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# 'The very latest, modom': The British Commercial Gas Association, the Gas Light and Coke Company and content marketing in interwar Britain

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## ABSTRACT

Content marketing involves the production of creative content by organisations to engage and develop relations with consumers. It has been practiced since at least the eighteenth century. Despite its longevity, there has been no detailed historical study of content marketing. This article seeks to fill this lacuna by examining the use of content marketing by the British gas industry in the interwar period (1918–1939). During this period, the gas industry faced fierce competition from electricity. It responded with the development of content. This included print, music, films, showrooms, exhibitions, cookery demonstrations and public housing. This paper will provide a historic case study of this content marketing. Through publicity and public relations, this content was consciously and strategically used by the gas sector alongside advertising, distribution, and sales. It was used to influence public opinion, reinforce advertising, and build a brand for the gas industry.

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## Introduction

Content marketing has become a central commercial strategy for organisations. It focuses on the creation of content to engage customers, build brands, and enhance sales (Clark, 2016; Pulizzi, 2009). Pulizzi has defined content marketing as, 'the marketing and business process for creating and distributing valuable and compelling content to attract, acquire, and engage a clearly defined and understood target audience' (Pulizzi, 2009, p. 5). Content refers to a range of creative and promotional outputs which are communicated across owned, sponsored, and earned rather than paid for channels. Examples include customer magazines, white papers, films, music, art, events, competitions, games and toys, museums, and exhibitions. With the onset of digitalisation, this list can be expanded to include websites, social media, webinars, online games, digital TV, videos, and apps.

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In this article, we will examine the historical application of content marketing by a study of the British gas industry in the interwar period. Content has been widely used by organisations for marketing purposes since at least the eighteenth century. Apart from Beard et al.'s (2021) historical review of the topic, there has been to date no detailed or explicit historical case study of its application. We will focus on the retail sector of the gas industry whose marketing strategy was based in this period on the development of gas cookers and new home appliances such as heating, water boilers and fridges. The gas industry made extensive use of content to market these products through publications, exhibitions, showrooms, branding, merchandise, film and public housing (Clendinning, 2017; Rotha, 1973; Scott, 2017). We will investigate what forms of content were developed and how they were used. The paper will also discuss to what extent there was an explicit awareness of content as a marketing tool and how it was integrated with advertising and public relations.

The article will first explain its methods and sources. Following this it will provide a literature review on historical research on content marketing, publicity, public relations, and marketing in Britain in the interwar period. It will then give a historic overview of the British gas industry in the 1920s and 1930s and its two key commercial players, the Gas Light and Coke Company (GLCC) and the British Commercial Gas Association (BCGA). It will next examine the strategy of selling gas in interwar Britain to the retail sector and the female market which the sector targeted. It will then furnish a case study of the use of content marketing by the gas industry. This will cover its use of print media and customer magazines, public exhibitions and cookery demonstrations, gas showrooms, Mr Therm, a brand developed by the gas industry, films and documentaries, and Kensal House, a public housing project built by the GLCC in 1937. It will end with a discussion of the strategy of content marketing, its extent in Britain in the interwar period, and the legacy which it has left.

## Methods and sources

The research in this paper is based on archival historical research through the examination of original sources and supported by secondary historical literature. Research took place at the National Gas Archives in Warrington, the British Library in London, and Kensington and Chelsea Local Studies and Archives. The work is mainly based on published narrative sources (Rowlinson et al., 2014) from the BCGA and the GLCC. This included the GLCC's house journal, the 'Co-Partners Magazine', and professional journals for those working in sales and publicity which included the 'Gas Bulletin', 'Home Service and Gas Sales' and 'Home Sales and Service'. These contained multiple articles on the commercial content of the gas industry in the interwar period, and particularly for the 1930s. The study also examined the surviving marketing content of the gas industry. This includes the pamphlets 'A Thousand and One Uses of Gas', the customer magazine 'The Flambeau', and its documentary films. Unfortunately, very few documentary sources (Rowlinson et al., 2014) were found, these either not having survived or have not been catalogued. Apart from letters and a report on the exhibiting of films by the BCGA, no other documentary sources pertaining to content were found. Use was made of sources relating to the General Post Office's Telephone Publicity Committee in the 1930s. Members of this committee included Sir Francis Goodenough, Controller of Sales at the GLCC and A.P. Ryan, the first director of GLCC's Publicity Department.

The lack of documentary evidence posed potential problems for understanding the intentionality of the gas industry in relation to content and marketing strategy. Fortunately, the

gas industry's journals comprehensively discussed these areas. Articles were found for The Flambeau customer magazine, Mr Therm, documentary films, gas show rooms, Kensal House and the strategy and integration of content in marketing campaigns. These sources were triangulated with sources related to content, which compensated for the dearth of documentary evidence. In addition, secondary literature on the gas industry and documentary film movement provided invaluable in the interpretation of sources during research. Online gas content on the internet was also found, which included music and the documentary films that were made by the GLCC. Finally, the reception of targeted audiences to this content was not found. Apart from occasional references from Clendening's (2017), this aspect of the gas industry's content marketing was not focused on in this article. It is certainly an area for future research.

## Literature review

The history of content marketing has been examined by Beard, Petrotta and Dischner (Beard et al., 2021). The authors point to established examples such as Deere and Company's farmer's magazine 'The Furrow', first published in 1895, the Michelin Guides of the early twentieth century, and Jell-O's free recipe books in the early 1900s. Numerous other examples of content marketing are given that include books and pamphlets written on how to store and prepare coffee in the eighteenth century and manuals distributed to doctors by Johnson and Johnson for using antiseptic to treat wounds in the late-nineteenth century (Beard et al., 2021, pp. 147–151). Whilst Beard et al. (2021) is the only explicit historical study of content marketing, there is a large corpus of historical literature on publicity content in the United States (US) and the United Kingdom (UK) and on the emergence of public relations (PR) in both countries.

In relation to the US, James Harvey Young's (1961) *The Toadstool Millionaires* has revealed the innovative use of publicity by patent medicine manufacturers in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This included the publication and distribution of medical almanacs which reached tens of millions of consumers and the production of elaborate shows that toured the nation combining entertainment, lectures, promotion, and selling (Young, 1961, chs 9 and 12). Ellen Gruber Garvey's (1996) *The Adman in the Parlour* has demonstrated how magazines in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries produced a range of creative content to assist advertisers. Magazines created competitions and games which encouraged readers to engage with advertisements, provide feedback, and create advertising-related fiction, poetry, and logos (Garvey, 1996, ch 2). Magazines also published editorial content and stories which promoted products advertised in magazines (Garvey, 1996, chs 4–5). Research has also focused on the production of ephemera, including trade cards, which were widely collected in the nineteenth century and creatively reconfigured in scrapbooks (Black, 2009; 2023; Garvey, 1996, ch 1; Rosenberg, 2022, pp. 68–77). The genesis of the southern 'mammy' brand persona Aunt Jemima, played by Nancy Green, a former slave from Kentucky, to promote the R.T. Davis Milling Company's instant pancake mix, has also garnered attention from researchers (Elya, 2007; Morgan, 1995). Green played Aunt Jemima who cooked pancakes and regaled her audiences on stories of former mythical and bucolic plantation days in exhibitions and events. Around this anthropomorphic brand, R.T. Davis developed a range of additional content that included music and a fictitious biography (Elya, 2007, pp. 15–28). Similar research has been carried out by Stephen L. Harp on Michelin's

creation of the Bibendum character in France (commonly known in English speaking countries as the Michelin Man) to promote its tyre brand, and its posters, art deco buildings, and road guides to encourage driving (2001). The legacy of the latter today are the eponymous Michelin Star Restaurants.

