Eventalizing the marketing concept

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Abstract This paper “eventalizes” the marketing concept and in doing so will highlight the value of detailed cross-source analysis in historical research. But more than this, it will not simply call upon canonical sources in relation to debates surrounding the marketing concept for the reason that non-canonical sources – that is, periodical material or out-of-print texts that very few people have read or have acknowledged as central contributions to the field – may contain references to debates that have long been written out of the historical record and could encourage us, as marketing scholars, to adopt a more sceptical stance toward what we take for granted historically and neglect to subject to critical scrutiny. This argument is illustrated via the demonstration that marketing scholars and practitioners were well aware of the benefits that accrue from a customer orientation and were encouraged to orient their organisations in this manner by the growth in industrial production facilities stimulated by World War I. This growth meant that production output could be maintained at levels far in excess of consumer demand, thereby necessitating that organisations register and act upon consumer requirements. These themes continue to gain prominence until World War II when there was a brief return to a production orientation. At this point, business and marketing practitioners adopted a critical stance with regard to certain types of consumer research. There are multiple reasons for this. Firstly, the U.S. government became the major purchaser of industrial and consumer goods. Secondly, business practitioners were sceptical of the value of market and consumer research as a result of the failure by pollsters (who were utilising sophisticated statistical techniques) to predict the outcome of the 1948 U.S. Presidential election. Given the conflation of market research with polling research in the popular press and business community, business practitioners were unsure about the validity and usefulness of market research. In equal measure, environmental factors including rising levels of competition, employee specialisation, product diversification and organisational decentralisation would contribute to the (re)emergence of themes associated with the marketing concept.

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INTRODUCTION

Let us begin by distinguishing between the conception of the marketing concept and that of the practice of the marketing concept. Of course, the label “the marketing concept” is commonly attributed to McKitterick in 1957 (Tadajewski and Jones 2008; cf. McKay 1954). In his article, McKitterick is careful to note that many of the theoretical debates surrounding various business philosophies were “not new” (Borch 1958). They were further developments of arguments already found in the historical record, albeit with new names and labels (see Borch 1958). This would come as no surprise to Bartels (1988) who carefully distinguishes between the idea of the practice of marketing and that of the concept of marketing (see also Maynard 1941). As Bartels writes,

No single change in distributive practice in the early twentieth century so abruptly impelled the use of a new name. But the confluence of ideas producing a new conception of distributive practice did produce that result and led to the initial use of the term ‘marketing’. Marketing must therefore be regarded not simply as a practice but as a conception – a concept of a practice (Bartels 1988, p. 4; emphases in original).

In line with this way of thinking, the present article is setting out to examine the continued development of themes associated with the marketing concept (themes indicated as already present in business practice in the eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Coolsen 1960; Dixon 1992; Fullerton 1988, 1994; Jones 1994, 2004; Jones and Richardson 2007; O’Shaughnessy 1995)) up until their conceptualisation by McKitterick (1957).

The contribution of this paper is primarily methodological. The methodological stance adopted here can be labelled an attempt at the “eventalization” of the history of the marketing concept. In “Questions of Method”, Foucault described eventalization as beginning with a “breach of self evidence” (Foucault 2000, p. 226). The self-evidence of those historical reviews that assert that marketing practitioners and scholars discovered the marketing concept in the 1950s (e.g. Vargo and Lusch 2004) are problematised by the limited number of articles that have highlighted how practices associated with the marketing concept were acknowledged by business people much earlier than this decade (e.g. Jones and Richardson 2007). In addition, Keith’s (1960) account of the turn toward the consumer is seductively simple in its explanation of the emergence of the marketing concept at Pillsbury and should not be uncritically generalised across the history of marketing thought.

This account will instead rediscover the historical “supports, blockages, plays of force, strategies, and so on, that at a given moment establish what subsequently counts as being self-evident, universal, and necessary. In this sense, one is indeed effecting a sort of multiplication or pluralisation of causes” (Foucault 2000, pp. 226-227).
That is, this paper will demonstrate the patchwork of economic, political and social contingencies that worked to structure the U.S. market economy and concomitantly discussions relating to the marketing concept.

Of course, it should be noted that Foucault suggests that an attempt to sketch these multiple constitutive processes “can never properly be taken as finite” (Foucault 2000, p. 227). This is, unsurprisingly, a view that is consistent with those Foucault put forward in relation to his genealogical studies. In other words, Foucault saw the emergence of particular debates as over-determined, with the emergence of a specific discourse due to a multiplicity of potential accidents, chance events and power/knowledge relations1. This contrasts with more traditional marketing history in the sense that cause and effect relations are not sought (these are more akin to a “total history” in Foucault’s terminology). An effective history by contrast, uproots “traditional foundations and relentlessly disrupt[s] its pretended continuity” (Foucault 1991: 88). These features are reflected in the methodological injunctions that pepper Foucault’s work. And this type of effective history requires the historian to exhibit “patience” and demonstrate “a knowledge of details” (Foucault 1991, p. 76). Developing this comprehension necessarily demands a willingness to spend a great deal of time in the library amassing “a vast accumulation of source material” (Foucault 1991, p. 76). Canguilhem (1994, p. 82) summarised this point well when he wrote, “The archaeologist has to have read a great number of things that others have not read”. Again, as Canguilhem noted,

Foucault…refers…to the original texts that slumber in libraries. People have talked about ‘dust’. Fair enough. But just as a layer of dust on furniture is a measure of the housekeeper’s negligence, so a layer of dust on books is a measure of the carelessness of their custodians

(Canguilhem 1994, p. 82).

The task of this paper, therefore, is best thought of as an attempt to examine the path by which we came to arrive at the marketing concept, potentially with the result of introducing discontinuity into our understanding of the constitution of the concept. In doing so, this paper will highlight the value of detailed cross-source analysis in historical research. But more than this, in line with the methodological injunction noted above, it will not simply call upon canonical sources in relation to debates surrounding the marketing concept for the reason that non-canonical sources – that is, periodical material or out-of-print texts that very few people have read or have acknowledged as central contributions to the field – may contain references to debates that have long been written out of the historical record and could encourage us, as marketing scholars, to adopt a more sceptical stance toward what we take for granted historically and neglect to subject to critical scrutiny.

1 It must be pointed out at this stage that this paper should not be read as if it provides a progressive narrative much like Keith (1960) articulated. Historical progression in the case of this paper would function as if it were a blinker, focusing attention on teleological evolution and away from the notion that the emergence of a discourse is always “produced through a particular stage of forces” (Foucault 1991, p. 83). This paper is interested in how the marketing concept came to take the shape that it does, and it does not pretend to view the marketing concept as the culmination of any “final…historical development” (Foucault 1991, p. 83). Nor will the presentation found in the main text provide the whole picture of the multiplication of events that worked to constitute the marketing concept, for the polyhedron of intelligibility that Foucault has in mind, has an infinite number of faces.
With this in mind, the argument is organised as follows. To begin with, the existing historical treatment of the emergence of the marketing concept is reviewed in order to provide a counterpoint to the subsequent examination of the early scientific, marketing management and industrial marketing literatures. The key themes that emerge from these literatures include: an interest in the consumer; product planning in line with consumer needs, wants and desires; the gathering of market information; and the employment of a profit, rather than a volume criterion for judging marketing success. The discussion of each of these features of marketing discourse is embedded in an account of the changing nature of the U.S. economic, social and political structures.

