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The governmentality of marketing discourse

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Abstract

This paper provides a reading of mainstream academic marketing discourse based upon Foucault's concept of governmentality. Three periods of marketing thought are identified, described and analyzed—'early marketing thought' (c. 1900–1960), 'marketing management' (c. 1950–1985) and 'service management' (c. 1975–present). For these three periods, respectively, our focus is on analyzing what marketing seeks to govern, how marketing governs, and who we become when governed by marketing. It is argued that customer orientation has become the dominant governmental discursive practice in marketing—it has embedded marketing discourse more and more deeply over time. By exposing the governmental rationality of marketing, this paper provides a basis for resisting and deconstructing marketing discourse.

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1. Introduction

Marketing has been an important force in legitimizing, producing and reproducing not only the consumerism but also the managerialism that characterizes contemporary society and its organizations (du Gay, 1996). One way to develop an informed understanding of the impact of marketing is to reflect upon and critically evaluate its history, both as a practice and as a school of thought (Hollander, Rassuli, Jones, & Farlow Dix, 2005), by taking a theoretical point of departure outside the marketing discipline itself. In engaging

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with such a reflexive project the present paper reports a reading of mainstream academic marketing discourse from its initial formulations at the beginning of the 20th century, via its maturity in the marketing management era, to its present formulation in the service management literature.

Our reading of marketing discourse is not conventional and in particular introduces two distinctive features that constitute the originality of the paper. First, we conceptualize marketing as a management discipline. This means that we do not read marketing primarily as a discipline focusing upon exchange relationships (Hunt, 1991) or as a discipline preoccupied with finding and satisfying consumer needs (Kotler, 2003). Rather, we place an emphasis on which types of government and management of organizations and their members that the marketing discipline envisions. Secondly, our reading of marketing discourse is informed by Foucault's concept of governmentality (Foucault, 2000a,b, see also Dean, 1995, 1999; Miller & Rose, 1990; Rose, 1996, 1999). As a consequence, our paper is less concerned with prior definitions of power and government than with the unfolding context-specific discursive practices and technologies of control that constitute the actors and interests of a particular governmental regime.

Even though the work of Foucault has been utilized to analyze managerial discourse within several streams of management studies (see Alvesson & Willmott, 1996, 2003 for overviews), including accounting (Edenius & Hasselbladh, 2002; Miller & O'Leary, 1987), human resource management (Townley, 1993), and general management (Covaleski, Dirsmith, Heian, & Samuel, 1998; Knights & McCabe, 1999), it has not been frequently used in marketing (Burton, 2001). A few studies, however, have pioneered the analysis of marketing from a Foucauldian perspective (Brownlie, Saren, Wensley, & Whittington, 1999; Cochoy, 1998; Hackley, 2003; Hodgson, 2002; Knights & Sturdy, 1997; Morgan, 2003; Skålén & Fougère, in press), among which one draws specifically on the notion of governmentality (Hodgson, 2002). However, in previous research, the governmentality of marketing as a prescriptive management discourse has not been focused on.

The analysis of the marketing discipline in the present paper draws in particular on an analytical scheme outlined by Dean (1995, 1999), which makes us ask three questions in the analysis: what does marketing seek to govern, how does marketing govern and who do we become when we are governed by marketing? It is important to note, however, that our analysis does not intend to determine whether or not the marketing discipline actually does fixate a particular subjectivity. Rather, it aims to pinpoint the subjectivity that marketing discourse envisions. Dean (1999, p. 32, *emphasis in original*) is very clear on this:

The forms of identity promoted and presupposed by various practices and programmes should not be confused with a *real* subject, subjectivity or subject position ... Regimes of government do not *determine* forms of subjectivity. They elicit, promote, facilitate, foster and attribute various capacities, qualities and statuses to particular agents.

The paper opens with a section introducing our Foucauldian framework with a special focus on the concepts of governmentality and government. In Section 2, we discuss methodology and outline our periodization of the marketing discipline. This is followed by a description and an analysis of marketing discourse in Section 3. In Section 4, we discuss the implications of the analysis. In Section 5, we put forward our conclusions as well as avenues for further research.

2. Government, governmentality and the subject

Foucault defined government as the ‘conduct of conduct’ (Foucault, 2000a). With the first ‘conduct’ in this phrase, Foucault wanted to imply that government is about leading, directing, guiding, etc. in a more or less deliberate way. But he also gave the verb ‘to conduct’ a reflexive meaning, i.e. that government is not only about leading others, it is also about leading oneself—it is about self-regulation. From this perspective, government can be understood as ‘reflexive self-control, [creating] situation[s] in which external sources of surveillance become unnecessary’ (Clegg, Pitsis, Rura-Polley, & Marosszky, 2002, p. 318). With the second ‘conduct’, Foucault meant people’s thoughts, actions and emotions—the object of government. The phrase ‘conduct of conduct’ thus means the deliberate direction of people’s articulated set of behaviors.

