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EMPTOR AUSTRALIS: THE AUSTRALIAN CONSUMER IN EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY ADVERTISING LITERATURE

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Well aware that it is the consumer who makes or breaks an advertisement, the advertising industry has long paid close attention to its audience. However, advertising historians have generally overlooked the industry's efforts to define the consumer and the impact this has had upon advertisements and the advertising industry itself. By examining the changing conceptualisation of the Australian consumer featured in the locally produced advertising literature during the early twentieth century, this study offers an insight into the inner workings of Australia's fledgling advertising industry. It demonstrates the ways in which advertising interacted with the world around it.

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Australian audiences have long been subjected to the advertising industry's incessant stream of proclamations, promises and prevarications. Throughout, the industry's aim has remained unchanged, as local advertising luminary Arthur O. Richardson noted in 1927: 'The fundamental dynamic of advertising is to stimulate possible purchasers to desire an object so much that they will not be content until they possess it'.[1]

Converting audiences into consumers was, and still remains, the advertising industry's *raison d'etre*. The advertising industry has therefore gone to great lengths to identify and characterise consumers and their desires. These efforts were most transparent during the first decades of the twentieth century, as the fledgling industry was still in the process of developing an understanding of its audience and, indeed, itself.

The early history of Australia's advertising industry has attracted relatively little scholarship. Stephen examined the ways in which advertising has laid the foun-

1 Richardson, *New Era*, p. 40.

dations for a consumer society. Advertising, she contends, created the desire to consume long before 'the mass availability of goods or a national income level that allowed for mass expenditure'.[2] Her study of the organisation of the interwar advertising industry demonstrates that the agents were aware of their actions: 'The advertising industry's trade journals saw the main problems confronting them as habits and attitudes that inhibited consumption'.[3]

However, Stephen fails to recognise the more fundamental issue concerning the advertising industry – namely its deep-seated desire for 'legitimacy'. As Crawford argues, the advertising industry's 'quest for legitimacy' played an integral role in its growth and development.[4] Since the late nineteenth century, the outrageous claims made in 'quack' medicine advertisements had undermined the believability of all advertisements. The industry thus craved legitimacy. This not only offered advertising respectability, it promised to deliver trustworthy and therefore effective advertisements. A detailed understanding of the consumer would enable the advertising industry to realise both goals, which, in turn, would facilitate the development of mass consumerism in Australia. The significance of this interconnection was not lost on advertising practitioners, who, as Spierings observed, 'identified success in their work with the promotion of an ever greater consumption of commodities'.[5]

Throughout its history, the advertising industry has been acutely aware of the need to understand the consumer. An early trade journal thus outlines an advertising man's attributes:

> He may be a guide, but he must also be guided. . . . He keeps his ear to the ground and learns what is wanted . . . He knows that today, while the ink is still fresh, the advertisement must do its work, for tomorrow means oblivion.[6]

The survival of an entire industry was therefore dependent upon the advertising agent's knowledge of the audience. In the early twentieth century, the advertising industry's conceptualisation of the consumer was far from static. 'Getting to know' the consumer, however, proved to be a slow and evolutionary process for advertising agents. The different perceptions of the consumer were, as Curti notes, 'gradual, never abrupt; and contradictory opinions were expressed in the same time span'.[7]

Reekie's exploration of the gendered consumer in Australian sales literature between the 1890s and the 1930s illustrates just how gradual such developments were.[8] The conceptualisation of the consumer in Australia nevertheless did change during the period under study, particularly in advertising literature. Early literature tended to regard the consumer as a single entity – a rational being whose

2 Stephen, Selling soap, p. 57.
3 Stephen, Agents of consumerism, p. 82.
4 Crawford, Quest for legitimacy.
5 Spierings, Australian advertising history, p. 102.
6 *Draper of Australasia*, 1901, 1(3), p. 138.
7 Curti, Changing concept, p. 337.
8 Reekie, Impulsive women.

consumption patterns were the result of a reasoned and objective decision-making process. This image would be eclipsed by the 'irrational' consumer. Proponents of this perspective felt that consumers were driven by emotional impulses rather than reasoned assessments; consumption was driven by desires rather than needs. Rather than characterising the consumer in a singular form, they asserted that there were different types of consumer. Reekie contends that this evolutionary shift was intrinsically linked to the discourse of gender. For her, 'the gradual shift . . . from a "rational" to an "irrational interpretation of human nature in trade literature can . . . be seen as a consequence of retailers" ' conviction that the customer was almost invariably female'.[9] However, the forces underpinning this shift remain largely unexamined.

Kingston provides a useful starting point for exploring the evolutionary shift identified by Reekie. Awareness of the consumer, suggests Kingston, stems from the act of consumption: 'as consumption has become integral to modern society, so the experiences and attitudes of the consumers themselves are of greater interest, if only to the manufacturers, advertisers and the retailers'.[10]

Expanding on this trajectory, this study will demonstrate that the changing conceptualisation of the consumer was the result of a number of factors. While gender issues were undoubtedly a crucial factor in this change, they were not the sole determinants. The technical, organisational and philosophical developments taking place within the advertising industry itself played an equally significant role in the changing conceptualisation of the consumer. The differing issues and concerns confronting individual advertising agents therefore resonate in their respective perceptions of the Australian consumer. Not surprisingly, the industry's voice was often divided.

The image of the consumer also bore the marks of broader trends and developments – particularly those occurring on a national scale. 'When we look at ideas about national identity,' writes White, 'we need to ask, not whether they are true or false, but what their function is, whose creation they are, and whose interests they serve'.[11] While it is obvious whose interests are served by the advertising industry's perceptions of Australian national identity, their construction and function nevertheless remain important issues. By examining the changing conceptualisation of the 'Australian consumer' and his/her rationality outlined by local advertising journals and monographs, this paper will provide an insight into the unique ways in which the advertising industry and its advertisements have interacted with popular perceptions of national identity. Moreover, the correlation between the advertising industry's constructions of national identity and its changing perception of the consumer illustrate the way in which advertising agents initially prescribed consumers rather than describing them.