Anat Rosenberg's book *The Rise of Mass Advertising* has demonstrated an extensive use of publicity and editorial content in Victorian and Edwardian Britain (2022). Whilst the core narrative of Rosenberg's study is the emergence of mass advertising, and the legal-cultural challenges which this faced, a sub-narrative is the creation of promotional publicity such as events, games, competitions, music, art, entertainment, and editorial and sponsored content in newspapers. What is noteworthy is the extent of these techniques. For example, the patent medicine brand, Bile Beans for Biliousness circulated eighty-three million pamphlets, published sheet music and cookery books, and orchestrated publicity stunts such as the 'Bile Bean March' musical event. The company spent an astounding £300,000 on marketing, equivalent in today's terms to roughly £46.5 million (Rosenberg, 2022, p. 249).

Research on PR has also demonstrated extensive creation of content. In the US, PR originated in the late nineteenth century and in the UK in the first half of the twentieth century. The 1920s and 1930s were important decades for the widespread application of PR that rivalled the use of advertising in certain sectors. Marchand (1998) has shown how PR emerged in response to the rapid growth of large-scale corporations between 1895 and 1904, precipitated by efforts by progressive-era presidents and federal government to stamp out cartels and collusion within American business. Corporations such as Standard Oil, Dupont, US Steel, and AT&T faced opposition from a host of opponents that included central and state government, journalists, liberals, trade unions, and clergy. They attacked corporations for their size, power, alleged lack of transparency, and threat to American freedoms. This led to the development of PR by American corporations. Practitioners such as Bruce Barton at the agency BBDO and Edward Bernays developed a range of mass persuasion techniques such as media management, events, film, sponsored radio shows, travelling road shows, exhibitions, and sponsorship of the arts (Fox, 1997, pp. 101–112; Marchand, 1998, pp. 130–163). These were created to garner public goodwill and establish social and political legitimacy.

William L. Bird Jr. has focused on the use of PR by American corporations to oppose President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal (1999). He demonstrates how American corporations utilised the new mass media of radio, motion pictures and in the 1950s television to create a new dramatic language that emphasised that business and not government was responsible for 'better living' in the US. Big business entered into show business, and through a strategy of entertainment and education attempted to forge relations with the American public. Corporate entertainment developed by advertising agencies such as *General Motor's Parade of the States* (1931) and Dupont's *Cavalcade of America* (1935) were political in nature and propagated the message that free enterprise and corporations were best for America and the American way of life (Bird, 1999, pp. 27–29).

Cynthia B. Meyer has developed Marchand and Bird's work in her examination of corporate sponsorship of radio and TV shows in the US from the 1920s to the 1960s (2014, 2018, 2021, 2022). As a result of government directives and institutional frameworks, national American radio broadcasters NBC and CBS, like their British counterpart the BBC, chose not to directly advertise in the 1930s and 1940s (Leblebici et al., 1991). Unlike the BBC, broadcasters could sell airtime to corporate sponsors who were allowed to develop radio shows and promote

their organisations and products in promotional interludes (Meyers, 2014, 2021). As Meyer has noted, 'Sponsored programs were a form of branded content: content designed to attract audiences but also carry a brand message' (2018, p. 428). Benefits from sponsored programs included audience identification with the sponsor, the development of good will, and the creation of brand identity. Shows were either named after corporate sponsors such as the aforementioned *General Motor's Parade of the States* or Dupont's *Cavalcade of America* or were named after products such as the *Cliquot Club Eskimos* or the *Ipana Troubadours* (Meyers, 2022, p. 139). The system transferred over to television in the 1950s. However, the much higher costs of producing TV shows and opportunities offered by multiple advertising in commercial breaks on television led to the collapse of the sponsored content model in the 1960s (Meyers, 2021, pp. 471–473).

Research on PR in the UK has focused on the interwar period. In contrast to the US, work has concentrated on the public sector. Jacquie L'Etang has charted the emergence of PR in central and local government in the UK and its professionalisation (2013). Mariel Grant has examined the use of propaganda (an older name for PR) by the State in the interwar period, examining its utilisation by the publicly owned General Post Office (GPO), and in national health campaigns (1994). Scott Anthony has mapped the emergence of PR in the UK through the role played by the civil servant Sir Stephen Tallents (2012). In particular, he has focused on the Empire Marketing Board (EMB), the GPO, and the BBC in the interwar period where a number of strategies such as film documentaries, exhibitions, promotional weeks, radio, posters, media management, and education were used in efforts at mass persuasion. Much of this history has focused on the political role of PR in providing information and education in an age of mass democracy.

Michael Heller has examined the commercial use of PR in interwar Britain (2008, 2010, 2016a, 2016b). Whilst acknowledging the political application of PR, Heller has emphasised its commercial use in bolstering corporate brands, promoting the use of new products such as telephones and radios, and creating social legitimacy for large-scale organisations. Like Marchand, he emphasises the defensive use of PR in shielding corporations against criticism. Heller has also focused on the creative use of mass media by corporations, particularly in relation to press releases, publications, documentaries, poster art, and corporate social responsibility (CSR). He has emphasised the integrated use of branded content in sophisticated communication campaigns (Heller, 2016a).

In relation to marketing, research in the UK has pointed to growth and important structural changes in the interwar period. The 1920s and 1930s saw advances in advertising, market and consumer research, integrated marketing communication, and the development of mass markets in consumer goods and consumer durables (Scott, 2017; Wilson & Thomson, 2009, pp. 224–227). Much of this was driven by increases in income, reduction in family sizes, the provision of generous hire purchase schemes, stable work, and the development of a mass media environment based on print, radio and cinema (Gospel, 1992; LeMahieu, 1988; Scott, 2017, p. 11). Peter Scott's (2017) work on the marketing of consumer durables has demonstrated how mass markets were created in Britain in the interwar period in sectors such as furnishing, home ownership, radios, vacuum cleaners and gas and electrical appliances. This was made possible by generous HP terms, and the development of value chains where producers and retailers co-operated together in producing mass markets. Innovative marketing campaigns were developed which educated consumers on the value of their products and were based on life style and aspirational marketing. This theme of lifestyle

marketing has been mirrored in work on consumer goods. Work by Schwarzkopf (2009) and Ward (1994) have shown how the marketing of products such as Lux Soap and Horlicks were grounded in sophisticated integrated marketing campaigns based on consumer research, segmentation and positioning, and pioneering communicated campaigns which emphasised health, beauty and fashion.

