12 THE EMERGING TRADITION OF HISTORICAL RESEARCH IN MARKETING: HISTORY OF MARKETING AND MARKETING OF HISTORY

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Historical studies in marketing have existed from the outset of the discipline, however rare and disorganized. Since the early ’80s, works of this type have grown in number thanks to a group of researchers intent on turning historical investigations in marketing into a new discipline. They seem about to succeed: since 1983, marketing historians have been gathering every two years for a conference, the fourth significantly titled: “Marketing history: The emerging discipline” [Nevett, Whitney and Hollander 1989].

My purpose is to describe this new body of research. As a sociologist of science, I do not want to give a review of historical perspectives in marketing but rather to examine why, how, in what context, according to what methods, and with what content marketing historians intend to take part in marketing research and to attract the attention of other actors—researchers, teachers, and practitioners. Agreeing with Peter and Olson [1983] who brilliantly demonstrate to what extent “science is marketing,” I’ll try to show that marketing historians intend to construct their subject matter—the history of marketing—in accordance with a carefully conducted marketing of history.
To do so, I shall first describe the conditions under which this new stream of thought emerged. I will then outline the reasons why marketing historians are now claiming the right to take part in the evolution of the marketing discipline, in general. I shall focus particularly on the advantages they see in adopting the historical perspective in marketing research. In assessing the merits of the history of marketing I shall ponder over the future of the marketing of history and over the impact of this movement upon the whole marketing community.

A Brief History of Marketing History

It would be a mistake to assume that historical approaches are new to the marketing discipline: studies of this type have always existed and been accepted by academic marketers (Bartels 1988; Jones and Monieson 1990b). In addition, the Journal of Marketing has sporadically issued works of a historiographic nature [Grether 1976]. However until the '80s, these studies were rather scattered, and most of them lacked any definite methodological perspective. Their authors were writing the history of marketing but did not consider themselves to be historians: most of the time, their contributions were isolated. Even Robert Bartels [1988], who has long been considered as the historian of the discipline, never presented himself as a historian, and the history of marketing was far from being his main concern [Savitt 1980, pp. 53–54].

In contrast, since the early '80s, the history of marketing has evolved from a topic for isolated researchers into an actual subdiscipline, organized as such, and is now the object of methodological orientations and specific skills.

We are witnessing the emergence of marketing history as a new research area. Marketing historians are now organized: since 1983, they have gathered for biennial conferences that attract an ever-increasing number of researchers [Hollander and Nevett 1985; 1987; Hollander and Savitt 1983; Nevett, Whitney and Hollander 1989]. Besides, a newsletter—Retrospectives in Marketing—has tied together a network of researchers who are now contemplating launching their own review, if not their own association [Jones and Monieson 1990b].

These researchers are also intent on publicizing their works and spreading their ideas in the field of marketing. To do so, they have published many articles in books [Firat, Dholakia and Bagozzi 1987; Nevett and Fullerton 1988] and in the major marketing journals [Fullerton 1988; Jones and Monieson 1990a; Nevett 1991; Savitt 1980]. Their attempts seem to be fruitful since both the Association for Consumer Research [Tan and Sheth 1985] and the American Marketing Association [Shapiro and Walle 1988] have devoted conferences to historical perspectives. Last but not least, the Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science has recently published a special issue on the history of marketing thought [History 1990].

How can we account for such a sudden (10 years) and drastic change in the status of historical research in marketing? The present success of historical perspectives can hardly be ascribed to some unprecedented turnaround in marketing scholars’ concerns. The reasons for the breakthrough in historical research in marketing seem to be twofold: on the one hand, it is a direct consequence of the changes in the general outlook in the academic field of marketing since the early '70s; on the other hand, it has been brought about by marketing historians’ experience in taking advantage of the opportunities offered by this new orientation: many marketing historians studied both marketing and history (Fullerton is a good example of scholars with such a background), and the renewal of the marketing field was for them an unexpected opportunity to take advantage of their particular skills.

