

Historizing the present: Research agenda and implications for consumer behavior

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Abstract

This paper conceptualizes the phenomenon of *historizing the present*, defined as emphasizing the historical significance of present events and treating the present from the perspective of history. The authors identify four modes of historizing the present (emphasizing that: (1) the present will shape history; (2) the present is a unique moment in history; (3) the present will be remembered in history; (4) the present echoes history) and demonstrate how historizing can be employed by marketers of for-profit and nonprofit organizations in a variety of contexts. The paper examines the psychological implications of appreciating the historical significance of the present and outlines a research agenda for studying the downstream behavioral consequences of historizing the present across diverse substantive consumer domains. It concludes with an examination of the broader societal implications of historizing the present as well as its implications for consumer well-being.

KEYWORDS

collective action, ethical consumption, experiential consumption, history, political consumption, self and identity, social movements, sustainability

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary consumer culture and recent popular trends such as wellness and mindfulness idealize being in the moment and focusing purely on the here and now. Accordingly, marketers often encourage consumers to seize the day and be fully present, rather than dwell on the past or think about the future (Black, 2015; Ehrenreich, 2009; Haws & Poynor, 2008; Keinan & Kivetz, 2008; Levin, 2017; Smalley & Winston, 2022; Tolle, 2004; Zaubermaier & Urminsky, 2016).

In this research, we examine an opposite type of rhetoric that can be effectively used by marketers of for-profit and nonprofit organizations alike—one that emphasizes historical awareness and contextualizes present events within a broader historical perspective. We conceptualize this phenomenon as *historizing the present*. While historizing the present has mostly been used in political discourse and campaigns, we demonstrate how this

phenomenon is relevant to a variety of consumer-related contexts and substantive marketing phenomena.

We define historizing the present as emphasizing the historical significance of present events and viewing the present from the perspective of history, and we introduce a framework that identifies four modes of historizing the present. Specifically, historizing can be done by emphasizing how: (1) the present will shape history; (2) the present is a unique moment in history; (3) the present will be remembered in history; (4) the present echoes history. Historizing the present includes messages, slogans, and expressions such as “history in the making,” “will be written in the history books,” “this is a historic moment,” “will alter the course of history,” “will go down in history” “shaping/making history,” “we are living through history,” “unparalleled in history,” “a historic first” and “be part of history.”

We illustrate each mode of historizing the present in an analysis of 156 famous speeches by prominent leaders

Accepted by Lauren Block, Editor; Associate Editor, Melissa Bublitz

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and U.S. presidential nominees in 34 elections. We then discuss the psychological consequences and mechanisms through which historicizing the present can impact consumers, including meaningfulness, solidarity and belongingness, scarcity, creating a sense of urgency, moral obligation, and efficacy and empowerment. Importantly, we explore the behavioral implications of historicizing the present across a series of prevalent consumer-relevant substantive domains, including new product adoption, experiential consumption, documentation, nostalgic consumption, sustainable consumption, prosocial behavior, social movements and civic action, and political consumption. Building on the proposed framework, we outline future research questions for empirically studying the impact of historicizing the present. In the general discussion, we highlight the broader societal implications of historicizing the present as well as its implications for consumer well-being, managers, policy makers, educators, and scholars.

HISTORIZING THE PRESENT

We conceptualize historicizing the present as emphasizing the historical significance of present events and viewing the present from the perspective of history. Historicizing

the present can be communicated through various vehicles and media, including advertising campaigns, press releases, social media posts and videos, public speeches, slogans, protest signs and posters, calls for action by nonprofits, social movements, and political candidates, press interviews, manifestos and written statements, songs, art, and literature. Iconic phrases that historicize the present include expressions such as “making the history of tomorrow,” “this is history in the making,” “history has its eyes on you,” “today is a historic day,” “never before in history,” “history will not forget,” and “we are living through history” (see Table 1). What these phrases have in common is framing present events as being important in the context of history.

To systematically examine the phenomenon of historicizing the present, we build on frameworks that consider criteria that observers may use to judge the historical significance of past events (e.g., Bradshaw, 2006; Counsell, 2004; Hunt, 2000; Lévesque, 2008; Partington, 1980; Phillips, 2002; Seixas, 1997; Smith, 2022). While these criteria focus on how people assess *past* events and do not consider how *present* events are historicized, they can offer insight into aspects of an event that may shape observer perceptions of present events from a historic perspective. Historical significance pertains to the importance that lay people and historians assign to

TABLE 1 Modes of historicizing the present and how they are communicated.

Modes of historicizing the present	Description of modes and examples of how they can be communicated
The present will shape history	Emphasizing how present events will impact history (in magnitude or consequences) or will change the course of history (long-term durable impact): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Today we are making history • Let's make history • Shaping history together • This will change the course of history; make the history of tomorrow; you shape history every time you vote
The present is a unique moment in history	Framing present events as novel, unique, or unusual: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Never before in history; for the first time in history • Once in a lifetime; once in a generation • A historic first or last • Never before; never done before; never happened before • Unparalleled in history; historical precedent • A special moment in history; only a few in history • This is a truly historic day/time/moment
The present will be remembered in history	Emphasizing how the present (event, actors, and their actions) will be remembered in history: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • History will not forget; historians will recall • How will history remember you? • History has its eyes on you; history will judge you • Be on the right side of history. Which side of history will you be on? Where were you on the day of the event? • Will go down in history as • When the history of our times is written
The present echoes history	Making allegories and drawing parallels to other historic events: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Labeling the event as [previous event] #2 • Comparing present to historic event: history is repeating itself; as big as; similar to; reminds me of; is happening again. This is how [a past historic event] started • Discussing how the event relates to other historic events • Lessons from history • History teaches us

certain past events. Historians cannot study everything that has happened in the past; instead, they focus on a selection of past events they consider to be significant (Bergman, 2020; Harcourt et al., 2011). Thus, historical significance is not necessarily an objective property of an event, but rather the result of interpretation and judgment (Counsell, 2004). Accordingly, different individuals and groups may view different events as historically important.

Specifically, the extent to which an event is considered to be historic may vary across generations and ethnic groups. For example, a 2016 survey asked Americans to list the top 10 historic events that occurred during their lifetime that they thought “have had the greatest impact on the country” (Pew Research Center, 2016). The majority of Americans mentioned September 11, 2001 (9/11), and the 2008 election of Barack Obama as U.S. President. Interestingly, African American respondents were more likely to rate Obama's election as the greatest historic event in their lifetime compared to White or Hispanic respondents. Similarly, the civil rights movement ranked third—after Obama's election and 9/11—on the list of the most significant events for African American respondents, but it was absent from the top 10 list for White respondents. Rankings of historic events may also vary across generations. For example, the U.S. Supreme Court decision to legalize gay marriage made millennials' top 10 list, but was only occasionally mentioned by Gen Xers and baby boomers.

Historic events occur in different domains (politics, society, culture, economy and business, religion, nature, and environment, science and technology) and vary along several dimensions, including valence (positive vs. negative), duration (short vs. long), scope (local vs. global), expectation and agency (expected vs. unexpected, planned vs. unplanned), and cause (human vs. natural). What they all have in common is the importance lay people and historians assign to them.

Specifically, historical significance frameworks (e.g., Bradshaw, 2006; Counsell, 2004; Hunt, 2000; Lévesque, 2008; Partington, 1980; Phillips, 2002; Seixas, 1997; Smith, 2022) largely converge around four main aspects that contribute to a past event's historical significance: impact, novelty, memory, and relevance. (1) *Impact*: Events are more likely to be considered significant if they had a momentous and long-lasting impact and resulted in significant change or consequences. The more people are affected by an event and the more deeply people's lives are impacted by an event, the more significant an event is considered to be. (2) *Novelty and uniqueness*: Events that are new, unusual or unique, groundbreaking, or never seen before are likely to be considered historic. (3) *Memory*: Events may be considered significant because they are remembered in a particular way and become part of a group's or society's collective memory. (4) *Relevance*: Relevance refers to the extent to which past events resonate and are applicable

in the present. Past events can be considered significant in the present because people recognize that they apply to a current situation. People may make analogies and connect experiences and events across time and space and may look back to see how others dealt with similar circumstances in the past.

Adapting these four criteria for judging past events as historic to describing and framing ongoing present events, we identify four ways of emphasizing the historical significance of a current event: (1) the present will shape history; (2) the present is a unique moment in history; (3) the present will be remembered in history; and (4) the present echoes history. See Table 1 for examples of relevant expressions that communicate each of the four modes of historizing the present. Below we describe each of these modes in detail and illustrate them with relevant quotes.

The present will shape history

This mode of historizing the present emphasizes that the current event will impact and change the future in significant ways and will thereby shape history. Common examples include phrases such as, “today we are making history,” “shaping history,” “this will change/alter the course of history,” “pivotal / critical moment in history,” “facing historic choice/turning point/junction,” and “making the history of tomorrow.” For example, “The work of today is the history of tomorrow, and we are its makers” (Juliette Gordon Low, founder of Girl Scouts, 1860); “Roll up your sleeves, set your mind to making history” (Carrie Chapman Catt, American leader in women's suffrage movement, 1913); “It is from numberless diverse acts of courage and belief that human history is shaped” (Robert F. Kennedy, 1960); “We never hide from history. We make history” (John McCain, 2008); “The main thing is to make history, not to write it” (Otto von Bismarck); “A small body of determined spirits fired by an unquenchable faith in their mission can alter the course of history” (Mahatma Gandhi); “Make history or be part of it” (Phil Knight, CEO of Nike).

