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Introduction

In a study by the French Marketing Association and Kantar on the image of marketing among French people (1,000 respondents), Béji-Bécheur, Decrop and Nabec (2023) observe that "marketing suffers from a negative image among a third of French people". Marketing is associated with negative terms such as "scam", "lie", "harassment", but also with over-consumption for 69% of respondents, environmental degradation for 53%, and mainly serves corporate interests for 79%.

Beyond this negative image, the most acerbic criticisms of marketing often conceal a severe questioning of the consumer society and, more broadly, of capitalism. Marketing is then accused of blindness or complacency with this dominant model, or even of collusion or active complicity in the destruction of the planet, social cohesion, and individual freedoms. By holding marketing – as an academic and managerial discipline – to account, Rémy et al. (2023) point to its implicit political role and underline the extent to which the discipline can no longer consider itself apolitical and neutral. On the contrary, they argue, marketing needs to politicize itself – "we need to 'politicize' our discipline" (p.93) – by adopting a radical stance: moving from "reformative sustainable marketing" to "transformative sustainable marketing" to meet the new challenges of global warming, the collapse of biodiversity and tensions over natural resources.

This stance is an opportunity for us to question the links between marketing and politics, to measure the extent of its responsibilities and to see the interests and risks of an increased politicization of the discipline. However, one of the difficulties lies in the polysemous nature of the term "politics". First and foremost, it refers to forms of government, the organization of power and its exercise by the state (polity). It also refers to public policy, the regulation of conflicts of interest by the powers that be to foster greater social cohesion within society and enable "living together" (Badiou and Lancelin, 2019). However, politics also has a less positive meaning, evoking the competitive struggle for the conquest and exercise of power, intrigue and power struggles known as "politics", attesting to politics' ability to unite as well as divide. Last but not least, politics can

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refer to forms of finalized action and means of resolving problems, particularly those of a public nature (e.g., in the fields of culture, economics, tourism, etc.). After outlining the protean relationships that exist between marketing and politics, we will examine the idea of transformative marketing and, more broadly, the politicization of marketing research.

From politics to marketing, from marketing to politics

The world is riven by major controversies and challenges in the areas of climate (greenhouse gases, rapid warming, extreme climatic events, etc.), geopolitics (wars, the imperative of energy or food security, sovereignty, etc.), society (poverty, inequality, etc.), ideology (political polarization, populism, radicalization, etc.), economics (creation and distribution of value in supply chains, globalization, inflationary tensions, etc.) and the environment.), ideological (political polarization, populism, radicalization, etc.), economic (creation and distribution of value in supply chains, globalization, inflationary tensions, etc.), technological (artificial intelligence, facial recognition, cybersecurity, digital sobriety, etc.) and democratic (dictatorship, citizen participation, etc.). In particular, the entry into the Anthropocene era – a period when human activities have a significant and global impact on the planetary system, geology, and climate – poses a major problem and calls into question the economic system as a whole. Marketing research and practice can hardly be abstracted from this context, as the discipline is by nature permeable to its environment and evolves with the world's transformations. Designing better marketing for a better world has thus become a priority for many academics and practitioners around the world (Chandy et al., 2021).

Marketing for a better world or taking socio-political issues into account

This growing awareness has been significantly reflected in *Décisions Marketing*, most of whose publications over the last five years have focused on the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (hunger, poverty, sustainable consumption, and production, etc.). In 2015, in its definition of marketing, the French Marketing Association (afm) had stressed the importance of "creating sustainable value for all stakeholders (individuals, companies or organizations)" and considering the externalities - negative and positive - of marketing practices on society. The proliferation of theses and publications on responsible consumption, the production of books on sustainable marketing (Dekhili, Merle and Ochs, 2021; Volle and Schouten, 2022) and the massive involvement of researchers in the afm's collective work to create "marketing for a responsible society" also attest to this growing awareness. For most of the topics addressed, the socio-political stakes are clearly expressed, even if, most of the time, no political stance or ideology on the part of the authors or editors is asserted or claimed.

Marketing for politics

The history of our discipline shows that marketing and politics are intrinsically linked, as the following four examples illustrate.