The History of the Marketing Discipline and the Discipline of the Marketing History

Up to the '70s, research in marketing met the goals stated in the marketing concept and the needs of marketing management. The marketing concept was defined as the means for a firm to satisfy the consumer’s wants at a profit [Powers and Martin 1987]. This definition had considerable impact on the organization of research in marketing as a whole. Because the marketing concept was exclusively devoted to managerial practices, it was quite natural that all the fields of research should serve business interests. Besides, since managers valued forecasting capacities as the main criterion by which to appraise research, works of a quantitative nature (statistical surveys, mathematical models . . . ) were highly favored [Karlinsky 1987].

Such a definition of research was restrictive for two reasons. First, the emphasis placed on quantitative techniques all but excluded the more impressionistic or qualitative approaches employed by such disciplines as anthropology and history. Then, the managerial orientation given to research prohibited the macro perspectives traditionally used by these disciplines and prevented the introduction of research that had no managerial
purpose. All this accounts for the very limited space marketing literature allotted to historical research until the '80s [Savitt 1980]. But the publication of the article "Broadening the concept of marketing" by Philip Kotler and Sidney Levy [1969] was to be a turning point in the evolution of the marketing discipline.

At the outset, the broadening they proposed was aimed at extending the skills of marketing technology to nonprofit organizations: hospitals, charitable or humanitarian societies, governmental agencies, and so forth. But some researchers immediately saw how they could take advantage of this idea. By adopting the broadening concept researchers could free themselves from the hindrances embodied in micro-orientation (marketing from the channel captain perspective), a managerial approach (marketing as a management science), and a normative method (marketing as a social technology).

First, the growing demand for other than purely managerial implications created favorable conditions for researchers to define new themes, new prospects, and new streams of research. The partial neglect of the viewpoint of the firm and the promotion of the perspectives of justice, the state, consumer movements, or society in general led behavioral researchers, for instance, to break with the rest of the discipline and form the Association for Consumer Research. Likewise, the new definition of marketing as a social process rather than a business function [Kotler 1972; Sweeney 1972; Bagozzi 1975] laid the foundations for macromarketers.

However, diversification was not totally accepted. The newly acquired autonomy of the incipient movements certainly widened the range of research studies: sociologists, anthropologists, linguists, all and sundry could put forward their approaches and carve out a place for themselves in the field of marketing.

A macro-orientation has arisen, over the past half decade. . . . This orientation is shaped chiefly by anthropological, sociological, and historical viewpoints, which are diffusing into consumer research, carried by newcomers to the discipline and imported by natives seeking wider interpretive frames [Sherry 1991, p. 556].

However, in practice, applicants still had to overcome a hurdle: method. To be given a chance to win acceptance for their points of view, they had to be well versed in the norms of positivism, which had ruled the discipline since marketing management was instituted. All subjects were acceptable provided they were tackled in the language of quantitative techniques, statistical surveys, and data analysis.

Once they had begun work in new research areas—consumer research

and macromarketing—some researchers took advantage of the independent position these subdisciplines granted them to go further and radically transform not only the content but also the methods of research in marketing. A vast epistemological debate arose in the mid-'80s, in which the supporters of logical empiricism opposed the promoters of more relativist approaches [Anderson and Ryan 1984; Bush and Hunt 1982; Dholakia and Arndt 1985].

The fate of the historians was closely linked to this double movement. Indeed, once the managerial orientation was no longer totally dominant, researchers could develop more academical themes of research, such as historical research in marketing (history of marketing thought, history of marketing channels, functions, systems, or practices). In addition, once that the hegemony of logical empiricism was questioned, researchers had the opportunity to promote alternative approaches, such as the historical perspective. As a consequence we cannot understand what marketing historians want, say, or do without simultaneously considering what other groups—macromarketers, consumer researchers or relativists—do, say, or want.

The historical approach which is crucial for scientificity can only be achieved through linking micro phenomena to their complex history and context. . . . Therefore, the growing interest in and importance of macromarketing within the discipline is a welcome harbinger of a trend toward greater scientificity and relevance in marketing [Firat, 1988, p. 103].

A Historical Perspective for Marketing Research

Bruno Latour [1987] in the field of sociology or Peter and Olson [1983] in the field of marketing have brilliantly shown how a piece of research has to arouse the interest of other researchers in its initial project to succeed. To develop a tradition of research devoted to a historical study of marketing, marketing historians have been trying for several years to gain wider support by promoting a new method: the historical perspective in marketing.