According to Foucault (1977, 1981, 2000a), government is contingent upon forms of knowledge and power is interwoven with knowledge. People govern themselves and others toward what they believe to be the truth, toward the right way to be. In contemporary society, ‘true’ behavioral norms are primarily developed by the human and behavioral sciences (Foucault, 1997), which prescribe how people in the domains addressed by these sciences should constitute themselves. There is, thus, a clear coupling between power/knowledge, practices of government and practices of the self, a coupling that enables the formation of a discursive totality. A central quest for the analysis of government lies in explicating this governmental rationality which is embedded in discourse and which produces subjectivity. As discussed in the introduction, however, discourse does not determine a ‘real’ subjectivity. Rather, people choose ways of governing themselves by adopting certain subject positions. Subjection thus works ‘... through the promotion and calculated regulation of spaces in which choice is to be exercised’ (Dean, 1995, p. 562), which is often facilitated by producing knowledge that suits particular ends (e.g. the customer should decide which products and services organizations offer). An analysis of government in a Foucauldian manner thus focuses upon ‘the collective [...] systems of thought and practice which underpin attempts to govern society’ in order to elucidate their governmental rationality (Hodgson, 2002, p. 321). It also acknowledges that power is not only repressive but also productive.

One prominent example of an analysis of governmentality that has implications for management studies is Nikolas Rose’s studies of psychology. Rose (1996, 1999) argues that industrial psychology has contributed to reconstituting the workplace and the worker in several ways. Most importantly, industrial psychology has allowed the worker to look upon him or herself as an enterprising self. ‘The enterprising self is [...] both an active self and a calculating self, a self that calculates *about* itself and that acts *upon* itself in order to better itself’ (Rose 1996, p. 154, emphasis in original). The notion of the active and enterprising self has also been discussed in management studies. One example of this is the work of du Gay (1991, 1994, 1996, 2004) and du Gay & Salaman (1992), who have analyzed various contemporary managerial discourses through which employees are re-imagined as entrepreneurs. A second example is Dean’s study of unemployment discourse in Australia, which is dominated by a subject position that frames unemployed people as taking responsibility for, and putting a lot of effort into, getting themselves back onto the labor market rather than being passive and relying on welfare systems (Dean, 1995).

Addressing marketing, Hodgson (2002) has argued that innovations such as relationship marketing may create a consumption relationship ‘whereby the choice and desire of

individuals may be mobilized to manage actions through the manipulation of “freedom” (Hodgson, 2002, p. 326). Furthermore, Skålén and Fougère (in press) have analyzed the disciplinary power of models for measuring customer-perceived service quality and found that, rather than promoting the excellence they promise, they contribute to normalizing organizations and their members.

The present paper contributes to this tradition of research in management studies by focusing upon the managerialism of mainstream academic marketing discourse, its governmental rationality, and the subject positions that are embedded in it. Our analysis builds on the analytical scheme presented by Dean (1995, 1999) and originates from Foucault’s (1985) own work, which makes us focus on the following three¹ dimensions:

- Firstly; the analysis of governmentality ‘involves ontology concerned with *what* [marketing] seek[s] to act upon, the *governed or ethical substance*’ (Dean, 1999, p. 17, emphasis in original). In this paper, we conceptualize marketing as a management discipline and focus accordingly on the intra-organizational processes of government that marketing brings about
- Secondly; the analysis of governmentality ‘involves ascetics concerned with *how* [marketing in our case] governs this substance, the *governing or ethical work*’ (Dean, 1999, emphasis in original). In making this analysis, we focus on explicating the central technologies that marketing has produced in order to accomplish government and analyze how they promote government. The technologies identified differ extensively from period to period in the history of marketing.
- Thirdly, the analysis of governmentality ‘involves deontology concerned with *who* we are when we are governed [by marketing] ... our “mode of subjectification”, or the *governable or ethical subject*’ (Dean, 1999, emphasis in original). The deontological aspect of the analysis thus focuses on what subjectivities marketing attributes to professional marketers, which is a major focus of the present paper. Subjectivity is understood as inextricably entwined with power/knowledge. In breaking with positivistic epistemology, Foucault argues for a performative epistemology, meaning that knowledge not only represents the world but also produces the world and its subjects (Miller & O’Leary, 1987). This means that ‘the humanist notion of a meaning-creating and autonomous human subject is rejected in favor of subjectivity as being discursively produced’ (Sturdy, 1998, p. 28). We will argue that marketing discourse stimulates employees into regulating themselves toward a distinct subjectivity which makes them governable in a particular way.