1. Political marketing: the use of marketing techniques in politics has a long history. From this perspective, the aim is to put marketing at the service of the triumph of political ideas and ideologies. The intrusion of political marketing into democratic life, far removed from the world of consumerism, is not without its practical (applicability, effectiveness, efficiency) and ethical (discrimination, manipulation, deception, false information) problems. As ob-

served by Manceau and Trinquecoste (2007), the parallel between the worlds of consumerism and politics has important limits and requires discernment.

2. Marketing and public policy: marketing has gradually become an integral part of public policy implementation, particularly in the context of social marketing, whether to promote better public health (combating tobacco, alcohol or drug consumption), prevent risky behavior (accidents, violence, etc.), preserve the environment (biodiversity, waste, pesticides, etc.) or engage communities in common causes (organ donation, voting, vaccination campaigns, etc.). In local authorities, marketing has also been mobilized to maintain and develop economic activities in territories, ensure job creation and preserve social cohesion. At the same time, public policies are imposing themselves and constraining marketing practices: the latter must comply to the political choices and democratic decisions made by political decision-makers. Laws, standards, and regulations are imposed, framing, regulating and restricting corporate decision-making and the application of marketing strategies and tactics. At European level, for example, the General Data Protection Regulation and the Service Digital Act show that regulation by political power is possible. The freedom of marketing teams in this area is therefore moderate.

3. Ideology, political orientation, and consumption: as Schmitt, Brakus, and Biraglia (2022, p.89) note, "*ideology is omnipresent in people's lives and manifests itself as a consumption ideology when consumers buy and use marketplace products, services, and experiences*". In the face of socio-political issues and controversies (environment, purchasing power, individual freedoms, health, etc.), marketing studies and research are giving increasing prominence to political ideologies in the understanding of social phenomena. For example, Irmak, Murdock, and Kanuri (2020) showed, in the American context, that conservatives (vs. liberals) had a greater propensity for psychological reactance in the event of government-implemented regulation. Lisjak and Ordabayeva (2023, p.1014) also observe that, "*in today's polarized society where ideology is inescapable and political division and activism are on the rise, political ideology is increasingly salient in the marketplace, and it shapes consumer preferences in significant ways*".

4. Companies, brands, and politics: many organizations are committed to certain socio-political causes, such as the fight against racism, the preservation of the environment and so on. By way of illustration, in this issue of *Décisions Marketing*, Moumade, Hemonnet-Goujot and Valette-Florence (2024) investigate the activism of brands that commit to certain causes, but also undertake actions in connection with their social responsibility or in political and social activities. The interpretation of the nature of these actions and their scope is open to debate, with many evoking green washing or woke washing. However, their impact on public opinion is not non-existent. Far from this universe of brands, the field of social economy – from large mutuals and cooperatives to the smallest associations – does not hesitate to elaborate marketing strategies to defend their causes and develop economically and ecologically sustainable business models. In a multitude of sectors (culture, sport, NGOs, etc.), marketing, although often criticized, is also seen as an indispensable recourse when economic equilibrium cannot be assured by public subsidies alone.

From reformative marketing to transformative marketing?

Against a backdrop of societal polarization and controversy, marketing and politics are thus bound to intersect and interact even more. In recent years, marketing has attempted to accom-

pany the evolution of corporate practices or to reform some of them (sustainable marketing, corporate social responsibility, etc.) and to modify consumer behavior (responsible consumption), without however profoundly transforming the system. For example, degrowth has rarely been a major objective in marketing practice and research, even though demarketing, sobriety and frugality have become very popular in recent years. Marketing, as a managerial discipline, was thus built in a market economy context, and developed mainly in companies to serve their interests (profit, growth, etc.). The practice of marketing, omnipresent in everyday life (shopping experience, advertising, promotions, customer loyalty, etc.), has fueled an imaginary world of consumption and contributed to a phenomenon of over-consumption. There's no point in denying it, just as students, organizations and researchers involved in marketing cannot pretend to be unaware of its main practices and aims.

The rise of critical thinking in marketing

In this context, the critical posture is essential to the evolution of the discipline and the mutation of dominant paradigms (Bertrandias, 2024). For years, it has been recognized in books and scientific journals (*Journal of Macromarketing*, *Marketing Theory*, J*ournal of Consumer Research*, etc.). The critical thinking and political commitment of eminent researchers against the current economic system has also asserted itself in various schools of thought (post-modernism, Consumer Culture Theory, Transformative Consumer Research, etc.), even before the climate emergency became a major issue (Arnould and Thompson, 2005; Cova, Maclaren and Bradshaw, 2013).