The marketing concept

Reading the studies published in the last twenty years that have touched upon the marketing concept, a similar narrative is often presented. The comments by Vargo and Lusch (2004) are typical, where they argue that in the period between 1950 and 1980 business became more customer-focused than it had been previously. Likewise, on Webster’s (1988, 1992) interpretation, until the 1950s marketing activities were broadly consonant with a sales orientation. What he means by this is that sales volume was equated with business success and the task of marketing was to sell those items the factory could produce. Instead of positioning customers as central to all organisational activities, the main focus of a sales oriented firm was fixated on selling their product(s), and the customers were not the starting point for, say, new product development. If this is a realistic account then it should be expected that these themes will not be present in any detail in the earlier marketing literature (i.e. pre-1950). It is already known that Fullerton (1988), Hollander (1986) and Jones and Richardson (2007) have provided some limited examples of related themes and argued for further in-depth attention to the scholarly and practitioner literature. The remainder of this paper responds to their call.

Registering the presence of the consumer

From the late nineteenth and into the first two decades of the twentieth century, the industrial and market economy in the United States appeared to be on an ever increasing growth trajectory. Cable technology, mechanised industrial production, steam power, electricity, train travel, sea transportation, the completion of the Suez canal and birth of aviation, along with the growth of large cities and the more effective cultivation of agricultural areas, served to increase the quantity and variety of products and services available to a dispersed population (Coolsen 1960; Hess 1933; Lynd 1932; Shaw 1912; Weld 1923). As Lynd (1934) perceived the business climate at the time, there appeared to be “million-dollar business frontiers beckoning to any one with enough enterprise to grasp them” (Lynd 1934, p. 2). It is no surprise, Lynd asserted, that in an industrial climate that could absorb seemingly endless levels of productive output that the “consumer should have remained the forgotten man in our national thought down to the 1920’s” (Lynd 1934, p. 2; cf. Lynd 1936, p.

2 It should be acknowledged that “for a century or more, economists have made assertions that the aim of our economic and business structure and its functioning was the satisfaction of consumer needs” (Tosdal 1933, p. 157; see also Tosdal 1939b, p. 7). Dixon (1999, 2002) has done an admirable job of illustrating this theoretical emphasis. However, as Tosdal notes, “the change which is occurring today is in the nature of a long delayed translation of theory into practice” (Tosdal 1933, p. 157; see also Kemmerer et al. 1917, p. 267).
Despite the apparent lack of attention given to the consumer, and an excess of attention devoted to increasing production facilities (Gwynn 1912) and their respective outputs, the end of the First World War transformed the business and economic climate, and this led to increased emphasis “on marketing” (Converse 1933, p. 2; see also Bartels 1988, p. 123; Sisson 1919, p. 146; Weld 1940, p. 66).

During the First World War, the industrial, rather than the consumer economy, had taken precedence, with consumers effectively forced into high levels of saving and investment because of the lack of consumption opportunities. As a result of the growth in production facilities – itself a concomitant of the war effort – following the cessation of conflict there was an “excess of industrial plant capacity”, over and above that required to service post-war levels of industrial and consumer demand (The New York Times 1926, XX6). With the massive growth in the industrial infrastructure, there was greater than ever competition for the disposable income of all classes of consumers (e.g. Shibley 1928). We might, incorrectly, be inclined to think that the “roaring twenties” and the usual depiction of consumer affluence that accompany this decade would ameliorate such competitive pressures. Certainly, Leach (1994) highlights the spectacular nature of department stores such as John Wanamaker’s and the discourses of “consumptionism” that are prominent in this period (see Tadajewski 2008). The image of the flapper – the modern, affluent, consumption-oriented and rebellious young woman, who was sexually, economically and politically liberated – clearly resonates with the images Leach documents in relation to the emerging consumer society. However, the flapper represented an image and lifestyle that “did not reflect the experiences of the majority of Americans, particularly those of young working-class men and women” (Hirschbein 2001, p. 112). As Hirschbein continues,

portraits of youth in 1920s popular literature centred on the relatively small population of young men and women in the colleges and universities, as well as those who went to France during the war, and did not correspond to the social world of most young people at the time

(Hirschbein 2001, p. 115).

At this historical juncture there was also the Great Migration, that is, the “mass movement” of black and white individuals from the South to the industrial cities of

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3 With the turn towards distribution and marketing activities by business people, there was also a growth in inter-organisational cooperation and the formation of trade associations. These would share market and distribution information between members on a reciprocal basis. Such groups emerged out of the discussions of the Eddy system and were set up in order to help members of an industry function more effectively in the unpredictable business climate of the twentieth century. By distributing trade and market statistics such groups effectively formed one of the first major attempts at industry led market research. This work would be curtailed by complex anti-trust cases relating to the issue of restraint of trade. They nonetheless sensitised the business community to the value of marketing research at an early date (although there were precursors (see Bartels 1988; Converse 1945; Coolsen 1960; Keep et al. 1998)). Particularly important – and rarely noted – was that in the discourses surrounding the trade association movement and later the debates about reciprocity, (which subsequently morphed in to trade relations) was the focus on business cooperation, not destructive competition (see Tadajewski 2009), which was believed to be beneficial to producer, supplier and consumer, and thus similar in nature to White’s (1927) argument about the need for balance in the marketing system.
the North. In a similar manner to the youth that Hirschbein refers to, the majority of “black citizens of a metropolis like Harlem were too busy scraping out a living and keeping a step ahead of the rent collector to be drinking and dancing in cabarets all night” (Kornweibel 1976, p. 308). This said, the expanding middle classes could, provided they had sufficient purchasing power, obtain the growing range of consumer durables\(^4\) such as irons, washing machines and refrigerators which did sell “relatively well” (Friedman 2004, p. 243; Graham 1997; Mayer 1989). Nonetheless, among the majority of consumers, “purchasing power remained limited” (The New York Times 1926, XX6). Although, as incomes rose, so did “postponable” purchasing, that is, the purchase of products that were not immediate, essential requirements (Tosdal 1933, 1942). This had serious implications for manufacturers and retailers alike who found they had “to keep a close watch on consumer demand to determine just what to buy and promote” (The New York Times 1929, N6).