3. Periodization, problematizations, and critique

Delineating between historical periods is always arbitrary. Periodization is, nevertheless, a fundamental and necessary tool in historical analysis. Following Hollander et al. (2005),

¹Dean (1995, 1999) includes a fourth dimension, that of teleology, which is concerned with why we govern or are governed. This aspect of government is not focused upon in this paper, because a discussion of this issue would be rather long and somewhat speculative bearing in mind that our object of analysis is the academic marketing discourse, which is not very explicit as regards this point.

we have adopted what these researchers believe to be the most appropriate periodization principle for the historical analysis of marketing:

Above all else, periodization should mark important turning points in time. Therefore, we believe that the most appropriate technique for periodizing marketing history is to use turning points in the material itself being studied (Hollander et al., 2005, p. 39).

In this paper, the term ‘turning point’ refers to changes, displacements, elaborations and developments in the managerial and governmental rationality of the mainstream academic marketing discourse. Following Foucault (1981, 1997), we use the notion of problematization to signify both the reasons for and the occurrences leading up to a turning point.² Problematizations are the ways in which a discourse is associated with questioning and interrogating the past and/or present (Dean, 1999; Rose, 1996). This questioning might center on a multitude of things, both inside and outside discourse. In the present paper, we will focus on the internal questioning of the mainstream academic marketing discourse itself. Such ‘reflexive’ problematizations or ‘internal-critique’ form the starting point for the elaborations and displacements of a discourse founded in positivism, e.g. marketing. Focusing on these aspects thus enables us to analyze and describe the governmental rationality of marketing discourse, and how it has changed at different times. Furthermore, problematization is a central concept in Foucault’s genealogical methodology. In genealogy, it is of central importance to reflect the present period in history in order to question the self-evident and the familiar (Foucault, 1988). Consequently, genealogy seeks to identify and illuminate significant developments leading up to the present discursive order.

When marketing discourse is read and presented as a regime of government, and when its managerialism is focused upon, it is fruitful to argue for a distinction between three overlapping periods: ‘early marketing thought’ (c. 1910–1960), ‘marketing management’ (c. 1950–1985) and ‘service management’ (c. 1975–present). The major reason for this is that important changes in marketing discourse have taken place between these periods as regards both the governmental domain being aimed for and the governmental technologies and practices being promoted in order to achieve government. The shifts between the three periods which we have identified thus mark turning points and problematizations of the governmentality of marketing discourse, but they also include important changes and elaborations. Since our focus is on academic marketing discourse, we primarily base our description of the three periods on the scholarly articles and books that have redirected the managerialism of marketing but also on the work of marketing historians and, occasionally, on influential textbooks. This means that most of the texts we analyze are written by North Americans, for North Americans and primarily address North American issues. However, in service management, European (particularly Scandinavian) scholars have also played a central role in redirecting the managerialism of marketing, thus the work of these scholars is also reviewed.

The periodization used in this paper shares its basic structure with other reviews of marketing discourse (Morgan, 2003; Vargo & Lusch, 2004; Vargo & Morgan, 2005;

²Connecting turning points and problematizations in this way is not as consequential as it might seem. In his writing on governmentality, Foucault himself frequently used the notion of turning points in a similar vein to how we use it here (see, for example, Foucault, 2000a, p. 211 and 218).

Webster, 1992). One important difference through, is that we reject the tendency in previous research to conceptualize the three periods as paradigms that are incommensurable with each other. In the present paper, we deconstruct the paradigmatic distinction between the three periods, arguing that, even though changes have taken place between them, there is a great deal of continuity in their dominant managerial rationality, making the claim of paradigm shifts, at least in Kuhn's (1962) sense, inappropriate and misleading.

We would also like to warn the reader about the false sense of progress (Hollander et al., 2005) characterizing some previous research. Such an analytical style is not consistent with the work of Foucault. Even though we describe the development of marketing discourse, including how practices and technologies have come to be perfected and elaborated on, this does not necessarily imply that we celebrate this development or that we believe that theories of marketing have improved. In fact, we perceive our analysis to be a critique of marketing. Following Foucault (1997), we argue that a critical discourse analysis should focus on the increasing level of governmentalization—the diffusion of governmental rationality within and across discursive and institutional domains—in contemporary society. We understand critique to be

the movement by which the subject gives himself the right to question truth on its effect of power and question power on its discourses of truth...critique would essentially insure the desubjugation of the subject in the context of what we could call, in a word, the politics of truth (Foucault, 1997, p. 32).

Critique is thus understood to be an articulation of, a kind of resistance toward, and a deconstruction of hegemonic governmental discourse (cp. Laclau, 1993; Laclau & Mouffe, 1985). By making the immanent, yet tacit, governmental rationality of marketing explicit and visible, our analysis provides the baseline for a critique of marketing, even though it does not realize the full potential of a critical analysis. The present paper articulates the governmental rationality of marketing, which is a prerequisite for resisting and deconstructing marketing discourse.

4. Analyzing the governmentality of marketing discourse

In this section, the description and analysis of marketing discourse are intertwined. We analyze the three periods of marketing scholarship introduced above: following Dean (1995, 1999), we focus on analyzing what marketing seeks to govern, how marketing governs and who we become when we are governed by marketing.

