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Discovering the Consumer

Market Research, Product Innovation, and the Creation of Brand Loyalty in Britain and the United States in the Interwar Years

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This article discusses the use of market and consumer research at Lever/Unilever and its advertising agency in Britain and the United States, J. Walter Thompson (JWT), in the interwar period. Research surveys conducted by JWT in the 1920s and 1930s helped Lever reposition its international soap brand Lux. The case demonstrates that Lever deployed qualitative market research techniques much earlier than usually acknowledged. Qualitative and quantitative consumer research methods allowed marketers at Lever and JWT to take account of autonomous consumer practices that limited the scope of management. The article also shows that marketing's cultural practices often predate its conceptualization and academic theorization.

Keywords: *marketing history; market research; consumer culture; J Walter Thompson; Unilever*

Market Research and its Place in Marketing History

One of the most fascinating subjects in the history of marketing is the remarkable rise of consumer and market research in the twentieth century. Understanding the factors leading to this rise helps historians and marketing researchers alike to gain a better picture of the various roles that consumers, brands, manufacturers, retailers, and marketers played in transforming the marketplace during the last century. This is of course of tremendous importance for the study of macromarketing, an intellectual endeavor that defines marketing not only as a set of activities executed by professional managers but as a sphere where consumer opinions, social attitudes, and desires interact with and shape corporate marketing policy. In as much as macromarketing addresses the issues at the nexus between marketing and society, the voice of the consumer ought to be at the heart of this intellectual endeavor of studying marketing within the widest possible framework of culture and society (Shultz 2007).

Market and consumer research, understood as an umbrella term encompassing various activities that allow consumers to establish a "voice" in the market place and corporations to "listen" to that voice, has attracted the curiosity of numerous historians of marketing and market cultures. Earlier authors, directly influenced by

the memory of those who shaped early market research during the first three decades of the twentieth century, acknowledged that the systematic study of consumer opinions and behaviors originated in the rapidly modernizing business administration processes of the American progressive era (Bartels 1941, 1976; Lockley 1950). During the 1980s, this insight of earlier authors seemed to have given way to a consensus that the earliest forms of market and consumer research came about in response to the economic crisis of the 1930s (Marchand 1985, 1998) but that the socially more relevant, "interesting" forms of research, that is, qualitative consumer studies, had their origins in the postwar era (Chandler 1977, 1990; Converse 1987; Tedlow 1990; de Grazia 2005; Silberer and Büttner 2007). Most historians surveyed here acknowledge the existence of turn-of-the-century advertising psychology emanating from the studies of Harlow Gale, Walter Dill Scott, and Harry Levi Hollingworth between the 1890s and the 1920s. Yet, there seems to be a strong historical consensus that these early advertising psychological discourses remained largely confined to the realms of academia and hardly

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influenced corporate marketing and advertising communication strategy before the advent of market segmentation techniques and consumer psychographics in the 1950s and 1960s. In this view, there emerge clear historical stages in the history of market and consumer research leading from the merely quantitative analysis of markets based on consumers' income and class status during the interwar years to qualitative consumer studies based on psychographic segmentation techniques and consumers' activities, interests, and opinions (AIO) during the 1960s (Harrison and Mitchell 1936; Richards, MacRury, and Botterill 2000, 26; Leiss et al. 2005, 157). Arvidsson (2006, 48) summarized this when he argued that market research before the 1960s used only one variable—income—and “employed a conventional understanding of class-based consumer cultures as a backdrop to its production of knowledge.”

Lever, JWT, and Market Research in the Interwar Era

In this article, the author will test these assumptions using the case of the Lever conglomerate and its international advertising agency J. Walter Thompson (JWT). Both companies became first connected when the American Lever subsidiary Lever Brothers entrusted its advertising of the soap product Lux to JWT in the North American market in 1915 (Account Histories 1926; “Little stories behind our accounts” 1935; Wilson 1954; Jones and Richardson 2007). The case of the Lux brand and its positioning in the North American and British markets will show that qualitative market and consumer research played a far greater role in strategic brand management during the interwar years than usually acknowledged. During the 1920s, JWT conducted large-scale and detailed consumer behavior investigations in relation to soap products and began to segment the market for cleaning products to position Lux in the mind of consumers. In these investigations, JWT researchers used segmentation, targeting, and positioning techniques far earlier than Tedlow's models of stages in marketing history would allow for (Tedlow 1990, 5–8). Rather than exposing consumers to a purely sales-oriented, mass marketing style of product communication, the market research conducted by JWT and Lever puts consumers in a more powerful position.

