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## A strategy of seduction? The role of commercial advertisements in the eighteenth-century retailing business of Antwerp

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This article aims to place the use of promotional advertising material in a long-term perspective. By analysing the functioning of eighteenth-century commercial notices in the retailing business of Antwerp, a provincial town in the southern Netherlands, we try to demonstrate how advertisements of this kind had no clear-cut persuasive meaning. Rather, they were used as a way of mediating information barriers between buyers and sellers and, thus, lowering transaction costs. A quantitative and semantic breakdown of the advertisements in a local newspaper, the *Gazette van Antwerpen*, will show the fallacies of presuming a direct manipulative force from these eighteenth-century commercial messages.

**Keywords:** eighteenth century; southern Netherlands; Antwerp; newspaper advertisements; retailing business; commercial discourse; consumption

Within current mainstream historical understanding there is general consensus regarding significant consumer changes in the eighteenth century, although discussion remains as to precise timing, location and social breadth (most recently confirmed in Overton, Whittel, Dean, & Hann, 2004). One influential line of reasoning, popularised by Neil McKendrick, correlates these eighteenth-century alterations on the demand side to the widespread rise of commercial advertisements in newspapers (see especially McKendrick, 1982; Mui & Mui, 1989). Advertising is perceived as one of the ‘new’ commercial techniques used by retailers to sell the growing amounts of goods. This leads to construction of narratives in which advertising becomes *the* signifier of an emerging consumer society, thus indicating the ‘persuasive’ or ‘rhetorical’ side of advertising as an historical *explanandum*. The assumption implies that advertising not only worked but also changed and shaped eighteenth-century taste and demand in ‘organising’ consumer choice around variability, newness and fashion, and ‘taught’ us to shop in a respectable and polite manner.<sup>1</sup> Recent, and more nuanced, literature has refrained from this instrumental and one-sided interpretation so as to stress a dialectical relationship between a fashion-conscious consumer and a knowledgeable retailer. Advertisements are seen as written ‘consumer cues’ to shoppers and one of a suite of promotional tools to tradesmen – parties that were both already immersed in polite discourse (see Berg & Clifford, 1998; Coquery, 2004; Morgan, 2006; and recently Stobart, Hann, & Morgan, 2007). Yet an implicit causality

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between advertising and the dawn of a consumer society is held intact. This is not to say that eighteenth-century consumers bought more, new, and fashionable products as a *direct* result of spreading, manipulative advertising. Rather, the language of newspaper notices helped to shape and fix *indirectly* contemporary consumer practices and lingering discourses of shopping and consumption. However, more empirical research and a radical deconstruction and re-contextualising of promotional material is needed before making sweeping statements about the net effects of advertisements or their supposedly important role in the making of 'consumer-citizens' (see e.g. Jones, 1996, p. 37).<sup>2</sup>

This article seeks to question older assumptions about eighteenth-century promotional material. Indeed, our analysis examines the use and function of commercial notices in the retailing business of the eighteenth century. For this purpose we compiled a database of commercial advertisements from the *Gazette van Antwerpen*, a local newspaper of the southern Netherlands.<sup>3</sup> Our choice of eighteenth-century Antwerp was a logical one. Recent probate inventory research places Antwerp alongside Amsterdam, Paris and London as an exemplary early modern consumer city (as analysed by Blondé, 2002, 2005; Blondé & Van Damme, forthcoming). According to this evidence, Antwerp had all the hallmarks of a 'consumer society', albeit on a somewhat modest level. Although the city witnessed a period of severe de-industrialisation and de-urbanisation at the beginning of the eighteenth century, many new consumer products were imported in this period, including tea and coffee, chocolate, Indian cotton, porcelain and so on (on the economic well-being of Antwerp in the eighteenth century, see Blondé, 1999; Lis, 1986). Indeed, Antwerp's well-to-do middle level and elite households increasingly bought new and fashionable products, heralding a much wider, more colourful and diversified material culture. From the 1750s onwards, Antwerp's economy adapted to these changing consumer patterns. Protected by moderate trade and tariff policies, local Antwerp entrepreneurs successfully developed import substitution industries and launched product and process innovations inspired by neighbouring countries, especially France (Van Damme, forthcoming). Henceforth, Antwerp recovered from its industrial crisis by adjusting its supply infrastructure to more fashionable and cheaper textile industries (such as the popular *siamoises* and printed cotton) and the processing of newly and/or imported products (including sugar refineries, tobacco manufactories, potteries, trinkets and toy factories). Clear diffusion processes were also occurring. As a result of (among other things) altering basic materials and using cheaper and less durable production processes, demand for consumer products spread socially and geographically (these conclusions were recently confirmed in Van Damme, 2007, pp. 185–257).

In sum, we have a test case comparable, at least to some extent, to concurrent processes in neighbouring countries. Questions remain, however, about whether these eighteenth-century consumer changes propelled any comparable 'advertising boom'. Were advertisements a significant element in this complex of changes on the supply and demand side, warranting narratives comparable to older advertisement research? Were they used by a large section of Antwerp's commercial circuits, or only by distinct types of retailers for very specific purposes and customers? (For an introduction to the diverse commercial circuits of Antwerp, see Van Damme, 2006.) Did these commercial notices function as a persuasive tool in the selling of increasingly complex and layered material output, or were other, perhaps neglected, motivations more important?

To answer these research questions our article is structured in a twofold manner. First, the Antwerp newspaper advertisements are placed in their broader historical context. Although they were part of a much older and encompassing culture of commercial printing, a quantitative analysis illuminates how Antwerp advertisements were indeed on

the rise and reflected eighteenth-century consumer changes – comparable to evolutions in England, France and the Dutch Republic (see Ferdinand, 1993; Feyel, 2000; Raven, 1993; Retat, 2001; Todd, 1989; Walker, 1975). This was a gradual process, of course, dominated by certain commercial actors of Antwerp society. In particular, retailers of second-hand goods targeted selective consumer groups with a specific rationale in mind. In the second part of this article, we elaborate on these findings. Questions are raised about why most Antwerp retailers neglected newspaper advertisements altogether as a useful tool for enticing customers. Indeed, one wonders if eighteenth-century commercial messages were as persuasive and influential as is sometimes stated. To be sure: some of the advertising templates and typefaces were quite specific for Antwerp, as becomes clear in the remainder of this article. However, we demonstrate how the advertising practices of eighteenth-century retailers were much akin to those in surrounding countries, thus justifying a general questioning of older interpretations about advertising. For this specific case – Antwerp in the eighteenth century – newspaper advertisements do not appear to have been an explanatory *deus ex machina*, or indirect ‘smoking gun’ of eighteenth-century consumer practices and shopping discourses. In comparison to existing interpretations of the same source material, we hope to offer an alternative scheme for understanding the role of promotional advertising material in the eighteenth-century retailing business.

