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Anna Zarkada *Editor*

Marketing Solutions to the Challenges of a VUCA Environment

Proceedings of the 2023 GMA-GAMMA
Joint Symposium, Seoul, Korea,
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Marketing Solutions to the Challenges of a VUCA Environment: What Have We Accomplished and What More Can We Do?



Anna K. Zarkada

1 Introduction

The marketing environment has changed dramatically over the past 20 years because of rapid technological advancement, major socio-political changes, and many recurrent economic upheavals. This most banal, yet frighteningly true, observation summarises the context in which our discipline faces its coming of age. The twenty-first century was ushered by 9/11 and the resulting ‘war on terror’ which changed, not only mundane things, like in-flight cutlery and airport procedures, but, also, deeply held beliefs about privacy and security. Less than a decade later, the world economy was rattled by the Global Financial Crisis and its aftermath, the euro-zone sovereign debt crisis, which reduced once mighty empires (Portugal, Italy, and Spain), the cradle of the western civilisation (Greece), and the home away from home of the world’s tech and data giants (Ireland) to the derogatory PIIGS. Just as the worst seemed over and the return to prosperity and globalisation appeared to be going full speed ahead, enter the COVID-19 pandemic which highlighted the fragility of both global supply chains and local businesses and shattered fundamental illusions of modernity, such as scientific detachment, news veracity, individual freedoms, and democratic institutions. Quarantines, social distancing, and face covering were imposed as prerequisites to survival and the convenience of the digital was offered as compensation. So, no more queuing for public services, participating in corporate meetings and classes in shirt, tie, and slippers, and never having to leave the cocoon, not even for the most perennially social activities and pleasures like shopping, travelling, sports, and attending concerts, were presented as life- and work-enriching technologies which, together with “the involvement of a ‘supportive’ government, ‘creative’ church and an ‘adaptive’ public, would leverage “resilience, recovery, and

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restructuring (the new three Rs)” to foster the “[n]ew conventions, rituals, images and narratives” that comprise the emergent culture of an inclusive ‘new normal’ [1].

The deployment of the ‘new normal’ mantra to quell widespread uncertainty and facilitate settling into an altered way of life, however, is anything but new [2]. Since WWI, whatever it is that emerges from a major global crisis is described by politicians and the media as, yet another, ‘new normal’: a sharp V-shaped further globalised economy, powered by more efficient business and leaner governance practices, and heralding vastly improved social conditions that leave no one behind.

2 The Book in Context

Back in September 2022, at the time of writing the Call for Papers for the *Greek Marketing Academy—Global Alliance of Marketing & Management Associations Joint Symposium*, the post-COVID-19 pandemic ‘new normal’ was taking its shape. The *Symposium* was to take place during the Seoul 2023 *Global Marketing Conference*, the theme of which—decided during the practically worldwide lockdown with the digital transformation in full swing—was “Marketing & Management Transformation in the Challenging Digital Environment”. However, the ‘new normal’ was not restricted to just the (many would argue, violent) intrusion of the digital into the physical. It encompassed the emergence of a complex phygital life which has been defined as the “result of the digital revolution and the transformation of the many activities and functions of ‘real life’ into corresponding digital entities” [3]. Marketing was obviously being pulled into a “highly experiential and phygital era” [4] but changes were taking place through all public and private spheres of activity so, the *GMA-GAMMA Joint Symposium* sought to expand the GMC problematisation to the challenges posed by a complex mix of environmental conditions, namely:

- climate change and environmental degradation,
- unforeseen economic and political shocks related to the war in Ukraine which brought back memories of the Yugoslav wars and drew attention to “a new sort of iron curtain ... descending around the world” as the “contours and stakes of a long-term confrontation”, the Global Cold War, are “coming plainly into view” [5],
- the major energy crisis, shortages of basic commodities, and changing tourist and investment flow patterns brought about by the sanctions against Russia,
- unprecedentedly rapid technological developments and large-scale digital transformation,
- supply chain and international trade disruptions,
- reconfigured labour relations, fluid forms of employment, altered work conditions, and the emergence of the gig economy,

- rising cost of living, economic polarisation, and the proletarianisation of the middle classes who were “being ‘hollowed out’ ... suffering stagnant incomes, ... subjected ... to increasing workplace monitoring and micromanagement, bureaucratic control, ... the loss of automatic pay increments, hot-desking in battery-farm open-plan offices, ‘presenteeism’ and attacks on ‘unaffordable’ occupational pensions [6]”.