In their seminal work on the rise of large-scale corporations and mass marketing, Tedlow and Chandler focused on companies that either concentrated in their growth strategies on the relatively homogenous American home market or specialized in markets that favored the

standardization of products and their communication. Chandler's is mostly a story of railways, industrial chemicals, rubber, oil, and electrical equipment, while Tedlow's model of stages stresses consumer goods sectors (soft drinks, automobiles, grocery retailing) that were largely confined to the American mass market before the 1950s. Unsurprisingly, both locate the arrival of market research and related segmentation techniques in the postwar period (Chandler 1977, 476–83; 1990, 619; Tedlow 1990, 8–9). The Unilever industrial combination and the JWT advertising agency, however, do not easily fit into the mold created by Tedlow and Chandler. Although the soap giant and the ad agency envisioned and benefitted from the emergence of nationally unified mass markets, both were also multidomestic international firms which during the interwar years began to operate globally through decentralized structures consisting of largely independent, national subunits and subsidiaries. As Bartlett and Ghoshal have argued, the main strategic thrust of multidomestic international firms is to respond to national differences (Bartlett and Ghoshal 1989; Harzing 2000). The decentralized, multidomestic nature of Lever and JWT made both organizations acutely aware of the internationally and regionally vastly different consumer preferences for vegetable oil-based and fat-based products such as soap or margarine.

At the same time, Lever's consumer-oriented branding policy also became the backdrop to its interest both in the vastness of the North American market and in the then leading American advertising agency JWT. Lever's approach to international marketing allowed its subsidiaries in individual countries high levels of independence in deciding on the creative execution of brand messages. The low level of centralization and integration allowed local decision makers to make use of their local expertise and develop “social embeddedness.” All of these factors resulted in a much higher interest at Lever and JWT in market and consumer research already in the 1920s.

Lux soap flakes were initially advertised by Lever's in-house advertising department and introduced to the United States in 1906. In 1915, the account was handed over to the JWT advertising agency, which in 1925 advised Lever Brothers to extend the brand by producing Lux toilet soap. This product was introduced in the British market in 1928, where JWT had become Lever's only advertising agency in addition to the in-house service Lever International Advertising Service (Sharpe 1964). JWT, in turn, was the first truly globally active advertising agency. Between 1925 and 1929 alone, it opened more than twenty new local dependencies in twenty-five countries around the globe (JWT News Bulletin 1928; de Grazia 2005). Apart from Lever, JWT

serviced other international clients such as General Motors, Pond's, Gillette, Kellogg's, Wrigley, Frigidaire, Sun-Maid Raisins, and Libby's. Offering unique organizational capabilities, it was well placed to accompany the various trans-Atlantic market introductions and line extensions which the Lux brand experienced between 1925 and the mid-1930s. The JWT agency followed a distinct business model whereby it focused on servicing a selected number of large clients whose advertising expenditures were well above the market average and who would be interested in buying a number of lucrative extra services, such as planning, market research, radio production, and so on. Following this model, JWT soon gained a unique position among American advertising agencies for its planned and "academic" approach to advertising services (West 1988; Silva 1996; Merron 1999).

JWT had opened a small dependency in London in 1899, which had to be closed in response to the outbreak of World War I. Its London office was reopened in 1919 and by the late 1920s JWT established itself in the British market as one of the top five advertising agencies as regards advertising billings and had acquired a unique capability to conduct large-scale market research surveys. It is important to remember that JWT was not the first or only advertising agency in the British market to offer such services. However, its organizational culture, its conceptualization of the market and the consumer, and its sheer size allowed JWT to be the first advertising agency in Britain in the mid-1920s able to offer market research techniques as a regular part of its campaign planning.

These market research techniques—readership surveys, consumer investigations into the uses of products, panel surveys on consumer habits and beliefs, and so on—became the working basis of JWT's campaign planning. The techniques that JWT used reveal the extent to which this advertising agency gained from the employment of Paul Cherington, the former Harvard Business School professor in marketing. At JWT in New York, Cherington had introduced the idea to construct advertising text and slogans in a way that aided the market penetration and the market expansion of a product. In other words, advertisements at JWT were written to give consumers a "reason-why" to purchase the product. JWT advertisements helped consumers rationalize their choice and constantly suggested new uses to which the product could be put (Cherington 1924, 1927; "Consumers decide" 1926).

The consistent use of market research by JWT London from the mid-1920s is indeed surprising. At its New York headquarters, the agency had created a research

department as early as 1915 (Kreshel 1989, 212–49). In the early 1920s, JWT raided Ivy League universities in search of scientific talent that could be of help with researching and analyzing consumer behavior. New hires included Harvard marketing professor Paul Cherington and from John Hopkins the psychologist John Broadus Watson (Kreshel 1990). After expanding to Britain, JWT conducted the first large-scale investigations between 1923 and 1925 for Sun-Maid Raisins and Pear's Soap by asking several hundred housewives, wholesalers, and shopkeepers where, why, and when these products were sold and bought, by whom, and for what purpose (Downham 1993). In 1933, the market research unit of JWT London had become so large that it was separated as a company and became the British Market Research Bureau (BMRB). The BMRB was one of Britain's first market research companies and was unique in the way that it offered its services also to nonclients of JWT London. By 1924, the New York head office of JWT had also developed an experimental kitchen where women would test and compare products and invent new recipes. In the late 1920s, this research innovation was adopted by the London office at Bush House ("Agency in Action" 1936; "JWT London: dates and data" 1959; Downham 1993).

