



## CONSCIOUS MARKETING: SEEDS FOR A NEW MARKETING CONCEPT TO DEAL WITH THE POTENTIAL CONFLICTS BETWEEN CONSUMERISM AND SUSTAINABILITY

*Marketing consciente: sementes para um novo conceito de marketing para lidar com os potenciais conflitos entre consumismo e sustentabilidade*

Afonso Carlos Braga<sup>1</sup>, Erika Camila Buzo Martins<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1 2</sup> Business Administration, PUC-SP, São Paulo, Brazil, Business Administration, ESPM, São Paulo, Brazil  
e-mail: afonsoabraga@terra.com.br, erikabuzomartins@gmail.com

### ABSTRACT

This paper deals with a perceived conflicting paradox between consumerism and sustainability among top marketing executives of three purposely selected corporations, where each company represent a current organizational paradigm: the functional, the human radical and the interpretative. A case study methodology, based on in depth interviews, combined with a comprehensive bibliographic research, enabled to address how the planet limitations to provide resources can influence business strategies. Functional paradigm companies, for example, pursue infinite growth while we live in a finite planet. The question is if the Marketing Department of those companies in the different organizational paradigms have a role in providing inputs in the strategic long term planning. Furthermore, if the marketing discipline in the academic environment influence decision makers that participate on the companies' business planning to shape the future in a perceived environment in 2017 where consumerism is posed in the against road of the planet sustainability. The study revealed that, the Marketing Department has limited power or voice to influence business decisions. On the other hand, 'greener' initiatives like Social Marketing, Green Marketing and Sustainable Marketing has potential to either evolve to or incorporate a new discipline concept, so called in this paper as 'Conscious Marketing'. This opportunity should be kicked off at the academic level in Universities and Business Schools that may reinforce the relevance of the theme and help to build in the students, a new generation of professionals, the knowledge that we live in a finite planet with limited resources and that the humanity need to revisit its consumption standards to ensure living conditions to the future generations.

**Keywords:** Consumerism. Sustainability. Conscious Marketing. Organizations Paradigms.

**ACEITO EM: 30/01/2020**

**PUBLICADO: 30/05/2020**



RISUS - Journal on Innovation and Sustainability  
volume 11, número 2 - 2020  
ISSN: 2179-3565

Editor Científico: Arnaldo José de Hoyos Guevara  
Editor Assistente: Rosa Rizzi  
Avaliação: Melhores práticas editoriais da ANPAD

## ***MARKETING CONSCIENTE: SEMENTES PARA UM NOVO CONCEITO DE MARKETING PARA LIDAR COM OS POTENCIAIS CONFLITOS ENTRE CONSUMISMO E SUSTENTABILIDADE***

*Conscious marketing: seeds for a new marketing concept to deal with the potential conflicts between  
consumerism and sustainability*

Afonso Carlos Braga<sup>1</sup>, Erika Camila Buzo Martins <sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1 2</sup> Business Administration, PUC-SP, São Paulo, Brazil, Business Administration, ESPM, São Paulo, Brazil  
e-mail: afonsobraga@terra.com.br, erikabuzomartins@gmail.com.

### **RESUMO**

Este artigo trata de um paradoxo conflitante entre o consumismo e a sustentabilidade entre os principais executivos de marketing de três empresas selecionadas proposadamente, em que cada empresa representa um paradigma organizacional atual: o funcional, o radical humano e o interpretativo. Uma metodologia de estudo de caso, baseada em entrevistas aprofundadas, combinada com uma pesquisa bibliográfica abrangente, permitiu abordar como as limitações do planeta em fornecer recursos podem influenciar as estratégias de negócios. Empresas de paradigmas funcionais, por exemplo, buscam crescimento infinito enquanto vivemos em um planeta finito. A questão é se o Departamento de Marketing dessas empresas, nos diferentes paradigmas organizacionais, tem um papel no fornecimento de insumos no planejamento estratégico de longo prazo. Além disso, se a disciplina de marketing no ambiente acadêmico influenciar os tomadores de decisão que participam do planejamento de negócios das empresas a moldar o futuro em um ambiente percebido em 2017, onde o consumismo é colocado na contramão da sustentabilidade do planeta. O estudo revelou que, o Departamento de Marketing possui poder ou voz limitados para influenciar as decisões de negócios. Por outro lado, iniciativas 'mais ecológicas' como Marketing Social, Marketing Verde e Marketing Sustentável têm potencial para evoluir ou incorporar um novo conceito de disciplina, chamado neste artigo como 'Marketing Consciente'. Essa oportunidade deve ser iniciada no nível acadêmico das Universidades e Escolas de Negócios, o que pode reforçar a relevância do tema e ajudar a construir nos alunos, uma nova geração de profissionais, o conhecimento que vivemos em um planeta finito, com recursos e recursos limitados. que a humanidade precisa revisitar seus padrões de consumo para garantir condições de vida às gerações futuras.

**Palavras-chave:** Consumismo, Sustentabilidade, Marketing Consciente, Paradigmas de Organizações.

## INTRODUCTION

Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century the marketing discipline arose, gained importance, visibility and, today, is one of the strategic fields in the great majority of market-led companies around the world. The use of marketing tools such as Segmentation and Positioning, or the study and the comprehension of the Company's Purpose and Marketing Strategy (Kotler e Armstrong, 2007), form a complex multi-faced framework with a wide range of approaches that lead the marketing discipline to be applied from a subjective/intuitive mode to a more scientific/structured mode.

Such wide range of applications and theories, allied to the misinterpretations of these tools, has potential to boost consumerism to meet the companies' growth goals, which may negatively affect some of the principles of planetary sustainability (Bauman, 2007, 2001; Guevara, 2008).

Now if the majority of the companies around the world aim at the *ad infinitum* growing, there is the risk of in the future that there will not be sufficient raw material or natural resources for so much expansion. One of the alternatives many companies looked for to keep coping with growth was the globalization, broadening their borders and reaching new markets. Nevertheless, as noted by Henderson (2003, p.83) "the terms 'global', 'globalization' and 'worldwide' are based in anthropological perspectives. It does not include the perspectives of the Earth, nor all the forms of life that share the planetary biosphere" so, at this moment, the humanity may need to face dilemma: the planet sustainability vs. consumption. The idea of this paper was to start a conversation about if the marketing professionals are aware of these specific limitations and how they see their companies facing the strategic challenge this perspective may have in their businesses and markets in the long term.

