Propaganda as marketing
Conceptual meanings of propaganda and advertisement in Sweden in the 1930s
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Abstract
Purpose – This study aims to analyze the use of two concepts, propaganda and advertisement, in two areas of Swedish society during the 1930s; first, their use by the advertisement business, and second, their use by the Swedish Cooperative Union and Wholesale Society.

Design/methodology/approach – By adopting a perspective of conceptual history, inspired by Reinhart Koselleck, the author is trying to pinpoint the meanings that were ascribed to these concepts in a 1930s context, the interdependency between these concepts and other keywords that were used in connection with them.

Findings – The study reveals how the ambiguous and synonymous use of these concepts served different purposes in the two fields of study. In the 1930s, propaganda was a key concept of communication and was used in manifold ways for selling goods and disseminating ideas. Propaganda was used to explain the newly introduced American marketing terminology. During the 1930s, the field of advertisement was trying to change what previously had been labeled as “idea propaganda” into “advertisement.” The ambiguous use of concepts made it possible for the Swedish Cooperative Union and Wholesale Society to combine advertisement for their produced goods with disseminating ideas of the cooperative ideology. The concepts of enlightenment (upplysning) and propaganda were crucial to hold together the ideological and commercial parts of the cooperative movement.

Originality/value – The interaction of meanings between commercial and political concepts is rarely researched in conceptual history or marketing history, which this article advocates to be an important field of study.

Keywords Advertising history, History of marketing ideas, Conceptual history, Cooperative movement

Paper type Research paper

Introduction
Propaganda has not always been associated with war and totalitarian countries. It did not carry negative connotations in Sweden in the 1930s when propaganda was a widely used commercial concept to describe activities to sell products and services and to disseminate ideas. It coexisted with the Swedish terminology for advertisement (reklam) in intricate ways. Propaganda was considered equivalent to marketing (marknadsföring), a term not yet coined in Sweden (Hermansson, 2002, p. 32f). The outbreak of the Second World War triggered a conceptual meaning of propaganda as something sinister, which led to a semantic struggle within the advertising industry. In this article I argue that commercial and political concepts need to be researched simultaneously, as they are interconnected and exchange meanings.

Concepts of the past can have the same grammatical structure as today, but their meaning and content can differ. Concepts have been filled, emptied, refilled and transformed deliberately or by chance, by need or by other circumstances throughout history. German historian Reinhart Koselleck argues that yesterday’s hopes and
Propaganda as marketing

479

desires, fears and sufferings can be visible to us if we analyze yesterday’s concepts. Past experiences are measured in concepts – insofar as they possibly can be captured conceptually in contemporary language and articulated in linguistic sources (Koselleck, 2004, p. 223). The uses of concepts and their meanings in different historical times are important sources from which we can develop deeper understanding of historical periods.

This leads into the aim of my study – to analyze the use and conceptual meanings of propaganda and advertisement (reklam) in Swedish society during the 1930s.

RQ1. How and for what purposes were the concepts propaganda and advertisement used?

RQ2. How did the two concepts relate to and depend upon one another, and what other concepts and keywords were used?

I researched the collective perception and construction of propaganda and advertising in one commercial field where the main aim was to sell products, and in one semi-commercial political field where the mission to disseminate ideas was combined with selling products. The commercial field is the advertising industry as it began to constitute itself during the 1930s. The political field is the semi-commercial Swedish Cooperative movement, the Cooperative Union and Wholesale Society that became industrialists, fighting monopolies in the 1930s. Its membership numbered up to 669,000, which on average meant there was a member in every third Swedish household (Elldin, 1950, p. 232). The Swedish cooperative movement was powerful and highly successful, and contributed to the global image of Sweden as a country that had successfully found a middle way between capitalism and socialism (Childs, 1936).

I chose the 1930s as the decade of study for several reasons. This decade was dynamic in Sweden. Politically, the Social Democrats began to build a welfare state. Economically, after overcoming the depression at the beginning of the 1930s, industries were expanding and industrial production of goods lowered prices, making them accessible to people of lesser means.