## The British gas industry

By 1918 gas was a mature source of energy in the UK. Produced from coal at gasworks, gas was used for lighting, heating, and cooking. In 1933, Britain had the highest per capita gas usage in the world (Scott, 2017, pp. 193–194). First used for public lighting in the early-nineteenth century, gas had penetrated the domestic retail market by 1880 (Clendinning, 2017, p. 2). In the interwar period the gas industry faced fierce competition from the electricity sector (Clendinning, 2017; Everard, 1949; Scott, 2017). Whilst electricity was introduced to Britain in the 1880s, it had been unable to establish itself as a source of energy. This was due to its high price and inability to establish a uniform system of power voltage. This changed in the interwar period through the British government's efforts to electrify the nation. The National Power Grid, built between 1926 and 1933, provided the UK with a standardised and cheaper form of energy. It was still, however, expensive compared to gas and coal. The number of electrical wired houses in England and Wales increased from two percent in 1910, to seven percent in 1920, a third in 1930, and to seventy-five percent in 1939 (Pugh, 2009, p. 72; Scott, 2017, p. 194).

In the interwar period the gas industry was highly fragmented. Divided between small-scale local and larger-scale regional enterprises, and between public (municipal gas boards) and private sector organisations, in 1937 there were seven hundred and six statutory gas companies and five hundred and fifty-four smaller non-statutory firms (Scott, 2017, p. 197). Yet the Balkanisation of the gas industry was offset by two factors: the BCGA and the existence of large-scale concerns that took a lead in the sector, particularly the GLCC. The BCGA, established in 1911, was a co-operative marketing association set up to promote gas in the UK (Clendinning, 2017, pp. 122–125). It consisted of gas producers, gas engineers, and the manufacturers of gas cookers. It was responsible for creating national advertising campaigns and the branding and marketing of gas. The BCGA established an important precedent in the UK in institutionalising collective advertising and marketing associations and boards. It would be emulated in the interwar period with the creation of the Electrical Development Association (est. 1919), the Telephone Development Association (est. 1924), the EMB (est. 1926), the Radio Manufacturer's Association (est. 1926), and the Milk Marketing Board (est. 1933) (Anthony, 2012, ch 2; Briggs, 1961, pp. 211–212; Constantine, 1986; Grant, 1994, ch 6; Heller, 2016a, pp. 1038–1039; Scott, 2017, pp. 198–205).

The GLCC was founded in 1812 and was the world's first gas company (Everard, 1949). Initially established to build street lighting in London, the GLCC moved into selling gas to domestic customers in the latter half of the nineteenth century. By 1935 it was Britain's largest gas supplier, controlling seventeen percent of the national market (Everard, 1949, p. 338; Scott, 2017, p. 197). The company was innovative in its marketing and selling of gas. It opened a Gas Sales Department in 1910 which functioned alongside its Distribution Department in the supply of gas to customers. In the 1920s it established a research and training centre in Fulham, West London. This designed and developed a range of new products that included cookers and



water heaters (Everard, 1949, p. 346). In 1931 it opened a publicity department which took care of marketing and PR. This was highly active in the 1930s, developing the gas brand Mr Therm, and releasing documentary films that dealt with public issues such as housing, nutrition, pollution and education (Clendinning, 2017, pp. 240–243; Everard, 1949, pp. 346–347).

## The strategy of selling gas to interwar Britain

Scott (2017, p. 183) has argued that the strategy of gas and electricity suppliers in the interwar period was to market and promote power hungry appliances, such as cookers and water boilers. This increased energy usage in the home and enhanced energy supply advantages by having a bigger and more efficient load. The aim was not to make a profit on selling appliances to customers, but simply to maximise their supply so as to increase energy consumption. While the need was the same for both gas and electricity, the main aim of the gas sector was to hold on to its market share in the face of the challenge from electricity rather than to necessarily increase it. The growing use of electricity to light homes, and the continued widespread usage of coal to heat homes and boil water, meant that the key home appliance for the gas industry was the gas cooker. This was a market which gas had successfully penetrated, had clear advantages over electricity in terms of price and utility, and was a heavy user of energy (Clendinning, 2017, p. 223; Scott, 2017, p. 189). Whilst the gas industry pioneered and marketed water boilers, heaters, refrigerators and other appliances, its strategic product was the cooker (Everard, 1949, pp. 348–349; Scott, 2017, p. 189).

In terms of branding, gas continued to be positioned as safe, reliable, affordable, and convenient. It augmented this in the interwar period with self-expressive benefits of interior design, home, fashion, lifestyle, femininity, and beauty (Clendinning, 2017, pp. 208–210; Scott, 2017, p. 198). Much of this reflected the rise of the design movement in the interwar period, where products were sold on the basis of their functionality *and* aesthetic appeal, changes in house design, where kitchens became more important to the home, and social changes, where while women were socially still seen primarily as housewives and mothers, emphasis was placed on beauty, health and leisure (Clendinning, 2017; LeMahieu, 1988, pp. 157–159; Pugh, 2009, ch 9; Saler, 1999). Gas suppliers developed new stylish enamelled cookers in a range of colours with adjustable heat settings, and focused on marketing them to replace the old Edwardian iron-cast cookers found in most British homes (Clendinning, 2017, p. 224; Everard, 1949, p. 316). These were sold or leased in art-deco showrooms, which marketed appliances as items of fashion and interior design for the modern home. This enhanced the image of the gas industry and made it appear as contemporary and innovative as electricity (Clendinning, 2017, pp. 233–235). In order to support this image, the gas sector embarked on a number of progressive social campaigns in housing, health, and the environment. This portrayed gas as not simply a commodity, but as a public service to the community (Clendinning, 2017, pp. 240–252; Everard, 1949).<sup>1</sup>

## Mrs. Consumer and content marketing by the gas industry in the interwar period

In the interwar period, the primary customer the gas industry targeted were housewives. Numerically, the largest of these were in working- and lower-middle class families. The working class were by far the largest social group in the UK in the interwar period. They made up



78.07% of the population in 1931, numbering nearly 32 million people (McKibbin, 2000, p. 106). While much smaller, the lower-middle class continued its rapid expansion from latter half of the nineteenth century in the interwar period. By far the largest occupation in this social class were clerical workers. The number of male clerks grew by 4% from 1911 to 1921, and 11% from 1921 to 1931 when they numbered 817,000 (Scott, 2017, p. 15).

The working class of the 1930s was very different from that of before the First World War. Less worked in the staple northern industries of textiles, coal, iron and steel, ship building and heavy engineering and more in modern manufacturing industries, in both fast moving consumer goods and consumer durables (McKibbin, 2000, pp. 106–110). These jobs were more concentrated in the Midlands and London and the South East. Workers were also better off than the previous generation. Unskilled workers earned 45% more in 1935/1936 than in 1913/1914, with 37% gains for semi-skilled workers, 39% for skilled workers and 37% for clerks (Scott, 2017, p. 13). Finally, for many work became more stable with an increase in internal labour markets, predominantly in the new manufacturing and white collar sectors. There was a gradual move away from external labour markets where work was often seasonal and unstable. Internal labour markets also provided employees with employment benefits, which included sickness and unemployment cover and pensions (Gospel, 1992, chs 3–4).

