
Guest editorial: Introduction to special issue on “Marketing of medical and health-related products”

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145

We are pleased to present to our readers the special issue of the *Journal of Historical Research in Marketing* (JHRM) on the “Marketing of medical and health-related products”.

Marketing activities focused on medical and health-related goods and services is evident throughout the course of history and an essential part of the development and evolution of business to business and consumer health markets. Marketing of medical and health-oriented products has made numerous positive contributions to the health-care industry, albeit along with those less auspicious (particularly before regulation and industry controls of more modern eras). To effectively supply the needs of medical and health-orientated markets, a wide array of products is needed. These range from those that are lifesaving or sustaining (e.g. emergency surgical supplies and equipment), bricks and mortar locations and servicescapes to enable service delivery (e.g. sanatoriums and spas), communications from government and private industry targeting consumer decision-making (e.g. vaccination and smoking cessation), growth and development of physick and pharmacological distribution and supply (e.g. early retailing by chemist and druggists, development of DTC markets) and even those whose positioning and appeal is based on more opportunistic, whimsical or superfluous claims (e.g. “efficacious” minerals, potions and supplements of the late 1800s).

The papers presented in this special issue enliven and add new and novel contributions to historical research in the marketing of medical and health-related goods and services.

The first paper by Rachel Greenfield “Catering to the experts: food marketing and health professionals in the early twentieth century”, focuses on early 1900s strategies used by food companies in a period where scientific knowledge became increasingly popular to promote the beneficial relationship between good food and health. The article showcases the Knox Gelatine, Borden and Sunkist brands and the strategies used to target consumers and food health “experts” (who advised American women). By these brands communicating beneficial nutritional elements to an emerging class of food “experts” and using third-party medical research that would be published in medical journals of the day, positive influence over both target audiences was achieved. The article points to how the adoption of research into marketing strategy and promotion led to convincing arguments of the benefits of their products.

In the second paper “‘Welcome to pure food city’: tracing discourses of health in the promotional publications of the Postum Cereal Company, 1920–1925”, Lauren O’Hagan explores discourses of health in the promotional publications of the Postum Cereal Company, 1920–1925 and suggests some 1920s advertisers had become “missionaries of modernity”. She shows how an American breakfast cereal company’s marketing campaigns informed by contemporary science and medicine exploited concerns about health and well-being. O’Hagan suggests that Postum’s marketing clearly reveals how the boundaries between advertising and health promotion can become unclear. This can potentially mislead consumers into mistakenly believing that particular processed foods may provide a protective “halo” against ill health.



Journal of Historical Research in Marketing
Vol. 15 No. 3, 2023
pp. 145–146
© Emerald Publishing Limited
1755-750X
DOI 10.1108/JHRM-08-2023-086

The third paper “Lost archives and found voices: reconstructing the marketing history of medical marijuana in Austria-Hungary” by Jure Stojan focuses on a medicinal product not commonly discussed in historical marketing research. The article analytically narrates the work of the Trnkóczy brothers who achieved monopolistic supplier status in pre-rolled medical cannabis cigarettes. Successful through first avoiding prohibition constraints to then maximising development of their market when an official permit could be obtained, the Trnkóczy brothers were able to launch an impressive marketing campaign. A lack of retrievable official archival data, which is discussed in the paper, has required the author to piece together material for analysis from numerous other sources, such as historical periodicals.

These papers, set in the context of their time, reveal the significance of reflecting on the past and how it informs our understanding of the marketing of health-care products within the environment of the 21st century. They are fascinating reads, and we are sure they will be greatly enjoyed by the JHRM readership.

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