

Marketization and commodification of history

It has been long established that history contains a performative role (Clark and Rowlinson, 2004; Wadhvani and Bucheli, 2013). And it is often used by organizations and individuals to emphasize certain elements of the past to different purposes. For example, during strong uncertainty times – such as social, economic or political crisis – historical accounts can help an organization to stabilize itself, to offer reliability, trustworthiness and credibility of its functioning. The importance of knowing, understanding its past and converting it into history has become so important that many organizations have now recourse to professionals such as historians or specialized consultants to manage their history. These people dive into the archives, organize and select them and choose the most appropriate outlets to disseminate their past to external and/or internal audiences. However, in this process, controversies and ambiguities (Brown *et al.*, 2013) can occur. Wishing to embellish their past, organizations or individuals can distort their past, manipulate it (Ricoeur, 2000), over-glorify it, or even fabricate it (Beverland, Lindgreen and Vink, 2008).

This special issue on “Marketization and commodification of history” has called research that focuses on the way actors marketize and advertise their history. They build or extract their «genealogy» – often calling for the help of historians to do such work – to construct storytellings.

The special issue includes six papers representing a rich selection of scholarly work. Together, these papers address different approaches in which history can be used, transformed, even manipulated to marketing and commercial outcomes. These papers emphasize the narrative aspect of history, as romanticized, mythical stories are crucial to better convince stakeholders or to sell to consumers.

The first set of papers elaborates on marketization and construction of cultural heritage through three different contexts: the Parthenon Temple, ANZAC (New Zealand Army Corps) and “roman national” in France.

In the first paper “Commodifying ancient cultural heritage: the market evolution of the Parthenon Temple”, Zafeirenia Brokalaki and Georgios Patsiaouras explore ancient, medieval and modern marketing forces and practices through which various actors have promoted, gifted, commercially traded, exchanged, acquired cultural artefacts and historical monuments. The case of Parthenon Temple is particularly interesting in the sense it reveals insights around the formation of illegal markets and arts trade practices. The authors question the ethical, socio-political, economic and aesthetic implications of the extensive marketisation of history and the case highlights issues around the (il-)legitimate ownership, promotion and consumption of heritage.

In the second paper “New Zealand’s Anzac nurses: marketizing the great war for a 21st century fit”, Jayne Krisjanous and Christine Hallett investigate a various set of data, including diaries, letters and memoirs about the role of the New Zealand Army Nursing Service (NZANS) during WWI. This provides an excellent example of the marketization of history based on cultural branding. In New Zealand, the story of ANZAC (New Zealand Army Corps) is pivotal to New Zealand’s patriotic spirit and national culture. To be maintained through time, this culture needs to be customized, as according to cultural branding’s principles (Holt, 2004) through the addition of stories and myths such as NZANS. The narratives around the nurses’ work are really illustrative as they refer to real figures



curing people. This also explains why some unknown or confidential stories are suddenly revealed and used, to revitalize cultural brands.

The third paper is titled the “Chromolithographed history: brands’ trade cards and the co-construction of the French “roman national” (1900s–1930s). The notion of *roman national* could be translated – although it would not constitute a perfect translation – into national myth. Indeed, it regards the romanced – and even fictional – narration that a nation builds about its own history. Anthony Galluzzo looks at the marketization and commodification of history quite differently from the other articles by understanding how a various set of French brands participated, through their chromolithographs, to the *roman national* in France. By doing so, there is a reciprocal purpose: the brands have helped forging a national spirit, but by recursing to these national myths, to popular and patriotic figures, they have also used the roman national to better advertise and sell their products.

In the second set of papers, the authors focus more on the use and production of historical materials by organizations.

The fourth paper “(En)act your age! Marketization of history in young SMEs” is from Donna Sears and Terrance Weatherbee. The authors show the interrelationship of history with market logics and norms and conceptually distinguish two forms of the use of history and heritage in marketing: commodification and marketization. Based on a longitudinal case study on the marketing communications of wineries in an emerging cool-climate wine region, Sears and Weatherbee show how the wineries responded to the norms and logics of fine wine by using their marketing communications and to signal their product authenticity.

“Marketing the past over the long run: uses of the past in French accounting textbooks, 17th–19th c.” is the fifth article of this special issue. Pierre Labardin and Pierre Gervais look at an unusual set of data constituted by 17th–19th century’s accounting books and have recourse to historical and organizational literatures. They highlight accountants can custom the past in two different ways, depending on the period studied: in the first customization, the past helps to legitimate and even glorify the present by settling a type of stability. In the second customization, the past is rejected as it represents a dangerous routine that impedes innovation turned towards the future. These perspectives help to elaborate different types of sales pitches for the accountants to promote their work. The authors theoretically discuss these contrasting views of the past and show the marketing and economic interest of recursing to the past.

In the sixth and last article, titled “Rhetorical history and strategic marketing: the example of Strabucks”, Pierre Volle explores the way organizations use rhetorical history through 1,852 “stories” conveyed by Starbucks over the last 17 years. Even though the company is quite young, it has heavily relied to different types of histories to encourage and develop its heritage. It does so through various strategies: narrating, visualizing, performing and embodying. The combination of these different strategies serves better the legitimation of the company’s heritage rather than having an accumulation of these narratives during a long period. The paper also discusses the non necessity of nostalgia for organizations wishing to use their history; in the case of Starbucks, history mainly serves the importance of strategic moves toward the future.

A set of topics have not been studied in this special issue, and we think it important to mention them and call for future research: organizations’ heritage management, interaction between stakeholders (historians, curators, managers, etc.) in the stage production of history, museums and exhibits on the heritage of brands and organizations and meaning of marketizing history for stakeholders.

We would like to end this introduction with our acknowledgement for the numerous reviewers who gave their time and energy and helped the authors with their constructive feedbacks.

Guest editorial

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3