As La Londe and Morrison (1967) suggest, it was during the early 1920s that marketing scholars began to debate the benefits of systematic planning in relation to marketing “problems”. This greater emphasis coincided with the broadening of the role of the sales manager from a focus on sales alone, to greater focus on short, medium and longer term strategic activities more consonant with the role of a “marketing manager” (La Londe and Morrison 1967, p. 11). While we should be cautious in over-emphasising just how widespread the adoption of practices associated with the marketing concept were (cf. Link 1932, p. 225), the early literature does illustrate extensive recognition of the need to move away from a production orientation whereby “Not so many years ago the manufacturing organization selling to industry produced a product and told his sales force to sell it” (Frederick 1934, p. 16). It is not unexpected that early owner-managers adopted this kind of orientation. After all, those who established the first companies were more concerned with “the product itself, because they were working so intimately with it, rather than upon the customer” (Lester 1935, p. 83).

Gradually the first generation of business owners turned their operations over to “men of commercial vision and leadership” and with this product “analysis from a market or customer point of view became of the greatest importance, and the designing engineer, instead of designing what he thought the customer should have, was forced to give particular heed to meeting the desires of a changing customer market and of

\(^4\) Much like recent debates about whether choice improves or impedes consumer welfare, Lynd (1932, 1936) argued that increased consumer choice regarding available products and services meant that many consumers exhibited a “profound illiteracy” in relation to the quality and value to be derived from a given product (Lynd 1932, p. 89, 1934, p. 4). This caused serious existential tension in consumption situations for many, he claimed, and such insecurities were then exploited by business (Lynd 1936). The cosmetic industry, among others, was especially adept at this. Increased consumer choice in a given product line also made predicting consumer demand more difficult (White 1928).

\(^5\) At this time some firms took consumer preferences extremely seriously. At General Motors, Harry Weaver was charged with managing the Customer Research staff and involved with large-scale projects that used survey and interview techniques (Weaver 1941). J. George Frederick (1959) also mentioned that he had been conducting motivation research studies since 1909 for various parties and then specifically for his company, The Business Bourse. And in a paper on the role of the sales manager Doubman (1924, p. 176) explicitly draws attention to personal interviewing which “Though not as mathematically accurate as some of the other methods...gives some very personal or local information” that statistical, market surveys would not ordinarily provide.
possible methods of distribution” (Lester 1935, p. 83; see also Bartels 1988, p. 18; Bristol 1932: p. 6, p. 38, p. 70; Butler 1923: p. 18, p. 20; Tosdal 1933, p. 157, p. 161).

Similarly, Frederick (1934) attested that manufacturers were aware that they had to develop their products according to the customer’s specifications by looking at the product development process from the customer’s point of view and, in turn, segmenting the market and tailoring the product accordingly. Part of the growing interest in commercial research and the shift from a production orientation can be attributed to the pressures placed on business by the banking industry. For the purposes of this paper, this appears to be one of the major “events” in the history of marketing thought in relation to the development of the marketing concept. Foucault, it should be registered, adopted a slightly unusual definition of an “event”. Specifically, he defined an event in the following terms:

*An event...is...the reversal of a relationship of forces, the usurpation of power, the appropriation of a vocabulary turned against those who once used it...The forces operating in history are not controlled by destiny or regulative mechanisms, but respond to haphazard conflicts*

(Foucault 1991, p. 88).

It was the bankers who usurped power in this instance.

Given the growth in the size of business organisations and the scaling up of industrial production, it is relevant to note that large industrial development projects did require equally ambitious amounts of finance; finance early entrepreneurs and business managers often did not possess (Shaw 1912). In this context, banking institutions were of crucial significance for some producers. This is not to say that banking institutions were necessarily the most powerful partner in any business arrangement. Indeed, Bell argued that only in “abnormal” economic conditions will the “creditor virtually dictate...the policies of the borrower’s business” (Bell 1928, p. 152). Still, it is likely that banking institutions were more cautious than most other stakeholders, especially given that the rise in production and the growth of mass markets demanded the determination of production schedules and subsequent storage of pre-produced products “far in anticipation of likely demand” (see Bell 1928, p. 153). This caution was reflected in the fact that in the pre-1930 period, bankers were often credited with counselling their clients regarding the value of industrial and market research.

Where the owner-manager had previously been in the position of power and would ultimately be replaced by the rise of the professional manager, the 1920s were marked early on by a serious recession. This provided the banking community with a chance to direct and coordinate management activities with a level of intimacy not yet seen in the industrial world. As a member of this community opined: the “*world has changed*” (Shibley 1928, p. 95). Markets were increasingly saturated with consumer goods, and a variety of possible substitutes presented themselves for most consumption requirements, so it was therefore essential that consumer requirements were the axis of production and “*scientific administration*” (Shibley 1928). The accurate predication of future sales was vital and considered “*an absolute essential of sound industrial procedure; no longer a mere estimate, but an idea thought through from the ultimate consumer, and relating to his demand as to quality, style, and volume directly to production and to the balance and control of inventory*” (Shibley 1928, p. 11; cf. Graham 1997, p. 552). It was in the post-war world that the relationship
between bankers and producers was cemented. As Shibley put it,

*The idea that a business could be balanced and scientifically controlled when founded on a forecast was fascinating to both [manufacturers and bankers]. Manufacturers who conceived and applied it early in 1921 and 1922 were able to get their inventories and consequently their working capital, into shape promptly... Those who refused to think their problems through, or did not possess the capacity for such thinking, found themselves frozen hand and foot. In such cases bankers had to take hold and do industrial thinking themselves. This is where they learned practically and conceived the full significance of the application of scientific methods to business* (Shibley 1928, pp. 11-12).

These pressures were compounded by the Great Depression which further pressed the point home that firms had to pay greater attention to the consumer and marketplace respectively (Brainerd 1934; Bristol 1932; Enright 1936; Hess 1933; Lewis 1930; Lynd 1934, 1936; Weld 1923, 1940). To underscore the impact of the Great Depression Hotchkiss writes,

*The Depression that followed the panic of 1929 was the most severe and prolonged in modern times. In the United States, it reached its low point in 1932. In that year farm income and factory output was less than half of its 1929 volume; foreign trade was less than 30% of its 1929 volume; the number of unemployed was estimated to be nearly 15,000,000 out of a total supply of 50,000,000 workers* (Hotchkiss 1938, p. 260).

The onset the Great Depression affected firms in a variety of ways. In his study of the rise of the salesman, Friedman (2004) maintains that

*Manufacturers of industrial goods fared worse than makers of consumer items. While consumption fell by 20 percent in the first four years of the Depression, investment declined by nearly 90 percent. People put off purchasing houses or cars but still spent money on food and entertainment, going to see movies like *Duck Soup* [1933], *Mutiny on the Bounty* [1935], and *Modern Times* [1936]* (Friedman 2004, p. 228).

