

A History of Advertising and Sales Promotion

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Abstract

Purpose – Advertising may have more than its share of historical works. Formal histories date to the 19th century, and general historical texts were written in the 1920s, 1950s, 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s. The 1980s and 1990s were especially productive decades for advertising historians. This paper presents a review and synthesis of this body of historical writings and research, driven by three objectives: (1) to avoid the “Americanization” and “Modernization” methodological-theoretical paradigmatic norms and limitations that characterize much of the prior historical research on advertising; (2) to directly avoid the Americanization paradigmatic limitation by synthesizing cross-cultural and global historical research findings; and (3) to present a brief history of sales promotion, with an emphasis on when and why it fully evolved as a marketing subdiscipline, with its own specialized practitioners and consultancies.

Approach – The search for sources began with a list of more than 3,000 works, originally compiled for a study of the most influential contributions to advertising’s literature. These sources were then augmented with a database search, with the goal of locating additional books, book chapters, and refereed journal articles focusing on relevant topics specifically outside the scope of the Americanization and Modernization paradigms. The narrative then reviews several general histories of advertising and synthesizes the findings with those published in scholarly journals. The narrative is structured using an *a priori* periodization scheme consisting of five periods: “Medieval” advertising (developments occurring prior to the end of the Middle Ages), “Early-Modern” advertising (the end of the Middle Ages to the start of the Industrial Revolution), “Late-Modern” advertising (the 19th century), “Contemporary” advertising (the 1900s to the 1950s), and “Post-Modern” advertising (the remaining years of the 20th century and beginning of the 21st).

Limitations – Although classic works and the most recent research journal articles are included in this review and synthesis, the paper does not report any primary research findings. The review of the academic literature was also not comprehensive, but emphasized selected works.

Contribution – The historiography of advertising has been criticized for promulgating methodological-theoretical norms and paradigmatic approaches that view advertising as a predominantly Americanized leviathan of progressive modernity. Also neglected by marketing historians is the history of sales promotion as a related and important marketing subdiscipline. This paper presents a more contextually sensitive and comprehensive narrative of the development of advertising and sales promotion history than has appeared before. Among the findings are several key ones. First, advertising existed much earlier than the beginning of the 20th century, it came into use for similar reasons, and much the same pattern of reasons occurred across the globe, including among the ancient civilizations of the Middle and Far East. Second, although American professional practices and consumer culture were quite influential during the 20th century, findings show that industry structures, professional practices, and creative expression often evolved independently from American influence, both before and during the 20th century. Third, many of the most influential Late Modern and Contemporary advertising pioneers contributed to developments and the widespread use of both advertising and sales promotion. Indeed, sales promotion did not fully evolve as a specialized subdiscipline, with its own independent practitioners and consultancies, until the 1970s.

Key Words – marketing history, advertising history, sales promotion history

Paper Type – Research Paper

The full paper will appear as a chapter in the upcoming "Routledge Companion to Marketing History". The Companion's publisher has required that the chapter not be published elsewhere. Therefore, only an abstract can be included in the CHARM 2015 Proceedings.