

CONSUMERISM REVISITED

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ABSTRACT

Although American consumerism is often discussed in terms of three eras, close reading of the historical record shows considerable consumer discontent, agitation and activity occurring outside these peak periods. This is particularly apparent when many normally neglected aspects of the long run efforts to increase buyer power in the buyer-seller relationship are included.

INTRODUCTION

This article suggests the usefulness of studying the history of American consumerism in a very broad light. In 1941, Agnew and Houghton (p. 401) noted the difficulty of defining and delineating anything as complex as the consumer movement. They also observed that periods of undramatic, sustained consumerism tended to connect the waves of "spectacular" reform. Bloom and Greyser (1981) implied similar ideas in a non-historical, predictive paper that foresaw continued but less confrontational consumerism in the 1980s.

In contrast, much consumerism history (Hermann 1970, Feldman 1976, Beem 1973, Nadel 1971, Evans 1980, Mayer 1989) concentrates upon three eras or peaks of activity (see Exhibit 1) and, like Agnew and Houghton's actual discussion, upon a relatively narrow range of such activities. While these authors generally stress "the turn of the century," "the New Deal," and the 1960's protest period, they differ considerably in assigning calendar parameters. They virtually ignore pre-1870 consumerism. Hermann (1970) and Evans (1980) begin considerably later than others; only Mayer (1989) and Samson (1980) include part or all of the World War I-1929 period in an era. They all omit the 1940s and 1950s; and Mayer (1989), the only author writing in the late 1980s, does not see that decade as part of the third era. These discrepancies themselves suggest that consumerism is more of a continuous process than the

Exhibit 1

Author	First Era	Second Era	Third Era
Herman (1970)	1890 - 1910s	1930s	1960s
Nadel (1971)	Civil War to Onset of WWI	New Deal	1959 & after
Feldman (1976)	Post-Civil War to WWI	New Deal	1960s & after
Samson (1980)	1870 - 1930	not applicable	not applicable
Evans (1980)	Early 1900s	1930s - 1950s	1960s & after
Mayer (1989)	1870s - 1910s	1920s - 1930s	1960s and 1970s

"three eras" concept implies. This article does not dispute the "three eras" approach in highlighting the most striking consumeristic circumstances in our history. It does argue that going back farther than most writers, looking at the inter-peak periods, and justifiably broadening the consumerism' rubric, furnishes an improved picture of this important force in American life.

The Approach

Several aspects of our approach are explained below. The definition of consumerism is important in the analysis. Several popular consumerism definitions are quoted below:

Consumerism is the widening range of activities of government, business and independent organizations that are designed to protect individuals from practices (of both business and government) that infringe upon their right as consumers (Day and Aaker, 1970, p. 13).

The organized efforts of consumers seeking redress, restitution and remedy for dissatisfaction they have accumulated in the acquisition of a standard of living (Buskirk and Rothe, 1970, p. 62).

The organized reaction of individuals to inadequacies, perceived or real, of markets, the marketplace, market mechanisms, government, government services, and consumer policy (Forbes, J.D., 1985, pp. 105-106).

An organized movement of citizens, specialist organizations and government to strengthen the rights and power of buyers in relation to sellers (Kotler and Armstrong, 1987).

All four of these definitions include the word "organized." Yet Craig-Lees (1992) argues that a social movement is by definition unorganized and that it becomes an interest group once it is subjected to an institutional structure. She draws attention to atomistic activities cited by Bloom and Greyser (1981). Consumerism has included much amorphous activity. A slight modification of the pithy Kotler and Armstrong (1985) definition appears most useful:

The collective and parallel efforts of consumers, specialized organizations and/or government to strengthen the rights and power of buyers in relation to sellers.

"Parallel" is used here in the sense antitrust uses "conscious parallelism": Individual decisions made with knowledge that others are making similar decisions.

Some Exclusions: The definitions used in this article, as is also true of those used by Buskirk and Rothe (1970), Forbes (1985), and Kotler and Armstrong (1987), but not Day and Aaker (1970) and Bloom and Greyser (1981), exclude pro-consumer activities of business itself. This does not deny that business organizations, either as a response to external pressure or out of corporate societal concern, may undertake some explicit, self-conscious consumeristic activities. Nor does it deny that business efforts to obtain and retain long-term satisfied customers will often substantially enhance consumer welfare. Those activities are removed from consideration here out of a desire to study the consumeristic movement in its most commonly understood form--as a force external to business and often (usually?) attacking or criticizing it. In other words, this really is not an analysis of how or whether the consumer became better or worse off over time. Rather, it is a study of how some non-business organizations and movements disported themselves over a time frame of 150 or 200 years. The null hypothesis is that there was little or no consumeristic activity outside of the three waves.

Nor have the authors discussed the consumerism of the 1980s and early 1990s. Although such a discussion would test Bloom and Greyser's (1981) explicit hypothesis and would be very relevant to the thesis advanced here. Consumer organizations and their programs have continued to exist throughout the period as have pro-consumer, or supposedly, pro-consumer agencies within government. But it is too soon, and probably too close to partisan political sensitivities to permit a balanced historical appraisal of consumerism's net impact during the past twelve years.