## I

The use of printed commercial messages by Antwerp middlemen was not a radically new invention of the eighteenth century. The city streets were cluttered with older promotional materials such as commercial posters on houses (the so-called *affiches*), shop signs, small prints distributed to passers-by, placards with handwritten notices attached and so on (see Van Damme, 2007, pp. 118–124). However, regular printing ‘alerts and advertisements’ (*waarschouwinge en advertenties* or *annonces et avis divers*) became something of an innovation from the end of the seventeenth century onwards. Everywhere in the southern Netherlands, from the large cities of Antwerp, Ghent and Brussels, to the smaller ones, such as Leuven and Tournai, advertisement papers (*aankondigingsbladen* or *feuilles*) started appearing. From 1713 onwards – the beginning of Austrian rule in the southern Netherlands – the Brussels government made a functional distinction between newspapers with general information, advertisement papers and specialised magazines with items on science, the arts or fashions. The editors of such publications were required to purchase a specific patent (or *octrooi*), making government censorship easier to enforce (see Luykx, 1970). In the eighteenth century only one newspaper existed in Antwerp, the previously mentioned *Gazette van Antwerpen*, and its editor held the exclusive rights to publish general information and advertisements of all sorts (for more information on early newspaper activity in Antwerp, see McCusker, 1996; Van Damme & Deploige, 1998).

The *Gazette van Antwerpen* had its origins in one of the oldest papers of the southern Netherlands, the so-called *Extraordinarisse Post-tijdinghen* (Van Laerhoven, 1972). From at least 1691 onwards the *Gazette* came out twice a week, on Tuesdays and Fridays. But it is only for years after 1700 that all (or almost all) editions from one year (around 104 or 105 editions) are preserved in the City Library of Antwerp (see Figure 1).<sup>4</sup> Hence, from this date forward it is possible to present a clearer picture of the evolution and use of newspaper advertisements. Comparable to calculations for England, France, the Dutch Republic, and later on in other cities of the southern Netherlands, the number of



**GAZETTE  
VAN  
ANTWERPEN.**

*Met Privilegie*  *van haere*  
*Keyserlycke* *ende*  
*Konincklycke* *Majesteit.*  
**1754.** **No. 17.**

**Dynsdagh den 26. February.**

**MADRID, den 28. January.**



En rekent, dat'er sedert het verloop der twee voorgaende maenden in verscheide Havens van dit Ryck soo uyt Engeland, Napels, als Sicilien etc. 184. (waer-gelade Schepen niet Graenten dienste van de noot-hebbende Provincien binnen gezeelt zyn.

Den Grave van Fuentes, onlangs door onsen Monarch behoemt om als deszelfs Ambassadeur aen het Hof van sijne Sardijnische Majesteit de belangen van dese Kroone te gaen waarnemen, doet den laetsten toefel ontdekken om derrewaerts te vertrekken. Volgens de hier ghemaeckt-wordende bereytsels: sal sijne Excell: alhier met meedere pracht als eenig van sijne Voorfaeten verscheynen; Hier-en-tusschen verseekert men, dat den Grave van Sada, die tot Turin dat Doorlo Ampt med den uyttersten roem bekleeft heeft, door den Catholieken Koninck op sijne hier te rug komste tot Raeder Heer van Staet, ende van het Cabiner mer een jaerlycks inkomste van 25000. Spaensche Pattacons verheven sal worden.

Den Koninck, de 7. Vrouw persoonen, onlangs in de Leger plaerse der Mooren uyt het Serrail van den Bey ontrent Ceuta verloft, seer hertelyck aen onse Souvereine bevoien hebbende, heeft dese opper-Vorstinne naer den Marquis van la Croix, Gouverneur van die gewichtige Vesting, eenen Brief doen afveindigen, door den welken haere Majesteit die 7. geluckige Gevangenen naer dese Hoofst-Stadt op onbiedt soo haelt als de selve tot Ceuta het H. Doopsel ontfangen sullen hebben. Haere Catholieke Majesteit heeft daeren-boven 7. seer prachtige witte Zattyne Kleedoren doen inpakken, met de welke dese Leerlingemin het Geloof verciert sullen wesen op den dag, op den welken sy door de gheheylghe Waters ghereynight, en met onse Moeder de H. Kercke vereenicht sullen worden; By dese Gifte voeght onse goet-jonstige Souvereine noch voor jeder een uytnemend Hals Cruys van Juweelen, benevens 700. Piafiers, willende dat de meermaels-gemelde Vrouw persoonen door geene andere Vaertuygen, als door een wel-gewapent Oorlogh-Schip van Linia naar Barcelona overgebroghe sullen worden, om, alhier yckelen der Africaense Roovers op de Zee ontkomen zynde, de reyse te Lande naer dese Hoofst-Stadt uyt Barcelona xports in setten. Hier-en-tusschen hebben de Heeren van S. Just, Colonel van het

Figure 1. Title page of the *Gazette van Antwerpen*, 26 February 1754.

advertisements in the *Gazette* rose remarkably throughout the eighteenth century: from a total of 31 in 1703 to over 1600 nearly 90 years later! (Research on newspaper advertising in other cities of the southern Netherlands can be found in De Potter, 1879; Gaus, 1966;

Michielsens, 1938, pp. 316–319; Pays, 1995; Van Aerde, 1932; van Leuffel, 1996; Van Schevensteen, 1923–1924; Vernooij, 1983.) In the same period the average number of advertisements per edition rose from fewer than one to over 15. Although the increase of advertisements in the second half of the eighteenth century was impressive, the acceleration rate for the number of advertisements between 1703 and 1723 was even more remarkable (Table 1). In a period of 20 years the number of advertisements multiplied by seven, a ratio that was never reached again in the eighteenth century.

