainstream. Members of sustainability communities and social movements offer their way of life as a model of successful alternative

living. As such behaviours modelled in these communities may later transfer into the wider community in general. In his analysis of social movements, Crossley (2003) argues it is important to think of them as fields when considering movement or upscaling as it allows for 'interaction' and 'process' in the ways we define them. It seems natural therefore that how 'know-how' is transferred from person to person takes centre stage in our deliberations. Yet marketing scholarship has been slow to explore the roles of family, communities and social movements in championing, modelling and transferring sustainable practices. We similarly see the role of education in developing the initial sustainable capabilities as an under-represented field of marketing inquiry.

Developing more sustainable people: Education

Although there has been a slow response to the role of education in sustainability within marketing (Bridges and Wilhelm, 2008), there is growing evidence of courses on sustainable consumption (Sahakien and Seyfang, 2018) particularly in Europe and the USA. At a grassroots level, initiatives such as the Eco-Schools Green Flag Award (Eco-schools.org.uk) seek to engage students from primary school level in considering sustainability within their schooling environment. At the higher education level accreditation bodies such as the Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME) and the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business International (AACSB) are promoting increased focus on sustainability within Universities and rankings such as the Corporate Knights (corporateknights.com) create a platform to promote greater sustainability focus within management schools. Rutherford et al. (2012) identify these accreditation mechanisms as a strong driving force for the adoption of ethics, CSR and sustainability content in the classroom. As such we have seen rises in the proliferation of ethics and sustainability topics, appearing in >50% of the learning objectives in higher education marketing curricula (Nicholls et al., 2013). Courses are diverse with some

designed “to provide capabilities towards understanding and addressing sustainability” while others are envisaged as more transformative in nature, intended to “mobilise political action” (Sahakian and Seyfang, 2018, p.240). However, do these initiatives lead to more sustainable people?

How much we know about the “stickiness” of sustainability marketing education is disappointingly small (Nunes et al., 2019). Most studies focus on either higher education curriculum development (Perera and Hewege, 2016; Vidal et al., 2015), or the prevalence of sustainability education in management schools (Nicholls et al., 2013; Wymer and Rundle-Thiele, 2017), with little exploration of its ongoing impact, nor on education prior to tertiary level (Nunes et al., 2019). Studies such as Koljatic and Silva (2015) identify that undergraduate student awareness of sustainability related issues certainly increases through exposure in the classroom, but awareness and changes in behaviour are not the same thing. Thus, education *for* sustainability needs also to be re-imagined in ways that engage and empower students so that they feel they can make a difference (Heath et al., 2019).

The school environment is a key factor in habit development alongside the home and community environment (Raju et al., 2010). Pauw et al. (2015) suggest that education for sustainable development impacts the sustainability consciousness of older children, and that exposure to eco-school activities improves environmental literacy levels of elementary school children (Özsoy et al., 2012). According to Kohlberg (1971), younger children are particularly susceptible to social norm messaging stemming from their unilateral respect for adults in early developmental phases. Engendering social norms around sustainability at an early stage should influence peer dynamics moving forward (Schmidt et al., 2012) and engender sustainability transference in the household and community. Yet there is surprisingly little research exploring

social influence and sustainability in early stage schooling (Sharps and Robinson, 2017), with a greater focus on adolescence and beyond (Stok et al., 2014), by which time some argue it is too late to make a substantive impact (Ritter, 2006). Thus, how marketing scholarship can be utilised to engender sustainable habit formation in early stage schooling could be a major factor in developing more sustainable people. Equally, a longitudinal approach monitoring and mapping habit dynamics over time would allow the investigation of the stability and endurance of sustainable behaviours, including the possibly disruptive effects of social media influence, which has been shown to amplify peer-to-peer recommendations in adolescence (Holmberg et al., 2016), both to dilute or generate sustainable choices. Therefore, as we aim to explore the development of more sustainable people, pushing our focus back from tertiary education, to primary education may provide a unique opportunity to create far reaching societal change. Thus, realigning sustainable people's development through families, communities and education is a starting point for *Integrating* theories of broader relevance to our changing society (and consumption habits). Whether that is how open we are to alternative modes of consumption, or more sustainable marketing systems, a foundational stand-point is to engage micro, meso and macro marketing perspectives in how our socio-cultural environment facilitates people to behave more sustainably.