9 Reekie, Impulsive women, p. 375.
10 Kingston, *Basket, Bag and Trolley*, p. 117.
11 White, *Inventing Australia*, p. viii.

SELLING ADVERTISING IN AUSTRALIA

During the early years of the twentieth century, the question of whether or not to advertise was frequently raised in the *Draper of Australasia* – the first local journal with a regular section devoted to advertising issues. Not surprisingly, the contributors to this section unanimously supported advertising. One writer thus observed: 'Advertising a thing doesn't always mean selling, but selling it always means advertising it'.[12] As advertisements spread across the pages of the press, advertising began to sell itself and the industry expanded accordingly. Discussions in the *Draper*'s columns indicate that local advertisers were becoming more interested in various aspects of advertising. The initial concern about the need to advertise was slowly being replaced by discussions about advertising outlay. 'Generally speaking, from 4 to 5 per cent of the gross sales is a fair expenditure,' counselled one contributor.[13] Others were beginning to show a greater interest in enhancing their advertisements' aesthetic appeals. N.L. Burnell thus told readers: 'The headline is one of the most vital parts of a successful ad. In it should be compressed as far as possible the gist of the whole advertisement'.[14] Marketing tips were also offered: 'Double the efficiency of your advertisement in the papers by making it relate to the show you are putting in your window'.[15]

Republishing articles from the leading American advertising journal *In Print*, the *Draper* served an important function for the fledgling advertising industry. The growing interest in advertising in Australia eventually led to the publication of *Reason Why* in 1908. Published by the advertising agency Burke and Weston in Sydney, *Reason Why* was the first Australian journal exclusively devoted to advertising created by admen. The publication of *Reason Why* and a second advertising journal a year later indicate that the advertising industry was both expanding and taking its work more seriously. The industry nevertheless remained in a primitive state – a point that was not lost on advertising practitioners. In 1911, Richardson, the former editor of *Ad Writer*, bemoaned the state of Australian advertising:

> Here in Australia, Advertising is not taken as seriously as it should be. There is too much groping in the dark, . . . too little recognition of the latent power of this twentieth century business developer . . . and altogether too much conservatism.[16]

It was up to the advertising industry to demonstrate to the public that advertising was an effective form of communication.

IDENTIFYING THE LOCALS

While the articles from overseas provided practical advice and theoretical perspectives on consumer nature, Australian advertising men found themselves alone

12 *Draper of Australasia*, 1908, 8(4), p. 136.
13 *Draper of Australasia*, 1904, 4(6), p. 208.
14 *Draper of Australasia*, 1904, 4(3), p. 118.
15 *Draper of Australasia*, 1905, 5(5), p. 162.
16 Richardson, *Power of Advertising*, p. viii.

when it came to defining the Australian consumer. Initial accounts of the local consumer in the *Draper* indicate that Australia's advertising practitioners were reluctant to underestimate their compatriots' sensibilities: 'Speaking generally, the Australasian public are perfectly well aware of the class of goods kept by any particular firm, therefore . . . there is no need for any of them to advertise solely to keep their name before the public'.[17]

Given the recent upsurge in patriotic sentiment surrounding Federation, this image of a practical, no-nonsense consumer seems to draw on the popular national characteristics outlined by Ward in *The Australian Legend*.[18] However, the passage from the *Draper* also advocates the use of emotional appeals to stir local consumers. Consumers, it suggests, were unlikely to react positively to bland appeals. While Australians were deemed to be discerning consumers, it is nevertheless implied that they enjoyed advertisements that were exciting, fresh and relevant. This duality can be similarly discerned in the comments made by eminent poster artist Harry J. Weston in a 1903 interview:

> He [Weston] wants something typically Australian – something that conveys some meaning to an Australian – and he believes in simple and broad treatment. . . . The imported poster, with rare exceptions has no meaning in Australia. . . . English subjects, English fashion plates and English characters are as much out of place as snakes in New Zealand, or socialism on the Stock Exchange. Mr Weston's motto is 'Australian posters for the Australian people'.[19]

Not surprisingly, the image of the stockman with his broad-brimmed hat, whip and riding-boots became a popular signifier of Australian identity in advertisements – particularly those appearing in the *Bulletin*, the so-called bushman's bible.[20] Figure 1 exemplifies the sentiments expressed by the *Draper* contributor and Weston.[21] The advertisement deliberately arouses the reader's emotions with distinctly Australian appeals before providing a descriptive account of the product. Although it is principally aimed at the male market, Figure 1's patriotic appeal nevertheless opens it to female consumers.

Adopting a less partisan viewpoint than Weston, A.J. Lamond observed that Australian consumers were unique and suggested that advertising appeals should be tailored to reflect local tastes and expectations:

> Australian advertisers should try and attain the happy medium between the English and the American methods. . . . But [with] the bulk of the population being from the Old Country the rather aggressive American style requires toning down a little, otherwise it might be just as likely to repel as to attract.[22]

17 *Draper of Australasia*, 1902, 2(3), p. 111.
18 Ward, *Australian Legend*, p. 2.
19 *Table Talk*, 19 March 1903, p. 13.
20 *Bulletin*, 20 January 1910, p. 34; *Bulletin*, 7 August 1913, p. 6; *Bulletin*, 13 December 1913, p. 39.
21 *Bulletin*, 4 December 1913, p. 39. See also Crawford, *Selling a Nation*, pp. 163–5.
22 *Draper of Australasia*, 1907, 7(1), p. 26.

Figure 1. Advertisement for Horlick's Malted Milk, 1913.
Source: *Bulletin*, 4 December 1913, p. 13.