For the women whom the gas industry targeted, experience of work did not differ so much from the pre-1914 period. There were more opportunities to work in factories and offices and less in heavy industries such as textiles, which had traditionally employed large numbers of women. Slightly less worked in domestic service (McKibbin, 2000, pp. 109–111; Pugh, 2009, pp. 178–184). Yet like before the First World War, the overwhelming majority of women gave up employment on becoming married. Married women in the working and lower-middle classes underwent, however, important social and cultural changes. In the interwar period one million houses were built by local councils on suburban estates (McKibbin, 2000, p. 188) and 1.8 million suburban homes were built by the private sector for owner occupation (Scott, 2017, p. 69). A substantial proportion of the latter were bought by the working class, particularly those in more stable and higher paid employment (Scott, 2017, p. 70). As a consequence, a significant minority of working class families were living on suburban estates by the 1930s. These families, who McKibbin refers to as the 'New Working Class' lived a very different lifestyle from the old working classes of the industrial cities and towns whose social lives were based on a neighbourhood-centred society and kinship (McKibbin, 2000, pp. 188–198). In its stead was created a private domestic lifestyle based on the home and family. In many respects this reflected the lower-middle class model of domesticity. In the interwar period this was increasingly based on consumption. As Scott (1917, p. 36) notes, 'The new model of working-class respectability was based around "privatized" family- and home-centred lifestyles, an increased commitment of monetary and psychological resources to the welfare and material advancement of children, and asserting status through the display of material goods and high standards of domestic hygiene and associated behaviour'. This message was propagated through the new mass media of print, radio and cinema. It was particularly broadcasted in the new women's magazines of the period such as *Woman's Own* (est. 1932) and *Woman* (est. 1937) who cultivated an ideology of domestic bliss and modern lifestyles based on companionate marriage, family, home, beauty, health and consumption (Pugh, 2009, p. 174).

The gas industry used a range of content marketing in the interwar period to target these women. This consisted of printed content, public exhibitions, cookery demonstrations,

showrooms, Mr Therm, film, and the building of Kensal House, a block of flats in Ladbroke Grove, West London. Whilst some of these, such as publications, exhibitions, cookery demonstrations, and showrooms were used before the First World War, others such as Mr Therm, film, public housing, and customer magazines were developed in the interwar period (Clendinning, 2017). Older forms of content marketing, such as print and gas showrooms, were also expanded and enhanced. These were integrated with each other and used in sophisticated marketing campaigns in the 1930s. Each of these will now be examined in more detail.

## Print media and customer magazines

Gas companies were major publishers in the interwar period and produced a wide range of print media that included magazines, books, and leaflets.<sup>2</sup> These were distributed to a range of stakeholders that included business, the public sector, and retail customers. Builders, architects, and public housing officers were particularly targeted to promote the installation of gas into the three million homes that were built in Britain in the 1920s and 30s. In the interwar period, the gas industry launched the publication *One Thousand and One Uses of Gas* to promote gas usage within industry and the public sector.<sup>3</sup> These were illustrated publications of around fourteen pages in length. They covered a range of sectors that included council housing, public health services, schools, factories, industries, farms, conference centres, and even zoos. The publication, 'Domestic Science Classrooms Planning and Equipment', for example, focused on the use of gas for the teaching of domestic science in schools.<sup>4</sup> Gas cookers, lighting, water boilers, and fridges were explained, illustrated and promoted throughout the publication.

The gas industry produced customer magazines for female consumers. The GLCC, for example, published 'Modern Living' and 'Hearth and Home' which had a combined circulation of 1.5 million female readers (Clendinning, 2017, p. 252). Customer magazines flourished in the interwar period in Britain. They were not intended primarily to sell, but to engage customers. Much of their content focused on lifestyle and human interest stories that indirectly related to the company's products and services. Scott has emphasised the importance of customer magazines in the interwar period for the selling of new products such as furniture, home ownership and cars (2017).

One customer magazine published by the BCGA was *The Flambeau*. This began in 1932 and targeted middle-class female consumers. *The Flambeau* was sold to gas companies and showrooms by the BCGA, who distributed it to targeted customers. The *Gas Bulletin*, the trade journal of the gas industry, advised on optimal methods to distribute the magazine.<sup>5</sup> Sending the magazine to influential women in the showroom's area was recommended,

Secretaries of Women Societies (one member sends two-thirds of its quarterly order for distribution among local women's organisations), school teachers, councillors' wives, doctors and dentists, matrons of hospitals, convalescent homes and welfare centres, mistresses of domestic economy centres – distribution of *The Flambeau* in these quarters without doubt helps us to keep a large body of local opinion not only conscious of the up-to-dateness of gas, but *au fait* with the modern appliances described and illustrated in the magazine.<sup>6</sup>

Other methods included distributing the magazines at cookery demonstrations and sending out copies to customers with gas bills. Gas companies and showrooms were also advised to target gas customers who had gone over to electricity, customers who had low

gas consumption in relation to the size of their houses, selected pre-payment customers, and to individuals purchasing or renting a new house.

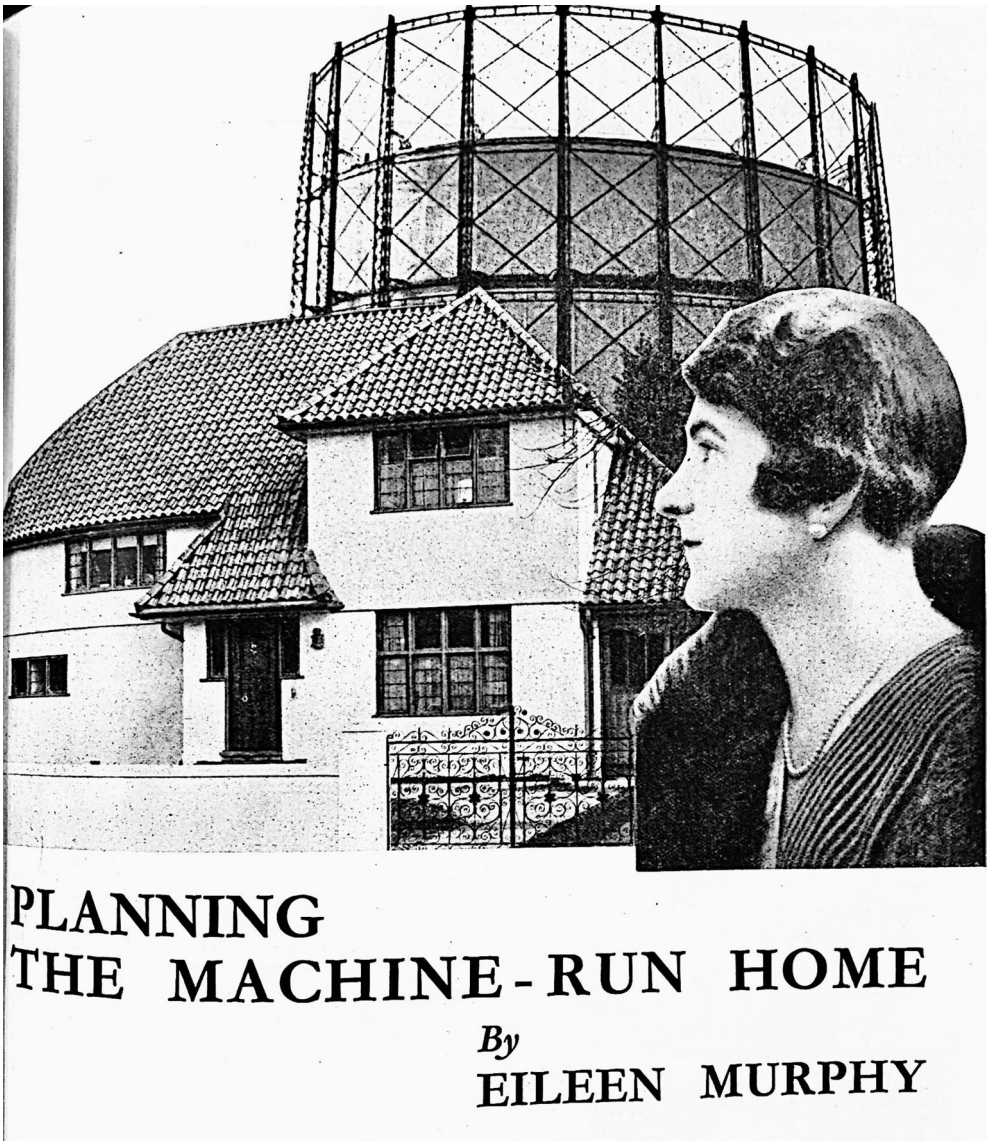
Whilst *The Flambeau* had articles on gas appliances and the gas industry, most of its content was about the home, family, health, leisure, and fashion. Two common themes in *The Flambeau* were home décor and celebrities. The creation of fashionable homes filled the pages of the magazine. Gas appliances such as cookers, heaters, and refrigerators were carefully threaded into these articles. Articles on celebrities and their homes were the most common features in the magazine. The Spring 1936 issue of *The Flambeau* had the movie actress Anna Lee on its front cover. Its feature article, 'Anna Lee on Bankside', covered Anna's dream home on the South Bank of the Thames in London. The article closed with a description of the actress' kitchen,