Models of Alternative Consumption

Critical accounts of sustainability within marketing call for more socially and historically situated understandings of consumption (Dolan, 2002). Drawing on the theoretical need for greater levels of *Debating* and *Envisioning* focused work in proposing new theoretical domains, we next turn to the increasingly visible phenomena of alternative models of consumption. Given that switching to more sustainable lifestyles has proven extremely difficult, alternative models provide insight for thought and practice. Consumers are 'locked-in' unsustainable

lifestyles, not because of their values, but due to everyday work and life circumstances (Sanne, 2002) and established market ideologies and practices (Holt, 2012).

To address this problem, discourse on sustainable consumption is shifting from choice to practice (Spaargaren, 2011) and from single issues (e.g. recycling or green purchases) to more holistic and transdisciplinary perspectives (Heiskanen and Pantzar, 1997), which recognise the importance of practices, material infrastructures, networks and organisations in the transition towards more sustainable practices (Clarke, 2008; Spaargaren, 2011). People consume products and services to accomplish social practices, such as sharing a meal, gardening, or exchanging gifts (Welch and Warde, 2015). As such, consumption is "embedded within routine and normative practices, which are constituted as much through collective as through self-reflexive individual action" (Southerton et al., 2004, p.15). Social practices manifest as particular configurations of material things, socially shared meanings and competences (Shove et al., 2012). People become adept practitioners in them because social practices are so central in everyday life (Røpke, 2009).

What is important here is how practices change. Alternative forms of consumption offer opportunities for examining the transformation of particular consumption practices into more sustainable ones. The introduction of a new product or technology for instance, can trigger the emergence of new meanings and consumer doings (what Maggauda, 2011, calls 'circuit of practice'), or a reconfiguration of relationships between consumer practices, cultural meanings and material objects (Scott et al., 2014). More radically, collective efforts to develop alternative consumption spaces offer opportunities for imagining alternatives to the dominant social paradigm (DSP) (Parker et al., 2014).

In this section, we examine the variety of research exploring alternatives to mainstream forms of consumption, as exemplified by emic, ground-up initiatives from eco-communities (Casey et al., 2017), and slow consumption markets (Tama et al., 2017), to access-based (Bardhi and Eckhardt, 2012), shared consumption (Belk, 2009; Rathinamoorthy et al., 2017) and non-consumption/pro-sumption movements (Balsiger, 2014; Ritzer and Jurgenson, 2010). Although an emerging space, much of this research focuses on *Identifying* the phenomena or *Delineating* how it differs in practice from other related phenomena. We see a movement towards creating unique pockets of theory within each phenomenological context, but little cross-theorising between them. We therefore ask whether there is a space for *Relating* these disparate fields of phenomenological studies into meaningful theoretical concepts of value to the furtherance of sustainable marketing theory. We start with a discussion of the concept of 'disruptive innovations', which can reframe business models to facilitate transition to alternative models of consumption. We then progress to discussing 'grassroots innovations' which are associated with activist and community-based projects, facilitated by social need and ideology.

Disruptive innovations

A variety of industries have seen a dramatic change in their operating landscape, with the emergence of disruptive innovations that provide products and/or services with alternative benefits to current market offerings (Christensen, 1997). Although in some instances these offerings may be seen as inferior compared to those offered by mainstream market-dominating businesses (e.g. quality, cleanliness, range of additional services), their attractive pricing, convenient locations, and non-standard accessibility (e.g. sharing, renting) are regarded as more important to the user. Companies, especially entrepreneurial ventures, are embracing disruptive innovations, by developing alternative business models that fall within the sharing

economy and collaborative consumption. The sharing economy encompasses collaborative consumption, and focuses on the capitalization of idle capacities on a peer-to-peer basis (e.g. Belk, 2007). Examples of collaborative consumption include "traditional sharing, bartering, lending, trading, renting, gifting, and swapping" (Botsman and Rogers, 2010, p.xv), which all share a common practice, the ability to temporally use and/or access a possession, or idle capacity. These concepts are enabled through the increased accessibility of online technologies that foster connections between people and their facilities and/or skills (Stokes et al., 2014). Access based economic business models are increasingly popular across a variety of sectors, with the most prominent examples emerging in the tourism (Airbnb, Couchsurfing), transportation (Uber, Didi), and fashion (Rent the Runway, Girl meets Dress) industries and peer-to-peer systems (Freecycle, Time Banks). Each of these approaches provides an offer-on-demand concept, whilst simultaneously creating an authentic experience for consumers.