Despite this exponential growth of the advertising section, the overall structure of the *Gazette* remained intact, indicating the creativity of the long working printer *Hendrik Aertsens* in managing the spate of notices. From the outset, the advertisements in the *Gazette* were, as a sort of general rule, restricted to the two columns on the last page (in England too this was common practice, see e.g. Morgan, 2006, p. 67) (see Figure 2). But the constant flow of advertisements in the 1750s forced the subsequent printer, *Jean Francois van Soest*, to find a solution: he reduced the type size and began filling the lower margins of the newspaper with advertisements. However, due to the continuous growth of advertisements, this measure proved temporary. Twenty years later the new printer *Joannes Henricus van Soest* took over the newspaper after his father's death. He introduced a two-paged supplement which was published nearly every Friday and cleared the margins of announcements. The typeface of the Tuesday edition, however, remained as in earlier times crammed with advertisements. It was not until the 1790s that the margins in every edition were cleared and adverts again restricted to the last page. The increasing number of advertisements was absorbed into a more sizeable four-page 'Supplement'. On two occasions this *Bijvoegsel* was twice as large as the newspaper itself. These consecutive formal interventions helped make reading the *Gazette* easier on the eyes, although the type size and space between lines were continuously reduced so as to print more characters per page.

Not all of these notices, however, were promotional messages of commercial middlemen: a substantial part comprised more factual announcements that were distinguishable from the advertisements placed by retailers.<sup>5</sup> The majority of these factual alerts remained fairly pedestrian and 'materially' focused. In signalling 'cultural' events, the *Gazette* played only a quite limited role compared to other contemporary newspapers.<sup>6</sup> For example, despite Antwerp's fervent cultural life, the *Gazette* lacks announcements for the much-frequented operas and popular plays which the newspaper's readers – mostly situated in the middling and upper tiers of society – doubtless frequented. And, even more

Table 1. Absolute and average number of advertisements in the *Gazette van Antwerpen*, 1703–1790 (including repetitions).

Year	Editions	Number of ads	Average number of ads per edition	Supplement		Ads in the margins
				Single (2 p.)	Double (4 p.)	
1703	101	31	0.3	0	0	0
1723	105	217	2.1	0	0	0
1743	105	381	3.6	0	0	0
1750	104	524	5.0	0	0	7
1770	104	1159	11.1	17	0	53
1790	105	1613	15.4	30	39	2

Source: Database *Gazette van Antwerpen*.



## A D V E R T E N T I E N .

**I.**  
**D**at ter Woon-huyfe van Jacobus Norbertus Dierckx in de Coepoort-ſtraet alhier, door den gefworē Roepet Julianus Jofephus Timmermans op 27. Mey 1754. en de volgende daghen publickelyck aen de meeftebiedende per ſtuck in Wiſſel-gelt ſal verkocht worde, een party Stoffen, te weten couleure en geverſde Saye Damaften, geſtrepte Callenmincken, Gynen, Camelots met Zyde, Florettaſſes, Prince Sergien, Trypen, Fuſtins, ende meer andere goederen van die foorten, te lanck om te verhaelen, alle naegelaten door wylen Joffr. de Wed. M. Barnaval.  
 N. B. Dat in dien tuſſchen tyd van de ſelve aldaer per ſtuck oock zyn te bekomen tot eenen civielen prys.

**I I.**  
**M**en ſal verkoopen op Woensdagh 22. Mey 1754. door de gefwore Roepers J. P. Willemsens en J. van Lemens, ten huys van Sr. Hebrant in den ouden Voet-bogen-Hof aen de Gaſt-huys-Bempden, een party ſchoon Schilderyen ſoo van van Dyck, als andere, voornaeme Meesters, item een party ſchoon-Print-boecken, met een party ſchoon Teekeningen van differente Meesters, achtergelaeten by wylen Joffr. de Weduwe Jaques van Hal.

**I I I.**  
**O**p Dynſdagh 21. Juny 1754. en de navolgende dagen, ſal ten Sterf-huyſe van wylen Sr. J. Siebrecht, in ſijn leven Conſt-schilder en Koopman in Schilderyen, op de Meir binnen Antwerpen, ſonder ophouden aen de meeftebiedende verkocht worden in ſpecie van Wiſſel-geld, door den gefworen Roepet J. van Lemens, een ſchoon Cabinet, beſtaande in een conſiderable party Schilderyen van de vermaeste Italiaenſche, Franſche, Duytſche, Nederlandſche, en Hollandſche Meesters, nu ſedert meer dan 50. Jaeren door den voorſz. Heer met veel ſorge vergadert, waer van de Cataloguen in de principaelſte Steden te bekomen zyn: als tot Gend by d' Hr Jan de Meere, Schilder en Konſt-kooper in de Doncker-heecke, tot Brugge by d' Hr Matthys de Viſch, Conſt-schilder en Regeerder der Academie, tot Bruſſel by d' Hr t' Serſteveus, Boeck-verkoopet, tot Mechelen by d' Hr Smyers, Conſt-schilder, en tot Antwerpen by de Wed. vander Hey, Boeck-verkoopet: ſullende de gemelde Schilderyen op Donderdagh 6. en Vrydagh 7. Juny voor de Liefhebbers te ſien zyn: En mits ernogh 561. Kopen buyten de Catalogue in t'voorſz. Sterf-huys zyn exiſterende, ſoo ſullen de ſelve 14. dagen te vooren, te weten op Maendagh 27. Mey, en de naervolgende dagen op de Borſe verkocht worden, alwaer ſy vroegh-tydts voor jeder ten thoſen geſtelt ſullen worden.

