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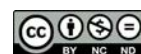
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The market and the masses: From chaotic corners to social media (re)tail events

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Abstract

In this essay, I examine and discuss the relationship between the market and the masses in light of recent retail-driven surges in the stock prices of firms like GameStop and AMC. Using two historical snapshots, I draw out similarities and differences between the way the collective power and rationality (or lack thereof) of the masses was portrayed in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century market literature and in recent debates about retail investor inclusion and social media or social trading platform-driven market volatility. The main difference between the historical discourse and the present situation is that the new digital market-expanding technologies enable effective retail investor mobilization and thus, increase the retail swarms' market-moving powers, which were previously less agile and forceful. However, eased and widened market access also transforms digital life into alternative data that is subjected to age-old strategies of market exploitation.

Keywords

Financial markets, retail investing, masses, GameStop

Introduction

The recent boom in retail investing, propelled by the rise of social trading platforms and social media, has brought about changes in the way the financial media and market professionals portray retail investors. In the distant as well as recent past, this group of market actors was mostly viewed as a bunch of timid, malleable noise traders throwing their dumb money into the market, not at random, but at whatever overbought stock in sight. Retail investors still bring noise to markets; in fact, they are making a whole lot of noise these days due to a massive increase in market share and a loud mobilization on social media platforms, most notably the Reddit site WallStreetBets, which became a household name in financial media as

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droves of small investors rallied around the ailing GameStop stock, resulting in it taking off in January 2021. As most observers will know, GameStop – a US videogame store franchise facing Blockbuster-like challenges adjusting to media use increasingly moving online – became a retail investor darling in reaction to aggressive hedge funds' massive, short-selling of the stock (Cassidy, 2021). Framed as a tale of the little man standing up against ruthless financiers' ominous speculation, the GameStop saga demonstrates that when small investors mobilize *en masse*, they are capable of (gamma) squeezing the life out of comparatively big financial actors (Martin and Wigglesworth, 2021).¹

Recent retail-driven booms and squeezes thus seem to be changing attitudes towards small investors. No longer simply considered docile lemmings or hapless prey, they increasingly are recognized as a disruptive force with the potential of wreaking market havoc by exercising their swarm-like collective powers (Calhoun, 2021; Scott, 2021). This reimagining of the speculating masses is a continuation of a long line and wide range of cultural imaginaries of lay investors and their market mores. In this essay, I relate present debates on the mass mobilization of retail investors to an earlier time in which the role of the masses in financial markets was a topic of concern for crowd theorists, financial journalists, and economists alike (Borch, 2020; Hansen, 2017; Stäheli, 2013). The result is by no stretch of the imagination an exhaustive account of the historical relationship between financial markets and the masses roaming in- and outside of them, but rather two historical snapshots – from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries – of the fear and fascination of the forceful yet feeble market crowd. The first of these illuminates how a dubious speculative scheme further ignited the masses' dismay with high finance, while the second shows how crowd dynamics and ideas of contagion and imitation among market actors obscured the spatial and bodily logic of markets. Reverting back to the present, I conclude by arguing that these historical instances of tension between markets and the masses resurface in intensified form today through two contemporary trends: the budding platformization of financial markets, which further erodes boundaries between Wall Street and Main Street (Kolhatkar, 2021; Langley and Leyshon, 2021; Westermeier, 2020), and social media's enablement of virtual and socially contagious market crowd dynamics (Goldin, 2021).

Snapshot 1: Buccaneers at the Board of Trade

What shall we say of speculations like that of the young American millionaire who, at the time of the Spanish-American war, bought at one stroke all the corn [*wheat*] obtainable in almost all the markets of the world, to re-sell it only when the commencement of the scarcity he had provoked had greatly increased the price? The affair should have brought him in four million pounds; but it provoked a crisis in Europe, famine and riots in Spain and Italy, and plenty of poor devils died of hunger. Are Socialists really in the wrong when they compare the authors of such speculations to common pirates, and declare that they deserve the hangman's rope? (Le Bon, 1899: 16)²

