

Introduction to the Special Issue: A Macromarketing Perspective on Alternative Economies

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Abstract

Alternative economies respond to the precarious conditions underpinning the everyday lives of individuals, and their lack of access to and scarcity of resources and competences. Recently there has been increasing interest in the field of macromarketing towards such alternative forms of exchange and marketplaces. Nonetheless, current understandings of alternative economies remain fragmented. The objective of this special issue is to advance our understanding of alternative economies and stimulate future research within this domain. Seven articles are included in this special issue of the *Journal of Macromarketing*. Each article presents forward-looking research exploring one of three aspects of alternative economies: (1) the paradigms used within alternative economies, (2) the institutional logics that guide action within these systems and (3) the implications to individuals, localities, markets, and society. The editors of the special issue briefly introduce the topic, provide a definition of alternative economies, and offer an overview of the articles and their contributions.

Keywords: alternative economies, marketing systems, exchange, institutional logics, macromarketing

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Alternative economies represent an essential part of “cultures of resistance” (Williams 2005) to the increasing commodification of everyday life. For authors such as Gibson-Graham (2006) and Williams (2005), dominant (capitalist) readings of the economy overemphasize profit-motivated, monetized market exchanges. Yet, there are various alternative spheres of activity which undermine the dominant economy model. Diversity, solidarity and interdependency are the foundations for shared commitments and collective attempts to minimize economic exploitation and to empower local subjects (Day 2005; Gibson-Graham 2006; Williams 2005).

Alternative economies respond to the precarious conditions underpinning the everyday lives of individuals, and their lack of access to and scarcity of resources and competences. As illustrated in Table 1, the mainstream economy is typically conceived to extract value from local communities, externalize governance and lead to crises and social stratification. Alternative economies have (re-)emerged in local communities where various groups and social movements are working towards localized development driven by their hope to improve human conditions. These activities are enacted via different types of transactions, labor and economic enterprises sometimes in objection, but also in parallel to markets under the nomenclature of social and solidarity economy, sharing economy, and neighborhood work.

Insert Table 1 here.

Merging the economic and political dimensions of citizenship (e.g. Trentmann 2016), alternative economies can be seen as a form of consumer-citizen activism (Dubuisson-Quellier 2013; Micheletti 2003; Wahlen and Laamanen 2015). Consumer-citizen activism targets

economic, political and cultural hegemonies in society (Snow 2004) through the everyday lifestyle choices of individuals both “spontaneously” (e.g. boycotts; Glickman 2009; King 2011) and through coordinated forms of collective action (such as brand and corporate protest; Palmer, Simmons, and Mason 2014; Varman and Belk 2009).

Alternative economies inter-connect with various macromarketing issues. These include the crisis of post-industrialism (Varey 2011) and the political construction of marketing systems (Arndt 1981; Layton 2009). Specifically, macromarketing researchers have been studying the impacts of exchange to relational parties and their surroundings (Laczniak and Murphy 2008), responses to consumer society, such as anti-consumption (Chatzidakis and Lee 2013), social entrepreneurship and informal exchange systems (Viswanathan et. al 2014), and organizations of the Fairtrade movement (alternative trade organizations [ATOs]; Golding 2009; Geiger-Oneto and Arnould 2011). Collaborative forms of consumption (Botsman and Rodgers 2010; Wahlen and Laamanen 2017) are based on some communal ethos allowing for access (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2012) or sharing (Belk 2010) of resources. Furthermore, there is a certain fluidity of actor roles and agencies in co-consuming activity, co-creation and prosumption (Arvidsson 2008; Cova and Cova 2012; Pongsakornrunsilp and Schroeder 2011; Ritzer 2014; Ritzer and Jurgenson 2010) that reflects how alternative economies build self-organized and self-sustaining provision systems. Finally, alternative economies stand for the creation of heterotopias that cultivate different forms of social and market ordering (Chatzidakis, Maclaran, and Bradshaw 2012; North 1999). Nonetheless, current understandings of alternative economies remain fragmented leaving larger scale questions on the intersections and interrelations of alternative economies with macromarketing largely underexplored and undertheorized.

