

# Critical Management Studies Conference Abstract

## History Stream

### Marketing Mytho-history: An Illustrative Analysis of Relationship Marketing in Industrial Branch Insurance

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Dr Dawn Burton  
Centre for Business Management  
Mile End Road  
London E1 4NS

Email: [d.burton@qmul.ac.uk](mailto:d.burton@qmul.ac.uk)  
Telephone: 020 7882 7823

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There has been considerable concern about the lack of historical discourse in marketing paralleling debates within other management specialisms. Historical discourse in marketing is marginalised. Few academics would readily identify themselves as marketing historians and mainstream marketing researchers rarely weave a historical perspective into their work. There exists only one definitive account of the development of marketing thought (Bartels 1988 3<sup>rd</sup> edition). Analyses of this work could hardly be described as critical (Shaw and Tamilia 2001). Papers written from a historical perspective rarely appear in high status US journals. Although the number has gradually increased since the 1930s, some of the more recent evidence of expansion overstates the case by including large numbers of conference publications in their analyses (Jones and Monieson 1990). Only two special issues focusing on historical perspectives have appeared in mainstream marketing journals since 1990, those in the *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* (Hollander, Nevett and Fullerton, 1990) and *Psychology and Marketing* (Holden, 1998). A testament to the lack of interest in historical approaches within the marketing academy, is that good quality marketing history papers are probably more likely to be written by academics outside, rather than inside the discipline as the papers in a recent special issue in *Business History* (Church and Goodley, 2003) on 'The Emergence of Modern Marketing: International Dimensions' testify.

The lack of marketing history papers is a cause for concern since they can be a vital source of synthesis in documenting the development of the discipline in the context of theory and knowledge development, or practice (Savitt, 1980). Furthermore, learning from the past to assist our understanding of the present is one way to avoid re-inventing the wheel for which marketing has received considerable criticism (Wensley, 1999).

This paper introduces the novel concept of marketing mytho-history to describe the current state of much 'historical' discourse in marketing. The concept of the myth is one which has been operationalised in several ways within marketing. For example, Stern discusses consumer myths (Stern 1995), Thompson (2004) analyses marketplace myths, while Clancy (1994) focuses on 'marketing myths that are killing business'. Mytho-history has not been the subject of a great deal of debate in marketing or elsewhere. In his wide-ranging discussion of the historical relationship between technology and culture in the US, Carroll (2000) describes mytho-history as the primary vehicle for the ideological and cultural construction of the subject. In her analysis of whiteness, Babb (1998) uses the concept of mytho-history to refer to mythologies that emerge out of a 'constellation of rhetoric', referring to an idealised version of the past. In the context of this paper, mytho-history refers to myth making during the knowledge generation process within the marketing academy. The marginalisation of marketing history in the discipline, and the absence of an integration of historical perspectives by mainstream marketing researchers in their work, has led to the development of increasing amounts of marketing mytho-history within the discipline.

The concept of marketing mytho-history is discussed in the context of recent developments in relationship marketing discourse. The vast majority of the literature on relationship marketing, positions it as a distinctive approach to marketing that emerged during the last decade of the twentieth century. Many marketing academics heralded relationship marketing as a new perspective that challenged conventional marketing that had traditionally focused on the 4Ps of the marketing mix. Indeed marketing historians have recently supported these knowledge claims and confined their history of development to the post 1980 period (Mulki and Stock 2003). A plethora of relationship marketing texts have been generated and have supported this viewpoint, so has a new journal developed as a forum for this 'new' scholarship. Despite rhetoric to the contrary, this paper will argue that relationship marketing is not new. Drawing on examples from industrial branch insurance, it will be demonstrated that relationship marketing was actively used as an internal and external marketing strategy as early as the mid-nineteenth century, and that it emerged as a response to a specific set of social, economic and political changes. In this respect, the view that relationship marketing was a new marketing concept unique to the final decade of the twentieth century is erroneous. It is a contemporary example of marketing mytho-history.

The paper concludes by reflecting on if and how a more historically driven discourse might emerge in the future.

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