I propose to distinguish two concepts from one another: Historical research and historical perspective. The term historical research could be used to denote the study of a subject during an earlier time period, thus emphasizing the understanding of the past. . . . In contrast, historical perspective is the study of a subject in light of its earlier phases and subsequent evolution. . . . In this sense, historical perspective "provides a description of change as well as the
means for understanding the process of change” (Kumcu [1987, p. 120] quoting Savitt [1984]).

The distinction is important because it clearly reveals the two-sided nature of historical research in marketing. On the one hand, historical research as such is turned towards an observation of the past, and therefore it is unlikely to interest nonhistorians, who are inclined to study the present: the assertion that marketing existed before marketing is considered by historians of marketing as a rallying cry and as a militant statement. It is not surprising that some of the key articles of the discipline are entitled: “The marketing concept: A déjà-vu” [Hollander 1986], and “How modern is modern marketing?” [Fullerton 1988]. On the other hand, the historical perspective addresses the whole community of researchers, whether involved in the past, the present, or the future of the marketing phenomena: indeed, historians propose their own way of understanding reality as an alternative method of research, that is, as a pattern any kind of researcher in marketing is able to follow.

A sense of history does not necessarily mean an interest for the long ago; more important here is how one views the present and the future — as static or as in flux [Fullerton 1987, p. 98].

The historical method offers a viable and applicable alternative methodology perspective for marketing theory building [Kumcu 1987, p. 130].

The contribution of the historical perspective in marketing research is not thematic, but rather epistemological. What historians intend to give other researchers is not, strictly speaking, specific materials, but rather a new conception of any type of research in marketing. Those who promote history are directly involved in the controversy between positivists and relativists, and that promotion implies a strict condemnation of existing research practices:

The point is that, in social phenomena such as marketing, neither the patterns nor the pace of change is known categorically in advance. Models, theories, and survey results alike apply best to when and where they have been done, not to all times and places . . . . The fact that an atom of a given type will always behave in a given way at a given altitude and temperature neither proves nor disproves that two consumers will behave in the same way given the same denomination coupon for the same brand of mayonnaise. Describing both behaviors with mathematical formulae makes no difference. Consumer behavior is likely to change over time whatever the formula; that of an atom will not [Fullerton 1987, p. 103].

The controversy that has thus been launched places two visions of the world in opposition, one defined in terms of change and unpredictability, the other favoring a mechanistic reading of social phenomena. All in all, what historians reproach positivists for is their being “ahistorical.” Because it aims at defining general and universal rules, positivism necessarily leads its supporters to emphasize recurrences and therefore to neglect the importance of sociohistorical changes. In the long run, the positivist researcher is trapped in a dead end, unable to explain anything (“What is status quo at a certain period in time does not explain phenomena, it renders them tautological” [Firat 1988, p. 100]). The positivist is also compelled beforehand to reject issues that might have proved interesting: “restricting research to survey, experimentation, and quantification . . . means that whole problem areas would have to be excluded from discussion and relinquished to irrational attitudes, although . . . they are perfectly open to critical discussion” [Fullerton quoting Habermas, 1987, p. 111]. If researchers borrow techniques from logical empiricism to account for evolving phenomena, they still obtain results that are questionable:

Contemporary marketing thought’s ambitious attempts to deal explicitly with change over time are found in dynamic modeling, in mathematical forecasting techniques, and in process oriented concepts such as family and product life cycles and the diffusion of innovations. Drawn heayly from other disciplines, these approaches emphasize the importance of change. Yet, they are largely ahistorical because of their implicit assumptions that change over time follows known, regular patterns and that the underlying relationships among variables are constant [Fullerton 1987, p. 101].

Finally, if marketing historians can concede to the proponents of logical empiricism that there is a unique external reality that can be empirically appraised and measured (“I tend to agree with the realists. There is a reality out there” [Firat 1988, p. 101]), then perhaps other scholars can keep in mind that one major characteristic of reality is that it submits to historical change. “Considering . . . that reality is ever-transforming and ever-reconstituting, what should be the main principles of a new approach to science?” [Firat 1988, p. 102].