Of particular interest for sustainable consumption is the rise of renting and swapping (Lang and Armstrong, 2018). Renting offers access to a product for a limited timeframe at a fee, with no transfer of ownership taking place. Swapping sees a redistribution of ownership, with individuals being able to make use of the product for an unlimited amount of time. Although both business models have increased in popularity in recent years, especially in fashion (Henninger et al., 2019) neither of them have become a mainstream phenomenon. There is a gap in the literature focusing on the full range of collaborative consumption business models, specifically surrounding the redistribution of ownership and its implications (Weber et al., 2017). There is also currently a lack of research addressing key implications, such as the supply chain issues for business models that move away from traditional modes of production to relying on third parties to exchange pre-loved/used items (Akbar et al., 2016). Research needs to investigate motivational drivers and barriers to engaging in collaborative consumption (e.g.

Hu et al., 2018), and there is presently little research exploring the organisational or institutional implications of this change.

Grassroots innovations

Individuals often organise themselves locally to create positive socio-environmental change in immediate and very practical ways (Hobson et al., 2016). Dispersed across the world, many initiatives share a commitment to "place-specific, community involvement in both process and outcome" (Smith et al., 2016, p.408). Recent years have seen an increasing interest in grassroots innovations and community-based initiatives (CBIs) within sustainability scholarship (Sekulova et al., 2017). Interest in these projects is growing, owing to their potential to inform policy on sustainability (Seyfang, 2005). The term grassroots innovations is defined by Seyfang and Smith as:

> networks of activists and organisations generating novel bottom–up solutions for sustainable development; solutions that respond to the local situation and the interests and values of the communities involved. In contrast to mainstream business greening, grassroots initiatives operate in civil society arenas and involve committed activists experimenting with social innovations as well as using greener technologies (2007, p.585).

This definition draws a distinction between grassroots innovations and market-based innovations; the former being driven by social need and ideology and the latter being largely driven by profit. As such, grassroots innovations are seen as niche, small scale community action. Niches are identified as protective spaces that shield innovation from external pressures, support innovative processes, and empower niche innovations' competitiveness in the mainstream (Smith and Raven, 2012). Niche projects are thus gradually moving from the edges of academic interest towards the mainstream. Once thought of as 'marginal', they are being

reframed as ‘innovative’. This shift indicates a recognition of the role such initiatives could play in our transition to a more sustainable society.

One example of this is Ecovillages, which are intentional communities organised around the concept of sustainable living (Moisander and Pesonen, 2002). Part of a global network, they are sites of social experimentation and new cultural forms. Ecovillages act as spaces of radical rethinking (Smith et al., 2016), fostering reflexivity and critical engagement through continuous discussion and debate (Casey et al., 2017). For example, in Cloughjordan Ecovillage (CJEV) in Ireland members have created a space in which alternative infrastructures are developed which facilitate more sustainable behaviours (Casey et al., 2017). These include a permaculture landscape design, low energy homes, Ireland’s renewable energy district heating system, woodland gardens, a community farm, a green enterprise centre, several civic spaces, and an educational centre (Casey et al., 2017). Members of CJEV hope to impact social transformation through modelling alternative ecological systems, alternative political/market systems and a community-based lifestyle, and run courses on different aspects of sustainability, encourage outsiders to visit, observe and even participate in community life.