This article addresses the interface between two fields of research that seldom connect. On one side, the development of political propaganda is an immense field of international research. It has its own bibliography and encyclopedia (Cole, 1996; Cole, 1998). The periods prior to and during the First and Second World Wars are the subject of many studies (Ellul, 1968; Baird, 1974; Paddock, 2014; Welch, 2013). On the other side, study of the development of advertising alongside modernity and a new consumeristic behavior is another field of research (Ewen, 1977; Marchand, 1986; Hermansson, 2002; Tungate, 2007; Swett, 2007; Schwarzkopf, 2008). Advertising may be defined as a type of propaganda (Jowett and O’Donnell, 2015, p. 162), or as overt “white propaganda” (Taylor, 1998, p. xxi). There are few historical studies about propaganda as a commercial/political concept and how it was interdependent on commercial concepts such as advertising. Business historian Stefan Schwarzkopf touches on this relationship when he investigates the conceptual meanings of advertising in nineteenth and twentieth century Europe and America. During the interwar period advertising was understood not only as a commercial practice, but also as political propaganda and social engineering (Schwarzkopf, 2009, p. 10). Historian Pamela E. Swett concludes that most researchers of political propaganda omit commercial advertising, and researchers of advertisement do the opposite (Swett, 2014,
Several researchers have discussed propaganda in different contexts within the marketing field. Ever since 1928 when Edward L. Bernays, a pioneer in the field of public relations, wrote *Propaganda*, this intersection between propaganda and marketing has been problematic (Ewen, 1977, p. 93; Bernays, 1928). Some contemporary studies in marketing strive to distinguish between political marketing, social marketing, political public relations and various types of propaganda (O'Shaughnessy, 1990; O'Shaughnessy, 1996; Collison, 2003; Martinelli, 2011; Baines and O'Shaughnessy, 2014). These studies are in my view very interesting as they indicate the ongoing problem with the slippery concept of propaganda and its relationship to commercial market terminology. The theoretical perspectives of these studies differ from my work, which focuses on conceptual history where the meanings of concepts are understood in a historical context to avoid anachronistic use. There is a lack of research about how commercial and political concepts develop, change and relate. I argue that this a productive research strategy to foster understanding of today’s conceptual uses. Historian Reinhard Koselleck states that such analysis can establish a degree of semantic control over today’s concepts (Koselleck, 2011, p. 16). It is evident that the techniques of persuasion rename themselves through history. They abandon used up terminology and migrate to more legitimate ones. Historian Philip M. Taylor describes how the “bad smell” of the concept of propaganda has led the use of new terms for political persuasion, such as the phrase “public relations”, which merely serves to add more layers obscuring the reality (Taylor, 1995, pp. 6-7).

In a fairly recent Swedish dictionary (1996) reklam means using mass information to persuade people to buy goods and services. The meaning of “propaganda” is the use of tricks of argumentation and persuasion to disseminate opinions (NE, 1996, p. 666, 662). After mentioning these contemporary meanings I will leave them behind, as this article investigates the historical meanings of the two concepts. What propaganda and advertisement have in common is that they are key concepts of communication. They are two types of persuasive communication techniques (Seiler, 1998, p. 4).

In this paper I cover the theoretical and methodological approaches and the sources that are used in my research. For clarity, I present the history of each investigated field and its relationship with advertisement and propaganda, followed by an analysis of the conceptual uses of the field. As Koselleck argues, the social and conceptual history must both be researched and in a second step juxtaposed (Koselleck, 2011, pp. 27-29). I then discuss how the use of concepts was affected by the outbreak of the Second World War and end with conclusions. This article is based on a more extensive study published in Swedish; see that work for extensive archival evidence to support the arguments (Gardeström, 2018).

**Theory, concepts and definitions**

A common feature of Reinhart Koselleck’s writings lies in his critique of the anachronistic use of concepts. This was manifested in the monumental collective work, *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* (1972-1997), where he and several other researchers analyzed the transformation of 115 basic concepts in the German language over the period 1750 to about 1850. This article is a modest endeavor to analyze two concepts in two different areas of Swedish society during the 1930s by using and adapting Koselleck’s methodological and theoretical approaches. Other conceptual history scholars have also adapted Kosleck’s perspectives, both to limited time periods and to study the conceptual changes during the twentieth century (Steinmetz, 2012). Even though this study is not a long-term structural
history of concepts, as Koselleck himself advocated, I have found his perspective useful to illuminate the relationship between propaganda, advertisement and other related key concepts.

Etymologically, the Latin word *propagare* is an agricultural word about how to spread vines by using grafts. Propaganda was first noted in use as a concept of communication 1622 when *Congregatio de propaganda fide* was founded by Pope Gregory XV to arrange missionary work that would counteract the threat of Protestantism. According to Koselleck, propaganda is a basic concept (*Grundbegriffe*). A basic concept is, in Koselleck’s view, qualitatively different from other concepts, terms or lexemes. Their usage has often changed from plural to collective singulars, as with histories to history and liberties to liberty (Koselleck, 2011, p. 13, p. 24). Koselleck claims that in each historical era there are a number of basic concepts that cannot be avoided because they are central in the political-social language. These basic concepts are always ambiguous, and they become carriers of many different meanings and are often contentious. They are of strategic political significance because the use of basic concepts determines how the world should be described. The language becomes a part of a social struggle (Persson, 2005, p. 18).