The ‘new normal’ seemed like a ‘veritable flux’, an “experience [which] has ceased to be merely one and many, a one that is also many, and has become one because of its multiplicity and difference” [7]. The ‘new normal’ was anything but ‘normal’ in the eyes of marketers and their clients—the last of the Baby Boomers, Generation X, and the older of the Millennials who comprise not only the bulk of the economically active population but also the key decision-makers in politics and business—that is, people who were born and raised in the certainties and stability of the post WWII era. What did look ‘new’ to all those people, however, was the forceful impact, speed, and unpredictability of the changes they were experiencing. The ‘new normal’ is a VUCA world.

The acronym was first used in the 1980s by the US Army to describe the Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, and Ambiguous circumstances brought about by new trends. Later, International Business scholars used it to describe the paradigm changes caused by Kondratieff waves “associated with rising and declining states, radical technology changes, and the challenging of incumbent firms’ dominant positions”, social trends like populism and nationalism, “increasing protectionism ... and a universally felt low trust in companies and governments alike” [8]. Exactly what the post-COVID-19 pandemic Global Cold War marketing context looked like.

The VUCA world was irrevocably eroding the familiarity that businesses and consumers shared and challenged their commonly held perceptions. This raised the key question of the 2023 *GMA—GAMMA Joint Symposium*: How could marketing academia come up with innovative, sustainable solutions to the Challenges of the VUCA Environment? Marketing theory and practice had flourished in the climate of growing affluence prevalent in the industrialised western economies and had spread, hand in hand with capitalism and consumerism, to the rest of “an increasingly multi-polar world, without an undisputed hegemon” [8]. With a looming stagflation in view and the Cold War balance of terror returning from its (imagined, it seems) obsolescence, the marketing discipline finds itself under very different conditions from those that made it what it is. Would our discipline be able to adapt and continue to grow during the VUCA tsunami of challenges?

The 2023 *GMA—GAMMA Joint Symposium* showcased cutting edge research on how the VUCA challenges affected marketing and how marketing was responding to them. The lively discussions generated by the presentations revolved around online shopping and consumer—brand relationships, shopping therapy, internal marketing, air travel and metaverse tourism. As the *Symposium* papers were being re-reviewed and rewritten to reflect the circumstances, theoretical advancements, and new empirical evidence of 2023, colleagues who could not make it to Seoul offered their contributions to this book, thus strengthening the *Symposium* themes and adding the

dimensions of sustainability and internationalisation. Reflecting the 2023 markets and brandscapes, they explore the nexus of the physical, digital, and phygital experience in a seamless, truly Hegelian, ‘one that is also many’. After a rigorous double-blind review process, a total of 10 original chapters with contributions by 22 researchers from Cyprus, Greece, Austria, Spain, the USA, and the Philippines were finally selected, for their quality, diversity of perspectives, and representativeness of the current marketing thought and practice. They cover a variety of key industries, namely airlines, tourism (both traditional and virtual), hospitality, sports, online retailing, fashion, and education. They are thematically organised—admittedly rather arbitrarily as most of them are cross-disciplinary and integrative in their approach—in three broad sections: Tourism and Travel, the industry that was hit the hardest by both the pandemic and the Global Cold War and its consequences, Consumer Behaviour, the heart of marketing that beats in altered rates, and Marketing Management, the blood that flows and keeps the markets alive and prospering.