While Lamond may have been echoing clients' marketing strategies, his concerns about repelling consumers nevertheless indicate that admen, both individually and collectively, were concerned about advertising's public image. 'Your advertising is the mirror the people look into', counselled one article in the *Draper*, 'and if the reflection is poor, skimpy or half-hearted, you won't prove that you and your business are worth looking at'.[23] Such concerns underpinned the industry's commitment to truthful advertising. False or misleading claims not only cast a shadow over all advertisements, it also meant that every advertiser was 'at the mercy of words, and the man who can lie the most can beat us out'.[24] Richardson's *The Power of Advertising* consequently encourages the industry to respect the consumer: 'In advertising, I hold the opinion that it is far better to over-rate a man's intelligence and judgement than to belittle it'.[25]

The desire for 'a happy medium' resurfaced in 1914, as the newly formed Victorian Ad Club discussed its affiliation with overseas organisations. Relaying his personal views, the Club's head, E.F. Ryall, told members:

> Whilst fully convinced that American methods, in their entirety, will not suit Australian conditions, I have a disposition to get away from English conservatism, although an Englishman myself. In doing business in Australia, it soon becomes evident that the hustling methods of the American engender suspicion, and rather tend to discourage business from otherwise. At the same time, we can learn much from Uncle Sam, and must confess that modern advertising owes its present advanced position to him. It is my firm conviction that affiliation with associated clubs of America would secure to us

23 *Draper of Australasia*, 1908, 8(1), p. 12.
24 Gewurz, *Wisdom and Success in Advertising*, p. 89.
25 Richardson, *Power of Advertising*, p. 163.

> the benefits of their pioneering work and experience, as well as much valuable help as time goes by.[26]

Ryall underscores the advertising industry's seemingly ambivalent image of the Australian consumer. On the one hand, he implies that they are not drawn in by advertising hyperbole. As Figure 1 implies, Australian consumers base their decisions on facts, not fantastic promises. This image of a rational consumer reflects the view outlined by a contributor to the *Reason Why*: 'People who read advertising are sensible people, else they would not read it'.[27] Garnering legitimacy for the industry, this claim also illustrates the assumptions underpinning the use of 'reason why' appeal in locally produced advertisements. It provided potential consumers with extended and often florid descriptions of the product and its qualities. However, unlike the American 'hard sell' advertisements, locally produced 'reason why' advertisements are somewhat more genteel. They appear to be grounded on the premise that consumption stemmed from a reasoned and informed decision-making process. As Reekie demonstrates, this image was deeply imbued with prevailing gender stereotypes. Male consumers, she writes, were characteristically deemed to be 'civilised, economically rational, seldom swayed by impulse, conservative and predictable, technical if not intellectual and a creature of the . . . world of work and politics'.[28] Noting that Horlick's was 'easily made' and produced 'healthy bodies and steady nerves', the creators of Figure 1 doubtlessly hoped to appeal to this type of consumer.

Yet Ryall's dissatisfaction with 'English conservatism' and admiration of American achievements suggests that the local advertising industry's perspective of its audience could not be one-dimensional. Australian advertising men certainly knew that consumption was not entirely based on calculated decisions; Figure 1's heading, after all, initially sought to stir the reader's emotions. The consumers who were most likely to react to these emotional appeals were deemed to be 'irrational'. This image of the consumer was also deeply engendered. Consumers who were guided 'by instinct, impulse and emotion' were commonly identified as females.[29] Such descriptions echoed prevailing attitudes concerning the 'weaker sex' and its inherent vulnerability.[30] Social mores also led many advertising experts to identify the consumer as a female. 'Three-fourths of the readers of advertisements are women,' declared one advertising man, 'Why? Because the average woman has more time for such reading than the ordinary man'.[31]

The image of the feminine consumer drew on the established norms of the retailing world. Retailers were well aware that most Australian households placed the family budget in female hands and that their profits were therefore dependent upon attracting (and maintaining) female customers. 'Recognizing then that woman IS the chief buyer, does it not seem wise to direct much of the advertising

26 *Ad Club Mag*, 1914, 1(1), p. 8.
27 *Reason Why*, 1908, 1(3), p. 21.
28 Reekie, Impulsive women, p. 371.
29 Reekie, Impulsive women, p. 370.
30 Garton, *Medicine and Madness*, p. 137.
31 *Draper of Australasia*, 1913, 13(12), p. 460.

to her?', asked a contributor to the *Reason Why*. It then added: 'We believe that advertisements should be written mainly to interest women'.[32] While retailers doubtlessly encouraged advertising agents to think of the irrational consumer as a woman, the advertising industry nevertheless had its own reasons for feminising the irrational consumer. For many admen, the irrational consumer was a desirable image. One advertising expert thus pointed out: '[I]t is well to remember that the wants of the world are different from the needs of the world. Women will spend money on their wants'.[33] To this end, the irrational consumer was a more appealing prospect than her discerning counterpart. Interestingly, the discourse concerning the irrational consumer identifies her in general terms; local advertising literature makes no mention of *her* nationality.

The two opposing images of the consumer reflected the commentators' respective clients and their clientele. Whether it was by way of osmosis or compromise, advertising agents at an individual level certainly took on the advertiser's views. After all, it was the advertiser who ultimately decided whether or not a particular advertisement would make it into print. However, on a broader level, this initial ambiguity concerning consumer rationality can also be seen as an indication of the fledgling advertising industry's own doubts. Without a neat or systematic way of categorising Australian consumers, many advertisers appear to have been unsure of their own advertisements. Their bold descriptions thus served a prescriptive function, providing them with an image of the consumer that suited their immediate needs. Identifying consumers as rational individuals helped project advertising as a serious business venture. This, in turn, lent some legitimacy to the advertising industry. The irrational consumer could similarly be used to highlight the advertising industry's efficacy to potential advertisers. Having a foot in each camp thus suited the needs of an industry that wanted to be taken seriously. This prescriptive process would become more apparent during the First World War.