**I V.**  
**M**en ſal publicck verkoopen ter Vrydags-merckt binnen Antwerpen, door den gefworen Roepet Joannes Petrus Willemsens: Een ſchoon groote Huiſingh met Vloere, Gange, Keuken, diverſche ne Camers, Plaetſe met Pompen van Put en Regen-Water, Weerdribbe, grooten Move, Kelders, diverſche opper-Camers, en Solders, Gronde &c. eertydts 2. Huyſingen geweest zynde, d'een genaemt de Blauwſchuyt, en d'ander den Timmer-hof, geſtaen ende gelegen in de Hoboke-ſtraet alhier.  
 De Verkoopers gaen af t' Recht van Calengieringe..

**I ANTWERPEN. BY JEAN FRANÇOIS VAN SOEST, in de Cammer-ſtraet.**

**De Condiſtien beruſten onder den voorſz. Roepen en onder den Notaris Vallée by S. Jacobs-Kerck.**  
 Men ſal den abſolucien Palm-ſlagh geven op den 5. July 1754. ſonder uyttel.

**V.**  
**M**en laet weten van weghens de Weduwe Jan Fothergil, woonachtigh tot Gend, dat ſy te koop heeft een party wel-geconditioneerde Conynge Vellen. Jemant gadinge hebbende om de ſelve in het geheel of ten deele te koopen, kan ſich t'haeren huys addreſſeren, alwaer ſy konnen gheſien worden; als oock eenige ſoorten geſneden Conyn ende Haſen-Hait.

**V I.**  
**A**lſoo onlangs binnen de Stadt Antwerpen ab inſtato zyn overleden Joffr. Maria Theresia ende Sr. Hendrick van Cantelbeek, Suſter en Broeder reſpective, beyde Hendricks Kinderen, daer Moeder af was Anna Maria Eeckelmans; ſoo wordt mits deſen voórde derde en leſte maal bekent ghemaect aen alle de gene vermeynen te hebben eenigh recht van ſuccesſie in de naergelaetenheyt van de voorſz. wylen ſoo van Vaders, als Moeders wegen, hun konnen addreſſeren by den Notaris Rombouts, woonende binnen de voorſz. Stadt in de Wolfſtraet aldaer, mede-brengende hunne behoorelycke verifications.  
 Als oock worden mits deſen geadvertent allē de gene, die ten laſte van de voorſz. Sterf-huysen enige pretentien zyn hebbende, de ſelve te brengen in hande van den voorſz. Notaris, die de ſelve (behoorlyck vindende) ſal bemelen, als oock ontfangen het gene ſommige aen de voorſz. Sterf-huysen noch moghten ten achteren zyn, die daertoe mits deſen oock woen-ge vernacnt te brengen in handen voorſz.

**V I I.**  
**A**lſoo binnen de Vryheydt s'Hertoghdoms van Hooghtſtraeten op den Beggyn-hove op 5. Febr. 1754. is overleden Joffr. Petronilla Antonia Dirckx, Beggynſen aldaer, Filia Antony Dirckx & Mariz Galmets, en by Teſtament haer Erſgenaemen geinſtutert heeft voor de eene hellicht de Erſgenaemen ab inſtato van haer Vaderlycke zyde, en voor de andere hellicht de Erſgenaemen ab inſtato van haer Moederlycke zyde; ſoo is't, dat alle, die gherechtigh meynen te zyn tot de voorſz. maekentſchap, haer recht believen in te brengen aen den Eerw. Heer Canonick Schoenman, onder-Pastor van t'voorſz. Beggyn-hof, zynde Teſtamentaire Exécuteur, mits hy ſijne rekeningh ſal doen van t'voorſz. Sterf-huys op Vrydagh den 31. Mey 1754.

**V I I I.**  
**M**its men op Maendagh 27. Mey ſal trekken de 3. Claſſe der 14. LOTERYE, opgerecht ten profijte van den gemeynen Armen deſer Stadt Antwerpen; ſoo waerſchouwt men jeder, wie intrest in de ſelve LOTERYE is hebbende, van hunne Lot-billetten op het ſpoedighſte te komen ſoumleren, waer toe men ſal vaceren op t'ordinair Comptoir in t'Maeghden-huys alhier tot op Vrydagh 24. ditto, wanneer de Boecken ſullen worden geſloten, waer naer een jeder ſich kan reguleeren. Oock dat'er mogh Loten tot de voorſz. 3. Claſſe te bekomen zyn tot 4. gls 16. ſuyv:

Figure 2. Last page with advertisements of the *Gazette van Antwerpen*, 26 February 1754.

telling, although the informative, factual category was also rising during the eighteenth century, its relative importance gradually diminished from almost 40% of all alerts to 15% after 1750 (Tables 2a and 2b). Clearly, the *Gazette van Antwerpen* had become a mediator of economic and, more specifically, commercial news: by 1770 international items about diplomacy and warfare still dominated the first pages, but advertisements – factual as well as commercial – consistently occupied more space than the actual news itself. Earlier research has revealed how approximately 75% of all pages in the *Gazette* during 1785 were devoted to advertisements of some sort (Pays, 1995, pp. 33–34).

Explaining the steady quantitative rise in eighteenth-century advertising activity is a complicated matter, as many factors contributed to the phenomenon. For example, the sudden advertising ‘boom’ in the *Gazette* after 1710 surely reflected the upswing of the urban economy, which was temporarily recovering after years of de-industrialisation and de-urbanisation (for the economic well-being of the southern Netherlands in this period, see in more detail Blondé & Van Damme, 2003). Although there appears to be a direct correlation between the number of advertisements and economic growth, the relation becomes pronounced only after 1770, when Antwerp experienced another moderate

Table 2a. Type of advertisements in the eighteenth-century *Gazette van Antwerpen* (absolute numbers, including repetitions).

	Other retail transactions			Retail via public auction		Rest					Total
	Books	Quacks	Retail	Luxury products	Other products	H	F	T	E	Factual alerts	
1703	9	1	5	1	0	3	0	0	0	12	31
1723	11	3	6	29	37	50	0	13	0	68	217
1743	13	16	18	30	71	133	6	7	3	84	381
1750	12	17	37	57	63	217	18	16	7	81	525
1770	39	14	75	125	185	462	87	4	6	162	1159
1790	65	3	56	232	319	608	82	2	2	244	1613
Total		400			1149					2377	

Table 2b. Type of advertisements in the eighteenth-century *Gazette van Antwerpen* (percentages, including repetitions).