The unnamed young American millionaire whose speculative venture the French polymath Gustave Le Bon was referring to in this excerpt from his book, *The Psychology of Socialism* (1899), was none other than 'the Napoleon of Wheat', speculator Joseph Leiter. In April 1897, at the age of 29, Leiter, the son of Chicago merchant and multimillionaire real-estate magnate Levi Zeigler Leiter, began to buy up all the cash wheat he could get his hands on in the trading pits at the Chicago Board of Trade (Marcosson, 1909). Though he refused to admit it, what Leiter commenced in the spring of 1897 was an attempt to 'corner' the wheat market. A corner

is established when a speculator or group of speculators acquire enough control of a particular commodity – in Leiter’s case wheat – allowing price manipulation. Historically, commodity futures markets have been particularly prone to cornering, the reason being that futures trading allows traders to sell what they do not own with the promise of delivering at the terminal date of the futures contract (i.e., short selling). To meet their obligations stated in the futures contract, the bearish short sellers would need the physical commodity they have sold short, which they would have to buy from the “deadly enemy of ‘the bears’”, that is, the “cornerer” (Marcosson, 1913: 5). Either they bought the quantity needed to settle their commitment at an unprofitably high rate or they defaulted, risking prosecution. As a popular saying went, “he who sells what isn’t his must buy back or go to prison” (Lefèvre, 1901: 431).

Leiter swept the market of physical wheat and gained an advantage over the shorts who did not own the physical equivalent to the wheat they were selling short. When the short sellers had to meet their obligations in their futures contracts and deliver the physical crop, they needed the wheat that Leiter now owned and suddenly found themselves completely at his mercy. The prospect of falling short on their commitments generated a sense of panic among the bears, who started to run up the price on wheat to the benefit of Leiter (Marcosson, 1909: 874-76; Smith, 1901: 26-30). Leiter drove them into a corner – his corner – just like the GameStop buy-and-hold crowd, unified through social media, would squeeze the short-selling hedge funds into theirs some 120 years plus later. The big difference between the two instances of short seller hostage taking is that whereas Leiter and his adversaries all belonged to the same financial elite, the GameStop/WallStreetBets squeeze was, whether completely true or not, cast as the people against morally bankrupt Wall Street power players (Brignall, 2021).

As with most attempts to corner markets, Leiter’s efforts proved futile. Regardless of whether it was due to overconfidence, recklessness, greed, or simply bad timing, Leiter “overstayed the market” and it got away from him (Marcosson, 1909: 875). That was at least the diagnosis made by financial journalist Isaac Frederic Marcosson, who wrote a quartet of articles on cornering in *Munsey’s Magazine* in 1909. Although unsuccessful, Leiter’s audacious speculative enterprise did not pass unnoticed. Magazines and newspapers revelled in Leiter’s dubious and daring endeavour, and the events at the Chicago Board of Trade even became sources of inspiration for the novelist Frank Norris when he was writing his bestseller *The Pit* (1903). Norris’ dramatic portrait of trading in the Chicago Board of Trade during the years 1897 and 1898 is filled with descriptions of ferocious crowds of traders struggling to secure the best deals in the ‘whirlpool’ of the trading pit. He imagines the market as a sublime force that overpowers and crushes people, as eventually happens to the novel’s protagonist and Leiter’s fictive counterpart, Curtis Jadwin (Biers, 2011; Norris, 1920 [1903]; Zimmerman, 2006).

Contrary to Norris’ dramatic depiction, those experiencing it at close quarters found the break of the Leiter corner on June 13, 1898, rather undramatic (Kaplan, 1953). Marcosson recalled no tumultuous scenes in the Chicago wheat pit that day, since Leiter, who was well-aware that his luck had run out, simply gave up and handed over his cash holdings of wheat to his creditors (Marcosson, 1909: 876). Perhaps wanting to defuse the debacle surrounding his corner attempt, Leiter denied he had cornered the market and told the Associated Press that it simply was “a case where the tail has begun to wag the dog” (Los Angeles Herald, 1898). He explained he had been caught off guard by a sudden fall in wheat prices as so many speculators had experienced before him. Even though the culmination of Leiter’s corner might not have been as spectacular as Norris had portrayed it in *The Pit*, the repercussions of the corner were allegedly as palpable as they were pervasive.

