Article Title Page

The depiction of marketing and marketers in the news media

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Robert Cluley is an Assistant Professor at the University of Nottingham and an Honorary Lecturer at St Andrews University. His research focuses on the social study of marketing. He is particularly interested in understanding how marketing practices and techniques shape society and culture. His research has been published in leading journals such as Organization Studies, Journal of Marketing Management and Marketing Theory.

Structured Abstract:

Purpose – In an effort to explain the high level of scepticism and distrust towards marketing and marketers, paper explores how marketing practice and practitioners are depicted in the mass media.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper analyses 6,877 news reports that discuss “marketing” across two one-year time periods from three UK newspapers. A systematic content analysis is presented through N-Grams and K-Grams, close readings of individual cases and manual coding.

Findings – The paper finds that the news media cultivates an image of marketing and marketing practitioners whereby marketing is portrayed in the news as a cost to businesses and something that businesses do to consumers. The study finds that marketers are also presented through a narrow viewpoint. Marketers are depicted as male and tend to be viewed a source of authority only when speaking on behalf of their organizations in response problems and crises.

Research limitations/implications – The cultivation effect of mass media is widely accepted among communications scholar, yet its use within marketing research is limited. The paper represents an empirical application of this approach.

Practical implications – Organizations including the Chartered Institute of Marketing and American Marketing Association have attempted to counteract marketing’s image problem by redefining what marketing means. The results of this study suggest that such attempts are unlikely to work as the practice of marketing, in particular PR, cultivates a negative image in the media.

Originality/value – The paper demonstrates the utility of cultivation theory and systematic content analyses of media texts. It develops a methodology to examine how professional practice is depicted in mass media.

Keywords: Cultivation theory, content analysis, N-gram, KWIC.

Article Classification: Research Paper

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Introduction

Marketing is suffering from an image problem. People associate it with spin, the hard sell and meaningless business buzzwords. Indeed, even as marketing practice ‘has become more sophisticated ... its status with the customer and the rest of business has never been lower’ (CIM, 2008). As a result, people resist marketing initiatives in their organizations and overlook marketing as a career choice.

To overcome this image problem, the UK’s Chartered Institute of Marketers (CIM) recommends that marketing practitioners and industry bodies promote ‘what marketing really means’ (2007). In the process they have assumed that marketing’s image problem is a matter of ignorance and misunderstanding (Gamble et al, 2011) and, in the language of brand management, they have attempt to fix it by focusing on marketing’s *identity*. This paper approaches marketing’s image problem from a new direction. It explores how consistent *images* of marketing practice and professionals communicated in the mass media support a long-standing *reputation*.

Drawing on cultivation theory, a leading approach in communication research, the paper reports the results of a systematic content analysis of UK news articles that discuss marketing. Reviewing 6,877 documents from drawn from three national newspapers across two one-year periods, the paper finds that marketing is rarely discussed in accordance with the definitions of marketing set out by industry bodies such as the CIM. Instead, marketing is most regularly used to refer to sales and advertising practices and with little recognition that marketers take account of consumer needs. When it comes to marketers, despite a majority of news reports describing successes for individual marketers, they are portrayed as a source of authority only when their organization has encounters bad news. Thus, the study suggests that

the presentation of marketing in the news media contributes to marketing's image problem in two ways. First, news media cultivate a consistent reputation. Second, they show marketers effectively shaping the news on behalf of their organizations. In this sense, the marketing profession may be a victim of marketers own successes. Consequently, the paper concludes that marketers could market marketing by using their own skills, techniques and theories. The first step in doing this requires us to appreciate the importance of marketing's reputation and not focus solely on the identity we would like to create.

The gap between marketing's identity, image and reputation

Does marketing have an "image problem"? Sheth, Sisodia and Barbuлесcu (2006) think so. They note that other professional groups, consumers and the wider public do not trust marketing practices or practitioners. Indeed, a series of studies have tracked a gradual erosion of trust in marketing practice since Bauer and Greyser's (1968) seminal investigation (see O'Donohoe, 1995 for a review).