However, as the famous saying goes, "*criticism is easy, but art is difficult*" (Nericault, 1732). To be convincing, especially to political decision-makers, business leaders, marketing researchers, the media, public opinion, etc., criticism must lead to courses of action that are credible, desirable, and acceptable. For example, when sustainable marketing is called into question because of its potential shortcomings (Rémy et al., 2023), credible alternatives must be put forward that are likely to significantly modify stakeholders' strategies in the short to medium term. For a decision-making-oriented scientific journal such as *Décisions Marketing*, this is a key issue if we are to avoid remaining at the utopian dream stage.

Challenging the economic and social system

First, as a simple management function, marketing can hardly abstract itself from the economic and social system in which it evolves and transform it. Adopting a critical stance towards consumer society, the market economy, capitalism, and liberalism is certainly useful, but changing the system requires a weight, influence, and legitimacy that marketing practitioners and researchers have not yet achieved. This is often a domain reserved for democratically elected politicians (state, local authorities, etc.), who often rely on experts from other disciplinary fields (economics, political science, law, etc.) to determine their public policies. We can certainly try to imagine a "marketing without the market" or a "marketing against the market", practiced outside the frameworks of the capitalist economy, in alternative systems such as administered or state-run economies where regulation and political control dominate (production, prices, investment, etc.), in societies partially coordinating the exchange of resources outside markets (cooperatives, AMAP "Association for the preservation of farming agriculture" communities, common goods and shared resources, ecovillages, etc.) or as part of collective initiatives emanating from groups of citizens on a local scale (Rémy et al., 2023). However, it should be noted that these situations

remain marginal on the planet. In the real world, marketing practitioners and researchers are confronted with the world as it is, not as they would like it to be.

Taking economic realities into account

Secondly, the denial of climate issues that has long persisted in society cannot give way to a denial of economic realities. The discovery of sustainable business models, combining societal and economic issues, has indeed become a priority (Monnot, Demil and Lecoq, 2023). As an actionable management discipline, marketing must therefore respond to the demands of organizations striving to combine – not without great difficulty – their economic development with their responsibilities to society. Marketing can hardly cut itself off from the business world, or curl up in the comfort of radical, incantatory criticism. Pragmatically speaking, supporting the societal transformation of these companies means raising awareness, supporting, encouraging, and educating current and future managers, rather than condemning, blaming and stigmatizing them. In other words, the "transformative theory" should be put to the test of the facts and the actors who are supposed to apply it. In concrete terms, how can we make the degrowth in production and consumption in France desirable to the large (294 GE), small (159,000 PME) or micro (4.3 million) businesses that are the source of economic activity, investment, innovation, and jobs? Many business leaders sincerely wish to make the ecological transition and are seeking to give themselves the means to do so. But in all these organizations, marketing is essential to creating and sharing sustainable value with all stakeholders. In other words, it's often an illusion to believe that ecological transition would be possible without marketing their products and services.

Differentiating transformative sustainable marketing from reformative sustainable marketing

Thirdly, if transformative marketing were to be established, it would need to be clearly defined and demonstrated how – apart from criticism of the market economy and capitalism – it would lead to new practices within organizations, in addition to those already widely considered for many years: product recycling and reuse, soft mobility, frugality, purchasing in short circuits, second-hand products, the fight against product obsolescence, etc. Sustainable development strategies also already include many changes in organizational practices, such as the circular or collaborative economy, changes in supply chains, energy sobriety and eco-design of products. Finally, public policies include numerous regulations and rules designed to encourage or compel companies, consumers, and citizens to adopt more responsible practices. For example, since January 1, 2024, the European Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive has set new non-financial reporting standards and obligations for large companies and listed SMEs. Consequently, while we can all agree on the need to redouble our efforts in a context where planetary limits are being reached and climate change is accelerating, the alternative ways of achieving this deserve to be made more explicit and put to the test of facts. For Hamant (2022) in particular, degrowth and sobriety can hardly mobilize the actors (consumers, corporations, local authorities, etc.), and it is above all important to imagine a multitude of complementary options to make the world robust and adaptable to the turbulence it will face (climatic, geopolitical, social, etc.).