The Living Planet Report (2012, p.3), from the non-governmental organization (NGO) World Wildlife Fund (WWF), reinforces the point of view of the planet's limitations:

"Business as usual" projections estimate that we will need the equivalent of two Planets by 2030 to meet our annual demands. Natural capital – biodiversity, ecosystems and ecosystem services – must be preserved and, where necessary, restored as the foundation of human economies and societies [...]. We can reduce our footprint by producing more with less, and consuming better, wiser and less.

The main question of this paper is to understand how marketing professionals facing the new ideas and movements about conscious consumption.

The existing data collection, theories and fieldwork research, allied with the discussion about the marketing, sales, consumption, social responsibility, etc. brings a reality yet not very clear under this view that, for now, is named here as "conscious marketing". Why a new term? Because there are acknowledged concepts as "conscious consumption" (Ballantine and Creery, 2009; Akatu Institute, 2012), "sustainable consumption" (Phipps et al, 2012; Jackson, 2005), "social marketing" (Dann, 2009; Peattie and Peattie, 2008), "sustainable marketing" (Gordon; Carrigan; Hastings, 2011) and so on, but nothing approaching the possible dilemma that would be the collective conscience and/or education from the most privileged part of the humanity to refrain consumerism and to buy only the necessary aiming at saving the planet.

This study is mainly qualitative in order to understand the borders between the academy theoretical view and the practice in the company universe. Therefore, an exploratory research based on in depth interviews with marketing businessperson allowed to understand the paradox of the consumerism vs. the sustainability. The focus was environmental, more specifically, the planet preservation.

One of the premises of this study is that a good part of the marketing professionals work in a company or a business. In addition to that, it was considered the organizational theory of these enterprises to define which would be the actors and which conversations would be considered to confirm the validity of the proposition: the strategic orientation of the company affects the behavior of the businesspeople and, consequently, the marketing planning in medium/long term. This consideration is important to make the paper more relevant, in other words, well founded from the theoretical point of view and not only a simple reverie, a utopia.

When it comes to organizations, it is relevant to understand the scenery where they are, as well as how

they see the competitive scenery, because it will reflect in their strategies for the growth and the role marketing has on achieving this goals. According to Van de Ven and Astley (1983) the dominant paradigm is the functionalist, strongly connected to the American school of management, which tends to isolate the individual and its subjectivism and reinforces the importance of the organizations. According to the authors around 80% of the companies are somehow identified with this paradigm that rules the corporations must be headed to the market that, in the end of the day, is who dictates the rules of success or failure. It is also where, theoretically, there would be bigger resistance about the theme, because it was where or the power of decision would not be on the interviewed businessperson's hands or his company (if it is a branch from a foreign headquarters), or because this kind of decision would not be in the power of the executive chosen to be interviewed. Besides, as emphasized by Dowbor (2013), in this paradigm the money paths' pass through the financial sector that became a necessity, the main way for the almost total changes, from a simple bread purchase with a credit card until the wealth transfers between companies and nations. The problem is this universe create dynamics in which money generates money without necessarily generating labor (employment) and/or a fairer income distribution, an important point observed during the study, but not in-depth because it was not the central focus of this paper.

Other organizational paradigms considered were the interpretivism and the radical humanism. The 'interpretivists', according to Burrell and Morgan (1979), put "emphasis on the understanding of the social reality after all the society is composed by individuals like that it is vital to understand the essence of the subjectivity in the world and, for that, they found in the theory of the social construction". The 'radical humanists' are "influenced by the subjectivity and as a characteristic they look for developing a sociology of the radical change, giving great importance to the human conscience seeing the individual as a subject of the history". This way, in order to position this paper facing the organizational theories' paradigms and to have a more accurate reading on how corporations are impacted and react to the challenges of sustainability and the finite limits of our planets in order to fulfill all the consumption needs of the humanity, the Burrell and Morgan (1979) approach was chosen. It is important to observe that the authors emphasize in their study to one more organizational paradigm, the "radical structuralism" which has the following characteristic, according to Andion (2012, p.4): "emphasizes the structural change in the society. Defends the fact that the radical change must occur in the society nature and structure [...] focus in the analysis of the power and class [...] metaphor: the political arena". As this research had as main target the analysis of the businesspeople who work in corporations, private or public, no representative of the "political arena" was interviewed, from the radical structuralism, being this another intentional cut and limitation of this paper.

Beside the marketing concepts and organizational theory, already presented, it is important to bring also the social aspect as dealing with the consumerism and sustainability topic. A reliable source of knowledge and analysis between the consumption and consumerism are some of the works of the Polish sociologist Zygmund Bauman (2007). In his work, *Consuming Life*, he defines the important difference there is between "Consumption" and "Consumerism". The consumption itself must be seen as something trivial, from people's routine, which follows them since when men started living in socially in tribes. It can be the casual meeting with friends in order to celebrate something, the acquisition of necessary items for the survival, safety, etc. Throughout humanity history the activities of consumption produced correlate actions such as production, transportation, storage, sales, the removal of what has been consumed, and it is no longer desired. It happens, however, a moment of inflection where there was an excess in production and the meaning of having utensils, food, assets, possessions and essential elements to assure the well-being of the family was superseded by the sense of having, of possession to display wealth or a social status. The transformation that the society witnessed was seeing happiness directly connected to 'having' and, that way, associating pleasure, satisfaction and even self-realization to the moments of consumption. At this point one enters in the consumerism arena and, a characteristic explored by Bauman (2007), is that the consumerism gain strength when the transition of the producer society happened, which moved from producing safety for a society through durable assets, properties, etc. to the accumulation (and display), wealthy society, named by the author as "liquid society" (Bauman, 2001).