Finally, and this is more of an inclusion than an exclusion, activities and laws that are commonly labeled "pro-consumer" in the literature have been accepted at thin face value here. Labeling laws and product standards may aid businesses whose product conform to the criteria without giving the consumer any real aid in decision-making. Sometimes that is an unintended consequence, sometimes it is not. In other words, "spurious consumerism is sometimes at least a possibility. Because it would require a different and lengthy study, this article has excluded any attempt to go beneath the surface of what is commonly accepted as the body of pro-consumer regulation.

As indicated below, however, this article has added to that body.

Some Inclusions: Areas studied here include certain types of consumeristic activity often overlooked or neglected in the literature. Justification for the inclusion of consumer cooperatives, antitrust regulation, maximum price controls and the regulation of controlled substances will be offered when those topics are broached in the body of the article. The inclusion of these categories reinforces, but is not essential to, the argument that will follow. Enough "traditional" consumeristic activity can be perceived preceding or intervening between the traditional "three eras" to support the argument for a continual stream of such activity.

Use of Secondary Data

Marketing writers with a historical orientation differ in several ways from professional historians (Witkowski 1991). Historians prefer research based entirely or very heavily upon the examination of primary documents. Marketing scholars, in spite of their "empirical orientation," typically believe that research should be cumulative and make greater use of secondary sources. This article presents a broad and general view rather than detailing the definitive history of any particular consumerist struggle. Consequently, major reliance upon secondary material accords with marketing traditions, and is quite adequate for the purpose.

Historical Orientation

The historian must interpret all material in the context of the period under discussion. This is easy to say and seems commonplace, but is actually difficult to do. Many early attempts to improve consumer and citizen life such as the mandatory inspection of steamboat boilers will be cited. Today we think of these as routine parts of the accepted fabric of any reasonably civil society. But that was not always so. Steamboats had to be invented, developed, placed into use, suffer boiler explosion casualties, and thus induce considerable public controversy before safety rules were imposed. The reader should join the authors in mentally recreating a world that lacked many measures now taken for granted.

SOME CONSUMERISM DOMAINS

Space limitations preclude more than limited examination of some of the many aspects of American life that have been subject to consumerist efforts. But efforts to enhance individual and societal welfare will be noted in such domains as: Protecting purchasing power, promoting product quality and information,

protecting consumer financial resources, protecting travelers, preventing addiction, ensuring healthy consumption, and enhancing the urban environment. Emphasis will be given to the domains understudied in consumerist literature.

Protecting Purchasing Power

Consumeristic efforts to maximize what the consumers' money can buy have taken many forms, including direct price controls, antimonopoly sanctions, co-operative enterprises, and educational and advisory services.

Direct Maximum Price Controls. Although the wisdom of governmentally-imposed maximum price controls may be debatable, such regulations clearly limit the power of sellers versus buyers. For example, Los Angeles and New York City's current residential property rent ceilings seek to force landlords to rent apartments to tenants (consumers) for less than they otherwise would charge. A desire for economic stability and modification of labor pressure for higher wages also motivated wartime general maximum price controls. Yet those controls also placed limitations upon sellers of consumer (and industrial) goods. During World War II the Office of Price Administration devoted special attention to the items that composed the Consumer Price Index sample. This most drastic form of consumeristic legislation has only been used sporadically in the United States, although it has a long history. In 1641, the Massachusetts Bay Colony authorized towns to set prices for milk, bread, casks, leather, wood and bricks (Shapiro 1963).

Substantial governmental price control was imposed during World War I through three agencies: the Food Administration, The Fuel Administration, and the Price-Fixing Committee of the War Industries Board (Taussig 1919). The Office of Price Administration administered a very complex and comprehensive set of controls during World War II (Galbraith 1952). A similar, although somewhat more modest effort was mounted by the federal Office of Price Stabilization during the Korean conflict (1950-1953). Federal maximum price regulations again appeared during the Vietnam War (1971 to 1973), again without the elaborate administrative machinery of the World War II effort (Rockoff 1984). The first three of these episodes fell outside the dates usually considered part of the three eras or waves of consumerism, yet at least two involved greater intervention in the marketplace than the work of any consumeristic agency. More limited price regulations were, of course, imposed in many monopoly and public utility situations. Limited price controls now exist upon medical services for the elderly.