“Propaganda” is one of the basic concepts in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*. Its history is covered in 40 pages that sum up how the term was politicized during the French revolution and how in Germany “propaganda” became a part of the business language at the end of the 19th century, and eventually how it became distorted by the Nazis (Brunner et al., 1984, Vol. 5, pp. 69-112).

*Reklam* (advertising) dates etymologically back to the Latin *reclama’re*, which means constantly proclaiming, something reminiscent of merchants who cry out their wares. It lacks any proud history and its use was first noted in Sweden in 1868 to describe the process of selling goods (SAOB, 1957, p. 892). Just like in Germany, advertising was used synonymously with propaganda in the beginning of the 1900’s to refer to the sale of products and services. Before the two World Wars, “propaganda” was in use in many European countries as a more or less neutral concept referring to the dissemination of political and religious ideas and commercial advertising (Clark, 1997, p. 7). In a Swedish dictionary from the 1930s, “propaganda” is defined as sometimes including advertising, which in turn is described as an American technology that already has received a bad reputation. The synonyms listed are “public recommendation” and “boastful announcement” (Östergren, 1938, p. 330).

**Concepts lost in translation**

There are acknowledged difficulties in translating the meanings of words and concepts from one language to another (Richter, 2008). I do have a problem with translating the word *reklam* with the English word advertising. In the present study I chose to add the Swedish word in parenthesis when clarity is needed. In the 1930s in Sweden, the word reklam had a much broader range of meanings than the English modern equivalent. In conceptual studies, there are always problems related to concepts losing or changing their meanings in translation, and some concepts get lost in translation. While the concept propaganda is globally used (even if its conceptual meaning may differ), variations of the word reklam are used in different languages in, for example, Denmark, Estonia, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia. In the international language Esperanto, the word used for advertising is reklamanta. In Latin countries advertising is translated into words connected with publicity, like *publicidad* in Spanish. In Germany, *Reklam* was used up to the 1933 for advertising, but was replaced during the Nazi regime by the German word, *Werbung*, as *Reklam* was considered to be too foreign (Swett, 2014, p. 44).
Some explanations are also needed for my use of the Swedish word *upplysning*, which I have chosen to translate into English as “enlightenment”. The most straightforward translation of *upplysning* is information, a word I try to avoid using. In Sweden in the 1930s *information* was rarely used to refer to communication. Lexically it primarily meant education, but a shift was about to take place (SAOB, 1933, p. 1442). My translation might appear to be old fashioned, but that is my intention, to estrange the familiar, which Koselleck called *Verfremdungseffekt* (Palonen, 2005, p. 35). For my discourse it is important only to mention the word “information” when my sources do.

**Method and sources**

The sources I used vary depending on which of the two fields I researched. Sources about the Cooperative Union and Wholesale Society (*Kooperativa förbundet*) are abundant, including its own archive (KF archives) and about ten different journals and newsletters that circulated during the 1930s. I identified articles and documents that discussed advertisement; these were scarcer than I expected. This organization had no regular sales department, as we currently expect from such organizations.

The Swedish Advertising Federation, founded in 1919, has no archives, although some of the minutes from its Board meetings have been preserved at the National Library of Sweden. The organization had an annual publication (*Svensk Reklam*) and they also printed special issues when national or Nordic conferences were held during the 1930s. Their meetings with formal lectures and more informal talks and discussions were often reported in articles in one of the three journals associated with the organization and the field of advertisement (*Aftärsekonomi, Futurum 1936*, *Reklamnyheterna 1936*). I have focused on articles and documents where “propaganda” and “advertisement” are used simultaneously.

According to Koselleck a researcher needs to juxtapose the social history and the conceptual history, so I took the following measures. First, I wrote a descriptive draft from primary sources of the social history of each field. I then roughly followed the approach outlined by Koselleck. Focus is two-fold, including both the concepts and the actual historical situation at that time, to research how language and actions relate to each other (Koselleck, 2002, p. 29). To investigate linguistic usage in the past, Koselleck argues that it must be placed within the historical context from which the usage originally emerged (Koselleck, 2011, p. 28, 29). To peg down how the concepts were used, a study is needed of source materials taken from everyday life during the chosen period (Koselleck, 2011, p. 22). I reviewed central advertising and cooperative journals from the 1930s and conducted a rough content analysis of all articles that simultaneously used “advertising” and “propaganda”. I categorized dominant usages of the concepts and the actions they described.