	Other retail transactions			Retail via public auction		Rest				
	Books	Quacks	Retail	Luxury products	Other products	H	F	T	E	Factual alerts
1703	29.0	3.2	16.1	3.2	0.0	9.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	38.7
1723	5.1	1.4	2.8	13.4	17.1	23.0	0.0	6	0.0	31.3
1743	3.4	4.2	4.7	7.9	18.6	34.9	1.6	1.8	0.8	22.0
1750	2.3	3.2	7.0	10.9	12.0	41.3	3.4	3.0	1.3	15.4
1770	3.4	1.2	6.5	10.8	16.0	39.9	7.5	0.3	0.5	14.0
1790	4.0	0.2	3.5	14.4	19.8	37.7	5.1	0.1	0.1	15.1
Total		10.2			29.3				60.5	

Note: H = announcements on the selling and rent of real estate; F = the selling of financial interests, tithes and shares; T = notices on the transport of people and goods; E = advertisements on educational services.

Source: Database *Gazette van Antwerpen*.



industrial and demographic acceleration (see Willems, 2006). Clearly, the phenomenal rise of commercial messages indicating sales and rent of real estate (H) was connected to this economic revival (Tables 2a and 2b) (see also Scholliers, 1962; Soly, 1974, for the connection between the sales of real estate and the global economic conjuncture). Between 1750 and 1770 this type of notices more than doubled, and by about 1790 they represented approximately 40% of all advertisements. Similarly, changes in the numbers of auctions of financial interests, tithes and shares (F) and the auctions of wood, a valuable fuel and building material (included in the category Public auction/Other products), mirrored the newfound vitality of the local and regional market in the last quarter of the eighteenth century.<sup>7</sup>

Besides these changes in the economic conjuncture, more profound alterations in Antwerp society were affecting this advertising 'boom'. Advertising in general was stimulated by a democratization process in printing: the publishing costs for advertisements tended to fall in the eighteenth century due to mounting commercial strife among newspaper publishers in the southern Netherlands (see Luykx, 1970, pp. 120 and 126–127). But placing an advertisement was no cheap matter: in 1791, for instance, one had to pay one guilder and eight stivers to *Johannes Grangé*, the printer of the *Gazette*.<sup>8</sup> Compared to the average daily wages of a male shoemaker, weaver, or tailor around 1780, this sum was approximately three days of hard labour (see Lis, 1986, p. 176). Of course, other factors balanced the relative cost of this investment. Again in the second half of the eighteenth century the overall transport infrastructure of the southern Netherlands, and the countryside around Antwerp in particular, was significantly improved through construction of modern, stone-based roads (Blondé, 1998). In reducing the overall travel time to the city, more distant audiences gained the physical possibility to respond to newspaper advertisements. This evolution, arguably, enlarged the potential readership of the mostly locally oriented notices of the *Gazette*, thus making publication of such costly announcements more rewarding.<sup>9</sup>

However, valuing the character and number of readers of the *Gazette van Antwerpen* is potentially risky given the lack of circulation figures and subscription lists.<sup>10</sup> The paper's successor, the *Antwerpsche Gazette*, had some 700 subscribers in the years 1808–1810, a number that the *Gazette van Antwerpen* likely never attained during the eighteenth century.<sup>11</sup> Even granting that most copies enjoyed numerous readers and listeners – copies circulated in households and between friends, or were read by patrons of coffee houses and inns – the actual readership would never have surpassed a few thousand in the mid-1700s (this is a much quoted extrapolation by Ferdinand, 1993, p. 398, for a comparable English newspaper, the *Salisbury Journal*). In any case, the actual number of readers in and around Antwerp was probably increasing due to rising degrees of literacy. Thus, since readership was increasing, placing an advertisement became ever more interesting for more people. Yet the total readership remained marginal in comparison to the actual number of potential customers – Antwerp alone had a population of some 50,000 inhabitants by the end of the eighteenth century (Blondé, 1999).

In explaining the rise of newspaper advertisements, one must also address the broader consumer changes that were occurring. Increasing numbers of local middlemen were discovering the *Gazette* as a means to promote and sell the growing output of Antwerp's emerging 'consumer society'. This correlation is often made for somewhat comparable localities in England, France and the Dutch Republic. To illustrate this point, we have classified the advertisements of our database into distinctive categories – reset in absolute and in relative numbers – so as to make comparisons over time easier to deduce (Tables 2a and 2b).<sup>12</sup>

Among advertisements concerning the retail of consumables, we can make an important distinction between notices for public auctions and those of other kinds.<sup>13</sup> Starting with the latter, it appears that announcements from booksellers/printers and physicians (and ‘quacks’) were common at the beginning of our sample period, comprising a third of all advertisements in 1703. As in England and France, book dealers and physicians (real and otherwise) of all kinds were early and avid users of the promotional pages in newspapers (see e.g. Coquery, 2006, pp. 46–68; Morgan, 2006, p. 67). Their motivations and reasons for doing so were clear from the outset. Booksellers and printers generally targeted the same potential customers who bought newspapers and read the announcements and advertisements. Booksellers/printers regularly bought *copyrights* on books, thus claiming their ‘intellectual property’ by making their catalogues of new prints public via advertisements (as also mentioned by Ferdinand, 1993, pp. 399, 403–406).<sup>14</sup> They did this in straightforward and informative language, stating the name of the book dealer, his place of residence, and the new titles he had added to his printing catalogue. Interestingly, booksellers/printers were careful not to overplay the commercial nature of their advertisement, and so replaced phrases like ‘is selling’ with the more neutral sounding ‘is printing’, ‘is offering’, ‘is making public’ and so on. This did not change as the eighteenth century progressed: in 1790, for example, only 25% of all book announcements (including repetitions) included the word ‘selling’; open price notations or repeated advertisements were equally rare. Book notices almost always ended with a long list of book dealers and stated how the offered titles could also be bought or found at these ‘prominent booksellers’ of the country.<sup>15</sup> This was a sensible business strategy for associated booksellers and printers across the southern Netherlands in battling ‘illegal’ and cheaper prints that were distributed by *colporteurs* in the cities and in the countryside in the wake of the so-called ‘reading revolution’ (the expression is from Engelsing, 1974; also see Bruneel, 1988; Vernooij, 1983). Around 1790 there was all-time absolute high of 65 notices concerning books, although the overall relative importance of this type of commercial advertisements in the *Gazette van Antwerpen* dropped steadily during the eighteenth century.

