



Marketing Cybernetics and Decadence Theory A Systems-Theoretical Analysis of the Normalization of Destructive Goods

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Abstract

This work applies cybernetic principles to marketing in order to develop a novel theoretical framework for political economy and economic theory. The framework is intended to provide a conceptual foundation for future economic research and contribute to a deeper understanding of economic systems. This technical text is creating a theoretical paradigm, which appeared as a result in order to understand the consumption of demerit goods. The cybernetical dynamic is working as a scientific explanation. This paper synthesizes cybernetic systems theory, behavioral economics, and Spenglerian cultural morphology to explain the persistent market success and societal normalization of intrinsically destructive consumer goods. It argues that marketing functions not as a peripheral persuasive mechanism but as a constitutive, autopoietic control system within capitalist economies—one that transforms moral resistance into stabilizing feedback, thereby institutionalizing ambiguity tolerance and systematically reproducing the structural conditions of late civilizational circularity.

Keywords: Cybernetics, Decadence theory, Marketing, System theory.

1. Introduction: Marketing as a Cybernetic Control System

From a systems-theoretical and behavioral-economic perspective, marketing cannot be reduced to mere communication or product presentation. It must be understood as a highly complex, adaptive control system operating within market processes. Its primary function is the reduction of uncertainty on both sides of the transaction by selecting, processing, and translating information into decision heuristics. This translational performance, however, is not neutral; it is inherently suggestive and aims to shift individuals' preference structures in a direction intended by the supplier, without necessarily corresponding to rational goods assessment. Scientific examination reveals that this steering function—often captured under the normatively charged term "manipulation"—is not a parasitic side effect of marketing but its constitutive core element, operating both microeconomically and macropsychologically.

1.1. Marketing as an Adaptive Control System

From the perspectives of systems theory and behavioral economics, marketing cannot be reduced to mere communication or product presentation. Rather, it must be understood as a highly complex, adaptive control system operating within market processes. Its primary function is to reduce uncertainty on both sides of a transaction by selecting and processing information and translating it into decision-making heuristics. This translation, however, is not neutral; it is inherently suggestive and aims to shift individuals' preference structures in a direction intended by the provider, without necessarily corresponding to a rational weighing of goods and alternatives.

Scientific analysis demonstrates that this steering function—often subsumed under the normatively charged term manipulation—is not a parasitic side effect of marketing, but rather one of its constitutive core elements. It operates at both the microeconomic and the macro-psychological levels.

At the individual level, marketing operates through cognitive framing. By strategically employing anchoring effects, opportunities for narrative identification, and conditioned stimulus-response patterns, it addresses the automatic, limbic decision-making processes of the human brain long before the cognitive control functions of the prefrontal cortex can take effect. To this end, marketing exploits evolutionarily embedded limitations of human rationality, such as loss aversion, social conformity pressure, and the affective misjudgment of probabilities. Its purpose is not necessarily deception for its own sake, but rather the generation of action-guiding attention in an environment saturated with information.

From a scientific perspective, this form of behavioral steering is functionally equivalent to a heuristic pathfinder: it provides orientation amid a noise of stimuli while simultaneously narrowing the available space of options in a systematic manner.

1.2. The Social and Macroeconomic Function of Marketing

The systemic significance of this manipulation can only be fully understood in its societal dimension. In modern capitalist economies, characterized by the fundamental underdetermination of needs and seemingly infinite competition among substitutable goods, marketing assumes the critical function of inducing demand. It transforms latent, diffuse dissatisfaction into specific, purchasable promises of solutions, thereby synchronizing the heterogeneous dissimilar structures of production and consumption.

Without this steering intervention, market equilibrium would not become more harmonious. Rather, it would risk collapsing into a fundamental coordination crisis, since demand is not intrinsically maintained at a sufficient level of elasticity but must be sustained through external stimuli.

This macroeconomic stabilization function lends manipulation a system-preserving significance. It constitutes the implicit regulatory mechanism that prevents the economic system from falling into an equilibrium of saturation or apathetic inability to choose.

At the same time, this control mechanism is scientifically ambivalent because it institutionalizes an epistemic asymmetry: consumers do not, in principle, possess the same knowledge of their own future needs and their susceptibility to influence as marketing does. This asymmetry leads to a gradual substitution of means-end rationality with systemic rationality. The originally instrumental relationship between means and ends is inverted in favor of an autopoietic logic of growth for its own sake.