In this sense, ecovillages can be considered as *Envisioning* potential roadmaps for how an ecologically sustainable post-consumer culture might be conceived. Ecovillages can also be instrumental in the diffusion of innovative sustainable practices by a) diffusing these practices within activist networks, b) scaling up the diffusion of practices to a larger following beyond the activist network and c) translating the adoption of grassroots practices at higher institutional levels (Boyer, 2015). An emergent body of literature looks at the outcomes of successful initiatives with the intention of transplanting successful practices into other contexts, thus adopting an etic approach to understanding the issue. However, this focus on outcomes often

results in glossing over the processes through which grassroots initiatives emerge, particularly in relation to how they challenge internal or external conventions (Smith et al., 2016). Indeed, the emergence and evolution of CBIs can "be seen as a messy process, often framed between multiple tensions and contradictory processes" (Sekulova et al., 2017, p.5). These are deserving of further attention because "conflicts taking place within CBIs impact not only community initiatives, but the milieu…in which they emerge, thrive and replicate" (Sekulova et al., 2017, p.15). As such they may form the basis for *Advocating* type contributions to theory, or *Revising* our current stock of theoretical assumptions to *Envision* an alternative societal system around sustainability.

In summary, whilst a focus on successful outcomes from alternative modes of consumption is evidently useful in determining desirable goals in more or less quantifiable ways, we argue that the processes involved in the making of these initiatives also deserve researchers' and policy makers' attention. Gibbs and O'Neill (2016) highlight how alternative economies challenge incumbent regimes and can radically change the socio-technical context. Geographically disparate, they may still share principles and ideals linked to sustainability, social justice or post-consumerism. These 'hotspots of disruptive transformation' symbolise a de-growth agenda that is more challenging for policy makers, businesses and communities to visualize (Gibbs and O'Neill, 2016, p.7), infusing sustainable innovations with non-capitalist processes and logic (Lloveras et al., 2017). Research needs to recognise and explore the unacknowledged contradictions that underpin the logic and rationale of scaling up sustainable alternatives (O'Reilly et al., 2018), and contest certain ideas about the benefits of economies of scale within business and marketing studies. Goworek et al. (2018) note that a key factor in the capacity and speed at which local actions could be scaled up is the connection of sustainability-related activities by intermediary organizations that can generate resonance between multiple sites

through association or alliance. By reconfiguring discourse in this way, marketers might reveal new possibilities for sustainability and offer insights to perform economy and society differently (Gibbs and O'Neill, 2016; Varey, 2010). If these ideas can be scaled beyond the community, or disruptive innovation level, there is scope for *Relating* alternative market systems to a grander meta-theory of sustainable market development, capable of prompting a more sustainable society, populated by more sustainable people.

Building Towards Institutionalised Sustainable Marketplaces

Having examined the possibilities of developing sustainable people and alternative models of consumption, and how these might be conceptualised, this third theme turns to the institutional marketplace level. It involves identifying (*Envisioning)* a clearer and less fragmented conceptualisation (Thomas, 2018) of the role of marketing in building sustainable markets (Geels, 2010).

Unlike other domains of sustainability-oriented research such as sustainable innovation, sustainable design, social enterprise or sustainable supply chains, marketing theory has overly focused on the consumer side of marketing (Kilbourne and Beckmann, 1998; Kilbourne et al., 1997), at the expense of theorising marketing's role in sustainable production and delivery (Lacoste, 2016; Sheth and Sinha, 2015). In keeping with both previous themes, we appreciate that the marketing context consists of interrelated entities such as institutions, structures and actors embedded within marketing systems operating at different (i.e. micro, meso and macro) scales (Thomas, 2018).

As far as markets are concerned, little attention has been paid to how organisations embed strong sustainability (Roper, 2012) from a macro and systemic perspective compared to the

growing body of literature on the incorporation of weak sustainability through incorporating sustainable business practices into corporate strategy (Leonidou and Leonidou, 2011; McDonagh and Prothero, 2014). In this light, markets pose severe challenges for marketers, as the myriad of mechanisms that underpin sustainable markets are complex and require delineating and summarizing (*Explicating*), as well as differentiating and integrating (*Relating).* This latter requirement was found to be lacking by Leonidou and Leonidou (2011) in their systematic review of environmental marketing and management research; this showed the field to be fragmented, lacking theoretical cohesiveness, and reactive in the face of the actions of stakeholders, rather than proactively engaging with phenomena. Similarly Chabowski et al. (2011), although identifying stakeholder theory as a core topic of interest in sustainable marketing research, suggested the research focuses on the management of stakeholders and their expectations as opposed to the integration of them in business transformation (Bondy and Charles, 2018).

