

THE PROBLEM OF TERMINOLOGY IN MARKETING HISTORY RESEARCH: AN EXAMPLE FROM THE NETHERLANDS

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ABSTRACT

People engaged in marketing-related activities may have described them, for various reasons, in terms different from those normally used by marketers. This can make it difficult for the researcher to identify relevant material in libraries and collections, especially given the diverse and relatively undefined nature of marketing history itself. The example of the International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, is used to explain how the replacement of card indexes by computer databases is compounding this problem, and may cause potentially rewarding material to be overlooked.

INTRODUCTION

Bartels (1976/1962) justifies beginning his account of the development of marketing thought at the start of the 20th century by asserting that this is when marketing began. In support he cites the 19th century British scholar Chenevix Tench who believed that language develops in response to need; hence, according to Bartels, if the term "marketing" was not used prior to the turn of the century, this shows that what we know as marketing actually did not exist before that time.

This view is open to at least one serious objection: it may be that the activities we know today as marketing were in fact being undertaken, but were referred to by a different name. It has been suggested, for example, that the term "advertising" was used to describe such activities in late 19th century Britain (Nevett 1988). Such differences in terminology are of more than theoretical interest. Indeed, they could have profound implications for scholars conducting research in marketing history. As more card indexes are replaced by computer databases, researchers are no longer able to proceed serendipitously and are having to rely increasingly on key words to identify relevant source material. Yet in some instances the marketing historian may not know what terminology was being used to denote marketing activities. This may be the case before the beginning of the 20th century; within forms of social or commercial organization different from those of the developed western world; and with respect to those organizations and people who do not realize, or do not wish to admit, that they are employing the kinds of techniques used in modern marketing. Unless the researcher is aware of the terms by which those involved referred to their marketing-related activities, he/she may have no means of detecting the existence of certain collections of relevant material, and so form erroneous conclusions about the existence of a marketing orientation.

Amsterdam's Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis (International Institute of Social History) provides an excellent example of how this might happen. The Institute houses a unique collection of some 47,000 posters dating back to the 1890s which were used to promote political parties and action movements, particularly on the left of the political spectrum. Specimens are drawn from many countries of the world, although the greater part of the collection is concerned with Dutch political parties. Clearly the Institute is a valuable source for the scholar interested in such topics as the application of advertising techniques to the promotion of political ideas, or the use of the poster medium by non-commercial advertisers. Yet a key word search of the Institute's new database would reveal nothing to indicate that the collections held any material relevant to subjects such as these.

The author wishes to thank Marien van der Heijden of the Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis, Amsterdam, for his help in the preparation of this paper.

The reason lies in the terminology employed by the Dutch political parties of the left, and subsequently by the Institute. The parties presumably would not admit that what they were doing in fact constituted advertising ("reclame"), which has strong associations with capitalism. They would probably be even less likely to concede that they were engaged in marketing themselves and their policies to the Dutch electorate. Instead they described their activities as "propaganda", a term which in the Dutch language does not have the same pejorative connotations that apply in English, and which would have enabled them to avoid the charge that they were using the same weapons that capitalism employed to manipulate the masses. The IISH followed the parties' own terminology in its indexing. Since it seems highly unlikely that a marketing historian would include "propaganda" in his/her battery of key words, the potential of the collection would be likely to remain unrecognized.

It must be admitted that, in a situation such as this, a traditional card index also would not follow marketing terminology. However, it offers a notable advantage over the computer database in that it allows the researcher to indulge in random browsing. In a subject like marketing history whose limits and areas of study are not clearly defined, the connection of an item in a catalog to a topic under investigation may not be apparent to anyone except the researcher. Advances then are made when the researcher incorporates a new element of knowledge into an existing corpus by showing a connection that previously had gone unrecognized. The contribution of serendipity to the development of marketing history should not be underestimated and would certainly be acknowledged by Hollander, among others. A card index made this kind of progress possible particularly by allowing the researcher to follow up leads offered by "see also" annotations, which a database does not provide (Baker 1994). The database, while aiding research in tightly structured and formalized disciplines, has disadvantages for academic trailblazers such as marketing historians.

To substantiate this point, this paper will now describe some of the IISH collection's more important poster holdings and explain their relevance to the marketing historian. First, however, it is appropriate to introduce the reader to the Institute's resources.

