

Marketing history from below: towards a paradigm shift in marketing historical research

Marketing
history from
below

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this article is to introduce the theme of this special issue. In doing so, the paper argues that marketing historical research is in need of a paradigmatic shift. Rather than privilege primary and secondary sources that preserve the perspectives and actions of corporate managers and of marketing academics, marketing historians need to open the historical narratives they construct much more than before to the experiences and voices of ordinary consumers, i.e. of those who actually shop and buy and choose. They also need to do more to incorporate into their narratives examples of the value-creation that consumers themselves enact, both inside and outside the sphere of the market.

Design/methodology/approach – By reviewing the state of the marketing historical literature, this paper introduces the “History from Below” school of historical thought into marketing historical research. It also tests to what extent a stronger consumer focus might be able to enrich historical research in marketing.

Findings – Although contemporary marketing historiography is characterized by a richness of themes and methodological approaches, there is still a marked difference between the way marketing academics and historians write the history of marketing and consumption. While, surprisingly, the former often tend to ignore the voices of ordinary consumers, the latter often lack the marketing-related “technical” knowledge to fully understand the significance of specific archival sources they discuss. This means that a genuine “People’s History of Marketing” has yet to be written.

Research limitations/implications – Findings from the paper will be of value to marketing historians who wish to expand the scope and agenda of their research and help historical research move away from narrow managerial perspectives and other “privileged” accounts of marketing.

Originality/value – This paper makes two original contributions. First, it introduces historiographical innovations associated with “History from Below” (social history) into marketing historical scholarship. Second, it attempts to help marketing historians identify alternative sets of primary and secondary sources, e.g. oral history archives, which would allow them to be much more optimistic about their own ability to reconstruct the perspectives of those whose voices are all too often ignored.

Keywords Narratives, Methodology, Consumer citizenship, History from below, Oral history, Prosumers

Paper type General review



Bringing the consumer back in

This is the 25th issue of the *Journal of Historical Research in Marketing*, which is now in its seventh consecutive volume. At this point in its own history, the journal and its readers might therefore want to spend some time analysing the research trends and conceptual tendencies that have characterised the content that is reproduced on its

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pages. While marketing historical research in the way it presents itself in this journal and at the biennial Conference on Historical Analysis and Research in Marketing (CHARM) is marked by an increasing diversity of themes that span all epochs and geographical continents, I argue that there is also a noticeable absence of what could loosely be termed “the voice of the consumer”. This assertion will strike most readers as a surprise, as marketing scholarship has frequently asserted that marketing begins and ends with the consumer (Keith, 1960; Kotler and Levy, 1969). And yet, most marketing historical work still focuses on firms and corporate strategy; managerial activities such as branding, product design, advertising and packaging; on the legal frameworks of marketing activities, marketing’s complicated relationship with government institutions; and, in particular, on the history of marketing thought as it unfolded within the confines of academia. While these are without doubt important areas of research which allow a critical view on how marketing embeds itself in or disembeds itself from its socio-cultural environment, they are also in danger of ignoring how consumers themselves created marketing content, innovated products, reacted to and changed marketing campaigns and contested corporate marketing activities through consumer boycotts and other forms of civil society-based activities.

While customer-centric marketing theory asserts that the consumer is the alpha and omega of all marketing activities, and increasingly the initiator of marketing innovations, most marketing historical research does not seem to see it that way. Very few papers that have appeared in this journal so far have explicitly taken this voice of the consumer as a vantage point of their historical research. While the term “consumer” appears in the keywords of exactly 23 out of the 120 or so research articles that have appeared so far in this journal, maybe five of these really engage with how consumer actually shopped, what they read, how they shared goods, how they co-produced product innovations, how and why they rejected corporate marketing activities and so on (Richmond, 2010; Kaufman-Scarborough, 2011; Toplis, 2010; Clark, 2014; Minowa and Witkowski, 2012; Stobbart, 2010; Logemann, 2013; Davis, 2010). This bias of marketing historical research towards managerial activities, academic thought and legislative processes is not at all untypical for the field as such. Other journals which in the past have helped landmark historical research to reach a wider audience, such as the *Journal of Macromarketing*, the *Journal of Marketing Management*, *Marketing Theory* and the *Journal of Marketing and Public Policy* have shown themselves prone to the same bias. One of these key contributions, Tadajewski and Jones’s (2014) collection of articles on “Historical Research in Marketing Management”, planned to appear in the *Key Issues in Marketing Management* books series, might be quoted as a case in point. Out of the nine articles collected here, only one deals explicitly with the actual behaviour of a group of consumers, namely, early-modern readers of fiction (Herman, 2003). In their review of historical research in marketing theory and practice which appeared recently, Tadajewski and Jones (2014) once again focus on “observing observers”, i.e. on what firms did to shape consumer behaviour and what academics wrote about consumers, markets and marketers. The “observed”, i.e. consumers themselves, do not really figure in this perspective (Tadajewski and Jones, 2014).