A CIM report on the introduction of marketing techniques into the UK's National Health Service identifies some practical consequences of this image problem. It describes staff members who dismissed marketing ideas due to their 'negative connotations' and resisted marketing initiatives because of 'a lack of understanding of what marketing is actually about' (CIM, 2008: 10). In response, the CIM (2007) argues that marketers must promote 'what marketing really means'. For the CIM (2014), it is 'the management process responsible for identifying, anticipating and satisfying customer requirements profitably'. Notably, this differs from the influential AMA (2013) 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'.

Laying behind these remedial efforts is a theorisation of marketing's image problem as a matter of ignorance (Gamble et al, 2011). Implicitly they assume that if people only knew what it really involved they would amend their attitude towards marketing practice and the marketing profession. But can such formal definitions really fix marketing's image problem?

Marketing theory would suggest otherwise. Brand researchers distinguish between the brand identities organizations hope to create, the fluctuating images consumers perceive in the marketplace and the relatively stable reputation of a brand that persists over time (Harris and de Chernatony, 2001). They tell us that effective brand management involves more than managing identity (Hatch and Schultz, 1997; Balmer, 2001; van Riel and Balmer, 1997). It involves working with a brand's reputation (Balmer and Greyser, 2006). Where organizations ignore their reputations, their attempts to manage their brands can be counter-productive. They can produce irreconcilable gaps between the identity they desire and the images consumers perceive in the marketplace (de Chernatony, 1999). Such ideas have gained particular purchase in understanding brand relationships beyond individual products and services such as corporate brands (Melewar and Jenkins, 2002) and national brands (Melewar and Akel, 2005).

Yet, a reputation is not simply a summation of images. Repeated psychological studies highlight a 'negativity bias' whereby negative images have greater impact on a reputation than positive ones (Morewedge, 2009; Rozin and Royzman, 2001; Ito et al., 1998). This is especially true when such negative images are consistent over time.

Surely, then, if we want to rectify marketing's image problem we cannot hope to do so by redefining marketing – the equivalent of creating a consistent brand identity. Instead, we need to understand marketing's reputation and how it relates to the images of marketing. In this regard, returning to brand theory and practice, we should suspect that the presentation of marketing within mass media texts contributes significantly to marketing's reputation.

Explaining a professional image problem: cultivation theory

Murray et al (1995) tell us that we can advance marketing theory by interrogating cognizant disciplines. Cultivation theory is attractive here. It is a well-established explanation of media effects that has achieved paradigmatic status in media and communications research. Moreover, although it has yet to be applied to business professions such as marketing, it has been used to explore how professions and occupations accrue reputations in spite of their identities.

Cultivation theory was developed across a milestone study of media content known as the Cultural Indicators project (see Gerbner, 1970). It tracked media content from the 1960s to the 1990s, paying particular attention to the ways certain people, activities and occupations were presented on television. These media representations would be compared with studies of those same people, activities and occupations in real life. Typically, they found notable differences. Once they had identified such differences, Gerbner and his colleagues would explore whether people who spent more time consuming media texts thought the world was more like its portrayal in the media. They routinely found such an effect. They dubbed it the “cultivation” effect. Indeed, so regularly did the effect occur that more recent studies do away with survey of viewers and simply assume that any differences in the portrayal of the social world on television will produce cultivation differentials among viewers.

This is not to say that Gerbner and his colleagues argued for a simple unidirectional view of media effects. Cultivation is the result of systematic trends in media content – including patterns in the ‘settings, castings, social typing, actions, and related outcomes that cuts across program types and viewing modes’ (Gerbner, 1998: 179). In brand theory terms, taken in isolation these settings, casts and so on are equivalent to images. The patterns that emerge among them produce a mainstream image of the world that has a gravitational pull on peoples’ attitudes and beliefs similar to the branding concept of reputation described above. People might not agree with mainstream images but everyone’s attitudes are related to it.