THE INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL HISTORY

The aim of the IISH as stated in its statutes, is "to promote the knowledge and the scientific study of national and international social history in the full sense of the word" (IISH 1985, p.2). The focus of its work has become "the rise and development of the working class, its organization and its ideas" (IISH 1985, p.2). Several of the people who played leading roles in setting up the Institute and establishing its collections were associated with the political left. Professor N. W. Posthumus, who took the leading role, was a member of the social democratic movement; Annie Scheltema was archivist of the Dutch Social Democratic Worker's Party; Arthur Lehning was former secretary of the Anarcho-Syndicalist international; Boris Sapir was a Social Democrat who had been forced to leave Russia; Hans Stein was a German exile and former correspondent of the Marx-Engels Institute; and Boris Nikolaevsky, who managed the Paris branch of the Institute, had been a menshevik delegate to the All Russian Soviet, and head of the Central Archive for the History of the Revolutionary Movement in Russia (Lucassen 1989, IISH 1985).

The Institute now houses more than 1,000 archival collections, over 500,000 books and pamphlets and some 60,000 periodicals as well as other items of printed material. The audiovisual department houses gramophone records, audio tapes, banners, badges, and a collection of some 47,000 posters. It is on these that the paper will now focus.

POSTER ADVERTISING: THE DUTCH SOCIO-POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

During the 1890's there was a considerable creative gap between commercial posters and those issued by Dutch political parties. Although there were notable Dutch poster artists, they confined their activities to commercial and cultural posters. In this sense the Netherlands lagged behind other European countries, notably France, where political parties enlisted the talents of such artists as Steinlein. This has

been attributed to the later emergence of political movements in the Netherlands, and the absence of large-scale poster advertising. The "poster culture" that flourished particularly in France and Britain had failed to take root (Van der Heijden, quoted in Rothuizen 1992, p.14). Dutch political posters at this time mainly took the form of basic typeset announcements without any illustration. Sometimes these were printed in two colors (red and black on a white background).

The integration of art into the political poster was related to the changing ideas about the role of the artist as a member of society. The Netherlands' most important left-wing political party, the Sociaal-Democratische Arbeiders Partij (SDAP) was anxious to involve artists in political action. In the 1890s this coincided with the community art movement, and with leanings towards progressive, if not socialist, parties. A leading figure in this movement was Richard Roland Holst, who was deeply concerned about the role of the artist in society, and who helped spread the ideas of William Morris in the Netherlands. Holst's own work, however, seems to have been unsuited to inspiring political action, and it was Albert Hahn who was the first to make an impact as a political poster artist, exploiting his talents on behalf of the SDAP (Van der Heijden, quoted in Rothuizen 1992, p.13).

SOCIAAL-DEMOCRATISCHE ARBEIDERS PARTIJ (SDAP)

The SDAP managed to assemble a group of artists, designers and printers who could work together to establish a firm visual tradition, such that it is possible to see the development of an SDAP style extending from Albert Hahn to the eve of World War II (Van der Heijden, quoted in Rothuizen 1992, p.15-16). The party made extensive use of the poster medium as a means of communicating its ideas to the Dutch public, trying to secure support for such causes as universal suffrage, a state pension plan and help for the unemployed. It also used the skills of its artist sympathizers to attack those forces which it identified as competitors -- mainly capitalism, militarism and reactionism. The three are shown in caricature in an example dating from 1922 (G1/312). Five years later an idealized worker holding a pickaxe in one hand and the red flag in the other is flanked by a vulture wearing a top hat and a bat wearing a military cap ().

By the mid-twenties the SDAP was in the forefront of the fight against rearmament and used vivid pictorial images to help make its case. A 1925 poster by van Papenhuizen shows a serpent labeled "militarism," towering over an anguished woman clutching a baby (B154/9) while another showed a vulture eating the body of a dead soldier (G1/298), and another a skeleton wearing an army helmet against a background of grave markers (G1/299).

The anti-war campaign was also positioned in relation to other key issues and interests. Women were targeted with specific messages urging them to oppose oorlogsbrand (war fever), and in 1928 the anti-war message was linked to the Olympic Games. The copy line "Sport means life, militarism means death" was featured in four languages -- Dutch, English, French and German -- while the illustration showed an athletic young male, behind whom was a skull wearing an army helmet and skeletal fingers about to take the young man in their grip (G1/1). A 1930 poster shows the SDAP trying to position the peace campaign as an economic issue, presenting it as a straight choice between war or the state pension (B201/18). By the early 1930's, however, the party had apparently identified Fascism as the biggest threat to peace, and proceeded to engage the growing menace head to head. A powerful illustration from 1932-3 for the International Peace Movement showed a pair of hands breaking a swastika and the message "Down with war and Fascism" (E1/299). By 1933, this anti-Fascist sentiment had been translated into a powerful campaign urging the Dutch public to boycott German goods. Sometimes the message was reinforced by a simple graphic device such as a line drawing of a door bolt on a poster urging the Dutch public to "Shut your door on German products" (D2/296). Generally, however, the campaign featured much stronger anti-Fascist symbols. A large fly was shown with a head that caricatured Hitler. The message was simple: Roei uit! Geen duitse waar! (Exterminate! No German products!) (D2/293). Other posters showed a figure in Nazi uniform wielding a whip (E342/28) and a German ape set against a background of bodies hanging from gallows (E242/29).