Physicians, like booksellers, also sold ‘patented products’ – such as oils, ointments, ‘inspirational’ treatments and ‘miraculous’ powders – which like books were sensitive to ‘false’ copying and distribution. These physicians, in publicising their own names, ‘inventions’ and whereabouts, probably hoped to warn the reading public not to be fooled by ‘impostors’. Some physicians even denounced the commercial nature of their alerts by emphasizing that ‘money will only be accepted after recovery’ or ‘no money wanted, until [the person treated, is] restored to health’.<sup>16</sup> To give their advertised treatments an aura of respectability, they typically invoked the guarantees of a royal or scientific acquaintance.<sup>17</sup> Sometimes the testimony of a successful cure was related at length in an advertisement that detailed the name, profession and whereabouts of a healthy, recovered patient.<sup>18</sup> Such information indicates the pains which physicians took to secure the quality of their treatments – which itself was a reason they used every promotional means at their disposal. As the eighteenth century continued, however, physician notices in the *Gazette* lost their importance in both relative and absolute terms (also see the older research of Van Schevensteen, 1923–1924).

The promotional pages of the newspaper also published a wide range of other retail transactions. Local craftsmen, shopkeepers and even non-professional citizens used the *Gazette* to sell single commodities or stocks of similar consumables. These could be as diverse as a pair of shoes, a watch, a saddle and coach, paintings, furniture, ironware, textiles, and even wines, groceries and foodstuffs like chocolate. Indeed, the quintessential

diversity of nascent eighteenth-century consumerism was unmistakably evident in the advertising pages. However, although the absolute numbers within this category of different advertisements rose continuously during the eighteenth century, its overall relative importance began dwindling early, somewhat comparable to the situation of book dealers. Influential eighteenth-century retailers, such as the *à-la-mode* shops, did not advertise at all: during the eighteenth century Antwerp included at least 50 (usually more) of these fashion shops, and not one used the *Gazette* to reach its clientele (Van Aert & Van Damme, 2005). Thus, linking new 'fashionable' consumer habits to advertising would therefore be incorrect. The category of different Antwerp retailers made marginal use of the *Gazette*'s promotional pages, and represented hardly 4% of all analysed advertisements around 1790.

In growing contradiction to these tendencies, the retail notices for public auctions of 'luxuries' (such as furniture, paintings, books, jewellery, carriages, etc.) and 'residual' goods (such as shopping stocks, fabrics, livestock, wood, ship cargoes, raw materials, etc.) became increasingly important, consistently representing a quarter of all announcements in the *Gazette* for most of the eighteenth century. Whereas notices for retail transactions represented the market of 'new' consumer goods, advertised public auctions supplied (typically) 'old', 'used' or 'second-hand' products (although the boundaries between 'new' and 'old' were rarely clear during this period) (see Van Damme, 2007, pp. 68–69). These advertisements were placed by the 'sworn criers' (*gezworen roepers*), a powerful and wealthy group within the corporation of old cloth dealers (*oudekleerkopers*) and one of the most important players on the large and layered second-hand market of Antwerp. The 'sworn criers' held the exclusive right to organise public auctions, either in the houses of the deceased or at the Friday Market (*Vrijdagmarkt*), an area designed in mid-sixteenth-century Antwerp specifically for such public sales.<sup>19</sup>

Notices of retailers, who were selling increasingly numerous kinds of goods, partially explains the 'boom' of eighteenth-century newspaper advertisements. But not all commercial circuits were as convinced as the organisers of retail auctions about using newspaper advertisements in their business practices. This puts into question the role of commercial announcements as a significant element in the complex of changes on the supply and demand sides occurring in Antwerp. Clearly, a large majority of tradesmen and craftsmen did not employ the *Gazette* as a persuasion strategy for selling their products. This makes the motivations of those who did advertise retail transactions all the more confusing. In fact, the following inquiry into the functioning of commercial messages in Antwerp's eighteenth-century retailing business underlines this apparent conundrum even further. To unravel the elusive meaning of commercial notices directed at Antwerp consumers and retailers, we must further scrutinise the actual rhetoric of advertising and the manipulative meaning often ascribed to these messages (see on the discourse of advertising Görlach, 2002; Gotti, 2005).

## II

An understanding of the semantics of early modern newspaper advertisements includes awareness of the differences between constructive (or informative) advertising and persuasive (or rhetorical) statements, as distinguished by the neo-classical economist Alfred Marshall (Marshall, 1919, 304–307). Whereas the former is mainly focused on providing customers with information about the name of the retailer, his location, and the goods for sale, persuasive advertising tries to communicate specific desires for a particular object through emphasising its quality, beauty or utility, sometimes in comparison or

opposition to similar products. Informative announcements tend to lower transaction costs; persuasive notices seek to create consumer loyalty for a particular product or to discourage substitution by another one.<sup>20</sup> Today this 'rhetoric of persuasion' is taken for granted, although it gained widespread dominance and sophistication only from the end of the nineteenth century, along with the branding of products.<sup>21</sup> Likewise, printed commercial rhetoric was not unknown during the eighteenth century, as evidenced for example by the famous trade cards or the ingeniously constructed notices of George Packwood (see Berg & Clifford, 1998; McKendrick, 1982). The question remains, however, as to how usual and widespread such manipulative messages were. Did Antwerp retailers frequently use such marketing constructs to reach and persuade potential clients? Were newspaper notices of this kind influential in 'teaching' consumers about fashion, variety and novelty, thus seeking to mould consumer taste and preferences?