From freedom to responsibility

Finally, one of the questions implicit in these debates is that of the place given to freedom, one of the essential values of our democratic societies. Sustainable marketing gives great importance to the notion of responsibility (corporate social responsibility, responsible consumption, etc.), and

thus acknowledges its corollary: freedom. Indeed, the responsibility left to consumers, companies, organizations, local authorities, etc. is matched only by their ability to exercise free will. Through the notion of responsibility, we recognize not only an obligation to be accountable for their actions, particularly regarding future generations, but also a form of agentivity. Admittedly, sustainable marketing can be judged insufficient in the face of global challenges, or even presented as a dangerous myth that distracts stakeholders from radical transformation. But these strategies and practices are based on an implicit sense of freedom rather than constraint.

The idea of transformative sustainable marketing explicitly carries a radical political project in view of the climate and environmental emergency (Rémy et al., 2023). The notion of marketing is itself questioned, and sometimes even ignored, because it is too closely associated with the market economy in which it has flourished. Unlike disciplines such as philosophy and sociology, which have produced many committed intellectuals (Sartre, Bourdieu, Latour, etc.), the tradition in management is quite different, and its principles appear to have been overturned.

Politicization in marketing

As demonstrated in the first Part, marketing and politics are linked. However, the notion of politics must be distinguished from that of politicization, which refers to "*the process by which issues, activities, practices and discourses find themselves endowed with political significance and are thus appropriated by actors invested in the political field (leaders, parties, journalists, interest groups, intellectuals, etc.)*" (Lefebvre, 2017, p 15). For Lefebvre (2017, p. 15), "*no social phenomenon is political by nature... Not everything is political, but every social fact is 'politicizable'*". The reclassification of a social fact (marketing activities, for example) as a political social fact by different actors then leads to "*transgressing or questioning the differentiation of activity spaces*" (marketing and politics, for example), once they become aware of the political and ideological significance of certain activities (Lagroye, 2003). For example, through a process of politicization, marketing practice and research would take on a political character, and its key players – managers and researchers – would take on a political role, asserting their ideology and convictions. As a result, marketing researchers may sometimes be tempted to confuse their profession and vocation with that of a politician, defending his or her values and beliefs. A marketing practitioner could also be given, rightly or wrongly, a political orientation based on his or her profession, interests, or practices. The potential confusion between marketing and politics thus presents certain risks, as a scientific debate is not the same as a political debate.

The separation between science and politics

What is at stake in the politicization of marketing is the separation, or conversely the potential confusion, between marketing and politics. This can occur in marketing practice, when the political ideology of the CEO shapes business practices in general and marketing strategies in particular (Chin et al., 2021). It can also influence the researcher's ideology, both in the choice of subjects for investigation and in the way facts are interpreted in the course of scientific work. However, as Weber (1959, p. 72) pointed out, the logic of science must be separated from that of politics: "*whenever a man of science brings his own value judgment into play, there is no longer any integral understanding of the facts*". Adopting an ethic of conviction, the scientist must, according to Weber (1959), give priority to the search for pure and unadulterated truth, without transgressing certain values or norms, do his duty with the utmost neutrality and tell the truth without thinking about the consequences of his/her discoveries. Politicians, on the other hand, must develop an ethic of responsibility, i.e., be accountable for their actions and their conse-

quences, and pragmatically readjust the means used to the ends pursued, with a view to efficiency (consequentialism).

Valuing the researcher's axiological neutrality, Weber (1959) suggests that the scientist should be aware of his or her own values in the course of scientific work, and limit as far as possible the biases they induce in the apprehension of truth. In other words, while political ideology is an inescapable social fact, the researcher's moral obligation is to minimize its effect on his scientific work. His political commitment, activism, or militancy in defense of a cause and values should interfere as little as possible with his/her activities as a researcher (interpretation of results, evaluation of peer research, etc.).