As a complementary method I conducted a keyword analysis with the aim of pinpointing the use of concepts in selected materials produced for specific events (Brylla, 2005). For Cooperative Union and Wholesale Society (*Kooperativa förbundet*), I chose a national campaign from 1932. For the field of advertising I chose to conduct a key word analysis of the Swedish Advertising Federation annual of 1932 and the *Futurum* journal in 1936 and 1938.

**The Swedish context – the 1930s**

Sweden was far from a welfare state in the 1930s. The country had remained neutral during the First World War. For the first time in the election of 1921, all citizens had an equal right to vote and the Social Democratic party began to gain support. Industrialization and urbanization during the previous decades had led to social unrest. Unemployment rocketed following the collapse of the American stock market in 1929. The economic situation grew
worse for Swedish trade and businesses in 1932 when Swedish Industrialist Ivar Kreuger committed suicide after his business empire went bankrupt. In the election of 1932 the Social Democrats came to power, and they stayed in power for 44 years. The new government chose to combat the crisis through an active state engagement in the economy and the introduction of social reforms and better wages. By doing so, consumption was maintained and resulted in improved economic conditions from 1934-1935 onward. These political and economic changes were influential in improving the Swedish national identity where a sense of a bright future was contrasted with a gloomy past as the modern welfare state evolved, built on a rational democratic governance. The Swedish model incorporated values of modernity and social security for all (Alm, 2004, p. 75, 79)

The field of advertisement

The Swedish Advertising Federation was founded in 1919. In the 1930s this fairly new organization was highly heterogeneous and consisted of artists, former journalists and businessmen. Buyers and sellers of advertisements all belonged to the same organization. Very few professional titles had developed, and “adman” was the general description for this emerging male-dominated occupation. American advertisements were the role models for this business. In 1930 the Swedish Advertising Federation only had around 200 members, but ten years later it had expanded to 1400 members. The organization’s aim was to clean up the business of advertisement from its bad reputation of cheating and lying, and to make advertisement a legitimate business (Björklund, 1967, p. 843, 848). There were similar processes taking place internationally, called “Truth in advertising”, a slogan adopted in 1924 by the Associated Advertising Clubs of the World (Ewen, 1977, p. 71f; Schwarzkopf, 2008).

In the organization’s own view, the breakthrough for advertisement in Sweden was in 1919 when it was founded. The 1920s was a period of transition, and by the 1930s advertisement “had come of age” and could demonstrate its position as a power in the business world (Rosenberg, 1930). The Stockholm Exhibition of 1930 was an important event in the process of advertising gaining a legitimate position in society. The Swedish Advertising Federation arranged a conference at the exhibition and the Nordic Federation of Advertisement was founded (Törnquist, 1931). There were visionary hopes that with the Stockholm Exhibition, the century of advertisement had begun (Björklund and Hedvall, 1931, p. 10). In the 1930s, advertising harbored hopes for a better, modern world, and like in other countries at that time it was seen as a messenger of modernity (Swett, 2007; Marchand, 1986). The association of an air of modernity with this fairly new business branch was also a smart business strategy to enhance public legitimacy of advertisement in society (Schwarzkopf, 2008, p. 170f.)

Advertising was described as a new technology, such as airplanes and radio – technologies that appealed to young people, an adman explained, but that older people could not understand (Affärsekonomi, 1933 p. 7). Among admen expectations were high on what advertising could achieve, but the opinion was divided as to what advertising in its essence really was. Adman Sven Rygaard commented in 1936 that two “schools” prevailed in the field of advertisement, an idealistic school and a materialistic school, and all it took was to bring three admen together to have both sides represented (Rygaard, 1936 p. 2). Rygaard himself was idealistic, which was manifested in the Futurum journal he started in 1936. It carried the slogan “advertising builds the future”, and viewed advertising, besides its function to sell, as art or a tool to solve societal problems such as unemployment (Futurum, 1936 p. 1).

The materialists were strictly oriented around economics and were clustered around the School of Economics in Stockholm. Professor Gerhard Törnqvist defined advertisement as “mechanized sales”, a systematic process of distributing goods to the consumers (Törnquist, 1933, p. 128). In
contrast, the advertisement journals expressed different opinions about the essence of advertisement. These included that it was education, a new church to foster the character of the people, succession of the ancient oratory of rhetoric, art, science, etc. When the admen met and dined at conferences they sang drinking songs and toasted the power of advertisement. Indeed, the 1930s was the decennium for utopian ideas about advertisement (Affärsekonomi 1937 p. 6; Futurum 1937 p. 7; Futurum 1936 p. 2; Futurum 1938 p. 1; Abard, 1933).