In an effort to stimulate demand, reinvigorate supply and improve the unemployment situation, it was towards the end of the 1930s that the Keynesian revolution occurred. From the U.K., Germany and elsewhere, governments were interested in reducing unemployment and the re-stimulation of their economies via a process of demand

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* The activities of Lillian Gilbreth are tied up with the discourse of market and consumer orientation that can be seen circulating through government, media and public policy channels. Gilbreth worked to inculcate female consumers with the idea that they should be intelligent shoppers. During the Great Depression she was prominent in attempting to define consumption as a productive activity. Via her involvement with the Emergency Committee on Employment, Gilbreth encouraged consumers to engage in careful study of the retailers and the manufacturers that they purchased products and services from. She argued that shoppers should buy from retailers who sold American goods in the most efficient way possible (cf. Lynd 1932, 1936). In this case, shopping was a means to stabilize the American economy and companies which engaged in efficient manufacturing and retailing through the use of economic and market forecasting “would be judged as good investments by astute women consumers” who would respond in kind by shopping and supporting such establishments (Graham 1997, p. 559).
management and market expansion.

Underpinning Keynesianism was, very broadly, the idea that by stimulating demand through government spending that this would be met with a corresponding increase in supply. This would, in turn, reduce unemployment, with citizens encouraged to consume larger quantities of products and services by virtue of the increased circulation of funds (see Frank 1982; Samuelson 1946; Walker and Vatter 1997). While Keynesian doctrines would be partially successful in Germany, demand management and governmental implementation of various New Deal programmes did not lift the U.S. economy out of the economic slump that followed the Great Depression. Demand management was subsequently used again during World War II more successfully.

As Daniel C. Roper maintained, prior to the stock market crash of 1929, it had become obvious that more effective distribution and greater attention to consumer requirements was “one of our major economic problems” (The New York Times 1933, p. 28). The U.S. Government was at the vanguard of such views. As the Assistant Secretary of State for Commerce, Klein registered, business and industrial research was only a relatively recent phenomenon. As little as twenty years previously research was usually the “occupation of a few individuals endowed with a favorable balance of vision and of means. Too often their work was unrecognized or the object of something akin to scorn on the part of the business man. But in the past twenty-five years research has made itself a very definite place in the development of modern industries…and it is destined in the future to play even a greater part in the improvement of our methods and the development and conservation of our natural resources” (Klein 1929, XX3).

Taking this emphasis to its logical conclusion, it was believed that marketing could be made more scientific and thus effective if those involved did one simple, but essential thing: orient all their activities around the consumer and work backwards (White 1927). For White, scientific marketing “is based on the theory of finding out what the consumer wants and then giving it to him” (White 1927, p. 99; emphasis in original). His idea is simple and resonates with more contemporary accounts of a customer-orientation: “The thesis of this book is that the beginning and the end of all marketing problems is the customer” (White 1927, p. 19; emphases in original; see also Bristol 1932, p. 116).

This focus on the consumer, while acknowledged as crucial by White (1927), Ivey (1926), Breyer (1934), Burtt (1938), Elder (1935), Frederick (1934), Leigh (1921), Shaw (1915, 1916) and Strong (1938) would, White (1927) declared, become increasingly essential in the future. The question that remained was would management actually listen to these views.

**MANAGERIAL INTUITION OR CONSUMER RESEARCH?**

It was too often the case, White (1927) insisted, that manufacturers had decided to produce those goods that please themselves, without reflecting for a moment that the marketplace might not clear them. In contrast to the “production orientation” gestured toward by Frederick (1934) as indicative of an outdated business practice, a seller, if they wanted to achieve business success, should no longer define their product or segment the market based on personal intuition alone (Weld 1923; cf. Coutant 1936, p. 28). A production orientation had, in White and Hayward’s opinion (1924, p. 397), delayed the “application of the principles of research to markets”.


However, with “the shifting of emphasis from production to distribution, the analysis of markets becomes increasingly important since the business man recognizes that it is only through a knowledge of marketing phenomena that he can compete successfully with other members of the same industry” (White and Hayward 1924, p. 397; see also The New York Times 1928, p. 47; Schell 1930, p. 29; Shaw 1912, p. 749, p. 755).

Managerial intuition and “trade instinct” (Talbert 1912) was still valuable (Otterson 1919; cf. Laidler 1930). In industrial markets, in particular, Elder (1932) talked about managers that can “sense” changes in the marketplace and the “very decided time advantage over his competitor who waits until his customers bring their problems to him” that this ability can confer (Elder 1932, p. 546).

Nevertheless the calls for close attention to market and consumer requirements were now loud and clear (Muir 1924). This said, the aforementioned sources, varied as they are, still present a far too simple picture of industry, consumer, academic and consultant relations. Businessmen had been accustomed to making their own business decisions and regardless of the deluge of literature that argued for a customer focus and the necessity of market analysis and consumer research (e.g. Graham 1997, p. 556), not all business people took heed of the advice offered by the research and academic communities. With many business people joining trade associations whose role it was to diffuse research and best practice to their members, it might be expected that such advice would have been welcomed, especially given that they were paying for it via annual subscriptions. This would be wrong. In a New York Times article entitled: “Open to Suggestions that they Do Not Follow” it is reported that in spite of large scale subscription to various trade associations and the research being undertaken by industrial, retail and independent groups “with a view to promoting business and profits, is the extent to which the results of such work are ignored by the merchants who really should benefit from them” (“Open to Suggestions that they Do Not Follow” 1926, E14). According to a “merchandise expert who does not desire to be quoted by name”, “little effort is being made by the smaller retailer to apply the findings of organizations or groups of which they are members”. This unnamed individual continues,

“These men will spend several days visiting their association meetings or conventions. They will apparently listen carefully to all that is said...But when they get back to their offices most of them either forget promptly what they have learned, or are unable to see a way to apply this knowledge to their own business

(“Open to Suggestions that they Do Not Follow” 1926, E14; see also Bristol 1932; Coutant 1936, 1937a, 1937b; Keyes 1949; White 1940).

Nor does this appear to be unusual behaviour. Hess (1924), Elder (1932) and Schell (1930) document the unwillingness of managers to realise the benefits of consumer research, even given the changing nature of demand7. Not only are manufacturers unwilling to register fluctuations in consumer demand (presumably therefore ignoring available research), they also ignored the benefits of learning from competitors actions (cf. Tadajewski 2009; White 1938, p. 164). On this point Schell (1930) is unequivocal:

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7 Many managers were apparently only paying “lip service to the dogma that ‘the Customer is King’” (Elder 1932, p. 543).
While it is true that the American industrialist more quickly accepts the discoveries of the pioneer than does the foreign manager, yet it is equally true that certain of our great industries are notably backward in their unwillingness to look about them and to benefit from the experiences of others... In every industry we find a proportion of establishments whose policies are thus controlled and in such plants we find senescence and ossification (Schell 1930, p. 35).