Anna is equally at home in her kitchen as in any other part of the house. Here she has fitted a most elegant up-to-date gas cooker and an automatic gas water heater to supply the house with hot water. Like most people who have a knowledge of and enjoy cooking, Anna plumps for gas. But she insists on up-to-date appliances. It is just as short-sighted to try to cook with a ten-year-old gas cooker (good service though it will give) as to try to get about in a ten-year-old car. The very latest is Anna's choice – but it must be gas.<sup>7</sup>

A content analysis was conducted on the BCGA's *The Flambeau* to quantify and illustrate the main themes of the magazine. This analysed over two hundred and fifty pages published in volumes 1932, 1934, 1936 and 1938 (see Table 1). This showed that celebrity related articles were the most common feature in the magazine and made up twenty percent of its content. This was followed by articles related to home décor, cooking and gas appliances, which together comprised half of the content of the magazine. Articles overtly linked to the marketing of gas which were found in the themes 'Gas Appliances', 'Gas Industry', and 'Gas Adverts' only accounted for sixteen percent of *The Flambeau*. The remainder of the content was related to lifestyle and domestic topics that repeated the message that gas was essential to a healthy, modern, fashionable and happy life.

**Table 1.** The Flambeau content analysis findings.

Theme/Subject	No. of articles	% of articles	No. of lines	% of lines
Celebrity	30	19%	2825	20%
Home Décor	18	11.4%	1602	11.3%
Cooking	15	9.5%	1532	10.8%
Gas Appliances	15	9.5%	1460	10.3%
Knitting	8	5.1%	972	6.9%
Motherhood, Family and Home	11	7%	823	5.8%
Holiday and Leisure	8	5.1%	819	5.8%
Fashion and Beauty	5	3.2%	818	5.8%
Stories, Poetry and Entertainment	12	7.6%	753	5.3%
Gas industry	9	5.7%	647	4.6%
Health	6	3.8%	613	4.3%
Children's Articles	5	3.2%	427	3%
Career and Entrepreneurial Women	2	1.3%	286	2%
Letters	2	1.3%	151	1.1%
Public Speaking	1	0.6%	144	1%
The Magazine	3	1.9%	101	0.7%
Gas Adverts	5	3.2%	88	0.6%
Competitions	3	1.9%	80	0.6%



**Figure 1.** Planning the machine run home from *The Flambeau*.

Note how this photomontage image communicates the message of femininity, beauty, home and gas (Source: BL, *The Flambeau*, Summer 1938, p. 7). Published with Kind Permission from the National Gas Archives.

### **Public exhibitions and cooking demonstrations**

Before 1914 public exhibitions were the preferred marketing medium of gas (Clendinning, 2017, p. 58). They were used to promote new products and communicate the connection between technological innovation, commercial products, and public service (Clendinning, 2017, p. 48). The gas industry organised them in town halls across Britain and supported affiliated ones in areas such as health and smoke abatement, and the Ideal Home Exhibitions which began in 1908. In doing so, the gas industry made the link between gas, public health,





**Figure 2.** Anna Lee on front cover of *The Flambeau* (Source: BL, *The Flambeau*, Spring 1936). Published with Kind Permission from the National Gas Archives.

improved housing, and national well-being (Clendinning, 2017, p. 59). In addition, it pioneered the introduction of cookery demonstrations at exhibitions in 1888 (Clendinning, 2017, pp. 62–63). Gas companies and stove manufacturers staged cooking shows with female



**Figure 3.** Mr Sherlock Therm, Innocent Woman Suspect! (Source: BL, *News* (Supplement to *Co-Partners' Magazine*), Innocent Woman Suspect, June 1937, 2).  
Published with Kind Permission from the National Gas Archives.



**Figure 4.** Interviewed slum dweller from housing problems (Source: NGA, *Housing Problems*, Gas Light and Coke Company, 1935).  
Published with Kind Permission from the National Gas Archives.





**Figure 5.** Kensal house and nursery school (Source: BL, *Co-Partner's Magazine*, Opening of Kensal House, April, 1937, p. 183).

Published with Kind Permission from the National Gas Archives.

demonstrators that showed the ease and efficiency of cooking by gas. This helped feminise gas use and promoted the use of gas in the home.