## 1. METHODOLOGY

The main methodology applied to this paper was the case study of big and global companies and organizations, each one representing one of the paradigms of the organizations selected for this paper: Functionalism, Interpretivism and Radical Humanism. Yin (2001, p.32) explains that the case study is an empirical investigation, that studies a phenomenon in the real context, especially when the limits between the phenomena and the context are not clear. Though qualitative research in depth with businesspeople from these companies, it was possible to understand how marketing professionals and these companies' strategies agree with a hypothesis risen by the project. Furthermore, this exploratory work used bibliographical research in order to collect information about secondary data from books, articles, thesis publications and other researches that had already approached the consumerism and sustainability matters, together and separated.

The fieldwork comprised interviews with the marketing executives using a structured questionnaire with open questions. The respondent was free to change the order of the questions and themes, with the intention of making him/her comfortable and, thus, increase the probability of getting authentic responses (avoiding the 'politically correct' opinion bias). According to Malhotra (2012), an exploratory research "provides a better view and comprehension of the problem. It explores with few preconceived ideas about the result of this investigation."

In the case of this paper, three focal interviews were performed with one representative of each company organizational paradigm with the respective focus, functionalism, interpretivism and radical humanism, in order to assess differences of perception, or not, to the question of the research (Yin, 2001, p.113). It is important to remember that the main limitation of the use of case study as research methodology is to avoid the temptation of generalizing the results and assume they will repeat in other situations, audiences or companies. According to Sousa (2005), "among the main benefits of the conduction of a case study are the possibility of the development of new theories and increasing the understanding about the real and contemporary events", exactly what is proposed in this paper: get hold of existing knowledge among the marketing professionals and understand if the concept of 'conscious marketing' is plausible of mere fiction

## 2. THEORETICAL RATIONALE

### 2.1 Sustainability and Marketing

One example of sustainability concept associated to consumption, in general, come from Ballantine and Creery (2009) that depart from Maslow's hierarchy of needs to investigate what they have defined as the 'voluntary simplifiers'. Through in-depth interviews with twelve consumers identified as belonging to that group, the authors concluded that these consumers are more likely to adopt 'conscious consumption' because they already have the physiological needs level met. Reinforcing this point Akatu's Research (2012) presented on the topline results that to reach the conscious consumption level "it would be desirable to seek the 'sweet spot' of the relationship between the welfare generated and the human resources and materials allocated to get to it. Creating conditions for this to happen collectively, on a large scale, is what is expected from enterprises and governments that are truly committed to sustainable happiness of their societies." It turns out however that there is much inequality, not only in the perception of this concept, but also in the proportion of the population that has reached this level of commitment, due to the unequal distribution of wealth across the planet, as shown by the data from the Global Inequality Index<sup>1</sup> (GINI, 2012) that show a little evolution since the turn of the century, going from 40.37 in 2000 to 35.75 in 2011.

---

<sup>1</sup> GINI index measures the extent to which the distribution of income (or, in some cases, consumption expenditure) among individuals or households within an economy deviates from a perfectly equal distribution. A Lorenz curve plots the cumulative percentages of total income received against the cumulative number of recipients, starting with the poorest individual or household. The GINI index measures the area between the Lorenz curve and a hypothetical line of absolute equality, expressed as a percentage of the maximum area under the line. Thus a GINI index of 0 represents perfect equality, while an index of 100 implies perfect inequality.

A closer point of view for the conscious consumption described would be 'sustainable consumption' which is defined by Phipps *et al* (2012) as being: "a consumption that simultaneously optimizes the environmental, social and economic consequences of acquisition, use and disposition in order to meet the needs of both current and future generations". This definition is the one most commonly associated and already adopted by numerous companies and corporations, the 'triple bottom line' as it addresses that are sustainable solutions that seek positive outcomes in social, economic and environmental areas. In the search of practical and political solutions, Jackson (2005) has developed an extensive research to study the way to establish policies that may lead to conscious consumption. The proposal defines this type of consumption as:

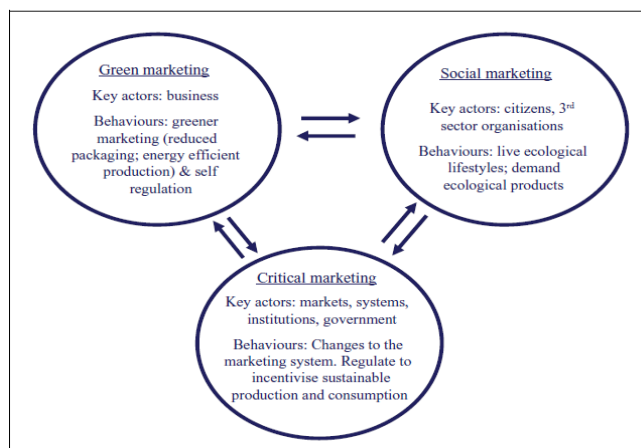
[...] examples of such behaviors include: the recycling of household wastes, purchase of 'sustainable' products, using energy efficient appliances, choosing green electricity tariffs, composting garden and kitchen waste, investing in 'ethical' funds, conserving water or energy, buying organic food, returning electrical goods for re- use or recycling, switching transport mode, changing travel behavior, buying remanufactured or reused goods, reducing material consumption, pursuing 'voluntary simplicity' and so on. (Jackson, 2005)

Part of the marketers' job is to understand the customers and their consumption patterns to design marketing plans and marketing strategies for their corporations. Therefore, it is expected that the concepts of 'conscious consumption' and 'sustainable consumption' would generate studies, commercial tools and definitions about 'social marketing' and 'sustainable marketing'. In fact, a number of authors developed papers, book chapters, etc. about those topics, like Ken and Sue Peattie from Cardiff, UK, that have been conducting for almost a decade specific research about social marketing. According to Peattie and Peattie (2008, p.3), social marketing initiatives should bring to the business arena an alternative approach to marketing for sustainability, on their own terms, "social marketing seeks to utilize tools, techniques and concepts derived from commercial marketing in pursuit of social goals", notwithstanding reinforcing Andreasen (2006, p.94) that earlier stated a similar definition and affirmed: "social marketing is about making a better world for all of us". Moreover, Dann (2009) produced a paper with a comprehensive research of the most used contemporary commercial definitions of social marketing with the aim to redefine its definition. The conclusion of his work was: "the adaptation or adoption of commercial marketing activities, institutions and processes as means to induce behavioral change in a targeted audience on a temporary or permanent basis to achieve a social goal".

