The four eras of “marketing” in twentieth century India

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this study is to understand the evolution of “marketing” in the public and corporate discourse of twentieth-century India.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper draws its inferences from an analysis of the digital Times of India and Financial Times historical newspaper databases, the corporate archives of two leading Mumbai-based firms – Godrej in consumer goods and Cipla in pharmaceuticals and oral histories of marketing managers.

Findings – The paper identifies four eras of “marketing” in twentieth-century India. Era I (1910-1940) saw the emergence of agricultural “marketing boards” and “marketing of officers” in the public sector and the growth of Indian and multinational advertising agencies. Era II (1940-1970) witnessed the formation of management and advertising associations and business schools with close involvement of American players. In Era III (1970-1990), there was a paradigm shift as “marketing” grew in corporate discourse and firms began to employ “marketing managers” in “marketing departments”. Era IV (1990-till date) witnessed the explosion of “marketing” in public and corporate discourse alongside the consumption boom in India. The paper shows how “marketing” evolved separately in the public and private sectors and in different phases as compared to that in the West.

Research limitations/implications – This paper overturns conventional wisdom on marketing history in India, which has so far discounted its significance before 1960 or accorded primary significance to the 1990s’ economic liberalisation programme.

Practical implications – Findings of this study will be useful to marketing professionals and teachers who wish to learn more about the history of marketing in India.

Originality/value – The paper uses unexplored archival material and provides the first account on the evolution of “marketing” in public and corporate discourse in twentieth-century India.

Keywords Marketing history, Advertising history, India, Cipla, Godrej, Marketing boards

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

The word “marketing” has assumed different meanings over time. Philip Kotler’s definition of marketing in 1976 as a “human activity directed at satisfying needs and wants through exchange processes” had changed by the sixth edition of his book in 1988, to a “social and managerial process by which individuals and groups obtain what they need and want through creating and exchanging products and value with others” (Mercer, 1999, p. 206). In 2013, the board of directors of the American Marketing Association (AMA) approved the

The authors thank the library staff at IIM-Ahmedabad, the staff at Godrej and Cipla corporate archives in Mumbai, Cj Kuncheria, two anonymous referees and Mr Indrapal Singh of Godrej for sharing his experience at Godrej.
definition of marketing as “the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large” (AMA, 2013). The periodic approval process by the AMA itself points to the changing meaning of the word.

The evolution of the definition is also associated with the evolution of marketing thought and practice. Wilkie and Moore (2003) highlighted four eras in the development of marketing thought in twentieth-century America. The first era from 1900 to 1920 “founded the field”, the second from 1920 to 1950 “formalised the field”, the third era from 1950 to 1980 led to a paradigm shift towards “marketing, management and the sciences” and the final era till date led to the “fragmentation of thought”. At another level, Tedlow (1990) characterised the “three stages of marketing” from fragmentation to unification to segmentation to describe the evolution of marketing in several industries in American business history.

Marketing practices have long been noted in Indian history, but references to the specific English word – “marketing” or its contemporary Hindi translation – vipanan – are scarce before the twentieth century. Today, “marketing” appears everywhere in India – in Government and business departments, business schools, college festival organising committees and various other administrative units. In this context, this paper asks the following question:

Q1. When and how did the word “marketing” enter the public and corporate discourse of India?

This is an important question in the history of marketing in any society as it unearths critical time periods and sets of factors that enable us to understand the semantics of a key term used in contemporary business.

If “marketing” has a continuously evolving meaning, thought process and practice in one region of the world, it can also take on different meanings or have different origins in other parts of the world. Cultural specificities of caste, religion and gender in India as well as its relatively lower level of economic development could, in theory, shape different notions of marketing. One academic study on India in 1960 had remarked that marketing was non-existent (Westfall and Boyd, 1960), suggesting that the word and concept developed much later. Standard accounts of Indian business history have also overlooked “marketing” or noted it only in the closing decades of the twentieth century (Tripathi 2013). These narratives have not attracted greater scrutiny till date because the history of marketing in India remains under-studied as “marketing” in academia has been an ahistorical subject (Varman and Sreekumar 2015). History departments in Indian universities have seldom focused on aspects of business and business or management schools have rarely engaged with research in history.

In this paper, we study newspapers, annual reports, archival documents and oral histories to show the unique ways in which “marketing” entered the public and corporate discourse of India in the twentieth century. Our analysis is constrained by the paucity of primary sources on marketing history in India and, therefore, focuses on accessible historical material. The analysis of public discourse is undertaken through the digital Times of India historical database, an important database to discern trends in vocabulary as it is the largest English language newspaper of India with origins dating back to 1838. We also analyse the digital Financial Times historical database of the British newspaper, founded in 1888, for drawing comparisons. The analysis of corporate discourse requires access to the primary documents stored in corporate archives, but they are less than ten in number in India. We chose two large Mumbai-based industrial firms – Godrej (founded in 1897) and Cipla (founded in 1935) – for this study because they belonged to different sectors –
consumer goods and pharmaceuticals, respectively – and because their archives were publicly accessible.

By studying the evolution of “marketing” in public and corporate discourses, this paper addresses a critical gap in business and marketing history that exists because of a “shortage of historical writing on marketing’s development as a business function” (Fitzgerald, 2007, p. 398) and contributes to an emerging historiography on consumption in South Asia (Haynes et al., 2010). Understanding the history of “marketing” is also important to understand the social, cultural and economic transformation of India.