What was believed to be critical in this context was the maintenance of a finely “balanced relationship” (White 1927) between the interests of the consumer, producer, retailer and government, as we shall see.

“BALANCE” AND A PAN-COMPANY FOCUS ON THE CONSUMER

For White (1927) there needed to be balance in the marketing system. It is not, nor should it be, biased in favour of the interests of one group (cf. Anshen 1941; Means 1934; Ulman 1937). It is not as unbalanced in favour of manufacturers, dealers or department stores as may be supposed, White suggested. It is contingent “on a nicely balanced relationship between producer and consumer, whereby each party is benefited”. Just as one of the aims of scientific management was to promote a better relationship between the company and the workmen, so the primary objective of scientific marketing should be to promote a better relationship between the company and consuming public” (White 1927, p. 99; see also Lester 1935, p. 212).

All members of an organisation, irrespective of functional boundaries, White said, had to realise that they had to work together in order to effectively satisfy the customer and in so doing, achieve whatever organisational objectives were the goals of the company. For our purpose here General Motors provides a suitable case study of this type of cross-functional focus on the consumer. In an address to stockholders in 1933 Alfred P. Sloan indicated the centrality of consumer research to GM. The customer research department was not, he maintained, to be considered an “isolated

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8 Although Lynd does register that similar discourses relating to “balance” in business–customer relations were often meant sincerely (e.g. Doubman 1924, p. 179) and that it was a “widespread sincere belief among businessmen that the consumer controls production” (Lynd 1932, p. 91), this begged the question of who exactly thought “deliberate obsolescence” was in the interest of the consumer. What, he added, was the function of the advertising industry if business was responding to consumer demand (Lynd 1936, p. 488; see also Lynd 1934, p. 6; White 1928); and why were department stores described as attempting to stimulate “want creation” (Jones 1905)?

9 Such espousals of a customer orientation could equally be viewed as a rhetorical move designed to legitimise business activity in the face of accusations of business profiteering to the detriment of organised labour and consumers (e.g. Capper 1920; Filene 1922). The marketing system was biased in favour of producer interests in certain respects; consumers faced marked information asymmetries regarding product quality and such imbalances were further supported by government policy (e.g. Lynd 1934, p. 3) and legal challenges against pro-consumer laws mounted by some of the biggest brand names during the 1920s and 30s (Lynd 1932, 1936). Nor were all consumers equal in the marketplace. Lynd repeatedly made reference to the fact that the wealthy or “large customers” (White 1928) exerted disproportionate influence in determining those goods that were produced (see Lynd 1932, p. 88, 1936, p. 487n7).
"department" (Weaver 1935) whose activities did not impinge on those of the rest of the organisation. Far from it,

To discuss consumer research as a functional activity would give an erroneous impression. In its broad implications it is more in the nature of an operating philosophy; which, to be fully effective, must extend through all phases of a business – weighing every action from the standpoint of how it affects the good will of the institution, recognizing that the quickest way to profits – and the permanent assurance of such profits – is to serve the customer in the ways in which the customer wants to be served.

(Sloan in Weaver 1935, p. 95n4; emphases in original).

In the final analysis, there had to be explicit coordination of all organisational activities that relate to the consumer for the very simple reason that all such “factors improve or tear down customer relationships” (Lester 1935, p. 212).

On a related point, the connections between customer orientation, satisfaction and organisational objectives were repeatedly stressed (e.g. Hess 1924; White and Hayward 1924; Ivey 1926; White 1927; Klein 1929; Schell 1930; Elder 1932; Nystrom 1932; Weaver 1935; Tosdal 1939a; Weaver 1941; Soule 1944a, 1944b; Ashcroft 1951). But it is only a customer orientation to the point that any consumer-related activities remain profitable for the organisation. Much like the arguments later put forward by McKitterick (1957) and Borch (1958) early marketing scholars and practitioners registered the value of producing goods and performing services that the consumer would appreciate. Mere appreciation, although valuable in terms of continued consumer good-will, is not necessarily commensurate with profit or market share objectives.

As White and Hayward acknowledged: “It does not always follow that the ideal product is the best one to manufacture” (1924, p. 403; cf. Bentley 1895, p. 111). Complimenting this point, Elder (1932) asserted that regardless of consumer preferences, an organisation had to determine which of those espoused desires the consumer would be willing to purchase:

The man who is charged with the responsibility of keeping the design in harmony with market requirements must be a many-sided individual. He must be a keen student of the underlying trends of modern life, with sufficient imagination to realize their import to his own business. He must be sufficiently sales-minded to distinguish between those improvements that consumers would like and those they will pay for. He must be thoroughly acquainted with modern manufacturing processes and materials, their possibilities and their limitations. He must be a man of vision, not hampered by traditional limitations; but not a visionary who refuses practical considerations.

(Elder 1932, p. 545).

In a cautionary moment, Weaver pointed out that “enthusiasm for this new tool, consumer research, and the desire to curry immediate favor by invoking it, should be tempered with due regard to other factors” (Weaver 1935, p. 96). Consumer research, while very useful in terms of product development and refinement, is not considered an appropriate substitute for managerial judgment and decision-making, for the reason that:

blind acquiescence to the expressed tastes and desires of the consumer, which, as applied to a highly technical product, might lead to violations of sound engineering,
to constructional difficulties, or to increases in cost outweighing the advantages to be gained

(Weaver 1935, p. 96; see also Soule 1944a: 169, 1944b: 210; cf. Palmer 1934, pp. 45-46).

Obviously, there were those customers who would have products tailored to their requirements and organisations and writers of this time were cognisant of the need to cater to the demands of those groups. Likewise, commentators and business people were equally aware of the need to carefully select and cultivate relationships with their most profitable customers (Coutant 1937a; Muir 1924; White and Hayward 1924), as well as appreciating the importance of divesting unprofitable customers in the long term.

**PROFIT NOT (ALWAYS) VOLUME CONSIDERATIONS**

*The second fundamental on which the marketing philosophy rests is that it is rooted in the profit concept, not the volume concept*

(Borch 1958, p. 20).

Before charting the movement away from the customer-orientation discussed above toward the production orientation required during the Second World War, the final issue to be examined is customer divestment. The marketing concept, after all, indicates that organisations should only seek to do business with those customers that contribute to the satisfaction of organisational objectives (Houston 1986). It follows that an organisation should seek to divest or never interact with those customers who do not contribute to organisational objectives.

To draw from one detailed example (an alternative, for instance, would be Muir (1924, pp. 85-94)), Frederick (1934) highlighted the case of a manufacturer who had been selling his products through distributors and direct to customers. When this manufacturer began to conduct a detailed study of the costs of the various selling practices they were using, it was found that “97.3%” of sales revenue was generated from “42.5%” of his customers. Even worse, the manufacturer was losing money on small orders because it cost “him $2.98 to pack, ship, bill, and collect for any order regardless of its size. Therefore, he suffered a direct operating loss on most of the orders received from...[57.5] per cent of his customers, in addition to the loss resulting from the waste incurred by permitting his salesmen to devote so much time to this group” (Frederick 1934, p. 307).

