

An Alternative Historical Method for Marketing Research: A Foucaultian Approach

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HISTORICAL METHOD IN MARKETING

There has been a recent interest in history and historical methodology in the marketing literature. Historical methodology is typically employed to generalize theories and test hypotheses (Chandy and Tellis 2000; Golder 2000; Savitt 1980), to periodize (Belk 1994; Low and Fullerton 1994), to situate a marketing phenomenon in a macro context (Low and Fullerton 1994; Nevett 1991; Witkowski 1989), or to understand the past either to make better decisions today (Golder 2000) or to illuminate the present (Belk 1987; Nevett 1991). While historical studies acknowledge that processes of change are complex, they tend to derive explanations by linear causal relations (Fullerton 1988; Savitt 1980; Smith and Lux 1993).

Based on the premise that marketing is interested in the present, this paper proposes an approach which uses history to diagnose current conditions in their complexity, going beyond linear causal relations. Aiming to generate rather than test theory, we offer a post-structuralist historical methodology, which adopts a Foucaultian framework and analyzes the contingencies that shape the emergence of an phenomenon. Our approach situates marketing as a cultural practice specific to the current epoch and tries to understand how such a practice, the relevant institutions, and the selves who experience this practice are governed and constituted by certain knowledges, which are rooted in the past and have undergone various transformations.

We suggest that a Foucaultian method will be viable in historical marketing research and take into account the criticisms of historical methods (see Brown, Hirschman and Maclaran 2001). Foucaultian framework utilizes history as a way of diagnosing the present to understand the current consequences of the elements inherited from the past (Castel 1994). This view takes into account the power relations and questions the taken for granted values that shape marketing and consumption practices. Rather than selecting a period and periodizing by exploring the continuity of a phenomenon, which is a common approach in the marketing, Foucault's approach is to select a problem of investigation. Foucault (1977) follows the present problem as far as it is necessary to find a

discontinuity. While historical research typically explains change in the evolution of a phenomenon through time by cause-effect relationships, there are relationships other than causality: historical events are likely to be contingent, a possible rather than necessary result of a set of complex relations (Foucault 1991; Kendall and Wickham 2003). Finally, while the historical studies in marketing typically test hypotheses and check the validity of assumptions to arrive at generalizations, a Foucaultian approach can be used to generate theories.

FOUCAULTIAN METHODOLOGY

Foucault (1977) looks for the discontinuity of the discourse under study and is interested in the characteristics of the discourse before and after the rupture. The concepts of "discourse," "archaeology," and "genealogy" are central to his analysis (Foucault 1972). Discourse is the corpus of "statements" whose organization is systematic. In the domain of marketing, discourses such as technology, economy, costs, aesthetics, needs and wants, and satisfaction govern practices such as consumption, advertising, and new product development. These discourses operate to produce the practices that constitute the subject - the consumer or the marketing manager and the object - the brand.

Archaeology and genealogy are the tools of analyzing discourses, synchronically and diachronically, respectively. Archaeology is the process of investigating the archives of discourses composed of "words" and "things" and their relationships (Kendall and Wickham, 2003). Genealogy reconstructs the origins and development of discourses grounded in a field of forces (Poster, 1994). It is a way of analyzing multiple, open-ended, heterogeneous trajectories of discourses, practices, and events, and of establishing their patterned relationships, as well as unmasking the taken-for-granted (Foucault 1980). The task of the researcher is to look for strategies of domination.

We provide an illustrative historical research process for examining the modernization of leisure time consumption in Turkey. We focus on the coffeehouse consumption. Archeology is employed to uncover the web of discourses such as religion, work ethic, medicine, pleasure, and economics. These discourses govern and

constitute the coffeehouse consumption as a practice, the coffeehouse as an institution, the coffeehouse owner, and the consumer as its subjects and the coffeehouse as a space. Genealogy is used to find out how the relationships among these discourses changed through time and to identify the power dynamics that shape the practice, the institutions, and the subjects.

THE COMPONENTS OF FOUCAULTIAN HISTORICAL RESEARCH

The following would be a most comprehensive set of parts:

1. *Problem generation: Interested in looking for contingencies rather than causal links, we ask "how" and "what" instead of "why" questions. In a study of modernization of leisure time consumption, a research question might be "how did coffeehouse consumption come to exist as a major form of leisure time activity in Turkey?"*
2. *Identification of the historical literary and non-literary materials: Data sources might include codes, fetwas (opinion by an authority in Islamic Law), literature, chronicles, miniatures, artifacts, travelers' notes, engravings, good-manner books, photos, advertisements, magazine articles.*
3. *Identification of an archive while paying attention to the relation between the "words" (e.g., religious and ethical rules, appropriate ways of coffee consumption) and the "things" (e.g., the design of coffeehouses). In order to be able to establish relations, the ordering of, and the repetitions in statements have to be taken into consideration.*
4. *Investigation of the ways in which statements produce ways of being (e.g. consumer) and acting (e.g. consumption).*
5. *Description of the spaces such as coffeehouses where coffee consumption is designated and acted upon.*
6. *Identification of institutions that relate to the coffeehouses, upon which statements act upon.*
7. *Keeping digging until reaching the discontinuities on the relative beginnings of coffeehouse consumption as a modern leisure time activity.*
8. *Finding the struggling knowledges and defining the dominant knowledges*
9. *Synthesis.*

We argue that such a Foucaultian method has the benefit of unmasking the taken-for-granted; overcome some of the criticisms of historical methods; and provide a means for theory generation.

THE FUTURE OF MARKETING'S PAST

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