Manipulation consequently emerges not merely as a tactical instrument but as a structural a priori of market activity as a whole. It is the invisible dirigiste impulse that transforms the seemingly free choices of individuals into calculable, aggregable, and therefore predictable market behavior. This insight moves marketing beyond the confines of mere sales psychology and identifies it as a central, albeit ethically challenging, control mechanism within postmodern economic systems.

1.3. The Success of Destructive Consumer Goods

The explanatory power of marketing with regard to the economic and social success of intrinsically destructive consumer goods—that is, products or artifacts associated with somatic harm, such as tobacco products and highly processed sugary foods; social disintegration, such as gambling and polarizing digital platforms; or ecological degradation, such as fossil-fuel technologies and non-recyclable disposable products—cannot be adequately explained by cognitive delusion or information asymmetry alone. Rather, it must be understood in terms of marketing's capacity to function as a systemic institution of temporal and moral decoupling.

Neuroeconomic research on decision-making accounts for this phenomenon through the human reward system's phylogenetically embedded tendency toward temporal discounting: the exponential devaluation of distant, probabilistic harms relative to immediate, certain rewards. Marketing does not merely exploit this tendency; through narrative and semiotic framing, it systematically reinforces it. Abstract representations of risk are replaced by exaggerated presentations of immediate benefits, while the destructive properties of a product are transformed into a form of cultural ambiguity. Their negative connotations are either neutralized or inverted into positively perceived expressions of social distinction and individual autonomy.

At a higher level of abstraction, particularly within sociological systems theory and the theory of secondary need formation, this phenomenon can be interpreted as an emergent property of a post-industrial consumer formation. Marketing no longer functions merely as a medium for transmitting product information. Instead, it operates as an autopoietic producer of meaning, embedding destructive goods within a complex network of identity-forming, community-constituting, and status-regulating symbols.

In this context, destructiveness becomes not an obstacle but, paradoxically, a catalyst for increased attachment. It generates strong affective bonds and habitual tendencies toward repetition—properties that marketing can further optimize through the deliberate construction of so-called habit-forming loops and the implementation of commitment-and-consistency mechanisms, as described by Robert Cialdini. Consequently, the long-term negative externalities of consumption increasingly recede into a state of epistemic irrelevance within the consumer's mental accounting.

A micro-level explanation of this dynamic can also be provided by the cognitive-psychological theory of motivated reasoning. According to this theory, individuals who are highly emotionally involved with a product tend to process information selectively, privileging evidence consistent with their existing preferences over contradictory evidence that may nevertheless be relevant to risk.

Marketing acts here as an exogenous catalyst by systematically modulating the availability heuristic. Although the harmful long-term consequences of a product may be known in principle, their subjective relevance to decision-making is continually marginalized by the immediate salience of tangible product attributes, such as taste, design, and social prestige.

This cognitive asymmetry is further intensified by microeconomic targeting algorithms, which measure individual differences in the personality dimension of future orientation. On this basis, they enable personalized, adaptively reinforced manipulation of perceived alternatives. The success of destructive products must therefore be understood as the outcome of a recursive process in which marketing not only reproduces innate biases in risk perception but also transforms them, through technologically controlled framing strategies, into a stable choice architecture that is scarcely accessible to metacognitive reflection.

1.4. The Social Normalization of Destructive Consumption

At the macrosociological level, the systemic conditions for the success of destructive goods emerge through marketing's institutionalization of ambiguity tolerance. Destructive products are embedded in a discursive framework that does not necessarily conceal their negative consequences but presents them as acceptable risks because they are ubiquitous and socially shared. In this way, collective fictions of harmlessness arise, relieving individuals of some of the cognitive dissonance associated with their consumption.

This collective normalization is based on the social-psychological principle of pluralistic ignorance. Individuals may assume that the concerns of others are atypical because marketing has established a consistent media presence

for these products, presenting them as self-evident components of everyday life. Through this process, the moral significance of destructiveness is gradually transformed into an apparently value-neutral matter of personal preference.

The explanatory power of marketing therefore extends beyond the analysis of persuasive communication. Marketing functions as a structural stabilizer of a normative vacuum, allowing the inherent contradiction between professed health or environmental awareness and actual consumption behavior to persist. From a systems-theoretical perspective, this suspension of contradiction functions as a necessary condition for maintaining prevailing patterns of production and accumulation. Marketing must therefore be understood not as a contingent factor in the success of destructive products, but as a constitutive one.