In *The Psychology of Socialism*, Le Bon notes that the corner provoked a crisis in Europe, and Marcossou traced its ramifications as far as Argentina, India, and Russia (Le Bon, 1899: 16; see also Marcossou, 1909: 876). To Le Bon, Leiter's attempt to capitalize on the hunger of populations was an emblematic example of a general "demoralization of the upper strata of society" (Le Bon, 1899: 16). Because of the "unequal and often unequitable partition of wealth" in society, the masses grew increasingly discontent and irritated with the manipulative games of these "common pirates" (Le Bon, 1899: 16). The bullish retail push causing the prices of GameStop and other heavily shorted stocks like the US movie theatre chain AMC to skyrocket in early 2021 was accompanied by a similar combination of inequality narrative and corruption claim, this time largely driven by social media users (Kolhatkar, 2021). But whereas Leiter's corner, according to Le Bon, enflamed the masses' lingering dismay with inequality-exacerbating high finance, it was the aggressive short selling of GameStop, AMC, and other stocks that fuelled animosity among masses of small investors, which led to the gamma squeeze.

Now back to Leiter's corner. In a *Munsey's Magazine* article covering Leiter's shenanigans, writer and financier Rollin E. Smith showed, like Le Bon, no great enthusiasm for corner-instigators. As a member of the Chicago Board of Trade and the Minneapolis Chamber of Commerce, Smith had experienced cornering first-hand. With thinly veiled spite, Smith described corner instigators as "men who ignore commercial ethics, defy trade opinion, and who endeavour to draw the public in to the market and finally, during the excitement of the bull market, sell out and let the public 'hold the bag'" (Smith, 1908: 261). These "buccaneers", as Smith called them, gave futures trading a bad reputation and discredited the grain trade. (Reputation management had been a central focus of US commodities exchanges ever since futures – a financial innovation that the finance-interested public and even some market professionals had a hard time seeing as anything but a vehicle for unadulterated speculation – were introduced in the second half of the nineteenth century [Cronon, 1991; Levy, 2012].) What differentiated the "modern-day manipulator" from the scrupulous pirate was, according to Smith, that the financier did not force his victim to walk the plank – at least not in the literal sense (Smith, 1908: 261).

Who the financial buccaneers were in the GameStop debacle is trickier to determine: was it the short sellers preying on the misfortunes of ailing companies in disrupted industries, or rather, the squeezers mobilizing on social media and running up prices in individual stock to ridiculous heights? In early 2021, before the dust had settled, the knee jerk reaction of the US Justice Department's fraud section, the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), and the Commodity Futures Trading Commission (CFTC) was to probe into potential manipulation behind the surge in prices for GameStop, AMC, and other stocks (Michaels, 2021). The suspicion seemed to be that someone must have led the mass of small investors on, orchestrating the concerted injection of dumb money into these seemingly hopeless firms. Hence, the culprits probably were cunning 'behind-the-scenes' speculators pursuing the age-old pump-and-dump strategy by luring the malleable retail crowd into artificially inflating the prices of GameStop, AMC, Peloton, and others. As chair of the SEC Gary Gensler stressed in a testimony before the US House Committee on Financial Services in May 2021, "I'm not concerned about regular investors exercising their free speech online. I'm more concerned about bad actors potentially taking advantage of influential platforms" (Gensler, 2021).

While Smith and Le Bon found Leiter's corner of the wheat market in Chicago unethical and disgraceful, Le Bon also saw it as a symbol of the unbridled greed of bourgeois financiers who unwittingly were pushing the masses towards socialism. While Le Bon showed concern for the way financial speculation and the accompanying concentration of wealth might

affect the masses, his worry should not be confused with sympathy for the deprived masses. On the contrary, there is no Marxian romanticizing of the working class in Le Bon's work. In fact, Le Bon did not think the working class possessed any "dignity, autonomy and revolutionary creativity" (Leach, 1992: 13). When flaunting their riotous inclination, the working class rather was, according to Le Bon, primitive, violent, destructive, and completely devoid of autonomy (Leach, 1992; see also Borch, 2012). It was out of fear of socialism and not solidarity with the masses that Le Bon cautioned against the unequal wealth distribution fortified by the schemes of Leiter and other illustrious financiers.

The "polymath prophet of Western decadence", as historian Eugene E. Leach fittingly calls Le Bon, foresaw great societal calamities associated with the increasing power of financial capitalism (Leach, 1986: 101). "One of the great problems of the future", Le Bon prophesied, "will be to find the means of escaping from the sovereign and demoralizing powers of the cosmopolitan financiers" (Le Bon, 1899: 82). Le Bon characterized this limited yet immensely powerful group of cosmopolitan financiers as "masters of public opinion" who extended the scope of their manipulation by seizing control of newspapers and journals and anonymously shaping public opinion to their liking (Le Bon, 1899: 82). By swaying the sentiments of the masses, financiers such as Leiter were assuming the role of crowd leader, a role Le Bon had thoroughly described in his seminal book, *The Crowd* (1896 [1895]). To Le Bon, the problem of financial markets boiled down to an asymmetrical and unidirectional relationship between powerful financiers and the masses. The latter group was subjugated to the former's will, as the hypnotized to the hypnotizer. The problem of late nineteenth-century financial capitalism was thus a crowd psychology problem.