One of the goals of this paper was to understand if social marketing is sufficient to address the sustainability challenges the planet is facing, but at the end, social is too broad and coping with a wide range of concerns like obesity, waste, ethical behavior, etc. Considering that a new concept could be considered, the 'sustainable marketing', that by literally making the use of the word 'sustainable' could than nail down towards a more concrete emphasis in sustainability. The best reference is the paper from Gordon, Carrigan and Hastings (2011) that in the abstract addresses the fundamentals of their work:

[...] how sustainable marketing could be achieved through the contribution of three existing marketing sub-disciplines; green marketing, social marketing and critical marketing. Green marketing facilitates the development and marketing of more sustainable products and services while introducing sustainability efforts into the core of the marketing process and business practice. Social marketing involves using the power of marketing to encourage sustainable behavior among individuals, businesses and decision makers while also assessing the impact of current commercial marketing on sustainability. This links into the critical marketing paradigm which entails analyses of marketing theory, principles and techniques using a critical theory based approach. This analysis can help to guide regulation and control, development of marketing theory and practice, and to challenge the dominant institutions associated with marketing and the capitalist system, encouraging a marketing system in which sustainability is a key goal [...] (Gordon; Carrigan; Hastings, 2011, p.2)

The authors conceptual paper was to “examine how three dimensions of marketing – green marketing, social marketing and critical marketing – contribute to a framework for sustainable marketing”, illustrated on Figure 1.



**Figure 1: A framework of sustainable marketing**  
Source: Gordon, Carrigan and Hastings, 2011

The authors bring into light the discussion of companies and businesses that, by developing, launching and supporting ‘greener’ products and services will become more profitable and become desired brands for the long run. Those corporations will then be more desired brands for the consumers and the third sector that are more sympathetic to sustainable products and initiatives that benefit more ecological solutions and lifestyles. That is also a group with “a good fit given the focus on voluntary behavior change” (Gordon; Carrigan; Hastings, 2011, p.10) pointed out as a key element to move the society to a new consumption pattern. Lastly, Critical Marketing is the third component required to pull together the other two blocks. The basis come from the Critical Theory which “task is to simultaneously offer a critique of contemporary society while envisioning solutions to the problems” (Gordon; Carrigan; Hastings, 2011, p.13). By doing so marketing could bring together markets, institutions and legislators to promote changes in behavior in the market system to influence production and consumption towards the sustainability cause.

On its end, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2002) defined sustainability “as the consumption of goods and services that meet basic needs and quality of life without jeopardizing the needs of future generations” however none of the marketing concepts selected up to his point clearly proposed tools or frameworks that could be immediately identified like the ‘golden marketing rules’ such as segmenting the marketing, brand positioning, the 4 Ps, etc. That is the reason why this paper suggests being one of the few new voices to raise the concept of ‘conscious marketing’.

## 2.2 Consumption and Consumerism, the impact on sustainability

Part of sustainability challenges comes from understanding the difference between ‘consumption’ and ‘consumerism’, as already explained by Bauman’s (2007) liquid society theory, reported in the Introduction. In addition to the potential worrying prospect of a reduced number of conscious consumers and the risk of a continuous growth of consumerism if humanity does not change its consuming habits, Figure 2 illustrates, based on the report The National Footprint Accounts (2012), one of the challenges this paper proposes: it is impossible for companies to aim for infinite growth because we live in a finite planet.

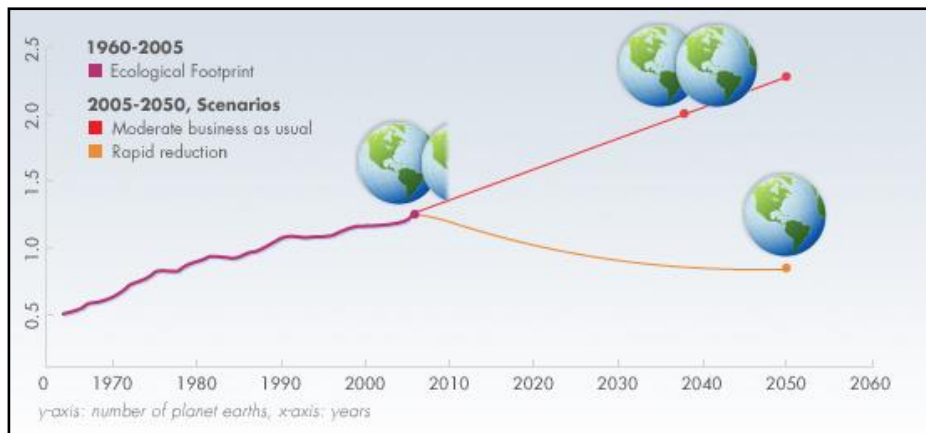


Figure 2: number of planet Earths needed to replace the existing resources

Source: <http://www.footprintnetwork.org/content/images/uploads/footprint>, access 13 May 2017

"Today humanity uses the equivalent of 1.5 planets to provide the resources we consume and to absorb what we discard [...] the Earth needs a year and six months to regenerate what we use in a year." (The National Footprint Accounts, 2012)

In short, the planet limitations are facing a major challenge considering the conflict between sustainability and consumerism that is present in many market segments, in many countries and most diverse cultures. Figure 2 also illustrates a simulation done by the Global Footprint Network for the next forty years. If humanity maintains the current consumption patterns by 2050 it will be needed 3 planets earth to accommodate consumption and the environment regeneration. Only if there is a 'rapid reduction', at the current technological standards, by 2050 mankind may return to the 70's sustainable level of 1.0 earth. Therefore, many things must be done, there are various potential areas to attack to reverse the current trend and increasing the number of studies of this new marketing concept being proposed in this paper, the 'conscious marketing', the better the academic & business areas will contribute in the quest for planetary solutions.