The public discourse of “marketing” in twentieth-century India
Newspapers offer fruitful ways of understanding changes in public discourses as they contain a large number of articles written by different authors. The digital Times of India (TOI) historical database covers all items printed in the newspaper between 1838 and 2007, including close to four million articles. The newspaper’s base in Mumbai, the commercial capital of the country, is an added advantage for analysing marketing trends. Simple frequency counts of keywords are misleading as the number of articles and size of the newspaper increased substantially over time. Hence, we follow the method of analysing the percentage of articles that reported a particular keyword, as a metric to gauge the popularity of the keyword (Tumbe and Krishnakumar, 2018), a standard practice in the field of corpus linguistics.

Table I presents this metric for four key words – selling, advertising, marketing and branding. These words have been chosen because they are action words that have distinct meanings as opposed to their noun forms. Other marketing keywords were also analysed but they did not generate sufficient search hits. Before 1910, the word “marketing” rarely appeared in TOI even though India, for long, had a vibrant history of bazaars, trade and textiles (Bayly, 1983, Roy, 1999, Riello and Roy 2009). Between 1910 and 1940, a clear upward shift is noted in its prevalence, especially in the 1930s. The prevalence rates are then

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decade</th>
<th>Selling</th>
<th>Advertising</th>
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<td>1870s</td>
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<td>1880s</td>
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<td>1890s</td>
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<td>1910s</td>
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<td>1920s</td>
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<td>1930s</td>
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<td>1940s</td>
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<td>1950s</td>
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<td>1960s</td>
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<td>1970s</td>
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<td>1990s</td>
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Table I: Trends in marketing-related keywords in the Times of India, 1860-2007

Notes: Figures rounded to the nearest decimal. 1860s refers to 1860-1869 and similarly for all decades, except for the 2000s, which refers to 2000-2007. Based on a search analysis of keywords in the “ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Times of India” database.
stagnant for the next three decades before jumping in the 1970s and then again considerably in the 1990s. Thus, there are four distinct time periods: 1910-1940 (coinciding broadly with the inter-war period), 1940-1970, 1970-1990 and 1990 till date.

Figure 1 compares the evolution of “marketing” in the TOI with the Financial Times, a British newspaper. The trend in the Financial Times shows a close correspondence with the four eras of development of marketing thought in America, as noted by Wilkie and Moore (2003), with a “paradigm shift” in Era III –1950 to 1980 – followed by slower growth. It may be argued that the higher prevalence rates in the Financial Times, relative to the TOI, has more to do with the nature of news covered, but while that may explain absolute differences, it does not explain the differences over time. What is striking is the lag of about two decades between India and Britain, with clear phases of growth, stagnation and very rapid growth. In Britain, this is then topped off with relatively slower growth in Era IV, potentially indicating what lies in store for India.

Having identified four clear phases in the evolution of “marketing” in twentieth-century India, and a lag with Britain, it remains to be seen as to what factors led to this particular path. One natural starting point is the level of economic development. In India, economic development has not kept pace with the Western world, and as a result, one may expect a different trajectory of “marketing” meanings and practices. Per capita incomes were stagnant in the first half of the twentieth century under colonial rule, rose since the 1950s and began growing at a rapid rate since the 1980s (Sivasubramonian, 2000). After major economic reforms in 1991 that liberalised and opened up the Indian economy to competition, private consumption growth rates picked up considerably. If “marketing” is linked with economic growth and consumption booms, it should see a sharp surge in the last decades of the twentieth century, which is precisely what we observe in Table I. However, “marketing” began picking up before the surge in per capita incomes and this deserves additional explanations. An important macro variable for marketing is the population growth rate, which began rising in India since the 1920s, galloping since the 1960s and peaking in the 1980s (Sivasubramonian, 2000). The increasing popularity of “marketing” in the inter-war period could perhaps tie up with some part of this demographic narrative.

![Figure 1. Percentage of articles in newspapers containing the word “marketing”](chart.png)

Source: Digital newspaper archives of Times of India and Financial Times
Marketing boards and public marketing

In the mid-1930s, “marketing” began to enter the public and administrative discourse of India through government-appointed marketing boards and marketing officers, primarily in the agricultural sector. The proximate reason for this development was the recommendation of the Central Banking Enquiry Committee in 1931. The 915-page report of the committee was published at a time when India was reeling under the severe impact of the Great Depression, especially in the agrarian sector (Rothermund, 1992). Eleven of the 27 chapters in the report were devoted to rural finance and one of these was sub-titled “marketing and movement of crops”. The committee observed the incorrect usage of marketing in several provinces to mean only “transporting and selling” and pointed out that it should cover “all activities involved from the time the product leaves the producer until it reaches the consumer” (GoI, 1931, p. 211). Taking cue from a preliminary report of the International Institute of Agriculture and “other writers on agricultural economics”, it described six functions of marketing – “collection and assembly, transportation, wholesale distribution, retailing, risk-bearing and financing” (GoI, 1931, p. 212). It recommended the establishment of marketing boards on a provincial basis to coordinate warehouse building, encourage cooperative marketing, assist in marketing products of cottage industries, conduct market surveys, standardise products and “help the agriculturalist to get a full and adequate return for his production” (GoI, 1931, p. 226). The concept of a marketing board was closely linked with the cooperative movement and the formation of the Empire Marketing Board (1926-1933) by Britain to “Buy Empire Goods” (Moore, 2016).