Tourism and Travel

In Chap. 2 **Erasmia Leonidou** provides a comprehensive review of *The ever-evolving landscape of Marketing Research for Air Transport and Tourism*. Even though in the past, tourism as a system has proven to be resilient to external shocks, this was not the case with the current VUCA environment which eroded trust, facilitated an unprecedented spread of e-WOM and direct communication between various stakeholders, and brought the need for environmentally sound practices to the forefront. As Leonidou points out, “the pandemic showed that life, in all its forms, should not be taken for granted and that it would be good to enjoy life responsibly to increase resilience to new crises in the future”. This resilience is essential to economic and social prosperity but seems to be rather precarious given the expanding and increasing in number Global Cold War battlefields, the humanitarian crises that follow one another, and the shrinking household incomes which are eaten away by inflation, unemployment and underemployment, and growing unserviceable consumer debt. Leonidou proposes several ways in which marketing research can facilitate the rebuilding of consumer confidence, the full utilisation of technology, and the promotion of eco-friendly choices.

An integral component of the tourism system is the hospitality industry; one that has undergone major structural changes in the past 20 years. In the current VUCA world, with shrinking incomes and declining consumer confidence, the resilience of the sector is seriously threatened. The examination of how official classification systems can be used as marketing tools to insulate individual businesses, as well as the whole sector is the key objective of Chap. 3 *Hotel Classification Systems as a reflection of Service Quality, current trends, and challenges during permacrisis: the Greek case (2002–2022)*. **Aimilia Vlami, Efthymia Sarantakou, and George Tsamos** present an account of the evolution of official hotel classification systems globally and the factors affecting their review process, and then focus on the case of Greece—a country which has been under a veritable storm of recurrent crises with an economy which is heavily reliant on tourism. They propose that an internationally uniform, contemporary, comprehensive hotel classification system which

focuses on key areas of guest satisfaction such as “digital transformation, hygiene and cleanliness issues, sustainability matters, personalized guest service and experience, workation, reliability, and transparency in the evaluation of the provided product” can be a powerful marketing tool.

The conceptual, historical, and comparative approaches of the other three chapters in the Tourism and Travel section of this book are complemented by the empirical evidence **Eugenia Tzoumaka**, **Stella Leivadi**, and **Kiki Kaplanidou** offer in Chap. 4 *Sport Tourism in the VUCA Era: The Effect of Destination Image on Behavioural Intentions of Active Sport Tourists*. Using data from a large sample of participants in a mountain-running event in Zagori, one of the most stunning landscapes in the world, the study explores the influence of the cognitive and affective destination image facets—such as attractions, event characteristics, destination atmosphere, relaxation, inspiration, excitement, and pleasantness—on the runners’ intention to revisit for further sporting events but also for leisure. Strategic use of “scenic beauty and sight-seeing opportunities” as well “[p]romoting the affective image of the destination” are proposed as the key marketing tools for destinations. The work highlights the fact that, despite the multifaceted nature of the tourist product, the destination brand elements are perceived in a uniform manner by consumers. In a VUCA environment, the already vulnerable to seasonality and fashion, tourist product becomes extra-sensitive to shocks. Tzoumaka, Leivadi, and Kaplanidou conclude that events have the power to extend the customer base, they cultivate a sense of community, and act as the milestones that support the year-round destination image which is “crucial ... for addressing the VUCA related challenges and fostering destination resilience”. This has wide socioeconomic implications for remote rural destinations and poor regions because high value tourists can act as catalysts to alleviate both isolation and poverty.

In the late 1990s US air travellers were asked to declare the firearms they were carrying. Today they are (almost strip-) searched and their water bottles are confiscated. Having changed from the playground of the very privileged, to being some of the busiest places on earth for decades, airports were suddenly shut down and then remained eerily empty for months, only to bounce back to serving 3.7 billion passengers in 2022. Not many public spaces have seen a transformation more dramatic than airports in their ownership, function, aesthetic, and role in cultural diplomacy, the economy, and destination marketing. In Chap. 5 **Pantelitsa Yerimou** and **Christos Themistocleous** present a comprehensive review of the evolution of airports into multi-faceted servicescapes offering unique experiences both in terms of physical features and social cues. They focus on the emotions travellers experience in an airport and link them to behaviours in *(Re)Defining Airport Experience: A New Framework Proposition*. They review theoretical frameworks and empirical evidence from a variety of disciplines and develop a conceptualisation of the critical role of passenger emotions in mediating the link between the airport environment and satisfaction while examining the moderating roles of sense of place and environmental responsiveness. The Chapter offers a framework for mapping travellers’ expectations, experiences, and emotional responses to physical and human-related dimensions of

the travel and tourism experience. Same as with Chap. 4, the work of Yerimou and Themistocleous straddles Tourism and Travel and Consumer Behaviour.