Not all the SDAP's posters were designed in the Netherlands. A particularly striking contribution to the boycott campaign in 1933 was produced in Belgium and had the Dutch copy added later in a white panel at the base. A soldier wearing a Prussian helmet emblazoned with a swastika was shown wielding a whip over the cowering masses. In the foreground a smiling German held a large sign which read (in English) "Made in Germany". A worker stripped to the waist pointed dramatically, indicating that the German should go (S202/12).

The party modified its appeals in the late 1930s. The threat of Fascism was increasing, but as an anti-militarist party in a neutral country the SDAP found itself in a difficult situation when voicing its opposition. The strong attacks on Fascism certainly continued. One poster from 1936 contained a map showing the number of extra penal establishments and concentration camps that would be built if the Fascists gained power in the Netherlands. The copy line proclaimed "Where Fascism reigns freedom dies" (D4/34). Another produced in the same year showed a dark wolf towering over a ruined cityscape in flames, the one word of copy reading simply "Fascism" (D206/3). The anti-militarist appeal, however, was now conspicuously absent. Instead the party fell back on general appeals such as "Free people in a free land" (B198/35a).

During the period 1919-1939 the SDAP's posters provide clear evidence of the way the party tried to reposition and repackage itself, distancing itself from events in Russia while still maintaining its Marxist-Leninist image. An example from the mid-twenties, when the links with Russia were still strong, shows Marx pointing to the SDAP name (B154/a). There are also visual echoes of Soviet art of the period, notably in the highly stylized and idealized portrayals of workers. This is apparent, for example, in the worker holding aloft a torch labeled "Socialism" (E1/200, 201) or the worker shown against a dark silhouette of factory chimneys in an illustration captioned "Out of the darkness into the light" (B155/16a). By the late 1930's, not only were such appeals conspicuously absent from SDAP posters, but the party was using pamphlets to attack the Soviet-German accord (D4/24, 25) and the Soviet invasion of Finland (D4/26, 27).

COMMUNISTISCH PARTIJ HOLLAND (1935: COMMUNISTISCH PARTIJ NEDERLAND)

The Communist party also made use of vivid graphics, incorporating dynamic elements of the Russian constructivists such as the diagonal placement of text (Van der Heijden, quoted in Rothuizen 1992, p.16). The examples in the poster collection, however, tend to be more stereotypical than the advertising produced by the SDAP. An election poster from 1929 shows an arm labeled "Third International" and a fist smashing down on a table. Assorted political leaders (also labeled) and opponents of the Communist party are sent reeling (E1/523). Another example from 1931 shows a huge fist rising above a stereotypical backdrop of factory chimneys, crushing an assortment of capitalists between its fingers. The design also incorporates the red star and hammer and sickle (B373/35a, B374/2).

Sometimes the appeal was more direct. Another poster from 1931 carries the copy line "For bread and work elect Communists" in large bold type, and shows a worker angrily shaking his fist while a woman holding a child stands anxiously in the background (D/018).

The Communist party also took up the cause of independence for Indonesia. A 1929 election poster proclaimed "50 million are gagged. Only the Communist Party fights for them" (B373/34a). Although this seems unlikely to have been an election-winning appeal, an annotation on the IISA index card states that the poster was banned. Another example from 1933 calls for immediate independence for Indonesia, supporting this with a quotation from Marx, an illustration of Lenin, Indonesian faces, and a ship named "The Seven Provinces" -- a reference to an area of political unrest in Indonesia (B374/5).

Although the reason is not apparent, the mid-1930's saw the party abandon visual imagery in favor of basically typeset announcements. It may be that the need for speed was one factor involved. This could explain a 1933 poster denouncing the arrest of German Communist and Social Democratic leaders following the Reichstag fire, and urging the Dutch public to send telegrams of protest (B375/8). However, 1935 and

1936 saw the appearance of a number of anti-war anti-Fascist messages, each basically typeset, the only graphic elements being an arrow pointing to a hammer and sickle. As well as denouncing Fascists generally as war mongers, the series attacked them on specific issues, notably the Italian invasion of Abyssinia and the Spanish civil war.