This special issue contributes to extant macromarketing research by following Gibson-Graham's (2006) call for more in-depth understandings of alternative economies with a view to consolidate current knowledge and to facilitate further "world-changing experiments" (2006, p. 165-166). The articles of this special issue illustrate *paradigms*, such as "postmaterialism" and "degrowth", underlying collective action in alternative economies. These provide guiding principles – cultural rules, norms understandings and practices – for the actions of different stakeholders (cf. Laamanen and Skálén 2015). Meanwhile *institutions* such as organized religion, free-market capitalism or government authorities can (attempt to) regulate alternative economy systems and thereby govern the creation of value (Laamanen, Wahlen, and Campana 2015). The implications can be liberating or frustrating: leading to the assimilation or co-optation of alternatives (Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007) or generating their own failures (Heath and Potter 2005). Drawing on the contributions of this Special Issue, we define alternative economies as systems of exchange, production and consumption partly or fully disembedded from modes of capitalist exploitation, aiming to empower their subjects and to provision community-based and broader social-environmental welfare.

Structure of the Special Issue

The special issue is divided into three thematic subsections. The articles in the first subsection take a deeper look at different *paradigms* underlying alternative economies. The articles in the second subsection examine the role played by *institutions* within alternative economies, and how contrasting logics can coexist within these systems. Finally, the articles in the third section look at the *implications* of these systems on individuals, localities and society more generally. These sections present different approaches and contexts for the study of alternative economies.

Paradigms within Alternative Economies

Alternative economies emerge from within, and in response to, broader social paradigms. In “Growth and Its Discontents: Paving the Way for a More Productive Engagement with Alternative Economic Practices”, Javier Lloveras and Lee Quinn address the long neglected intersection of alternative market economies with questions of economic growth. Noting the prevalence of “growthmania” (Daly 2002) – the centrality of Gross Domestic Product in measures of economic and societal well-being – the authors identify three emerging responses: green growth, a-growth and degrowth. Green growth largely concerns maintaining an emphasis on economic growth via more environmentally-sustainable practices and technologies; a-growth introduces the importance of alternative measures of well-being and finally, and degrowth questions the role of economic growth altogether, counter-proposing a ‘virtuous circle of quiet contraction’ (Latouche 2009). Given the inherent tensions and contradictions in paradigms of green growth and a-growth, Lloveras and Quinn consider degrowth as a far more compelling alternative for alternative market economies. Despite the formidable, if not utopian, task of challenging powerful growth-driven institutions, the authors note that the imperative for degrowth already interpenetrates a variety of bottom-up movements and systems of social provision, including alternative currency schemes, co-housing projects, community-based infrastructures and not least, alternative logics and practices of consumption (Chatzidakis, Larsen, and Bishop 2014).

Building on the premise that a “dominant social paradigm (DSP) “defines the basic belief structures and practices of marketplace actors” leads, according to Johanna Gollnhofer and John W. Schouten, to hyper-consumption and economic growth at the cost of the environment. Yet, in

their article “Complementing the Dominant Social Paradigm with Sustainability”, the authors claim that sustainability can challenge the status quo by questioning underlying assumptions and generating alternative markets that are based on complementarity (rather than opposition or parallelism) between the DSP and environmental concerns, that is, sustainability-based profitability. The authors using the case example how the consumer activism platform *Foodsharing* made arrangement with retailers regarding the use of food stuffs considered waste. The complementarity of *Foodsharing* is based on the mechanisms of non-monetary redistribution of already rejected items: this according to the authors is non-confrontational and not based on parallelism with the traditional profit-based market. In assuring its operations, the platform needed to navigate both the retailers profit motives and public policy makers attempts to ensure consumer protection. The article illustrates how alternative economic actors can extend the traditional marketplace alleviating a sizable sustainability problem for the retailers (and providing an image benefit in the process). Complementarity can be the key allowing for entry and influence over an existing market system and generating change that is beneficial for sustainability and social welfare.