The Nordic Advertising Congress in Stockholm in 1937 had the slogan, “Advertising serves society.” Chairman Tom Björklund stressed that advertisement must not be an end in itself but a means to a better society. Social Democratic Prime Minister Per Albin Hansson gave the opening speech at the Congress and praised “sound advertising” as a significant force to create a richer society. The Prime Minister encouraged the admen to devote more attention to “the art of political advertising and the best way to make such advertising serve society” (Hansson, 1937).

The slogan “Advertising serves society” coincided with a process where advertising began to expand into new non-commercial areas as healthcare, local government, traffic planning, and the Swedish army. Such activities had traditionally been called propaganda, for example “health propaganda”, and had not been administered by advertising agencies. In 1937 the advertising journal Affärsekonomi published a special issue about what they called “idea propaganda”. The editorial explained that there was no longer a need to differentiate between advertisement and propaganda. In recent years it had become evident that commercial advertising played an important role in another area, namely when it came to the spreading of ideas. There was still a suspicious attitude toward advertisement in “idealistic organizations”, the editor complained, but people had to get used to paying to get their messages published (Affärsekonomi 1937 p. 20).

Conceptual uses in the field of advertisement
My main results are that propaganda was the overall general description of all collective efforts to sell products and services, which with our terminology today would be called “marketing”. Advertisement was the dominant concept for goods sold through trademarks. On a closer examination, I observed four more subtle parallel uses of “propaganda” and “advertisement.” These have been investigated through key word analysis of articles in three magazines about advertising (Affärsekonomi, Futurum 1936-, Reklamnyheterna 1936-). In identifying these parallel uses, I focused on articles and where “propaganda” and “advertisement” are used simultaneously. The four parallel uses are.

Collective commercial advertising where various manufacturers collaborate to advertise a product, for example tea, called tea propaganda. During the 1930s there were efforts to relabel these activities and instead call them collective advertisement (kollektiv reklam).

Campaigns where non-profit and commercial stakeholders worked together to achieve a certain behavior from the general public were considered to be of societal and commercial interest. For example, milk propaganda started in 1922 to persuade people to drink milk and at the same time improve milk production.

Political party’s election campaigns. These were described both as advertisement and propaganda. Government agencies and non-profit organization also used both concepts in campaigns to change the behavior of the public in their own interest, such as Traffic propaganda for safer traffic.

As a concept of communication to describe communication technologies. The dissemination through media technologies is described in terms of propaganda, such as film propaganda. Advertisements, posters, radio and film and big exhibitions were described as
tools of propaganda. Here “advertisement” also could be used and communication technologies likewise could be described as the technologies or tools of advertisement.

There was a gradual change in terminology in favor of the concept of advertisement, which can be considered as a semantic struggle. In the field of advertisement there were efforts to get rid of the concept of propaganda and replace it with the concept of advertisement, also including the dissemination of ideas. For example, in one of the first Swedish handbooks about advertisement, which was written in 1931 by two leading members of the Swedish Advertising Federation, the word “propaganda” is rarely mentioned. It described the functions of the concept of propaganda, but relabeled these as advertisement. The authors wrote that political advertisement is the oldest and most methodically developed type of advertisement in the world (Björklund and Hedvall, 1931, p. 16).

As mentioned previously, there was an effort in the advertising field to colonize what was formerly thought of as “idea propaganda” and to turn it into a new business area. The argument was that two concepts had merged together anyway, implying that the concept of propaganda was no longer needed. But in the heterogeneous field of advertisement it was not possible to get rid of the concept of propaganda and it remained in use. There was even an advertisement agency called Propaganda (Hedvall, 1937).

Old concepts also helped to introduce new terminology. During the 1930s, there was a lack of economic terminology in Sweden to describe the process of advertising. As mentioned the Swedish equivalent of marketing (marknadsföring) was not yet coined (Hermansson, 2002, p. 32). American terminology was used, but when attempting to explain the concept of “sales promotion”, Professor Gerhard Törnqvist found it difficult to translate and ended up saying it was “indirect propaganda” (Törnquist, 1932). The introduction of the phrase “public relations” in 1936 by adman Will Wallin posed similar problems. He explains “public relations” as a technique of propaganda and enlightenment. “Public relations” was introduced as a novelty that private industry, governments, and political parties could all use to control and direct public opinion (Wallin, 1936).