Consumer Behaviour

Emotion governs travel and tourism decisions as well as shopping. During the COVID-19 era, millions of people that had never used the internet before learnt how to shop online and the value of worldwide retail e-commerce sales at the end of 2022 was almost double that of 2018 [9]. So, retail therapy, one of the most emotional forms of shopping, also transcended time and space and freed itself from the brightly lit shop window to the backlit screen. **Marlo Novino, Joliber Caminong,** and **Rosalinda Andres** present the findings of an empirical investigation of motives and underlying cultural antecedents of how “a simple tap or click of a button can uplift moods and redefine the shopping experience” in Chap. 6 *Exploring the Link between the Filipino “Deserve ko ‘to” Mindset and Online Retail Therapy*. In VUCA times, when spirits can be low, anxieties heightened, and the sense of control over one’s life diminished, self-regulation theory suggests, and the data confirm, that self-efficacy is the most influential factor driving self-gratification through solace-offering online shopping. Novino, Caminon and Andres explain the Filipino *deserve ko ‘to* mindset and highlight not only the importance of culture for the study of consumer behaviour, but also the particularities of the Philippines, a large and growing market that has yet to attract sufficient interest from marketing academia.

Online retail therapy is not the only mechanism for alleviating existential angst [10] that consumers employ in their hours of purchase decision-making, boredom, loneliness, stress, or identity crisis. In Chap. 7 *The growing complexity of COBRAs: A Systematic Review* **Naziyet Uzunboylu, Demetris Vrontis, Yioula Melanthiou,** and **Ioanna Papsolomou** delve into the nascent and fast growing, but still sparse, literature on a broad spectrum of consumers’ online brand-related activities (COBRAs) and manage to provide the first ever attempt at giving structure to the field. Most importantly, they identify a host of avenues for further research and pinpoint methodological, contextual, and theoretical gaps in the literature of interest to both scholars and practitioners. They explore motivations for consuming, contributing to, and creating brand-related content as forms of *inter alia* information management, entertainment, identity construction, integration into a brand community, and even empowerment. Their findings echo the literature on consumption motives [11] and highlight the common thread stitching together the quilt comprising COBRAs, retail therapy, conspicuous consumption and consumerism in the twenty-first century: the role of the consumer in achieving the sought after marketing result is at least as important as that of the marketer. This means that we are way past the age of ‘marketing to’ and in need of a swift and determined change of mindset to value co-produced by ‘marketing with’ consumers [12].

No generational cohort performs more COBRAs than Generation Z, also known as the iGeneration who are the focal point of Chap. 8 *Co-Creating Sustainable Buying Behaviour Among Generation Z Consumers: The Role of Earned Media*. GenZ are unique in the sense that they are the most diverse and best educated [13], and most tech-savvy generation yet. They were born with television, computers,

and the internet—all the technologies the introduction and diffusion of which shaped the previous generations—at their fingertips, and they know no other than a constantly VUCA world. The fashion purchasing motives have attracted the interest of **Emmanouela Kokkinopoulou, Ioanna Pappasolomou, Dimitris Vrontis, and Lucia Porcu**. They ask a set of questions revolving around how digital and social media and the connected generation's heightened brand awareness can be leveraged by marketers in order to “strengthen the hedonic and eudemonic well-being state of Generation Z and shift their purchasing behaviour to more sustainable [fashion] choices”. This way, GenZ's two favourite industries, technology and fashion, can be brought together to promote a more environmentally sound future for all, with less water waste and less pollution. The extensive review of the literature culminates in a conceptual framework and a set of testable propositions, and concludes that the motives for sustainable consumer behaviours need not be just altruistic and idealistic but they can also be purely egoistical; to “increase hedonism by giving them joy, pleasure, and instant gratification, [and] improve their eudemonic state, by leading to feelings of self-esteem, self-respect, and life fulfillment”.