The social responsibility of the marketing researcher

The freedom enjoyed by the researcher implies that he is accountable for his actions to other members of the scientific community or society in general and takes responsibility for the consequences. Researchers have the capacity to act on the world and their environment, and benefit from agentivity. They must respect the values of deontology, integrity and ethics in their scientific work. However, to what extent should a researcher in management, and in marketing, be held responsible for the consequences of his or her research work on society at large, even though he or she does not have a decision-making power equivalent to those of politicians or top managers? There is currently a strong temptation to extend the researcher's traditional responsibilities (ethics, deontology, etc.) to include social responsibility (Royer, 2011). However, when a researcher starts investigating a research topic, he or she generally has no intention of harming a community or the planet and does not know in advance what uses will be made of his or her work. A researcher can certainly take part in public debates, give lectures, raise awareness among his/her students and warn of the risks of inappropriate use of his/her research results. But since (s)he generally has no decision-making power, can (s)he reasonably be held responsible for the consequences?

To emphasize the individual and collective responsibilities of marketing researchers is to consider that there is a direct and certain causality between their research and the damage observed. But this responsibility cannot be absolute, only relative. For example, researchers are rarely informed or aware of the re-use of their work by various public and private decision-makers. It also presupposes that they have had complete freedom to act, to choose their subjects of interest and to carry out their scientific work. However, most of the time, they are not totally free in their activities (programs, laboratories, funding, peer reviews, etc.). Nevertheless, marketing researchers must be accountable to society.

The need for a pluralism of values

On the other hand, it's important not to over-emphasize responsibility, guilt, or even stigmatize researchers, if only because they have decided to investigate a research topic that seems irrelevant, useless, or potentially damaging in the light of current societal issues (over-consumption, pollution, damage to health, etc.). For example, a marketing researcher dealing with purchasing behavior, sales promotion, digital marketing, or consumer loyalty could quickly be associated with a political ideology and reduced to a zealous collaborator of the capitalist system. His/her research could also be interpreted as a form of denial of the socio-political issues facing society. This is a clear example of the risk of stigmatizing and blaming those whose research themes are not in line with the dominant ideologies and values. Yet, to be fertile, research must be plural and open to all sensibilities and expertise. It does not sit well with the establishment of a new, over-

arching moral order to replace a dominant "mainstream" model condemned in its day for being oppressive and "marginalizing" (Arnould and Thompson, 2005).

This fundamentally raises the question of the role of individual and social values in the production of scientific knowledge. These values are often incommensurable, insofar as there is no objective order to define their relative importance (social cohesion, health, environment, freedom, etc.). These value systems are both intimately linked to a country's culture and extremely disparate within it. For example, discourse on the urgency of climate change and economic degrowth is sometimes inaudible in southern countries, where part of the population suffers from extreme poverty and aspires to access health, employment, and consumption (Amidjogbe, 2023). And in northern countries, conservative and nationalist values are gaining ground, fueling climate-skepticism and identity-based discourse. At a time when nationalism and populism are on the rise worldwide, the autonomy, freedom, and neutrality of researchers in their scientific work could be one of the best safeguards for democratic regimes.

The neutrality of marketing researchers

Classical epistemology has long sought to separate science and society. Historically, marketing has also followed this approach to acquire scientific legitimacy. In practice, as in marketing research, the discovery of "natural laws", scientifically indisputable facts, falsifiable hypotheses, reliable and valid measuring instruments, and the testing of theories based on collected data (experiments, surveys, etc.) remain guarantees of rigor and scientificity. The ideological and political stance taken by researchers must not be allowed to alter or compromise the search for scientific truth that is objective, precise and based on reason. The impartiality of researchers appears here to be a condition for the scientific nature of the discipline. This model of knowledge production also presupposes that a community establishes a disciplinary framework, organizes peer review, and publishes scientifically proven results that then become authoritative (Lamy, 2007). The world of scientific research – including journals such as *Décisions Marketing* – is still largely dominated by this model.

However, mechanisms of power and influence are not absent from scientific communities. In line with Callon and Latour's (2013) critical work on the classical epistemology of science, many authors denounce a double myth: that of impartiality, of research independent of ideology and political choices, and that of a separation between nature (non-humans) and culture (humans) when, on the contrary, they should be crossed and hybridized. Analyzing science as it is constructed, Callon and Latour (2013) have notably highlighted researchers' strategies for getting a scientific statement accepted, defending their interests and enlisting allies (colleagues and politicians in particular). Scientific communities are therefore not exempt from political games and strategies of influence. Nevertheless, is the role of the researcher to promote his or her political ideology – and not just a scientific statement – and to produce confusion between scientific facts and his or her own values? Nothing is less certain. The risk would be to fall into an extreme epistemological relativism in which science would be no more than a political expression. One theory would then be "*as good as another, the whole being merely a matter of opinion or subjective desires*", and the implicit project of scientific research would be solely "*to develop theories with the aim of convincing others that one is right*" (Chalmers, 1987, p.266). Thus, bringing politics into a scientific statement may call into question the place of science – and in this case marketing research – within society.