1.5. The Cybernetic Foundations of Marketing

Applying fundamental cybernetic principles to marketing opens up a systems-theoretical perspective in which the manipulative character of marketing is understood not as a moral deviation, but as a functionally necessary regulatory mechanism within a highly complex, dynamic market system.

From a cybernetic perspective, marketing can be modeled as a recursive sensor-actuator system designed to reduce systemic entropy continuously—that is, the unstructured and unpredictable diversity of human needs and behaviors. It achieves this through continuous informational feedback and targeted interventions, thereby stabilizing the relationship between production systems and consumption systems.

This regulatory function becomes particularly clear through W. Ross Ashby's concept of requisite variety. The economic system faces a fundamental challenge: the behavioral variety of consumers, which constitutes a disturbance variable, can exceed the provider's capacity for control. Marketing operates as a variety amplifier by standardizing perceptions, establishing decision-making heuristics, and homogenizing preference structures. In doing so, it selectively reduces consumers' cognitive complexity and compensates for the regulatory gap that would otherwise threaten the stability of transactions.

This interpretation reveals the manipulative dimension of marketing as a system-inherent process of equilibration.

The practical implementation of this cybernetic logic is evident in the classical feedback loop of strategic marketing management. Market research functions as a sensor, continuously collecting data about environmental conditions, competitive developments, and consumer responses. Within the controller—that is, marketing planning—these data are compared with a defined setpoint, such as a sales target, market-share objective, or brand-image goal. The actuator then introduces corrective impulses into the system through operational measures such as advertising, pricing, and distribution.

The effectiveness of this regulation, however, does not depend solely on the objectivity of measurement. It also depends on marketing's cybernetic capacity to generate recursive self-reference. The variables being measured, such as brand awareness or purchase intention, have themselves already been shaped by previous marketing interventions. Consequently, the feedback loop is calibrated not against an entirely external reality, but against state variables that have partly been constructed by the system's own narratives.

This recursive closure means that marketing does not simply respond to an independently existing consumer sovereignty. Rather, through the continuous modulation of patterns of attention and evaluation, it actively helps produce the very form of consumer sovereignty to which it subsequently responds.

Second-order cybernetics, particularly as developed by Heinz von Foerster, provides a framework for understanding this phenomenon through the concept of observing systems. The observer—in this case, marketing—changes the reality being observed, namely the consumer, through the very act of observation. This undermines any straightforward causal separation between subject and object.

1.6. Positive Feedback and the Runaway Effect

The epistemological entanglement described above acquires particular systemic significance when applied to destructive products.

A cybernetic analysis suggests that the success of such products can be associated with positive feedback loops, or reinforcing feedback, which differ from negative, stabilizing feedback by amplifying deviations from an initial state.

Through intense neurobiological stimulation, destructive products may generate strong affective reinforcement. Marketing uses this feedback to optimize product design, communication strategies, and distribution channels. This optimization process can, in turn, intensify consumption, leading to physiological or behavioral adaptation that may require higher doses or more frequent consumption to achieve comparable effects.

In cybernetics, such a self-amplifying dynamic can be described as a runaway effect. The argument developed here is that marketing may not merely fail to restrain this dynamic but can actively intensify it through the implementation of so-called habituation algorithms, insofar as these increase the predictability of consumer behavior and thereby improve the regulatory efficiency of the system.

Put differently, marketing transforms the destructiveness of a product into a stabilizing control parameter. It uses consumer dependence as a measure of its own steering success and may expand the feedback loop through the introduction of complementary products, such as cessation aids or compensatory goods. In this way, an extended control loop emerges that narratively reconciles the systemic contradiction between harm and perceived necessity.

At the macroeconomic level, the cybernetic perspective reveals marketing as a homeostatic mechanism of the capitalist system as a whole, comparable to a thermostat, but with one decisive modification: whereas a conventional thermostat aims to maintain a fixed setpoint, the setpoint of the marketing feedback loop is itself variable.

It is continuously adjusted upward by internal system dynamics, including the imperative of perpetual revenue growth and competitive pressure. The system is therefore oriented not toward equilibrium in the conventional sense, but toward a continuous, self-referential escalation of its control impulses.