Two answers spring to mind: first, it is futile for researchers to try to confine themselves to the postulates of positivism: “One obvious principle needs to be the recognition that we should not seek a single, eternal and universal truth” [Firat 1988, p. 102]. Second, given the changing nature of reality, a new approach is necessary:
Marketing thought should not be, and does not have to be, ahistorical. It can develop the missing sense of time, change, and context by studying the philosophy and methods for dealing with these issues that have been devised by historians, historical sociologists, and philosophers of history [Fullerton 1987, p. 98].

The historical perspective implies that scholars should always consider concepts and theories, institutions and customs to be in motion: “Social systems do not tend to equilibrium, but rather to flux” [Fullerton 1987, p. 107].

Change is the new ally historians try to win over. Since history means change, changes must be made: scholars must show that the world changes at a rapid pace to change the world of research in marketing:

the historical method sees all social and cultural reality as being dominated by change [Kumcu 1987, p. 119].

It is not enough to state the great variability of historical phenomena, the proof of the historical perspective is in its ability to account for change in a new, consistent way. To meet this demand, historians propose alternative approaches to historical causality and new methods to account for it. To explain change without resorting to deterministic causal models, one can, for instance, adopt the patterns of social interactions:

Bringing about change in buyer behavior is a fundamental goal of marketing practice. . . To alter buyer behavior, new institutions and tactics are devised. Partly in response to these, and partly in response to other stimuli, buyers do alter some of their behavior [Fullerton 1987, p. 101].

Yet presenting historical change in such a way is also a means of promoting new methods. Insofar as processes of interaction cannot be assessed through quantitative techniques, researchers must resort to more qualitative approaches, such as the comparative method:

Most historical research involves the qualitative comparison of events over time or between different places without regard to either a known or a theoretical standard as is used in statistical inference. Unlike the null hypothesis as in the case of a sample and a population, no precise process is available which allows for error estimation. Comparison itself is based on the ability of the researcher to describe a certain phenomenon in two time periods or in two areas [Savitt 1980, p. 56].

Researchers could also use records [Dröge, Germain, and Halstead 1990], case analysis [Fullerton 1987], narrative discourse [Fullerton 1987], or even literary criticism [Stern 1990]. However, I don’t intend to draw up an exhaustive list of the different methods historians have proposed but rather to note that if the epistemological choices historians have made imply a specific methodology, this methodology also conveys particular skills which, in turn, are also attributable to well-defined groups of actors: that is, the outcasts:

Applied to marketing phenomena, such ideas as the historical perspective are a valuable corrective to the unreflective assumptions of underlying rationality and stability in which most marketing scholars have been trained [Fullerton 1987, p. 108; emphasis added]

and the allies:

Phenomenology, hermeneutics, and critical theory present new historiography approaches to science recognizing the historical nature of reality [Firat 1988, p. 102].

Researchers traditionally present their choices as going from epistemology to method, and from method to their specific skills. Yet in practice, research instead goes from skills to epistemology. The issue at stake in the debate about the historical perspective is whether to make room for historians and their allies. In recounting the history of marketing, one cannot avoid discussing the marketing of history.

Broadening the Horizons of the Historical Perspective

New conquests take place on several fronts. Because of the epistemological debate about the historical perspective, academics acknowledged the emerging discipline. Having gained ground, some marketing historians can now explore other fields, namely education and business.

Since the mid-'80s, a number of them have tried to gain acknowledgement from business schools. Until now, they have been only teachers of marketing: they want to be recognized as marketing history teachers. They [Fullerton 1988] have thus suggested textbooks and they [Firat and Dholakia 1989; Nevett and Hollander 1987] have even suggested that the history of marketing as a whole should be rewritten. Moreover, they [Kirkpatrick 1987; Myers 1988; Witkowski 1989; Wright 1988] argue that marketing history should be introduced as a full teaching subject. However, since most business students intend to go into management practice, to defend the pedagogical virtues of marketing history, historians must necessarily demonstrate its managerial efficiency:
Much marketing history is didactic in nature. . . . One use is of particular interest in Marketing history, and that is the use of historical analogy to help frame contemporary decision making. . . . If a firm is faced with a particular set of environmental circumstances it is appropriate to scan historically for a similar set of circumstances to help predict outcomes [Myers 1988, p. 87].