Consumer Cooperation. Much of the consumerism literature has ignored or given little attention to the cooperative movement. Strictly speaking, the cooperative societies are sellers themselves. But the cooperators did not envisage an arm's length relationship with their members. They sought to empower consumers by creating an alternative source of supply. Reduction or redistribution of profit margins and elimination of promotional services were expected to reduce living costs. The co-ops also hoped to teach their members good buying practices. Although one source says that the American retail consumer cooperative movement did not assume meaningful form until 1920 (Knapp 1969), there were numerous thrusts prior to that date both within and outside the first era. Colonial society undoubtedly was a mixture of individualism and collectivism. Formal consumer cooperation dates back to at least 1829 when a group of Philadelphia workers established a store financed by monthly dues to supply goods at wholesale cost. Another labor group, the New England Association, formed a buying club in 1845 that soon led to the establishment of a cooperative store, called First Workingmen's Protective Union (Parker 1956). Within a year, the Protective Union had 12 divisions. By 1853, this movement had expanded into New York and several states in the Midwest as well as Oregon. But internal problems grew more difficult and by 1867 most Union stores had disbanded (Parker 1956). By 1869, practically every industrial town between Boston and San Francisco had some form of cooperative distribution institution (Parker 1956, Knapp 1969). In 1882, some socially conscious Harvard students established the still flourishing Harvard Cooperative Store to assist their less affluent classmates. Several other

cooperative college stores were introduced at about the same time or shortly thereafter (Gras 1942).

At the other end of the nineteenth century social scale, many immigrant groups, who often were familiar with cooperation in Europe, set up societies in this country. Their ethnic and cultural homogeneity facilitated initial success, but eventually hindered expansion and federation (Knapp 1969). The gradual acculturation of the members within the larger society must also have been a problem.

There were numerous other attempts to create cooperative retailing institutions in the years after 1900. Nevertheless, cooperation seemed somewhat better able to take root after 1920. They received some increased attention during the 1930 depression and small self-help buying clubs were a form of social activity during the 1960-70 protest years. But consumer cooperative stores never achieved the success in this country of cooperation/mutual financial organizations (discussed below), rural electrification co-ops, or agricultural cooperatives (outside the scope of this article).

Advice. Among the first advice books were cookbooks. In 1742, William Parks, of Williamsburg, Virginia, reprinted Eliza Smith's The Complete Housewife, or Accomplished Gentlewomen's Companion (a popular English cookbook, first published in 1727 in England), but made some changes to adapt it to American tastes and conditions (Longone and Longone 1984). In 1796, the Amelia Simmons' American Cookery became the first, and for many years the most influential, cookbook written by an American and published in the United States. While borrowing from English cookbooks, Simmons also employed indigenous American products such as corn meal (Longone and Longone 1984). It wasn't until 1824 that the next important and very popular cookbook, Mary Randolph's The Virginia Housewife, Method is the Soul of Management, was published. Other influential cookbooks followed a few years later: Eliza Leslie's Seventy-Five Receipts for Pastry, Cakes and Sweetmeats, Louis Eustache Ude's The French Cook, and Lydia Maria Child's The Frugal Housewife (Coyle, Jr. 1985), and Longone and Longone 1984). Much later, another major development was promotional literature, in the form of cookbooks, issued by national food and kitchen equipment companies (e.g. General Mills' Gold Medal Flour Cook Book). Many of the themes that persist today marked these early American cookbooks: diet and health; temperance; management and organization; and economy and frugality (Longone and Longone 1984).

By the mid-1800s, women were receiving a stream of home-making advice books, such as those by Catherine Beecher. These were forerunners of the domestic science/home economics movement. Vassar College pioneered a course in "domestic economy" in 1865, but dropped it three years later. Some women's academies and female seminaries instituted similar courses, the land grant colleges gave considerable importance to the movement and, by 1890, many women's liberal arts colleges began offering home economics work (McGrath and Johnson 1968). The formal, scholarly home economics movement seems to have started prior to the conventional "first era" but gained momentum during that period. Apparently it had not gone far enough to preclude a recommendation in 1912 by the noted economist, Wesley C. Mitchell, for a new discipline that would create "doctors of consumption" to teach and advise housewives and to study general consumption problems (Mitchell 1912). Starting about 1918, just after the first peak, the American Home Economics Association began working with manufacturers on grade and informative labeling of consumer products and on testing consumer fabrics. In the 1920s it worked with the American Standards Association in incorporating consumer products in a broader industrial standardization and simplification movement spearheaded by then Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover (Hollander 1984).

Contemporaneous with the rise of the cookbooks offering household advice and recipes to the American housewife was the emergence of national magazines and almanacs (e.g. Godey's Lady's Book, Peterson's Ladies National Magazine and Harper's Bazaar), which at first were mostly concerned with fashions, but after the Civil War the emphasis shifted to household management and domestic economy, cooking and entertaining (Longone and Longone 1984).

The other best-known sector of the consumer buying advice system, the product rating agencies,

Consumers' Research and Consumers' Union, appeared in the 1930s during the second era, but steadily gained circulation in post-peak years. Their history is too well-known among marketers to need rehearsal here. Governmental labeling and advertising regulations generally seek to improve information, rather than actually advise, and are discussed elsewhere. A neglected area of research involves the history, nature and impact of a wide array of commercial and noncommercial advising services that ranges from book reviewer to financial planner.