The present is a unique moment in history

This mode of historizing the present emphasizes the novel, unique, or unusual nature of the present moment and includes expressions such as, “never before in history,” “for the first time in history,” “once in a lifetime,” “once in a generation,” “this is a truly historic day/time,” “a historic first/last, historic moment/landmark/record,” and “on the verge of a historic day.” Examples include, “Never before in history has innovation offered promise of so much to so many in so short a time” (Bill Gates); “Never before in history have human beings been called on to act collectively in

defense of the Earth. Now climate change is our global enemy;" (Desmond Tutu) "It will go down in history as a turning point for the music industry. This is landmark stuff. I can't overestimate it!" (Steve Jobs on the iPod and iTunes Music Store, 2003); "For surely this is the first time in our nation's history that a significant number of its religious leaders have chosen to move beyond the prophesying of smooth patriotism to the high grounds of a firm dissent based upon the mandates of conscience and the reading of history" (Martin Luther King, Jr.); "Never before in the history of American politics has a great issue been fought out as this issue has been by the voters themselves" (William Jennings Bryan, 1896).

The present will be remembered in history

The third mode of historicizing the present constitutes taking the perspective of future observers and emphasizing how they might view the present moment. Examples include phrases such as, "history will not forget," "will go down in history as," "history has its eyes on you," "be on the right side of history," "how will history remember you," "they will ask where were you on this day," "history will recall," and "when historians will recall/when the history of our times is written." For example, "Difficulty is the excuse history never accepts" (Edward Murrow, American journalist); "We'll go down in history as the first society that wouldn't save itself because it wasn't cost effective" (Kurt Vonnegut, novelist); "When the history of our times is written, will we be remembered as the generation that turned our backs in a moment of global crisis or will it be recorded that we did the right thing?" (Nelson Mandela); "Before history is written down in books, it is written in courage" (George W. Bush); "I feel that when the history of our times can be written, the supremely significant record will be the physical, psychic, and social changes women have undergone in these exciting decades" (Amelia Earhart); "History never looks like history when you are living through it" (John Gardner); "History, like God, is watching what we do" (Bono, artist and activist); "When the history of the war is written, I wonder to whom the greatest credit will be given; to the men who went to fight or to the women who are working in a way that many people hardly believed that it was possible for them to work" (Lord Derby quoted by Carrie Chapman Catt, 1916).

The present echoes history

The fourth mode of historicizing the present draws parallels and analogies between the current moment and relevant past events to emphasize the significance of present events and convey what might happen if action is, or is not, taken in the present. Examples of this mode

of historicizing include phrases such as, "history teaches us," "history is repeating itself," "similar to/reminds me of [a past event]," "this is as big as [a past event]," "this is [a past event] #2," "[a past event] is happening again," "this is how [a past event] started," and "lessons from history." This mode of historicizing discusses how a current event relates to other historic events, and it refers to past historic events or historic figures. It is often meant to serve as a warning, create awareness for a cause, make a persuasive argument, or mobilize action. For example, "Those that fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it" (George Santayana/Winston Churchill); "History, despite its wrenching pain, cannot be unlived, but if faced with courage, need not be lived again" (Maya Angelou); "What is done cannot be undone, but one can prevent it happening again" (Anne Frank); "History doesn't repeat itself, but it often rhymes" (Mark Twain); "The historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence" (T.S. Eliot).

To illustrate and examine how these modes of historicizing the present are manifested in the real world, we analyzed prominent public speeches by U.S. presidential nominees and leaders of social movements. Such speeches seek to arouse and inspire audiences and mobilize collective action to support the speaker's cause and promote engagement in civic action. We analyzed a total of 156 speeches. These included 63 speeches available online delivered by U.S. presidential nominees at their parties' conventions in 34 elections between 1860 and 2020, retained in the University of California Santa Barbara repository (presidency.ucsb.edu; 1860, 1868, 1904, 1908, and 1928 were missing speeches by one of the two candidates; 1864, 1872, 1876, 1880, 1884, 1888, and 1892 were missing speeches by both candidates). Since some presidential nominees had been or went on to become leaders of social movements, some speakers (e.g., John F. Kennedy, Abraham Lincoln, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Theodore Roosevelt) appeared in both databases, though the speeches did not overlap. Additionally, the analysis also included 93 speeches by leaders of social movements supporting a wide range of causes (e.g., anti-slavery, racial equity, women's rights and suffrage, anti-nuclear proliferation, anti-poverty, labor rights, universal human rights, public service, and civic duty) obtained from sojust.net.

The analysis revealed that the majority of the speeches (68%) featured at least one instance of historicizing the present. Speakers who used historicizing in their address did so on average 2.25 times. Importantly, we found evidence for all four modes of historicizing the present. Out of the total of 239 instances, 24% highlight that present events will significantly change the future and shape history, 33% invoke unique and notable milestones, achievements, and opportunities, 13% take the perspective of future observers and emphasize how they might view the present moment, and 41% draw parallels between the present and relevant past events (the sum exceeds 100%

since a few instances invoked multiple modes of historizing the present). Table 2 provides examples of relevant quotes included in the analysis, illustrating each mode of historizing the present.

The analysis highlights the presence of distinct themes that reflect the four modes of historizing the present. Next, we discuss the psychological consequences and mechanisms through which historizing the present can impact consumers and motivate individual and collective action. These include meaningfulness, solidarity and belongingness, scarcity and rarity, a sense of urgency, moral obligation, and efficacy and empowerment.

EXAMINING THE IMPACT OF HISTORIZING THE PRESENT

Historizing the present can evoke diverse psychological and behavioral consequences, as summarized in Figure 1. We first discuss the psychological mechanisms by integrating relevant research from consumer behavior and related disciplines. We then discuss the behavioral consequences across important substantial domains within consumer research.

Psychological consequences of Historizing the present

Nardini et al. (2021) and Lteif et al. (2024) propose that consumer research can offer important insights into the motivational, cognitive, and emotional forces that mobilize consumers to take action, both individually and collectively. Building on insights from their frameworks for understanding consumers' reactions to societal or global issues, we investigate the psychological mechanisms that underlie the effect of historizing the present on mobilizing consumers' action. We argue that historizing the present can intentionally and unintentionally invoke several interesting and powerful psychological mechanisms. These include positive and negative emotions, such as hope or fear and despair, pride or guilt and shame, anticipated regret, and fear of missing out (FOMO); as well as cognitive and motivational responses such as creating and stressing a sense of urgency, moral obligation and legacy considerations, identity-based motivations, solidarity and belonging, perceived scarcity, purpose making, and self-efficacy.

We begin by discussing the psychological mechanisms—meaningfulness, solidarity and belonging, scarcity and FOMO, a sense of urgency, and moral obligation—associated with motivating consumers and compelling them to act (i.e., making them feel like they want to and have to do something). We then discuss how historizing the present can also make consumers feel more efficacious and able to make an impact. In Table 3, we follow up with an outline of research

TABLE 2 Quotes from speeches by U.S. presidential nominees and leaders of prominent social movements.

Modes of historizing the present and quotes from famous speeches

The present will shape history

Presidential nomination speeches

“Philadelphia is a good city in which to write American history.”
(Franklin D. Roosevelt, 1936)

“Standing as we do here tonight at this great watershed, this great fork of history, may we never be silenced, may we never lose our faith in freedom and in the better destiny of man.” (Adlai Stevenson, 1956)

“For the harsh facts of the matter are that we stand at this frontier at a turning-point of history.” (John F. Kennedy, 1960)

“We make history tonight—not for ourselves but for the ages.”
(Richard Nixon, 1968)

“We are now at the critical point, a turning point in our economic history of our country.” (Jimmy Carter, 1980)

“We never hide from history. We make history.” (John McCain, 2008)

Social movement speeches

“We are now faced with the fact, my friends, that tomorrow is today. We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now. In this unfolding conundrum of life and history, there is such a thing as being too late.” (Martin Luther King, Jr., 1957)

“For better or for worse, your generation has been appointed by history to deal with those problems and to lead America toward a new age.” (Lyndon B. Johnson, 1963)

“At times, history and fate meet at a single time in a single place to shape a turning point in man's unending search for freedom.”
(Lyndon B. Johnson, 1965)

“The choice is ours, and though we might prefer it otherwise, we must choose in this crucial moment of human history.” (Martin Luther King, Jr., 1967)

The present is a unique moment in history

Presidential nomination speeches

“Never before in the history of American politics has a great issue been fought out as this issue has been by the voters themselves.”
(William Jennings Bryan, 1896)

“We are in the midst of the largest and the longest period of peacetime prosperity in our history.” (Lyndon B. Johnson, 1964)

“Just to be alive in America, just to be alive at this time is an experience unparalleled in history. Here is where the action is.”
(Richard Nixon, 1972)

“Never before in our history have Americans been called upon to face three grave threats to our very existence, any one of which could destroy us.” (Ronald Reagan, 1980)