The two movements—the promotion of historical views in the area of education and in the sphere of business—are closely interconnected and support one another. In July 1991, the Journal of Marketing published an article by Nevett entitled “Historical investigation and the practice of marketing.” Written by one of the major leaders of the new discipline, this article can be regarded as the first public offer of service that marketing historians—that is, historians from within the field of marketing—have made to managers:

The point argued in this article is that historical techniques have validity when one is working with marketing data as well as historical evidence and can be a useful supplement to scientific method in the context of marketing practice [Nevett 1991, p. 13].

Let’s consider the situation. I thought I had shown that the fate of marketing history was joined to the movement of broadening the concept of marketing, yet I am now forced to admit that some historians are trying to return to the narrower dimensions. It seemed more academic subjects of research and nonpositivist methods with a macro orientation were favored when managerial views were renounced and subsequently led to the emergence of a historical tradition of research in marketing. Yet now a growing number of marketing historians are resorting to stressing the managerial relevance of their own discipline, which implies a micro orientation with forecasting capacities and application outlets. Are some historians ready to renounce the historical perspective to win the favors of business firms? Or have I been mistaken?

Neither one nor the other. In his article, Nevett is careful to reaffirm his attachment to the historical perspective again:

Historians often cannot satisfy positivist criteria. . . . The historian . . . does not attempt to predict but to explain (p. 14). . . . historians are not concerned with the future (p. 19).

He also insistently argues in favor of a practical use for historical research in marketing, which must become “the foundation upon which future strategy must be formulated” (p. 16) and “the guide for future strategy decisions” (p. 17).

In fact, to avoid falling into a contradiction between helping managers make decisions and refusing to make predictions, Nevett intends to rally managers to his own side: he will prove to practitioners that practice is closer to the historians’ views than to the scientific, positivist approaches . . .

Though marketing is generally taught as a “scientific” subject, its practice . . . appears to have much more in common with traditional historical investigation (p. 14); . . . the demands put on language by the marketer are different from those of the scientist and nearer to those of the historian (p. 15).

However, although the historian contemplates showing managers that managers are unconscious historians, he is also aware that gaining acceptance for this change of identity—for this new alliance—is likely to take time. Meanwhile, it may be necessary to make do with the former affiliations and advocate a modus vivendi. While trying to show how history and managerial practice are close to each other, Nevett is careful not to deny the virtues of positivism that managers still consider legitimate:

It is not suggested that the positivist approach be abandoned. Both approaches should have a place in the practice of marketing. . . . The two approaches do not conflict; they complement and illuminate each other (p. 22).

Refusing to attack anybody head-on (neither those fellow historians who are strongly averse to positivism, nor the community of researchers and practitioners who rely on logical empiricism), unwilling to claim anybody’s place but their own, the managerial-oriented historians come close to following the strategy that made the broadening concept succeed. The analogy can be continued: to gain new allies—education and business—these marketing historians are determined to add a micro orientation to their macro perspective; in other words, we have shown that they are willing to broaden the concept of historical perspective to suit managerial and teaching purposes. It is as if they were retracing their steps along the path laid out for them by the broadening concept 20 years before. Are the marketing historians paralleling the past of the discipline? Does this parallel allow us to forecast impending success for the marketing of history? Ronald Savitt declared in 1980 in the article that launched the movement:

Marketing history can show meaningful interconnections and parallels among different events. Its role will be to isolate and illustrate the changes that marketing and its respective institutions have made, the factors which have been influential in effecting change, and the consequences of change [Savitt, 1980, p. 57].
Conclusion

The case of marketing history appears to be a good example of how scholarly disciplines generally evolve. Particular researchers rely on their personal skills and projects to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the general evolution of their field. The actions of these researchers may result in wider transformations, which later will represent new opportunities (or barriers) to some of their peers. When it begins, a research tradition cannot yet be considered a movement (a movement is nothing but the effect of particular and successful undertakings). If marketing history now deserves to be called a movement — because the actions of pioneers have attracted other researchers, and because they have given birth to an institutionalized subdiscipline — it is not clear that the recent managerial trend in marketing history can be called a movement. There are historians who refuse any managerial orientation and managers who do not support it yet. And that still makes a big difference.