Protection of Consumer Financial Interests

Efforts to protect consumer financial interests have dealt with interest rates and other aspects of consumer loans, credit, banking, and insurance.

Borrowing Costs. Usury (i.e., maximum interest rate) laws date back to the colonial period in the U.S. and to antiquity elsewhere. These laws were intended to protect farmers, small businesses, and other borrowers, as well as consumers. By the 1920s, many state legislatures had enacted "small loan" laws that permitted higher rates on such loans because of the lenders' higher costs and risks.

Two private sector efforts to reduce small loan costs appeared around the turn of the century. One was a sort of benevolent pawnbroking, the other was the formation of cooperative credit unions. In 1890, a group of wealthy New Yorkers established the Provident Loan Society of New York to lend money at moderate interest rates upon pledges of jewelry and other personal property (The Society 1991). The Russell Sage Foundation, a philanthropy established in 1909, subsequently helped create similar Remedial or Provident Loan Associations, with varying degrees of success in about forty cities (Ryan 1921, Glenn et al. 1947). Cooperative credit unions, which had started in Germany in 1849 and spread to many other countries including Canada by 1900, first appeared in the U.S. in 1909. By 1917 there were 111 such unions in four states (Glenn et al. 1947). They served as depositories for worker savings, encouraged thrift, and provided moderate-cost small loans.

Banking. The period from the American Revolution to the turn of the nineteenth century saw many efforts to create a dynamic, expansionary and yet safe banking system. These objectives were not always successfully reconciled. Moreover, desires for economic and financial stability (for a long time individual banks issued their own currency, i.e. "banknotes") may have been paramount to consumer (depositor) interest in framing safety policy. Yet the public was supposed to gain from changes in bank chartering, reserve requirements, lending limitations, and bank inspection.

Originally, commercial banks were chartered by special acts of the state legislatures. In 1839 Michigan enacted a "free banking" law that allowed easy incorporation of any would-be-banking group that met certain specifications. This was intended to increase competition in banking. Although the Michigan experience was disastrous, a number of other states followed with stricter requirements between 1838 and 1858 (Klebaner 1990). The National Bank Act of 1863 created a dual system in which federal law directly controlled the chartering and operation of the preponderance of bank assets and less directly affected the remainder. Bank reserves were a subject of concern during the same period. A dozen states had set statutory reserve requirements by 1861. These ranged from five per cent in Maine to 33 1/3 per cent in Ohio, Massachusetts and Louisiana. Many early charters also limited lending to some capital ratio and also imposed other limits. The national banking system included two reserve requirements.

By the early 1800s, the states had begun imposing reporting requirements, which the banks often ignored. The New York (state) Safety Fund Act (1829) created a bank auditing service. Abolished in 1843, it was re-established in 1851 (Klebaner 1990).

Many subsequent banking reforms have occurred during the three eras. The Federal Reserve Act was passed in 1913. The creation of the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation was one of the

regulatory responses to the 1930s bank failures. Similarly, in 1969, the Truth in Lending law and similarly oriented legislation emerged in the consumeristic push of the third era. But the new Regulation DD, which controls both methods of calculating deposit, interest and communication to depositors, has just come into effect in 1993.

Life Insurance. Stalson (1942 [1960], ch. 13) describes a substantial stream of state life insurance regulations, that began about 1807, got well under way in the 1820s and 1830s, and reached impressive dimensions in the 1859-69 decade. Massachusetts, New York and Pennsylvania were leaders, but most other states followed their example. These laws often raised barriers against, or imposed special burdens on, "foreign" (i.e. both non-U.S. and out-of-state) insurers, apparently both as protection for consumers and domestic competitors (see Markel 1991). Much of the state legislation was consumeristic and Stalson (1942 [1969]) notes that this characteristic seldom weakened and often was reinforced over time.

This latter group included increasingly rigorous financial reporting requirements, mandatory publication of financial data, minimum capital, reserve, bonding and reserve-to-liability ratio standards with ultimately audits and controls by regulatory commissions, prohibitions against engaging in mercantile business or writing other types of insurance, mandatory "non-forfeiture" policy provisions that gave policy holders some continued protection when policies were terminated because of nonpayment, and especially popular with the public "Married Women's Acts" that sheltered some or all of a widow's or dependents' benefits from the claims of a deceased husband's creditors.

These efforts certainly were not entirely successful. Major reform initiative occurred around 1870 and 1905 (Stalson 1942 [1969], ch. 23). Nevertheless, the 1827-1869 interventions demonstrate well-defined consumerism in life insurance marketing prior to the "turn-of-the-century" era. The authors cannot here explore developments in mutual, fraternal, savings bank and government life insurance or in insurance against other risks. In recent decades, regardless of the supposed state of general consumerism, medical and health insurance seems to have been the focus of the most intense consumeristic reform concerns, followed by automotive liability insurance.