“We meet at a special moment in history, you and I.” (William Clinton, 1992)

Social movement speeches

“In the long history of the world, only a few generations have been granted the role of defending freedom in its hour of maximum danger. I do not shrink from this responsibility – I welcome it.”
(John F. Kennedy, 1961)

“I am happy to join with you today in what will go down in history as the greatest demonstration for freedom in the history of our nation.” (Martin Luther King, Jr., 1963)

“And we must rejoice as well, for surely this is the first time in our nation's history that a significant number of its religious leaders have chosen to move beyond the prophesying of smooth patriotism to the high grounds of a firm dissent based upon the mandates of conscience and the reading of history.” (Martin Luther King, Jr., 1967)

(Continues)

TABLE 2 (Continued)

Modes of historizing the present and quotes from famous speeches
The present will be remembered in history
<i>Presidential nomination speeches</i>
“History will say that great as was the allied triumph in war, no less a victory was achieved at the peace table.” (James M. Cox, 1920)
“The very soul of America was touched as never before with a fear that our liberties were to be taken away. What America did needs no reiteration here. It is known of all men. History will acclaim it; poets will find it an inspiration throughout the ages.” (James M. Cox, 1920)
“Had we just papered over the differences between us with empty platitudes instead of frank, hard debate we would deserve the contempt of our fellow citizens and the condemnation of history.” (Hubert H. Humphreys, 1968)
“I believe that historians will recall that 1968 marked the beginning of the American generation in world history.” (Richard Nixon, 1968)
“When the history of this period is written, I believe it will be recorded that our most significant contributions to peace resulted from our trips to Peking and to Moscow.” (Richard Nixon, 1972) “... for history has made us the leader, and we are obliged by history to keep the highest standard possible.” (Robert Dole, 1996)
<i>Social movement speeches</i>
“When the history of the war is written, I wonder to whom the greatest credit will be given; to the men who went to fight or to the women who are working in a way that many people hardly believed that it was possible for them to work.” (Lord Derby quoted by Carrie Chapman Catt, 1916)
“With a good conscience our only sure reward, with history the final judge of our deeds, let us go forth to lead the land we love, asking His blessing and His help, but knowing that here on earth God’s work must truly be our own.” (John F. Kennedy, 1961)
“So I ask you to join me in working long hours and nights and weekends, if necessary, to pass this bill. And I don’t make that request lightly, for from the window where I sit with the problems of our country I recognize that from outside this chamber is the outraged conscience of a nation, the grave concern of many nations and the harsh judgment of history on our acts.” (Lyndon B. Johnson 1965)
The present echoes history
<i>Presidential nomination speeches</i>
“Whatever its new trappings and new slogans, tyranny is the oldest and most discredited rule known to history.” (Franklin D. Roosevelt, 1940)
“Because tonight the contest is the same that we have faced at every turning point in history. ... between those who have vision... and those who want only to maintain the status quo” (Lyndon B. Johnson)
“This dedication to idealism runs through America’s history.” (Richard Nixon, 1972)
“Throughout the whole history of this country, we have seen, time and time and time again, that when we are united we are unstoppable.” (William Clinton, 1992)
“You have shown what history teaches us – that at defining moments like this one, the change we need doesn’t come from Washington. Change comes to Washington.” (Barack Obama, 2008)
“That’s why ‘stronger together’ is not just a lesson from our history, it’s not just a slogan for our campaign, it’s a guiding principle for the country we’ve always been and the future we’re going to build, a country where the economy works for everyone, not just those at the top.” (Hillary Rodham Clinton, 2016)

TABLE 2 (Continued)

Modes of historizing the present and quotes from famous speeches
<i>Social movement speeches</i>
“History is repeating itself.” (Margaret Chase Smith, 1950)
“For thirty centuries history has been iterating and reiterating that, in a moral fight, woman is simply dauntless; and we all know, even with our eyes shut upon Congress and our voters, that, from the day that Adam ate of the apple and told on Eve, down to the present day, man, in a moral fight, has pretty uniformly shown himself to be an arrant coward.” (Mark Twain, 1873)
“The history of mankind is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations on the part of man toward woman, having in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over her.” (Elizabeth Cady Stanton, 1848)

directions for examining how these insights could be applied and studied in various substantive consumer domains.

Meaningfulness

Meaning refers to the interpretation and understanding of an object, an event, or an idea (Baumeister & Vohs, 2002). In consumers' lives, meaning making is a fundamental need that allows consumers to construe coherent narratives of events and experiences and establish a sense that the world is predictable and explainable, that challenges can be managed, and that aspirations can be achieved (Vohs et al., 2019). Consumers often ascribe symbolic meaning to products that remind them of past experiences or embody their goals and desires (Belk, 1988; Fournier, 1998), and they imbue products with meanings that represent social roles and norms (Avery & Keinan, 2015; Kleine III et al., 1993; Wooten, 2006).

Meaningfulness, according to Mead and Williams (2023), is the sense that one's life has significance, purpose, and connections beyond the present personal experience, either as an individual or as part of a group. Consumers consider their lives as meaningful when they feel that they matter in the world. Such feelings originate from activities that have implications beyond the self, such as helping others and praying (Baumeister et al., 2013). To fill life with purpose, consumers need a sense of mission, a prospect of growth, and intentions to achieve their objectives. Products can facilitate this sense of purpose and the pursuit of meaningful goals. For example, running gear may help with training for a marathon, and a savings account may facilitate buying a house. Finally, feeling connected to people, places, time, and ideas generates a sense of continuity and increases meaningfulness in one's life (Baumeister & Vohs, 2002; Eichinger et al., 2022).

To transcend beyond the present moment and place and connect with others, consumers can use products, services, and experiences such as dining in restaurants,



FIGURE 1 Examining the impact of historizing the present.

visiting national sites, and wearing college T-shirts. Consumers may find meaning even in the most mundane products (Wang et al., 2021). However, meaningfulness is reached only when all three components (significance, purpose, connections) are fulfilled. Therefore, it is no surprise that consumers tend to perceive experiential activities, such as celebrating a graduation or volunteering, to be purer sources of meaning than activities related to consumption, such as purchasing a class ring or shopping (Mead & Williams, 2022; Weingarten & Goodman, 2021). Consumers also prefer to savor meaningful experiences over pleasurable ones (Carter et al., 2023). This may be because meaningful experiences are more likely to facilitate connections with people, places, or processes. Nevertheless, even everyday products like cookies or dolls can be infused with sacred meaning and used in rituals because they are value-expressive for individuals or because they increase social cohesion and societal integration (Belk et al., 1989; Wang et al., 2021).

Historizing the present helps consumers situate current events within a larger historical framework and offers a sense of continuity beyond the present moment. It can put present events in a cultural context and highlight their societal impact, which may influence consumers' sense of significance and connection. By weaving current events into ongoing personal and collective narratives, historizing can give consumers a sense of purpose and direction and contribute to a sense of meaning (Nardini et al., 2021). In highlighting a historical context that is larger than any particular individual, moment, or location, historizing may empower consumers and help them see their role in shaping a future narrative. Finally, framing current events as part of historic collective narratives may increase consumers' connection to others with a shared fate. Indeed, meaningfulness increases interpersonal appeal (Stillman et al., 2011).

It would be interesting to examine how historizing the present can affect consumers' need to own products with symbolic meaning. It would also be interesting to explore the effect of historizing the present on consumers' cause contribution and leadership as well as the likelihood of converting bystanders to upstanders through the sense of meaning. Notably, complex

situations and events might relate to more than one narrative and create tension among different principles, which might create a values gap (Baumeister & Vohs, 2002) that, in turn, could lower the sense of meaning. Considering that most political, environmental, and social issues are multifaceted and complicated, future research should investigate how historizing the present can help consumers navigate these tensions by shaping their sense of meaning and subsequent behavior.

Undoubtedly, meaningfulness has a positive relationship with well-being. It increases people's sense of stability and fulfillment and can help consumers cope with stressful life events (Park & Baumeister, 2017). Pursuing meaning may lead consumers to invest their time where they see it matters the most. It would be interesting to examine the effect of historizing the present on consumers' prioritization of, commitment to, and investment in different life domains—including their interest in material purchases—through the pursuit of meaning (Goor et al., 2021). Historizing the present could increase consumers' brand involvement and loyalty at the same time as it bolsters their quest for societal change and collective action. Such action can enhance solidarity and belongingness, as discussed next.

Solidarity and belonging

Solidarity refers to unity and support among individuals or groups who share common goals, interests, or values. It involves standing together in times of need, expressing empathy and compassion for others, and working collectively to address shared challenges (for a full definition, see Chatzidakis et al., 2021). Sociologists and anthropologists have studied “external solidarity,” which refers to individuals' identification with groups other than their own; in contrast, consumer research has mostly focused on “internal solidarity”—that is, identification and relationships among members of the same group that bolster belonging and commitment to collective goals and action (Chatzidakis et al., 2021).

Internal solidarity keeps people united in different contexts, through communal life and

TABLE 3 Future directions for examining the impact of historicizing the present.