Marketing Management

The connected generation and the Millennials navigate the phygital with ease, like ducks in their own pond, but this is not the case for the GenX and some of the Baby Boomers who are the leaders of the marketing profession and academia. **Yioula Melanthiou and Sergey Vasic** provide a road map for not only recognising and keeping pace with emerging technologies that reshape markets and the social experience but also for leapfrogging, that is “transcending the role of mere followers and become the driving force that sets standards; in essence, they must aspire to be the catalyst for change in a VUCA world”. Chapter 9 *The Metaverse in an Era of Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity (VUCA)* illustrates applications in the virtual domain, explores business opportunities in the Metaverse that arise through leveraging shared experiences, training, and interactive product and destinations promotion, and actual metaverse tourism activities. This chapter also straddles themes, as it emphasises the potential uses of the Metaverse for the tourism industry. No technology, however, offers benefits with no risks, so, Melanthiou and Vasic also offer words of caution alongside the reasons for marketing management to seriously consider the investment of (still considerable and for many organisations prohibitive) resources for development, deployment, and, eventually, diffusion.

Chapter 10 *Conceptualization, measurement, and outcomes of Internal Marketing in Higher Education: An overview of the literature* by **Evdoxia Kyriacou** brings us back to the totally physical part of the sector that supports all the rest: Higher Education. The extensive literature review turns the spotlight on the most important resource for any organisation, its employees. A quality service product, one that co-creates valuable experiences and supports a robust brand, rests heavily on the satisfaction and engagement of the employees and their ability to live the brand. In universities, this is more important than anything. Kyriacou reviews a diverse but fragmented body of literature and provides clarity on the conceptualisation as well as critical insights into the measurement of internal marketing. She provides a historical overview and

a bibliometric analysis of the dimensions of internal marketing, reviews approaches to its measurement, and presents its consequences at a personal and organisational level. She highlights the importance of internal marketing as a tool for coordinating and integrating people in an organisation as well as for overcoming resistance to change. It is exactly the ability of an organisation to adapt to circumstances and change with the times that is the basis of its resilience. What Kyriacou suggests is that internal marketing can become “a powerful tool for shaping the future of HEIs and their broader impact on society”, by developing an agile culture thus alleviating the effects of the VUCA environment they have been operating in for decades now.

The final chapter of the book reminds us that, despite globalisation and the dominance of MNCs in an increasing number of markets worldwide, branding and designing customer experiences across national borders is still one of the most challenging tasks for marketers. In Chap. 11 *Marketing solutions to the challenges of a Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous (VUCA) environment: Applications in International Marketing* **Meletios Niros** and **Angelica Niros** focus on the effects of VUCA conditions on consumer—related factors, such as ethnocentrism, animosity and confidence, and product—related factors, such as country of origin effects, and discuss their implications for both exporting and global firms. They also propose coordination, agility, information and knowledge management, restructuring, experimentation, advanced marketing intelligence and technology, and, most importantly, building brand, value, and relationship equity as ways to alleviate the effects of VUCA political, economic, social and technological conditions. Echoing the conclusions of the other authors in this book, Niros and Niros conclude that the cultivation of an agile culture and designing a flexible structure can counter the effects of volatility, inter-functional participation in decision-making can address uncertainty and complexity, and the use of marketing technologies such as big data analytics can reduce ambiguity.

3 Key Take-Aways

If there is one thing all the authors in this book agree on is that the key objective of relentlessly seeking competitive advantage is a thing of the past, if not totally of the previous century. In the VUCA world that arose with the dawn of the twenty-first century what matters is resilience. The organisations that will survive and will reasonably hold on to the hope of thriving, will be the ones that will be able to utilise technology, market and consumer research and intelligence, employees, and quality to design and market eco-friendly solutions to customer problems. The concept of the product is viewed as much broader than just physical objects and services. It extends to integrated digital, virtual and phygital configurations of cognitive and affective brand attributes, and serves as a mechanism of value and experiences co-creation and relationship building.