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Nevet, Terence; Whitney, Kathleen; and Hollander, Stanley C., eds. 1989, Marketing History: The Emerging Discipline. Proceedings of the Fourth Conference on Historical Research in Marketing, Michigan State University Press, East Lansing, MI.


Franck Cochoy's thoughtful essay presents a view of the evolution of marketing history that many readers will no doubt find controversial. Of course, the introduction of new ideas and perspectives by younger scholars is essential to the intellectual regeneration of any discipline, so Cochoy's interpretation of the events surrounding marketing history's emergence as a subdiscipline of marketing should be a source of satisfaction. Such is his apparent enthusiasm, however, that he is sometimes inclined to advance his argument by means of assertions that are not borne out by the facts and then to use these assertions as the basis for historical judgment.

My first reservation concerns the timeframe within which he has chosen to work. He concentrates on the 1980s, dismissing earlier work as "lacking any definite methodological perspective." While some of the writings produced before (and indeed after) 1980 might be characterized in such terms, this sweeping condemnation seems particularly unjust in the case of Hollander, whose landmark "Wheel of retailing" article appeared in 1960, and who continued to publish a number of insightful historical studies.

The 1980s certainly saw a tremendous growth in interest in marketing history among scholars in the United States. According to Cochoy's account, the picture changes from one of a few researchers working in isolation to an actual organized subdiscipline. In fact, marketing historians in the early 1980s were not really that isolated. For example, Hollander, Savitt, and Lazer, three of the leading proponents of marketing history, were colleagues at the same university, and several individuals who have made important contributions since then were Hollander's students. Taking this into account and reinstating some of the historical corpus of the 1960s and 1970s, we see a gradual gathering of momentum, rather than Cochoy's sudden and drastic change.

When Cochoy turns his attention to determining why this growth of interest should have occurred, he focuses on two factors, the first of which is the broadening of the marketing concept. As the managerial orientation lost its dominant position and the hegemony of logical empiricism came under challenge, an opportunity arose for scholars to advance the cause of marketing history. The second factor is the expedience of marketing historians in exploiting this opportunity, as they apparently joined in some kind of concerted action to secure acceptance of their work, which Cochoy describes as the "marketing of history." Indeed, he asserts early in his essay that the desire to market marketing history has even determined its subject matter. The question here is one of motivation, and it is central to Cochoy's explanation of events. He believes marketing historians are "intent on publicizing their works and spreading their ideas," a proposition he bases on the fact that they have succeeded in publishing a number of historical articles. Rather than seeking to substantiate some kind of conspiracy theory, he might do well to consider a more obvious explanation, which is to be found in the conditions of employment at American universities. University teachers need to publish to secure tenure and promotion. It became more feasible for marketing academics to publish historically oriented work after the biennial meetings had helped signal marketing history's academic respectability, and personal security and advancement were surely more powerful motivators driving them to exploit this opening than was any desire to join with others in marketing a new research perspective.

At this point, Cochoy sees the issue as being "Whether to make room for the historians and their allies." He presents a picture of two opposing camps: on the one hand the majority of marketers schooled in the tenets of positivism; on the other are the historians and their supporters. However, the marketing scene ought not to be drawn in such stark terms. All the marketing historians cited by Cochoy are actually teachers of marketing and as such would have one foot in each camp. They also conduct research and publish in areas other than marketing history, which in fact may not even be a major interest. Seen from this perspective, perhaps marketing historians might better be characterized as the amateurs of the marketing world, rather than the organized cadre portrayed by Cochoy.