Modes of Historicizing and underlying psychological mechanisms	
Modes of historicizing	<p>Which modes of historicizing the present are more effective in impacting each of the psychological mechanisms (urgency, moral obligation, solidarity, scarcity, efficacy, meaningfulness)?</p> <p>How does the effectiveness of historicizing the present compare to other messages for mobilizing action?</p> <p>How do marketers choose which mode of historicizing to use?</p> <p>Which modes of historicizing are commonly used together?</p>
Underlying mechanisms	<p>Which of the psychological mechanisms are more effective in mobilizing action?</p> <p>What additional psychological processes (cognitive, affective, and motivational) are associated with historicizing the present?</p> <p>When does historicizing the present backfire and paradoxically create the opposite effect (helplessness rather than efficacy, polarization rather than solidarity, despair rather than hope)? What are intended and unintended consequences of historicizing the present?</p>
Moderators and boundary conditions	
Characteristics of the consumer	<p>How does historicizing the present impact different consumer segments? What individual differences influence and predict the response to historicizing the present?</p> <p>What modes of historicizing are most effective for different types of potential audiences (those who actively or passively support the cause, those who are involved or oppose it)?</p> <p>How do consumers' nostalgic tendencies and age shape their response to historicizing?</p> <p>What is the role of religiosity? Interdependence? Moral identity? Political ideology? Do liberals vs. conservatives vary in their response to different historicizing appeals?</p> <p>When historicizing relates to a brand or product, what is the role of product involvement and familiarity, brand loyalty, self-brand connection, and being part of the brand community?</p> <p>Is historicizing the present more appealing to innovators and early adopters compared with the late majority and laggards? Are market mavens more likely to respond to historicizing?</p> <p>How do need for uniqueness, time orientation, hyperopic (farsighted) tendencies, and psychological dispositions of optimism vs. pessimism impact response to historicizing?</p>
Characteristics of the context/cause	<p>Is historicizing the present more common and more effective for positive or negative events? For planned vs. unexpected and spontaneous events? For continuous vs. one-time occurrences? For a consensus vs. polarizing cause? For official institutionalized vs. grassroots activities? What is the role of the objective rarity and impact of the event?</p> <p>Do historicizing messages change over time, in early vs. late stages in the movement, cause, event, organization, or technological innovation?</p> <p>How does media coverage historicize the present? How is historicizing different when done to create news headlines and grab attention vs. to raise awareness for a cause?</p>

TABLE 3 (Continued)

Characteristics of the message	<p>Are the different modes of historicizing more effective in calls for omission vs. commission (i.e., a call to start or stop doing something; for example, "Stop using plastic" vs. "Start using sustainable materials")? Are they more effective in calls for fighting for change vs. resisting change?</p> <p>How does the source of a message impact the response to historicizing (i.e., internal vs. external objective outsider claiming the event is historic)? Which sources are more credible? Which media are more effective in communicating historicizing messages?</p>
Examining the behavioral consequences of historicizing the present in substantive consumer domains	
New product adoption	<p>What are the costs and benefits of historicizing the launch of new products? How can historicizing the present be effectively used in product launches to generate awareness and purchase interest? In which industries are historicizing new product introductions more prevalent and effective? Can historicizing the present generate awareness to the broader impact of new technologies on society? Are early adopters more responsive to historicizing messages? Can historicizing the present overcome or create resistance to new technologies?</p>
Experiential consumption	<p>Can historicizing the present increase consumers' interest in acquiring certain experiences? How does historicizing the present affect the way in which people participate in the experience? Does it increase interest in joint consumption? Does it impact the choice between experiential and material goods? Can historicizing the present impact the perceived value and willingness to pay for historicized experiences? Does it make the experiences seem more meaningful? Does it increase perceived scarcity? What type of experiences are historicized?</p>
Documenting behavior	<p>How does historicizing the present impact consumers' documenting behavior? Does it increase purchase interest in souvenirs? Which modes of historicizing are more effective in motivating documentation? How does historicizing impact the way in which consumers document the event (e.g., photo, video, collecting keepsakes)? Does historicizing affect the objective of documenting and disseminating the documentation (i.e., the intended audience and time frame for sharing it), and what aspects of the event are documented?</p>
Nostalgic consumption	<p>Does historicizing the present increase interest in nostalgic consumption and products related to past related historic events? Do historic events generate heightened nostalgia? How does historicizing current events impact positive and negative perceptions of the past in comparison to the present? Does it evoke specific past experiences? Are nostalgic consumers more likely to historicize the present and respond to historicizing messages?</p>
Prosocial behavior	<p>Which of the four modes of historicizing the present is more effective in inspiring prosocial acts? How does historicizing impact intentions to donate time vs. money, or make first time vs. sustained contributions? Does the source of historicizing matter (e.g., official vs. unofficial sources)? How does historicizing influence motives for donating (e.g., altruism, warm glow, gratitude, status and social recognition, or material gain)?</p>

TABLE 3 (Continued)

Sustainable consumption	Can historizing the present help overcome the attitude-behavior gap in sustainable consumption (translate intention into actions)? Does historizing make climate change a more concrete issue? Which mode of historizing can best call into attention the gravity of the “boiling frog syndrome” and create a heightened sense of urgency? Can focusing on specific extreme weather events and labeling them as historic generate more awareness?
Social movements and civic action	How have social movements employed the different modes of historizing the present to mobilize collective action? Are there consistencies vs. differences across various types of social movements? Is historizing the present more effective in mobilizing bystanders or upstanders who already participate in the movement? Which modes of historizing are more effective for communicating to those who support vs. oppose the cause?
Political ideology and consumption	Can historizing elections encourage people to vote? Which modes of historizing are more effective in inspiring political engagement? Do liberals and conservatives historize the present in different ways? Do they try to evoke different reactions and emotional responses? Are different political groups more likely to historize the present? How does historizing impact media consumption and interest in political news and debates?

experiences (Chatzidakis et al., 2021) and rituals (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). Candlelight vigils, sharing meals, organized runs or parades, wearing symbolic colors, or simple gestures like kneeling in support for BLM are examples of recurring activities or behaviors that consumers engage in together or individually to create a sense of unity or shared identity. Consumers often buy branded products and participate in ritualistic acts in order to belong to brand communities and sustain a sense of solidarity with the group (Belk & Tumbat, 2005; Bellezza & Keinan, 2014; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). Therefore, the feeling of “we”-ness is strong within brand communities: community members feel a connection to one another, even if they have never met, as they all share a link to something that is bigger and more important than themselves. This shared consciousness transcends geographic boundaries (Muniz Jr & O’Guinn, 2001).

When leaders and consumers historize the present, they contextualize contemporary challenges, experiences, and struggles within a broader historical framework, which can affect feelings of solidarity in several ways. Recognizing historical patterns and movements can create a sense of identification with past efforts to address societal issues. This shared identification can inspire individuals to unite in collective efforts to bring about positive change (Nardini et al., 2021). A historical perspective can also reveal the long-standing commitment of certain groups to social causes, which can mobilize trust, collaboration, and action. Moreover, envisioning how current actions will affect history can increase a sense of shared destiny and thus increase solidarity and a sense of belonging. Some forms of participation may be more passive, as discussed next.

Scarcity and rarity

Scarcity is the state of being in short supply. In marketing research, scarcity is defined as a subjective sense of having more needs than available resources (Mullainathan & Shafir, 2013; Roux et al., 2015). Consumer researchers have examined the impact of both objective and perceived scarcity across different resources and domains, including constraints in financial resources, food, products, and time (Bellezza et al., 2017; Blocker et al., 2022; Briers et al., 2006; Fernbach et al., 2015; Hamilton et al., 2019; Hill, 2008; Inman et al., 1997; Nelson & Morrison, 2005; Shah et al., 2012; Sharma & Alter, 2012; Zhu & Ratner, 2015). Resource scarcity focuses consumers’ attention on the focal resource and boosts its perceived value (Shah et al., 2015; Spiller, 2011), and it can bolster various consumer behaviors, such as interest in a wider range of marketing offers (Fan et al., 2019) as well as more creative use of products (Mehta & Zhu, 2016).

Framing present events as historic, rare, and unique may compel individuals to participate in and contribute to these once in a lifetime special happenings. Such extraordinary and memorable occurrences may be perceived as “collectable experiences” that people can add to their “experiential checklist” or “experiential CV” (Bhattacharjee & Mogilner, 2014; Keinan et al., 2019; Keinan & Kivetz, 2011). By increasing a sense of scarcity, historizing the present may create a fear of missing out (FOMO). When an event seems scarce, rare, or unique (e.g., a historic all-time record-breaking sporting event, such as the Olympics or the World Cup finals, a natural event such as an eclipse or a meteor shower, an important announcement such as a historic election result), consumers may feel compelled to be there when it happens, to be part of the event, experience it in real time, or watch it live on TV (Vosgerau et al., 2006), and will likely remember where they were when it happened or when they heard about it. A sense of scarcity may motivate a desire not only to attend the experience and be part of it, but also to document it with videos, photos, or souvenirs. Historizing the event by referring to it as “a historic precedent/a historic first,” “never before in history,” or asking “What will you tell your children? Where were you on this day?” increases perceptions of scarcity and rarity. Marketers use such expressions to sell event tickets, souvenirs, and keepsakes and to motivate TV viewing and news coverage. Historic media events are often positive or neutral (e.g., royal weddings and coronations, the first moon landing), but may also be associated with negative events (e.g., funerals of political figures, a press conference following tragic events). Even when historic events are devastating, consumers may try to find ways to document and commemorate them and consider how they want these events to be remembered in the future (Marcoux, 2017). Moreover, while media events merely offer consumers opportunities to participate as

spectators, other historic occurrences may allow or require more active participation and immediate attention.

