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Critically Performing Post-Growth Marketing

A dystopian-optimist's guide to researcher activism

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2025

Document Version:

Peer reviewed version (aka post-print)

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Egan-Wyer, C., & Bertilsson, J. (2025). *Critically Performing Post-Growth Marketing: A dystopian-optimist's guide to researcher activism*. 1. Abstract from SCORAI Europe Conference 2025, Lund, Sweden.

Total number of authors:

2

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Critically Performing Post-Growth Marketing

A dystopian-optimist's guide to researcher activism

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Problem definition

Critical marketing faces a dilemma between utopian thinking in mainstream marketing sustainability research and the pessimistic standpoint of terminal marketing. This research addresses the need for a more optimistic approach in critical marketing that acknowledges the necessity for systemic change while providing actionable solutions for activist researchers.

Method

The conceptual study proposes a theoretical framework called 'dystopian optimism', which combines degrowth principles with critical performativity theory. This approach is analysed through a conceptual lens, exploring its potential to transform critical marketing and contribute to the realisation of post-growth futures.

Results

The research presents two main contributions:

1. A novel model of thought for critical marketing:
 - Dystopian optimism counters both utopian thinking in mainstream marketing and the pessimism of terminal marketing.
 - It supports the need for fundamental systemic change while offering inspiration for critical marketing scholars to participate in transformative change.
 - The model emphasises the possibility of changing the system from within by altering norms, thoughts, values, and practices.
 - It rehabilitates critical marketing by suggesting ways to be optimistic while still advocating for transformative change to a post-growth economic system.
2. A practical approach to realising post-growth futures:

- The study combines degrowth principles with critical performativity theory to offer a concrete path towards post-growth realities.
- It proposes that marketing researchers should actively contribute to degrowth by developing theoretical representations of post-growth conditions.
- It outlines *how* critical marketing researchers can contribute to this paradigm shift by theorising fringe utopian projects into dominant modes of consumption and production. (By teaching only growth-driven *business* models, we are seriously limiting the imagination of future marketers to perform alternative economic systems.)

Significance to mainstreaming sustainable consumption

This research significantly advances the discourse on mainstreaming sustainable consumption by:

1. Proposing a framework that bridges the gap between critical theory and practical implementation of post-growth principles.
2. Offering a pathway for critical marketing to actively shape sustainable consumption practices through theoretical performativity.
3. Demonstrating how degrowth principles can be integrated into marketing thought and practices, potentially normalising post-growth ideas in mainstream discourse.
4. Providing a model for intentionally using performativity to drive change towards sustainable consumption patterns.
5. Positioning critical marketing scholars as key actors in broadening societal imagination beyond current capitalist paradigms.
6. Suggesting concrete ways to transform alternative consumption models from fringe experiments to dominant practices.

By combining critical marketing insights with degrowth principles and performativity theory, our research offers a novel approach to mainstreaming sustainable consumption. It provides both theoretical grounding and practical suggestions for marketing scholars and practitioners to actively contribute to the transition towards a post-growth society, thereby addressing the urgent need for systemic change in consumption, production and marketing. It provides a framework for critical marketing theorists to perform desirable realities and contribute to a post-growth society.