It would be wholly unfair to suggest that the sidelining of consumers in marketing historical research is something only to be found in the work of Tadajewski and Jones. Readers familiar with their work will, like the author of this article, be in awe of the immense erudition and the sheer scope of literature reviewed in their 50-odd page

overview quoted above. The only reason for focusing my critique on these two authors is that both are perhaps the most prominent representatives of marketing history as a field and will be able to see this reading of their work for what it is, namely, an encouragement to strengthen marketing historical research by incorporating an alternative paradigm, one that starts with the consumer and then works its way back, so to speak, to the marketing environment that is made up of firms, media, social groups, technologies, legal constraints and cultural trends. Adding to the defence of Tadajewski and Jones as the two foremost marketing historians of today, it needs to be stated that the relative privilege afforded to the managerial and the academic perspective on marketing is nothing that uniquely afflicts marketing historical research.

As a relatively new field, it finds itself somewhat squeezed in between its much older and bigger academic cousins of marketing research, business and economic history and the history of media and communications. As regards the latter, [Daymon and Holloway \(2011\)](#) acknowledged some time ago that the history of public relations, too, is characterized by a reluctance to undertake historical research into minority groups and activist groups, that is, groups other than the large organizations that are normally responsible for communications campaigns. Both authors even go further and extend their analysis to the field of marketing history as such:

Historical research in marketing has tended, as in public relations, to overemphasize the corporate; this is at the expense of consumers and not-for-profit groups, whose active role in creating meaning and influencing cultural transformation is overlooked in many historical accounts ([Daymon and Holloway, 2011](#), p. 191).

The same can be said for business history, which one might view either as a neighbouring field that works in parallel to marketing history, or indeed as an overarching field into which marketing history fits in as a subfield. In whatever ways one sees this relationship, it is important to note that business historians, too, are struggling to move away from accounts that centre-stage firms and other established corporate actors ([Scranton and Fridenson, 2013](#), pp. 26-30; [Walton, 2010](#); [Friedman, 2010](#); [Hornstein, 1999](#)).

One cannot talk about active consumers without realizing the potential political implications that underlie the notion of a citizenry that contests the attempts of corporations and bureaucratic administrations to control what choices are available, what kind and how much product-related information consumers might access, the quality of service consumers can expect or what means consumers might have to seek redress after purchase of a faulty product. But the interaction between marketing and politics does indeed go much further than that and ultimately also includes the foundational choices that are made on how a polity is to be organized in the first place. It is at this more fundamental level where marketing historical research has a tendency to shy away from engaging with the realities of political ideology and with the history of marketing's engagement with non-democratic forms of political governance. A lot of marketing historical research seems to believe in the blissful image of marketing being naturally wedded to choice and freedom, and hence, democracy and the project of the enlightenment. This view is perhaps best summarized in Welch's and Jocz's argument that "good marketing makes for better democracy" ([Quelch and Jocz, 2007](#)).