Within this interpretation, marketing's manipulative character is neither a technical deficiency nor merely an ethical aberration. Instead, it is presented as a cybernetically necessary condition for maintaining system stability amid exponentially increasing product variety and comparatively limited human information-processing capacity.

Marketing compensates for the structural undercomplexity of human decision-making by supplying externally generated, system-produced decision certainty. Yet this certainty comes at the cost of a gradual erosion of autonomous choice.

The resulting cybernetic analysis therefore suggests that manipulation in marketing should not be treated as a contingent disturbance, but as a constitutive, systemically necessary control principle that reproduces itself through recursive feedback processes. Understanding this principle requires a transdisciplinary synthesis of control engineering, decision theory, and critical systems sociology.

1.7. Moral Criticism as a Feedback Mechanism

Cybernetic analysis provides a system-immanent explanation for the apparently paradoxical phenomenon that goods with documented somatic, social, or ecological harms not only maintain persistent market demand but also become increasingly normalized over time. This occurs despite ongoing moral appeals, public-health warnings, and, in some cases, regulatory restrictions.

The explanatory force of this approach derives from a central insight of second-order cybernetics: moral resistance does not necessarily operate as an external disturbance attempting to correct the system from outside. Instead, it can become integrated as an internal signal within the established feedback loop of marketing, where its opposing function may be transformed into a reinforcing mechanism.

Moral criticism—whether expressed through scientific publications, public debate, or political demands—initially creates a negative evaluation of the product. Marketing, however, may respond not simply through denial or ignorance, but through a complex process of semiotic recoding that transforms the criticism into a marker of distinction.

The perceived dangerousness of a product can be narratively reconstructed as an indicator of authenticity, nonconformist enjoyment, or the sovereign rejection of paternalistic institutions. In this way, a moral warning may paradoxically contribute to the product's attractiveness by associating it with taboo or risk. In a society increasingly organized around the management and mediation of risk, such associations can become a scarce source of experiential appeal.

From a cybernetic perspective, this transformation can be described as a form of negative feedback that does not reduce the deviation—in this case, consumption—but instead stabilizes the system's identity by incorporating the contradiction into its own operations.

Marketing integrates moral opposition into its feedback loop through counterframing strategies: it appropriates opposing arguments and uses them as a rhetorical background against which to position the product.

One illustrative mechanism is the cybernetically describable process of dissonance absorption. Public moral criticism creates cognitive dissonance between consumers' knowledge of a product's harmful effects and their continued consumption. Marketing does not necessarily resolve this dissonance by eliminating the harmful behavior. Instead, it may provide cognitive pathways that alleviate the tension, for example by emphasizing individual freedom, relativizing probabilities of harm through statistical framing, or promoting compensatory narratives such as "responsible enjoyment" or "offsetting consumption through exercise."

These pathways function as homeostatic control elements. They help maintain the system's state—that is, the continuation of consumption—despite disruptive moral impulses. This occurs not through direct resistance, but through an adjustment of the system's setpoint.

The moral standard is not necessarily rejected outright. Instead, it may be displaced within consumers' mental accounting into an abstract, socially shared, and practically nonbinding category, while concrete purchasing decisions continue to be governed by immediate, emotionally charged product attributes.

1.8. Recursive Institutionalization and Collective Habituation

From a cybernetic perspective, the normalization of destructive goods emerges through a recursive process of institutionalization. Repeated and systemically reinforced interactions between marketing impulses, consumer responses, and moral counterarguments gradually alter the collective social memory.

Cybernetics can describe this process in terms of structural coupling between the economic system and society's moral system. These systems operate according to their own internal logics but influence one another through selective perturbations.

Marketing may interpret moral disturbances not primarily as constraints on action, but as operational resources that enable the product to be repositioned continually within an ongoing public discourse.

Crucially, this process need not be centrally or intentionally directed. It can unfold through autopoietic self-reproduction: every moral criticism generates a marketing response, which may provoke further criticism and, in turn, further responses. With each iteration of this feedback loop, the destructive product becomes more deeply embedded in the cultural repertoire because it becomes a recurring reference point in a continuous, publicly visible process of negotiation.

This process may confer a form of symbolic legitimacy on the product, elevating it from a mere consumer good to a cultural symbol whose meaning extends far beyond its material function. Its normalization is sustained precisely by the persistence of the controversy surrounding it. Conventional advertising already anticipates this dynamic in the familiar trope of the "controversial but honest product."