With today's retail investors roaming multiple online platforms in search of equal parts market knowledge and investor community, the swaying and formation of public opinion is much less clear-cut than what Le Bon claimed in his accusations of financial foul play by powerful cosmopolitan financiers. The concerted action drummed up on Reddit, Twitter, and other social media platforms during recent retail-driven stock booms suggests a more complex collective psychology than the unilateral leader-follower dynamic presented in Le Bon's work. Retail investors seem to have their views on markets shaped by multiple influences, not exclusively from the puppet masters of high finance. Today, the affectation-dynamic between the investing masses and the market works both ways, with professional marketeers becoming increasingly aware of and attentive to the ways in which retail investors' rationalizations and motivations move markets. As Gillian Tett (2021) put it in a *Financial Times* opinion piece addressing the GameStop "meme stock mania", studying "attention patterns in cyber space" is now equally important as analyzing market fundamentals. The plethora of (mainly virtual) venues for sharing views on markets, combined with eased market access through social trading apps – most notably the self-proclaimed democratizers of finance, Robinhood – contribute to a blurring of the boundaries between noise and information, expert and amateur, insider and outsider. Among other consequences, these expansions of the financial ecosystem into the digital realm reshape the spatial logic of the market.

Snapshot 2: Disrupting the spatial logic of financial markets

Leiter's corner of the wheat market was staged in the Chicago Board of Trade's trading pits. Nowadays, exchanges' trading floors are mere relics of a bygone era. Covid-19 almost dealt the death blow to the iconic Chicago open outcry pits – the Eurodollar options pit being the exemption – when the CME Group (Chicago Mercantile Exchange) decided not to reopen the pits they had temporarily closed due to pandemic restrictions (CME Group, 2021). With most

of today's trading being semi- or fully-automated, the physical trading floor is no longer the beating heart of the market as it was in the late nineteenth century (Pardo-Guerra, 2019). Back then, the exchange building was the marketplace, and even though irrational collective market behaviour was not confined to the octagonal pit in Chicago, the proximity of the trading posts at the New York Stock Exchange, and so on, the floor was where such behaviour was most clearly expressed.

Le Bon's compatriot and contemporary, the sociologist and crowd theorist Gabriel Tarde was fascinated by financial markets and, more specifically, what one might term the sociology of the trading floor. Though critical of excessive speculation, which he saw as a modern-day epidemic (Tarde, 1903: 145-46, n. 1), Tarde did not express the same kind of undivided loathing for financial capitalism as Le Bon. His interest was more strictly scientific. To Tarde, exchanges were relatively confined spaces where his ideas about the social could be studied. In *Psychologie Économique*, a two-volume work based on a series of lectures held at the Collège de France during the years 1900 and 1901, Tarde described stock exchanges as "laboratories of collective psychology" (Tarde, 1902a: 329; see also Latour and Lepinay, 2009; Lazzarato, 2004). Tarde was not alone in viewing the stock exchange as a collective behaviour lab. American sociologist William Graham Sumner argued that "the stock exchange shows the possibility of suggestion" – suggestion being the inter-mental process by which ideas intrude on the mind, unreflectively – seemingly proving "the power of the crowd over the individual" (Sumner, 1907: 220). To Sumner as well as Le Bon, the irrational crowd was in opposition to the rational, truth-seeking yet susceptible individual. Tarde did not draw this type of sharp distinction between the individual and the crowd, the rational and the irrational.