To allow transformation in marketing institutions (Kilbourne and Carlson, 2008), we need to consider the social and cultural milieu in which they operate. Thus, rather than treating sustainability as a micro-managerial issue, or individual consumer choice issue, scholars and practitioners could usefully embrace a wider perspective that locates it within the dominant social paradigm (DSP) that forms the worldview in Western industrialized societies (Kilbourne et al., 1997; Kilbourne and Carlson, 2008). The DSP was first defined by Milbrath (1984, p.7) as "the metaphysical beliefs, institutions, habits, etc. that collectively provide social lenses through which individuals and groups interpret their social world". Essentially it encapsulates a cosmological domain relating to a culture's fundamental beliefs and a socio-economic domain incorporating economic, political and technological dimensions (Kilbourne and Beckmann, 1998; Kilbourne et al., 1997). The DSP informs a society's value systems and

ecological views at a macro level, and impacts on and is, in turn, impacted by individuals' beliefs, attitudes and behaviour at a micro level (Kilbourne and Beckmann, 1998; Stern et al., 1995). Thus, for example, at a macro level an ontological, anthropocentric view of humans in relation to the rest of nature (Eckersley, 1992; Purser et al., 1995) and a dominant focus on economic growth and self-interest (see Kilbourne et al., 1997) drive materialistic understandings of progress and quality of life (Kilbourne et al., 1997; 2018) at the expense of more humanistic values (Varey and Pirson, 2014).

This macromarketing perspective allows space for scholars, institutions and actors to appreciate how economic, political, technological, and other structures and values of society drive, reproduce and reinforce beliefs that impact on sustainability (Geels, 2010; Kilbourne and Beckmann, 1998; Kilbourne et al., 2018). These governmental, regulatory, economic and social institutions, which constitute the culture of a society (Kilbourne et al., 2018), affect the ways in which different social agents interpret, prioritize and act on sustainable matters; for example, they both reflect and legitimate the "almost universal emphasis" of companies "upon economic returns, with consumption as the root towards profit maximisation" (McDonagh and Prothero, 2014, p.1198). Furthermore, embracing a macro perspective leaves room to contemplate the systemic nature of sustainability issues, by allowing consideration of the inter-dependent nature of economic, social and ecological realities (Thomas, 2018; Varey, 2010). Despite recurrent calls for a whole systems approach to address market-related concerns (Thomas, 2018; Kilbourne and Mittelstaedt, 2012; Fisk, 1967), in order for marketing to seek ways to engage meaningfully with sustainability issues, it remains unclear how effective transformation can happen in light of institutional constraints. As scholars and researchers of sustainability, this is partly due to recognizing ourselves as being embedded within the DSP and hence myopic when envisioning "transformation". Perhaps we could benefit from greater

reflexivity, as well as humbleness; indeed, drawing on worldviews and examining the relationship between the DSP, materialism and environmental behaviours in non-Western (Polonsky et al., 2014) or indeed less industrialized societies could shed light on ideologies, values, beliefs and behaviours that may unwittingly limit the scope of our analysis.

Despite large volumes of work at the micro-marketing level (Dangelico and Vocalelli, 2017; Leonidou and Leonidou, 2011; Chabowski et al., 2011) and a burgeoning debate at the macro-marketing level (Kilbourne et al., 2018; McDonagh and Prothero, 2014; Varey, 2010), we do find the meso level has been somewhat neglected in extant sustainability marketing literature (Thomas, 2018). A number of barriers have been identified at this level including: lack of will among corporate leaders, the context specific nature of sustainability, the privileging of shareholders' interests, the prioritising of economic growth, the lack of accepted measures of sustainability, the frequent accrual of costs and benefits to different industry institutions and actors, the lack of market transparency, dislocations in the market that separate investors from responsibility for resultant damage, detachment between production and consumption and the power of the media/social media in "constructing" realities of sustainability (Ozdamar Ertekin and Atik, 2015). In general terms these complex issues relate to the institutional constraints to addressing sustainability issues and problems. In the *Envisioning* (*Revising*) conceptual space there is very little consideration of how companies can be encouraged to be proactive in shaping the ultimate sustainability of markets. Employing systems thinking to examine the marketplace through multiple conceptual goals would enable marketing scholarship to address the difficulties inherent in creating sustainable futures and to suggest ways forward for marketing theory. We propose that scholarship in this field will help shape an environment in which sustainable production becomes an institutionalised norm rather than an (assumed) cognitive choice.