Public exhibitions and cookery demonstrations continued to be widely used in the interwar period. Cookery demonstrations also began to be given regularly in showrooms. The gas industry added new features in exhibitions such as the display of model kitchens equipped with the latest gas appliances and the showing of gas films.<sup>8</sup> Of particular note was the gas exhibit at the British Empire Exhibition in Wembley in 1924. Whilst the industry devoted space to the industrial manufacture and uses of gas, its centrepiece was, 'The Seven Ages of Women'. This consisted of a set of rooms which represented seven stages in a woman's life from the childhood in a nursery, to a young woman managing her own business, and ending with a mature woman reposing at home (Clendinning, 2017, p. 213). All rooms had tableaux actors and were fitted with gas appliances and fashionable interior décor. The demonstration was reported to be particularly entertaining to King George V and Queen Mary. The royal couple chatted to the actors of the exhibition who remained in character. King George V was reported to have 'laughed heartily' over the 'unaffected replies' of the children he spoke to in the playroom section of the exhibit.<sup>9</sup>

### Gas showrooms

Gas showrooms were opened by the larger metropolitan gas companies in the 1890s. Showrooms expanded and became more elaborate in the interwar period. They featured fitted kitchens and furnished displays of the home.<sup>10</sup> Companies also invested in social



amenities such as cafes. In larger concerns, theatres were built for cookery demonstrations and films, and home and customer service departments, including new kitchen planning centres, were expanded.<sup>11</sup> By the 1930s gas showrooms were retail and social centres which provided women with information, entertainment and leisure (Clendinning, 2017, p. 230). In many respects, they emulated department stores that had developed in North America, Western Europe and Japan in the latter half of the nineteenth century (Crossick & Jaumain, 1999). These had turned shopping into leisure, had transformed urban and retail environments, and provided 'third spaces', that included cafes, libraries, galleries, exhibitions, and amusements. Jon Stobart has shown how provincial department stores outside London had rapidly grown in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (2017). In the interwar period, these continued to expand and became more elaborate in terms of size, décor, amenities, and entertainment. Department stores focused on customer experience to differentiate themselves from chain stores with whom they competed (Stobart, 2017, p. 837). Gas showrooms adopted these strategies, particularly in their efforts to respond to the electrical industry, which also opened showrooms in the interwar period.

Half of the GLCC's new showrooms incorporated lecture theatres. The largest, such as Kensington and Barking in London, could seat two hundred people, with smaller gas showrooms having seating for forty attendees (Clendinning, 2017, p. 268). Theatres were elaborately fitted. The demonstration hall in Folkestone, South East England, for example, had a background of stainless steel sinks, pale green tiling, and white furnishings. It seated fifty people and demonstrations were given weekly.<sup>12</sup> Cooking shows became more sophisticated. Female demonstrators would cook meals and simultaneously wash clothing. By the late thirties water heaters and refrigerators were also being demonstrated.<sup>13</sup> Attendees could request dishes to be cooked and the finished culinary products were raffled off to audiences. For many housewives weekly demonstrations at local gas showrooms became a regular form of cheap leisure (Clendinning, 2017, pp. 270–271). Over one thousand women weekly viewed demonstrations in the showrooms of London's South Metropolitan Gas Company in the 1930s, while the GLCC in 1937 estimated that over one hundred thousand women attended its demonstrations (Clendinning, 2017, pp. 269–270). With a Greater London population of eight million in the 1930s, this indicated an impressive level of market penetration of female consumers.

## Mr Therm

In 1931 the Publicity Department of the GLCC launched Mr Therm who became the brand of the gas industry, and remained so until 1960 (Clendinning, 2017, p. 233; Everard, 1949, pp. 346–347; Scott, 2017, pp. 198–199).<sup>14</sup> An engaging, two-dimensional cartoon character with a smiling face and head of flaming gas, Mr Therm provided personality to the gas industry. He became the most ubiquitous piece of marketing content that the sector produced and was integrated into its different content platforms. He was found in posters, adverts, gas showrooms, films, music, cookery books, badges and broaches for children, and even on china plates and cups.<sup>15</sup> In 1943 he featured with two of the lead characters from the hit BBC Radio comedy show, *It's That Man Again*.<sup>16</sup> The recording was a humorous public service announcement produced to encourage people to save gas in order to promote the national war effort.



**Figure 6.** National Gas Cookery Week.

Note the cooking demonstration taking place in front of the showroom, Mr Therm, and the large numbers of housewives and families in the audience (Source: BL, Home Service and Gas Sales, March 1937, Survey Seven: Beside the Seaside. Home Service in Rendezvous-Street, p. 43). Published with Kind Permission from the National Gas Archives.

Mr Therm was a friend of women, who was often featured in cartoon adverts and posters giving advice on the latest gas appliances. In the 1937 the popular song, 'Meet Mr Therm', was produced by the GLCC. Sung by Ernest Butcher, it began with the refrain,

Meet Mr Therm

He'll make your life a pleasure

He'll give you lots of leisure

So meet Mr Therm<sup>17</sup>

Mr Therm also adopted various roles in his mission to alleviate household drudgery for women. In one role he played the character 'Mr Sherlock Therm' with his two faithful Disneyesque bloodhounds, 'Waste Not' and 'Want Not'.<sup>18</sup> In his quest to track down the villain 'Demon Foodwaste', Mr Sherlock Therm was portrayed as trying to save housewives' food bills by stopping food from going off, and in the process helped the gas industry's campaign to promote refrigerators. Mr Therm developed a playful and popular image of Britain's gas industry, which had been traditionally perceived as serious, masculine, and industrial. It was one which was adopted by gas industries across the world and still remains a defining motif of the sector today.

## Film

In 1935 the GLCC and BCGA began to produce films to promote gas and the gas industry. These were divided between promotional and documentary films which addressed social issues of housing, nutrition, poverty, education, and pollution. Many of the commercial films were light-hearted such as *How Daisy Bell Came to Town*, a film about cooking with milk, which included the slapstick duo the Griffiths Brothers as a comic cow. Mr Therm also starred in several of these films such as *Meet Mr Therm* and *Two Frightened Ladies*, which was described by *Home Sales & Service* as a 'comedy with music and song'.<sup>19</sup>

Despite being smaller in number, it was the documentary films produced by the GLCC which attained most fame, and are seen today as some of the leading British productions of the period (Clendinning, 2017, pp. 240–245; Rotha, 1973). These were made between 1935 and 1937 and include: *Housing Problems*, which addressed the issue of substandard housing within the UK, *Enough to Eat*, which examined malnutrition, *The Smoke Menace*, which documented the problem of smog pollution, and *Children at School*, which highlighted the poor condition of Britain's state schools (Clendinning, 2017, pp. 240–241; Rotha, 1973, pp. 157–158). These were made by the British documentary film movement, who produced documentaries as an educational and civic medium in the UK (Aitken, 1992; Rotha, 1973). The movement had been founded by John Grierson in the 1920s and had initially been used by the EMB (1926–1933), a state run body designed to promote inter-imperial trade and the consumption of empire products within Britain (Aitken, 1992, pp. 90–126; Rotha, 1973, pp. 38–65). By the 1930s documentary films were made by a number of corporations in the public and private sectors. These included the GPO, GLCC, the British Broadcasting Corporation, Shell-Mex and British Petroleum, Imperial Airways, and the Orient Shipping Line (Rotha, 1973, p. 143).

Why did the GLCC make films about social issues which were not directly related to selling gas? A.P. Ryan, the first director of GLCC's Publicity Department, had worked with Grierson at the EMB before joining the GLCC and understood the value of film in reaching larger audiences and influencing decision makers (Clendinning, 2017, p. 243). S.C. Leslie, who took over the publicity department from Ryan and managed the production of documentary films, gave three reasons for their genesis: documentary films modernised the image of the gas industry by associating it with contemporary problems and public service; it helped combat the link of social progress and the electrical industry; and it enabled the GLCC to positively contribute to the alleviation of mass poverty (Rotha, 1973, p. 155). Documentaries on social issues differentiated gas from electricity which only made commercial films (Rotha, 1973, p. 156).