### 3. RESULTS

#### 3.1 Quantifying the marketing concepts that connects to sustainability

An extensive literature search focused primarily on scientific articles published in Brazil and Globally was conducted to check how the topics related to sustainability, for example, are being connected somehow to marketing, if there is a focused or broad point view of about the subject, if it is possible recognize distinct brand/business positioning considering the most popular jargons, etc. The search was limited to documents from 2007 to 2016 to bring the latest in the subject, to assess the incidence over this period (increasing, decreasing or stable) and to see if any of the concepts outlined the others. The illustration of the data collected can be viewed at Table 1:



**Table 1: incidence of scientific articles in Brazil, the past 10years**

"MARKET JARGON"	SOCIAL MARKETING				GREEN MARKETING				CRITICAL MARKETING				CONSCIOUS MARKETING			
	Brazil (*)		International (**)		Brazil (*)		International (**)		Brazil (*)		International (**)		Brazil (*)		International (**)	
	Articles (unit)	%	Articles (unit)	%	Articles (unit)	%	Articles (unit)	%	Articles (unit)	%	Articles (unit)	%	Articles (unit)	%	Articles (unit)	%
2016	1	3,8%	4	5,6%	1	11,1%	5	6,7%	0	0,0%	6	10,7%	0	0	0,0%	
2015	0	0,0%	10	13,9%	0	0,0%	4	5,3%	1	33,3%	1	1,8%	0	0	0,0%	
2014	4	15,4%	5	6,9%	3	33,3%	14	18,7%	1	33,3%	4	7,1%	0	1	12,5%	
2013	3	11,5%	14	19,4%	0	0,0%	16	21,3%	0	0,0%	11	19,6%	0	1	12,5%	
2012	3	11,5%	8	11,1%	3	33,3%	12	16,0%	0	0,0%	8	14,3%	0	2	25,0%	
2011	2	7,7%	11	15,3%	0	0,0%	10	13,3%	1	33,3%	6	10,7%	0	0	0,0%	
2010	2	7,7%	10	13,9%	0	0,0%	6	8,0%	0	0,0%	10	17,9%	0	1	12,5%	
2009	3	11,5%	6	8,3%	2	22,2%	3	4,0%	0	0,0%	4	7,1%	0	0	0,0%	
2008	5	19,2%	1	1,4%	0	0,0%	4	5,3%	0	0,0%	4	7,1%	0	2	25,0%	
2007	3	11,5%	3	4,2%	0	0,0%	1	1,3%	0	0,0%	2	3,6%	0	1	12,5%	
TOTAL	26	100%	72	100%	9	100%	75	100%	3	100%	56	100%	0	0%	8	100%

(\*) Data from SciELO.org

(\*\*) Data from ScienceDirect.com

Source: Author's compilation

The analysis of the table reinforced that there are few voices discussing the subjects that motivated the development of this paper. In terms of international publications there is a balance in the amount of published articles that discuss 'social marketing', with 72 jobs, 'green marketing', 75 articles and 'critical marketing', 56 texts. In comparison with the Brazilian production, 'social marketing' has a reasonable number of studies with 26 items, however there is a big drop when it relates to 'green marketing' with 9 jobs and with 'critical marketing' with only 3 articles. The search confirmed that, in the past years, there is still little production relating sustainability directly to marketing activity in general. Curiously, the approved papers the last 2 years dropped, but there is no clear explanation for that. An interesting research question for future studies, but that is not the focus of this paper.

The idea of 'conscious marketing' generated the lowest number of texts and papers addressing this topic. Among the international search only 8 works were located and from 2007 onwards. In the case of Brazil, no articles were published.

Lastly, a quick scanning in most of the titles and abstracts of the articles checked on this search showed that there is a wide range of use and application of the selected jargons. For example, the term 'social marketing' can either come dissociated, and yet touch in the critical points highlighted in this paper, or embark on the marketing the area role of exploring the communication tools advertise the organization's initiatives in social actions to reinforce a brand/company image and promote employees' engagement.

### 3.2 Confronting the in depth interviews with the study propositions

Considering the major challenges presented in this papers, it was possible to elect six major propositions that confronted with the executives' responses enabled us to figure out:

- a) **Proposition 1** – in order to justify the corporate investments, it is expected by various stakeholders that their business present continuous growth, as it is understood and performed on the current economy. However, in scenery of a planet with finite resources, the *ad infinitum* growth is unfeasible so, how these corporations imagine facing today this future dilemma?

Based in the research results this proposition cannot be validated or invalidated, in other words, actually it is nonexistent. One point that was clear is the immediacy issue. The majority of the companies and organizations have their agenda driven to assure results in the short term. An important angle of the immediacy was noted by Dowbor (2012, p.74), "the mainstream of the economy has banned the long term and the group view, on which avoid the unpleasant problem of the structural impacts of development."

Furthermore, regardless the approach of the organizational paradigm, the sustainability issues, in the matter of planet preservation and its capacities of regenerating in order to suppress the humanity with the necessary resources, is out of reach of most people and executives. Businesspeople, in particular, are focused in the short term, or at most, in its 'Five Year Plan'. The scenery for 10 or 20 years from now is out of the reach of the marketing professionals and ordinary people, being probably the next generation's

responsibility to build new paradigms that effectively incorporate behavior changes that take into account solutions still unpublished as the concept of ‘conscious marketing’ proposed in this paper.

- b) **Proposition 2** – the companies can and must fulfill the important role with the intention of assure the planetary sustainability aiming its preservation, in other words, from natural resources to the species. Is this movement still incipient?

For the Functionalism, this proposition would not be valid, however the other two approaches studied makes sense, especially for the companies that in their essence are committed with sustainable values in their mission, vision, and values, in other words, the firms most identified with the Interpretivism. These organizations that have economic goals but will, nonetheless, aim at a harmonious growth with the environment. According to the interviewee: “the individuals understand their contribution to the work they are performing and its impact in the system and the environment as a whole.” There is a notion that people form a company and everyone has the opportunity and motivation to give their contribution.

The radical humanist approach also captures the company strength, but under the view of being a potential ‘window’ in order to pass on its causes and thus impact and influence a more aware portion, known by them as changes agents.

Being the functionalism the dominant paradigm, it is correct to admit that it is an incipient movement.

- c) **Proposition 3** – does working in companies and initiatives that somehow develop sustainable projects and products with proved results, increases the personal proudness and fulfillment feeling of the professionals motivating them to new initiatives, or at least the maintenance, of activities in this area? Would it be possible to imagine a virtuous circle in this situation?