4.1. *Early marketing thought (c. 1900–1960)*

It was in the United States that marketing was born as an academic discipline, and it was also there that all the principal developments of the early period originated. When the discipline was in its early days, at the beginning of the twentieth century, it had no uniform identity and there were many competing approaches to marketing. It is important to note that it originally dealt mostly with farm products—in that respect, the discipline evolved in much the same way as the society it was born into, since the principal focus changed from agriculture to industry and then to services. There was concern for the consumer and the customer quite early on—the citizen as a consumer was even perceived to be one of the main audiences of this scholarship (Bartels, 1962).

Marketing scholars (Vargo & Lusch, 2004; Webster, 1992) present this period as being characterized by more of a descriptive than prescriptive or managerial approach. One must say that everything is relative, however. The concern for efficiency was, for example, present to a certain degree already, and the prescriptive consumer/customer approach is definitely visible, albeit not as explicitly as was the case later. That is why saying that there has been a ‘paradigm shift’ between this period and the ‘marketing management’ period is, in our opinion, highly exaggerated. This period was also much more contested than marketing scholars (e.g. Webster, 1992) would suggest. As in any young discipline, several perspectives were competing.

4.1.1. *What is being governed (ontology)?*

Actually, there was no one clear audience early on in marketing, nor was marketing discourse unified in terms of what/who was the object of its knowledge—and thus subject to this knowledge. Thus, the ‘governmental’ project of marketing discourse was not very well defined. There were three principal approaches to marketing between c. 1910 and the 1930s: a ‘commodity’ approach that studied the processes involved in the marketing of products, an ‘institutional’ approach that described the wholesale and retail institutions, and a ‘functional’ approach that focused on marketing functions and activities (Bartels, 1962). These three approaches constituted, to varying degrees, what was appropriate in mainstream marketing scholarship until the 1930s. However, even then certain ‘unorthodox’ studies existed that would become the bases for the continued evolution of marketing discourse—e.g. White’s (1927) very managerial proposal regarding ‘scientific marketing management’, offering guidance to companies in their marketing by drawing on Taylor’s scientific principles of management and the technologies of control these entailed.

By the 1930s, some major changes had already occurred, with a much greater focus on non-agricultural and manufactured goods within ‘commodity marketing’ (Breyer, 1931; Comish, 1935) and, more importantly, an interest in the consumer which went far beyond the study of buying motives, considering consumers as the driving force of the economy (Phillips, 1938). This special concern for the consumer became the rule, to varying degrees, even during the early 1940s, when it was coupled with an emphasis on the management of marketing (see, in particular, Alexander, Surface, Elder, & Alderson, 1940).

One of the main audiences for marketing was originally claimed to be the general public, since a central concern was to ‘clarify misconceptions held among the public’ (Bartels, 1962, p. 39). It was not rare for marketing authors to raise issues of general societal interest in their writings: Clark (1922), for instance, defended advertising for its ‘educational value’ (Bartels, 1962, p. 170). This general interest defined citizens as consumers. Once defined in this way, consumers became of key interest to managerial marketing scholars whose project was advanced by the possibility to co-opt (Baudrillard, 1970) citizens/consumers as the main actors of the market economy. One of the principal driving forces behind this rearticulation was the economic crisis during the 1930s, which followed an economic period of prosperity during which the need to question the prevailing approaches to consumers/customers was not felt (Cochoy, 1998). However, at this stage, the only subject position that had been re-framed by this customer interest was the selling function since it was understood to be closest to the customer. Thus, the people who were subjected most to the notion of satisfying the customer’s needs during the early days were sales staff.

4.1.2. *How is government achieved (ascetics)?*

During the 1930s, previous, naïve sales philosophies—contending that aggressive salespeople would be successful—were strongly questioned by the marketing discipline. This questioning began as early on as the late 1910s when widely held notions, e.g. holding that ‘selling cannot be taught’, started to be challenged (Whitehead, 1917). However, many training programs and textbooks remained more concerned with salesmanship as being the persuading of the customer to accept the salesman’s viewpoint and purchase the goods (see, in particular, Ivey, 1937). Scholars more clearly positioned within the marketing discipline took issue with the notion that selling lay in imposing the salesman’s will upon the customer: Jones and Comyns (1918), for instance, held the view that selling should be viewed as a ‘warm, man-to-man affair’ (Bartels, 1962, p. 88). They treated the salesman as an employee, ‘a unit of the selling organization’ (Bartels, 1962). At the core of the discussion about the nature of selling as fundamentally either a matter of persuasion or a more balanced man-to-man process wherein the whole organization is represented lay the contrasting views of salesmanship as an ‘art’—i.e. Douglas (1919, p. 4) writing about ‘the methods of artistic persuasion’—and the ‘scientific’ conceptions of selling. The scientific perspective progressively gained ground and became the dominant one in the 1930s when it was claimed that the economic crisis made it necessary to act in a more rational way.