What this viewpoint ignores is that good marketing can also make for better dictatorship. Scholars outside the marketing history community have long

acknowledged that (O'Shaughnessy, 2015). In a widely-reviewed study on Hollywood's complicity with the Nazi regime, historian Ben Urwand showed how the German consul in Los Angeles practically dictated to the studios what could be said about Nazi Germany, and how the studio bosses changed or even cancelled movies according to the consul's wishes so as not to lose their share of what was then an extremely lucrative export market. Paramount and Fox then invested profits made from the German market in a German newsreels company, a medium that was of course part and parcel of the NS propaganda machinery, while MGM even financed the production of German armaments (Urwand, 2013). Work by Heidi Tinsman in her *Buying into the Regime* and by Natalia Milanesio in her *Workers Go Shopping in Argentina* shows how "the consumer's interest" was used by various political lobby groups in the USA and in South America between the 1950s and the 1980s to prop up dictatorships in Chile and Argentina (Milanesio, 2013; Tinsman, 2014). Work by Rosendorf (2014), in turn, showed how state-of-the-art public relations and advertising campaigns developed by none else than the very large Young & Rubicam advertising agency during the 1980s were used to improve the image of Spain under dictator General Franco, a regime known for having run concentration camps with half a million prisoners and having abducted up to 300,000 children. There is some evidence in this journal that marketing historians are open to this line of inquiry, but of course more such work is welcome (Große-Börger, 2014; Berghoff and Kolbow, 2013).

By contrast, it is promising to see that marketing historians have recently shown themselves more open to investigate the contentious relationship between consumption and the issue of race (Tadajewski, 2012). It will astonish the reader of 2015 to see how 50 years ago an article in the field's foremost academic research outlet, the *Journal of Marketing*, presented Afro-American consumers as obsessed with symbolic values of products, especially of fashion goods, as desperate to buy their way into "accepted white middle-class values", and keen buyers of deodorizing soap, apparently because of the "belief that Negroes smell different than whites" (Bauer *et al.*, 1965, pp. 1-2). The racially configured consumer has now a prominent place in marketing historical research and this journal has a strong record of publishing research in this area (Davis, 2013; Kreydatus *et al.*, 2013; Branchik and Davis, 2009).

In conclusion, while there are certainly promising signs of marketing historical research opening up to a wider set of critical issues, the historiography still tends to focus on the history of corporate marketing campaigns and the intellectual development of academic marketing thought, thus extending the perspectives of those who market, as opposed to the voice and influence of those who are being marketed to. What is more, despite the recent acknowledgement that consumers are actually not merely being marketed "to" but instead very active in the creation of value and content, very little historical scholarship exists that shows how this value- and content-creation by consumers was actually shaped in the past. One reason for the relative absence of ordinary consumers in marketing historical scholarship is a lack of understanding amongst marketing historians, rarely trained as historians themselves, of methodological alternatives to a firm-, government- or academia-centred outlook.

Methodological alternatives

An obvious question that raises itself here is of course whether the voice of the ordinary consumer can actually be researched by historians, given that most archival records are

created within large-scale organizations – be that private-sector companies or state-based organizations. As [Daymon and Holloway, 2011](#), p. 191) acknowledged:

The ordinary lives of publics in relation to professional communication are extremely thin, their memories and voices often disregarded; in many instances, these have now been lost in the course of time.

Against this pessimism about the very availability of archival sources should be set the optimism of the marketing historian: yes, these sources do exist and the voice of the consumer can be reconstructed.

As regards the situation in the UK, much useful data can be found in the archives of the Mass Observation movement, which is housed at the University of Sussex in the south of England. Mass Observation was a social research organization set up by an anthropologist, a poet and a film-maker in 1937, but it understood itself more as a social movement to motivate people to become observers of daily lives in Britain. To provide a counter-point to the “official” record of national life kept at the National Archives and in the establishment-run newspapers, “Mass Obs” recruited a panel of around 500 untrained volunteer observers who either maintained diaries or replied to open-ended questionnaires ([Hubble, 2006](#)). The collections of Mass Observation comprise thousands of pages of diary entries, photographs, questionnaires, research reports and newspaper clippings, most of which has been digitized by Adam Matthews publishers. Marketing historians interested in the way ordinary people used media or thought about advertising as a subject will find much useful material here. Similar material on the history of consumption in Italy stretching back to the 1930s was collected by a team around David Forgacs at Cambridge University ([Forgacs and Gundle, 2008](#)). In the USA, oral history archives, some of which are fully searchable online, include the American Folklife Center and the Oral History Archives at Rutgers and Columbia University. Marketing historians with a particular interest in the production and consumption of food in the South will, for example, find the Oral History Archive of the Southern Foodways Alliance in Oxford, Mississippi, a very useful resource. Some years ago, Richard Elliott and Andrea Davies wrote a highly readable introduction on using oral history methods in consumer research ([Elliott and Davies, 2006](#)), and, in the same handbook, Terry Witkowski and Brian Jones provide very valuable guidelines for how marketing historians can themselves create or at least utilize oral history records for their research questions ([Witkowski and Jones, 2006](#); [Hill et al., 1997](#); [Witkowski and Hogan, 1999](#); [Harrison III et al., 2011](#)).