Institutional Logics within Alternative Economies: Between Collision and Collaborations

Alternative economies engage with the conflicting – and at times converging – logics and practices of dominant institutions. Vinita Godinho and Srinivas Venugopal examine the implications the collision of marketing systems that are based on conflicting logics. Their article entitled “When Exchange Logics Collide: Insights from Remote Indigenous Australia” examines the tensions emerging in social and marketing systems with the introduction of objects from one institutional system to the other and the legitimation around money use. The authors claim that

“our understanding of subsistence marketplaces where money is still in the process of being fully accepted and seen as legitimate, is limited”. The authors conclude that when “money is imposed onto remote Indigenous contexts, without efforts to link it to traditional knowledge systems, cultural norms and practices” generate severe tensions and prevents the communities to make full use of the new resources. The authors illustrate how community-led educational programs can relieve these tensions by providing tools for the communities and individuals to manage their new resources in their subsistence marketplaces.

In the article “The institutionalization of Alternative Economies: The process of Objectification in Time Banks”, Eleni Papaoikonomou and Carmen Valor explore the role of institutional logics in shaping the objectification process within alternative economies, with a special focus on exchange systems. Specifically, through a comparative study of time banks in Greece and Spain, the authors discuss the emergence of four logics within these economies: the political logic, the social logic, the social welfare logic and the market logics. These logics may affect the organizational form, practices, norms, devices and performance measures in alternative economies. However, not necessarily all four of these logics can be found in all exchange systems at the same time. Some alternative economies might be focused more on the political resistance to the mainstream market while others can be driven by a social welfare logic and have the aim of helping the people. While extant research has considered alternative economies as acting against the capitalist market logics of balanced reciprocity, the article argues that alternative economies are hybrids and the market logic has the function to control and regulate the performance of these economies. This is because people are socialized to capitalist market logics from very early stage, hence they are “templates for action and understanding available to most people”. From their analysis, it can be also concluded that there is the need of an

underlying institution (such as the mainstream market) which makes the alternative economies function.

Through the analysis of the Small Chapels Movement in Brazil, Daiane Scaraboto and Bernardo Figueiredo analyze how value is created and sustained within alternative economies, and discuss the role of a religious institution, like The Church, in regulating the exchange (or circulation) within these systems. In the article “Holy Mary Goes ‘Round: Using Object Circulation to Promote Hybrid Value Regimes in Alternative Economies”, the authors concur that there are a several institutional logics within these systems which also create multiple value regimes such as spiritual value, linking value, reputational value and economic value. Furthermore, they argue that the entanglement of these different logics leads a hybrid regime of value within alternative economies. The hybridity of value regimes together with a strong institutional power (religion) can grant the sustainability of alternative by “reducing internal tensions of participants and external criticism; and promoting resource dependence among heterogeneous participants. The article also discusses the role of material objects within alternative economies. In fact, the author stress how the creation of value not only stands in the exchange (economic value), but in the circulation of the object which allows practice such as contamination between the individual and the object, totemization by singularizing the object during the circulation, and fetishisation “whereby possessions materialize members’ magical thinking”. These practices allow an increasing of the linking value of the object which goes beyond the market value.

Implications of Alternative Economies to Individuals, Localities, Markets, and Society

Alternative economies bear implications for individuals, localities, market actors, the

environment and society at large. Ahmed Benmecheddal, H  l  ne Gorge and Nil-Ozcaglar-Toulouse provide a rethinking of “alternative economic markets in the context of economic crisis and austerity in Greece”. They begin with the observation that current studies conceptualize alternative markets either as being opposed to capitalist markets, or as deliberate extensions of capitalist markets that reinforce their development. In contrast, they focus on a less voluntary context of alternative market creation, that is bartering systems that were developed in direct response to the increased economic austerity imposed in Greece. By doing so, the authors draw a series of insightful observations, including the role of bartering in ensuring the short-term economic survival of otherwise threatened producers and consumers, the use of alternative currencies as complementary rather than fully antagonistic to conventional currencies, and the underlying agenda of barter economies as one that foregrounds solidarity to those in need. Finally, the authors emphasise the role of such alternative economies not only as “places for business” but also as “places for socialising” (Gagn   2011), fostering inclusivity and community-building. Altogether then, what the authors define as “constrained alternative economies” share distinct characteristics that warrant further empirical and theoretical treatment.