Cultivation theory is widely accepted by media and communications researchers. It was one of the three most-cited theories in mass communications research published in the most prestigious academic journals between 1956 and 2000 (Bryant and Miron, 2004). Researchers have used the theory to explain the heightened fear of crime among heavy-viewers of television (Minnebo and Eggermont, 2007), the reliance on racial and sub-culture stereotypes among heavy viewers of television (Calzo and Ward, 2009) and misconceptions of professions among heavy viewers of television (Van den Bulck, 2002). Equally, researchers have used cultivation theory to explore the effects of marketing practices. They argue that adverts cultivate sexualisation (Lin, 1998), body consciousness (Blaine & McElroy, 2002) and stereotyped gender images (Paek et al, 2011).

Of particular relevance to marketing’s image problem is a stream of cultivation research looking at the depiction of professions in cultural texts (Quick, 2009; Chory-Assad and Ron Tamborini 2003; Turow and Coe, 1985; Lichter and Lichter, 1983; Gerbner et al, 1980; Dominick, 1973; Gerbner, 1966). Collectively, these studies tell us that mass media texts

cultivate mainstream reputations concerning who does certain jobs, what those jobs involve and the status of those jobs in society. Signorielli and colleagues, for example, find that working life on television is dominated by white males (Signorielli and Bacue, 1999; Signorielli, 2009). Similarly, Mayerle and Rarick (1989) conclude that television shows tend to misrepresent the work educators do. In place of routine activities such as marking and lesson preparation most TV shows ‘have characters involved in illegal activities, illicit affairs, substance abuse [that] would be unseemly and unacceptable to the audience to have educators engage in’ (Mayerle and Rarick, 1989: 153). More recently, Ley et al (2012) argue that popular television shows such as *CSI* reframe what scientists do. They depict time-consuming activities such as analysing DNA samples as fast-paced and fool-proof.

Studies applying cultivation theory to occupations and professions, then, suggest that mass media representations systematically depict particular kinds of people doing particular kinds of work – neither of which necessarily resemble the reality of those occupations. These produce a mainstream reputation that is highly influential in shaping people’s opinion of occupations and professions. In regard to marketing practice, cultivation theory suggests that systematic trends in the presentation of who marketers are and what marketers do within mass media texts will cultivate marketing’s reputation. Based on these ideas, this study has been designed to answer two exploratory research questions: 1) *How is marketing depicted in the mass media?* 2) *How are marketers depicted in the mass media?*

Method

To answers these questions, the study follows the accepted methodology of cultivation analysis. Put simply, the study proceeds through a systematic content analysis of media texts. However, as cultivation research suggests that many occupations are under-represented on

television – primarily because they do not lend themselves to compelling narrative structures – rather than focus on a limited number of texts that depict marketing, the study focuses on news reports. The news is ‘the area of the media in which our culture most insistently demands a veridical reproduction and decries distortion’ (Tuchman, 1979: 541). Indeed, despite the complexities of their production, images presented in the news are largely accepted as an accurate reflection of the real world and, consequently, have a huge influence on public opinion (Herman and Chomsky, 1988).

Sample

In order to lessen the effects of particular news stories, which may run for several days, the study uses a one-year sample frame from the beginning of the project (21.2.12-21.2.13). Given the economic situation at the time, which we might expect would influence the presentation of business practices such as marketing, a second one-year sample was drawn from before the financial crisis (21.2.05-21.02.06). The UK was selected as a research site because the CIM has diagnosed an image problem here.

Out of eight prominent national newspapers in the UK (*Express, Guardian, Independent, Mail, Mirror, Sun, Telegraph, Times*), three sources (*Guardian, Telegraph* and *Sun*) were selected for analysis. Each paper in the sample runs Monday-Saturday. They reflect a range of political views and market orientations – which have been shown to impact news reporting (Beam, 2003). These sources are regularly listed in the most read newspapers in the UK. Each is not only popular but also influential. Indeed, Boykoff (2007) argues that when sampling from news outlets to establish how a particular event, object or practice is framed, we need to make sure we focus our attention on influential sources rather than popular ones. For verification we can compare the N- and K-Gram analysis (discussed below) for the

sample to the overall population of eight prominent national UK newspapers. The N- and K-grams produced from the population were extremely alike to those produced for the sample. The rankings were very similar, $r_s = .821$, $p < .01$.