Marketing historians interested in bringing the voice of consumers back into their research are by no means limited to oral history archives. Archival collections that would normally be used by historians only to study managerial attitudes towards consumers and consumption practices can of course be scoured for material that reveal a gaze in the opposite direction, namely, how consumers’ attitudes towards marketing changed over time. The above-mentioned Mass Observation archive and the archival collections of institutions such as the Institute of Practitioners in Advertising (UK), the Advertising Association (UK), the Advertising Educational Foundation (USA), the Association of American Advertising Agencies (USA) and, not the least, the extensive collections of the J. Walter Thompson (JWT) advertising agency, held at Duke University and at the History of Advertising Trust Archives, Norwich, provide plenty of evidence of research conducted by these institutional bodies and by JWT on how

consumers perceived advertising as such (Advertising Association, 1977; Walter Thompson, 1976). Little known, but these institutional bodies and popular media began already in the interwar period to use the new methods of public opinion polling to test the attitudes of consumers towards advertising as an industry (Week-end Review, 1932).

In a similar fashion, marketing historians will find the collections of market research companies of great interest to reconstruct the lost voices of consumers in the past. While the world's largest market research companies have made it somewhat difficult to research their archival collections, some institutions and companies are very easy to research. For example, the world's first market research department, set up by the Curtis Publishing Company in Philadelphia under Charles Coolidge Parlin, compiled hundreds upon hundreds of market and consumer research reports since 1911. These and other relevant papers are held in over one hundred boxes at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia (Ms. Coll. 51), while some can also be found at Hagley Museum and Archives in Wilmington, Delaware, which in itself holds a breathtaking collection of sources on the history of American consumers' engagement with new products and new technologies since the late nineteenth century. Amongst others, Douglas Ward and Regina Blaszczyk have shown how to use these sources to research changing consumer attitudes to the mass market (Blaszczyk, 2000; Ward, 2009). Marketing historical researchers will also find a cornucopia of relevant material in the recently digitized market and consumer research reports that were compiled since the late 1930s by Ernest Dichter at his Institute for Motivational Research (Desmond *et al.*, 2014).

What these and other primary sources allow us to study is the ways in which – often female – consumers themselves became part of and reshaped the distribution and adoption mechanisms through which product innovations became widely dispersed. Manko (1997) and Alison Clarke's (1999) work on the marketing models used by Avon Cosmetics and Tupperware, for example, shows how consumers became actively enrolled into these firms to become marketers on behalf of the brands. Both authors drew on a wide range of ego-documents and autobiographical material from those at the bottom of the corporate hierarchies. These voices are preserved in archival collections, and marketing historians only have to care to look for them (Manko, 1997; Mayer, 1995; Clarke, 1999; Scott, 1998; Yeager, 1999). Franz's (2005) work takes us into a somewhat similar direction. Her study Tinkering showed how early car consumers enthusiastically redesigned their cars, thus adding value to them. Instead of just passively buying and then using their cars, drivers as users and consumers added trunks, luggage racks, beds and metal constructions for other useful extensions, especially tents. These adaptations rendered cars more comfortable and economical, as drivers could use them to save money for overnight accommodation on long-distance trips and holiday tours. These post-purchase activities by masses of early car buyers resulted in a completely new dynamics in the cycle of innovation, production and consumption. The clear lines between the three became increasingly blurred as people turned from passive buyers of a pre-designed and mass-produced product into "prosumers" and finally inventive users who changed their cars' design. Little known, Earl S. Tupper was one such tinkerer who went on to apply his experiences as "prosumer" when he introduced Tupperware to the American mass market. Soon, a new medium emerged in form of the car enthusiasts' magazine which provided a space for car consumers and hobby-engineers to share the user-solutions they had developed. Oldenziel and Hård (2013) in their study of how Europe's contemporary culture was

created from below since 1850 go even further and show how active consumers appropriated machines and tinkered with technological processes such as machine sewing, radio broadcasting, train transportation and food processing, in that process changing the way we work, travel, communicate, dress and eat.