In their article “Well-being in Alternative Economies: The Role of Shared Commitments in the Context of a Spatially-Extended Alternative Food Network”, Forrest Watson and Ahmet Ekici illustrate the importance of shared commitments and how these commitments form between and connect various actors in alternative economy settings. Defining shared commitment as “a choice of a course of action in common with others”, the authors illustrate how congruent values, goals, and concern over the well-being of others enables collective action in alternative food networks (AFNs). Their empirical case of “Miss Silk’s Farm” exemplifies a local and non-local space where social entrepreneurship connects owners, “100 employed

villagers, various actors in the community, and tens of thousands of urban consumers” in common well-being goals. Their model of shared commitments explicates the dyadic ties that develop between the focal actors of owners, employees and customers, but particularly between employees and customers through various practices such as introducing the employees to the customers in communication, adding a “human touch to products” with handwritten labelling, live feed from the production facilities and visits to the farm by the customers. These practices ultimately lead to the willingness of customers to pay a price premium that benefits the local female employee base providing them independence and sustenance. The authors conclude that their study and the theorization of shared commitments exemplifies the implications of diversity and geographical distance in the study of alternative economies, but that future research should also consider the possibility of ill-being in alternative economies.

Implications of Alternative Economies to Macromarketing Research

New discourses of economy and economic possibility, the cultivation of non-capitalist subjectivities, and alternative forms of political and marketplace participation remain underdeveloped in marketing scholarship. This special issue on Alternative Economies widens our current understanding of the concept of alternative economies within the macromarketing literature. First, this special issue introduces different paradigms on which alternative economies are based upon, second it discusses the multiplicity of institutional logics at stake and how value is created and redefined within these economies, and finally it analyzes the implications for consumers, workers and producers.

Still, many questions are left open for future contemplation and empirical examination. In particular, macromarketing scholars are in a unique position to examine the often challenged idea

of scalability of local systems. If alternative economies are supposed to be localized to maintain value in the community and respond to local issues, then what are the methods of generating a larger challenge to globalized capitalism? Also, recent discussions around solidarity and social economies (Utting 2015) emphasize the inherent challenges in creating economic relations that are just to all participants: producers, workers, consumers and citizens. How can alternative economies better respond to the need for local populations to maintain their cultures and avoid the kinds of cultural domination as discussed by Godinho and Venugopal (2017)?

Furthermore, several articles in this special issue (Gollnhofer and Schouten; Papaoikonomou and Valor; Scaraboto and Figueiredo) claim that some forms of alternative economies may not fully withdraw from capitalist market logics but work in conjunction with mainstream market actors. This resonates with accounts of traditional business organizations that engage in some ‘alternative capitalist’ practices of voluntary social responsibility alongside their main profit-making activities. Parallel activities for these mainstream businesses can include sponsoring traineeships, or ‘noncapitalist’ distribution, such as allocating (some) ownership to employees (Gibson-Graham 2006, p. 74-5). More research is required for deeper and more sophisticated understandings of the relationships between mainstream and alternative markets and the relationships that exist within and across different paradigms and institutions.

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Table 1. Differences between mainstream and alternative economies (adapted from Gibson-Graham, 2006, p. 87).

MAINSTREAM ECONOMY	ALTERNATIVE ECONOMY
a-spatial/global	place-attached
specialized	diversified
singular	multiple
large scale	small scale
competitive	cooperative
centered	decentered
a-cultural	culturally distinctive
socially disembodied	socially embedded
nonlocal ownership	local ownership
agglomerative	dispersed
integrated	autonomous
export-oriented	oriented to local market
privileges short-term return	value long-term investment
growth oriented	vitality oriented
outflow of extracted value	recirculates value locally
privately owned	community owned
management lead	community led
controlled by private board	community controlled
private appropriation and distribution of surplus	communal appropriation and distribution of surplus
environmentally unsustainable	environmentally sustainable
fragmented	whole
amoral	ethical
crisis-ridden	harmonious
participates in a spatial division of labor	locally self-reliant