Sense of urgency

A sense of urgency refers to a state of heightened focus and motivation characterized by a proactive approach to addressing challenges and pursuing opportunities. Urgency increases awareness of the existence and impact of a current issue, and it involves recognizing the importance of acting promptly to address a problem, seize an opportunity, or prevent negative outcomes. The recognition that a situation requires immediate attention is linked to the perception of time sensitivity and a need to act decisively. Urgency ignites the motivation required for change because without it, consumers may be complacent, believing that things are fine as they are and accepting the status quo (Kotter, 1996).

An extreme event can heighten consumers' concerns about the issue at hand and their perceptions that the event is personally relevant. Direct or authoritative calls for action, such as “climate change now,” can then increase consumers' sense of urgency to act as climate upstanders (Lteif et al., 2024). Similarly, the act of characterizing and interpreting current events and circumstances in a historical context can dramatize and make the events seem more critical and consequential, thus eliciting a sense of urgency. Historizing the present through comparison to and allegories of past historic events, or by the mere idea that history is in the making, can draw attention to the severity of present-day challenges. Examining how societies responded to past emergencies—or considering how they might react to recent events—in a suboptimal manner may prompt individuals to realize the gravity of the current situation and feel a sense of urgency to address it effectively. The thought of a potential disaster can lead consumers to prepare for it in order to minimize potential damage; for example, by stockpiling food (Humphreys & Thompson, 2014). Moreover, situational urgency is one of the key factors influencing consumer preferences in prosocial contexts (Forgas & Cromer, 2004).

It is important to study and understand both the desirable and undesirable effects of creating a sense of urgency through historizing the present. For example, the tendency to catastrophize can increase feelings of pain and depression (Turner et al., 2000). Moreover, viewing the present from a historical perspective may elicit fear, existential threat, and concerns about mortality (Arndt et al., 2004). Although precarious situations that elicit a sense of urgency may increase the need to protect oneself and avoid further personal risk, recent research demonstrates that consumers may be more likely to make altruistic choices for others in urgent situations compared to non-urgent situations (Liu et al., 2023).

It would be interesting to examine how the use of different communication modalities to historize the present, such as visual vs. verbal means of communications (Amit et al., 2009, 2013), or text messages vs. email, can affect the sense of urgency (Kaju & Maglio, 2018). Short messages on social media and WhatsApp groups may convey more urgency than blog articles and opinion columns. Furthermore, consumers may extrapolate from temporal closeness to other dimensions of closeness. For instance, messages on X (Twitter) may push consumers to act because they feel not only the need to do so immediately but also to gain greater social closeness to others. Finding ways to create a sense of urgency among consumers is relevant to many social issues and consumption contexts. For example, in the context of raising awareness of global warming and the environmental consequences of human activity, the task of bolstering a sense of urgency is particularly challenging and crucial (Lteif et al., 2024), and so is elevating consumers' moral obligation, as discussed next.

Moral obligation

Moral obligation encompasses a sense of inherent duty to act rightly, which is driven by one's conscience, rather than solely by contractual obligations or social rules. It generates a sense of personal responsibility to act in accordance with what is ethical, even in the absence of a legal mandate (Nelson et al., 2006; Zimmerman, 1996). Moral obligation is often considered to be a stable trait that is part of one's moral identity (Aquino & Reed II., 2002; Hart, 2015; Singer, 1981). It therefore shapes one's self-concept, motivations, and emotional systems (Hardy & Carlo, 2005; Oyserman, 2007). A personal sense of moral obligation strongly impacts consumer decision making and can predict behavior better than social norms (Gorsuch & Ortberg, 1983; Jennings et al., 2015). However, research shows that moral obligation can vary by context, such as across cultural environments (Miller, 2001) and marketing appeals (Nelson et al., 2006). Indeed, emotional guidelines and situational feedback can generate feelings of anger, guilt, pride, and decoupling, influencing consumers' moral judgments and decisions (Amit & Greene, 2012; Bhattacharjee et al., 2013; Nardini et al., 2021; Paharia, 2020; Steg & Vlek, 2009; Tausch et al., 2011). These emotions, especially future-oriented emotions such as anger and hope, can motivate consumers to act (White et al., 2019; Włodarczyk et al., 2017).

Notably, moral obligation encourages consumers to act to benefit the social good in various domains. For example, it predicts charitable giving (Moore et al., 1985), donating blood (Pomazal & Jaccard, 1976; Zuckerman & Reis, 1978), sustainable consumption (Steg & Vlek, 2009), and paying taxes (Gorsuch & Ortberg, 1983). Consumer research shows that moral responsibility also plays an important role in brand communities. The feeling of moral

obligation contributes to group cohesion, and in times of threat to the brand community, it is the driving force behind collective action (Muniz Jr & O'Guinn, 2001).

To make moral decisions, consumers must evaluate an action and its potential outcomes based on historical references and context. Historizing the present amplifies the meaning of current actions and may work both by stressing the impact of the present on the future and by using historical references to past events. Thus, historizing the present equips consumers with the wisdom of the *past* while highlighting the need to take action in the present. Variations of the famous saying “history repeats itself,” originally attributed to the 19th-century philosopher Georg Wilhelm Frederick Hegel, have been used by many philosophers and politicians, including Winston Churchill, Karl Marx, and George Santayana, not only to allude to recurring patterns in society but also to argue that historical references are essential for the development of society, and that if we do not remember past events and act based on acquired insights, tragedies will reoccur (e.g., “History repeats itself, first as tragedy, second as farce” (Karl Marx, 1852)).

Historizing the present may also invoke a sense of moral obligation by evoking the *future* through legacy concerns. For example, consumers supporting animal rights may be motivated to leave a positive legacy and a better world for future generations (Beers, 2006). Similarly, legacy considerations can increase eco-friendly consumption, as those reflecting on their legacy are more likely to choose sustainable options and engage in ethical consumption (Zaval et al., 2015). Thus, historizing the present can induce a sense of moral obligation through either past- or future-oriented appeals, adding to the power and versatility of this mechanism.

Efficacy and empowerment

Efficacy refers to one's ability or capacity to produce an intended effect (Bandura, 1977). Self-efficacy (i.e., the belief that one's action will result in the intended impact) is crucial for motivating individuals and groups to take initiative, set ambitious goals, persist in the face of challenges, and engage in purposeful endeavors. Consumers are more motivated to act when they believe they have the skills and abilities to make a difference (Armitage & Conner, 2001; Paharia & Swaminathan, 2019; White et al., 2011, 2019). For example, consumers are likely to choose eco-friendly products or adopt challenging sustainable behaviors when they believe their behavior will have an impact on society (Lteif et al., 2024; Peattie, 2001). In the sociopolitical context, political efficacy (i.e., perceived ability to influence the political environment through action) predicts social activism among consumers and advocacy groups (Velasquez & LaRose, 2015).

Consumer research shows that self-efficacy is associated with hope, power, and risk-taking, and the ability to

envision a path to the desired goal, and that it can predict collective action for the greater good (Anderson & Galinsky, 2006; Magaletta & Oliver, 1999; Włodarczyk et al., 2017). For example, women prefer products made by other women because they hold stronger action efficacy beliefs than men that their purchase choices can facilitate gender equality in business (Schnurr & Halkias, 2023). If efficacy is perceived to be low, even motivated consumers will not take action (Tausch et al., 2011). These insights stress the importance of perceived efficacy among individuals and groups and its impact on mobilizing consumers for action.

The term “collective efficacy” refers to a group's common belief in its ability to work together effectively and achieve specific outcomes. Collective efficacy fosters a sense of shared responsibility and empowerment, mobilizing people to collaborate toward common goals (Chen & Bliese, 2002). According to White et al. (2019), the perception of collective efficacy, together with messages communicating others' behaviors (collective action), are particularly effective in motivating consumers to engage in sustainable actions.

Historizing the present can bolster feelings of collective efficacy in several ways. First, by highlighting past successful collective efforts, historizing the present can show that collective action can lead to meaningful change. Knowing that others have made a difference in the past can boost individuals' and groups' confidence in their ability to bring about change in the present. Moreover, by comparing current and past consumer movements, individuals can identify patterns, strategies, and tactics that were effective in driving positive outcomes. In this way, historizing the present can empower consumers and counter feelings of helplessness. Furthermore, it may help consumers see how far certain social and environmental issues have come over time and envision how current events may impact the future. Recognizing progress can, in turn, motivate consumers to continue the momentum and reinforce the notion that their actions are part of the collective effort and that every contribution matters.

Next, we discuss how historizing the present and the psychological mechanisms it evokes can impact subsequent consumer behavior in diverse substantive domains. This discussion highlights opportunities for future research with implications for both consumers and marketers. In the general discussion, we explore the broader societal implications of this phenomenon.