Today, these activities would be called “user-led innovations”, and these car enthusiasts’ magazines would be studied by an army of researchers focusing on “consumer-generated content”. What is typical for the contemporary marketing literature is that it works with an overtly “presentist” historical narrative that sees consumers before the early twenty-first century as more or less passive and at the receiving end of a goods-driven marketing logic (Vargo and Lusch, 2004; Achrol and Kotler, 2006). To counter such ahistorical theorizing of consumer behaviour, marketing historians really ought to do a better job at denouncing naïve narratives of progress: consumers in the past were never passive, and marketing and consumption practices were rarely based on a goods-centred, discreet-transaction logic. As argued by Ben Wooliscroft, it cannot even be upheld that marketing thought before the 1990s followed this simplified “before-after” story (Wooliscroft, 2008; Hamilton, 2014).

In general, marketing historians will not have trouble finding ahistorical simplifications in the mainstream marketing literature, especially those that overlook the active contributions of consumers in the making of marketing institutions. Consumer co-operatives, a concept that last found mention on the pages of the *Journal of Marketing* in the late 1970s, is only one consumer-based business model that might stand in for many similar omissions. As consumer-driven alternatives to corporate marketing forms, consumer co-operatives are almost completely overlooked today, and this has to do with the way marketing textbooks introduce the subject to undergraduate students, which, in turn, formats the methodological choices of those who teach marketing and then study its history. Take, for example, Europe’s most widely adopted undergraduate marketing textbook, Philip Kotler’s *Principles of Marketing*. The UK consumer co-operative group is mentioned twice in this textbook (Kotler *et al.*, 2013, pp. 391-392, p. 406), but represented as a “retailer co-operative”. From reading this book, students would have no idea that as early as the late 1760s, consumers in England banded together to conduct their own wholesale buying and then retail-selling through stores that were owned by these very consumers (hence, the name “consumer” co-operative). Students would not realize that consumer co-operatives are democratically controlled, viable alternatives to corporate ownership forms that made enormous contributions to the modernization of marketing (Gurney, 2012; Schwarzkopf, 2009). The largest retail organization in Scandinavia is consumer-owned and some influential media organizations like the German *die tageszeitung* are consumer co-operatives. How would mainstream marketing scientists and their undergraduate students know all of this if marketing historians themselves do so little to research this subject? “Consumer-to-consumer marketing” has become a great hype of late, yet the fact that all of this has a pre-history ranging all the way back to the nineteenth century is forgotten and marketing historians are partially to blame for this (Wilson *et al.*, 2013; Furlough and Strickwerda, 1999; Battilani and Bertagnoni, 2015).

As has been shown by numerous historians before, consumers can also organize to bring about change through boycotts and other campaigns of consumer resistance (Jundt, 2014; Stole, 2006; Glickman, 2001, 2004, 2009; Chartriot *et al.*, 2006; Hilton, 2009; Brückweh, 2011). These boycotts were enormously important in helping to abolish

slavery, in bringing down British rule in India and in isolating Apartheid South Africa (Smith and Greer, 2015; Heath and Waymer, 2009; Midgley, 2007, pp. 63-64; Friedman, 1999; Thompson, 2009). To address the role of consumers in all of this, and the effects that these consumer protest movements had on corporate marketing, new types of sources have to be discovered by marketing historians, such as papers of women's groups who often did the organizing and protesting with regards to food safety, food prices or problematic origins of food (Hunt, 2010). While our colleagues in consumer research and macromarketing research have long recognized the role of boycotts and anti-consumption ideologies in the making of modern consumer identities, marketing historians seem to trail behind (Kozinets and Handelman, 2002; Chatzidakis and Lee, 2012; Hawkins, 2010; Krisjanous, 2014; Larsen and Lawson, 2013).