It should also be emphasised that there was a historical context to the GLCC's sponsorship of documentaries. The gas industry had for decades served working class customers, it had gas collectors and home service departments who visited their homes and communities. It had worked since the 1890s with public charities and local government on issues such as social housing, nutrition, and smoke pollution (Clendinning, 2017, pp. 33–37, p. 59, pp. 140–141, pp. 192–193, p. 244). It had historically positioned gas as a public service and solution to many of the problems which blighted British society (Clendinning, 2017).<sup>20</sup>

The gas industry's documentaries were shown in cinemas across Britain. *Housing Problems* was reported by the BCGA to have been met with applause in London at each screening by working-class audiences (Clendinning, 2017, p. 245). This led to the film being exhibited nationally.

The gas industry also established its own distribution channels for films. A report by the BCGA in 1935 on 'Film Propaganda', recommended three methods of exhibiting films to (a) existing audiences of clubs, associations and social bodies at their meetings; (b) invited audiences in hired halls; (c) invited audiences in cookery demonstrations halls and showrooms.<sup>21</sup> Screenings in showrooms and exhibitions were particularly popular. Films were advertised in the press, showrooms, and on posters and gas vans. Influential members of the community were sent personal invitations. Tickets were mailed to customers and distributed through showrooms and meter inspectors. Local dignitaries, such as town mayors, were often invited to open film showings.<sup>22</sup> One gas showroom reported two thousand and thirty-nine visitors for screenings over the period 20 - 24 September 1937, and an average of one hundred and seven viewers per performance out of a seating capacity for one hundred and twenty people.<sup>23</sup>

## Kensal House

In 1937 the GLCC built Kensal House in Ladbrooke Gove, West London, a model public housing estate for slum dwellers which consisted of sixty-eight flats which housed three hundred and eighty people, including two hundred and forty-four children (Clendinning, 2017, pp. 246–253; Everard, 1949, p. 352). The flats were designed by the renowned architect Maxwell Fry and social housing expert Elizabeth Denby. Kensal House was built in a modernist Bauhaus style, one normally reserved for affluent housing. Its two blocks consisted of two and three bedroom flats with a living room, kitchen, balcony, and a small ventilated balcony for drying clothes.<sup>24</sup> The rents for the flats were highly affordable and equivalent to those paid for council housing in London.<sup>25</sup> Each flat was equipped with an enamel gas cooker, a gas water heater for hot water in the kitchen and bathroom, a gas copper in the kitchen where laundry could be washed, a coke fire lit by gas in the living room, a gas fire in the main bedroom, and gas lighting activated by light switches.<sup>26</sup>

Fry wrote of Kensal House that, 'the work was the desire to build a group of homes where people whose incomes allow them little above sheer necessity could experience as full a life as can be.'<sup>27</sup> Elizabeth Denby described it as an Urban Village.<sup>28</sup> The estate had two club rooms with canteens for adults and children, a work-room where carpentry and boot repair could be conducted, allotments, a terrace, two lawns, a rooftop garden, and a playground for children.<sup>29</sup> It had a nursery school for young children from Kensal House and the local area.<sup>30</sup> The estate was managed by a committee consisting of fourteen representatives with Miss Elizabeth Denby as chairperson.<sup>31</sup> The GLCC stated that the purpose of Kensal Rise was to demonstrate that gas homes could be built and run cheaply and provided an example of what could be done to solve the problems of slums and housing in the country. It showed that the comforts that the middle-classes enjoyed could be made available to the working-classes through public housing.<sup>32</sup>

Kensal House represented a fusion of the all gas show-homes, which the sector built in exhibitions and on new housing estates, with CSR. It promoted the comforts of the all-gas home on a mass scale and was a social project that dealt with issues of housing, education, nutrition, and pollution. It provided affordable, decent housing combined with educational facilities.<sup>33</sup> Lower rents and affordable energy from gas and coke, the GLCC argued, allowed people on low incomes to spend more money on food (Clendinning, 2017, p. 250). The flats, through their gas and coke heating, were promoted as producing minimal amounts of smoke and thus beneficial to the environment.<sup>34</sup>

## Discussion and conclusion

The gas industry's marketing strategy of supplying gas appliances on easy terms and a cornucopia of content was highly successful. The sector retained its dominance in relation to cookers with nine million households using gas at the end of 1938 compared with only 1.16–1.33 million households using electricity (Scott, 2017, p. 189). One in five homes used gas for heating water, though the sector continued to be dominated by coal which was widely used by working class households (Scott, 2017, pp. 190–191). Whilst only a small number of houses bought refrigerators, it is interesting to note that the sale of gas fridges appears to have outstripped those of electricity (Scott, 2017, p. 191). Sales of gas also gradually increased, despite a fall in its use for lighting (Everard, 1949, p. 349).<sup>35</sup> More importantly, this strategy meant that gas remained a major source of energy in British households in the face of fierce competition from electricity and has remained so since the interwar period (Scott, 2017, p. 193).

Given the vital role that content played in the marketing of gas in the interwar period, an important question is can one detect a deliberate practice of content marketing? The term was only first used in 1996, with the Content Marketing Association being established in Britain in 2009 and the Content Marketing Institute being established in the USA in 2011. Whilst there is no mention of content or content marketing in the interwar period, there were several terms used by the gas industry and the broader private and public sectors to refer to earned and owned material that was used for commercial purposes and was distinct from pure advertising. As we have seen, the most important was publicity. Much of the above content was created by the GLCC's Publicity Department (Everard, 1949, pp. 346–347). Other terms such as propaganda, and to a lesser extent public relations, were interchangeably used.<sup>36</sup> For example, films developed by the gas industry in the 1930s were referred to as both publicity films and propaganda films.<sup>37</sup> The *Flambeau* was described as publicity and as a 'propaganda magazine'.<sup>38</sup> An article in the *Bulletin of the British Commercial Gas Association* in December 1931 was titled, 'Christmas Propaganda at Newcastle: A National Publication and Local Publicity'.<sup>39</sup> A feature on the use of publicity by the gas and electricity industries commented, '... a good dose of propaganda adroitly dissimulated is very good publicity'.<sup>40</sup> While publicity was sometimes used to refer to the entirety of a company's promotional programme<sup>41</sup>, it often referred to non-advertising marketing content which was used to influence public opinion rather than to precipitate a sale. For example in 1933, Sir William Crawford, an advisory member of GPO's Telephone Publicity Committee<sup>42</sup>, classified its publicity activities into three categories: (i) Press, (ii) Posters and (iii) Sundries, which were classified as 'films, exhibitions, etc.'.<sup>43</sup> The Telephone Publicity Committee at the GPO laid the basis for the establishment of its public relations department in 1934 under the directorship of Sir Stephen Tallents, the first government PR department in the UK (Anthony, 2012, ch 4).