The sources were searched using the LexisNexis database. Each article using the term “marketing” in the source newspapers during the sample timeframes was downloaded from the database in Word files. No distinctions were made between UK National Editions and local editions for Ireland, Scotland and Northern Ireland. However, duplicate stories were deleted from the sample – with only the National Edition entry remaining. In addition, superfluous metadata added to reports by LexisNexis was deleted. The output was then transferred to QADMiner and WordStat for computer-assisted content analysis. QADMiner is a qualitative data analysis software package which organizes textual data and passes it to WordStat. WordStat is a quantitative content analysis and text mining module which analyses the frequency and proximity of key words and phrases. Both programmes are produced by Provalis Research.

The number of reports for each newspaper in each sample timeframe is listed in Table 1. Cross-tabulation suggests a strong relationship between the timeframe and newspaper ($X^2(2, N = 887) = 43.363, p = .000$). *The Guardian* was over-represented in the first timeframe but *The Sun* was under-represented. This trend reversed in the later timeframe with *The Guardian* being under-represented and *The Sun* over-represented.

INSERT TABLE 1.

Data-analysis

Zappavigna (2012) recommends that content analyses should uncover reoccurring ‘couplings’ around selected keywords and that such couplings can be uncovered by computing N-grams and K-grams. An N-gram is a form of keyword-in-context analysis based on a computation of the most popular words that follow a keyword (N). For example, an N+3 analysis would look for the most common three word patterns starting with a keyword. A K-gram analysis involves computing the most popular words that precede a keyword (K). For example, a K-3 analysis would look for the most common three word patterns preceding a keyword.

These computations highlight the most regularly occurring couplings in a corpus and can direct a close reading of specific cases to illustrate the nature of the trends. Using this approach in her study of a huge corpus of tweets, for instance, Zappavigna (2012) finds that “work” is frequently coupled with the proposition “have”. That is to say, when a tweet mentions “work” it is likely that it will be followed or preceded by the word “have”. Exploring individual cases, she argues, that this coupling reflects a wider coupling of work as a duty and burden.

This method has been adopted to investigate the depiction of marketing practice in the dataset. N- and K-gram analyses have been performed for the keyword “marketing”. The trends that are revealed through these analyses are then supported with close readings of individual news reports. Illustrative examples are offered to demonstrate the nature of specific couplings. Given the negativity bias described earlier, particular attention is paid to illustrating the nature of negative couplings which – even if less common – may have a disproportionate effect on people’s attitudes.

To explore the depiction of marketers, a manual coding procedure has been followed. Using keyword searches, the dataset was reduced to those cases that directly discussed marketers. This was done by filtering the dataset for references to “marketer(s)”, “director(s)”, “manager(s)”, “executive(s)” and “assistant(s)”. After verifying each case referred to marketing practitioners, each case was then manually coded by two research assistants along four dimensions. First, the coders looked for clear indications of the marketer’s gender. This was decided on the basis of reported first-names and pronouns. If there was no clear gendering of the subject, the code was left blank. The second coding category asked whether the article was about a marketer or whether the marketer was talking about another topic. Third, manual coding established whether the marketer was speaking as an authority figure on the subject of the story or whether they were described as seeking information on a subject. To establish this, the manual coders looked for evidence of direct and indirect quoting from the marketer. Finally, coding established whether the story had a positive or negative sentiment. As the dataset covered specialist and general news reports, computer-assisted sentiment analysis was not deemed appropriate. Such methods can be skewed by focused topics (Yardi and boyd, 2010). Instead, the coders looked for evidence of positive sentiments through a bespoke dictionary of key terms including ‘opportunity’, ‘investment’, ‘benefit’ and ‘growth’. Negative sentiments were represented through terms such as ‘threat’, ‘unethical’, ‘problem’ and ‘loss’. If there was no clear sentiment the code was left blank. Each coder performed their analysis separately on a two randomly-ordered lists of articles. Discrepancies were judged by the author.