The field of the cooperative movement
In my second field of study, the Cooperative movement, semantics played an important role to bridge the gap between political and commercial activities. The concepts of propaganda, enlightenment and advertisement were combined and used in intricate ways. The Swedish Cooperative Union and Wholesale Society was founded in 1899 by 41 local consumer cooperatives. From a rather poorly funded beginning, the movement expanded and founded industries for mass production. In 1930s, under the management of Albin Johansson, the Cooperative union set up industries to support the cooperative grocery stores (Kylebäck, 1974).

Unlike in other countries where the business activities and consumer union were structured as two separate organizations, the Swedish Cooperative Union and Wholesale Society combined these functions. This meant that a parliamentary democratic union of consumers existed alongside a commercial organization that operated using fast decision-making guided by business principles. The split led to a complicated organizational structure with many frictions (Ruin, 1960, pp. 62-65). However, this complicated organization proved to be an asset where advertisement was concerned, as it made it possible to combine disseminating of cooperative ideas with the selling of cooperative brands.

Commercial Cooperative advertising in Sweden was developed out of the seventh guiding principle for operating cooperatives articulated by the first cooperative, the weavers in Rochdale, at its foundation in 1844. This original seventh principle was the promotion of education. The weavers in Rochdale wanted to teach its members to read, write and count. But in Sweden there was already a public education system in place, so when Anders Orne
Orne was straightforward about the application of *upplysning* to business. He said that spreading knowledge about the cooperative and its activities would in fact be considered a business expense corresponding to the private company advertisements (Orne, 1918, p. 28).

Cooperative advertising in the early 1920s was insignificant. Ads in newspapers were inconspicuous in black and white, simply stating that a good cooperative product was sold. During that period advertisements had a bad reputation and were perceived as a trick used by private industry to cheat consumers. Furthermore, advertisements only made articles more expensive. By the end of the 1920s this attitude began to change (Elldin 1950, p. 293; Jonsson, 2017, p. 654, 666f). During the 1930s cooperative industries began to produce more than the cooperative stores could sell, which led to an increased need for advertisements (Kylebäck, 1974, p. 297). Cooperative advertisements strived to appear, ideologically and aesthetically, as something different. They embraced the functionalist movement and the cooperatives employed modernist artists to produce posters for national campaigns. The campaigns often presented the cooperative industries as symbols of progress. Their style, focusing on short catchy slogans, was admired by other admen. For example, an ad for a light bulb was accompanied by the slogan “The lamp that makes happy” (*Lampan som gör glad*); this was declared by leading admen to be a stroke of genius; in its silliness and incorrect grammar the slogan was an example of the American advertisement technique of short circuit appeal (*Affärsekonomi* 1935, p. 17).

Under the direction of Mauritz Bonow, different parts of the cooperative organization were coordinated into large national campaigns that aimed to sell cooperative goods and disseminate facts and arguments about the economic model of the cooperative movement (Bonow, 1934). A major national campaign started during the 1932 recession. It was presented as the antidote to despair by using slogans like “In the service of households”. The campaign coordinated all its activities. For example, colors, layout, and the slogan were all matched in ads, flyers, leaflets, posters, flags, window displays as a part of the coop’s general strategic plan called *samklang* (harmony) (Elldin, 1950, p. 280f).

The influential role of the Swedish cooperative movement in the consumer market was internationally recognized. In the first chapters of his 1936 book, *Sweden the Middle Way*, the American author Marquis Childs pays tribute to the Swedish Cooperative Union and Wholesale Society as an important prerequisite for the Swedish middle way between capitalism and socialism. He admired its practical focus and effective organization, which managed to prevent trusts and other monopolies from taking over by fostering the promotion of competition in business and delivery of good products in well-kept shops with well-trained staff. The Swedish Cooperative movement had succeeded while the cooperative movement in England and Scotland had been less successful. He felt that the main explanation for the Swedish success was the strong central organization of its cooperative movement (Childs, 1936).

Childs’ book advocated the Swedish model in the US. Sweden had more effectively escaped the recession during the 1930s than many other countries. The Swedish Cooperative Union and Wholesale Society contributed to this success by curbing the formation of private corporate monopolies dominated by their profit motives, and instead facilitated efficient mass production which led to social benefits for consumers. The book contributed to the rising international interest in the Swedish cooperative project, and generated many official visits from other countries (Alm, 2004, p. 87f; Hilson, 2017, p. 138f.).
One visitor was American adman K.G Martin, who was intrigued by the large-scale, high-quality, commercial advertising carried out by the cooperatives in Sweden, which he described as “providing every conceivable feature of advertising service” (Krantz, 1955, p. 44). Usually Swedes went to the US to learn the advertising trade; here he thought Americans had something to learn from Sweden. In 1938 Mauritz Bonow, who co-ordinated advertisement activities in Cooperative Union and Wholesale Society, wrote an invited article in the American advertising journal Printer’s Ink entitled “How the Swedish Cooperatives Advertise – and Why” (Bonow, 1938).