Protection Against Unsafe and Deceptive Products and Practices

Consumerism history has given preponderant attention to the reduction of fraud and the promotion of hygiene, which does seem to have had some correlation with the coming and going of the three eras, probably accounts for the scholarly emphasis upon those eras. Since the major aspects of this domain are well-known, and since the underlying hypothesis here is primarily tested by what happened outside the temporal peaks rather than within them, the discussion of this domain will be brief. Major components include bans on deceptive advertising, misleading labeling, and on impure or unsafe foods, medicines and cosmetics.

Protection Against Adulterated and Impure Foods. The pure foods and drugs movement is often attributed to the publication of The Jungle in 1906, Upton Sinclair's stunning expose of meat-packing abuse. The Jungle was indeed a catalyst, but as so often happens with consumerism and other social movements, it crystallized long-standing and long-growing sentiments. Okun (1986) has provided a detailed record of earlier, much clearer publications and legislation, mostly at the state level, that paved the way for federal controls.

A German work, A Treatise on Adulteration, by Frederick Accum (1820), was published in a pirated U.S. edition in 1821. Many American books on the subject appeared in the 1840s, 1850s and 1860s (Okun, 1986).

Crusading newspaper campaigns also excited interest in food and drug reform during the same

period, although political interests generally defeated ameliorative legislation at the state level. Several issues seemed important: (1) adulterated and unregulated pharmaceuticals, (2) unsanitary milk supply, especially the growing urban practice of maintaining herds of ill-kept cattle in dirty, confining barns at distilleries, to be fed "swill," a byproduct of whiskey production, (3) the addition of cheap, highly unstable and explosive dilutants to kerosene which, at the time, was widely used for household illumination, (4) unsafe lead content in cookware and tableware, and (5) general adulteration of prepared and processed foods.

A Special Examiner of Drugs was appointed at the New York customs house in 1846 to help intercept adulterated and unsanitary drugs. Two years later, Congress enacted specific legislation to reinforce his activities. This was fairly important step because at that time much of America's pharmaceutical supplies were imported through New York. The Examiner's reports and the agitation he induced also led pharmaceutical and medical societies to seek more control over the dispensing of medicines. Such regulation did not come in, for example, New York until 1872 when the legislature empowered the College of Pharmacy to appoint a board of pharmacy that would register and license practitioners.

Somewhat earlier, in 1866, in response to efforts by sanitarians and investigative journalists who were distressed by filthy living conditions in New York City, the state created a Metropolitan Board of Health to gain control over sanitary conditions in the City and its environs. The Board moved swiftly to improve hygiene in municipal public food markets. In 1868 the Board began testing kerosene for adulteration and after 1869, it became concerned about milk supply. By the late 1870s, not only health crusaders but also business interests represented by the National Board of Trade became interested in the control and elimination of product adulteration. Dr. Harvey Wiley became Chief of the Chemical Division of the U.S. Department of Agriculture in 1883 and led the campaign that culminated in the Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906. A fairly steady stream of food, pharmaceutical, agricultural and other product safety rules and regulations has since emanated from Washington, both within and outside of the peak consumeristic periods (e.g. Pesticides Residue law 1954, Food Additive law 1958, Color Additives law 1960).

Antimonopoly and Public Utility Regulation

Mayer (1989) acknowledges two main streams of U.S. consumerism: An antimonopoly drive and a product/promotion truth and safety drive. He then explicitly elects to join the main body of consumerists in concentrating on the latter effort. It is undoubtedly true that much of the early monopoly regulation (see Tedlow 1981) was designed to protect smaller competitors and business customers from the competitive and anti-competitive practices of larger enterprises and combinations and trusts.

Nevertheless in at least some, perhaps in many, instances the consumer stood to gain from restraint of monopoly power. This article will later note how states, in the early years, tried to use their charter requirements to impose service and other conditions upon transportation companies. Strong antimonopoly sentiments appeared in the body politic by the 1830s. The Loco-Foco Party, based in New York, took an antimonopoly stance and similar sentiment appeared in the upper midwest. After the Civil War, the Farmers' Alliance and other agrarian organizations took the lead in fighting the industrialists. Quite a long time was required before this sentiment evoked passage of the Sherman Antitrust Act at the end of the century. But clearly that act, like so many other forms of consumerism, emerged out of long smoldering complaints.

The authors will not rehearse the complete history of antitrust. But it is interesting to note its almost complete suspension during what is supposed to have been one of consumerism's peak periods--the early 1930s. There was an Office of the Consumer Counsel attached to the National Recovery Administration, the New Deal agency that sponsored Codes of Fair Competition devised by

management and labor. But that office was ineffective and the NRA has been characterized as "the greatest conspiracy in restraint of trade in America's history." Fortunately the Supreme Court, in the Schuster case, found that NRA involved an unconstitutional delegation of power to the Code Authorities, usually trade association officials, who did much of the drafting of the actual Codes.