At the macrosociological level, normalization should therefore not be understood as a simple, linear process of acclimatization. Rather, it can be interpreted as a phase shift within the feedback loop.

Repeated exposure to moral warnings may lead a significant proportion of the population to exhibit reduced sensory and behavioral responsiveness. In neurobiology, this phenomenon is known as habituation; in social psychology, related processes are discussed under the concept of the normalization of deviance.

Marketing can exploit such habituation effects by adjusting the frequency and semiotic variation of its messages. On the one hand, repeated messages may fall below the threshold of habituated attention; on the other, occasional high-intensity signals—such as limited editions or provocative campaigns—can reactivate attention when moral opposition threatens the system's stability.

This oscillating form of regulation, comparable to strategies used in control engineering to prevent system inertia, allows marketing to position destructive goods within a fluctuating equilibrium between provocation and familiarity.

The product is neither completely taboo nor entirely beyond criticism. Instead, it is maintained in a state of controlled ambiguity. This dynamic transforms an objectionable exception into an accepted component of everyday life precisely because the product is routinely discussed and repeatedly encountered.

In summary, the cybernetic framework explains not only the persistent market presence of destructive goods but also their successful normalization as a systematic outcome of the recursive entanglement of marketing and moral opposition.

Moral resistance is not necessarily overcome or circumvented. It may instead be incorporated into the feedback loop as an essential disturbance, losing some of its destabilizing force and being converted into a system-stabilizing impulse that generates further meaning.

The systemic rationality of this process lies in its ability to sustain the public presence of destructive goods, thereby transforming them from merely existing products into socially influential and eventually familiar phenomena. From this perspective, normalization is not simply a failure or loss of control on the part of the moral system. It is a possible consequence of a system configuration in which contradiction itself becomes a driving force of self-reproduction.

1.9. Spengler's Decadence Theory and the Circularity of Modern Consumer Society

Connecting cybernetic marketing analysis with Oswald Spengler's thought opens up a broader epistemological perspective by situating the systemic logic of marketing within the macrohistorical framework of Spengler's civilizational morphology.

The synthesis of three conceptual elements—marketing cybernetics, the normalization of destructive goods, and Spengler's theory of decadence—produces a philosophy-of-history model in which the success of destructive products is interpreted as a systemic symptom of a late civilizational phase characterized by circular self-reproduction.

Applying cybernetic analysis to the historical framework developed by Spengler, particularly his theory of civilizational circularity in *The Decline of the West*, allows the underlying dynamics of destructive consumer goods to be examined over a longer historical timescale.

Spengler's model understands the transition from an organically developing culture to a rigidifying civilization that reproduces itself as an inevitable morphological process. Within the present synthesis, modern marketing's cybernetic structure is interpreted as the operational counterpart of this transition. Marketing functions as a regulatory apparatus that does not merely reflect the circular movement of late civilization described by Spengler, but actively generates and stabilizes it.

In this interpretation, decadence is not understood primarily as moral decline. Rather, following Spengler's morphological conception, it represents the objective form assumed by a civilizational organism approaching the end of its development.

The destructive character of consumer goods does not, in this account, cause decadence. Instead, it is interpreted as a systemic symptom that helps stabilize a feedback loop whose setpoints are no longer derived from transcendent or organic sources of meaning, but from the recursive self-reference of the system's own operations.

The circular movement of history described by Spengler—the replacement of culturally creative forces by a civilizational phase dominated by economic, rational, and technical-mechanical principles over symbolic and organic forms—corresponds structurally to the cybernetic transformation of marketing.

Marketing evolves from an instrumental medium of distribution into an autopoietic producer of meaning. Its feedback loops no longer simply serve pre-existing needs; they generate the needs whose subsequent satisfaction is then used to validate the success of the system's own steering operations. The process thus becomes circular.

In Spengler's terminology, this corresponds to the transition from the soul of culture, which derives its forms from an internal and unquestioned metaphysical foundation, to the intellect of civilization, which transforms values into relational quantities that can be substituted at any time.

Marketing exploits precisely this substitutability as a variety amplifier, integrating destructive goods into a circular system of expanding product diversity. Within this system, products are legitimized less by their material utility or ethical quality than by their position within the feedback loop itself.