The introduction of notions and practices from scientific management into marketing discourse as early as during the late 1920s has especially contributed to the setting up of new and productive methods of dealing with sales jobs. These methods have entailed control technologies such as ‘setting sales quotas, and [...] training, compensating, stimulating, supervising, and evaluating the performance of salesmen’ (Bartels, 1962, p. 204). An extreme—but telling—example of the new scientific approach to selling was Canfield’s (1940) methods of studying and controlling the function of the salesman: ‘he used concealed microphones, he had investigators posing as buyers, he recorded salesmen’s traveling time, and he measured their foot travels with pedometers’ (Bartels, 1962, p. 92) (!). The marketing discipline’s claim to scientific knowledge, which became significant during the 1930s, aimed to make salespeople perceive these new technologies of control and discursive practices as appropriate and contributing to the optimization of their work, but also to encourage managers and executives to accept more and more of the managerialistic marketing notions as legitimate and well suited to their work.

4.1.3. *Who do we become (deontology)?*

As stated above, during the first half of the 20th century, marketing’s emergence as a managerial discipline and a scientific field was mainly designed to affect salespeople. The new rational discourse on the optimization and control of selling performances—through ‘training, compensating, stimulating, supervising and evaluating the performances’ (cf. above)—aimed to make salespeople more accountable for their performances and thus more competitive, in the sense that it was understood as providing incentives for them to improve their productivity quantity-wise, become more inclined to compete with others, and seek to improve their be better than them in understanding and caring for the customer.

According to Bartels (1962, p. 85), this led salespeople to become ‘heroes of the business world’, although one may wonder whether their lives were any the better for it. However, if we are to believe Bartels (1962), not only were they competitive, but there was also a sense that their selling of products was for the common good. Indeed, being a good salesman

was no longer considered a matter of the ‘ability to sell goods to people who did not need them’; on the contrary, it became a matter of the ‘ability to sell goods at a profit for the mutual benefit of buyers and sellers’ (Bartels, 1962, p. 90). At that time, marketing discourse envisioned ‘customer-interested’ salespeople, and since they were also becoming increasingly seen as employees who were well integrated into the organization, the idea of a general ‘customer orientation’ for the organization was implicitly present.

In the 1950s, this notion of ‘customer orientation’ or ‘consumer orientation’ became a particularly dominant way of conceiving of salespeople’s jobs. This clearly stemmed from the emergence of the ‘marketing concept’ (American Marketing Association, 1948): the notion that ‘selling and all business functions logically begin with an understanding of the market and interpret this understanding into all activities of the business’ (Bartels, 1962, p. 98). The notion of ‘market segmentation’ also gained currency in the 1950s and was claimed to affect the selling function a great deal (see, for instance, Meloan & Rathmell, 1960).

4.2. *Marketing management (c. 1950–1985)*

As argued in the previous section, marketing was a rather diverse discipline during its early years. However, during the course of the 1950s, the normative and managerial focus of what is often referred to as *marketing management* became the dominant governmental rationality of marketing discourse (Kotler, 2003; Webster, 1992). In marketing management, it is no longer so important to study and explain *how* marketing as a practice functions, but how marketing *should* function. Central to the establishment of marketing management was the launch of the marketing concept, which holds that the marketing orientation of the firm is of the utmost importance. The marketing concept was discussed and defined in a few discipline-shaping papers during the late 1950s/early 1960s (Drucker, 1954; Levitt, 1960; McKitterick, 1957). McKitterick (1957, p. 78), for example, wrote: ‘the principal task of the marketing function in a management concept is not so much to be skillful in making the customer do what suits the interests of the business as to be skillful in conceiving and then making the business do what suits the interests of the customer’.

4.2.1. *What is being governed (ontology)?*

Marketing management was not primarily a reaction to earlier marketing thought—as described above customer orientation had been present for a while in marketing discourse. It was more of a reaction to previous managerial perspectives. With the introduction of the marketing concept, the central aim for managers was to produce products adapted to the needs of their target markets. According to Levitt (1960), such a focus differed from the competing discursive managerial practices and control technologies at the time. It differed, for example, from the ‘production concept’, which holds that businesses should focus on high production efficiency, low costs and mass-distribution, and from the ‘selling concept’, which holds that the firm must undertake an aggressive selling and promotion effort in order to get its products sold. The marketing concept changes the perspective from focusing on the organization’s capacity to the customer’s needs. Rather than producing products that suit the manufacturing process and selling them by means of massive promotional efforts, the marketing concept upholds that the organization should produce what customers want and adapt its production facilities to suit these needs (Kotler, 2003; Levitt, 1960; Webster, 1992). In addition to salespersons, the power/knowledge of the

marketing concept thus also targets organizational staff involved in strategic decision making, those collecting data from the customers, e.g. managers, marketers, and salespersons (but notably not operatives).