This international recognition was proudly received in Sweden. Bonow boasted that American advertisers were surprised that the Swedish cooperatives, unlike the cooperative movement in several other countries, conducted extensive commercial advertising campaigns in addition to providing general consumer enlightenment (Krantz, 1955, p. 42).

It should be noted that many activities that were called advertisement in Bonow’s English article were called “propaganda” in Swedish. The cooperative’s definition of propaganda was “the systematic work to disseminate enlightenment of the co-operatives and economic life in general” (Odhe, 1933, p. 46). Clearly, “propaganda” was a concept that carried both commercial and political meanings and could be used for advertisement as well to disseminate cooperative ideology. For example, a new position instituted at the local level in 1931 was called “propaganda leader” (propagandaledare). These propaganda leaders had a mix of commercial and political jobs. They were to recruit new members and be able to justify cooperative ideology, but also help inventory stock in cooperative stores, organize events and even sell Christmas trees (Vi Vill, 1934, 1939). The propaganda concept was also used for internal cooperative marketing in a strictly commercial way. In a newsletter to the cooperative stores, certain shoes being promoted for sale in the cooperative stores were described as; “the propaganda shoes of 1938” (Varumarknad II, 1938, p. 1) (Figure 1).

**Conceptual uses in the cooperative movement**

Within the co-operative movement “propaganda” was a concept of communication used to describe how the enlightenment (upplysning) would be carried out and disseminated with different techniques, whether it was an advertisement for cooperative products or for the spread of ideas. “Propaganda” was the performance of “enlightenment”. The concepts of enlightenment (upplysning) and propaganda were crucial in unifying the ideological and commercial part of the organization.

The ambiguous concept of upplysning made it possible for the Swedish Cooperative Union and Wholesale Society to incorporate commercial advertisement within its ideological structure, as a part of the original seventh Rochdale guiding principle. When commercial and ideological persuasion techniques blended successfully, the result was described as harmony (samklang).

In the campaign in 1932, the application of the concept of propaganda helped bridge the gap between commercial advertisement and other activities, such as recruiting more members to the cooperative movement. My key word analysis of the articles in four different internal cooperative journals that covered the same national campaign in 1932 revealed that propaganda and advertisement were often used to describe the same activities[1]. The leaflets that were distributed were often called “advertisement leaflets” or “propaganda leaflets”. The journals used many compound words to describe specific activities, compounded either from the word propaganda or the word advertisement (reklam).

The conceptual use also varied depending on which part of the cooperative movement the central organization was addressing. When addressing the social consumer movement the concept propaganda was preferred, even if the activity that was described included
advertisement, such as helping to hand out “propaganda leaflets”. When addressing local elected representatives, “advertisement” was used but “propaganda” still dominated. When addressing cooperative store managers, there was a slight dominance of the “advertisement” terminology. For example store managers were informed that advertisement was a world power with a huge influence over people – phraseology not typical of cooperative language (Kooperativa Skyltfönstret 1933 p. 2).

Changes under the threat of war
The use of concepts in the advertising field were transformed by the threat of war. As Koselleck claims, during transformations in society, like revolutionary processes, basic concepts can begin to shift their meaning and words begin to overlap in new patterns (Koselleck, 2011, p. 8). In 1939 the slogan “Advertisement serves society” was reused in a different context by the Chairman of the Swedish Advertising Federation, Folke Stenbeck. He used it as an argument that advertising had a new and important mission after the outbreak of the Second World War, namely, to help the Swedish government prepare the population to handle the present crisis in a responsible and sensible way (Stenbeck, 1939). As in other countries, admen became employed by the Government war agencies (Fox, 1975, Stole, 2013).

The men of advertising clearly wanted to do their duty to their country, but it was also a new business opportunity when the market for commercial advertising collapsed at the outbreak of the war. Faced with the threat of war, the Swedish Advertising Federation founded two committees on its own initiative: a civil committee for the economic and social crisis in war and a military committee for military propaganda in cooperation with the National...
Commission for Economic Defense. The military committee submitted a plan suggesting that propaganda be included in military plans, reflecting the understanding that “propaganda” in many parts of the world began to emerge as an important part of the national defense. This new component of defense was to use techniques of persuasion, and it did not matter what these techniques were called, according to the Swedish Advertising Federation.