From this perspective, moral resistance to such products appears as a remaining reflex of an organic morality that has already been transformed by civilization and has lost much of its binding force. The cybernetic system does not simply ignore these moral impulses; it absorbs them as useful disturbances, generating the dynamics that, in a historical period characterized by circularity, become the system's principal remaining form of apparent progress.

1.10. Destructive Consumption as an Indicator of Civilizational Transformation

Viewed through this threefold framework, the normalization of destructive goods appears as an empirical indicator of the Spenglerian transition from culture to civilization.

Whereas culture derives its taboos and prohibitions from an internal necessity that binds the community together, civilization increasingly relies on functional rules that can be subjected to continuous cybernetic optimization.

Marketing, understood as the operational core of this civilizational regulatory logic, transforms the destructiveness of a product into a systemically exploitable form of ambiguity. This can be compared to Spengler's

conception of money as a force that dissolves qualitatively different values into quantifiable and interchangeable units.

Society's habituation to products that damage health or degrade the environment becomes the collective psychological expression of this circular movement. According to the interpretation developed here, such a movement is characterized by the absence of a transcendent goal or purpose: it exhausts itself in the perpetual repetition of its own operations.

Cybernetic marketing systematically reinforces this repetition through positive feedback loops, including mechanisms of dependence, status-based distinction, and habitual consumption rituals. As a result, the consumption of destructive goods becomes embedded in everyday life not as an isolated act, but as a recurring and self-perpetuating cycle.

This cybernetic interpretation also radicalizes Spengler's concept of historical circularity in one important respect. Whereas Spengler described the civilizational process as a fateful sequence of growth, maturity, rigidity, and decline, cybernetic marketing analysis suggests that this process is not merely passively experienced. It is actively reproduced through the continuous, self-referential optimization of the system's own feedback loops.

Marketing becomes an engine of circular time. It technically realizes what may be described, in Spenglerian terms, as a false infinity: the apparent but substantively empty continuation of the same under the guise of novelty.

It does so through the incessant variation of product designs, communication frames, and narrative positioning, without fundamentally changing the destructive core of the product.

This oscillating movement of appearances constitutes the operational form of decadence proposed in this analysis. It creates the impression of vitality, dynamism, and progress while repeatedly reproducing an already established state of systemic self-reference at an ever-increasing frequency.

In cybernetic terms, this intensification may produce resonance amplification, making the system increasingly susceptible to emergent instabilities. Yet the system may respond to these disturbances—including moral criticism and legal or regulatory interventions—by converting them into stabilizing impulses within its own feedback structure.

At the macrohistorical level, this synthesis suggests that the success of destructive goods should not be interpreted simply as a pathological deviation from a healthy market logic. Instead, it is presented as a system-constitutive performance of Spengler's late civilizational phase, in which civilization not only tolerates its own destructiveness but elevates consumption into one of its principal cultural expressions.

Marketing, understood as the cybernetic embodiment of this civilizational spirit, realizes Spengler's circularity not merely metaphorically, but through concrete regulatory processes. It establishes a closed feedback loop in which the production of destructive goods, their narrative legitimization, their habitual incorporation into consumer behavior, and their social normalization mutually stabilize one another.

Moral contradiction consequently becomes not the point of rupture, but a continuing source of energy for the cycle.

Spengler described this as a tragic feature of civilization, although he could not have anticipated the technological precision with which modern marketing would transform this dynamic into an operational variable that could be managed cybernetically.

Within this perspective, decadence ceases to function merely as a moral-philosophical category. It becomes a systems-theoretical condition whose defining feature is its capacity to absorb contradictions and record them as further confirmation of its own circularity. The continued social acceptance of destructive consumer goods provides an everyday yet significant empirical expression of this condition.

1.11. Conclusion: Cybernetic Marketing Analysis as an Applied Epistemology of Spengler's Morphology of History

The preceding analysis brings together three levels of explanation: the cybernetic regulation of marketing, the social normalization of destructive consumer goods, and Spengler's morphology of history.

At the micro level, marketing shapes perception, preferences, and decision-making through cognitive framing, heuristics, and recursive feedback. At the macroeconomic and macrosociological levels, it helps coordinate production and consumption while potentially transforming moral criticism into a resource for maintaining demand. At the macrohistorical level, these processes are interpreted through Spengler's account of the transition from organic culture to self-reproducing civilization.