The consumer goods giant Lever had equally been an early adopter of consumer and product research techniques. In 1920, a Research Department was established at Port Sunlight. In 1925, Lever set up its own advertising agency, which by 1930 had evolved into Lintas. Lintas did not always enjoy a harmonious relationship with JWT in the British market. After 1935, market research was carried out at Port Sunlight on a regular basis under Harry Munt. In the 1960s, Lintas became one of the main innovators in the use of computer technology for the analysis of psychographic and lifestyle data in market research (Digg 1966; Jones 2005). Lever and JWT developed a different outlook on the market and therefore developed different rationales for market research. Lever and Lintas tended to be more interested in using market research for the tabulation of sales data to gain quantifiable measurements of which income bracket of the consumer body bought which product how often and through which channel at what price (Stewart 1930). This attitude toward the possibilities of market research can be interpreted as a response by the manufacturer to the challenges of industrial capitalism in an age of mass production and mass selling (Arvidsson 2006).

JWT was similarly interested in the quantitative side of market research to discover new uses for the products it advertised and new themes and consumer interests that could be exploited in advertisements. This focus on

actual consumer behavior in the home, however, allowed JWT to transgress the boundaries of a purely statistical interest in market research. Unlike their colleagues at Lever and Lintas, the JWT researchers were much more interested in qualitative data on how consumers behaved in the shops and at home, how they made sense of products, and why they accepted or rejected brands. As an advertising agency, JWT was of course interested in gaining qualitative data to develop advertisements that were both useful and exiting “news” for consumers. This, in turn, enabled the agency to carve out spaces of market and consumer knowledge through research that seemed inaccessible to its clients in the manufacturing sector. Market research, especially of the qualitative type, allowed JWT to justify its mediating role as a communication specialist between manufacturer and consumer and alleviate the anxiety of its clients about the ever more choosy and elusive consumer body (Marchand 1985; Lears 1994; Lury and Warde 1997).

There is another factor that made this agency somewhat unique. Most advertising agencies at that time—both in Britain and in the United States—were driven by male copywriters, who often celebrated themselves as “stars” of a new era of mass communication (Marchand 1985; Fried 2005). At JWT, copywriters for soap and cosmetic product advertisements were often women. Female “ad-smiths” had a better understanding of the needs, fears, dreams, and desires of their almost exclusively female audience (Weil Davis 2000). In the interwar and the postwar years, it was also common practice to have female members of staff conducting the interviews, while male research staff worked on the tabulation of the data. This practice, while slanted by the fact that members of JWT often came from privileged backgrounds far removed from the “mass” of consumers they studied and communicated with, ensured that the social space of market research was formed by women talking to other women in a relaxed atmosphere at home about brands, shopping patterns, and family life. Contemporary advertising and psychology textbooks presented the target group of advertisers of household products—that is, women—often as irrational and suggestible by the lure of advertising texts if these were themselves prepared by women who observed and recorded attitudes, interests, opinions, and behavior (Frederick 1929; “Helen Lansdowne Resor” 1964; Reekie 1991). JWT market researchers, therefore, went well beyond the traditional conceptualization of market research as the study of quantifiable consumer behavior linked to the stratification of the “ABCD” income groups and social classes.