A WAR OF WORDS AND IMAGES

The upsurge in patriotic fervour following the declaration of war in 1914 generated further reflection on the relationship between consumer and national identities. The industry's solution was to encourage Australians to consume products and nationalist sentiment – independently and interdependently. The *Ad Club Magazine* thus declared:

> [T]he Ad Club of Victoria has the satisfaction of knowing that it is playing its part in a great commercial upheaval, which has for its objects the furtherance of British interests throughout our great Commonwealth; a greater regard for commercial patriotism; a due perception of the vast future of empire trade, and practical application of that energetic commercial spirit.[34]

32 *Reason Why*, 1908, 1(4), p. 12.
33 *Draper of Australasia*, 1907, 7(5), p. 161.
34 *Ad Club Magazine*, 1914, 1(2), p. 3.

Advertising firms urged advertisers to seize the opportunity that stood before them. In December 1914, the Paton advertising agency announced: 'With popular inclination so greatly favouring him, with his goods, indeed, almost half sold, the Australian manufacturer finds opportunity thundering at his door'.[35]

As the advertising industry predicted, 'commercial patriotism' proved a profitable formula. Such appeals demonstrated the advertiser's patriotism on the one hand, while stimulating the consumer's own sense of patriotism on the other. These advertisements also blurred rational and irrational appeals. Advertisements for patent medicines used the testimonials received from soldiers to underscore the quality of their product and, more importantly, to encourage consumers to send the advertised product to the frontline. Asking the nation's mothers, wives, girlfriends and sisters to put their money where their heart is, one advertiser declared: 'SOLIDERS IN THE TRENCHES Urgently WANT MORE ZAMBUK for their Cuts, Wounds and Sore Feet'.[36] The advertisement simultaneously appeals to both types of consumers – the emotional purchaser and the rational user. A 1915 advertisement for Gowing Brothers menswear stores reveals that advertisers were conscious of using such appeals:

> There *is* Sentiment in Business. These past few weeks have witnessed a Nation-wide effort to arouse the patriotism of the people. . . . to stir the National sentiment of Australians to the point of action. On the one hand the appeal to the young men has been, and still is, to join the ranks of those whose blood is being shed to keep us a Nation of free people. On the other hand, those of us who must stay behind are asked but fairly, to make it our business to see, that those of 'Our brave boys' who come back are provided with work and wages, and the dependents of those who do not – out of our wealth. . . . For nearly half a century we have urged Australian people to wear Australian wool . . . but always for the reason of its superior goodness and better value. Today we urge you to mix sentiment with your business, to weigh the added reasons for your preference, and to buy Australian Goods.[37]

Dressing consumption as a patriotic endeavour, however, was no guarantee of success. Indeed, the deployment of such appeals required a degree of tact. The *Draper*, for example, roundly criticised one advertiser's attempt to commemorate the first anniversary of the Gallipoli landings:

> Beyond all doubt, the firm are [sic] perfectly sincere in their appreciation of the heroic landing, and their tribute to their employees with the colours is entirely wholehearted. Yet to make such the subject of a public announcement will arouse in some minds a suspicion that the advertiser is turning the national pride and sorrow to personal advantage. Unfortunately, the public regard an ad. as a merchant's appeal for business, and will be slow to attribute to him a higher motive. . . . [W]e cannot believe the announcement under review is good business.[38]

35 *Ad Club Magazine*, 1914, 1(3), p. 26.
36 *Bulletin*, 18 September 1915, p. 52.
37 *Australian Worker*, 14 October 1915, p. 2.
38 *Draper of Australasia*, 1916, 16(6), p. 161.

A company's use of patriotic copy and its highlighting of the company's sincerity for the national cause indicates that advertisers implicitly understood the limits to which they could exploit the consumer's emotions.

Australia's propagandists did not need to account for their overt and often crude use of nationalistic appeals; their patriotism was unsullied by commercial interests. However, this did not prevent them from borrowing ideas from their commercial cousins to improve the effectiveness of their own work. This was particularly evident in the production of propaganda posters. While early Australian efforts were strongly influenced by imported material and the assumptions contained therein, later posters displayed greater emphasis on appealing directly to an Australian audience.[39] Australian propagandists were not complete novices. Artists, such as Weston, were already well-versed in the art of poster production. Many of Weston's wartime posters illustrated his aforementioned motto 'Australian posters for the Australian people'. Figure 2, one of Weston's more noteworthy efforts, identifies the war in distinctly Australian terms. Likening the German threat to the destruction wrought by bushfires, the poster surreptitiously exploits the mateship ethos with a simple question.[40]

With their combination of striking imagery and a simple statement, posters such as Figure 2 were aimed squarely at the reader's emotions. The impact of the poster campaign was still vividly recalled by one veteran decades later:

> Facing Martin Place, looking up from George Street, was a four-storey newspaper office on the front of which was a picture of Lord Kitchener with his right arm and forefinger outstretched with these words inscribed underneath, 'Your King and Country needs you. Who's next?' This finally made me issue an ultimatum to my father: in July I would enlist without his consent, he finally gave his consent.[41]

That a British poster featuring a British general ultimately aroused such an emotional response suggests that Australian audiences were perhaps a little more British than local advertising theorists claimed. Interestingly, these appeals underwent a discernible shift as the war progressed. The distinctly Australian imagery and appeals featured in posters such as Figure 2 appear to be an attempt to overcome the division caused by the conscription and sectarianism. Although it was only one factor among many, the relentless propaganda campaign nevertheless helped sustain the combat strength of the Australian Imperial Force throughout the war.

The wartime propaganda poster campaign also had an impact on the advertising industry. At the opening of the inaugural Australian Convention of Advertising Men in 1918, R. Maynard commented on the advertising industry and its role in the war effort. Referring to the lessons gleaned from the propagandists, he claimed:

39 Vaughn, *Holding Fast*, p. 147; Stanley, Introduction, p. 11.
40 Stanley, Introduction, p. 9.
41 Dawes and Robson, *Citizen to Soldier*, p. 50. See also Thomson, *Anzac Memories*, p. 97.

Figure 2. Advertisement of the Win the War League, ca. 1916.
Source: Monash University Rare Books Collection.