To *Envision* meaningful changes towards sustainability we need an integrated change in mentalities across different industries and professions (Srnka, 2004) where organisations may hold multiple and conflicting goals. We need to challenge managers' beliefs, mindsets, and practices that are heavily entrenched in the DSP (Kilbourne et al., 1997; 2018) and, thus, tend to resist solutions that narrowly focus on economic and financial notions of company performance rather than consider broader social and environmental ones. With the EU reframing sustainable policy towards their Circular Economy Action Plan in 2015, and UKRI launching Interdisciplinary Circular Economy Hub and Centres in 2020 the growing prominence of the circular economy discourse is significant (Murray et al., 2015). Yet sustainability scholars note the idealised expectations of circularity (Hopkinson et al., 2018) which currently exists in a fragmented and embryonic form, are fraught with tensions, over-claimed (Lazell et al., 2018) and primarily focused on post-consumption waste management (Velenturf et al., 2019). This move towards a circular (rather than linear) economy together with the overall adoption of cleaner technologies and production processes remains a small step towards the goal of environmental sustainability (Ghisellini et al., 2016; Crane and Matten, 2016). Social science insight to consumption has not yet been thoroughly interrogated in the circular economy context, exposing a contribution gap for marketing scholars to tackle the risks and trade-offs associated with the circular economy, and deliver desirable business and societal outcomes. Thus more work needs to be done to shine a spotlight on the hitherto neglected area of building sustainable markets.

Discussion: Theoretical domains for the future

The field of sustainability in marketing is conceptually and contextually limited by the interlocked and self-perpetuating constraints we have identified throughout this paper. Rather

than borrowing theory from other disciplines in the hope that it will illuminate our understanding of consumer behaviours it is time to privilege large scale, detailed, expansive theory building and testing work to make truly sustainable progress from a marketing perspective. Sustainability is a grand challenge, a large-scale, complex, enduring "wicked problem" (Jarzabkowski et al., 2018), which cannot be addressed from the individual up, but only by considering the system as a whole "making a link between individual action, social structures and institutional conditions towards collective action and transformations towards sustainability" (Sahakian and Seyfang, 2018, p.233). The Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations have been put forward as the most universal and widely adopted of the grand challenges (George et al., 2016). A number of the SDGs are an important focus for marketing and consumer scholars interested in sustainability: renewable energy, sustainable cities and communities, responsible production and consumption and climate action (www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/). Problem-driven research is needed to tackle a grand challenge and this would likely take the collaboration and concentration of a generation of marketing scholars. Current institutional structures, that is short term research performance management and assessments such as the Research Excellence Framework (REF) in the UK, do not however lend themselves to long term, integrative, extensive theory building and testing work. Current research expectations mean academic management privileges short term, empirically driven, fragmented (journal article sized) chunks of research. There is no impetus to *Integrate* them. Providing a response to a grand challenge requires first, an interdisciplinary approach and second, a wider, less individually centred phenomenological/socio-anthropological approach relying less on established theories.

Interdisciplinarity is of vital importance to a wider perspective on sustainability as the circular economy discourse demonstrates (Velenturf et al., 2019), allowing us to gain insight from

alternative viewpoints and frames of reference both within and outside of marketing, and as a way to tackle this grand challenge and to ensure that development does not take place in isolation. However, necessary interdisciplinary aspects run counter to traditional academic disciplinary structures (Reid et al., 2018). As we have highlighted consumer behaviour and marketing are adept at borrowing from other disciplines. Unfortunately, as MacInnis and Folkes (2010) note this has led to a multi- rather than interdisciplinary approach. That is, there is no blending of the disciplines and the way scholars are trained and rewarded is based within their disciplinary field.