An associated question is to what extent content marketing was explicitly used as a strategic marketing tool? Within discussions of publicity there is clear evidence of this. A remarkably explicit summary of the role of content and publicity can be found in the minutes of the Telephone Publicity Committee of the GPO in 1933,

It may be said that the shortcomings of the present methods of telephone publicity are that they in the main aim at selling telephone services to the individual without first creating a sense of need of telephone service among the public generally. In other words, there is little mass suggestion. Whilst therefore existing methods could doubtless be extended and improved upon, future publicity developments should first of all be in the direction of awakening a national 'telephone-mindedness' and obtaining the good will of the public.<sup>44</sup>



Publicity focused on the soft-sell of mass suggestion and the management of public opinion and reputation. It created life-style changes and perceived needs for the new consumer products of interwar Britain. Most advertising and sales focused on the hard-sell of inducing consumers to buy these products.<sup>45</sup> The BCGA spoke, for example, of the importance of *The Flambeau* in creating an appealing medium for communicating to readers the advantages of new gas appliances, 'They are illustrated in actual and attractive settings, often in the homes of famous people, and an unconscious desire is set up in the reader's mind to possess them, especially if in her home the appliances are somewhat out-of-date.'<sup>46</sup>

The strategic use of publicity content was evident in marketing campaigns that the BCGA launched in the 1930s to promote sales of appliances such as hot water boilers, gas fires and gas cookers. These were highly integrated in nature. In the National Gas Cooker Fortnight held in February/March 1938, advertising in national and local newspapers was combined with editorials, mailing shots, posters, films, window displays, showrooms, cooking demonstrations, and competitions.<sup>47</sup> The BCGA explained that the use of a wide range of promotional tools was based on a strategy of repetition,

All advertising depends for its effect on repetition. An isolated message in a morning newspaper may produce an impression which quickly fades. Repeat the same message again and again and it will infallibly influence the mental attitude and finally even the actions of those whom it is specially addressed. In a short-term campaign, the message must be repeated with remorseless frequency. If the message of the national advertisements is repeated and its effect reinforced by press advertisements in local newspapers, by films, by lantern slides, by window displays in the local showrooms, by canvassing, by competitions, by newspaper articles – then the gas undertaking can feel that it has spread its net wide enough to catch all the customers who at that moment are ripe for buying. The national advertisements may start the train of thought in the customer's mind, but in most cases they need to be supplemented by energetic local action before she is brought to the culminating point at which the salesman closes the order.<sup>48</sup>

Anat Rosenberg has demonstrated how theories of behavioural marketing, grounded in psychology, became widespread in British advertising at the turn of the twentieth century. This was based on concepts of association, memory, image, habit, rational and non-rational responses, repetition, and hierarchy of effects models such as AIDA (Attention, Interest, Desire, Action) (Rosenberg, 2022, p. 330). Indeed, the latter was taught to gas salesmen in the 1930s.<sup>49</sup> In the above quote we see a theory of advertising and marketing based on repetition and sequence. National advertising began the process by creating awareness, local advertising and publicity reinforced national advertising through constant repetition, and sales closed the process through action and purchase. The role of publicity content was one of repetition, reinforcement and arousal.

Content thus had a macro long-term role of mass persuasion and a micro short-term function of reinforcement. It was grounded in rational (functional) and non-rational (symbolic) appeals. Both were integrated into a marketing strategy that sold gas on associational rather than product benefits. As one commercial gas manager observed, 'Our domestic sales policy is based on selling gas – not merely as a fuel – but in terms of comfort, speed, cleanliness, convenience and economy.'<sup>50</sup> Here we see a third role of content, that of brand building. Stefan Schwarzkopf (2010) has shown how trademarks were turned into brands in the first half of the twentieth century by embedding the former with powerful social, emotional, and symbolic attributes that appealed to consumers. 'A brand', he observed, '... is a trademark

that has been 'released' to compete in the social-cultural sphere of the market' (2010, p. 165). Brands were augmented with identity, image, and personality which differentiated products and created long-term relationships and customer loyalty. This process is clearly evident in the content of the gas industry, which furnished gas with functional, social, emotional, and self-expressive appeals, provided it with personality and identity, differentiated it from electricity, and formulated long-term relationships with customers and communities. Yet whereas Schwarzkopf focuses on advertising and external management through advertising agencies such as J. Walter Thompson, this case study of the gas industry has demonstrated internal brand building through the BCGA and larger concerns such as the GLCC, and the use of advertising *and* publicity content to create socio-cultural associations and brand loyalty. Content such as customer magazines, gas showrooms, cooking demonstrations, home visits, exhibitions, and films were particularly important for customer engagement. They facilitated and encouraged interaction and relationship-building between the gas industry and its consumers.

As seen in this article, content marketing was not confined to the gas industry and was widespread in Britain in the interwar period. It was particularly prevalent in the public sector and in areas where companies enjoyed monopoly or oligopoly market powers and provided essential services to the nation. The use of content was widespread at the GPO, at the BBC, at the London Transport Board, and in government bodies such as the Ministry of Health and the Milk Marketing Board (Anthony, 2012; Grant, 1994; Heller 2016a, 2016b; LeMahieu, 1988; Saler, 1999). But it was also evident in the railway industry, the oil sector, life insurance and the electricity industry (Heller, 2008, 2010; Scott, 2017; Turner, 2018). In addition, Scott's (2017) research has demonstrated that content was widely used to market consumer durables. It was used in the furniture sector, house building and building societies, the radio sector and the car industry where it was utilised to promulgate lifestyle benefits and build brand equity. For example, Scott (2017, p. 61) observes the publication of the booklet/customer magazine, 'Good Furnishing' by the Times Furnishing Co., which in 1935, 'included items on weddings, film stars, health and beauty, and a knitting pattern, as well as "What furniture means to your home", and planning various rooms'. Estate builders provided lavish promotional events to prospective buyers on their new housing estates that featured elaborately furnished show houses, firework displays, concerts, and launches hosted by film and radio stars (Scott, 2017, p. 86). Work by Schwarzkopf (2009) and Ward (1994) on the marketing of consumer goods have noted the use of pioneering advertising campaigns, both developed by the American agency J. Walter Thompson. Content may well have been more applicable to high involvement products, while advertising may have been more applicable to low involvement fast moving consumer goods and have been more dependent on external agencies. More research is certainly needed here.

A final note should be said of the cultural legacy of the content that was created during the interwar period. One fascinating aspect of content marketing was the way in which it mimicked popular culture. This can be seen in its journalism, its films, its events and its music. LeMahieu (1988) has noted that by the 1930s a shared popular culture had emerged in Britain that appealed to all social classes and was grounded in journalism, literature, film, radio, music and fashion. Organisations in Britain both emerged themselves in this culture and augmented it through their content. This promoted their products and services and enhanced their corporate brands. To draw on Meyer and Rowan (1977), organisations reflected their external environment through a process of institutional isomorphism in order to generate reputation, legitimacy and trust. This



left a legacy of organisational immersion in popular culture which is still a major strategy of marketing in Britain today. In addition, much of the content of this period has bequeathed an important cultural legacy in itself. This can be seen in the documentary films of the period, its poster art, its architecture, its literature and its designs (Aitken, 1992; Anthony, 2012; Heller, 2010, 2016a, LeMahieu, 1988; Saler, 1999). Whilst some of the motivation for the gas industry's content marketing was defensive in nature in response to the threat from electricity, much of it was positive in terms of the relations it evinced with customers, the corporate image which it projected and the cultural and social artefacts which it has left behind.

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