
The American Marketing Journal, the National Marketing Review, and the Intellectual Origins of the Journal of Marketing

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This study is an intellectual history of marketing. Intellectual history investigates the evolution of ideas within the larger societies in which they are expressed. Intellectual history is concerned with the individuals who produce thought and research and examines their lives and their professional interactions. Literature reviews, in contrast, are not historical because they generally focus entirely on texts with little regard for people, for broader contexts and trends, and for why ideas are accepted or rejected at a given time (Fullerton and Punj 2004). Applied to the field of marketing, intellectual history documents the evolution of marketing thought, while also giving biographical accounts of the many forerunners who created and disseminated marketing ideas. From this perspective, theory in marketing is socially constructed over time.

The state of marketing thought in 1936, when the Journal of Marketing (JM) was founded, is the historical phenomenon of interest. JM has been the most important scholarly journal in marketing for over 70 years and so the ideas in play when it was created are relevant to marketing scholars today. The present study explores the foundational ideas of JM – marketing’s original intent so to speak – through an analysis of The American Marketing Journal (TAMJ) and The National Marketing Review (NMR), whose covers are reproduced in Figure 1. Published between 1934-1936, these two journals merged to form JM in July, 1936. Their sponsoring organizations, the American Marketing Society and the National Association of Marketing Teachers, also united to form JM’s publisher, the American Marketing Association (Agnew 1941; Converse 1952). Although editorial and literary histories of JM have been written over the years (Applebaum 1947; Grether 1976; Kerin 1996), its two predecessor journals have not been analyzed. Their period of publication has significance because the ideas and attitudes these journals embodied, as well as the professional, associational decisions made by the marketing scholars who nourished them, influenced subsequent marketing research, teaching, and practice.

Following the introduction, which provides four arguments for the importance of this research and reviews

some of the literature on the history of marketing thought, the next section discusses the historical research process, the data sources, and the analytical methods. Unlike much history writing, which tends to be vague about its procedures, historical research in marketing should be just as transparent about its processes as any other methodology (Witkowski and Jones 2006). Then, to establish the broader intellectual and social contexts of the primary sources, a brief history of the early marketing field – its teaching, literature, and professional associations – is presented, followed by an account of some of the economic and political challenges to U.S. marketing in the 1930s. The findings section presents TAMJ and NMR publishing data, investigates the two journals’ content and contributors, and makes comparisons with other related business publications of the time. The discussion section interprets this evidence in terms of the gatekeepers, the implicit ideology, and counterfactual analysis, and consider some implications for the field of marketing today.

This history gives a glimpse of the marketing field and its thinking in the mid-1930s. Marketing had two well-run and active professional associations and two lively, respectable journals dedicated to teaching, to research, and to marketing progress. The spirit of the writing was generally confident and future-oriented, despite the business setbacks of the Great Depression, the hostile attacks on marketing practice from numerous critics, and the threat of government intervention. The articles published in TAMJ and NMR show a marketing field concerned with topics in marketing management, but also a strong interest in macro issues, such as conflict in channels of distribution, and regulatory influences. Quantitative analyses were less frequent and far less sophisticated than those of today, but writing styles were excellent and the ideas expressed still compelling. Building the field of marketing required a sustained level of professional interaction. Maintaining contacts and networks required substantial personal effort. It is hoped that this story will stimulate greater appreciation for the history of marketing thought and for the bright, hard-working people who made it possible.

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FIGURE 1
COVERS OF THE AMERICAN MARKETING JOURNAL AND
THE NATIONAL MARKETING REVIEW