The central thesis is that marketing can function as more than an instrument for communicating information about products. It can become a self-referential control system that generates demand, shapes the preferences through which demand is expressed, and incorporates opposition into its own reproduction.

Within the proposed synthesis, the normalization of destructive consumer goods serves as an illustrative case of this dynamic. Their continued acceptance is interpreted not merely as a consequence of individual irrationality or insufficient information, but as a possible outcome of the interaction between behavioral mechanisms, institutional structures, and recursive marketing processes.

The connection to Spengler provides this analysis with a historical-philosophical dimension. The circularity of marketing is interpreted as an operational expression of a civilizational condition in which apparent innovation and progress may coexist with the continuous reproduction of established systemic patterns.

The resulting framework therefore presents cybernetic marketing analysis as an applied epistemology of Spengler's morphology of history.

It offers a way to investigate how the self-referential dynamics of modern marketing may reproduce the very civilizational conditions within which they operate, transforming contradiction into a source of continuity and apparent novelty into a mechanism for the perpetuation of the existing system.

1.12. Implications and Open Questions

The preceding analysis has sought to demonstrate that the success and societal normalization of intrinsically destructive consumer goods cannot be adequately explained through the lens of individual persuasion, information asymmetry, or moral failure alone. Rather, it emerges as the systematic output of a cybernetic control apparatus—

marketing—that operates as a constitutive, self-reproducing institution within late capitalist economies. The synthesis with Spenglerian morphology further suggests that this dynamic is not a contingent aberration but the operational expression of civilizational circularity itself: a condition in which contradiction is not resolved but perpetually absorbed as the fuel of systemic reproduction.

This conclusion carries several implications that merit further theoretical and empirical attention.

First, the cybernetic reframing of marketing as a recursive sensor-actuator system challenges the persistent conceptual divide between "legitimate" market communication and "manipulative" persuasion. If manipulation is not a peripheral excess but a functional prerequisite for systemic stability under conditions of exponential supply diversity and finite cognitive capacity, then the normative vocabulary of deception, autonomy, and informed consent requires fundamental revision. The relevant question is no longer whether marketing manipulates—it necessarily does—but under what conditions its steering function remains compatible with minimal conditions of individual and collective self-determination.

Second, the integration of Spengler's decadence theory into systems-theoretical marketing analysis opens a macrohistorical dimension that has been largely neglected in contemporary consumer research. The normalization of destructive goods appears not as a failure of moral regulation but as the empirical signature of a civilizational phase in which the system's own self-reproduction has become its sole organizing principle. This perspective does not excuse the production and consumption of harmful goods; it contextualizes them as symptoms of a deeper structural logic that transcends individual actors and intentional strategies.

Third, the concept of structural coupling between the economic and moral systems of society suggests that moral criticism, however necessary, cannot be expected to destabilize the control loop from outside. If moral resistance is systematically converted into stabilizing feedback—through counterframing, dissonance absorption, and the transformation of taboo into distinction—then the efficacy of moral appeal as a regulatory mechanism is fundamentally limited. This does not render moral criticism meaningless; it redirects attention to the structural conditions under which moral impulses might genuinely disrupt rather than reinforce the system's autopoietic closure.

Several empirical questions emerge from this framework. First, the precise mechanisms of recursive self-referentiality in marketing measurement demand investigation: To what extent do key performance indicators such as brand awareness, purchase intention, or customer satisfaction represent genuine system-external states rather than narratively constructed artifacts of prior marketing interventions? Longitudinal studies tracking the co-evolution of marketing metrics and actual consumption patterns could illuminate the degree to which the control loop has achieved operational closure.

Second, the concept of positive feedback loops in the consumption of destructive goods—runaway effects driven by neurobiological adaptation and habitualization algorithms—requires finer empirical specification. How do different product categories (tobacco, gambling, digital platforms, fossil fuels) vary in their feedback dynamics? What role do algorithmic personalization and predictive analytics play in accelerating or stabilizing these loops? Comparative studies across regulatory environments could identify conditions under which runaway effects are dampened or amplified.

Third, the hypothesis of pulsating regulation—the strategic oscillation between provocation and self-evidence—invites empirical testing through time-series analysis of advertising content, media coverage, and regulatory interventions. If moral criticism is indeed absorbed as a stabilizing rather than destabilizing impulse, we would expect to observe a systematic temporal correlation between moral controversy and subsequent consumption persistence or even intensification, mediated by counterframing strategies and habituation effects.