A portrait of the twenty-first century consumer struggling to survive and hoping to thrive in a VUCA world is also emerging from the 10 chapters in this book. With incomes shrinking and employment becoming increasingly precarious, people seek

quality markers over frills to guide their consumption—related decision making. They engage in a variety of brand related activities in order to achieve hedonic and eudemonic well-being goals and expect brands to socialise, interact, play, learn, and just be with them. This shifts the focus of the marketing discipline away from the bottom-line and towards people. The results will come out of a variety of consumer behaviours such as positive WoM and e-WoM, user generated content posting, brand content sharing, liking and commenting on, and eventually purchase, use and display, repurchase, revisit, identify with the brand and make the brand part of the identity construction project. Understanding the motives behind all types of consumer behaviours has thus become of paramount importance.

The role of the marketer is to understand these motives and orchestrate interactions on various platforms, at different touchpoints, and across different cultures—each with their own format, rules, language, and institutions—using generation- and context -appropriate physical and social cues. Marketing to consumers is no longer relevant. Theory, empirical evidence, experience, and technology support the marketer of the twenty-first century in marketing with consumers. The responsibility of the marketer, nowadays, is to use the tools of the discipline to promote sustainable solutions to consumer problems.

4 Conclusion: The Way Forward

Just as we were getting used to robots, machine-mediated sexual pleasure, instant food, surveillance, fake news, and mind control—a world uncannily similar to both Woody Allen’s 2173 [14] and George Orwell’s 1984 [15], there came the war in Gaza to intensify the shock of the Ukraine war and bring back “[s]upply chain wobbles” pretty much like those we experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic, only, this time caused by war and draught resulting in the Suez and Panama canals “suffering from obstructions to trade traffic” [16]. So, now we are faced with 1950’s and 1970’s problems, like choosing sides in a Cold (but possibly getting hot rather fast) War, oil crisis, inflation, rising interest rates, and an oft predicted looming recession, if not full-on stagflation and stunted long term economic growth [17]. We have built a predominantly digital economy but, the price of electricity and the disruptions in the shipping of electronic devices from Asia, where they are manufactured, to Europe and the USA are likely to make it inaccessible to a lot more people than it already is.

The direction and beneficence of our much-celebrated technological advancement are becoming increasingly more questionable. For example, drones, like the ones that many of us have used as toys and companies like Zipline™ are using to deliver medical supplies to remote communities from Rwanda to North Carolina [18], were also used to execute suspected terrorists without trial [19], recently managed to penetrate the mighty Iron Dome [20], and seriously damaged cargo ships in the Indian Ocean [21] thus wreaking havoc on both the Israeli sense of security and the global supply chain. And whilst we worry about student papers written by ChatGPT, who could really tell how close we are to “a new era of cheap, anonymous war, where

the kill decision has moved from man to machine” [22] or to fighting with sticks and stones like our primitive ancestors did?

For marketers in the twenty-first century, the questions of what is, what could, and what should be marketed, to whom, for who, and how are acutely pressing. Marketing is not solely responsible for severe contemporary problems like the co-existence of two major killers—hunger and obesity—in many of the world’s advanced economies, homelessness and millions binge-watching “some of Manhattan’s most relentless realtors as they close multimillion dollar deals faster than a yellow cab runs a red light” for nine years in a row [23], the commercialisation of education, healthcare and even motherhood [24] and ultimately “[t]he scaling up of ‘needs’ [which] outpaces the growth of incomes so that many people who are wealthy by any historical or international standard actually feel poor” [25]. Undoubtedly, however, it has had a role to play in global as well as local inequalities, overconsumption, depletion of natural resources, and environmental degradation. A thread, running through the chapters of this book, that needs to be unravelled is the responsibility of the discipline as a whole, but, above all else, of each and every one of us for what we promote and how. And it is not just products. It is also people as role models [26–30] and ideologies that we promote, often without giving their substance and value a second thought.