To Tarde, imitation, mental contagion, and suggestion were all inescapable social facts, not just intersubjective processes occasionally manifesting as outbursts of irrational energy, obscuring otherwise orderly encounters between rational people. Proponents of the financial market – financiers, regulators, economists – highlighted and exploited this questionable distinction in their efforts to shield the market from the masses, high finance from small speculators, economic man from social man (Hansen, 2017: Ch. 3). Tarde, on the other hand, ridiculed economic man, whom he saw as a heartless and asocial abstraction (Tarde, 2007: 631), and referred to supply and demand as the "so-called law" of the market by which people let themselves be guided (Tarde, 1968 [1890]: 405). People working markets could not escape the passions, beliefs, group affiliations, and so on shaping behaviour in the stock exchange:

[T]he market is, above all, dominated by psychological influences, by inter-mental actions, the current of which passes through all brains at the same time and a few spirits, who have serious reasons to be discouraged or filled with hope, spread their discouragement or confidence well beyond their group, to all the groups of the Stock Exchange; busy feverish, eminently able to exercise and suffer contagions of this kind. (Tarde, 1902b: 197, my translation)

Inter-mental contagion and other forms of subconscious influences were thus, according to Tarde, the driving forces in the markets. Beliefs, desires, and volitions moved people, who moved markets:

The peaks and troughs of values in the stock market, unlike the oscillations of a barometer, could not even remotely be explained without considering their psychological causes: a fit of hope or discouragement in the public, the propagation of a good or bad sensational story in the minds of speculators. (Tarde, 2007: 630)

So, even though the exchanges' trading floors were neatly demarcated psychological laboratories where collective behaviour had its clearest bodily expression, the *psychological causes* moving markets were not bound by that space. The distinction between the inside and outside of the market was not as clear cut for Tarde as it was for someone like Max Weber, who argued passionately for stricter access requirements in exchanges to prevent underqualified and emotionally susceptible small speculators from destabilizing the order of the market (Weber, 2000b, 2000a). Capital requirements and other entry barriers would however not prevent "corridor conversation" and "sensational news" from intruding on the minds of marketeers and contribute to the movement of prices (Tarde, 1902a: 195). Processes of imitation and contagion would always bind and connect the market to its outside.

Despite or maybe because of their exoticism, Tarde's ideas and Le Bon's as well were picked up by quite a few American social scientists in the early twentieth century (Hansen and Presskorn-Thygesen, 2021). The Chicago school sociologist, Robert E. Park, for example, drew inspiration from Tarde's theory of the social in his writings on behaviour in the stock exchange and the city (Park, 1904, 1915). Progressive sociologist and unapologetic eugenicist, Edward A. Ross was a vivid reader of Tarde and, much like Park, compared Tarde's thoughts on the big city with social-psychological dynamics of the market (Ross, 1908). Ross' Tarde-inspired comparison of city and market crowds was taken directly from the lesser-known economist Edward David Jones, who in his book, *Economic Crises* (1900), offered a lengthy discussion of the psychological phenomena of crises (see Hansen, 2021). The British economist Arthur Cecil Pigou borrowed the same Tarde-infused analysis from Jones as Ross had done (Pigou, 1912) – it must be noted that both scholars properly acknowledged Jones' work – which just goes to show that Tarde's unconventional ideas of the social found their way into more mainstream social science through a variety of channels.

Early adopters of Austrian School neoclassical economics like William Tausig, Frank Fetter, and Irving Fisher were, despite their staunch faith in market order and rational action, also interested in crowd psychology. Fisher, another hardnosed eugenicist (for many social scientists at the time, including Fisher and Ross, progressive economics and politics went together with eugenics [Leonard, 2005]), was particularly enticed by imitation theory and how imitation determined fashions in the economy. "Fashion is one of those potent yet illusory social forces which follow the laws of imitation so much emphasized by Tarde, Le Bon, Baldwin, and other writers", Fisher writes, and he continues by stating that, "[i]n whatever direction the leaders of fashion first chance to move, the crowd will follow in mad pursuit until the whole social body will be moving in that direction" (Fisher, 1907: 333). Fetter had a similar perspective on the psychological factors allegedly destabilizing market values:

The universal tendency to rhythm in motion (material or psychic) manifests itself in an overestimate or underestimate of rent and every other factor in value. This is emphasized by a psychological factor called the 'hypnotism of the crowd'. Most men follow a leader in investment as in other things. The spirit of speculation grows till it becomes almost a frenzy, and people rush toward this or that investment, throwing capitalization in some industries far out of equilibrium with that in others. (Fetter, 1904: 353)

The main difference between Tarde and most adopters of his ideas was that the latter resorted to the laws of imitation, mental contagion, and crowd mesmerism when they had to explain market anomalies (panics, crazes, frenzies, and so on). To Tarde, these were basic features of the social, regardless of whether the situation was extraordinary or completely mundane.