4.2.2. *How is government achieved (ascetics)?*

During the marketing management period, segmentation and targeting were developed as central control technologies aimed at knowing the customer. The principal aim of segmentation is to divide the market into clusters of customers who share similar sets of requirements, a procedure that is highly dependent on the availability of customer knowledge. A wide body of technologies for gaining this knowledge was thus developed, including customer surveys and focus groups. When a particular organization has segmented the market, it has to decide which ones to target. Target decisions should be based on the attractiveness of the segment and the company's objectives and resources (Kotler, 1976, 2003; Smith, 1956).

Segmentation is still an active field of research (see Bolton & Myers, 2003). For our purposes, however, it is not necessary to describe the technicalities of this research in detail. It is more important to focus on segmentation and targeting as governmental technologies. We see them as designed to frame and control strategic decision making concerning what should be produced, for whom, and when. But it is also evident that they are premised on the assumption that the level of interaction between employees and customers is, and should be, limited and indirect—they draw a clear line between the object of knowledge in market research (potential consumers) and the subject carrying out the market research. The aim is to know the customer.

4.2.3. *Who do we become (deontology)?*

As conceived by marketing scholars, a fully implemented marketing concept would radically change the priorities of the organization toward the needs of the customer (Levitt, 1960; McKitterick, 1957). In our reading, this can be translated such that the power/knowledge of the marketing concept brings about a change of subjectivity which is distinct from other managerial discourses such as finance or scientific management. Compared to subsequent developments in marketing—e.g. service management—we would argue, however, that the required change was limited, in order for it to be interpreted as successful from a managerialistic point of view (see Kotler, 1976). The reason for this is that the premier technologies associated with the marketing concept—segmentation and targeting—are merely used to gather information regarding the customers, and for taking decisions regarding which markets to focus on. In doing so, they introduce a demarcation between organizations and their customers, a demarcation that is dismantled in service management. Within the latter, personnel *are* conceived of as an important part of the offering, which is not the case in marketing management (Grönroos, 2000). The envisioned customer-oriented subject in marketing management knows virtually everything about the segmented markets and targeted customers. The underlying rationale is that this power/knowledge should frame the strategic decision making: i.e. what to produce, when to produce it, and how. But this does not require the customer-oriented subject to adapt to certain beliefs which are in accordance with customer demands. Adopting such a position can even be an impediment to objective and rational decision making. In marketing management, the customer orientation and its managerialism are about knowing the customer. Marketing management produces the 'customer-knowing' subject.

4.3. Service management (1975–present)

At the end of the 1970s, marketing management and its customer-oriented managerialism were problematized by scholars who were later to establish service management. Shostack (1977), for example, argued that service industries had not integrated marketing into their management because mainstream marketing offered no guidance, terminology or practical rules which were clearly relevant to services. Originating in the managerial implications of what were believed to be idiosyncrasies of service (so called ‘service characteristics’), service management has evolved from an industry- and function-based subfield into an aspiring general management approach, supposedly applicable to any kind of organization and reaching far beyond the traditional functional area of marketing (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). As a result, service management has gradually shifted from being a reaction to marketing management and goods marketing (cf. Shostack, 1977) into becoming a dominant force of change within marketing—including goods marketing—elaborating on the marketing concept rather than replacing it (Vargo & Morgan, 2005). It may be that service management is not *the* dominant approach in contemporary mainstream marketing. However, it is undeniably from this stream that the managerialism of marketing has been redirected.

4.3.1. What is being governed (ontology)?

One key notion in service management is that services (and to an increasing extent most goods as well) are both processes and outcomes. *How* something is done is considered to be equally important as the end result, from a customer point of view (Grönroos, 1983). The conduct of employees, especially staff with direct customer contact (cf. the expression ‘moment of truth’, Normann, 1984, where the face-to-face interactions between frontline employees and customers are specially emphasized), as well as employees in supporting and/or managerial functions, then becomes crucial and emerges as a central target for the managerialism of marketing (Larsson & Bowen, 1989; Schneider & Bowen, 1995). Gummesson (1991) argues that the entire staff should consider themselves ‘part-time marketers’, with obligations toward both their ‘internal’ and ‘external’ customers. In the service management development of marketing discourse, all organizational members are turned into objects of marketing management and control.

In addition to this intra-organizational extension of the governable domain, there is also the inter-organizational expansion of the governmental rationality outlined above. Originally formulated as a reaction to the prevailing focus on goods in traditional marketing (Shostack, 1977), service management has evolved into a general discourse of modern enterprise, and according to its advocates, applicable to virtually any organizational situation (Grönroos, 2000; Normann, 1984). In particular, it has been argued that the service characteristics originally drawn upon are of a general nature, more or less apparent in any organizational context (Gummesson, 2002; Vargo & Lusch, 2004). Accordingly, when everybody is said to be working in service organizations (Levitt, 1972), it is argued that service management should become the ‘dominant marketing logic’ (Vargo & Lusch, 2004)—in our reading, the dominant governmental rationality—not only in traditional service companies but in organizations of all kinds. In comparison to previous formulations of marketing discourse, the ‘governed substance’ (Dean, 1999) being targeted is thus considerably expanded.