To be clear: persuasive semantics were not communicated in the open typographical way that we are accustomed to today. Capitals and italics occurred, but the eighteenth-century *Gazette* included no figures, taps, bold headings or underlining, and this contrasts with examples from English newspapers.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, the message was not communicated in an overtly commercial or slogan-like manner. Rather than being persuasive or repetitive, retail notices used a 'take-it-or-leave-it' vocabulary. Incessant repetitions of the same message were rare; respectability and civilised restraint dominated the advertisement discourse – a characteristic we return to later. But the language of the Antwerp retail advertisements was rhetorical on a basic level. The use of adjectival words in front of an object for sale could make the difference between simply informing customers about available merchandise and convincing them of the merchandise's intrinsic value.<sup>23</sup> Not all adjectives were clearly manipulative, of course; some plainly described an object's qualities. Yet baroque descriptions and word congestion could evoke the variability of eighteenth-century material culture (see also Rabuzzi, 1995–1996, p. 181). References were made to an object's material or fabric (wood, silver, ivory, silk), physical state (raw, crude, cut, dyed), dimensions (big, small), colour (red, black, yellow, green) or to the undefined number of objects (some, several, other). There were also adjectives that surpassed neutral description of an object to pronounce its beauty or quality. Second-hand artwork could be made more appealing by referring to the 'renowned Master' who had created it, and 'very fine and rare coins' were surely more attractive to customers than unspecified coins. The 'compound' material in these messages made emotional appeals to collectors. In Tables 3a and b these 'manipulative' adjectives are categorised for two sample years (1750 and 1790) and for most advertisements of retail transactions containing both 'new' and 'old' consumables.<sup>24</sup>

Use of persuasive, sometimes superlative, adjectives was well established in the retail notices of the *Gazette* around 1750. From the 48 notices of other retail transactions (comprising the categories Books, Quacks and Retail) 15 advertisements (or 31%) contained persuasive adjectives. The most frequent adjective was '*schoon*', which is compared to the English word 'fine'. Similarly, for the retail advertisements for public auctions of luxuries in 1750, no less than 68% contained these simple rhetorical devices, with '*schoon*' again figuring prominently.<sup>25</sup> Another telling rhetorical device was adjectives indicating a product's 'fashionability' (*modieus*, *a la mode*, *modern*) or 'newness' (*nieuw*), sometimes used in combination. The organisers of public auctions led the way in using such adjectives in their advertisements. Adjectives like 'new' and 'modern', which were practically non-existent in the first half of the century, suddenly began appearing in dozens of advertisements from the 1750s onwards.<sup>26</sup> References to second-hand products 'after the latest taste' (sic) likewise appeared in this period; for



Table 3a. Persuasive adjectives in advertisements of other retail transactions (absolute numbers, excluding repetitions).

	Total of advertisements	Total of ads with persuasive adjectives	Total of persuasive ads containing only the adjective 'schoon'	Total of persuasive ads containing adjectives like 'mode'/'modern'	Total of persuasive ads containing adjectives like 'nieuw'
1750	48	15	9	0	0
1790	110	25	8	4	2

Table 3b. Persuasive adjectives in retail advertisements of public auctions of 'luxuries' (absolute numbers, excluding repetitions).

	Total of advertisements	Total of ads with persuasive adjectives	Total of persuasive ads containing only the adjective 'schoon'	Total of persuasive ads containing adjectives like 'mode'/'modern'	Total of persuasive ads containing adjectives like 'nieuw'
1750	38	26	8	3	3
1790	170	121	63	20	21

Source: Database *Gazette van Antwerpen*.

example, 'a good well-conditioned carriage, constructed after the very newest taste'.<sup>27</sup> Furniture, gold leather and carriages, 'as good as new', were offered for sale in Antwerp and other localities in the southern Netherlands.<sup>28</sup> The inundation of the second-hand markets with the concept of 'fashionability' sometimes produced strange expressions and even oxymorons: in June 1790, for example, 'a fine Bedstead of green cloth, made two years ago after the newest taste' was advertised.<sup>29</sup> Ironically, retailers of new products were more hesitant to advertise the newness and fashionability of their wares, although by 1790 one could read in the *Gazette* an advertisement for 'a fine modern carriage made after the newest taste'.<sup>30</sup>

The composition of advertisements showed no remarkable progression in persuasive rhetoric during the eighteenth century. The category of different commercial middlemen, in particular, did not seem convinced that newspaper notices were a sensible business strategy for influencing customers. This again brings into question their motivations for publishing. Some commercial middlemen made it paramount to inform the public that they were 'still in business', usually after negative rumours; others communicated moving to a new address or the new owner of a business.<sup>31</sup> Another retailer stated that he addressed only the readers of the *Gazette* because of the 'low attendance of people passing-by the *Pieter Potstraat* [the street where he lived and worked]': in normal circumstances customers were apparently informed via the shop's sign or interior.<sup>32</sup> Such remarks make clear that newspaper advertisements were less important for retailers in the business of selling the eighteenth-century growing 'world of goods'. Investing time and money in more direct and personal means of communication – such as a lavish shop, a well-displayed stock, or a trustworthy and civilised association with customers – were probably more efficient ways of reaching clientele and building trust and reputation. As Claire Walsh (2000, p. 88) has noted: 'the shop was the point of information and persuasion'. This remark is even more true for the eighteenth century, a time of quickening fashion changes

and altering material culture. With the range of consumer choices widening, retailers increasingly provided complex advice and information that would have been impossible to gauge in a restricted commercial alert (Blondé & Van Damme, forthcoming). Moreover, trumpeting one's reputation and trustworthiness in an advertisement could even be counterproductive. After all, many people still harboured old reservations about these fairly new promotional materials and often overly aggressive sales techniques (see Cox & Walsh, 2000, pp. 108–109; Feyel, 2000, p. 308; Mui & Mui, 1989, p. 83; Wischerman, 2000, pp. 1–2; and for the southern Netherlands Michielsens, 1938, pp. 305–306, 314). This also accounts for the respectable and restrained tone used in most advertisements: references were made to 'good, civilised and ready service' or 'servicing everybody in an orderly way'.<sup>33</sup> Similarly, although explicit price notations were not unknown, products were normally advertised for a vague but polite 'civilised price'.<sup>34</sup>