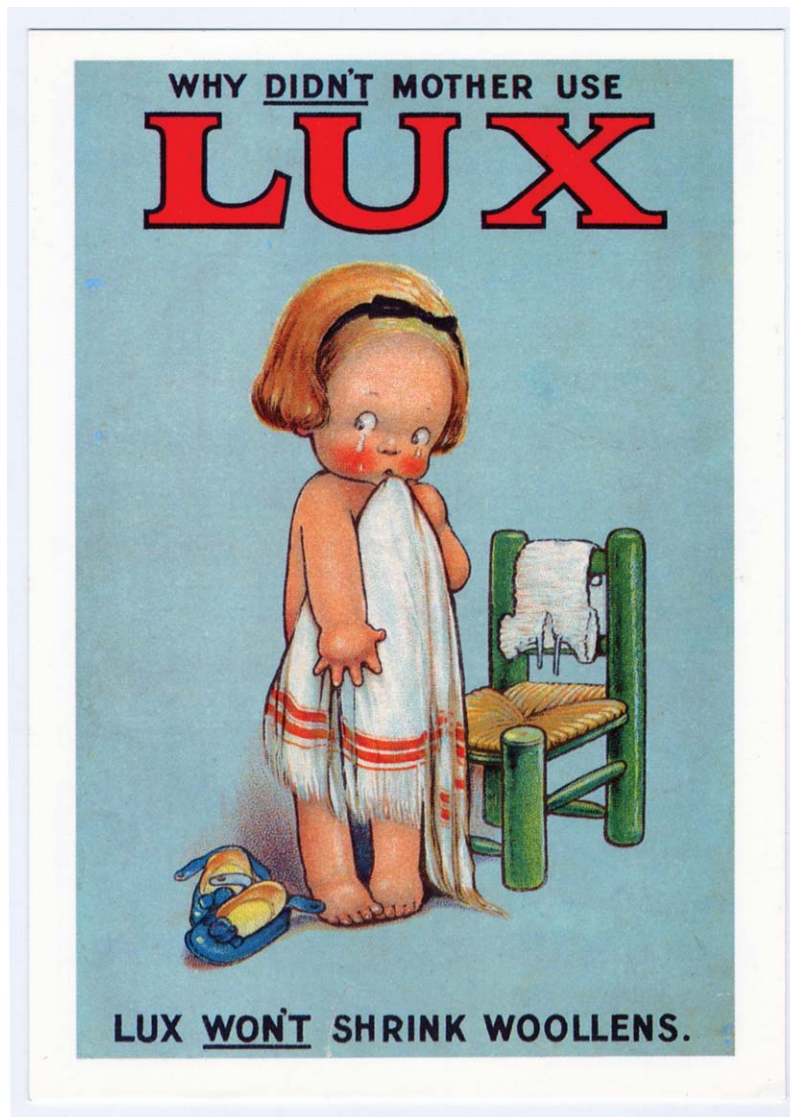
The Brand: Lux Soap Flakes

One of Lever’s earliest product innovations was a production technique developed in 1889, which allowed soap to be produced in forms of flakes. The resulting product, soap flakes, made washing easier and preserved the garments as women did not have to rub clothes with the hard soap bar. In 1900, Lever’s product came on the market as “Lux soap flakes.” The product, with its distinctive brand name (derived from the Latin word for light “lux,” which in English also suggested “luxury”) and packaging was one of the first attempts at integrated marketing in the United Kingdom. Lux became a brand targeted at high- and middle-income consumers who wanted to preserve expensive clothing. The brand became associated with care and gentleness but also with the idea of expensive lifestyles. Moreover, the product was positioned as a problem solver (Levitt 1960); if consumers were rich enough to buy expensive clothes, they also had problems which low-income groups did not have, that is, the preservation of silk or other expensive clothes. Lux helped solve these problems.

In 1906, Lever began to export Lux soap flakes to the United States. There, its advertising agency JWT suggested that the traditional positioning of Lux as a product to be used to wash woollen garments (see slogan in fig. 1: “Lux won’t shrink woollens”) should be widened so that consumers saw Lux as a product that could be used for all fine fabrics. This repositioning followed a typical strategy applied by JWT. Its advertisements often followed an aggressive market expansion strategy for their products; by suggesting a wider framework of possible uses for a given product both the customer base and the usage rate of a product could be increased (Ansoff 1957). For its client Lever Brothers, this strategy resulted in increased sales from 10,000 cases in 1915 to over one million cases in 1918 (“The history of Lux Flakes” 1950; Lovett 1970). This strategic marketing orientation of JWT’s advertising is further exemplified in its decision to use advertisements in 1922 to promote the use of Lux for the washing of dishes.

In the early 1920s, the Lux advertising campaign in the American market took a crucial turn toward dialogic consumer engagement. In 1924, JWT invited American housewives to submit testimonials for Lux soap flakes. These letters, of which about 53,000 arrived at the JWT headquarters, were used by the agency to conduct a survey of consumer habits. It turned out that consumers had independently begun to use the flakes for the washing of their hands, for baths, for their babies, and for washing their hands and hair. This effectively created brand

Figure 1
Lux Soap Flakes Advertisement, UK 1910



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extensions into new product lines (toilet soap, shampoo, etc.). These findings encouraged Lever Brothers to extend the brand and offer consumers a Lux toilet soap, which was launched on the American market in 1925 and three years later on the British market (“Lux Flakes Account History” 1950).

In 1927, Lever decided to reposition the Lux brand on the British market, too. In a highly volatile market, the expensive quality product Lux had begun to lose market share to generic soap flake products which were sold in bulk. Moreover, in 1924, Colgate’s Palmolive toilet soap was introduced in the United Kingdom supported by the

American Lord & Thomas advertising agency. By the mid-1930s, Palmolive had diversified into shampoo soap, shaving cream, and face powder (“Statistical Review of Press Advertising” 1937; Edwards 1962). What added to this competitive pressure were Lever’s limitations in strategically positioning its own brands in a crowded market. Soon after World War I, Lever had managed to acquire a quasi monopoly in the British soap market and produced some 60 percent of all soap consumed in the United Kingdom (Edwards 1962). By 1930, Rinso, Persil, Sunlight Soap, Lifebuoy, the Monkey Brand, Pear’s, and Lux were all part of the Lever Empire.