4.3.2. *How is government achieved (ascetics)?*

The governmental regime of service management is characterized by two rhetorically contradicting, yet integrated, control practices: standardization and flexibility. Interest in the 'how' of the service manifests itself through being greatly concerned with controlling processes and activities, i.e. with what is actually happening during the simultaneous production and consumption of the service. Ensuring that the service process (the chain of activities that make up the service) is carried out in conformity with customer expectations is considered vital (Oliver, 1997; Zeithaml, Parasuraman, & Berry, 1993) and thus there are strong incentives to reduce the heterogeneity of service performance through standardization (Levitt, 1972). This in turn implies a specific kind of employee conduct control. Direct managerial surveillance is often viewed as difficult to exercise and/or deemed inappropriate in service settings, but other managerial control technologies, e.g. evaluative customer satisfaction surveys and customer perceived quality measurement methods, are frequently utilized. The argument in service management is that these and similar technologies will ensure employee conduct being characterized by such things as empathy, reliability, trust and responsiveness, which are all believed to be crucial for service excellence (Zeithaml, Parasuraman, & Berry, 1985). However, as pointed out above, previous critical research has argued that such control technologies will contribute to normalizing organizations and their members, rather than making them excellent (Skålén & Fougère, *in press*).

The management technologies and discursive practices of service management enable the exertion of power at a distance (Foucault, 1977, 2000a) and thus a government that transcends the inherent idiosyncrasies of service operations, but only to a limited extent. Too much reliance on standardization is believed to obscure employees' possibilities to satisfy customer needs (Pine, Peppers, & Rogers, 1995) by hindering flexibility (Zeithaml et al., 1985). Therefore, the control technologies referred to above are not designed to govern employee conduct in detail. They do not, for example, give exact instructions as regards how empathy, trust, etc. should be expressed by personnel. Rather, they are aimed at establishing normative control and thus a distinct conduct by instilling and promoting managerial values which are believed to shape employees so that they may deal with the service encounter in an 'adequate' way. As previous critical research has pointed out, empowerment not only makes people 'freer' but also shapes freedom (Cruikshank, 1994).

Fully-implemented customer orientation is supposed to become the dominant way of thinking throughout the entire organization, giving rise to a 'service culture' characterized by constant striving to deliver 'superior' customer value (Edvardsson & Enquist, 2002; Schneider & Bowen, 1995). When the creation of customer value is established as something that the organizational members really think they want to strive for, they will be truly and fundamentally governed by the power/knowledge of service management.

4.3.3. *Who do we become (deontology)?*

The subjectivity presupposed by service management could be described as the 'customer-determined subject'. The service employee is supposed to have internalized the service culture which frames his/her actions, thoughts and feelings in a managerialistic fashion. Hence, he/she is knowledgeable about the customer's situation as well as about his/her own role in creating customer satisfaction, and is continuously searching for new ways of creating customer value. Accordingly, the 'customer-determined subject' is not a passive but an active self. In order to relate to the above discussion about the enterprising self (Dean, 1995; du Gay, 1991, 1994, 1996, 2004; du Gay & Salaman, 1992; Rose, 1996, 1999),

we would argue that the ‘customer-determined subject’ regulates him/herself toward the discursive norm. It is, thus, a truly governmentalized self (Foucault, 2000a).

5. Customer orientation as a dominant governmental rationality

The underlying argument in our description and analysis has been that the governmentality of marketing discourse is attributing customer-oriented subjectivities to organizational members in a gradually deepening manner. In this section, we explicate this argument by drawing on Townley’s discussion regarding ‘depth’ (Townley, 1998).

5.1. Depth

Townley (1998) has argued that Foucauldian analyses should be inspired by ‘depth’ rather than ‘binary opposition’. The latter approach to research, which has been dominant in marketing, ‘reflects a modernist approach to knowledge ... premised on the dualism of a knowing subject gaining knowledge of a known object’ (Townley, 1998, p. 192). Analysis informed by this standpoint focuses on the opposition between constituents, e.g. hard and soft management practices, Taylorism and human relations, marketing management and service management, etc. The move from one formulation of knowledge to another is often described as a paradigm shift.

If we adopt the metaphor of depth, opposition will be downplayed. Instead, such aspects as continuity, consistency and compatibility will be emphasized. Central binary oppositions will be re-evaluated. Informed by ‘depth’, an analysis of marketing discourse, from the perspective of governmentality, will focus on its increasing governmentalization. Based on Foucault (2000b), we define governmentalization as the development and diffusion of governmental rationality in marketing discourse. Analyzing the depth of the governmental rationality of customer orientation in marketing thus enables us to explicate how this rationality was developed and to what degree it directs the managerial governmentality of marketing discourse.