The marketing department was opened in India in 1935 as a central coordinating department managed by the Government, and by 1936 all provinces had marketing boards and a hierarchy of marketing officers, who toured districts across India (TOI, 1936, 1937). A. M. Livingstone was the first Agricultural and Marketing Advisor to the Government of India. All-India conferences of marketing officers were held periodically to review their work. In one such conference, N. C. Mehta, Vice-Chairman of the Imperial Council of Agricultural Research, gave a speech on the virtues of marketing surveys, which, according to him, were “not merely concerned with amassing difficult data of doubtful accuracy” but enabled “practical results by raising the quality of merchandise” (TOI, 1937). Another conference presenter observed the “unique opportunity to promote the economic development of the country through better and more efficient marketing” (TOI, 1939). Tea and coffee were two products, which received particular attention at the retail levels but for most other products, the notion of marketing was limited to wholesaling. The AGMARK certification mark was created under the Agricultural Produce (Grading and Marking Act) Act of 1937, and facilitated easier grading of a variety of agro-products in subsequent years (TOI, 1938a).
These events of the 1930s are important to note as they left behind a strong legacy in Indian marketing history. AGMARK labels continued to thrive in the twenty-first century. The central marketing department was renamed as the Directorate of Marketing and Inspection under the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare. Provincial marketing boards transformed into state level marketing boards or Rajya Krishi Vipanan Boards and Agriculture Produce Market Committees (APMCs) at various administrative levels, often with pricing powers. Since the 1930s, the word “marketing” or “vipanan” breached the lives of hundreds of millions of Indians working in the agricultural sector.

Other government departments practiced marketing but did not use the word. Government “advertising” through various mediums was prominent from the late nineteenth century (TOI, 1878). A report of the National Planning Committee on Trade in 1947 recommended the “creation of new markets by propaganda”, the “need for better statistical and marketing intelligence” and employing “Marketing Officers” focussed on internal rather than external trade (GOI, 1947, Chapter 5).

The post office of India not only served as a marketing channel for the private sector but also emerged as the largest retailer of stationery and financial products, with 13,000 offices in 1900 and over 155,000 offices today (Tumbe, 2015). Its “Make savings a must habit” advertising pitch through the Directorate of Publicity in the 1950s partly mirrored the feats of the British Post Office in the 1930s (Tumbe, 2015, Figure 5; Heller, 2016). However, the word “marketing” was rarely used in internal communication and annual reports. It was only in 1992 that the post office set up a “Marketing Division” to “assess customer’s needs and to strive to satisfy them by providing them the required services, to publicise the services already existing as also the new ones to be provided” (GoI, 1992). A Corporate Identity Plan was launched in the same year to “brighten the image of the Department in the eyes of the public” and the department’s employees. This shift in public marketing in the 1990s was clearly related with developments in the corporate discourse.

**Godrej and the marketing of consumer goods**
Godrej is one of the largest Indian business groups today, whose ownership since 1897 has remained tightly under control by family members belonging to the Parsi community. Headquartered in Mumbai, it focuses mainly on consumer goods and historically has been associated with locks, safes, soaps, typewriters and steel furniture and equipment, operated by two principal companies, Godrej & Boyce and Godrej Soaps.

**1897-1960s: Marketing without “marketing managers”**
Until the 1960s, “marketing” rarely appeared in Godrej’s annual reports and internal documents. Godrej did, however, advertise in the English and regional language press. Over 450 display advertisements were published in the TOI alone in the first six decades of the twentieth century. The 200-odd display advertisements in the 1950s represented 0.6 per cent of all display advertisements in the newspaper. An analysis of a sample of these advertisements reveals that they emphasised two core themes – reliability and *swadeshi*. Reliability was demonstrated by showing patents, demand for its products in Europe and quotes from leading personalities. *Swadeshi* or Indian-ness was also emphasised, especially in its soap advertisements (Haynes, 2010; Kaur, 2010).

The creation of advertisements was typically outsourced to advertising firms, whose number increased greatly in the inter-war period, leading to the formation of the Advertising Agencies Association of India (AAAI) in 1945. The seven founding members included Indian and international ad agencies in Bombay and Calcutta – Lintas, National Advertising, Adarts, J Walter Thompson, Keymers, General Advertising Agency and Press...
Syndicate. By 1962, the Indian Advertising Yearbook listed over 300 advertising agencies and the biographical details of nearly 400 people in the advertising agencies (Narasimhan and Chari, 1962). Popular designations in the industry included “Art Directors”, “Publicity Officers”, “Advertising Managers” and only three people had “Marketing” in their designations. Some of the advertising firms were multinationals such as J Walter Thompson (JWT), which started its Indian operations in 1929 with General Motors as its sole client, and soon grew to become the largest and most well-known advertising agency in the country (Haynes, 2015). Unilever initially had an account with JWT in 1930; then it managed its own advertising through its branch office, Lever Brothers (India), before setting up Lintas (Bombay) in 1938, which stood for Levers International Advertising Services (Haynes, 2015, p. 4). JWT, meanwhile, set up a “Marketing Research Department”, and by 1959 was publishing a leading market research document called The Indian Market, which classified the 15 major states of India into A, B, C and D category markets (TOI, 1959).

In 1938, Godrej was listed as one among 34 clients of JWT (Haynes, 2015). By the 1960s, Godrej also had a publicity office staffed by copywriters who were required to hold five years of “specialised experience with an advertising agency or an advertiser” (TOI, 1963). B. K. Karanjia, family friend and biographer of the Godrej’s, joined the firm in 1955 as Publicity Manager, after he helped bring out a 12-page supplement in the TOI, recounting the early struggles and diverse achievements of the firm (Karanjia, 1997a, pp. 13-14).