The articles in this issue

This special issue addresses this and other gaps in the literature and asks what historical research in marketing can contribute to shed light on the cultural-economic spaces that lie beyond the realm of firm activities, that is, the spaces populated by consumer communities, social experiences, political resistances and consumer-led alternatives that make up the market. The articles collected here have been arranged according to their chronological focus so as to give readers in impression of the historiographical possibilities that open themselves up to researchers interested in looking at marketing history from the perspectives of those whose daily lives marketing is aimed at. In their own right, these four articles provide an overview of the various forms that active consumer-citizenship took over the past 120 years or so, and the different attempts made by civil society, political authorities and economic interests in trying to shape and then mobilize particular consumer behaviours.

The issue begins with Ian Mitchell's paper on how concerned citizens in late nineteenth-century Britain used the consumer's power of choice in the market to forge an alliance that could improve working conditions in many parts of industry. Mitchell argues that the origins of "ethical shopping" can be found in the late Victorian era when a group of Christian Socialists began to propagate the idea that consumers should use their spending power to direct demand in the direction of those firms that treated their workers well, paid them a fair wage and abolished child labour in their factories. Although the idea to organize consumers around boycotts of specific products and preferential spending on politically and/or ethically favoured alternatives had been around for decades, Mitchell argues that these were examples of often short-lived campaigns, while the actual organization a standing consumers' league was bound up with the surging interest in the social gospel during the 1880s. It is not hard to find parallels here to the often much less stable and less organized contemporary examples of consumer-led protests against working conditions in factories in emerging economies that churn out trainers and t-shirts for Walmart, Tesco and ALDI.

Rolf Schroeder takes us forward into the 1940s, a decade not often associated with active consumerism, choice or marketing, for that matter. His article introduces readers to barter centres that emerged in Germany during the Second World War and its immediate aftermath. At a time when products were in preciously short supply and many people starved and could only feed themselves thanks to food supplies such as the one organized by the Cooperative for American Remittances to Europe (CARE). In the absence of functioning market mechanisms and sufficient supply of even basic goods

like food and clothing, Germans began to organize local exchange and trading systems, through which half a pack of lard could be exchanged for various items of winter clothing. After some time, as Schroeder shows, the Allied occupiers even began to officially encourage the workings of these barter centres as a way to make the flow of goods and services easier at a time when criminal groups exploited shortages through black market racketeering. As with the article by Mitchell, readers will make obvious connections to the contemporary parallels, such as the rise of Internet-based platforms, such as gumtree, craigslist and airbnb, which allow consumers to offer and exchange goods, but also services like transport and housing.

The next article by retail historian Matthew Bailey takes us forward into the world of post-war affluence in Australia, and the growth of shopping centres in particular. Bailey argues that the emergence of this retail format has too often been written from the perspective of the owners and managers of these new types of suburban cathedrals of consumption. In trying to recover consumers' experiences of these innovative retail spaces, historians often find it hard to identify archival sources that would allow them this reconstructive work. In the absence of established archival sources, Bailey shows us how marketing historians can succeed in creating their own archive through the oral history method. Bailey went to the airwaves and the Internet and recruited nearly one hundred consumers who shared their testimonies on how they first explored a shopping centre in their neighbourhood and how they came to use these spaces over time. What is interesting to see here is how consumers at times combine very diverging individual attitudes to such centres and create personal narratives that allow them to have *both* fond memories of their own visits to these sites and more critical memories of the impact that these shopping centres had at times on the monotony of high streets in central parts of towns and cities.

The last article by young Argentinian historian Pablo Pryluka takes us into the late twentieth century. The years between the late 1970s and the early 1990s, that is the decades after the welfare state-based consumer-boom of the affluent post-war years, are characterized by the successive scaling back of the welfare state and the accompanying construction of a neoliberal regime of the responsabilization of the individual citizen as consumer. Pryluka's research into the setting-up of a consumer rights organization in Argentina in 1980 shows that consumer rights organizations need not be grassroots civil society groups but can be equally grown on "astroturf", i.e. top-down, by a right-wing military junta. Following an anti-socialist, free-market-oriented political ideology imported in part with the help of American economic advisors, the junta around General Jorge Rafael Videla hoped that further government intervention into the economy would be made unnecessary if the home market could be organized more efficiently around increased consumer demand. Market efficiency, however, required consumers that are well-informed about prices, quality differences and choice alternatives, and it was to these ends that the dictatorship set up and sponsored a consumer rights organization which distributed information material into households and schools. Pryluka's article shows that the dream of an Argentinian consumers' democracy sat quite comfortably with the disappearance of thousands of dissidents, authors, journalists, academics and students, whose bodies and families were tortured and whose children stolen to be given to members of the military elites for illegal adoption.