Not enough evidences were collected in the case study in order to validate or not this proposition; however, in contrast with the proposition 1, it is not possible to be categorical to affirm it is inexistent. It can be an opportunity for the future studies that have conditions to go deeper in this analysis.

- d) **Proposition 4** – as fulfilled the safety and physiologic basic needs, as well as the affective (love/relationship), do companies and their communication agencies direct their advertising and promotion arsenal reinforcing the consumerism, by interpreting that the levels of self-esteem and personal fulfillment can be achieved through the acquisition of certain assets and brands?

There were indications of the existence and acknowledgement of the consumerism, of which that ‘having things and assets’, outcome of more abundant credit, raises the search for possessions. However, in the way this proposition was formulated, demanded a comprehension and engagement with marketing typology that only professionals of the area would have fluency to interpret and react. Because it was not the focus of this paper, it can be discarded.

- e) **Proposition 5** – companies consider some sustainability indexes, metrics and trends for the medium/long term strategic planning process. Are these data the same number as always, for instance the growth of GDP/capita, ecological footprint, etc. or do they consider the new trends that goes beyond the economic?

The current voice is the triple bottom line that is already incorporated on the routine of the corporations, regardless the organizational paradigm it is focused on. Nevertheless, none of the interviewees has showed knowledge or reported the use of new metrics suggested in this study; nor even the representative of the ‘radical humanism’ that stated that they are moved for causes, not indexes; unless a good index is strong enough to generate a good cause. This way, this proposition was invalidated.

### 3.3 Discussion: Conscious Marketing

In the article entitled “Strategic Sustainability: is there a return in long term?” Claro and Claro (2014, p.3), proved through the quantitative analysis the hypothesis that “companies, which invest in sustainability in the strategic format present a better performance after an external shock (crisis 2008)”. They attested also the following hypothesis: “[...] investments in sustainability, in the Strategic format, which integrates the perspective of core business and economic performance of the company, tends to last in the long term”. It worth highlighting the following results:

There is a virtuous circle between the practice and the report, in other words, companies that invested in sustainability, report the actions and projects, and improve in the next year. These companies tend to be better in a long term. This article provides evidences for a theoretical consensus that the sustainability investments affect the companies in a long term.

The evidences of the Brazil Foods (BRF) company studied, in this article, in a historical context, exposes the evolution of the strategic investments in sustainability and their relation with the competences and the central business of the company. Bearing in mind the results and the changes of which the studied company passed in the period from 2005 to 2011, the effect of this integrated view of the sustainability becomes key to the long-term development. The contribution of this work, therefore, will be aligned with the two hypothesis studied. (Claro; Claro, 2014, p.24)

In other words, in spite of the impression given by the interviewees that would be a difficult to measure results or that there is no metrics to support the initiatives in sustainability, the article has proved that it is possible and it brings long term results to invest and communicate actions in the context of the triple bottom line. Probably, as it was reported also in the field research, companies that has in its essence the integrated sustainability to their mission, vision and values will potentially have more chances to be well succeeded, as observed with BRF.

A new challenge, highlighted by the interviewees, it is to input the theme of the sustainability in the CEO schedule as a relevant and strategic theme. The UN Global Compact (2013) research performed by the consulting Accenture with 1.000 CEOs, in 103 countries, encompassing 27 industries, pointing interesting data in order to better understand the CEOs schedules:

- 32% believe that the global economy is in the right way to serve the demands to be generated by the increase of the population;
- 33% reported that the companies are doing enough effort to serve the challenges of sustainability;
- 38% believed that they can quantify the value of their initiatives in sustainability
- 37% see the lack of connection between the business and the added value for the initiatives in sustainability as a barrier to accelerate their progress
- 83% believed the governmental and regulatory policies are critic for the progress of the initiatives

The statistics of the study explain in parts the fact of the sustainability theme to be in the schedule, but not as a priority. Roughly speaking only 1/3 of the CEOs believe they are on the right path or they are taking correct actions, or can even attribute the due value (result) of the initiative. The aggravating is more than 80% understood that the government and regulating agencies role can be an additional obstacle in the process, in other words, apparently they are transferring part of the problem to third parts.

Although by the company and corporation side the possibility of taking the new concept of ‘conscious marketing’ seems distant, on the other edge there are consumers, the society, that in the end of the day generates a demand for products and services to be served by the organizations. There is a group of consumers for who is more evident the notions of “consumerism”, “social, green and critical marketing” and “impact on future generation”, which were three key points considered in this work. The two main points, in particular, were well studied by Peattie and Peattie (2008) on the article “Social Marketing: a pathway to consumption reduction?”. The work sought analyzing the potential that the marketing subject could have to stimulate the reduction of consumption in the aspect of the social marketing. The authors evaluated the difficulties in use the conventional theories of marketing, because the way is inverse and developed throughout the history, as mentioned in this extract: “the tendency of ignoring the reduction in the consumption in the central debate of marketing segue continues nowadays because it does not match or it is well accepted by the good practice or existing theory”. It would be practicing what they named as “de-marketing”, which generates discomfort and contradiction. The concepts listed on Table 1 (social, green and sustainable marketing) is building awareness about the need to change the current consumption standards to benefit the planet preservation, but not at the pace expected and desired by the radical humanists.

However, every day more voices arise rethinking the marketing, including one of the ‘gurus’ of the subject, Kotler (2010). In his book “Marketing 3.0” the author releases an innovative view for the marketing discipline stating that it should surpass the limits of the marketing department to encompass the business view of the companies. That way, the marketing arsenal could be used to create value for the business, which is also the interest of all in the organization.

One example of companies reported by the author is The Body Shop, a British cosmetic company which acts globally that is “acknowledged as equality and socially fair model, although this attitude is often noticed as anti-capitalist or anti-globalization.” (Kotler, 2010, p.17)

Another company mentioned is Timberland, which presents “solid brand integrity”. Its positioning and brand identity transmit the image of a “good clothing and shoe company inspired in the outdoor life.” The difference is obtained through the “engaged citizenship, environmental management and global human rights” and the company keeps loyal to this principle. An example of it happened in 1994 when “the company profit dropped from US\$ 25.5 million to US\$ 17.7 million and the board kept the volunteer community service program understanding that it is part of the DNA of the brand (Kotler, 2010, p. 44). In his view, Kotler proposes that by the mission, vision and values the companies that practice the marketing 3.0 are capable of gather “mind, heart and spirit” and thus showing commitment with society, employees’ engagement and shareholders consistency being loyal to their views.