On the distribution side, Godrej & Boyce made limited progress until the 1960s. Firms’ distribution networks in India at this time were noted to be weak in general, barring “marketing giants” such as Lever Brothers (now Hindustan Unilever) and Bata shoes, who “dealt through a wide network of dealers or outlet shops” (Ray, 1999, p. 55). Consumer goods were often reaching consumers through selling agencies appointed by manufacturers. Godrej had three showrooms in Mumbai and branches-cum-showrooms were set up in Calcutta, Delhi, Madras, Hyderabad and Kanpur between 1928 and 1939, selling steel furniture and equipment. However, branch expansion was halted for the next three decades (Karanjia, 1997b, p. 300). Starting from the mid-1930s, a few dealers were appointed outside Mumbai, and relationships with them extended to the end of the century (Karanjia, 1997b, p. 303).

Marketing was not a major focus area in the firm till the 1960s. This was partly because demand outstripped supply owing to a shortage of steel in the economy, and hence, what was produced easily got sold (Karanjia, 1997a, p. 150). B. P. Godrej (1915-1994), trained as a scientist with a doctorate in technical chemistry, recounted that his sons – Adi and Nadir – took the firm ahead through marketing:

The way they’re marketing the fruits of my research, nobody could have done a better job. Of course I don’t share their faith in marketing. But then, I’m not a marketing man (Karanjia, 1997b, p. 87).

1970s-1990s: Professional marketing and management

The roots of professional management in India lay in mercantile communities, managing agencies and multinationals that entered India in the inter-war period (Ray, 1999). Management Associations were formed in Bombay, Delhi and Calcutta in 1954, 1955 and 1957, and the umbrella organisation, All-India Management Association (AIMA), was formed in 1957. The Indian Institutes of Management (IIM) were set up in Calcutta and Ahmedabad in 1961 through public–private–foreign collaborations with MIT and Harvard, respectively (Tripathi, 2013). Along with these developments, traditional business families, which hired few professional managers, began educating their children abroad, who came
back with a different management mind-set. Aditya Birla, pioneer of India’s overseas investment drive, studied at the MIT in the USA and returned to India in the 1960s to extend his family-business empire (Tumbe, 2017).

Similarly, Nadir Godrej did his MBA at the Harvard Business School and returned to India to join his family business. His elder brother, Adi Godrej, studied at the Sloan School of Management at MIT, returned to India and took over the leadership of Godrej Soaps in 1963-64. The firm’s turnover rose from INR 20 million to nearly INR 6 billion in 1995 and has been credited to the adoption of “new marketing skills and strategies” (Karanjia, 1997b, p. 65). “Branding” was a key part of this strategy as Godrej Soaps launched 55 brands in consumer products alone between 1965 and 1995 (Karanjia, 1997b, p. 79). For distribution, 30 depots were set up to service various markets, which later functioned as clearing agents (Karanjia, 1997a, p. 157). Cinthol, a soap-brand that derives its name from “Synthetic Phenol”, was launched in 1952 and was listed among the 101 strongest brands of India in 2004 (Superbrands, 2004).

A more fine-grained evolution of “marketing” can be observed within Godrej & Boyce, manufacturer of consumer durables and industrial products, through archival documents and oral histories. There were three major developments linked with marketing in this period of the firm’s history – professionalization, regionalisation and divisionalisation. A professional outlook to management started taking shape in the 1950s itself as managers within Godrej were sent to management training programmes. Dr Keki Rustomji Hathi, with a doctorate in history, and who would eventually spend 52 years with Godrej, was one such beneficiary. He began his career with Godrej in 1944 at the age of 22 as a salesman and was soon posted as Branch Manager outside Mumbai (Godrej Archives, 2006, p. 1). After attending a month-long advanced management course run by the MIT faculty and organised by AIMA in Srinagar, he was selected for the Sloan Fellowship Program in 1962 to study industrial management for a year (Karanjia, 1997b, p. 223). He eventually returned to Mumbai to work as Senior Deputy Sales Manager (GA, 2006, p. 14).

Foreign-educated managers were not well received by everyone at Godrej. S. P. Godrej (1912-2000) argued that foreign texts did not fit the Indian context (Karanjia, 1997a, p. 155). With the establishment of the IIM’s in the 1960s, a fresh pool of young professional managers was available for recruitment, though job prospects for them were initially weak (Tripathi, 2013). Dr Hathi recruited a couple of summer trainees from IIM-Ahmedabad in the mid-60s and narrated a particular episode, demonstrating their utility [reproduced below verbatim]:

One lady called Ms. Wadia, who used to run “Interpub”, was doing advertising for Cinthol. She came to us for interview [. . .] for presentation. Then she suggested that we must conduct a survey to find out why our product is not popular, what is wrong before she could launch her campaign. We agreed and she bought one Sardarji who was professor of Management in Bombay University and he did such a lousy job of preparing that report. So this lady could not get our assignment [. . .] put two of IIMA boys to conduct the survey and guided them. They took three-four days. Then I asked them to look at it from this angle and that angle. And it was such a nice report, when Mr. N.P. Godrej read it he said to send them 2000 rupees each (GA, 2006, p. 17).