As low-involvement products, all these brands had to be heavily advertised to gain consumers' top-of-mind awareness and, thus, cannibalized each others' market shares, incurring large advertising costs on Lever.

Accordingly, Lever became much more interested than other producers of fast-moving consumer goods in Britain to obtain strategically relevant information about consumer behavior and its own competition. In 1927, the need to revitalize the Lux brand had become so acute that the soap giant advised its advertising agency JWT to find out exactly what kind of consumers bought Lux and how the brand was positioned in their minds. JWT approached this problem by conducting a market research survey on a scale formerly unknown in British marketing. In late 1927 and early 1928, JWT researchers interviewed 3,200 housewives in twenty towns and cities across England about their attitudes toward washing generally and their habits in using soap brands in particular ("Lux England 1928" 1927; "Lux Flakes—3,195 Consumers" 1928; "Special interviews on washing habits" 1930).

The driving question behind this research was to find out how the consumption of soap in general could be increased. Among other factors, the research surveys identified the use of washing soda (soda ash) as substitute for soap, especially in low-income households, as a behavioral market barrier to all soap products. The surveys also studied the details of how soap products—and Lux soap flakes in particular—were used in the different types of families. Here, the studies found out that the greatest resistance to the use of Lux soap flakes was of course its high price but that this was combined with a lack of knowledge on the side of the female consumer as to the possible household uses of the product. Those housewives that were attached to the brand mostly came from a high-income segment or saved a pack of Lux flakes for the occasional laundering of expensive underwear. In recognition of the difference among the "initiator," the "decision maker," and the "buyer" within the decision-making unit of the buying process, JWT also asked which person within the family actually made the decision to switch from Lux to a cheaper soap brand.

By talking to thousands of housewives, JWT found out that the actual competitive advantage of Lux lay in its superior quality, and its unique selling proposition (USP) was that by using flakes the housewives did not have to rub precious garments with the hard soap bar. The market researchers also found that for every one visit to the pharmacy, housewives made six visits to the grocer. Because soap and shampoo at that time would only be stocked by pharmacies, JWT advised Lever to push the Lux product line into grocers and other retail outlets to facilitate the take-up of the product by the

target market. Crucially, this type of research also involved the interviewing of retailers and shopkeepers, who were recognized by JWT as important gatekeepers in the integrated marketing process. In the interviews, JWT found that grocers feared that the soap smell "would get into the butter" and other animal fat-based products stored in what to an American agency often looked like crowded, old-fashioned little shops in the United Kingdom ("Summary of investigation" 1930). It therefore advised Lever to redesign the packaging of Lux so that grocers were reassured that the product would not "interfere" with what they saw as their staple trade—the selling of foodstuffs. The agency researchers also interviewed the Lever sales manager about their experiences with retailers in the country and on how the product sold over the year. This interest of JWT in the retail end of the marketing process again supports the idea that for this agency market research was a necessary part of an integrated marketing approach, which had to complete the advertising-driven "pull" of consumer demand by creating retail acceptance of a new product ("push").

JWT's market research gave a great deal of attention as to how the whole product category of soap was used by the prospective target market and how Lux soap flakes in particular could be woven into that network of washing habits and everyday life behavior. The JWT researchers for example observed in detail how women washed their clothes, how much soap was being applied to what kind of garments, how women opened and stored the pack, the average water temperatures they applied, the techniques of ironing, and so on. The questionnaires used by JWT also allowed women to reflect on what washing meant for their bodies (ageing, destruction of skin by soda products) and on the social meaning of "washing day." JWT studied the local conditions that influenced the sales of soap. It recognized that the typically hard water of England's southern counties created a different set of needs and problems for housewives in comparison to those housewives living in the soft-water areas. Similar regional differences were exploited when JWT advised Lever that the use of woollens in the predominantly working class North of England and the comparatively higher consumption of silk in England's rather middle-class South provided an opportunity for Lux's core product features (care and gentleness) to be communicated in a differentiated and more targeted way.

The market research reports produced by JWT as well as the face of the campaign later in 1928 suggest that the basis of the whole campaign was a quasiethnological analysis of modern housewives' washing habits. These findings directly refute assertions that market research

before the 1960s only used one variable—class status, that is, income—and showed little interest in the rich data that extensive, qualitative analysis was able to produce. Rather than just asking which income bracket—ABCD—among consumers purchased the product, how often and where, the JWT team clearly attempted to chart a map of behavioral patterns connected to the consumption of soap products in the household. Based on the opinions that consumers expressed at experimental washing sessions, JWT found out that a lot of women used washing soda as a cheap and aggressive substitute for more expensive soaps but often ruined the skin of their arms and hands with it. In the background of this discovery of consumers' behavioral and psychic dispositions toward brands stood the discovery in the mid-1920s of the fact that brands invoked images in people's minds and mainly existed as collections of social attributes. At a 1924 account planning conference, a female JWT copywriter for example clearly described the Lux brand in terms of its image and its brand personality when she wrote: "I think of Lux as a member of the lesser nobility. She is probably a Marquise. She is gay, spontaneous, care-free. If you met her in the flesh she would greet you with squeals of delight and trills of laughter. She had a home. . . . But her home gave her no anxiety. She whisked her handsome woollen blankets through the rich lather and out they come like new. Husband she must have had, but he never appears. Maybe he follows the sea or maybe he couldn't stand the pace" ("Conference Miss Flemming" 1924).