BEHAVIORAL CONSEQUENCES OF HISTORIZING THE PRESENT AND IMPLICATIONS FOR SUBSTANTIVE DOMAINS WITHIN CONSUMER RESEARCH

The phenomenon of historizing the present lends itself to multiple domains within consumer research, including

new product adoption and diffusion of innovations, experiential consumption, documenting behaviors such as buying souvenirs and taking photos, nostalgic consumption, prosocial behaviors, sustainable consumption, civic action, and political consumption. Next, we discuss how historicizing the present adds a timely and novel perspective for studying each of these phenomena and opens the door to new research directions. [Table 3](#) lists promising questions for future research within each of these substantive domains.

New product adoption

Every year, around 30,000 new products make their debut in the marketplace, yet a staggering 95% fail and 92% of startups fold in the first 3 years of operation (Piloto, 2021). Research has documented many challenges in marketing new products. Adopting new products requires behavioral change, which can be difficult because consumers incur financial, social, and psychological risk and switching costs, and tend to see greater benefits in the products they own than in new, unfamiliar products (Fisher & Price, 1992; Rogers, 2003).

The four modes of historicizing the present can help address these challenges and generate interest in new products. They might do this, for example, by providing a broader perspective on innovation through lessons from the past and future impact on history or by stressing the historic significance of new products. These messages can be communicated in product launches by highlighting how a new product represents a unique moment that will be remembered and have a strong impact. Historicizing new technologies is often aimed not only at generating purchase interest but also awareness of these technologies' impact on society (e.g., "AI is going to be the most significant development of human history," Sam Altman, CEO of OpenAI; "ChatGPT isn't just a seminal moment in AI history; it's a seminal moment in human history," Bhavin Shah, CEO of Moveworks). Interestingly, considering current events in a historical context may create a collective mindset that can elicit cultural or social germination: developing new ideas, innovative thinking, and novel initiatives (Lteif et al., 2024).

Moreover, new product adoption hinges on products' complexity, visibility, and user compatibility (Gourville, 2006). By viewing product launch through a historical lens, new products could be: (1) more easily understood, lowering perceived usage complexity; (2) linked to events that are part of consumers' social identity and values, increasing perceived product-consumer compatibility; and (3) linked to visions of a potential future, bolstering the product's perceived societal impact and visibility, which may ultimately increase the speed of adoption.

Future research can examine the effect of historicizing the present on different consumer segments—from

innovators and early adopters to late majority and laggards (Moore & McKenna, 1999). While innovators are more receptive to new technologies, late adopters might look for more evidence of product benefits. Thus, comparing innovative products to past products from a historical perspective and stressing the potential impact of new products may cast new products to late adopters as less risky and highlight the adoption benefits over losses. Similarly, historicizing the present might be effective for interdependent (vs. independent) consumers, who are less likely to adopt radical (vs. incremental) innovation (Ma et al., 2014) but may respond more to messages invoking collective memory and social identity due to a collaborative mindset.

Finally, historicizing the present by drawing parallels between the present and relevant past events can serve as a simulation tool for predicting cultural inertia versus evolution. By studying historical development and adoption of disruptive technologies through different stages (e.g., Golder et al., 2009), analysts can learn about shifts in societal norms and devise strategies to mitigate resistance to change. This can help innovators and organizations manage change and disruption in different audiences.

Experiential consumption

Experiential consumption entails consumer involvement in events and activities in order to acquire life experiences (Van Boven & Gilovich, 2003). Prior research suggests that experiential consumption generates greater happiness and well-being outcomes than consumption of material goods because it is better integrated into consumer identity, enhances social relationships, and lowers social comparisons. These outcomes and mechanisms are achieved not only through actual consumption, but also through recall of past events or consideration of future experiences (Gilovich et al., 2015).

Given the benefits of and growing demand for experiences, it is important to study the antecedents of experiential consumption and to devise strategies for designing positive consumption experiences. Historicizing the present can play a role in shaping consumer interest in experiential consumption. Stressing the rarity and uniqueness of current events can increase demand for experiences by boosting events' experiential value, positive emotions, and desire to collect unique experiences (Keinan & Kivetz, 2008, 2011). Future research may examine how a sense of scarcity induced by historicizing the present may affect preference for material goods versus ephemeral experiences (Tully et al., 2015).

Comparing present events to historic counterparts can contextualize cultural practices and traditions that would enhance the meaning and appreciation of current events. The cultural thread can weave similarities into the social narrative, commemorating historical moments

and stressing cultural legacy. Furthermore, knowledge of historical practices can inspire consumers to seek authentic and traditional forms of experiential consumption. This might involve engaging in activities that were valued across generations and preserving their integrity.

Notably, by recognizing a significant impact of current events on the future, historizing the present can increase a sense of collective meaning and meaningfulness, social identity, and solidarity, which comprise essential elements of experiential consumption and enrich collective experiences. Finally, the historic context may shape consumers' temporal perspective taking. Future research can examine how historizing the present influences hyperopic (farsighted) versus myopic perspectives and, in turn, self-control and preferences for experiences (Kivetz & Keinan, 2006).

Documenting behavior

Consumer research on the documentation of events and experiences has focused on the documentation of personal experiences such as vacations, celebrations, milestones, and funerals (Barasch et al., 2017; Diehl et al., 2016; Gentry et al., 1995; Zauberman et al., 2009). For example, researchers study how photographing hedonic experiences shapes enjoyment (Barasch et al., 2018; Nardini et al., 2019).

Little work has examined documentation of collective events from a personal perspective (DeBerry-Spence & Torres, 2022). Yet, documentation of historic events is increasingly common. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the marketplace saw soaring demand for both high-tech and traditional low-tech tools that enable documentation, including diaries, guides, and books for journaling (Whitney, 2005), and Zoom workshops for creative journaling (Phadke, 2020).

In addition to documenting their own experiences of collective events, individuals also consume various forms of documentation created by others. For example, the COVID-19 pandemic generated a growing interest in documentaries, movies, books, and famous diaries that feature others' personal stories and accounts of past events such as the Great Plague of London (1665–1666) and the 1918–1920 Great Influenza epidemic (Smith, 2020; Yan, 2020).

These behaviors are important to study not only because of their growing prevalence but also because of their societal impact. Consumer documentation of personal and historic events, as well as the dissemination and consumption of this documentation, shape collective memory and narratives and influence the course of present and future events, policies, and social movements. In 2020, the footage of George Floyd's murder posted on social media sparked one of the largest protest movements in U.S. history. In 2022, the ubiquity of smartphones

gave unprecedented access to video accounts of the war in Ukraine, shaping public opinion (Johnson, 2022).

Historizing the present can impact how collective current experiences are documented by consumers. Realizing the uniqueness and collective impact of current events may motivate consumers to document. Past documentation may focus consumers on what aspects of events to document and how. Historizing the present can also inspire documentation through collecting and buying souvenirs and memorabilia (Atasoy & Morewedge, 2018; Brunk et al., 2018; Marcoux, 2017), keeping sentimental possessions (Winterich et al., 2023), as well as taking photos that illustrate one's personal, authentic perspective (Barasch et al., 2017) and other forms of memorialization (Anderson & Hamilton, 2023; Robinson et al., 2022). Furthermore, it can offer consumers a means of building archival records that can impact collective narratives and future change.

Nostalgic consumption

Consumer research has examined nostalgic consumption, involving collecting and consuming products, artifacts, and paraphernalia associated with the past (Holbrook, 1993). Examples include vinyl records, cars, books, pens, perfume, television programs, food, clothes, watches, jewelry, furniture, toys, memorabilia, photographs, and family heirlooms (Beverland et al., 2021; Brown et al., 2003; Brunk et al., 2018; Curasi et al., 2004; Grayson & Shulman, 2000; Huang & Fishbach, 2021; Loveland et al., 2010; Marcoux, 2017; Price et al., 2000; Sarial-Abi et al., 2017; Sturken, 2007; Türe & Ger, 2016). Certain events may increase consumers' nostalgic feelings. For example, the COVID-19 pandemic generated heightened nostalgia (Xia et al., 2021; Yeung, 2020).

Since nostalgia is associated with juxtaposing the past with certain features of our present lives (Davis, 2011), historizing the present is relevant for nostalgic consumption. In particular, comparing the present to similar historic events can encourage the consumption of products associated with those events. Thus, products that leverage nostalgia could use historizing to emphasize the historical significance of past and present events associated with their offerings. The four modes of historizing we identified can be further used to appreciate the historical significance of past events; for example, they could be employed by museums and other organizations that wish to preserve and commemorate these events. It would be interesting to study which modes are more likely to encourage the commemoration, interest, and nostalgic consumption of products associated with historic events. It would be similarly interesting to understand how individuals' nostalgic tendencies shape their response to the historizing of present events.

Moreover, by reminding consumers of past experiences, nostalgia not only connects them to the past but also facilitates future narratives and enables them to better cope with existential threats. Nostalgic consumption can therefore have psychological benefits, such as enhanced self-worth and self-continuity (i.e., perceived connection between one's past and present selves), increased life meaning, improved social connectedness, and reduced loneliness (Routledge et al., 2011; Sedikides et al., 2008; Vess et al., 2012; Wildschut et al., 2006; Zhou et al., 2008). Thus, historicizing the present, by giving rise to nostalgic feelings, may contribute to positive well-being outcomes.