This episode shows that marketing research was not a well-established activity for firms in the mid-1960s while showcasing the value of management education in imparting requisite skills. The summer trainees left and Godrej recruited their first batch of management trainees from the third batch of management graduates at IIMA in 1968. The trainees underwent an intensive two-year training at various manufacturing plants and operating units, directed by Dr Hathi, who recounted this episode as follows:
After recruiting them, from my own experience being trained up I had prepared a proper programme for them. Taken as two years trainees. We could manage and at that time not many people were going to these institutions. They were not appreciated at all. We were one of the first to go there. Interview at IIM, then at Godrej. Group discussions and all at Godrej [...] The whole programme that I had prepared of what these people should know, was circulated not only among them but it was also circulated throughout the organization to all plants in-charge that these people will go to and ask these questions, etc. they were naturally recruited for Marketing [...] [After the retirement of Mr. Sanjana, the Sales Manager] Then sort of a proper concept was taken and proper designations were given to top people also. One day Mr. Godrej told me that you can write as a General Manager, Marketing. But there were other senior people too. Then, I prepared a circular giving designation to all top people including my name and showed it to him. He read it and called a meeting of all these people and said this is what we want to do [...] Before, hierarchical structure: Godrejites were there and all managers that’s all. Designations were not formal then. Managers, chief engineer, chief accountant, etc. only with my circular in 1972, formal structure or designation came about (GA, 2006, pp. 18-20).

The word – “marketing” thus formally entered Godrej with the establishment of the marketing department and the position of General Manager (Marketing) in the early 1970s. This transition occurred owing to the exposure to new management practices brought out by management associations and educational institutions. In subsequent years, the marketing department recruited many more MBAs, designed training programmes, strategized on branding, advertising and packaging, developed “Product Management” and set out detailed manuals on duties and responsibilities of the sales force (GA, 1971/1982, File 7). Over time, it “virtually became a brain bank for the organisation” (Karanjia, 1997b, p. 226).

Along with professionalization of marketing management, there was branch expansion from 1977 onwards, leading to 28 branch, sales and area offices spread across the country by the 1990s, entailing more work for the marketing department (Karanjia, 1997a, p. 151). Under a regionalisation strategy introduced in 1988, the country was divided into four regions, with every region having one regional manager each. Henceforth, the Managing Director and General Manager (Marketing) had to deal with only them and not several branches, as before.

Finally, Godrej & Boyce introduced a major restructuring programme in 1991, whereby “divisions” were introduced in the organisational structure of the firm. The objective was to “achieve better focus on profitability, customer satisfaction, market share and business growth, resulting in industry leadership in a fast changing environment” (Karanjia, 1997b, p. 100). As a result of divisionalisation, marketing was subsumed in each of the eight new business divisions (GA, 1991/2002). In 1996, Godrej & Boyce was a firm with a workforce of over 10,000, which engaged with over 1,000 wholesale dealers and 5,000 retail outlets.

Management consultants played an important role in bringing about change within Godrej in these decades. In 1976, it hired a management consultant, Dr K. K. Anand, an ex-IIMA professor, to review the marketing area, and his firm was invited to review organisational processes at critical junctures over 15 years. A. F. Ferguson & Co. were also invited to review organisational issues in 1991 before the introduction of divisionalisation (Karanjia, 1997b, p. 49 and 100).

These changes in marketing and management structures within Godrej were closely witnessed by Mr Indrapal Singh who was recruited by Godrej in 1968 from IIMA in its first batch of management trainees. He rose within the firm to become General Manager (Marketing) in 1990 and later, President of the Precision Equipment Division and Machine Tools Division. He also served as the President of the Bombay Management Association in 1996. We had the opportunity to interview him on 8 May 2017, in Mumbai, to learn aspects
of Godrej’s marketing history. According to Singh, his initial experience at Godrej was relatively tough as managers were not used to working with fresh MBA graduates. Writing briefs, making catalogues, attending exhibitions, market surveys, constructing branch efficiency indices, briefing the sales force were some of the wide-ranging tasks involved in the marketing department. The job involved lot of travelling and hence, few women were involved owing to prevailing gender norms. The Government of India was an important buyer of Godrej’s products, and mastering tendering processes was critical for marketing. Dealers’ meets since the 1980s and performance awards for salesmen and dealers were important marketing milestones in the firm. In Singh’s view, divisionalisation in the 1990s had benefits but also led to certain inefficiencies in marketing.

Advertising for Godrej was typically done through Hindustan Thompson Associates (HTA), linked with JWT and Ulka (for locks and furniture) during his time with the firm. Godrej participated extensively in television commercials in the 1980s and an innovative screen-time sharing formula was used to advertise different products within the Godrej group stable. There were promotions through newspapers and magazines, festival offers and a process of centralising management of over 4,000 hoardings all over the country. Singh’s knowledge on marketing was influenced mainly by Western textbooks and field experiences. In the marketing world of his time, multinationals, paint and battery companies, Hindustan Lever and Godrej were well respected firms to work with; Vicks and Horlicks were some of the powerful brands, and “marketing” had gone well beyond advertising, as was the case in the 1960s.

Cipla and the marketing of pharmaceuticals
Cipla, earlier known as the Chemical, Industrial & Pharmaceutical Laboratories, is one of the largest pharmaceutical companies in India today, whose ownership since 1935 has remained tightly under control by the Hamied family. It was founded by Dr Khwaja Abdul Hamied (1898-1972) who pursued his PhD in chemical technology in Germany (Hamied, 1972). Since his passing away, the firm was led by his son Dr Yusuf K. Hamied (PhD Chemistry, Cambridge) for 52 years. Headquartered in Mumbai, Cipla focuses mainly on active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs), generic drugs and the development of new formulations. In this section, we trace the evolution of “marketing” through the firm’s annual reports preserved at the Cipla archive.