The examples and practices presented in the book were the way Kotler found to illustrate what he understands as being the “marketing concepts’ evolution” which are generating a transforming movement. It is aligned with the perceptions of the three respondents of the field research in which everyone, in their own way, report having this need for a change: the functionalism suggests the education and formation of a new generation, the interpretivism affirms the sustainability and conscious consumption causes are growing trends (and even to survival) and the radical humanism is always looking for the “transformation drivers” in order to impact the society to question/change the *status quo*.

Considering all this points and back to one of the questions of this research, if there is space for a new concept, the ‘conscious marketing’, it was developed a model that takes into account the evolution of some marketing concepts (inspired by Kotler) from the oldest tool of the subject that was the word-of-mouth marketing (when the Man started to live in society), passing by nowadays and until a still unknown future. In order to show how the marketing concepts are broadening their field and impact, the image of a spiral was chosen, as illustrated on Figure 5, which is always opening and expanding. The model was inspired by the evolution proposed by the marketing 3.0, pointing specific moments in time and using famous brands to illustrate the key concepts proposed by Philip Kotler.

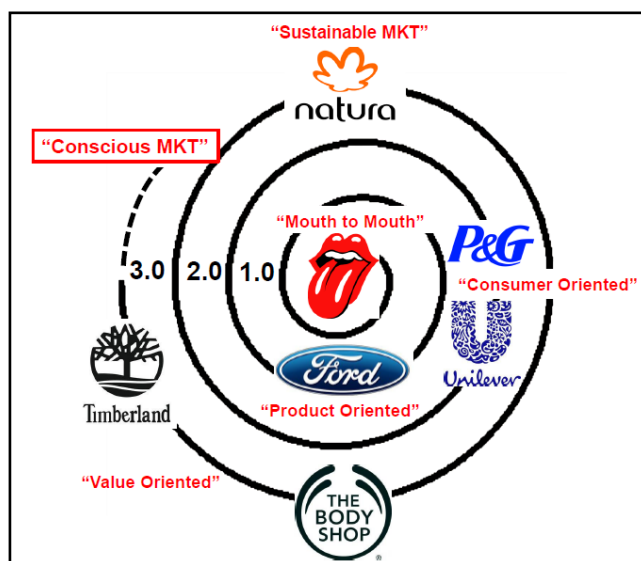


Figure 5: Spiral Model – the evolution of selected marketing concepts  
Source: the author

Based on the model, it is possible to note that in the origin it was the word-of-mouth marketing until the “Fordism” event that changes the view of productivity and made the industry of mass consumption burst throughout the production line (1.0). When they supplied and served world in their needs marketing centered in the consumer in order to fulfill and ‘create’ new needs. It was when companies such as Unilever and P&G segmented their markets, created categories, product differentials, etc. in order to conquer the consumer (2.0). Following this evolution some companies understood that their mission goes further than generate profit and it is structured in their essence taking into account sustainability concepts, social responsibility, etc., represented in the model by the Brazilian company Natura (2.0 +). Finally, taking the examples of Kotler, The Body Shop and Timberland represent the concept of value marketing (3.0).

The tease of this paper was to suggest that the idea of ‘conscious marketing’ could eventually be the next step. The conscious marketing hold on important fundamentals of the Social Marketing, of the Green Marketing, of the Sustainable Marketing and also of the value marketing to investigate how the society needs to evolve, as described by Correa (2012, p.8), “we are looking for ways to assist the transition individual to collective, from the ‘to have’ to the ‘to be’ and new organization and attitude values.”

## CONCLUSION

Going back to the starting point of this work, it can be noticed by the bibliographic research and by the interviews that there are still few voices that approach this topic. As more studies, articles, works are performed bigger is the opportunity of reaching more people, more opinion leaders, more students and also a new generation of professionals that will have to face the consequences of the current consumption that appears to be ‘inconsequential’.

There are already books, theses, papers articulating important concepts like Green Marketing, Social Marketing and Sustainable Marketing. The benefits of Green Marketing have been proved and companies that truly developed and launched green products are enjoying the advantages of the triple bottom line. The Social Marketing tends to focus more on causes, on the human relationship side of the organizations and how those companies are influencing the environment, but does not focus specifically on sustainability or conscious consumption.

Sustainable Marketing is the closest existing concept that has a good synergy with the main theme of this paper, however has not addressed to date, at least based on the bibliographic search performed, a key point that is how to enlarge the conscious consumption ideas into a ‘conscious marketing’ new framework.

Considering all those key factors, three key propositions can emerge from this paper for future quantitative and more comprehensive studies. The propositions are:

1. The companies can play an important role with the intention of promoting planetary sustainability in the broader sense of saving, in other words, from the inputs to the species. Is this movement at least incipient?
2. There have been conversations about the finite limits of the planet, that the humanity is reaching a consumption level than can become unsustainable, talks about movements for a more conscious consumption, etc., but these are cultural and behavioral changes difficult to alter fast. In this matter the governments, the NGOs and the learning institutes (elementary and secondary) must assume the role of forming a new generation, more conscious, that will develop in their personal lives and at work positive attitudes in relation to the Earth preservation.
3. The marketing theory has been evolving since the first times of ‘word of mouth’ until the avant-garde concepts such as Marketing 3.0 from Philip Kotler. The practical applications of these concepts cross the borders of the marketing departments and are evaluated and practiced in many areas, in all hierarchic levels of the organizations. Has the idea of the ‘conscious marketing’ potential to become another concept like green market, social marketing and sustainable marketing?

To sum up, this paper aimed to raise if there is the possibility of opening for the discussion of a new marketing concept, the ‘conscious marketing’, but it is still in the field of the propositions and hypothesis. It needs to be better assessed and worked with statistical rigor, with a broader base of respondents in order to prove

the hypothesis and then start the development of the concept around the theme. As recommendation for future studies, we leave the suggestion of starting a quantitative research with businesspeople and companies to quantitatively validate the work and thus open a new lane for studies in the marketing universe.