Notably, besides past-oriented nostalgia, consumers may anticipate feeling nostalgic in the future and proactively document events and collect artifacts related to present experiences they would like to commemorate. Thus, historicizing the present could potentially contribute to the future-oriented production (not just past-oriented consumption) of nostalgia.

Prosocial behavior

Consumers' prosocial behavior is directed toward benefiting others in need and includes acts such as helping, volunteering, cooperating, sharing, donating, purchasing ethical products, and abiding by social norms like paying taxes (for a review, see Labroo et al., 2023). Mobilizing consumers to act prosocially can be challenging due to psychological and social barriers such as the empathy gap and diffusion of responsibility (Batson et al., 2002; Latané & Darley, 1970; Rathje et al., 2021).

Examining the effect of historicizing the present on prosocial behavior would answer recent calls for considering an intersocial perspective (which considers interactions among people, entities, and societies) when studying prosocial behavior. Prosocial behavior is often required during events of historical significance (e.g., donating blood, clothes, and other resources to the victims of natural disasters). Historicizing such ongoing events can increase a sense of moral obligation, urgency, and solidarity. It would be interesting to examine which of the four modes of historicizing the present might be more effective for inspiring prosocial acts, and for which types of affected groups and audiences. For example, is it more effective to emphasize the uniqueness of an event or to draw parallels to relevant past events, and are some forms of historicizing more effective for encouraging people to donate time versus money or to make first time versus sustained contributions? Additionally, the source of historicizing might matter. Future research can compare the effectiveness of historicizing by official versus unofficial sources.

Furthermore, extant work identifies individual characteristics that correlate with prosociality, such as agreeableness (Graziano & Eisenberg, 1997), self-monitoring

(White & Peloza, 2009), gender identity (Winterich et al., 2009), religiosity (Stavrova & Siegers, 2014), social class (Piff et al., 2010), interdependence (Allen, 2018), psychological entitlement (Campbell et al., 2004; Goor et al., 2020) and moral identity (Winterich et al., 2013). To the extent that historicizing the present taps into consumers' sense of moral obligation, solidarity, and shared faith, it may differentially impact these various consumer segments.

Prosocial behavior is also influenced by distinct motives, including altruism (i.e., purely benefiting the cause), emotional reward and regulation (i.e., feelings of "warm glow," empathy, love, or gratitude), reputation (i.e., receiving social recognition), and material gain (e.g., receiving tax benefits for donation), as well as by social norms (Barasch et al., 2014; Berman et al., 2015; Cavanaugh et al., 2015; Khan et al., 2020). Choice defaults and simple nudges can also influence prosocial behavior (Banker et al., 2022; Goswami & Urminsky, 2016; Johnson & Goldstein, 2003). Historicizing the present could be tailored to invoke some of these factors (e.g., by highlighting how past generations overcame similar struggles to create a social norm). Notably, perceived efficacy, which may be bolstered by historicizing, increases prosocial behavior. For example, highlighting a single victim (vs. a group) increases donations to a cause because it bolsters the perceived impact and reduces the perceived cost of helping (Jenni & Loewenstein, 1997). It would be interesting to examine the impact of historicizing the present by highlighting certain (individual) stories of historical characters on mobilizing prosocial behavior.

Sustainable consumption

Historicizing the present could also impact sustainable and socially responsible consumption. While many consumers agree that it is important to protect the environment and natural resources, intentions to do so do not always translate to behavior (Fennis et al., 2011; Keinan et al., 2020). Thus, a major challenge in encouraging sustainable and green consumption is addressing the attitude-behavior gap (White et al., 2019). This is partly because consumers may not consider sustainable behavior to be urgent (Trudel, 2018) or their individual actions to be impactful (Tausch et al., 2011). Global warming is an abstract and long-term phenomenon that requires sustained action. According to Lteif et al. (2024), the mindset behind collective climate action includes gathering, groundswell of support and collective efficacy, germinating ideas and initiatives, gluing grassroots initiatives through trust, and galvanizing collective efforts into actions. Historicizing the present might tackle environmental challenges by raising the sense of urgency, solidarity, and moral obligation needed to mobilize consumers to engage in community-based climate action. Environmental movements can use historicizing language

to emphasize collective motives, ethical importance, and future impact. For example, climate activists highlight humanity's collective fate and urgency of action by situating environmental issues in historical perspective and proclaiming that this is “one of the biggest crises humanity has faced” and that this is a pivotal moment in history to address it. Historizing the present can also call into attention the gravity of the “boiling frog syndrome” by comparing global warming to historic measures that developed gradually into dramatic outcomes. In contrast to causes that involve clear, concrete, short-term threats and solutions, the longer-horizon nature of climate change means that environmental organizations may need to work harder to motivate immediate action. Further, since sustainable outcomes require action on a very large scale, historizing and highlighting collective efficacy may be particularly helpful. It would also be interesting to study whether focusing on specific facts or events (e.g., record-high temperature or rainfall) and framing them as historic would be more effective than discussing climate change in broader terms. It would be important as well to study how historizing the present can mobilize action in contexts in which consumers feel overwhelmed, powerless, and uncertain, as is often the case with climate change. Finally, it would be interesting to identify the types of consumers who may be more affected by historizing appeals that invoke future generations and legacy concerns, and when such appeals might backfire and lead to apathy, skepticism, or denial.

Social movements and civic action

Consumer researchers are recognizing the importance of studying social movements and how nonprofit organizations promote engagement and participation in civic action (Lteif et al., 2024; Nardini et al., 2021). One of the greatest challenges of social movements, and a key to their success, is mobilizing consumers to participate in collective action—empowering people to rise together and turning them from bystanders to upstanders (Chenoweth, 2021; Chenoweth & Stephan, 2011; Nardini et al., 2021). Future research can examine how historizing the present impacts different consumer segments as well as different types of social movements. Consumers and potential audiences of social movements could be segmented based on the extent of their support for the cause. For example, the climate justice group 350.org segments its “spectrum of allies” into active supporters, passive supporters, those who are neutral or uninvolved, passive opponents, and active opponents (<https://trainings.350.org/?resource=spectrum-of-allies>; Chenoweth, 2021). Converting passive supporters into active advocates (e.g., by saying, “let's make history together”) may require different modes of historizing the present than encouraging passive and active opponents to defect or keeping passive opponents neutral (e.g., by saying, “history will

judge you” or “what side of history will you be on?”). The effectiveness of historizing messages may also depend on the social cause. Touraine (1985) offers a typology of a variety of social movements, including the pursuit of collective interest; reconstruction of a social, cultural, or political identity; defense of status or privileges; social control of the main cultural patterns; creation of a new order; and national conflicts. It would be interesting to examine how historizing the present manifests in different types of movements, to identify the consistencies versus differences across the various types of social movements, and more broadly to examine how social movements may effectively employ the different modes of historizing the present to mobilize collective action.

Political ideology and consumption

There is a growing interest in consumer research on the impact of political ideology on consumption behavior. Historizing the present may intersect with consumers' political actions and political ideology in interesting ways. First, historizing is often used by political leaders to mobilize voting and campaign support (Table 2), and different modes of historizing could be more effective in inspiring political action and activism in the audience. For instance, the analysis of presidential nominees' speeches reveals that echoing the past is more popular than other modes of historizing. Yet, it is unclear if this mode is more effective than others in inspiring the audience to act. Distinct modes of historizing might also have diverging appeal as a function of audience political ideology. For instance, liberals are more open to change (Jost, 2009; Jost et al., 2008), whereas conservatives are more receptive to nostalgic appeals that paint the past in a positive light (Kenny, 2017; Lammers & Baldwin, 2018). Thus, liberals (vs. conservatives) may be more influenced by historizing appeals that focus on future impact (vs. appeals that make references to past relevant events).

Historizing the present may also interact with consumers' political ideologies to inspire nonpolitical action. For example, companies often appeal to consumers' political beliefs and values by taking a political stance to bolster sales and attract or retain customers (Bhagwat et al., 2020; Hydock et al., 2020). It will be interesting to examine how historizing on the part of firms might impact consumer purchases differently depending on the type of issue (e.g., sociocultural such as same-sex marriage vs. economic such as minimum wage), company stance (e.g., official statement vs. contribution or donation vs. ad campaign), spokespeople and partners (e.g., celebrities, social activists, political candidates, nonprofits). The framing of historizing attempts may also matter because of the distinct moral values that liberals and conservatives prioritize (Haidt & Graham, 2007). For instance, liberals may respond more to historizing appeals that highlight individual

harm and protection due to their individualizing moral values, whereas conservatives may respond more to historicizing that highlights duty, group interests, and loyalty due to their binding moral values (Fernandes, 2020; Kidwell et al., 2013).

Finally, firms' historicizing appeals in nonpolitical initiatives or campaigns (e.g., product introductions, unique collaborations, and deals) may fare differently in liberal and conservative segments. On the one hand, liberal consumers may be more susceptible to historicizing that frames the present as being unique, owing to their stronger desire to differentiate horizontally through the expression of unique personal characteristics (Ordabayeva & Fernandes, 2018). On the other hand, conservatives may be more amenable to firms' historicizing attempts across contexts, due to their stronger support for the free-market system and market actors in general (Jost et al., 2003).