1935-1960s: Marketing without “marketing” managers
The chemicals and pharmaceuticals industry follows a B2B marketing system, where firms and doctors are typically the principal clients, and not the end consumers. To sell drugs, firms need to convince doctors to prescribe them to patients and ensure that stocks are available at the nearest dispensary. This can be done through advertising in medical journals, through medical representatives that visit doctors or both. From its inception, advertising was an important concern in Cipla, as narrated in its 1937 annual report:

We’ve not yet fully started to advertise the Company’s products on a large scale. From the few advertisements which have appeared in medical journals and some local papers, we could judge that the response was extremely encouraging. The Managing Director of your Company, who may be considered an expert in advertising is busy making plans for an extensive advertisement campaign all over India. It is expected that the advertisements will be released by the end of this month [...]. Your Company has engaged the services of several medical canvassers in Bombay, who are regularly visiting medical men and distributing free samples. Our preparations are now being prescribed and have also been purchased, though in very small quantities by some of the hospitals as well (CA, 1937).
After a few years of production and sales and publicity generated by high-profile visits of leading nationalists to the firm’s premises, the 1940 annual report mentions the existence of a Medical Propaganda Department:

The Company’s Medical Propaganda Department has been considerably increased. Our Medical Representatives are working in almost every important town in India and in many towns outside as well. We expect that the sales during the coming years will be continually increasing (CA, 1940).

The first few years of World War II gave a further impetus to Cipla’s sales as their main competition – imported drugs – declined (Hamied, 1972). But then in 1942-43, exports were stopped, and import restrictions led to a fall in production and subsequently in sales too. In 1949, Cipla came out with its own scientific journal that could also be used for advertising. All of this led to medical canvassing and propaganda expenses increasing throughout the 1940s and the ’50s. And these were popularly held responsible for increase in sales throughout the period. Concerns were also raised over “blackmarketing”. In 1952-53, a campaign for medical professionals to patronize Indian-made products led to sales increasing more than before. And this trend continued in the ‘50s. An advertisement in Cipla’s 20th annual report gives weight to this contention:

Cipla: India’s National Pharmaceutical Concern. The Chemical, Industrial & Pharmaceutical Laboratories, Ltd., briefly known as Cipla, is one of the foremost pharmaceutical manufacturing concerns in India. It is India’s national concern where scientists and workers from every corner of the country-Bengal, Bihar, Madras, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Punjab and Uttar Pradesh, belonging to every race and creed are working with zeal and have helped to make Cipla a truly national scientific organization. EQUAL TO THE WORLD’S BEST (CA, 1955).

The tagline, “Equal to the world’s best” was used in various advertisements of this time. Print newspapers were used to advertise, but not extensively. Initially, advertisements focussed on particular products, but by the late 1940s, they were focussed on Cipla as a pharmaceutical firm selling quality products. In 1938, it ran a print ad campaign in the TOI for “Cremozon”, a fairness cream “guaranteed to make dark skin whiter” (TOI, 1938b). In the 1950s, Cipla carried only 4 display advertisements in the TOI as compared to 200 run by Godrej. Media Agency P Ltd., an advertising firm established in 1952, listed “Chemical and Pharmaceutical Laboratories Ltd.” as one if its clients, which in all likelihood referred to Cipla, whereas Lintas held accounts of important pharmaceutical multinationals such as Sandoz, Glaxo and Hoechst (Narasimhan and Chari, 1962, p. 132).

Advertising and sales promotion expenses described in the annual reports were usually over 6 per cent of Cipla’s net sales till the 1960s, far higher than firms in other industries of this period.

In addition, there were other advertisements and statements brought out in the annual reports throughout the years, which show the changing character of the company. Some of these were as follows: “The company aims to play a vital role to achieve ‘health for all’ by 2000” (1948) and “Cipla has established a tradition of Quality, Purity and Dependability. Cipla is always at the service of the Medical Profession and the Indian Nation” (1960). Much later, these statements changed to “Caring for Life” (2000) and “Healing for Life since 1935” (2003).

1970s-2000s: Professional marketing and international expansion

Some of the marketing nomenclature till the 1960s included “medical propaganda”, “advertising” and “sales promotion”, but the word “marketing” was not in vogue. In fact, the term “marketing” was used in Cipla’s annual reports for the first time in 1971, mirroring the experience of Godrej in the early ‘70s. This was again used to signify the increase in sales
owing to marketing efforts. In its 1976 annual report, Cipla defined itself as a “streamlined marketing organization”. It professed to have 150 medical representatives visiting around 10,000 doctors all over India, which were supplemented by “informative literature, medical bulletins, samples and other useful promotional material”. It also had “sales depots, distributors and stockists in all large towns to ensure an even distribution throughout India and make Cipla products available in the remotest markets”. In 1979-80, there was also a mention of the “Speciality Products Division” getting merged with the “Marketing Division” as it wasn’t being profitable on its own.

Further expansion and improvement of the marketing department kept taking place over the years, by using more modern marketing and sales promotion techniques. In 1980-81, there is mention of FOCUS marketing forums taking place, where all marketing teams across India took part. Further on, in 1987-88, a new marketing division of the company known as “PROTEC” was set up. This division was aimed at providing the medical profession with the latest in therapeutics covering a range of speciality products. And by 1990 itself, the company’s PROTEC division had grown commendably with its sales exceeding INR 55 million. Under it, the company’s distribution network had also been widened, including setting up of four new sales offices. However, in a personal communication with a medical representative who worked in this period for a small pharmaceutical firm, we also found that Cipla had union problems with medical representatives for a brief period.