Depictions of Marketing: What is marketing?

Looking at the result of an N-gram analysis for “marketing”, it is clear that marketing is largely depicted as a job role within commercial organisations. Table 2. offers the top 30 N-

grams from the corpus. The most frequent terms that follow marketing include job titles such as ‘director’, ‘manager’, ‘executive’, ‘chief’ and ‘boss’ and functional areas of business such as ‘department’, ‘company’, ‘board’ and ‘firm’. Other predominant terms point towards attempts to influence marketplace behaviours such as ‘spend’, ‘budget’ and ‘costs’. Less popular depictions of marketing link it to a set of practices such as ‘campaign’, ‘campaigns’, ‘strategy’, ‘tool’ and ‘techniques’. Put simply, this suggests that marketing is largely depicted as something designated people in business do – not a process or orientation engaging the whole of an organization.

INSERT TABLE 2.

In the N-gram analysis there is a single reference to the kinds of marketing practices that may contribute to the market’s image problem. This is the idea of marketing ‘calls’. Exploring the texts that use this phrase, each article refers to cold-calling through automated recordings, text messages and call centres. Such hard-selling tactics do not sit easily in the definitions of marketing offered by CIM and AMA. This becomes clear when we drill into specific cases. These include phrases such as ‘irritating marketing calls’, ‘unwanted marketing calls’ and ‘text pests’. Notably, many of these articles position consumers as ‘victims’ of intrusive marketing practices. For example, after discussing aggressive marketing directly one article reads: ‘I’m bombarded by telephone messages from sales people in overseas call centres ... You never buy what they’re offering, but it doesn’t seem to stop them calling’.

Table 3. offers the top 30 K-grams from the corpus. The leading terms in this analysis, including ‘Head of’, ‘Director of’ and ‘Chief’, also position marketing as job role and a business function. However, in this table we see more indications of the things that

marketing involves. There are a number of relatively neutral and predictable couplings such as ‘sales’ and ‘advertising’ and some more recent modifications such as ‘internet’, ‘online’ and ‘digital’. Perhaps most interesting from this analysis is the emergence of additional couplings which may support marketing’s image problem. For example, we see terms such as ‘aggressive’, ‘clever’ and ‘ambush’.

INSERT TABLE 3.

It is important to emphasize that each of these couplings can reflect marketing in both a positive and negative light. Focusing on “aggressive marketing”, for example, it is used to refer to successful marketing campaigns such as ‘an aggressive marketing push that saw [sales] climb above 200,000’. Yet ‘aggressive marketing’ is also used to position marketing as a manipulative activity. We see instances where ‘unethical advertising’ is coupled with ‘aggressive marketing campaigns’, reports of ‘big-name companies’ who face ‘criticism for their aggressive marketing strategies in developing countries’ and discussions of ‘aggressive marketing’ in the financial sector leading to ‘people taking on more debt’.

Notably, in each of these cases the term ‘aggressive marketing’ is used to present marketing as something done to people without their consent. Indeed, in a number of articles about elective cosmetic surgery accusations are levelled at ‘aggressive marketing techniques’ for exploiting innocent consumers. One article states: ‘At present people have no choice but to be exposed to the aggressive marketing tactics of some cosmetic clinics, whether they be in public spaces, in magazines, on the internet or on TV. So these adverts affect everyone, not just individuals already considering surgery’. Here, marketing is presented as a manipulative activity that influences innocent, unsuspecting and passive consumers who have *no choice*.