In sum, historicizing the present can be used by a broad set of actors to impact behavior across a wide range of consumer-relevant domains. In Table 3, we propose directions for future research to further unpack the modes of historicizing the present, its underlying mechanisms, behavioral consequences, and boundary conditions related to the consumer, context, and message characteristics.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Boundary-breaking consumer research considers the broad impact of the studied phenomenon on various stakeholders, including academics, consumers, practitioners, policymakers, educators, media, and society (Davis et al., 2016; Hill, 1995; MacInnis et al., 2020). Examining the phenomenon of historicizing the present and its implications enhances our understanding of the psychological processes that mobilize consumers' individual and collective action in diverse consumption domains, such as sustainable consumption, experiential consumption, and new product adoption. Emphasizing the historical significance of ongoing events and treating the present from the perspective of history can help organizations and marketers empower and inspire consumers and create a sense of purpose, efficacy, solidarity, urgency, scarcity, and moral obligation. Moreover, this paper answers a recent call to broaden consumer research on individual behavior to include the collective actions of consumers standing together in a community (Lteif et al., 2024). We explore how historicizing the present may promote both individual behavior and collective coordinated behavior of individuals in groups. We conclude with a discussion of the implications of historicizing the present for: (1) society and consumer well-being, (2) interdisciplinary research, and (3) the consumption of mass media and education.

Implications of historicizing the present for society and consumer well-being

Our conceptualization seeks to advance the literature on transformative consumer research (Block et al., 2022; Bublitz et al., 2016, 2019, 2023; Chatzidakis et al., 2021; Cross & Dellande, 2023; Davis et al., 2016; Gollnhofer et al., 2019; Hill, 1995; Kozinets & Handelman, 2004; Lteif et al., 2024; Nardini et al., 2021, 2022; Nøjgaard, 2023; Spielmann et al., 2023) by examining not only how historicizing the present impacts consumption but also how it impacts society and consumer well-being.

Historicizing the present can raise historical consciousness and draw consumers' attention and awareness to overlooked societal issues and problems. For example, awareness of historical power imbalance and discrimination can increase consumers' sensitivity to matters such as cultural appropriation and structural racism (Lin et al., 2023). However, a broader historical perspective and considerations of how current events relate to the past and the future create a contrast with the popular present-focused wellness and mindfulness trends. Mindfulness practices encourage consumers to “be in the present” (i.e., focus on the here and now rather than dwell on the past or worry about the future). The wellness movement has been criticized for distracting consumers from political discourse by focusing on positivity, self-care, and present orientation at the expense of dealing with social problems. Critics of positive psychology argue that the practice of positive thinking requires deliberate self-deception and repressing or blocking out of unpleasant possibilities and negative thoughts (Ehrenreich, 2009). This can lead to, among other things, optimistic bias and dismissal of disturbing news, and ultimately can undermine preparedness (Cerulo, 2019).

Thus, a key challenge for social movement leaders who historicize the present is doing so in a way that instills hope, empowerment, and optimism but still raises awareness of social problems as well as the adversaries, obstacles, and effort involved in addressing these problems. According to Ehrenreich (2009, p. 206), “the threats we face are real and can be vanquished only by shaking off self-absorption and taking action in the world,” and while we may not always succeed, “we can have a good time trying.” For example, consistent with this duality, nonprofit organizations may try to both raise awareness of a cause and create positive uplifting fundraising occasions that include family-friendly experiences and events, music, food, live performances, and camaraderie.

Moreover, the notion of self-care is particularly interesting to study in the context of social movements and historical consciousness (Ratner et al., 2023). While this term is often associated with justifying selfish behavior and disregarding others' suffering, the practice of self-care was popularized in the context of social activism in the 1960s and '70s. It is rooted in the work of Black

women of the Black Power movement to counter activists' burnout and to encourage self-care. As Angela Davis (2018) explained, practicing radical self-care “means we're able to bring our entire selves into the movement.” With the rise of the women's rights and civil rights movements, this medical idea of self-care became political (Harris, 2017).

Future research can further examine the positive implications of historizing the present for consumer well-being and explore how they can be leveraged in various contexts to benefit consumers and society. Such well-being implications may include a sense that one's life has significance, connecting with others through shared fate, making sense and coping with present events, fostering resilience, optimism, self-transcendence, and self-actualization, and having a better and more informed understanding of present events and the complex world we live in.

Implications for interdisciplinary consumer research

Recently, there has been a push to promote interdisciplinary scholarship and diversity of ideas, methods, and populations studied in consumer research (Block et al., 2021). Our research agenda addresses these calls by identifying a phenomenon that has a major impact on consumers as well as the society at large. Historizing the present is not only a timely topic but also a timeless one, spanning generations and cultures, as we identify many parallels in historizing the present across geographies and time periods.

Studying this phenomenon can generate novel research that spans different research traditions, units of analysis (individuals and groups), decision contexts, time frames, and consumer roles. Consistent with recent calls for boundary-breaking consumer research, our proposed research agenda expands beyond implicit boundaries and is embedded in local and global political, social, cultural, and legal systems (MacInnis et al., 2020).

Another approach to producing boundary-breaking research is shattering methodological boundaries. Our research offers numerous methodological opportunities, as the study of historizing the present lends itself to a variety of quantitative and qualitative approaches and research paradigms using diverse primary and secondary source materials. We illustrate the phenomenon using databases and collections of public speeches by political figures and social movement leaders. This suggests that, in addition to traditional experiments and surveys studying the impact of historizing the present, researchers could analyze nonprofits' calls for action and marketing communications, public speeches, protest signs, artifacts, videos and photos posted on social media, media coverage, real-time and retrospective interviews, usage of art and stories (Avery

et al., 2010; Bublitz et al., 2016, 2019), online reactions to political advertising and debates (Hill, 1989; Lovett & Shachar, 2011), content analyses of secondary data and institutional archives, historical documents, and constant comparative methods (Hill & Hirschman, 1996). Scholars could build on such methods and integrate different accounts to paint a fuller picture of the phenomenon. Exploring historizing the present in various substantive domains can meaningfully integrate and advance distinct traditions within consumer research.

Implications for the consumption of mass media and education

Mass media often historizes the present for the purpose of grabbing viewers and readers' attention by using news headlines such as “for the first time in history,” “historic victory/loss,” “historic all-time record,” and “a historic day.” Beyond making consumers tune in, media coverage that historizes the present can serve a broader purpose of raising historical consciousness and awareness of important social issues (McCombs & Shaw, 1993; McQuail, 2010). For example, the “Made by History” section in the *Washington Post* is edited by a team of professional historians who argue that “in order to make history, we first have to understand how history has made us,” paraphrasing Martin Luther King, Jr. (the original quote was: “Instead of making history, we are made by history,” 1954). This section offers historical analyses to “situate the events making headlines in their larger historical context,” including highlighting “parallels between the past and present” (Rosenwald et al., 2021).

Historizing the present may be particularly important for creating awareness among younger generations, who are considered by some to be chronically myopic and lacking adequate historical knowledge (Goldberg, 2023). Over the last decade, historians and educators have been raising concerns about the alarming decline of historical knowledge and awareness among younger generations (Goldberg, 2023; St. George, 2023). Social media, smartphones, and artificial intelligence are further contributing to this problem, by exposing consumers to misinformation in place of having informed conversations and discussions (Haidt, 2022; Haidt & Twenge, 2021). In addition to reliable media articles and traditional textbooks, educators need to develop effective tools for making the subject of history and important historical events more relevant and relatable to students (Bickford et al., 2020; Chugh, 2022). Some directions may include, for example, using storytelling on social media platforms (Barnett, 2022; Holmes, 2019), feature films (Fear, 2023; Tamkin, 2023), interactive tools, in-depth conversations, and personal stories, experiences, and photography (Brooks, 2018; Westervelt, 2015).

Additionally, consumer researchers can apply consumer psychology insights to address these issues and

promote historical awareness. Such historical perspective could foster empathy, deeper understanding of complexities and the experience of others, and appreciation of a common shared humanity. Well-informed consumers who are well-versed in history are also better equipped to protect and defend democratic values. Across the world, we are witnessing countries backsliding to autocracy, with countries including the most advanced democracies in the world experiencing a “democratic recession” (Diamond, 2015, 2019). As Thomas Jefferson stated, the most effectual means of preventing tyranny is “to illuminate, as far as practicable, the minds of the people at large, and more especially to give them knowledge of those facts which history exhibits, that possessed thereby of the experience of other ages and countries” (Jefferson, 1779). Robert Penn Warren similarly proclaimed, “History cannot give us a program for the future, but it can give us a fuller understanding of ourselves, and of our common humanity, so that we can better face the future.” Greater historical awareness and perspective are thus important and beneficial for both individuals' well-being and for appreciating our common humanity and promoting strong multi-cultural democratic societies.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The article describes entirely theoretical research.

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How to cite this article: Goor, D., Keinan, A., & Ordabayeva, N. (2024). Historizing the present: Research agenda and implications for consumer behavior. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 00, 1–23. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jcpy.1417>