The results of the continuous investigations by JWT London were directly translated into a campaign plan on the British market for 1928–1929. JWT came to the following conclusions about advertising the product: the campaign had to overcome the chief resistance to Lux—the high price—and give housewives with lower or average incomes a clear set of reasons as to why buying Lux made sense economically and how Lux could be made part of their laundering work. The main thrust of the research seemed to indicate that the buying power among British consumers existed but that Lever needed to understand its consumers better. The advertising messages, therefore, had to concentrate on the uses of Lux as a product in those parts of life where the least resistance to its price would be encountered, that is, the washing of very fine fabrics and baby garments.

To carve out a unique position for Lux and to differentiate the product from its competitors, JWT recommended that all advertisements should be based on the theme of fashion. To increase the relevance of the product to the target group, JWT devised advertisements which conveyed "news" about the world of style,

prestige, and glamor. The ultimate aim of the campaign was to turn the perception of the product from being "simply a different kind of laundry soap" into a "magical kind of product" ("Lux Press Campaign" 1927; "Lux advertising during 1928" 1928). The new Lux campaign that started in March 1928 broke with the traditions of soap advertising, which until then tended to stress the product attributes in a "slice-of-life" surrounding characterized by housewives shown at work in the kitchen or in the bathroom. In the new Lux campaign, the female reader was no longer confronted with real-life images of healthy children and happy housewives, but instead with stylish, thin, and modernist drawings of living fashion-dolls in expensive clothes. To attach the new USP of Lux—keeping female consumers' most treasured clothes like new—and to surround Lux with an air of distinguished lifestyle, JWT simply used the fashion-doll drawings so familiar from retail advertising.

What is important about this repositioning exercise is that by directing all the mental energy of the captive advertising audience toward the idea of keeping one's most expensive clothing like new, JWT reinvented Lux as one of Britain's first lifestyle brands or what Douglas Holt has called an "identity brand" (Holt 2004). The skillful design of the fashion-styled advertisements translated the tangible USP of Lux into an emotional selling proposition (ESP). Although the brand communication of all other soap products told consumers what the product did to their clothing (cleaning) and how it helped women care for their families ("Lifebuoy soap for health"; "the shortest way on washing day: the Rinso way"; "sunlight: not yet one and washing done"; "victory—won by Persil"; "Persil washes whiter"), Lux advertising told female audiences what the product did for their personality. Other than Rinso or Persil or the plethora of unbranded products that were available to British and American housewives, Lux became a brand that based its very identity on the narrative of transformation and rejuvenation; the use of Lux in the household promised to turn a simple "housewife" into a style savvy, adorable, fashion goddess. The key to this narrative were the findings of JWT's behavior- and identity-oriented market research (figures 2 and 3).

Apart from recasting the values the brand offered to its consumers, JWT directly translated the results of their investigations of the various market segments and their mental habits into advice that focused on marketing mix decisions. Amongst other things, JWT suggested that Lux soap flakes not only needed to be communicated in a new, more "fashionable" way but also needed a new, fresher pack design. It advised Lever to offer the

Figure 2
Lux Soap Flakes Advertisement, UK 1928

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HOME NOTES

AUGUST 11, 1928.



Rubbing shrinks jumpers-- makes them harsh, unlovely

wool fabrics are too sensitive for any but the gentlest care

SO soft and colourful when you buy them — your gay woollen jumpers, cosy sports sweaters and cardigans.

Costly, too! Yet a single improper washing may make them unwearable — shrunken, faded, unlovely, long before they are worn out.

Rubbing with common soap is the enemy of your fine woollens. For rubbing mats the sensitive wool fibres, makes them shrink and thicken, fades the delicate colours.

In Lux your most treasured jumpers and sweaters are safe. For the sparkling Lux lather cleans

gently and surely — without any rubbing at all.

Simply make a bowlful of foaming Lux lather (three tablespoons give you a whole gallon of bubbling suds), and rinse your jumper up and down, pressing the lather gently through the fabric over and over again.

See how quickly dirt and stains vanish! In just a few seconds your precious woollens are clean again — soft, downy, unfaded — lovely as when you bought them.

Full directions on every Lux packet tell how to wash woollens most successfully.