The main question to answer in this case, Frederick claimed, was whether the manufacturer should continue to serve those accounts that were unprofitable in the short-term, in anticipation that they may become profitable at sometime in the future. Or would divestment be a more appropriate stratagem in recognition that not all customers were equally profitable?

In this case, Frederick noted that the manufacturer decided that it was better to concentrate his sales activities on those customers who were generating the most profit – the 42.5% of customers – and not to sell to the 57.5% of unprofitable customers. Instead of fulfilling “small orders at a loss”, the firm’s salespeople substantially reduced a “vast amount of general solicitation work” by divesting unprofitable customers with the “result that they were able to concentrate on the profitable, and potentially profitable, accounts” (Frederick 1934, pp. 307-308; see

What, in essence, Frederick was arguing, was that the implementation of this strategy meant that the “manufacturer’s salesmen were relieved of more than 50 per cent of the calls they formerly had to make, and consequently, that they could sell more effectively to the profitable customers, by giving more thought to their production problems, and by spending more time in consultation with these customers and their purchasing agents, thus rendering much more specialized and helpful service” (Frederick 1934, p. 308).

One major benefit of this type of selective distribution and sales activity was the amount of close contact and customisation of the manufacturer’s product to customer specifications that could take place. Here the onus was on the sales-manager to “differentiate between profitable and unprofitable customers, [and] to determine the frequency with which the profitable customers shall be visited” (Elder 1935, p. 121; see also Elder 1935, p. 123). This divestment strategy can be differentiated from a sales oriented approach inasmuch as customers were not treated as if they were all equal (Webster 1988). As the case studies provided by Frederick (1934) and Elder (1935) illustrate, firms sought to divest themselves of unprofitable customers and concentrate their attention on the smaller group of profitable consumers, seeking to build longer-term relationships with them, in order to better serve their client base (see Tosdal 1942, p. 79).

By way of a conclusion, this account will now document the shift, at least in part, from a customer orientation; a move that was encouraged by the onset of the Second World War. By pointing to the relevant social, economic and technological developments post World War II, this analysis will be better situated to appreciate the environmental features that provided the conditions of possibility that contributed to the labelling of the marketing concept, as presented in the work of Borch (1958), McKay (1954) and McKitterick (1957).

WORLD WAR II: A RETURN TO A PRODUCTION ORIENTATION

The foregoing discussion has highlighted the attention devoted to a market and customer orientation that can be found in the history of marketing thought and business practice. Nonetheless, with the Second World War looming, the debate shifted focus from the consumer and back toward a production orientation (Bliss 1942). In an effort to ready the economy and military for a prolonged, bloody battle, the American industrial structure rapidly expanded its production capabilities. The shift from a civilian economy to a war economy was not immediate however (Bliss 1942). While the U.S. Government had been in a state of “preparedness” for potential conflict from 1939, there was resistance from industry during 1940 and into 1941 regarding the restriction of civilian production, especially by the automotive industry who “resisted intensely any curtailment and conversion that disturbed competitive positions” (Kositinen 2004, p. 132).

By April of 1941, the Bureau of Research and Statistics reported that consumer durable producers were beginning to engage in curtailment, balancing the need to meet defence demands and “essential” consumer requirements (Kositinen 2004; see Bliss 1942, p. 107; Tosdal 1942, p. 76, p. 79).
Consistent with the need to limit civilian production, the U.S. Government exerted considerable, but decentralised, influence on industry via numerous war agencies. Among the more notable were the Office for Emergency Management and its related agency, the National Defence Advisory Commission, which were involved with procurement and industrial expansion. On the civilian side, the Office of Price Administration was charged with the stabilisation “of prices, holding down the cost of living, and guarding against profiteering” (Kositinen 2004, p. 97). A number of marketing scholars who later won acclaim for their academic prowess were associated with this department including Stanley Hollander, Wendell Smith and Wroe Alderson (Emerald Now 2001; Wooliscroft 2006; Wright 1966). Alderson also served in a variety of other departments, including the Bureau of Economic Warfare and the Foreign Economic Administration.

Of course, the expansion and efficient running of all productive industry was the most pressing task facing industry during the war (Bliss 1942; Wulfeck 1945). Indeed, it was a function of the lack of demand following the Great Depression and the economic stagnation of the early 1930s, as well as the recession of 1937, that enabled the effective mobilisation of the necessary production capabilities in a limited time frame (Hotchkiss 1938). Even so, the Army, Navy and other wartime bodies demanded greater levels of production, which were only obtainable via the building of new production facilities.

One impact of this reorientation away from the civilian economy was that competition in these industries was substantially reduced. Manufacturers, driven by the demands of the war economy and by governmental edict, rapidly sought to standardise their products, with the major problem for industry not one of actually selling their goods, as it had been prior to the war, but production (Shoup 1942; Tosdal 1941). With the switch from civilian to war production, Bliss asserted that “the marketing function of business is subject to considerable curtailment…When the government replaces individual consumers, retail stores, wholesalers, and jobbers as the purchaser of American products, the need for sales organizations is diminished” (Bliss 1942, p. 110; see Kyrk 1942; Weld 1940; cf. Tosdal 1941, p. 216). Regardless of the conversion of civilian industry to military production this did not mean that the U.S. was no longer a “consumers paradise” (Kennedy 1999):

"Though Roosevelt had warned that the nation could not afford to build a war economy on top of a consumer economy, in fact the United States managed to do exactly that... Three developments underwrote the war’s fantastic explosion of goods: full resource utilization, including both unemployed workers and idle plants; the diversion of resources, especially underutilized agricultural labour, from lower to higher-productivity employments; and notable gains in productivity, fuelled by burgeoning investment in more efficient plant and equipment, increased reliance on electrical power, and technological improvements" (Kennedy 1999, p. 645).

Although Bliss registered the benefits of industrial expansion for the U.S. economy, he, like many observers at the time was also acutely aware that war was usually followed by recession. As such, industrial expansion had to be met with a corresponding increase in marketing efficiency, since the major problem with massively expanding industry to meet wartime requirements was that the extra industrial capacity would consequently be “available to swell or to glut the markets of the postwar period. Not only will competition be greater from company to company, but also from industry to industry...How profitably to distribute the products of this increased capacity is
a problem to which thought cannot be directed too early” (Bliss 1942, p. 115; see Tosdal 1942, p. 75).