> Strangely enough, the war had done more, in fact, was the largest factor, in the development of advertising than any other factor in the last fifty years. . . . The Kitchener army was raised by advertisement. . . . The delegates from the South to that Convention had taken, and were taking, a very great part in the raising of the Australian War Loans, and they had taken also a great part in the Red Cross movement and other patriotic activities.[42]

The impact of the propaganda war was also evident in the convention's programme, with speakers discussing topics such as 'The Value of Illustration in Advertising' and 'Art in Relation to Advertising'. The industry's views had clearly changed since the early days of the conflict, when an advertisement for a commercial artist described artwork as the 'helpmate' of copy in the modern adver-

42 QIAM, *Proceedings and Resolutions*, p. 15.

tisement.[43] From the production viewpoint, wartime posters underscored the drawing power of striking imagery combined with simple statements. During the following decade, this lesson would become more pronounced in commercial advertisements.

The poster campaign also suggested that an effective campaign did not necessarily require a quality product; success stemmed from the advertising agent's *persuasive skills* rather than the advertiser's knowledge of a given product. Any questions about the need for a professional industry exclusively devoted to advertising were effectively silenced.

In eschewing the principles of 'reason why' appeal, these lessons also supported the view that audiences were more likely to be motivated by emotions rather than facts. The image of the emotional consumer could now be broadened to include the primary target of the propaganda campaign – young men.

THE MODERN CONSUMER

The war had proven to be a catalyst for the advertising industry and, indeed, a new generation of admen. In his memoirs, the eminent advertising executive G. Patterson and erstwhile Digger thus recalled:

> [T]he war years strengthened my outlook on life, taught me the warm friendliness and nobility of the common man and thus enabled me to get on well with people in all walks of life.[44]

However, from the industry's perspective, it was the propaganda campaign that would have an ongoing impact upon the way that it conducted business.

Although the battlefields had fallen silent, advertising literature frequently retained language of war. In 1919, one contemporary had little qualm in identifying advertising as propaganda:

> Nobody needs to be told about garters, or fountain pens, or pipes, or tooth pastes in general. Such products don't need mere advertising. But every special brand or make of every such article needs selling propaganda – which is advertising meshed with selling.[45]

While H. Lasswell's 1927 exposé of wartime propaganda activities ended such analogies, the principles of propaganda were nevertheless absorbed by the advertising industry. The demands made by one contributor in the *Waddy*, the journal of the New South Wales Advertising Institute, thus echo the principles learnt from the propagandists: 'Decide now that the old idea, that the sole function of advertising was to make sales, has been proved false and is, therefore, inadequate'.[46]

43 *Ad Club Magazine*, 1914, 1(3), p. 33.
44 Patterson, *Life*, p. 19.
45 *Australasian Manufacturer*, 1919, 4(177), p. 24.
46 *Waddy*, 1919, 1(4), p. 23.

During the course of the 1920s, the image of the 'general' consumer in advertising literature increasingly suggested that the industry viewed its audience as a mass of irrational consumers. As Reekie contends, this was a reflection of the growing orthodoxy that held the consumer to be female.[47] With the manufacture of household items increasing, advertisers were desperate to attract as many new consumers as possible.[48] Echoes from the prewar years nevertheless persisted. Analysing an advertisement for Bonds hosiery for the *Draper*, a reviewer thus observed: 'The ad. man is palpably aware that while a man may buy a certain brand of hob-nailed boots because they are Australian-made, a woman will not be influenced wholly by this factor in the purchase of her hosiery'.[49] When describing the local consumer, the advertising literature likewise reverted to prewar assertions. W.G. consequently noted in the *Draper*'s advertising section:

> The Australian ad-man seems to have caught the vision of the American, added to it the solidarity of the Englishman, and is adapting both to his profession with that common sense and moderation which, from a visitor's experience, is one of the chief characteristics of the Australian.[50]

This point is underscored by Patterson's fortuitous acquisition of the account of the American soap giant Palmolive. When an errant shipment of the soap landed in Sydney, Patterson deftly secured the account by arguing that 'the soap was already well known through the circulation of American magazines'. However, the agency's first advertisements sought to cater to the local audience's tastes:

> [W]hile layouts were based on American advertisements, we considered the introductory copy must have a British flavour. The first paragraph of the opening half-page began, 'When Britain was a country of woad-stained savages . . .'[51]

While W.G. had echoed earlier observations, his claims also differed from previous commentators insofar as they project a slightly more positive image of the American approach. This shift could in part be attributed to the increased exposure to American firms. During the war, American products gained a foothold in the Australian market. Over the course of the twenties, American companies were the leading exporters of cars, films and electrical wares to Australia.[52] Such products were imbued with a strong sense of modernity. Along with their wares, these American firms also exported their own advertisements and promotional material. Fearful of falling behind, local advertising agencies similarly followed the American lead. The increased American presence also had a significant effect on local industries. As Whitwell notes, Australian firms sought to emulate American models of production.[53] The interrelationship between the local advertising

47 Reekie, Impulsive women, p. 375.
48 Hill, *Industrialization*, p. 18.
49 *Draper of Australasia*, 1920, 20(7), p. 270.
50 *Draper of Australasia*, 1921, 21(12), p. 481.
51 Patterson, *Life*, p. 39.
52 Churchward, *Australia & America*, p. 106.
53 Whitwell, *Making the Market*, p. 15.

industry and the developments taking place in the manufacturing sector is illustrated by a brochure for the Art Training Institute's commercial art course:

> Among the factors which have caused the phenomenally rapid growth of advertising are the remarkable developments of mass production, mass distribution, and mass selling, the rapid expansion of great departmental stores, chain stores and one, two, or three price stores; the fast elimination of jobbers, wholesalers, and middlemen; and the almost 'mushroom' growth of the credit instalment and time-payment system of purchasing. All these economic developments have combined to make Advertising a profession abounding with future possibilities and rich in financial benefit.[54]

The growth of Australia's car market during the 1920s underscores these claims. In the year 1921–22, car registrations numbered 99,270. By 1928–29, the figure had grown to 466,930.[55] The 1921 tariff had seen manufacturers as Ford and General Motors set up local production plants in the mid-twenties. The costs of producing cars locally coupled with an emerging culture of buying on credit made car ownership more accessible. Australia's fledgling car manufacturers duly enlisted the services of the advertising industry to popularise the ideology of car ownership and, indeed, their respective firms. However, the impact of the manufacturing sector upon the advertising industry did not end there. The lucrative General Motors account, for example, had lured Campbell-Ewald agency and the J Walter Thompson (JWT) agency to Australia in 1929. While Campbell-Ewald soon closed its doors, JWT prospered. Moreover, it would become an active contributor in the local industry's discourse on consumer attributes.