It is apparent that more phenomenological/socio-anthropological approaches to balance against the predominate cognitive individual theories are required, but these need to be part of an interdisciplinary approach, not multidisciplinary. It is expected that a phenomenological/socio-anthropological approach (see Murphy and McDonagh, 2016) would more directly address the conceptual goals of *Envisioning* new phenomena and *Relating* (most typically *Differentiating*) often fringe or alternative sustainable phenomena and concepts, and *Debating* the generalisability of alternative socio-cultural practices (Prothero and Fitchett, 2000). Although vastly smaller in the number of studies to analytical approaches, socio-anthropological approaches tend to *Refute* the assumption of cognitive, rational choice, focusing instead on the lived experience of actors trying to live more sustainably. This however also has its limitation in the present scholarly environment for many of the reasons outlined earlier in this paper (short-termism, multidisciplinarity and methodological ease). In particular, socio-anthropological approaches tend to frame sustainable behavioural change as consumer resistance (Craig-Lees and Hill, 2002), political (Prothero et al., 2011) or anti-consumption (Kozinets and Handelman, 2004) related. Thus, authors typically focus on *Identifying* new sustainability related phenomena, and *Refuting* how we understand sustainable behaviours,

rather than *Integrating* these disparate phenomenological fields, or *Advocating* alternative theories or modes of practice. Progress is however being made. Alternative tribes of consumers are explicated, showing alternative behavioural conduct within an often counter-cultural sociological framing. Within this, the scope for *Relating* different forms of phenomena into higher levels of conceptualised theory has become a focus for theorists (McDonagh and Prothero, 2014; Thompson and Coskuner-Balli, 2007). However, the work has often struggled to translate into generalizable theories of direct relevance to mainstream marketplaces (Davies and Gutsche, 2016).

The most concerning gap within the theoretical development of the sustainability and marketing space however is not the underpinning conceptual goals of the researchers, all of which are laudable, but the distinct lack of *Integrating* or *Debating* between them. It is rare to find new conceptualisations from the *Envisioning* papers progressing into *Explicating* studies as one would expect following a pragmatic theory of inquiry (Dewey, 1938). Where authors have *Refuted* assumptions underpinning core theories or methodological approaches (such as Bagozzi, 1975 and Belk, 1988), little progress has been made in *Revising* existing theoretical constructs or *Integrating* newly identified phenomena. Accepting that sustainable behaviours are rooted in our socio-cultural milieu, as much (if not more than) our cognitive behavioural patterning (Belk, 1985), there is a distinct need to *Revise* our existing stock of theoretical models away from the economic and psychological to the developmental and sociological. Marketing scholarship's over reliance on consumerist logics is a barrier to the emergence of *Envisioning* alternative theories and modes of practice, capable of *Advocating* a better set of interventions allowing for a sustainable change in our society.

Conclusions: Thoughts for the future

In this paper, we have put forward our aim to seek sustainable futures in marketing and consumer research. We have identified gaps and how these might be filled, using the themes of sustainable people, models of alternative consumption, and sustainable marketplaces, to examine extant research whilst drawing upon the work of MacInnis (2011) to provide a coherent understanding of the current state of play in the field. We have also suggested potential ways to move marketing out of its current position to enable it to address the grand challenge of our time: sustainability. We also note MacInnis's (2011) four recommendations for moving forward the field of marketing *per se*, and we endorse her call to value conceptualisation, address shortages in current research, develop new scholars, and promote training in conceptual thinking skills. With this paper, we also seek to instil increased scholarly confidence to challenge the system, by advocating an interdisciplinary phenomenological/socio-anthropological approach to address the conceptual goals. For marketing practitioners, we have highlighted throughout the paper where marketers might engage with sustainability, such as the development of more sustainable people through education, the possibilities for change in models of alternative consumption, and the challenges towards transformation in building sustainable markets. The opportunity afforded by this special issue of EJM, and the support of the AoM in pushing forward the marketing discipline as a whole, make a first step to realising the new research agenda for sustainability and marketing.

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General conceptual goal	Envisioning		Explicating		Relating		Debating	
Specific conceptual goal	Identifying	Revising	Delineating	Summarizing	Differentiating	Integrating	Advocating	Refuting
Meaning	To notice that something exists	To reconfigure the identified phenomenon to shift perspectives or make proactive change	To describe an entity and its relationship to other entities	To encompass and consolidate related entities into a theoretical whole	To discriminate between different dimensions of a concept which form parts of the whole	To synthesize distinct dimensions of a concept into a harmonised whole with its own unique meaning from its parts	To endorse an alternative mode of thought or practice	To challenge an existing mode of thought or practice

Table 1 Conceptual goals