According to Weber (1959), the researcher must be reflexive about his own ideology or political orientation and try to reduce its effects on his scientific work. His role is not to flaunt them and

use them as a banner to rally forces around him. A scientific community cannot, therefore, be reduced to a political arena in which one side or the other strives to make its point of view prevail. Such a vision would necessarily be a source of power struggles, as has sometimes been the case in other disciplines (sociology, economics, etc.).

A risk of discrediting marketing research?

Creating confusion between science and politics would also pave the way for the post-truth world, where all truths are equal, and no scientific fact can be attested independently of the values to which it refers. For example, global warming, as observed by the scientists of the IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) over the years, would be a mere figment of the imagination, not an authoritative scientific fact. Even though their work is based on incontrovertible data, IPCC members are frequently accused – by certain governments or sections of public opinion – of promoting their "environmentalist" values and ideology. Similarly, the covid epidemic has merely be seen as a social construct, the consequence of social negotiations between multiple stakeholders (research organizations, governments, healthcare professionals, laboratories, etc.), and not as the result of contagion from an identified and characterized virus (SARS-CoV-2). In 2019, for example, scientific debates and the publishing world were thrown into the public arena, particularly around hydroxychloroquine, and permanently discredited the word of researchers.

Thus, the confusion between the facts and the values of scientists does not strengthen disciplines but weakens them. Bensaude-Vincent and Dorthe (2023) observe how the gap between experts and the public has widened in the age of social networks and collective hysteria on certain controversial subjects. For Ruby (2023), "*one wonders whether it is the scientists themselves who doubt the public's ability to judge for themselves what is true and what is false, or whether it is the public that has accumulated distrust in the face of instances of scientific practice that do not conform to the ideal of neutrality*". The same is certainly true of social sciences (economics, sociology, etc.), which are currently struggling to make themselves heard in societal debates, with intellectual elites regularly vilified in public opinion for their unavowed political commitment and lack of "objectivity". For Durkheim (2002, p. 42), "*we will win popular confidence all the more easily if we are perceived as having fewer personal ulterior motives. Today's speaker must not be suspected of being tomorrow's candidate*". In such a context, to quote Weber (1959), the scientist would no longer have any legitimacy to enlighten the politician, unless the scientist wished to engage in politics, act and take responsibility for his or her actions.

The articles published in this issue of *Décisions Marketing* are therefore not intended to be read politically, even if they potentially raise socio-political issues (economic crisis, role of technology in distribution, brand political activism, influence of experts and healthy eating).

Moumade, Hemmonet-Goujot and Valette-Florence examine the effects of brand activism on the quality of the relationship with consumers. They show how brand activism produces an emotional mechanism, a function of consumers' psychological distance from the cause, and a cognitive mechanism, a function of the brand's perceived legitimacy in defending it.

Loupiac, Le Nagard and Herbinet investigate the interests and limits of augmented reality in trying on experiential goods, particularly furniture in the home furnishings context. In particular, they point out that trust in augmented reality is limited, and that it helps decision-making only for those with a particular appetite for digital technologies and e-commerce (pro-online, around 20% of respondents).

Kaswengi, Faye Diallo and Aurier consider how purchases of terroir store brand products evolve in periods of economic expansion and contraction. Combining perception and purchasing behavior data, they show that, in periods of macro-economic contraction, the image of quality favors the choice and quantities purchased of terroir store brand products, while low prices, the image of the aisle head, leaflet promotions and the variety on offer tend to reduce their choice.

Finally, Abaidi, Ben Nasr and Cottet look at how endorsement by an ordinary expert on the packaging of a food product influences perceived proximity and consumer confidence and, more indirectly, intention to buy a brand. They demonstrate that it is advisable to include the producer's image and information on the packaging.

Happy reading !

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