In general, Australian advertising literature from the 1920s displayed an increasing interest in America. Articles by American visitors commenting on Australian advertising or Australian advertising agents who had returned from the United States were frequently published in trade journals. While the rest of the nation retained its strong attachment to Britain, local advertising men were busily identifying themselves with their trans-Pacific neighbour. Upon his return from a visit to the United States, the President of the Victorian Institute of Advertising Men, H.E. Wilson observed: 'Americans seem a little distrustful of English people, but recognise Australians as brothers with similar problems and aspirations of their own'.[56] An article on Australian advertising originally published American journal *Printing Art* further underscores the differences between Australian and British advertising men: 'Here the advertiser more closely follows the traditions and spirit of America than any other people we know, and stubbornly refuses to be led around by the ear, despite English influences'.[57]

While individual advertising men were doubtlessly proud of the similarities being drawn between them and their American cousins, the industry as a whole hesitated to identify itself altogether with Madison Avenue. Australian agents tacitly understood that American advertising techniques did not guarantee success.

54 Art Training Institute, *The New Era of Commercial Art*, unpaginated.
55 Forster, *Industrial Development*, p. 31.
56 *Advertising in Australia*, 1922, 1(9), p. 9.
57 Cited in Barker, Advertising art, p. 73.

They appreciated that there were significant differences between Australian audiences and their American counterparts. Already in 1920, there were complaints concerning 'the intrusion of the vulgarest [sic.] type of Americanisms within locally produced advertisements.[58] Such sentiments would resurface later in the decade in relation to the use of modernist art techniques in advertisements. Over the course of the decade, advertisements increasingly featured bold lines and harsh angles. Advertisements such as Figure 3 illustrate how advertisers sought to endow themselves and their products with a sense of style, contemporaneity and, of course, modernity. *In Print* provided a clear explanation of what advertisers hoped to achieve by incorporating this modernist style into their advertisements:

> The ideal advertisement is the advertisement that attracts immediate attention, and there can be no doubt about the power of 'futurist' drawing to fulfil this purpose. . . . The puzzling nature of so much of modern art, which is a source of irritation to those who are not attuned to the mind of the artist . . . is again an advantage of the advertiser, owing to the curiosity aroused by these pictorial puzzles. These are the purely practical

Figure 3. Advertisement for Tooth's KB Lager, 1929.
Source: *Bulletin*, 8 May 1929, p. 43.

58 *Waddy*, 1920, 2(2), p. 1.

> points, which are of more importance, from the advertiser's point of view, than the permanent aesthetic significance of the designs.[59]

Such appeals, it seems, were not based on the premise of a rational consumer.

Many local advertising experts were vehemently opposed to this new style of design. Richardson, for example, predicted that advertisers would soon 'tire of the crazy and unsatisfying cubist illustrations' and 'return to the style which has real art, beauty, simplicity and commercial value'.[60] In *Advertiser's Monthly*, E. Perugini voiced his views even with greater vehemence. Sounding like an advocate for a return to the 'reason why' form of appeal, he declared:

> It [modern art] is oriental or savage in its origins, and is based entirely on the decorative and pictorial attempts of the primitive and coloured races of mankind. . . . [I]t has definitely a pernicious influence on the national mental viewpoint. We are a white race, and are supposed to live in a decent and advanced civilization, why then should we encourage and adopt the baser, animistic viewpoints of the niggers and jungle inhabitants. . . . Either we whites *are* a higher species, or we are not. If, as we so frequently state, we are, then the least we can do is to live up to our superiority.[61]

From an advertising perspective, this outburst also provides a candid insight into the degree to which advertising agents drew on a combination of established 'conventions' and gut feelings to create their advertisements.

Perugini's racist tirade demonstrates the pervasive influence of popular perceptions of national identity and underscores the importance of viewing advertisements contextually. Such claims thus illustrate what Williams deems to be Australia's 'disaffection with the modern age'.[62] The image of the Australian advertising agent revealed by Perugini also stands at odds with the image of the American adman of the corresponding period. Whereas Marchand describes American advertisers as the 'apostles of modernity', their Australian counterparts could be described as the moderators of modernity.[63]

Figure 3, however, demonstrates that local advertisers were nevertheless willing to use those aspects of the modern style that served their immediate interests. The advertisers that integrated the 'curious' and 'primitive' designs into their advertisements recognised that it conveyed sense of style, sophistry and modernity that appealed to Australian consumers (both male and female). For these agents, consumption patterns were the ultimate arbiters of style, not conventional artistic taste or racial theories. The rapidly escalating levels of consumption and advertising expenditure during the course of the decade provided a ringing endorsement for the industry and its growing pragmatism.

While the image of the Australian consumer that emerged in the advertising literature in the 1920s was increasingly informed by more pragmatic concerns, it nevertheless remained subject to the advertising agents' own preconceptions.

59 *In Print*, 1927, 1(4), p. 13.
60 Richardson, *New Era*, p. 79.
61 *Advertiser's Monthly*, 1929, 1(9), p. 5.
62 Williams, *Quarantined Culture*, p. 3.
63 Marchand, *Advertising*, p. 1.

Noting that advertisers of this period viewed consumers with a 'mixture of contempt and respect', Pope's observation of American trends during this decade is no less applicable to Australia.[64] When the Great Depression hit Australia in 1929, the declining levels of consumption would further reinforce the industry's paradoxical view of local consumers and their attributes.