As discussed earlier, many previous analyses of marketing discourse (Morgan, 2003; Vargo & Lusch, 2004; Webster, 1992) are informed by opposition rather than depth. Periods similar to ours have been described as paradigms incommensurable with each other. This paper has shown the continuity between marketing traditions. In particular, we have shown how customer orientation was present when marketing was born as a discipline, how it was developed and elaborated on in marketing management, and how it was designed to reach every corner of the subject and organization in service management. To us, *customer orientation* has become the dominant managerial theme in marketing discourse.

If we recapitulate and reflect upon our analysis using the metaphor of depth, it becomes obvious that customer orientation was definitely present, but not dominant, in marketing discourse during the early years. Customer orientation was then designed to act upon salespeople only and the technologies for controlling them in a customer-oriented way were imported from scientific management. We would describe the subjectivity immanent in marketing during this period as the ‘customer-interested salesperson’.

Within the marketing management approach, customer orientation becomes something of a dominant governmental rationality in marketing discourse. However, due to the separation of customers and employees, customer orientation is articulated as not yet

necessary throughout the organization. Rather, certain types of employees are targeted, i.e. the manager, the marketer and the salesperson, i.e. those dealing with the marketing function of the organization. In order to foster these customer-oriented subjectivities, technologies such as market segmentation and targeting were developed. The power/knowledge of these technologies supports employees in their endeavors to know the customer, thereby framing them as ‘customer-knowing subjects’; but the technologies do not encourage the employees to internalize customer beliefs based on customer requirements.

If we move on to service management, one of the fundamental aspects characterizing it is that each and every one becomes the target of customer orientation—everyone is reframed as a part-time marketer. The customer-oriented governmental rationality promulgated by service management targets the whole organization. This is made possible by additional technologies of government, e.g. customer-perceived quality measurement methods, which foster standardization and flexibility and the establishment of normative control in the form of a service culture. The subjectivity that service management envisions can best be described as the ‘customer-determined subject’, whose thoughts, feelings and emotions are determined to varying degrees by customer requirements. Service management thus fosters people who believe, act and feel in accordance with customer requirements and who take for granted that this is the right way to be. This conceptualization of subjectivity is more elaborated than the subjectivity envisioned in marketing management, which is not determined by customer requirements but uses information about customers to decide on which actions to take without necessarily internalizing the customers’ assumed beliefs or values. Our main argument is summarized in the table below (Table 1).

To sum up, we have discussed the depth of customer orientation in marketing discourse from two perspectives. The first has focused on the types of employees attributed with a customer-oriented subjectivity. Here we see an evolution from targeting only salespeople to applying this governmental rationality to each and every organizational member. The second perspective has focused on the extent to which customer orientation is supposed to control those being targeted. Here we see an evolution from an ambition to control ‘superficially’ to a situation where each and every aspect of the human being is made an object of this governmental rationality in service management. In other words, we argue that marketing has evolved into a truly governmentalized discourse: its governmental rationality has been considerably expanded over the years.

Table 1
The governmentality of marketing discourse

	What (ontology)	How (ascetics)	Who (deontology)
Early marketing thought	Salespeople	Technologies from scientific management	The customer-interested subject
Marketing management	Managers, marketers, and salespeople	Segmentation and targeting	The customer-knowing subject
Service management	All organizational members are envisioned as part-time marketers	Technologies of standardization and flexibility	The customer-determined subject

6. A genealogy of customer orientation

The present paper can be described as a genealogy of customer orientation. We understand genealogy in a Foucauldian manner and we thus see it as a particular form of critical historical analysis that attempts to diagnose the present time, and where we are at this very moment, by comparing it with historical accounts in order to question the self-evident as well as the familiarity of the present (Foucault, 1988). In providing insight into what marketing seeks to govern, how it governs, and who we become when governed by marketing, we argue that we have challenged the familiar way of perceiving marketing. The specific contribution inherent in our analysis is twofold: firstly, that we have explicated that customer orientation is the dominant discursive managerial theme in marketing; and secondly, that we have shown how this theme has evolved in the history of marketing thought.

Even though our paper thus provides a starting point for a more fundamental critique of the managerialism of marketing, the critique we offer here must be seen as limited. One reason for this is the theoretical position we have adopted.³ Foucault (1997, p. 32) himself argued that ‘critique would essentially insure the desubjugation of the subject’. As we see it, this ambition is not always fulfilled in analyses of governmentality, which mostly focus on explicating the governmental rationality of particular discourses (in the same vein as we have done with marketing) without necessarily articulating how to break free of them. Maybe we need to elaborate on the notion of desubjugation (and desubjectification), which is not very apparent in Foucault’s and his followers’ work on governmentality, in order to realize the full potential of critique in an analysis of governmentality. In future research, it would also be interesting to complement our analysis of the governmentality of mainstream academic marketing discourse with an analysis of practice. This is consistent with Hollander et al. (2005) who argue that a true history of marketing should include marketing history and the history of marketing thought.

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³The other main reason is the limitations that the article format imposes.

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