In 2003, the company entered into a co-marketing arrangement with Ranbaxy, whereby the two companies sourced certain formulations from each other. Continuous training to personnel in technical and marketing areas was considered by the firm to be a source of its competitive advantage. In 2009-10, new marketing strategies were brainstormed to cater to the booming healthcare market, involving Cipla’s hospitals, stockists and other stakeholders. Sales promotion expenses then amounted to 2 per cent of the revenue. It also generated international publicity in this decade by developing cheap antiretrovirals to fight AIDS.

However, Cipla’s growth wasn’t just owing to marketing efforts made in the domestic markets but, to a large extent, dependent on exports, which rose to account for half its revenue. Though attempts were continuously being made since the inception to increase exports, they started bearing fruit only in 1963 when Cipla collaborated with the Export Promotion Council. And exports were considered as dependent on sales promotion as domestic sales were. This led to special efforts being made in sales promotion in foreign countries (CA, 1969). Also, in 1970, a joint export promotion organization formed by the manufacturers of drugs and medicine was joined by Cipla with Government of India’s approval. Later in 1972, the company joined Triochem Products (Pvt.) Ltd. for the promotion of pharmaceutical exports in South East Asia. During this period of sales promotion efforts in Malaysia, Cipla’s pharmaceutical formulations were distributed and marketed by Barkath Pharma, Malaysia. All of this eventually led to the company’s exports exceeding INR 900 million in 1979 and it being awarded the second Chemexcil (Export Promotion Council) Award (1978-79), an award that was given in due recognition of a company’s exemplary performance in “international marketing”.

In the 1990s, the company was exporting to many of the technologically advanced countries, along with the developing countries. Besides consolidating its position in existing markets, the company even made successful inroads into new markets, including Latin America, South Africa and the Middle East. During 1998-99, an alliance was formed with Neolab, a British company, for marketing a range of generic products in selected European markets. The company also tied up with an Irish company, Channelle Pharmaceuticals, to
market a range of human and veterinary drug formulations in Europe. In 2002, Cipla was one of the leading exporters of bulk drugs, and its products were registered in over 140 countries. Partnerships and strategic alliances continued for several years in Cipla’s international marketing. By 2007, almost 55 per cent of the overall income came from operations outside of India (CA, 2007-08).

Thus, the above account reiterates our argument offered in the first section. The 1970s were a period of reform in marketing at Cipla, not only in domestic markets but also in foreign ones. Its marketing techniques were considered backward back then in the pharmaceutical sector. And so, employees were hired from other pharmaceutical companies for gaining their knowledge and to improve upon marketing practices of the company. Examples of this begin from the 1976 annual report, when a person formerly employed by Abbott Laboratories Pvt. Ltd. as Marketing Services Manager was recruited by Cipla for the post of Marketing Controller. Marketing personnel were also recruited from Rousell Pharmaceuticals India Ltd., Pharmaceutical Co. of India and from companies in other sectors.

However, this trend interestingly did not involve MBAs being recruited. Among those with marketing designations in the 1970s and ‘80s, the degrees usually comprised BSc, MSc, MBBS, with some having BCom or a diploma in advertising and marketing. One interesting point to be noted is that the very year Cipla won the second Chemexcil Award in 1978-79, an export executive was employed who had a diploma in international marketing, and had previously worked with Pharmaceutical Company of India. There were other designations related with marketing prevalent at that point of time. Some of them were: Sales Manager, Sales Promotion Manager, Marketing Assistant, Manager-Distribution & Sales Administration (1980), Hospital Services Executive (1984) and Manager-Marketing Administration (1990). And owing to these efforts, despite in 1985 when the pharmaceutical industry became increasingly competitive owing to licensing and foreign brand names, it was stated that – “Expansion and modernization of the manufacturing facilities is being supported by the strengthening of the company’s marketing capabilities and distribution network”. Figures from the annual reports suggest that the relative contribution of marketing expenses vis-à-vis money spent on research and development decreased over eight decades. However, as this discussion shows, marketing played a vital role in the growth of the company since its early days.

The four eras of marketing
It is now possible to connect the previous three accounts on agricultural marketing boards, Godrej and Cipla with the four distinct time periods on the evolution of “marketing”, as noted in Table I. The period from 1910 to 1940 saw marketing emerge in the agricultural and public sector and to a lesser extent in Indian and multinational advertising agencies. In the inter-war period, research has pointed out that print advertising was prolific in various languages and instrumental in shaping “middle-class” values (Haynes, 2010). The next three decades witnessed little spurt in “marketing” in the corporate discourse even as major changes took place to launch professional management and advertising through the formation of management and advertising associations and schools. The “paradigm shift” took place between 1970 and 1990 when “marketing” stormed corporate bastions with “marketing managers” and “marketing departments”. Modern marketing techniques, especially market surveys and quantitative analyses took hold as did professionalization, regionalisation and divisionalisation. Wilkie and Moore (2003) had described this phenomenon in America to take place between 1950 and 1980, and thus, it took root in India with a lag of two decades. Finally, the opening of the Indian economy in the 1990s to domestic and foreign competition led to a consumption boom creating the demand for more
extensive and sophisticated marketing practices. It also pushed the public sector to adopt marketing practices from the private sector, even though it had originally been the source of “Marketing Officers” in the 1930s. Table II describes these four eras of marketing in twentieth-century India.

