

## PERIODIZATION SCHEMES IN MARKETING HISTORY: A DRAMA IN X ACTS

Stanley C. Hollander, Michigan State University  
Kathleen M. Rassuli, Indiana-Purdue University Fort Wayne  
Laura Farlow Dix, Indiana-Purdue University Fort Wayne

### ABSTRACT

Periodization is defined as the dividing up of large and small segments of marketing history into relatively homogeneous periods. Periodization is one of the historian's major tools for organizing historical narrative, reporting and analysis. In spite of several weaknesses identified by Stowe (1983), periodization enables events to be placed in appropriate temporal and sequential context. Social scientists and marketing historians have used a variety of periodization schemes for this purpose. This paper will assemble, collate, and analyze attempts to periodize marketing history.

Nineteen works were analyzed from the areas of anthropology, economics, advertising, and marketing. The data were divided into 12 long period schemes and 7 short period schemes. The number of periods for each scholar varies from 3 to 11. The length of individual periods range from one decade to several centuries. Matching periods scholars descriptions was made difficult because some authors did not date their periods.

In analyzing the long period schemes, there appears to be commonalities in descriptions of successive periods across the authors. There also appears to be agreement on the progression of marketing over time, if not the dates of arrival (which differ by country). Since the studies originated in different academic disciplines, the descriptions complement each other and provide a rounded view of centuries of marketing history.

The short period schemes cover a more recent span of time, the last century and one-half. There was much more certainty among the short period scholars as to the dating of occurrences. While this precision creates ease in classification, it also creates the potential for arbitrariness. Often ten year periods were used for purposes of exposition, and yet contrary to this purpose, they have been interpreted as analysis. The periodization of marketing thought is especially problematic because some periodization schemes concentrate on text books (e.g., Bartels, 1976), whereas others use journal articles (e.g., Kerin, 1996). Comparisons between these two types of schemes are hampered by a number of problems, such as the time lag before journal material enters textbooks, among others. The short periods models also concentrate more on the history of thought than on the history of marketing.

The authors draw some conclusions from this collection of periodization schemes. One obvious difference between the long periods models and the short periods models is the difference between a telescopic and a microscopic point of view. The long periods models emphasize major shifts in economic relationships. However, generalizations get broader and descriptions more vague the farther back in time a period occurs. Thus, descriptions of periods prior to the 15th century are especially vague. It is apparent that the closer an author is to the period under description, the more detail the author is able to provide. So that authors from earlier in this century appear to have a clearer telescope on historical periods of several centuries ago than do more recent authors. In the short periods models, small differences seem to loom much larger. In all periodization models, contemporary prejudices and interest loom large. The time of the writing affects the author's impression of the occurrences in the recent past. The contemporary bias may be even more pronounced in the short periods. Thus, while contemporary authors may have a clearer picture of periods in their recent past, single issues can color the lens.

There are clear benefits to studying periodization schemes. Cumulatively they provide a guide to what the profession regards as an acceptable view of its past and progress at any particular time. The collection provides scholars with a rich collection to help organize data and acts as a useful teaching tool. Overall, schemes reveal dominant patterns worthy of further research. Care must be taken, however, because not all schemes are of equal merit. Moreover, in general, periodization focuses on discontinuities, not continuity.