The normative implications of this analysis are profound and uncomfortable. If manipulation is constitutive rather than contingent, and if moral resistance is systematically absorbed rather than transformative, then traditional approaches to consumer protection—information disclosure, education, moral suasion—may be structurally insufficient. This does not imply fatalism but rather a recalibration of regulatory imagination.

Three directions merit consideration. First, structural interventions that target the control loop itself—rather than its outputs—might prove more effective than attempts to modify individual behavior. Examples include restrictions on data collection and algorithmic personalization, mandatory interruption of positive feedback loops (e.g., gambling limits, tobacco plain packaging), or the introduction of systemic friction that disrupts habitualized consumption patterns.

Second, the concept of requisite variety suggests that reducing the behavioral variety of consumers may be a prerequisite for stable transactions, but this reduction need not be achieved through manipulation. Alternative mechanisms—such as deliberative democratic processes, participatory design of choice architectures, or collective consumption governance—could potentially provide decision security without expropriating autonomous choice capacity. Whether such alternatives can be scaled within existing economic structures remains an open question.

Third, the Spenglerian framing raises the uncomfortable possibility that the normalization of destructive goods is not a problem to be solved but a symptom of a civilizational phase whose logic cannot be transcended from within. This does not counsel resignation but rather invites reflection on the conditions under which a system might transition from self-referential circularity to genuine openness—a question that lies at the intersection of political economy, cultural theory, and the philosophy of history.

The framework developed here is not without limitations. The cybernetic model, while powerful in its formalization of systemic dynamics, risks overstating the degree of operational closure and understating the heterogeneity of consumer agency. Not all consumers are equally susceptible to manipulation; not all moral criticism is absorbed without residue; not all regulatory interventions are neutralized. The model identifies systemic tendencies, not iron laws. Similarly, the synthesis with Spengler, while heuristically productive, carries the risk of historical determinism.

The claim that marketing "realizes" Spenglerian circularity operationally does not mean that the outcome is inevitable or that alternatives are illusory. Rather, it suggests that the structural conditions of late capitalism systematically favor certain dynamics over others—a claim that invites empirical specification rather than philosophical closure. Finally, the normative ambivalence of manipulation remains unresolved. If marketing's

steering function is indeed necessary for systemic stability under conditions of cognitive overload and supply diversity, then its complete abolition might produce coordination crises rather than liberation. The challenge is not to eliminate manipulation but to render it transparent, accountable, and subordinate to democratic deliberation—a task that requires not only scientific analysis but political will and institutional innovation.

In sum, the cybernetic analysis of marketing and its synthesis with decadence theory offers a diagnostic framework rather than a therapeutic program. It reveals the structural logic that underlies the persistent success of destructive goods and the societal normalization of their consumption. Whether this logic can be interrupted—and under what conditions—remains the central question for future research, policy, and collective self-reflection. The answer will depend not only on the system's internal dynamics but on the capacity of societies to recognize themselves in the mirror of their own control loops and to decide, collectively, what forms of stability they are willing to accept and what forms of manipulation they are prepared to refuse.

There is a final irony that deserves acknowledgment. The present analysis, like marketing itself, operates within the system it describes. The scientific observer who diagnoses manipulation is not exempt from the recursive logic of observation; the act of analysis may itself become a signal within the control loop, absorbed as yet another counterframe, yet another semantic variation that the system can integrate without structural transformation. This is not a counsel of despair but an invitation to reflexivity. If second-order cybernetics teaches us anything, it is that the distinction between observer and observed is not given but enacted—and that the act of observation changes what is observed. The scientific critique of marketing's manipulative character thus participates in the very dynamic it seeks to illuminate. Whether this participation can be rendered productive—whether it can shift the system's setpoints rather than merely supply it with new fuel—is not a question that can be answered in advance.

It is, in the end, a practical question—one that will be decided not in the pages of journals but in the ongoing, contested, and always unfinished negotiation between markets and democracies, between systems and lifeworlds, between the closed loops of self-reproduction and the open horizons of collective self-determination. The analysis offered here is, at best, a modest contribution to that negotiation: an attempt to name the mechanisms that hold us in their grip, so that we might, at least, know what we are up against.

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