Clearly, Bliss is exhorting companies to ready themselves for the return to a customer-attentive civilian economy that would inevitably follow the war (Tosdal 1941). Industry had, as documented above, focused their attention on production efficiency and the development of new technologies and methods of construction (Ashcroft 1951; Shoup 1942; Tosdal 1942). The post-war economy did not bring this to an immediate halt. But rather complimented this further with a boom in research and development activity. This accelerated in the 1950s. Furthermore, competition escalated “dramatically both within the United States and in world markets...[and] American industry once again turned its attention toward problems in the marketing arena” in ever greater numbers (Hunt and Goolsby 1988, p. 42).

**AFTER THE WAR, RETURNING TO A CIVILIAN ECONOMY**

According to Jacoby “since World War II...[research activity has] been rising between 10 and 40 percent every year” (1962, p. 33). More companies devoted considerable resources to research and development and technological advances decreased industrial product life cycles and accelerated product and technical obsolescence (Soule 1944a). Technological progress was “changing the...structures of business organizations in the following ways: diminishing the relative importance of the production components of organization, and to some extent the financial components, while greatly enhancing the relative importance of the marketing and research and development components” (Jacoby 1962, p. 36).

The stabilisation of markets was, of course, a key issue in the post-war world. Avoiding a boom/bust economic climate required that production be related to “long-term levels of demand”, rather than relatively short-term “sales fluctuations” (Bliss 1942; The New York Times 1949). And demand, so the argument went, “may be stabilised by more...[careful] advertising, merchandising, and pricing programs... Business also was advised to make more use of market research by improving company research staffs as well as by studying data compiled by outside research organizations” (The New York Times 1949, p. 20). Even with these recommendations, firms reoriented themselves to the economic climate in a comparatively slow manner.

McLean (1958) referred to the comments of a Senior Vice President of the Continental Oil Company who assesses why a shift from a production to a customer-orientation took so long after the war. Not only was the collection of market research still quite a new task for many companies, especially smaller companies (who, as stated above, previously ignored research findings despite funding the research). It was even more difficult for many traditionally sales oriented organisations to translate the results of research into actionable organisational policies and products. One reason for this, McLean (1958) posited, was that actually listening to customer complaints or acting upon research that does not cohere with one’s own perception does not “come naturally” to most salespeople (who were often the conduits for the collection and dissemination of research).

And McLean makes the case that, a good salesman will have learnt

...to talk around adverse facts which may be raised by unreceptive customers. He also learns to brush aside the unhappy circumstance of a lost sale and to approach each new prospect with spirit and enthusiasm. A good salesman thus automatically develops into
a ‘good forgetter’ and learns not to let his mind be cluttered, or his work be influenced, by negative experiences. He learns to look at the world through some special ‘salesman’s glasses’ which shut out the negative and accentuate the positive. Later on when he reaches higher management levels and when control reports begin to come across his desk, he intuitively closes his mind to them and searches for, or has his subordinates prepare, some other kinds of figures that will be more satisfying to him (McLean 1958, p. 4).

Whether or not salesmen10 find this task difficult, and whether or not it would continue to bias their interpretation of business conditions (i.e. as they rise up the corporate hierarchy), it was more and more important that firms did pay greater attention to their consumers’ requirements and modify short, medium and long-term plans in accordance with predicted environmental changes. The salesman could no longer easily “sell anything...by [the] sheer force of his personality” (Burtt 1941, p. 145; emphasis in original). This was because post-war consumers had greater levels of disposable income and a large number of producers competing for their custom (Borch 1958).

In addition, manufacturers such as GM, General Electric, General Wood and retailers like Sears, Roebuck and Company were also faced with pressures to reduce costs. They did this by seeking out and creating new markets in order to offset competitive pressures and ameliorate the fixed costs associated with running large automated production plants11 (Borch 1958; McKitterick 1957; Moore 1957). Alongside these marketplace conditions, the growing complexity of organisational structures, due to managerial decentralisation, occasionally resulted in the breakdown of intra-departmental communication (Borch 1958; McLean 1958; McKitterick 1957; Moore 1957). Furthermore, the “preparation of new plants, products and promotions requires increasing decision lead time, which certainly adds a burden to accurate forecasting; and as specialization grows, the number of employees who understand any whole situation and can make any whole decisions keeps shrinking” (Borch 1958, p. 22; emphases in original).

Each of these factors – increasing levels of competition, employee specialisation, product diversification, organisational decentralisation, environmental complexity, the recessionary conditions of 1957 and 1958, to name but a few – contributed “to the development of the marketing philosophy” (Borch 1958, p. 21; see also Moore 1957); although not all organisations adopted the marketing concept wholeheartedly.

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10 According to Cheskin salespeople were not alone in ignoring research; “creative” people did likewise (Cheskin 1960, p. 145).

11 An important political-economic factor requiring that U.S. organisations continue to improve their operational effectiveness and presumably customer orientation (Smith 1995) was the movement of gold from the U.S. during 1958 (which influenced investment in the U.S.) (Drucker 1959), as well as the decline in exports of U.S. products. This decline was due to a variety of factors including the growth in investment in Europe due to higher interest rates and the Suez crisis (see The New York Times 1958, 1959a, 1959b). Far from the post-WWII world where “the entire world needed every kind of American product from foodstuffs to machinery” the recovery of war-damaged nations courtesy of the Marshall Plan had the effect of improving the industrial infrastructure of European nations (Warburg 1961: SM10), thus increasing levels of competition. Rising consumer income meant that consumers could choose from the best products available, from whichever source suited their requirements (Drucker 1961; The New York Times 1959, p. 37). The U.S. had, at the same time, become complacent in its industrial pre-eminence and “priced and featherbedded itself out of the world markets” (Warburg 1961, p. 53; cf. Nixon et al. 1959).
(Keith 1960; O’Brien 1961; see Kotler 1967, p. 139).

Many of the commentators above such as McKitterick (1957), Moore (1957) and Borch (1958) worked or researched at large organisations (GM, Sears, Roebuck and Company, and General Electric respectively) and Moore (1957) argued that the “purest examples” of the application of the marketing concept were found in “merchandising organizations”. But it was not simply manufacturer intransigence that made them less interested in understanding the consumer’s requirements. There were other factors that impacted upon their receptivity to market and consumer research.

In an interesting study, Henry Link outlined three profiles of business executives. The first is “very enamoured [sic] of the development of polls of public opinion and consumer studies and has accepted them in a worshipful and uncritical attitude” (Thorndike et al. 1942, p. 11). The second is “very sceptical” of research and “doesn’t believe in consumer research at all” (Thorndike et al. 1942, p. 11.) The third is sceptical, but not unwilling to commission consumer research: “He is willing to accept a study only if it meets certain scientific standards” (Thorndike et al. 1942, p. 11). In some instances, the lack of appropriate training for researchers led to studies being criticised for lacking credibility. The research analyst was depicted as having “rushed to a conclusion without securing an adequate set of facts, or…[for having] not been able to present his material in a more convincing manner” (White 1940, p. 185; see also Weld 1940, p. 69).