OTHER SOCIALIST PARTIES

During the 1930s there were several other Socialist parties in the Netherlands making use of the poster medium to promote their policies. Although the IISH archive contains fewer examples of their campaigns, it is clear that the visual imagery they employed was as strong as that of the SDAP and the Communists. A poster for the Onafhankelyke Socialistische Partij shows workers stamping on and crushing buildings labeled "Bank", "Stock exchange", and "Dogma" (E1/584). A 1933 example with the headline "Against war and Fascism. Vote OSP" is illustrated by a swastika wearing a helmet and gas mask, the tube from the mask leading the eye down to the OSP name (H1/228). An election poster from the same year proclaims simply "Fascism is death" (H1/226).

The OSP strongly supported the boycott of German products. A powerful contribution to the campaign shows a worker wielding a hammer about to smash a swastika labeled "Hitler-Germany" (E1/1581).

The Revolutionair-Socialistische Arbeiderspartij was another group that believed itself to be the true guardian of the Marxist-Leninist tradition, and was careful to distance itself from events in the Soviet Union. A 1937 poster declared "In the name of Red October 1917, with Marx and Engels, Lenin and Trotsky, forward to the 4th International. Fight against the Stalin terror" (E1/578). A second poster from the same year shows Stalin crushing the masses with a scythe while a capitalist death figure stands behind him. The poster includes the names of 12 revolutionary leaders executed by Stalin, and claims he has murdered hundreds more (E1/577). A third example from 1937 accused Stalin and the Soviet bureaucracy of betraying the October revolution, and blamed them for sabotaging the Spanish civil war (E1/576). A poster published the following year contained a quotation from Mussolini in which he called Stalin a Fascist (H1/200-201). Perhaps sensing these attacks were paying off, the RSAP appealed directly to members of the Dutch Communist party to change their allegiance. In a poster believed to have been issued in 1938, it urged them to "Turn back to Lenin" (H1/195-6).

The RSAP was particularly savage in its attacks on Nazism. Hitler was denounced for murdering Jews in a poster showing two Nazis violently beating members of the public and emptying the pockets of what is presumably a corpse (B346/29). In another example, a grotesque vulture with the head of Goebbels and a swastika on its wing is shown with the words "Juden raus" coming from its mouth (). In a third, a Nazi holding an ax in one hand and an olive branch on the other is shown chopping up corpses while a female figure representing democracy weeps in the background (D2/950). This was meant mockingly. The woman symbolizes the attitude of parliamentary democracy, including non-revolutionary socialist parties such as the SDAP, which lamented but failed to act¹.

The same theme is apparent in another example from 1938. At this time, the Netherlands was facing the problem of refugees trying to enter the country from Nazi Germany. The government was keeping the border closed with the support of the main political parties; the RSAP wanted it opened. A poignant poster from that year showed a high wall around the country, from which Dutch political leaders were indicating that the gates were to remain closed to the suffering figures in Germany who were pleading to enter (B346/28).

¹ The author is indebted to Marien van der Heijden for this interpretation.

The RSAP also made use of simple, direct typeset posters. A series thought to have appeared in 1938 included such appeals as "Against Orangism and Nationalism" (H1/216-7-8), "Against Fascism and Capitalism" (H1/213-4-5), and "Against Nationalism and Militarism" (H1/202-3-4).

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The poster campaigns described above were not regarded as advertising by the political parties concerned and are not treated as such by the IISH who, quite understandably, have followed the same nomenclature. To the marketing historian, however, they are examples of marketing communications, and offer clear evidence that -- perhaps unwittingly -- the political left in the Netherlands was employing standard marketing techniques. Countervailing environmental forces were identified and targeted; parties positioned in relation to their competitors; audiences segmented and appeals tailored to their needs; messages varied to exploit particular communication opportunities; and powerful "corporate" images created and projected. This was done employing design principles taken from commercial advertising, and exploiting the oldest advertising medium, the poster. The point is not whether Dutch socialists are correct in describing their communications as propaganda rather than reclame, but that people outside the world of marketing might describe-quite legitimately-by some other term something we recognize as a marketing activity.

The IISH collection is therefore of considerable relevance to the marketing historian. There are probably many others which illustrate the applications of marketing techniques, even though those involved may not have realized they were employing them. It would be a tragedy for marketing history if such sources were to overlooked or ignored simply because they do not employ orthodox marketing terminology.

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Note: references in parentheses after descriptions of posters are IISH index numbers.