By way of summary, then, from N- and K-gram computations and subsequent close readings of illustrative examples, it is clear that marketing is depicted in the news media in relatively consistent ways. To answer the first research question, we can say that unlike the desired identity of marketing which emphasises the collaborative nature of marketing in facilitating exchange that creates value for a range of stakeholders, marketing is portrayed in news reports as a business function focused on selling. At the extreme, this function is portrayed in negative terms as a nuisance that people cannot opt-out of. As such, the portrayal of marketing also runs counter to the CIM's definition as there is little to suggest that marketers identify, anticipate or satisfy customer requirements. Rather, marketing is routinely portrayed as a way businesses force goods and services onto people which they do not want or need.

Depictions of marketers: who are marketers?

Manual coding of the news stories that referenced “marketers” produced some notable results (see Table 4.). The coding process investigated four elements of the news stories: what is the gender of the marketer (*Gender*)? Is the report about a marketer or is the marketer a source of information on another topic (*Topic*)? What was the status of the marketer in the story (*Authority*)? What sentiment surrounded the marketer in the story (*Sentiment*)?

INSERT TABLE 4.

Gender portrayal

Research shows us that mass media texts can gender particular professions in ways that do not necessarily map onto real-world labour statistics. In this regard, the CIM reports that while only 23% of marketing and sales directors are female, women are ‘well represented’ in

junior level marketing jobs in the UK (2013: 1). In contrast to these statistics, in the news reports that indicated the gender of a marketer, marketers were identified as women in 27.12% of cases. Several reports noted this gender imbalance. The following extract provides an example:

‘...the trend of few women achieving senior roles is not just limited to advertising - it is noticeable across all marketing disciplines, my own included. Having worked in direct marketing for nearly 20 years, I have noticed that it is not just in the creative departments that women are under-represented in senior roles. From my observations of account handling, the male/female split is around 50/50, but in senior level positions (board directors and above), this shifts to around 90/10’.

However, cross-reference analysis suggests that female marketers are not portrayed differently in the news reports. In other words, women marketers were just as likely to be the topic of a story as their male counterparts ($X^2(1, N = 722) = .428, p = .513$). They were just as likely to be referenced as a source of authority as their male counterparts ($X^2(1, N = 427) = .312, p = .576$). They were also just as likely to be spoken about in a positive or negative light as their male counterparts ($X^2(1, N = 497) = .018, p = .895$).

Indeed, some examples suggest that being a marketer is a more important identity marker than ones’ gender. The following extract discusses what typical marketers are like without any mention of gender:

‘What are typical marketers like? Are they T-shirt-wearing creatives, who spend their days waiting for eureka moments of artistic inspiration? Or are they bespectacled

number-crunchers, never happier than when immersed in facts and figures? While these stereotypes may fall at the extreme ends of the spectrum, the answer is that modern marketers need an abundance of creative talents, but at the same time they must also be able to manage and analyse data. They are, in effect, expected to have an almost uncanny ability to be two different people at any one time’.

So, to summarize, the news reports in the sample tended to depict marketing as a male profession. Roughly speaking, for every three news reports including male marketers, there is only one report that includes a female marketer. Many reports even highlight this gender imbalance. Yet, the gender of the marketer did not affect how they were discussed in the news reports. The fact that someone is a marketer seems to be a more important driver of the ways they are discussed than whether they are male or female.

Topic

The manual coding revealed that 44.1% of news reports that mentioned marketing practitioners included a discussion with a specific marketer. These involved marketers discussing topics ranging from their career, their view of marketing practice or the fortune of their organization. Often these reports presented the marketer as a source of authority on a topic. Indeed, when the news stories talked to marketers, the marketer is often depicted as a source of information than requesting information ($\chi^2(1, N = 481) = 253.451, p = .000$). In contrast, 54.7% of the news reports that mentioned marketers talked about, rather than to, a specific practitioner. This involved reports about movements in the job market as well as more critical discussions about the activities of particular practitioners and organizations. In this regard, when the marketer was coded as being the topic of the story, the story was more likely to describe others giving them advice.