Made by a 10-day process, so costly none but the world's greatest soap-makers could afford it, the filmy Lux flakes are safe for washing any fabric water alone won't harm.

LEVER BROTHERS LIMITED
PORT SUNLIGHT
LX 494-247

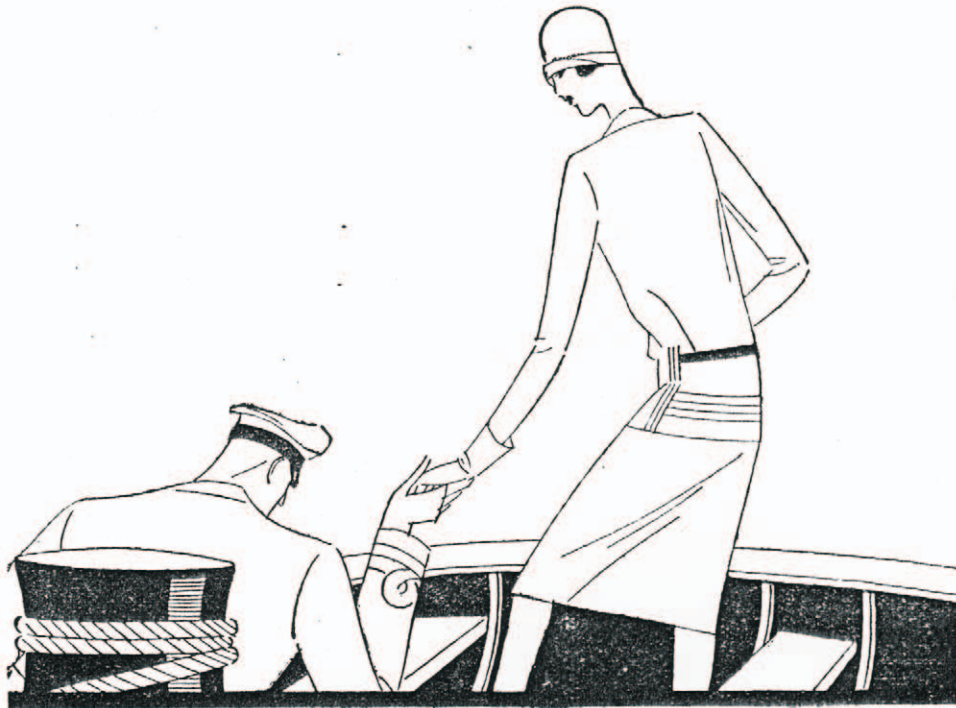
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Figure 3
Lux Soap Flakes Advertisement, UK 1928

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HOME NOTES



Rubbing shrinks jumpers— makes them harsh, unlovely

Keep them like new . . . right through the summer

Adorable—the new sports clothes! Crisp washing silks—woollens softer, finer than any you had before—slim tailored flannels . . . how to keep these lovely things fresh, trim, smart!

For if you rub them with bar soap you may ruin them at once—make them faded, unattractive.

Rubbing with bar soap wears out the frail silken threads, ruins flannels and woollens too—makes them shrink, grow harsh, unlovely.

Lux makes all harmful rubbing unnecessary. Just whip its glistening flakes to a sparkling lather—and rinse each garment up and

down, gently squeezing the bubbling, cleansing Lux suds through the fabric. Dirt and stains vanish like magic. In a few seconds your precious things are clean again—silks just as lovely, unfaded, woollens as soft and downy, as when they were new!

Directions for washing silks and woollens most successfully are given on every Lux packet.



Made by a 10-day process so costly none but Lever Brothers, the world's greatest soap-makers, could afford it, the snow-white Lux flakes are safe for washing any fabric water alone won't harm. Lux is sold only in the familiar blue packets.

Lx 501-247

LEVER BROTHERS LIMITED, FORT SUNLIGHT

Source: Reproduced with kind permission of Unilever from an original in Unilever Archives.

product in smaller, more affordable packs which invited consumers to try the product and later purchase the larger packs. Moreover, the market investigations conducted by JWT in the years after 1928 also led to the recommendation to extend the brand and offer Lux in form of toilet soap and as a shampoo in different variations (“Short brand histories” 1952; “Lux Shampoo” 1929; “Lux 1928/1939” 1939). As an early example of market development, JWT advised Lever to create and exploit new markets for Lux by pushing the product into the formerly ignored retail channel of grocers and devise advertising messages that induced consumers to try the soap flakes for the washing of dishes (figures 4 and 5).