Propaganda, enlightenment, advertising, “public relations” or what all the more or less synonymous concepts are called, in its innermost content present nothing new. The new, however, is the conscious, systematic, well-organized utilization of modern technology and science (psychology), to create a spontaneous and fast conformity of the public opinion. (Rosenberg, 1940, p. 27)

The different suggestions by the Swedish Advertising Federation were not always easily accepted by the newly formed State war agency, Statens informationsstyrelse. Admen complained of the incompetence in the State agency, that its employees lacked knowledge about advertising (Björklund, 1967, p. 869). In the end, an Advertisement Council was founded within the State agency for the duration of the war.

The Second World War complicated the use of the concept of propaganda within the advertising industry, as propaganda began to be associated with the manipulation of facts by totalitarian states. When the 1930s had passed, Swedish adman Gustaf Abard proclaimed advertisement to be a good force for combating German propaganda. He thought that democratic states needed to uphold their position in the world at a time when facts were distorted by propaganda. With the help of advertising, these states could raise their populations’ awareness of the present crisis. Such advertisement could not only present facts, but accomplish this in a convincing and popular way that people could understand. And of course, Abard added, advertising could be presented without the exaggeration that was integral to the propaganda used in totalitarian countries (Abard, 1940).

Abard’s use of “propaganda” as a concept that had negative connotations is more aligned with today’s perception of propaganda than how it was perceived in the early 1930s. He used advertisement as a political concept, as a tool for democracies to combat totalitarian propaganda. This highlights how the commercial and political meanings of these concepts are interdependent.

In Germany the use of propaganda became stigmatized after the First World War and was almost impossible to use in West Germany after the Second World War (Brunner et al., 1984, Vol. 5, p. 112). In Norway after the Second World War the most prominent advertising journal, Propaganda, quickly changed its name (Gripsrud, 2011, p. 123). Meanwhile, in Sweden a neutral use of the concept prevailed. For example, the leading Swedish Labor union, LO, had a bureau of propaganda until 1966 (LO: s propagandaråd, 1966). Although research that compares uses of the concept of propaganda across countries is scarce, one could assume that the prevailing neutral use of the term in Sweden was related to the country not being a part of either of the two World Wars. Thus, unlike other countries, Sweden had not directly faced the problem of war propaganda.

Conclusions

In the 1930s, the terminology to describe different marketing strategies and tools for mass communication were not yet developed in Sweden. Old concepts needed to be used to describe this emerging business. The ambiguous and synonymous use of concepts served different purposes in two fields of study. Propaganda was a commercial concept used in diverse ways in advertising during the 1930s. If one specific use of propaganda can be pinpointed in the field of advertisement, it is as an overall concept, which later would be replaced by the specialized term of marketing (marknadsföring).
During the 1930s the advertising field was trying to change the previously understood concept of “idea propaganda” and relabel it as advertisement. Some admen wanted to omit the use of propaganda and replace it with reklam, without success.

The concept of enlightenment (upplysning) was used by the Swedish Cooperative Union and Wholesale Society as a broad and general concept that could encompass almost everything, from education to advertisement. Propaganda was used to describe the process of disseminating cooperative ideas including advertisement, and incorporated the communication techniques needed to accomplish this dissemination.

As a basic concept, propaganda, in Koselleck’s perspective, was central to the political and economic language at the time and thus was almost impossible to avoid. In times of transitions, modern and old words and concepts begin to overlap and shift their meanings (Koselleck, 2011, p. 8).

The concept of propaganda was what Koselleck calls “janus-faced”, simultaneously pointing back to past experiences while facing forward to future expectations. The concept’s ambiguities were used to describe transformed conditions in a “modern” world (Koselleck, 2011, 9; Richter and Richter, 2006, p. 346). All the temporal dimensions of “propaganda” were intertwined in this transformation (Koselleck, 2002, p. 30).

At the start of the Second World War, these two interdependent concepts were related in a slightly changing context. An older sinister meaning of propaganda surfaced, and its political meaning was stressed. In contrast advertisement was proclaimed to be a good force, a good persuasion, unlike totalitarian “propaganda”, as Gustaf Abard’s example in this paper reveals. In the same context admen brought their knowledge to the State war agency, Statens informationsstyrelse. The admen’s use of propaganda was merged with other concepts of persuasive communication techniques, such as advertising and public relations.

Note


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