Authority

The manual coding revealed that marketers were positioned as a source of authority in 47.5% of the reports. They provided information about their business, products and markets. There are even some news stories in which marketers provided general advice based on their marketing expertise. In the following example a marketer advises job seekers to see themselves as brands and to use what they know of marketing to package and position their brand more effectively:

‘Suppose you were a washing powder. How would you stand out in the supermarket? Lisa Bennett, assistant brand manager for Pantene Pro-V at Procter & Gamble told her audience that when you look for a job, you are marketing your personal brand. Lisa advises job seekers to identify unmet needs of their consumers and ensure that they “have the right match of skills and qualifications to meet them”. She said people should think of their skills, experience and character traits as a product and their prospective employer as its consumer’.

Less common than such cases are news reports detailing how marketers listen to others. Marketers are reported as receiving information just 7.3% of the time. The following extract serves as an illustrative example of such a news report. In it we see a marketer state that they have “listened closely” to what their customers wanted:

‘The introduction of the Everyday Value range is not a back-of-the-envelope decision, insists the company, rather it is part of a carefully thought-out strategy. “We have listened closely to what our customers want and Everyday Value will provide

products that taste better, look better and are healthier - still at the same great price,” said David Wood, Tesco marketing director’.

These results suggest that across news reports marketers are more likely to be portrayed as sources of information. Although news reports tend to talk about marketers as much as they talk to them, it is rare for news reports to describe marketers seeking or receiving information and advice from others. Given that both the CIM and AMA definitions of marketing practice emphasize the ability of marketers to represent the customer within organizations, it is notable that the news reports consistently present marketers providing information to others rather than listening to their customers.

Sentiment

Positive sentiment surrounding marketers was most prevalent in the data. News reports discussing marketers have an identifiable positive sentiment 37.7% of the time and a negative sentiment 28.6% of the time – the remainder had no identifiable sentiment. Positive sentiment took the form of goods news stories in which marketers were described achieving professional and personal success. It was also evident in cases where marketers were described as possessing a unique insight into the marketplace.

Given the image problem identified with marketing, it is worth exploring those stories that surround marketing with a negative sentiment in detail even though these are less common. Stories were classed as having a negative sentiment if they provided negative couplings with the marketer or marketing. They were also classed as possessing a negative sentiment if the story itself was clearly a bad news story. Here, some reports described bad news that had happened to a marketer. For example, one report tells us ‘a marketing executive from Putney,

South West London, caught chlamydia from a one-night stand abroad'. Other reports both reflected and reinforced a negative coupling by describing marketers in negative terms because they are marketers. Some suggest that marketers are ill-equipped to deal with the realities of the business world. For example, a report tells us: 'If you make marketers depressed, they go nuts'. Other reports highlighted the limited prospects for marketers within organizations. The following extract provides an example here: 'Marketing directors may hold themselves in high esteem, but unfortunately that view is not always shared by their bosses'. In other reports, the practice of marketing rather than marketers was discussed in negative terms. For instance, in the following extract marketing is described as an ineffective business practice: 'Audi marketers waffled about "premium compact", but this was basically a rejigged VW Golf'.

However, the most notable trend that relates marketers to negative sentiments occurred when marketers were presented as the face of an organization in a bad news story. These run from problems at prisons to epidemics and terrorism. In the following illustrative extract, a marketing manager speaks on behalf of a mobility scooter company to deflect criticism of their products and customers. The report tells us: '[A] marketing manager, says: "People have a view that there are a lot of people claiming benefits that they are not entitled to. There is some confusion. Subliminally it makes them more cynical, more hostile towards scooter users"'. In other examples, marketers speak on behalf of a company in response to a specific crisis. The following extract provides an example of this type of report: '[A] marketing director at the hotel said symptoms had been reported last Saturday, adding: "We are glad to report nearly everyone is fully recovered. We are not aware of anybody being taken into hospital"'.

Analysing the sentiment of stories in relation to the other elements that have been coded offers a relatively clear overall picture. Marketers are far more likely to be sources of information for bad news stories ($\chi^2(1, N = 350) = 28.093, p = .000$). Given the illustrative examples above, we can conclude that when marketers appear in bad news reports it tends to be in response to a negative event for their organizations. The marketer's job is not to listen but to try to reframe the negative sentiment. That is to say, across these news reports, marketers are portrayed as practicing media management. Indeed, the news reports even reflected on this issue. For example, one report advises: 'mentally remove the pivotal phrase "according to new research" and substitute "according to some desperate marketing executives in the company named elsewhere in this article"'.