Now, Link does appreciate that the number of executives subscribing to the second position is gradually declining (see T osdal 1942). Nevertheless, we should not forget that actually predicting consumer needs, wants and desires remains extremely difficult (Bliss 1942). In fact, “In the area of civilian needs, conditions seem to defy forecasting and the widespread use in government agencies of complex statistical devices in estimating civilian needs did not carry much conviction for the results they produced. Producers, of course, were troubled by these uncertainties”(Bliss 1942, p. 111).

Bartels’ also underscored producer concerns: “It is said that the inadequacies of existing research methods became more apparent in 1949 and 1950” (Bartels 1988: 134; see also Nash 1937). This was not simply because, as Bartels believed, “businesses became uneasy about accumulating inventories12 [of consumer motivation] and changes in consumer demands” (Bartels 1988, p. 134). Another possible reason was the 1948 Presidential election, where polling organisations using complex statistical methods nonetheless failed to predict the result with even a semblance of accuracy (Ashcroft 1951). Nor did business managers differentiate polling from market research, as the following comment indicates:

*For most observers, last week’s ‘wrong way’ expertise [sic] by some public opinion pollsters was funny. But market research technicians – the business world’s pollsters*

12 The work of Copeland (1924) is the exemplar here. The problem with these lists of consumer motivations was that even though the scholars involved in their production argued that a priori theorisation should be avoided, this was precisely what they then did. Later writers argued that such lists could not possibly cover the range of potential consumer motives (Britt 1950). Demands were subsequently made for consumer behaviour researchers to engage in actual fieldwork studying consumer motivation(s) (Britt 1950; McGregor 1940). Encouraging this was the acknowledgement that there were serious voids in knowledge about the consumer and this can be connected with the rise of motivation research (Tadajewski 2006b).
Alderson felt compelled to respond: "Wroe Alderson, past president of the American Marketing Association, said market research seeks facts while public opinion deals with the vaguer items of opinion and attitude" (The New York Times 1949, p. 20). This is not to suggest that all business people necessarily turned away from polling research. Raymond Bauer (1958) clearly indicates that one third of all American businesses still used "polling methods" for research purposes. Although, it is at this moment that motivation research with its combination of qualitative and quantitative methods and the frequent denunciations of survey research as "nose counting" rose to prominence (Tadajewski 2006b). Here, a failed prediction of a Presidential election might be partly responsible for encouraging some business people to question the scientific credibility of survey research and at least experiment with motivation research.13

This analysis must draw to a close. There is no better way to end this foray into the history of marketing thought than to cite McKitterick’s (1957, p. 76) summary of the factors that contributed to the birth of marketing concept, since it illustrates how different accounts of this development both reveal and elide certain elements of our history, and serves to further flesh out our "polyhedron of intelligibility":

...business management has very difficult planning decisions to make, requiring that it foresee and analyze many alternative developments relating to its customers, competitors, and its own resources, and management must get these decisions made by people who are organized in an enormously complex structure, in which they are aware of the interrelationships of their part and the business, but unable to adequately see the whole business and its environment, and the ends to be served by these forecasts and decisions are becoming increasingly diffuse and uncertain. It is in this sort of setting that the marketing concept was born.

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13 This is an extremely complicated debate and no assumption of monocausality is being assumed. Indeed, as Foucault discussed his "method", he called explicitly for the construction of a "polyhedron of intelligibility" (Foucault 1991, p. 77). Thus, when it is argued that the polling incident did impact on the perception of statistical, survey research it should not be assumed that our discursive and non-discursive contestation ended there. Our textbooks with their positivistic, quantitative approaches that remain highly valued in American universities tell us that. At this historical point however, many were critical of polling research (cf. Bauer 1958). Louis Cheskin (1960, p. 112), a motivation researcher, pointed out that "The national elections of 1948 were an outstanding example of the unreliability of polling methods. Dr. Gallup, Dr. Roper and other pollsters failed to predict the election results because many [respondents] just didn’t know or would not say how they would vote. People could tell the interviewer what they thought they would do when they walked into the voting booth, and sometimes they did. What people think they will do and what they actually do when they have to act are often entirely different". On this basis, Cheskin called for more non-conscious reaction research. Supported by the funding from the Ford Foundation, business education and research would nonetheless move toward quantitative, "positivistic" research, deeply influenced by information processing views of the consumer that were developing in computer science and ultimately marketing (Tadajewski 2006a).
CONCLUSION

In this paper existing historical accounts of the development of the marketing concept have been problematised. As Zuckerman and Carsky (1990) have previously noted, given the interest in the consumer by marketing scholars and practitioners, it is interesting to speculate why marketing scholarship actually “came so late to its focus on the consumer. Marketing practitioners knew early on that they must pay attention to consumer needs, must investigate and learn about those needs...Recognition of marketing theory’s slow response to this concept forms an interesting addition to marketing history” (Zuckerman and Carsky 1990, p. 316).

It was demonstrated that marketing scholars did register early in the last century that an understanding of consumer behaviour and consumption choices was vital. Still, it would appear that business practitioners were occasionally less enamoured with the idea of getting close to the consumer or with consumer research than a reading of early marketing texts could lead us to believe (Burtt 1941; Thorndike et al. 1942; Weld 1940). They should not be condemned for this, as a variety of factors may have inclined them to turn away from their role as the consumer’s voice in their organisation. The failure of complex statistical routines to predict the 1948 Presidential election was one, among a complex number of factors, that was significant in this case.

There are some limitations to the above analysis that deserve to be noted. Firstly regardless of the protestations of scholars and practitioners the consumer has not always been treated especially well. Books such as Chase and Schlink’s (1927) Your Money’s Worth, Chase’s (1931) The Nemesis of American Business, Schlink and Kallet’s (1933) 100,000,000 Guinea Pigs, C.W. Mills’ (1951) White Collar, Packard’s (1959) The Hidden Persuaders, or Nader’s (1965) Unsafe at Any Speed among many others demonstrate this. Palmer (1934), for example, discussed various examples of unscrupulous marketing practice in an attempt to forewarn consumers.

To be sure, there are always counterexamples to any historical narrative such as that presented above if one is not cautious enough about the claims being made. As Brown (2001a) has perceptively argued, snake oil medicine shows were relatively commonplace over the period 1870 to 1950. Such marketing tactics thus overlapped with the more sober examples provided in this paper. Marketers have, in other words, always diverged in terms of the way they approach the customer. Some have carefully conducted consumer and market research, while others have preferred their own intuition. Equally, other companies have realised that customers often do not know what they want or cannot articulate it clearly, as Weaver (1935, 1941) at GM occasionally admitted (see Brown 2001b).

What hopefully this paper has shown is that clear, linear histories often elide more than they reveal. By looking more closely at the historical record, we can often see that the development of our discipline was far more contingent on social, political and economic changes than we may have otherwise anticipated.

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