Though overly speculative at times and empirically under-substantiated most of the time, Tarde's ideas about the social suggest – when applied to financial markets – intriguing questions about where the market starts and stops, who influences whom in the marketplace, and if it is at all meaningful to differentiate between individual rationality and collective whims. These types of questions re-emerge today as market buzz and speculative excitement spreads through the capillaries of social media and new digital market infrastructures, greatly expanding the reach of financial markets and the realms from which financial markets are reachable.

Conclusion

While the GameStop episode probably does not herald a new era of democratized finance, people certainly are more widely exposed to finance since the advent of 'gamified' speculative technologies that grant almost frictionless (and fun) access to markets, market information, and market knowledge (van der Heide and Želinský, 2021). This "growing convergence of financialization and digitalization" (Kompurozos-Athanasidou, 2022: 67) sheds light on and, at least to some extent, reconfigures the relationship between the market and the masses. As market access is eased and market chatter takes place across numerous virtual communities, the ways in which information spreads, virtual crowds mobilize and disperse, and affectivity prompts action in the digital space attracts more attention from market professionals, arguably marking a new reciprocity in the market's relation to the masses. Though insignificant as isolated actors, if mobilized, the speculating masses are capable of moving markets, regardless of what cause it is that unifies them.

The introduction of new technological infrastructures has transformed markets time and again. Think about the stock tickers disseminating price information via telegraph wires in the latter half of the nineteenth century or the introduction of the Bloomberg terminal in the 1980s, the market interface providing traders with market information and the possibility of electronic execution of trades from their computer screens (Beunza and Stark, 2004; Handel, 2021; Pardo-Guerra, 2019; Pinzur, 2021). Whereas these technological innovations made professional trading and established markets more efficient, the platform technologies used for eased market access and knowledge sharing today are aiming at retail money (Langley and Leyshon, 2021). These are not industry-streamlining technologies, but market-expansion technologies. And with this expansion comes new opportunities for big data-driven investment firms to utilize the wealth of non-standard alternative data generated across this financialized digital space (Hansen and Borch, 2022). The SEC's chairman Gary Gensler expressed concern about this in his testimony on the GameStop debacle before the House Committee on Financial Services:

[I]t's no longer just retail investors or even [humans who are following these online conversations, but] institutional investors and their algorithms. Developments in machine learning, data analytics, and natural language processing have allowed sophisticated investors to monitor various forms of public communication to see relationships between words and prices. This practice, called sentiment analysis, has picked up steam in the last couple of years, and it has grown to include online communities. With that comes the risk that nefarious actors may try to send signals to manipulate the market. This is an area for which we will continue to deepen our understanding, resources, and capabilities. (Gensler, 2021)

Widespread and eased market access does not reduce the risk of exploitation. It enables new forms of exploitation – both completely legitimate strategic opportunities pursued in the

market and the more ominous tactics that Gensler alludes to – by turning the virtual life of the masses into data points from which market edge can be discovered and exploited.

Notes

1. What happened to GameStop in early 2021 was that massive retail investments in the stock drove up the price, which meant trouble for those holding short positions in the stock. In simple terms, a short position is a bet against a stock, where the holder profits if the price of the stock falls. The short seller does not own the stock but borrows it and sells it in the market with the anticipation of a drop in its price. If the price falls, the short seller will be able to buy back the stock cheaper, return it to the borrower, and get the price-difference as a profit. The borrower gets a lending fee from the short seller, which is their incentive. However, if the price of the stock rises, the short sellers will eventually – due to their obligation to the borrower – need to buy back at a loss. And if the price skyrockets, as in the case of GameStop, some short sellers might be unable to afford buying back the stock and thus, default on their obligation. The situation that the GameStop short sellers found themselves in, during early 2021, is called a *gamma squeeze*. It suffices to say that it is a ‘gamma’ squeeze because it involved trading in options. For a thorough market structure review of the events and detailed explanation of the gamma squeeze, see the SEC’s report on the GameStop saga (SEC, 2021).
2. In the English translation of *The Psychology of Socialism*, the French word ‘blé’ is translated as ‘corn’ and not ‘wheat’, which is the correct translation. While it might seem a puny translation error, it is of tremendous importance for those involved in commodities trading to know whether they are trading corn or wheat futures. Since Le Bon did not disclose the name of the ‘young American’ in question, knowing if he bought corn or wheat has real historical significance.

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