In sum, we can see that marketers are presented in relatively consistent ways in the data set. They tend to be male. They are portrayed as sources of information and are rarely reported as engaging in activities through which they can listen to the needs and requirements of their customers. This is particularly the case in articles with a negative sentiment. In such cases, it is far more likely that marketers will be presented "spinning" a bad news story.

Limitations

The study reveals that marketing is portrayed in relatively stable ways across the sample. However, it is important to note the limitations of the analysis. First, while three source newspapers provide some indication of the range of discussions concerning marketing and is in keeping with existing content analyses of media texts, one must be cautious when drawing wider conclusions based on just three newspapers. The N- and K-grams were verified against a population of 8 prominent national newspapers. But correlating the sources with the manual coding categories, for example, indicates some significant underlying relationships. For

example, although *The Guardian* tended to discuss marketers more often than it talked to them, this trend reversed for the other papers ($X^2(2, N = 876) = 17.118, p = .000$). Related to this, the timeframes may have an effect on the depiction of marketing. For example, women were underrepresented in the first timeframe whereas in the later timeframe they were over-represented ($X^2(1, N = 727) = 15.121, p = .000$).

Future research could easily overcome these limitations by sampling more widely. However, this is a major undertaking. Running the verification test produced a sample of over 25,000 articles. Still, such studies could confirm whether the cultivated images of marketing change over time or whether particular outlets have more influence than others.

A final limitation of the study relates to the manual coding. Each variable was categorized as a dummy variable. This provides the most revealing results and for *Gender*, *Topic*, *Authority* provides a good fit with the available outcomes. However, for *Sentiment* a dummy variable is problematic. Clearly, it is possible for an article to be very negative or slightly negative. Such fine-grained insight was lost in this study. Future research could overcome this by developing a more detailed protocol to interrogate the data.

Conclusion

This study suggests that marketing and marketers are discussed in relatively consistent ways in news reports. Put in the language of brand theory, we can say marketing and marketers have a consistent *reputation*. Marketing is typically presented as a cost to businesses that helps them to sell their goods and services. In extreme cases, it is depicted as a set of victimizing, annoying and exploitative tactics that result in negative personal, cultural and social effects. For their part, marketers are portrayed as being male. Whether they are the

topic of a story or a source of authority on an issue depends on the sentiment of the story. When a story has a negative sentiment, the reports show marketers engaging in media management to spin a story on behalf of their organization.

Although more news stories had a positive sentiment than a negative one, psychologists tell us that negative stories will have a great influence on people's perceptions, attitudes and beliefs. If this is true, we can begin to understand where marketing's "image problem" comes from. It suggests that marketing's image problem may be, at least in part, a consequence of both marketing's *reputation* and the success of marketing practice itself. It is precisely because marketers are able to shape the news agenda that they cultivate a negative image of spin.

Thus, the study suggests that the root of marketing's problem is not ignorance or misrepresentation but that some of its most public-facing activities, which influence people's perceptions, are the kinds of things people are uncomfortable with and suspicious of. That is to say, the marketing profession may suffer as individual marketers successfully achieve their objectives. One solution, then, might be to work with the cultivated reputation rather than treat it as an image problem. Finding ways to demonstrate that marketing involves more than spin and how spin fits into the marketing orientation may be more effective remedies to marketing's image problem than redefining the *identity* of marketing. This might involve spinning stories about marketing, promoting the profession as a career choice or even engaging in honest discussions about the role of marketing in culture, society and the economy. In so doing marketers could use their persuasive powers to embrace and reframe marketing's dark sides rather than deny or overlook them. Alternatively, rather than promote

what marketing means, marketers could attempt to blend into the background of marketing practice.

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