It is not just the economy and technology that are going ‘*Ahead in Crabwalk*’ [31]. The grand theories of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries supported the emergence of the self-determined and democratically governed nation-state, for the people and by the people, and, together with the great inventions, facilitated the mass industrialisation which promised endless prosperity for all. The prosperity has yet to be delivered but its price, in the form of isolating the workers from both the products of their labours and other workers, is being paid daily for almost two centuries now. Also “mass packaged and delivered” were “ideas [in the] easily digestible form of a variety of *-isms*” [11] which, in the twenty-first century, seem to have taken the path of Jorge Luis Borges’ Map of the Empire and are being “delivered ... up to the Inclemencies of Sun and Winters” [32] and all that remains is “shreds of lost utopias and fantasies of globalism” [11], the fragments of universality and an idealised multiplicity of theories, politics, laws, judgements and stories [11, 33, 34]. Ostensibly forgotten, and in many places legally banned political stances, like fascism, are reappearing. Despite the illusion of dominance of the non-linear, user controlled, ‘soft communication’ it is actually the simplicity of linear ‘heavy communication’ to passive viewers reduced to the ‘blob state’ over traditional mass media [31] which is being reproduced over social media platforms. Thus, state and commercial propaganda indoctrinate the masses into who is on the right and who on the wrong side of history and cultivate the various anti-X and Y-phobias (replace X and Y with your chosen enemy of the day) which are growing like Fibonacci spirals powered by AI and platform algorithms.

To treat the mass and social media like neutral blank canvasses on which marketing can write its slogans, narrate its stories, and paint its images is, at best, a sign of utter naivety. Similarly, to distance the marketer from politics and world affairs can be treated as rational no more. Not taking a stance is not just amoralistic anymore because the consequences of marketing communications are too wide, too deep and

too painful to ignore. The assertion that “[t]oday a country belongs to the person who controls communications” [35] is not only more valid than ever but rather timid; the world and its wealth together with the truth belong to whoever or whatever controls communication. Marketing is by definition a systematic approach to controlling a specific part of reality through communication. As “the marketing discipline has reached maturity (if it has not already taken the downward slope of its life cycle) it is high time it re-examined itself and its societal function” [11]. Levinas made the “primordial phenomenon of gentleness”, the natural tendency of humans to assume “responsibility for the Other”, the basis of his philosophy and translated the Greek word *φιλοσοφία* as the ‘wisdom of love’ to distinguish his approach from the commonly used literal translation of philosophy as ‘love of wisdom’ [36]. The 1998 Nobel Prize winner, Amartya Sen [37], equated economic development with the free supply of basic necessities, such as education and health care, for all and considered values such as freedom and dignity its only viable and ethical basis. It is not only philosophers and economists that sound the clarion call for the replacement of amoralistic marketing with axiological societaling [11]—ethical marketing for, not just with, society.

More and more marketing academics insist that it is our responsibility to assume responsibility for the way we use traditional and new media to access audiences and influence publics, for the creation of symbolic, the manipulation of physical, and the merging of cognitive and emotional spaces in a way that interferes with the evolution of social and cultural life. For example, Manrai and Manrai [38] called for the replacement of a “popular marketing mix,” with a “rightful marketing mix”. Achrol and Kotler [39] expressed their hope for a “millennial shift”, working towards a “period of joy, serenity, prosperity, and justice” brought about by a brave effort on the part of marketers and consumers alike to liberate marketing from the engineering of its function and drive it towards becoming a truly social science. Murphy, Laczniak, and Wood [40] proposed that relationship marketing needs to be driven by virtue ethics and based on trust, commitment, and diligence. Even practitioners have, for over a decade now, been bringing to our attention the observation that the future of brands rests on their demonstrating accountability, respecting trust, and wholeheartedly assuming responsibility for their social influences [41]. Our responsibility is heightened by the VUCA conditions which are so intense as to give ‘permacrisis’ the honourable place of 2022 word of the year [42]. In this context, which looks like rather unlikely to change for the better any time soon, this book presents theoretical, empirical, and practical solutions to key marketing problems of the twenty-first century and sets the basis for rethinking how marketing can become part of the solution, instead of the problem—if I may be excused to finish as I started this introduction, with a cliché which is oh! so painfully true.

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