As noted earlier, these eras coincide with the demographic and economic transitions at two ends. Population began to grow in the 1920s in the second era, and per capita incomes began to rapidly grow only in the fourth era; both were important structural factors for improving “marketing” practices. On the other hand, these eras do not coincide perfectly with the evolution of retailing in India, which moved in tandem with state patronage (Tumbe and Krishnakumar 2018).

The meaning of “marketing” in India has changed from the notion of developing the supply chain in the agricultural sector to a gamut of efforts and strategies required to push products and services to the consumer. In the 1930s, the Government cared about standardisation and weights, contracts and market places but not so much about advertising. This changed as ad agencies and publicity offices came to the fore in subsequent decades. Till the 1960s, advertising and selling were two distant activities and “marketing” was associated more with the former concept in corporate India. Management associations, schools and consultancies shaped a new discourse in which “marketing” became a preeminent discipline and word. It entailed much more than advertising and selling and involved tasks ranging from market research and surveys, strengthening of

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<tr>
<th>Era</th>
<th>Distinctive characteristics</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Marketing [Before 1910]</td>
<td>“Marketing” as a word not used in India though bazaars and trade have a long and rich history</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. Agriculture and Ad Agencies [1910-1940]</td>
<td>Agricultural marketing boards and marketing officers in the public sector</td>
</tr>
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<td>Growth of Indian and multinational ad agencies</td>
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<tr>
<td>II. Associations and Academia [1940-1970]</td>
<td>Advertising Agencies Association of India formed in 1945 comprising Indian and multinational ad agencies</td>
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<td>JWT’s “Marketing Research Department” and Indian Market publication; “Marketing Managers” in ad agencies</td>
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<td>Ford Foundation, Harvard Business School and MIT have close interactions with the All-India Management Association set up in 1957 and the Indian Institutes of Management in Ahmedabad and Calcutta formed in 1961. Marketing departments introduced in business schools</td>
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<tr>
<td>IV. Consumption Boom [1990 till date]</td>
<td>Increase in scale and variety of marketing operations Inter-firm marketing arrangements Competition pushes public sector to adopt marketing practices followed in the private sector</td>
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distribution systems and hosting of exhibitions and dealer’s meets. By the 2000s, the word “marketing” was used more frequently than “selling” in common vocabulary (Table I).

Foreign players had a significant impact in shaping concepts of “marketing” in twentieth-century India. The “Empire Marketing Board” served as an inspiration for Indian agricultural marketing boards. British rule also stimulated a swadeshi marketing campaign by the Indian national movement to buy locally made Indian goods, as reflected in the Godrej advertisements. In the middle of the twentieth century, American influences, through JWT, Ford Foundation, Harvard Business School and the MIT had a major role to play in introducing Western marketing concepts and techniques in the world of advertising agencies and management education. Subsequent developments in marketing curricula in Indian management institutes took place almost entirely along Western lines (Varman and Sreekumar 2015).

Conclusion
This paper overturns conventional wisdom on marketing history in India, which has so far discounted its significance before 1960 (Westfall and Boyd, 1960) or accorded primary significance to the 1990s economic liberalisation programme (Tripathi 2013). While “advertising” and “branding” received a major thrust in that decade, “marketing” appears to have followed a different path with important break-points identifiable before 1991, especially in the 1930s and 1970s. “Marketing”, as a word, did not first arrive in the private corporate or industrial sectors but instead, emerged during the Great Depression years in the public and agricultural sectors. This was a time of marketing “field formalization” in the USA as the Journal of Marketing was established in 1936 and the American Marketing Association was formed in 1937 as a union between an advertising association and a marketing society founded in 1915 and 1931, respectively (Wilkie and Moore, 2003; Cochoy, 2014, pp. 541-542). The contrast between India and the USA shows how a particular word or a concept in business can have varied origins in different societies. In the second half of the twentieth century, “marketing” entered the public and corporate discourse in a much bigger way, especially as businesses began appreciating the utility of having formal marketing departments.

Would the results of this study change if we had access to the archives of Hindustan Unilever and Imperial Tobacco Company (ITC), two large Indian firms known for their marketing strength, rather than Godrej and Cipla? We doubt so as the keyword analysis of newspapers and Godrej and Cipla corporate discourse match well in the second half of the twentieth century. Biographies of people associated with Hindustan Unilever and ITC and, in particular, the biographical sketch of Raj Chatterjee, a sales manager who joined ITC in 1934, also point to a very hands-on marketing approach in that time and the absence of consumer research and market surveys.[1] Nevertheless, our study of only two firms is a limitation that future studies can overcome by comparing trends in sectors outside consumer goods and pharmaceuticals.

The evolution of “marketing” described in this paper may not be unique to India. Marketing boards emerged in the 1930s in several tropical colonial countries and especially in West Africa (William, 2007). State-controlled marketing and propaganda departments were also important features in countries that followed socialist and communist policies, which were home to the bulk of humanity, for much of the twentieth century. As many countries of the world abandoned these policies towards the end of the century, corporate notions of “marketing” soon spread through Western knowledge systems. A dual-track evolution of “marketing” as a concept in rural areas through marketing boards and in urban areas through management schools, management associations and corporate boards could
provide a more holistic way of understanding marketing in the twentieth century. Understanding the transition of the marketing phenomenon in other societies may, therefore, throw up even more surprises on the elusive origins of “marketing” and inform debates on the evolution of other business functions within organisations.

Note
1. British Library India Office Records, Mss Eur T 88/1, corrected transcript of Raj Chatterjee. Some of the first examples of market research can be traced back to Hindustan Lever in the 1940s and ‘50s (Tandon 1971).

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Further reading
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