Why not a “people’s history of marketing”?

The aim of this special issue is to bring closer together the social history of consumption and of consumer identity-production on the one hand, and marketing history on the other, which is too often limited to managerial marketing practices and academic marketing thought. Although the *Journal of Historical Research in Marketing* has published various articles that fall into the former category (Whelan, 2014; Minowa and Witkowski, 2009; Jeong Min, 2013), there are still missing links between these two perspectives. A kind of marketing historical research that takes the experience of power and powerlessness alike of ordinary consumers more seriously could tentatively be called a “marketing history from below”, or even a “People’s History of Marketing”. Writing the history of a subject from the perspectives of those not in power has a honourable tradition in historiography running back to the historians of the French Annales School and eminent British historian E. P. Thompson, who coined the term “history from below” in 1966 (Thompson, 1966). Today perhaps better known as “social history”, this historiographical school focuses on those outside “established” corridors of power (e.g. political and military leaders), and it deliberately reads history against the structure that it was given by those in power who often ended up writing the history we have come to believe in (Black and MacRaild, 2007, pp. 111-113; Sharpe, 2001). For historians of marketing, this perspective might create real opportunities to move away from unreflected, “Whiggish” historical narratives, which, in the words of Ken Alder, present historical accounts of great leaders in such a way as to make the triumphs of these individuals “an inevitable outcome of the righteous logic of their cause” (Alder, 2006, p. 301; Scranton and Fridenson, 2013, pp. 30-33).

A marketing history written from below would avoid constructing narratives of the (inevitable) success of enterprises, industries, professions and schools of thought who march ahead against resistances on their way up. Reading history “against the grain”, as philosopher Walter Benjamin put it in 1940, marketing historians could pay more attention to questions of how consumers and citizens respond to and interact with firms and brands in ways not anticipated by marketers; the question of how consumers before the twenty-first century acted as prosumers and integrators of operant resources; the question of how consumers mobilized modes of social criticism against intrusive marketing schemes; and questions of how the discursive figure of the “powerful consumer” was in itself fought over by the political Left and the political Right during the twentieth century. This little catalogue of questions, which has at its centre the problem of consumer power, empowerment and disempowerment, is already being used by marketing historians with the aim to unlock the critical potential of history “against the grain”. To quote but one example out of a myriad of others, research by Ronald Fullerton into “devious” consumer behaviour has shown how consumer misbehaviour might be interpreted historically as the unintended consequences of a strong socio-political focus on creating an ideology of good life through consumption (Fullerton and Punj, 2004). The “people’s history” perspective, in turn, has also been already applied by historians in their studies of the economic effects of the industrial revolution, of book marketing during the nineteenth century, of the effects of black markets on mid-twentieth-century consumer behaviour in Britain and of consumer co-operative and other communal economic practices in the USA (Griffin, 2014; Zboray and Zboray, 2005; Roodhouse, 2013; Curl, 2012). The “history from below” perspective has often been equated, by proponents and detractors alike, with tendentious “Marxist history”. After

Griffins's (2014) book on the actual experiences of those who lived through the early years of the industrial revolution in England, such convenient labels cannot be upheld any longer. Griffin studied the personal testimonies of 350 working-class people and arrived at a surprising interpretation of the socio-economic effects of the industrial revolution which, very much in contrast to the accounts given by Marxist historians like E.P. Thompson and Eric Hobsbawm, points at the opportunities, freedoms and choices that became available to the working class because of the economic upheavals caused by industrialization. What the example of Griffin's investigation shows is that, rather than narrowing down the methodological and interpretative alternatives of marketing historians, a change of perspective in favour of the nameless within the multitude of ordinary consumers is more likely to widen the scope of marketing historical research as well as improve its allure to researchers who so far have perhaps failed to interest themselves in its findings.

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