The approach proposed in this paper may be a small angle, but of considerable importance to the cause that was noted as having little discussions: the role of marketing to understand, produce valuable knowledge and develop analysis and frameworks aiming a greater goal, for the individual consumer and the common good, that is the long-term preservation of a planet with limited resources.

Hopefully this paper will provoke further research and studies in the area of 'conscious marketing', motivate further qualitative and quantitative surveys that will prove the relevance of the theme hereby suggested. Taking this topic into the Universities' environment may bring more educators on board to discuss the point among professors and students to form a new generation of conscious consumers.

## REFERENCES

- AKATU. Research (2012). Towards a Well-Being Society. Available at: [http://www.akatu.org.br/pesquisa/2012/SUMARIO\\_PESQUISAAKATU.pdf](http://www.akatu.org.br/pesquisa/2012/SUMARIO_PESQUISAAKATU.pdf), access on 29 set 2013. (Portuguese)
- ANDION, C. Aiming for a new interpretation of the paradigm shifts in public administration. EBAPE.BR, v. 10, nº 1, artigo 1, p.4-19. Rio de Janeiro, 2012. (Portuguese).
- ANDREASEN, G. Social Marketing in the 21st Century. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2006.
- BALLANTINE, P.W.; Creery, S. The consumption and disposition behavior of voluntary simplifiers. *Journal of Consumer Behavior*, 8, p.1–12, 2009.
- BAUMAN, Z. Liquid Modernity. Translation: Plínio Dentzien. Rio de Janeiro: Zahar, 2001. (Portuguese)
- BAUMAN, Z. Consuming Life. Translation: Carlos Alberto Medeiros. Rio de Janeiro: Zahar, 2007. (Portuguese)
- BURRELL, G., & Morgan, G. *Sociological Paradigms and Organizational Analysis*, Heinemann, 1979, p. 1-37.
- CLARO, P. B. O.; Claro, D. P. Strategic Sustainability: is there a long term return on the investment? RAUSP, Vol: 49 No: 2, April/May/June. Sao Paulo, 2014. (Portuguese)
- CORREA, R. M. Os Níveis de Consciência Organizacional, sob a Perspectiva da Responsabilidade Social. Master's Degree Dissertation in Business Administration. PUC-SP, São Paulo, 2012, p. 151. (Portuguese)
- DANN, S. (2009). Redefining social marketing with contemporary commercial marketing definitions. Elsevier: *Journal of Business Research*, p.147-153
- DOWBOR, L. The odd paths of our money. São Paulo : Editora Fundação Perseu Abramo, p. 72, 2013. (Portuguese)
- GORDON, R; Carrigan, M.; Hastings, G. A framework for sustainable marketing. *Sage: Marketing Theory*, 11(2), p. 143–163, 2011.
- GUEVARA, A. J. H. Consciousness and Sustainable Development in the Organizations. São Paulo: Cengage Learning, 2008. (Portuguese)

HENDERSON, H. Beyond Globalization: Shaping a Sustainable Global Economy. São Paulo: Pensamento-Cultrix, p.83, 2003. (Portuguese)

JACSON, T. Motivating sustainable consumption: a review of evidence on consumer behavior and behavioral change. Centre for Environmental Strategy. University of Surrey, 2004.

KOTLER, P.; Armstrong, G. Marketing Principles. São Paulo: Pearson Prentice Hall, 12. ed, p.28-47, 2007. (Portuguese)

KOTLER, P.; Kartajaya, H; Setiawan, I. Marketing 3.0. Translation: Ana Beatriz Rodrigues. Rio de Janeiro, RJ: Campus, 2010. (Portuguese)

MALHOTRA, N. K. Marketing Research: applied orientation. 6. ed. Porto Alegre: Bookman, 2012. (Portuguese)

OECD. Towards Sustainable Household Consumption? Trends and Policies in OECD Countries. Paris: OECD, 2002.

PEATIE K., Peattie S. (2008). Social marketing: A pathway to consumption reduction? Elsevier: Journal of Business Research, doi:10.1016/j.jbusres.2008.01.033

PHIPPS, M; Ozanne, L. K.; Luchs, M.G.; Subrahmanyam, S.; Kapitan, S.; Catllin, J. R.; Gau, R.; R. W. Naylor, R.; Rose, R. L.; Simpson, B.; Weaver, T. (2009) Understanding the inherent complexity of sustainable consumption. Elsevier: Journal of Business Research, p.1227 – 1234.

SOUSA, R. In: Miguel, P. A. C. et al. Research Methodology in Production Engineering and Operations Management. Rio de Janeiro: Elsevier Editora, p. 132, 2005. (Portuguese)

THE NATIONAL FOOTPRINTS REPORT (2012).

[http://www.footprintnetwork.org/en/index.php/GFN/page/world\\_footprint](http://www.footprintnetwork.org/en/index.php/GFN/page/world_footprint) , access on 03 feb 2014

UN Global Compact Report. United Nations Global Compact-Accenture CEO Study on Sustainability: Architects of a Better World, 2003. [http://www.accenture.com/Microsites/ungc-ceo-study/Documents/pdf/13-1739\\_UNGC%20report\\_Final\\_FSC3.pdf](http://www.accenture.com/Microsites/ungc-ceo-study/Documents/pdf/13-1739_UNGC%20report_Final_FSC3.pdf), access on 13 feb 2014.

VAN DE VEN, A. H.; Astley, W. G. Central perspectives and debates in organization theory. New York: Johnson Graduate School of Management, Cornell University, Administrative Science Quarterly, Vol 28(2), p. 245-273, 1983.

WORLD BANK (2012). Development Research Group. GINI Index 2012. <http://iresearch.worldbank.org/PovcalNet/index.htm>. Access on 07 April 2014.

WWF - World Wide Fund for Nature (2012). Living Planet Report Summary 2012. WWF International, Gland, Switzerland, p.3.

YIN, R. K. (2001). Case Study: Planning and Methodology. 2.ed. Porto Alegre: Bookman, 2001. (Portuguese).