With the help of some well-selected quotations, Cochoy demonstrates how marketing historians have emphasized the value of a historical perspective in marketing practice, stressed the importance of change over time, and pointed out flaws in the positivist approach. In the latest evolutionary phase, he believes they are trying to return to a micro managerial orientation and to win the support of practitioners by demonstrating how history can help in decision making. However, a managerial orientation has been a consistent theme—though admittedly not a prominent one—of work in marketing history (for example, Dickinson [1983] and Fuller-
tion [1983]) and particularly in more general business history [Kantrow 1986, and Smith and Steadman 1981]. It would seem more appropriate, therefore, to portray this movement as a shift in emphasis rather than a major change of direction.

Although one might disagree with aspects of Cochoy's interpretation of events, he deserves every credit for presenting a thought-provoking account of marketing history's emergence during the past decade. It lies beyond the scope of his essay for him to speculate as to why such developments should have been confined almost exclusively to the United States. This seems particularly puzzling, given the strong European tradition of historical scholarship. In France, for example, one might have expected to see some kind of rapport between macromarketers and historians of the Braudel school. It seems odd that it should have been left to American scholars to explore such topics as retailing in medieval Paris [Dixon 1991] and the marketing expertise of Louis XIV and Colbert [Twede 1989]. Could it be, perhaps, that marketing in Europe has yet to achieve the status of academic respectability that would cause scholars working in some traditional disciplines to deem it worthy of consideration?

References


Author's Reply by Franck Cochoy

Understanding the Marketing of History in Marketing

Being a "younger scholar" (as Professor Nevett puts it), I deeply appreciate the honor of receiving thoughtful comments from a "senior" researcher.

Professor Nevett first discusses the "time frame" on which I have focused. In fact, if I have emphasized the '80s, it is not because of some personal neglect for the earlier works conducted in marketing history, but because the historians started networking at that time, turning marketing history into a genuine "research tradition." Nevertheless, I thank Professor Nevett for the precision he suggests on this point.

More important, Professor Nevett criticizes me for resorting to some kind of "conspiracy theory," and proposes as an alternative "a more obvious explanation," based on the personal logic of academic careers. I have probably been misread or misunderstood, since my purpose was precisely to show to what extent any social movement results from the interaction of individuals pursuing their own goals, rather than from any kind of "concerted action." When I speak of a "marketing of history," it is of course the self-marketing of each individual researcher that I have in mind. According to Professor Nevett, all researchers try to forward their own research and career interests: "University teachers need to publish in order to secure tenure and promotion." But I hope that even in the American academic realm, such an activity does not only mean publishing, but also publishing something. Would Professor Nevett deny the fact that he and his colleagues have a subject matter to promote and defend? (I would rather consider his comments opposing me as a good proof of the contrary). Therefore, one has to admit that while securing tenure and promotion through their publication, marketing historians are simultaneously "publicizing their work and spreading their ideas." But the reverse is also true: by conducting their individual "marketing of history" in their articles, marketing historians also legitimate their own field, thus contributing, even modestly, to the opening of useful publishing outlets for their career advancement.

Along this line, it is clear that in the last 20 years the scholars who were trained or interested in marketing history consciously grasped the opportunities created by the changing outlook in the marketing discipline. One can also understand that in the '80s the people who had been encouraged by earlier individual successes (Savitt's [1980] JM article, for instance), who shared the same research interests and who happened to be geographically close to each other (Hollander, Savitt, Lazer . . .), gathered in order to do something together and to organize, let's say, a conference: whether this is to be seen as a conspiracy or more simply as an ordinary event in academic life is not my responsibility. (As an "outsider," I am often surprised by marketers' rejection of their own discipline as soon as one supposes that they are applying it to themselves!)

Lastly, Professor Nevett reproaches me for oversimplifying the marketing world by dividing it into "two opposing camps," namely the positivist majority and the nonpositivist minority (the latter supposedly including marketing historians). Ironically, such a criticism on the part of Professor Nevett is probably due to his personal modesty: his statement deliberately ignores the last part of my article, which was precisely devoted to an analysis of his own behavior as a good example of a third attitude. May I now make an immodest request? Taking my own self-oriented, marketing-like interests in the marketing field into account, I would like to ask Professor Nevett for the right to belong to a fourth camp, to target a new niche for myself: the group of external "younger," enthusiastic observer(s).
Research traditions in marketing

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