Deceptive Advertising. Outside common law sanctions against outright fraud (probably of little value to the average consumer in the usual situation), the first federal statute in this area was the Postal Fraud Law adopted in 1872, at the very beginning of the broadest definition of the first peak. It was aimed at perpetrators of get-rich-quick and similar schemes who were using direct mail solicitation to ensnare consumers. The controversial Printers' Ink Model Statute appeared in 1911, toward the end of the first peak. The statute, proposed by an advertising industry trade magazine and eventually adopted by many states, forbade false and deceptive advertising. Many criticize it for lack of enforceability and some believe it was a diversionary tactic to forestall or delay federal regulation. That came in 1914, with the passage of the Federal Trade Commission Act, and intensified when the reinforcing Wheeler-Lea Act was passed in 1938 (Fueroghne 1989).

The FTC's early interest was in protecting competitors rather than consumers (Tedlow 1981). Yet by 1925, 75 per cent of its cease-and-desist orders were issued against false and misleading advertising (Stuart 1974).

Protecting Travelers

Travelers, regardless of their purpose, have always been prime targets for victimization as well as moral responsibilities for their hosts. "I was a stranger and you took me in" has long been true in both a cynical and a literal sense.

Inns and Hotels. Statute and common law have invested inns, taverns, and hotels with a quasi-public utility character since ancient times. Although definitions of "appropriate," "wholesome," and "reasonable" have certainly varied over time and over quality of establishment since colonial times, subject to some exceptions, public lodging and catering establishments have been required to adequately shelter and feed any sober and respectable traveler who will pay the appropriate charges and for whom there is room (Sherry 1976). Long lists of federal, state, and municipal public health, fire safety, anti-discrimination and other codes have steadily defined and enlarged those requirements.

Transport Media. Consumeristic regulation of public transport has centered on safety (which also has labor and environmental implications), service, and price. Some of the early state regulations attempted to control rate making and that has become a central issue in national regulation.

Consumeristic pressure emerges from felt needs. Large social movements may stimulate the perception of needs (Mayer 1989, ch. 2), but the needs themselves can also arise out of technological, economic or social changes entirely separate from any generalized public mood. This is true of transport safety regulation. The first Congressional act to regulate steamboat safety "for the better security of the lives of passengers" was created in 1838 after several disasters, an extensive debate between interventionists and laissez-faire advocates, and the earlier adoption of ineffective state and municipal laws. This new act also proved ineffective even after several amendments. Dreadful accidents continued, so a much stricter steamboat act was adopted in 1852. It only applied to passenger vessels, a fact that demonstrates its consumeristic intent. A stream of legislation over the last 140 years has introduced and reinforced design, equipment, maintenance, staffing, personnel licensing, and operating requirements. The important legislation included the Steamboat Acts of 1838, 1852 and 1871, all outside the three peak consumeristic periods (Bennett 1976).

Similar safety problems arose with the introduction of railway passenger service in 1831 (Clarke et al. 1897). State regulation dealt, not very successfully, with accident problems and the environmental problems of unsafe grade crossings. The states did, however, force the railways to use locomotive steam or other substitutes to replace the hazardous stoves that originally heated passenger cars (Clarke et al. 1887). The creation of the Interstate Commerce Commission in 1897, often cited as one of the earliest consumerism manifestations, provided a mechanism for federal railway regulation. In the early days the states also regulated service by, for instance, mandating what stations must be served or even controlling the frequency of service (Meyer 1903). Airline passenger service began in 1914 and led, once again, to some state and municipal legislation. By 1926, the growth of air service and its problems called for federal intervention. The federal Aeronautics Bureau (1926) undertook the testing and licensing of pilots, engines and aircraft (Whitnah 1966).

All these transport media exhibit a similar pattern: An adventurous and entrepreneurial start, severe safety problems, ineffective local regulation and, finally, federal control (often initiated in a highly confrontational climate).

Protection Against Addiction

Studies of consumerism have generally ignored anti-alcohol and anti-narcotic drives, in spite of usually including some aspects of the anti-smoking campaign. This widespread differentiation of prohibition and similar measures from other consumer protections may rest upon tradition or upon some challengeable distinctions.

(1) The substance agitation may be perceived as being more religiously oriented than the generally secular consumer movement. Many temperance workers have cited Scripture and have had sectarian affiliations (eg. the Women's Christian Temperance Union). But the traditional consumerists have had their clerical supporters, and many secular temperance groups (eg. Anti-Saloon League) have been concerned with temporal consequences, such as improving individual physical and financial health, protecting families and maintaining social stability (Tice 1992).

(2) Most consumeristic regulations impose sanctions only upon errant sellers, not buyers. The consumer who buys a mislabeled product is not normally penalized. That is not true of the controlled substance laws, although punishment of sellers is usually more severe and relatively more frequent than that of consumers (Hollander 1984). The temperance drive has used a mix of anti-seller activities that varied from advertising and marketing channel controls to outright prohibition and the physical destruction of saloons (Furnas 1965). Furthermore, users have been subjected to the traditional consumer movement tools of exhortation and education. There may also now be a tendency to penalize consumer behavior that supposedly imposes costs, such as health care expenses, upon society, eg. failure to use seat belts. Historically, an 1810 Pennsylvania law imposed a \$500 fine on any consumer who bought a life insurance policy from an out-of-state firm (Stalson 1942 [1969]).