DEALING WITH DEPRESSION

The Depression hit Australia hard. Unemployment hovered at 20 per cent in the darkest days of 1932–33.[65] The number of bodies produced by Holden's Motor Body Builders in 1930 was less than one-third of the amount in 1928.[66] For many struggling manufacturers, advertising expenditure was often the first part of the budget to be reduced or cancelled. A 1934 advertisement for one agency estimated that £8 million was being spent annually on advertising – less than half the estimated amount spent in 1921.[67] As the *Advertiser's Monthly* reveals, the economic crisis forced the advertising industry to re-examine its practices: 'The success of a campaign will depend upon the ability of the advertiser to judge the pulse of public thought and to drive home the appeal and sales message in a manner which awakens a spontaneous response in the heart of the average Australian'.[68]

Dwindling profits were not the industry's only problem. Noting that 'Nobody advertises unless he wishes to make personal gain', one Victorian parliamentarian suggested that advertising be taxed so that the Government could 'get something out of these advertisements and announcements in these times'.[69] Many complained that advertising added to the cost of products. 'Advertising men', reported *Newspaper News*, 'are charged with promoting a sort of armaments race of wasteful expenditure, especially in superfluous boosting of universal necessities under expensively created brands of doubtful utility to the consumer'.[70] In light of such problems, the industry adopted a more pragmatic view of the consumer. Noting that optimism worked to keep consumers 'in the frame of mind to spend', Figure 4 highlights the reason for this shift. What people wanted from advertising, argues Marchand, was 'not a true mirror but a Zerrspiegel, a distorting mirror that would enhance certain images'.[71] As opposed to the image of a cautious and thrifty consumer, Figure 4's image of an irrational consumer susceptible to his or her whims served to underscore the benefits of maintaining advertising expenditure amidst the economic downturn.

64 Pope, *Making of Modern Advertising*, p. 249.
65 Boehm, *20th Century Economic Development*, p. 26.
66 Stubbs, *Australian Motor Industry*, p. 10.
67 *Rydge's Business Monthly*, 1934, 7(1), p. 4; VIAM, *Efficiency in Advertising*, p. 40.
68 *Advertiser's Monthly*, 1930, 2(2), p. 3.
69 Victoria, *Parliamentary debates*, 1930, 183, p. 3035.
70 *Newspaper News*, September 1932, p. 8.
71 Marchand, *Advertising*, p. xvii.

Figure 4. Advertisement of Griffin Shave & Co. advertising agency, 1931.
Source: *Newspaper News*, February 1931, p. 19.

While Figure 4 briefly appeals to national sentiments, advertising literature during this period increasingly refrained from commenting on the general idiosyncrasies of the Australian consumer. An article in *Newspaper News*, the industry's leading journal, clearly states the cause for this shift:

> Impossible as it is to escape the thing, patriotism seems a poor substitute for efficiency in sales appeal, says an expert. . . . [A] particular brand or commodity is bought by a person because of its specific use value, its efficiency for a specific purpose . . . the only real reasons why we should buy a product are its quality and value for money and not because it comes from Australia or South Africa or Canada.[72]

72 *Newspaper News*, March 1931, p. 4.

Developments within the advertising industry itself also contributed to this change. JWT's venture into the Australian market was facilitated by a 'secret weapon' – market research. While the local advertising industry had spent the 1920s declaring *ad nauseum* that modern advertising was 'scientific' and 'efficient', it would be the arrival of JWT that marked the real beginnings of scientific advertising in Australia. R. Simmat, JWT's research manager, detailed the monumental change taking place in the advertising industry: 'Modern Advertising, by substituting the scientific for the inspiration, has made advertising less and less of a hit and miss affair.' Simmat then outlined the firm's unique approach:

> Scientific method involves three steps prior to the formulation of any advertisement and merchandising plan. The first is *the collection of facts*; the second is *the analysis of the facts collected*; and the third is *the graphic presentation of these facts*.[73]

While JWT's methods were rudimentary, they nevertheless encouraged advertising men to replace assumptions and 'gut feelings' with more reasoned accounts of the consumer and his/her desires. The Hemingway and Robertson educational manual, *Practical Advertising*, thus proffered pragmatic advice on the Australian consumer. Differentiating between Australian consumers, it noted:

> In the writing and designing of Australian advertising there must be studied and taken into account many distinct differences in the mental, moral and material outlook of the people in various States. These differences are due in great measure to the climate and productive differences of the States. The climate of Sydney, for instance, induces people to live in the open air, but the citizen of Hobart lives indoors to a much greater extent.[74]

However, assumptions based on presumed national attributes did not altogether disappear. A different lesson from the same manual thus opines:

> In Australia, the direct command method, though frequently used, is perhaps not as successful as in older countries. Probably this is due to the independent outlook of Australians – a relic of the not-so-far-distant pioneering days.[75]

Significantly, the celebration of market research in advertising journals throughout the 1930s was at odds with the Australian industry's actual operations. In *Newspaper News*, one advertising man observed that 'While many Australian advertising firms claim to include market research . . . very few, if any, are equipped to render it successfully'.[76] A brochure for the O'Brien Publicity went one step further. It claimed that market research should be 'treated with discretion – particularly in Australia'. 'In most instances', it continued later, 'our clients have a very fair idea of the market value of their own goods'.[77] Rather than assessing publicity, it seems many local agencies regarded market research as a means of promoting publicity.

73 Simmat, Modern advertising, p. 52. [original emphasis]
74 Hemingway and Robertson, *Practical Advertising*, p. 32.
75 Hemingway and Robertson, *Practical Advertising*, p. 11.
76 *Newspaper News*, October 1930, p. 11.
77 O'Brien Publicity, *25 Years*, unpaginated.