Consumer Research and Marketing Innovation

By engaging with consumer practices and by inviting consumers to share their subjective knowledge with the agency, JWT exhibited an acute sense for the limitations of managerial knowledge as well as the poverty of a purely quantitative approach to consumer research. The agency researchers at JWT London and New York also had an unusual understanding of the opportunities which marketing communication in general and market research in particular offered for creating a dialogue with their target groups. By fostering this dialogue, consumer investigations changed the nature of the market place and redefined the consumer as a proactive partner in the marketing process. Lever and JWT discovered the consumer as a source for marketing and product innovation. Thus, the emergence of market research needs to be understood as a major reorientation in the mid-twentieth-century marketing management. This assessment, in turn, supports Bakker (2003), Jones (2007), Church and Godley (2003), Fitzgerald (2005), Fullerton (1988), and Hollander (1986), who questioned the idea of a lack of marketing orientation in what has often been called the “production era” of early twentieth-century industrial societies.

The above case study shows that rising incomes of the middle- and working-class consumers in the interwar years and the increased choice between products pushed companies in the consumer goods sector into adopting a more consumer-focused outlook on the marketing process. The case of the Lux brand also shows that Lever and its international advertising agency JWT began to pursue market segmentation strategies far earlier than recognized in the traditional model of stages in marketing history. In addition, Lever and JWT did not only segment the market for soap products in terms of traditional demographic factors but engaged in an early form of

psychographic and behavioral segmentation based on the idea of fashion as a new “way of life” for young and middle-aged women in the 1920s. This created a set of “thick descriptions” of consumer behavior that helped position Lux as a lifestyle brand that responded to highly differentiated consumer needs. Therefore, the beginnings—however humble—of qualitative consumer research are to be sought in 1920s market research practice and neither in the academic discussion of motivation research between the 1930s and 1950s nor in the multi-factor analysis of 1960s psychographics.

Yet most importantly, market research was used by Lever and JWT not just to map consumer behavior. The extensive surveys gave thousands of interwar consumers a chance to talk back to the Lever industrial conglomerate. The consumer response measured by JWT forced Lever to redesign parts of its product line and communicate products in a different way. Lever’s marketing in the late 1920s therefore allowed consumers to coauthor products rather than passively consume them. This “new” consumer was thus empowered on two levels: financially (higher household incomes) and also socially as a “prosumer” who coauthored the brand. Here, in the subjective realm of daily practices, the term consumer power acquired a new meaning. Rather than simply referring to the traditional idea of choice, which allowed consumers to spend their money either on product “x” or product “y,” consumer power was discovered by JWT as the ability of consumers to use products in ways which neither manufacturers nor advertisers intended, thus changing market structures and marketing conditions.

JWT began to engage in what Holt (2002) and others have described as “feedback loop” in which advertising agencies have to look at how consumers use and interpret brands to create values that fit in with increasingly fragmented lifestyles. Lever and JWT constantly observed how consumers changed the uses of their products and the meaning of Lever brands. Lever remained competitive in the interwar period not by telling consumers how to behave, what to buy, and how to use products, but by scrutinizing what consumers did with the purchased products within their respective social environments. By the mid-1920s, both Lever and its advertising agency had realized that the survival of a brand in a mature market depended on handing over parts of the control over the meaning of a brand to the consumer (de Chernatony and McDonald 2003). The early interest of JWT and Lever in market research and consumer behavior helped Lever readjust its marketing philosophy from a product-oriented to a consumer-oriented outlook. Market and consumer research therefore needs to be understood as a major innovation in the early twentieth-century

Figure 4
Strategic Brand Management of Lux Soap Flakes, UK1927-1935

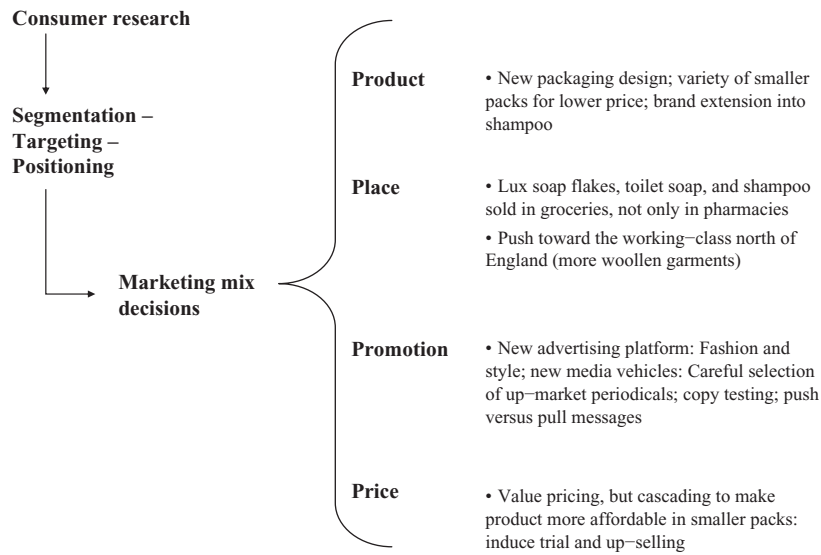


Figure 5
Lux soap flakes advertisement, USA 1925



marketing process, on a par with the discovery of strategy, the marketing mix, and the product development function.

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