(3) The temperance movement is not a consumer advisory activity in the sense that a wine-tasting society is. The temperance workers do not tell consumers how to maximize either intoxication or flavor per dollar. At times they have promoted specific substitutes (coffee, clean water, physical exercise). More importantly, these substance opponents have constantly told consumers that they would benefit if they spent their money in other ways. In terms of the definitions advanced earlier, the temperance movements have frequently seen themselves as freeing addicts (consumers) from the power of evil sellers (or sellers of evil) by, on the one hand, strengthening consumer resistance (medically and mentally) and, on the other, weakening or eliminating the sellers' ability to reach the market. Recognition of this motivation does not imply any judgment about the wisdom of, or even the extent of, the need for any particular remedial action.

The important thing is that the temperance movements have impacted consumption practices,

are long-standing, have had important economic consequences, and certainly modify the generally accepted time pattern. Tice (1992) held that since colonial days, the U.S. has alternated between alcohol tolerance or promotion and alcohol discouragement. In 1830, a generally protectionist period, the existing high tariff on tea and coffee was drastically reduced to encourage their use as alternatives to alcohol. (The protectionists may have also used these reductions to make their tariff increases more palatable.) The temperance movement induced the only direct consumption control in U.S. constitutional history. Prohibition was adopted in 1919, also outside the traditional three eras.

Finally, restrictions have, and are, being directed at many products and services once, or even now, considered more or less licit: alcohol, narcotics, tobacco, prostitution, gambling, and handguns. Other industries might wonder if they will ever be added to the list.

Environmentalism

Environmentalism is a separate movement from consumerism. In fact, the two may be in conflict as when automobile emission standards designed to protect the atmosphere impose higher fuel or equipment costs upon motorists/consumers. Yet there are relationships between the two movements. Probably a very substantial overlap exists among the adherents of the two programs. Both force business to behave differently than it would in their absence. Most importantly from our perspective, environmentalism has three objectives: (1) it may seek to protect nature for its own sake, as exemplified by the Endangered Species Act; (2) it may seek to insure pleasant, safe and healthy living conditions for future human generations; or (3) it may seek to provide such conditions for the present generation. Obviously all of these objectives may be embraced within a particular environmentalistic drive. More significantly for the present discussion, the third objective often, or perhaps always, is consumeristic in character. When sanitarians became concerned about crowding, filth and disease in nineteenth century tenements, they sought legislation that required landlords to improve their accommodations. In essence, to the extent that such legislation was enforced, it altered buyer-seller relationships. Labels of environmentalism or consumerism are equally appropriate. In some instances the environmentalists sought public provision of services (e.g. parks) that were previously lacking or available only from private suppliers. Even here the hope often was that the new service would alter the expenditure patterns of the poor (outdoor recreation instead of saloon patronage). This article will discuss some aspects of early environmentalism that were clearly pro-consumeristic.

City Planning and Public Works. Early attempts to provide attractive, viable urban environments can be found in the design of colonial cities, such as the pleasant square of William Penn's Philadelphia, and in later developments, such as Major L'Enfant's famous 1791 defense-oriented plan for Washington, D.C. The long-term increase in both city planning and the provision of public services arose from many interrelated positive and negative causes: sheer growth in city size, increasing industrialization with concomitant problems of noise, dirt and congestion, absorption of many unskilled workers, concerns about public health and societal integration, and a growing belief in the therapeutic and spiritual value of nature (Schultz 1989).

The extent to which cities can control matters related to their development has evolved over the centuries. Today's civic responsibility for public goods, such as parks, water supply, roads, grew over time. Early governments performed few services and taxed little. The colonial assemblies and municipal legislatures systematically regulated certain kinds of property use. Boston, New York City, Philadelphia, Charleston, and other cities commonly dictated the kinds of materials to be used for construction, and controlled locations of noxious enterprises, such as tanneries, slaughterhouses, and gunpowder manufacturers. In the 1820s, however, contrary to prevailing practice, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts gave public lands to the Boston Water-Power Company, to support the Company's water power project (Schultz 1989). But during the first half of the 19th century, many cities did not control public works, such as water supply or sewage disposal. Until well into the 1850s, they relied on private

aqueduct firms, who refused service to unprofitable, remote and low-income areas.

Public health concerns initiated a counter-trend. In 1837, New York City began construction of a public water supply system. The first metropolitan planning commission was set up in Boston in the 1840s in response to the pollution of the Charles River. Worries about sanitary and social conditions in the tenements evoked housing reform efforts. New York first banned public privies and basement apartments in the 1860s and Boston mandated fireproof construction for tenements in 1891. Other large cities followed suit. Municipal sewage and waste disposal efforts began even earlier (Christensen 1978).

All these activities, and similar ones such as the provision of public fire protection, sought to improve the municipal environment and reduce consumer dependence upon private suppliers. City park and beautification work impinged much less upon direct buyer-seller exchange but had the same living conditions improvement objectives.