As early as 1933, *Newspaper News* was optimistically claiming that 'It has taken the Depression to provide the real test of advertising, and advertising has come through the ordeal with an enhanced reputation.' In terms of the consumer, it continued 'in times of depression people did not buy but, in the jargon of salesmen, "must be sold" '.[78] The Depression had hardened the industry and its attitude towards the consumer. Much to the industry's surprise, consumers kept consuming throughout the economic crisis. Although the level of consumption had fallen, the public did not revert to a preconsumerist lifestyle. The advertising industry's survival had ensured that Australia would remain a consumer society. Looking ahead, the advertising industry's future prospects were further bolstered by the growing popularity of a new advertising medium – radio. W.A. McNair conceded that radio 'as an advertising medium . . . was [a] complete puzzle' to many agents during the early thirties.[79] From the mid-thirties onwards, radio's popularity had made it an indispensable medium in any major advertising campaign. Mastering the art of radio advertising was not simply a technical question; it required intimate knowledge of the consumer. By the end of the decade, the industry had succeeded in applying its understanding of the consumer to the new medium in order to convert listeners into consumers.

The economy's gradual recovery over the course of the decade saw the advertising industry adopt a somewhat condescending view of the consumer. Advertising literature suggests that the industry was abandoning its view of the rational consumer. 'It is the business of advertising to sell dreams if it is to bring about a sustained increase in the sale of the product it promotes,' observed *Newspaper News* columnist H. Ferguson in 1937.[80] Displaying similar confidence, Richardson baldly declared: 'Believe it or not the buying public likes to be hypnotised with hyperbole. They find the truth too commonplace, prosaic and unbelievable'.[81] This was a far cry from his 1911 claim that it was better 'to over-rate a man's intelligence . . . than to belittle it.' While market research claimed to be bringing science into advertising, its existence was nevertheless premised on this view of the consumer. The primary concern of market research was to motivate consumer desires – which were presumed to be latent and ultimately irrational. Far from the rationale underpinning the 'reason why' appeal, advertising was becoming a form of 'infotainment' targeted at an audience that was deemed to be passive and irrational. In this sense, Australian consumers were little different to those in America, Britain, or France.

CONCLUSION

While the Depression had marked the beginnings of a new era in the advertising industry's conceptualisation of Australian consumers, the Second World War

78 *Newspaper News*, July 1933, p. 10.
79 McNair, *Some Reflections*, p. 18.
80 *Newspaper News*, March 1937, p. 3.
81 *Rydge's Business Journal*, 1937, 11(5), p. 660.

effectively entrenched it. Mobilising itself to form the War Effort Publicity Board (WEPB), the advertising industry functioned as the Commonwealth's propaganda machine.[82] Not surprisingly, the pragmatic view of the consumer hardened as the industry waged its ideological campaign. F. Goldberg, the head of the WEPB's specialised media section, illustrates this process:

> Advertising today is part of a wide-spreading propaganda machine concerned with the all-important task of *moulding public opinion*. . . . [A]dvertising can no longer be regarded as a purely commercial entity, but rather, as a department of the much wider and essentially modern science of propaganda.[83]

Rather than being an accurate description of the consumer, Goldberg's image of the consumer serves as a reflection of the grim status of the advertising industry, not to mention his personal biases. This pragmatic shift in advertising theory further demonstrates the inherently prescriptive nature of the advertising industry's 'descriptions' of the local consumer.

While the more refined market research techniques of the fifties and sixties would eventually confirm many of the industry's earlier claims, this overview of early twentieth century advertising literature reveals the degree to which 'gut feelings' and educated guesswork had underpinned earlier definitions of the 'Australian' consumer. Rather than describing the consumer, the advertising industry during the early twentieth century was prescribing the consumer – one that served advertising's own needs and requirements. These approximations also account for the gradual development of advertising theory that Curti identified. Unwilling to risk sales by contravening 'conventional' wisdom, advertising experts thus urged the local industry to attain a happy medium. At the outer extreme, figures such as Perugini called for outright conservatism in advertising appeal. In each case, the existence of alternative approaches to advertising reveals the degree to which ideas about the consumer were constructions. Each image of the consumer forwarded by advertising agents selectively echoed broader trends and developments, not to mention the personal biases of the individual expert providing the 'description'.

The discourse of nationhood contained in advertising literature clearly illustrates its selectivity. Prior to the First World War, the advertising industry unproblematically blurred consumer and national identities in its journals. The war saw the conflict between consumer and national identities first come to a head, as advertising experts struggled to reconcile the positive view of the 'Australian' with the irrational view of the mass audience. As the industry's increasingly negative view of the consumer increasingly came into open conflict with notions of Australian identity, advertising literature quietly ceased to equate the two identities. This is not to say that advertisers ceased to use nationalist appeals; they clearly did not. However, advertising literature does indicate that the advertising industry no longer saw Australian consumers in distinctly national terms. By the late 1920s,

82 See Crawford, Nothing to sell?
83 *Rydge's Business Journal*, 1942, 16(2), p. 275.

the consumer was increasingly identified as a socio-economic entity – a development that would be further cemented by market researchers and their categories. While their imagery differed, the propaganda created by Australia's advertising industry during the Second World War nevertheless shared the same view of the consumer as their American and British counterparts. To this end, the consumer had already become a homogenised or 'globalised' concept. In advertising circles, ideas about nationality had become an afterthought rather than the guiding principle.

The development of the conceptualisation of the consumer thus demonstrates that the advertising industry has generally worked to reinforce popular ideas about Australian identity – particularly those aspects that fulfilled or coincided with its commercial imperatives. It is this highly selective amplification of consumer attributes that marked the advertising industry as one of the most influential image making industries. Over the subsequent decades, a more seamless approach has been adopted. Advertisers have thus used slogans like 'Aussie Kids are Weetbix Kids' and 'I'm Australian as Ampol' to identify themselves with Australians who, in turn, are asked to identify themselves with advertisers' brand names. To this end, it seems that advertisers are still prescribing the Australian consumer. However, this process has also had a significant impact on the conceptualisation of Australian identity. For the local advertising industry, the term 'Australian' has ceased to a description of the consumer. It is now just another brand name vying against Coca-Cola or Nike in the marketplace for the consumer's hard earned dollar.

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