

# 2

# History

*Keith Gori*

*“History is not just events and chronology; it is carried forward in the human consciousness. The past is alive in the present and may shape the emerging future.”*

**Andrew Pettigrew, Business Historian**

Historical research is a growing field within the academic discipline of marketing. This chapter looks at why it is important to study the history of marketing and provides a brief (albeit incomplete) analysis of some major marketing developments in history. The case study of Cadbury offers an example of a company with a rich marketing history.

## Why study (marketing) history?

A generally accepted understanding of history is the study of the past by those in the present; or, as Carr (1990: 55) puts it, the, “process of interaction between the historian and his facts, an unending dialogue between the present and the past...both the inquiry conducted by the historian and the facts of the past into which he enquires.”

We can understand, then, what history is in this way, but the question remains as to why we should be interested in or by it. Historians and philosophers of history have engaged in lengthy debates over both the purpose of studying history and on what that history might include. As Stearns (1998: 1) writes, “People live in the present. They plan for and worry about the future. History, however, is the study of the past.” Stearns (1998) sets out a number of propositions on which the study of history can be justified:

- 1 It helps us understand people and societies.** History offers a mass of information about how people and societies behave, the understanding of which is difficult (though many disciplines try). Stearns (1998) argues

that history offers the only extensive evidence base on which to analyse how societies function.

- 2 It helps us to understand change and how things came to be.** Stearns (1998) claims that the past causes the present. Although history is about much more than chronological patterns, it is clear that we cannot understand the significance of certain contemporary issues without trying to understand their root causes.
- 3 Its has importance in our own lives and for providing identity.** Stearns (1998) celebrates the beauty of history well told and of the 'pastness of the past', arguing that history is enjoyable and interesting. Moreover it provides identity, be it a family identity, a national identity, or a political identity.
- 4 It provides moral understanding and is essential for good citizenship.** He suggests that history provides a terrain for moral contemplation, and allows us to question the characters and events of the past in relation to our own moral views. By doing so, it is hoped that advancement can be made in the present.

Taking these four examples we can argue that marketing needs history in the same way. Marketing needs to understand the processes by which the people, organisations and systems in which it operates have come to be as they are. History can be interesting for students of marketing, marketers and others to engage with the discipline's past. It provides the discipline with identity, assists in moral understanding and helps to ensure that marketing can act for progress for business, consumers, and wider society.

## Marketing in the Ancient World

Marketing is a relatively young academic discipline, having received sustained scholarly attention for just over a century, and although there has been some historical attention given to both theory and practice in this period (Jones, 2010), historical research in marketing is not as well developed as it is in, for example, business, management or accounting. Jones (2009a) claims that the development of these fields is in a more advanced position due to their having a longer standing critical and pluralist culture, or having considerable contribution from scholars working in history departments rather than business or management schools. Given the wide-ranging debate, and the growing prominence of interpretive and qualitatively driven research in marketing and consumer research, it is perhaps unsurprising that there

has been a considerable growth in the volume of historical research during recent decades. As the qualitative, interpretive methods generally utilised in historical research have increasingly thrived, so a space has been created for historical research in marketing. This growth in historical research in marketing has included the development of a biennial conference devoted to the subject (running since 1983), increased publication of historically orientated articles in marketing journals, and more recently the development of a dedicated journal, the *Journal of Historical Research in Marketing* (Jones, 2010).

Historical research in marketing has developed in two broad areas: marketing history, and the history of marketing thought. Marketing history tends to analyse companies, industries or economies in order to explore the histories of advertising, retailing, product design, distribution, and other elements of the marketing mix; whereas the history of marketing thought scrutinises the philosophical development of marketing ideas, concepts and theory (Jones, 2009b; 2010). Both approaches offer the historical depth of analysis that any successful field ought to pursue, and have gone a long way towards correcting the “poverty of ahistorical analysis” from which the discipline suffered (Fullerton, 1987: 97). Beyond the ‘specialist’ marketing historians that engage in these kinds of research, many marketing publications begin with a ‘potted history’ of the theoretical concepts and approaches under investigation and the contextual means through which this is being studied. Though not particularly common, students on both undergraduate and postgraduate degree programmes can take a historical marketing issue or development as the basis for their dissertations or theses, particularly given the increasing use and accessibility of online archives and materials (Gori & Perez-Vega, 2015).

Having questioned why we might be interested in the history of marketing, the chapter continues with some historical analysis of the concept of marketing and its development in society. Organising a history of a vast period of time and a broad concept such as marketing could be approached in a number of ways, including chronologically by geography, or arranged by topics within the broader subject (e.g. distribution, promotion etc). Here a chronological approach is taken, although this can prove difficult in itself. Ideally, such a periodization should hinge on key events rather than being organised by a more binary dating system such as discussion of each decade or century (Hollander et al., 2005). For example, historians have often talked about the long-eighteenth (Baines, 2004), the long-nineteenth (Hobsbawm, 1962; 1975; 1987) or the short-twentieth century (Hobsbawm, 1994) to acknowledge and embrace this. The pitfalls can be seen in Egan’s (2008) history of twentieth century marketing which often falls into the trap of discussing decade-by-decade