In 1831, Massachusetts created a "rural cemetery" in an attractive location near Boston. If the dead could be provided with park-land surroundings, so could the living. The New York legislature, in 1854, began purchasing land for Central Park. The striking results induced park construction in many other cities. Subsequent movements, such as the City Beautiful movement, sparked by the Chicago World's Fair in 1893 and the Garden City movement evoked by Ebenezer Howard's 1898 book of the same name, fostered increased city planning and the dispersal of smaller parks into slum areas (Christensen 1978).

SOME CONCLUSIONS AND SOME IMPLICATIONS

Conclusions

This study does not controvert the three eras or peaks hypothesis. First, if those eras are defined broadly enough (see Exhibit 1), they leave little time for "nonpeak" events. Add all the writers together and the peaks become a plateau interspersed with some narrow valleys. Second, there did seem to be times when, for whatever reasons, and the explanations in the literature are many and varied, the pace of protest quickens.

But, and this is the point, consumerism as a whole, and even many of its individual domains do not suddenly emerge full-blown, nor do they necessarily with the achievement of their first goals, necessarily end. For one thing, apparatus, such as regulatory commissions and voluntary or semi-voluntary standards, become institutionalized and often continue after the pressure that created them is no longer newsworthy. More importantly, the desire of the population to improve its lot by altering or fine-tuning the supply system appears deep-rooted and continuous. The particular topics of greatest concern rotate over time. Product safety may be paramount at one time, price levels at another, the availability of addictive substances in a third period, and credit problems at a fourth time.

The importance of taking a very broad view of consumerism is that it heightens the realization that pressure for change can come in many directions and at any time. It also gives a more realistic picture of the total intervention into buyer-seller relationships.

Implications

For business. History shows that many harbingers of consumerism appeared even before 1875. Much of the early state transportation, antimonopoly and other regulation was unsuccessful but some had important effects and all paved the way for later, more stringent controls. During, and after World War

I, supposedly a nonpeak period, some price controls and some price protests appeared, the anti-alcohol movement enjoyed its greatest strength, and legislation continued to grow in such areas as transportation safety, insurance and product standards. Again, during the boom period of World War II and its aftermath, price control became a major issue.

It is said that generals are always preparing to fight the last war. Marketing executives should note from history that consumerism will appear from new directions, and frequently focused on new as well as old concerns. Yet history also shows that consumer and public concerns and expectations tend to grow over time. Management has much to gain from quick response or, better yet, operations that anticipate and avert the need for responses.

For Study and Research. One cannot look at the broad long-term sweep of American consumerism without wondering about many questions, some of which have already been extensively examined in the literature and some of which have not. These questions include:

1. This article has concentrated upon efforts to improve consumers' material welfare. But consumeristic pressure can be and has been used for many other purposes. A full history would also examine socio-political utilization of consumer purchasing power (Smith, 1990).
2. The eminent political scientist Robert E. Lane (1993) argues that consumers obtain goods and services in two ways: by buying them and by voting for them. The history of transfers between the public and private agendas, including questions of subsidization and imposition of user fees, should be studied in terms of its consumer impact.
3. There is much overlap and some conflict between support for consumerism and support for environmentalism. Do the two movements exhibit similar histories? This article has shown some relationship between the two and the authors have gathered some evidence, not presented here, of quite early environmentalism.
4. How, and in what ways, did consumer welfare and protection change from colonial times (a period of mercantilistic government intervention) to the antebellum years of independence (presumably dominated by a laissez-faire philosophy)?
5. Can direct relationships be traced between growth in market inefficiencies, such as asymmetry in the possession of information between buyers and sellers, and the intensification of consumeristic pressure in specific domains?
6. Retailing, the point of delivery of most consumer goods, has steadily become more impersonal during the last 125 years. How has this affected consumerism?
7. As noted, not all so-called consumerist is actually what it purports to be. There is room for some historical detective work on the origin of, support for, and impact obtained by many "consumeristic" regulations.
8. The relative role of the leader versus the environment is a perennial question in history. That is true of the history of consumerism.
9. A struggle has long existed within the consumer movement between those who have taken anti-materialistic and materialistic stances. The latter have emphasized "better buymanship" or the receipt of more material benefit per dollar spent. They appear to have won the battle. Creighton (1976) has documented this conflict in home economics and Belk (1993) has described it among Mormon pioneers in Utah. The analysis

should be generalized.

10. In the realm of history of marketing thought, we need to ask how some activities become fixed as consumeristic while similar ones do not. More generally, although it would be an excruciatingly difficult task, we probably should try to re-examine many traditional classifications and categorizations.

Thus whether business operators or academic researchers, we should realize that in consumerism we are dealing with a complex, long-standing phenomenon whose intensity varies from time to time but never seems to go below a constant carrier wave. As long as market inefficiencies, inadequacies and asymmetries persist, that wave is likely to continue to exist.

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