The sworn criers of the public auctions likewise used other business practices than newspaper advertisements to reach their audience. Consumers could be reminded of an upcoming event by posters (*plackbillets*) attached to houses and by informational handbills distributed on the streets (Van Damme, 2007, p. 119). Yet many auctions were not advertised. Placing a commercial notice was not cheap, and so it seems logical that criers purchase one only if it was worthwhile, for instance, when the value of the objects for sale was high enough to assume that middle- and upper-class readers of the *Gazette van Antwerpen* would be interested in attending the auction. The organisers of public auctions, however, faced different challenges as compared to other tradesmen and craftsmen, and this led to higher use of newspapers' promotional pages. Unlike local shopkeepers, sworn criers traded with a larger and more 'anonymous' audience that changed significantly from event to event. Public sales differed from the usual sales practices regarding the lack of longstanding and personal ties between retailers and customers. Indeed, several lawsuits regarding auction practices indicate how knowledge and trust had to be mediated between buyers and sellers.<sup>35</sup> In this context, newspaper advertisements could lower transaction costs by providing information about the sworn crier, the place of auction, and above all a first description of the products for sale. Using the promotional pages more frequently than other retailers thus followed the logic of trading with larger and more impersonal market segments.

Yet rather than trying to mould and shape public consumer discourse, the language of the newspaper advertisements of public auctions was constructed in a familiar and established way.<sup>36</sup> Not coincidentally, the considerable use of dry, informative language and the unvaried structure of the newspaper message had roots in another form of publishing information. Since the late middle ages, civil and central authorities had used printed placards to communicate to their subjects. They would suspend such notifications in Antwerp's most significant public spaces, such as the city hall (near the central market), the stock exchange and the wharf (in the port) (Rylant, 1930, p. 43). In a quite formal and passive voice they addressed citizens to inform them of civic decision-making, changing market regulations, and upcoming events, such as public sales. The arrival of the newspaper as a novel medium in the seventeenth century did not change the grammar and vocabulary for promoting auctions. On the contrary: texts from placards were simply copied into the *Gazette*. This advertising form was maintained until the end of the *ancien régime*, and probably even into the nineteenth century – such is the underestimated power of traditions.

These are remarkable conclusions: in a period of rapid changes in the material culture and shifting tastes and preferences in Antwerp, the advertising section of the local *Gazette* proved not to be a popular venue for persuasive semantics. Newspaper advertisements did

not seem to be the great instigator behind the 'birth' of an acquisitive consumerism in the city; nor did they change or affect the commercial parlance used in this period of increasing consumption. Discourse tended to follow larger societal evolutions rather than vice versa. One tendency is striking: the surging 'cry' of consumers for new and fashionable products also affected the marketing of 'old' consumables. The sworn criers, confronted with a shifting balance from durable products to cheaper, varied and more easily replaceable items, increasingly labelled old products with modern and fashionable adjectives, as described above. Newspaper advertisements, however, modelled such discourse on existing enticement schemes used for places like fashion shops and on the market. Such advertisement did not 'teach' or 'cue' readers about new consumer sensitivities, but reflected them in a straightforward manner.

In general, persuasive adjectives were used randomly in the eighteenth-century *Gazette* and were not limited to specific objects. The only exception was artwork: words like 'famous', 'renowned' and 'distinguished' referred almost exclusively to painters and other artists, probably as a key element in determining an object's actual value. Attributed musical instruments, sculptures and luxury furniture were expected to fetch higher prices than anonymous craftsmanship.<sup>37</sup> This appeared to be the case especially for paintings. Of course the Antwerp painter *par excellence*, Pieter Paul Rubens, was an important 'brand': even if a commercial middleman was unsure of the fact, he would still attribute artwork to Rubens' name, apparently to lure customers. The sworn crier Henricus van den Bosch, for instance, advertised in May 1790 that he was about to sell, among other things, 'a set of Paintings, of which one is said to be from Rubens'.<sup>38</sup>

The overall lack of information about artwork offered splendid opportunities for specialised art dealers with the necessary expertise. It probably stimulated the success of previous hardly used promotional material, such as printed auction catalogues, in Antwerp and the rest of the Low Countries after 1750. Increasing numbers of sales were organised not just for paintings but also for books and other collectables. Such sales were often promoted via hand bills, placards and printed lists of objects for sale.<sup>39</sup> Art catalogues especially distinguished themselves in their increasingly sophisticated jargon for describing the colour, expression, composition and drawing of a painting, attributing it to a certain master. The breakthrough of such auction catalogues for books and artwork around 1760 is strikingly parallel to the quantitative leap of newspaper advertisements of this kind.<sup>40</sup> However, whereas newspaper advertisements published objects for sale in a random and haphazard manner, auction catalogues used specific and rhetorical language. These catalogues provided potential buyers with information that newspaper advertisements – due to their rigid structure and space, and the limited amount of specialised knowledge of the sworn criers – could not deliver (see for more detail Van der Stighelen & Vermeulen, 2006). This apparent success after 1760 of printed auction catalogues, full of manipulative language, puts the role of newspaper advertisements in perspective again. In the eighteenth century the quantitative rise in newspaper advertisements was never paralleled by a significant qualitative evolution. This underpins our conclusion that commercial advertisements were unlikely to have been an important business strategy for Antwerp retailers.

### III

The analysed quantitative rise of eighteenth-century advertising in Antwerp parallels research in England, France and the Dutch Republic. But numbers can be deceiving and do not warrant narratives that link this evolution in any direct or indirect causal way to

emerging consumer society. In fact, we must ask whether the eighteenth-century changes in taste and demand of Antwerp consumers would have been less pronounced without the parallel rise of this kind of newspaper advertisement. And even more to the heart of the issue: did newspaper advertisements matter as an established persuasion strategy for the majority of Antwerp retailers? In this article we have provided evidence which suggests that newspaper notices were not instrumental in selling the increasing complexity of the late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century material culture; they were not even functional in trying to mould new 'consumer culture' based on extension of the everyday shopping world (see e.g. Morgan, 2006, p. 62).

The following statement of John Styles about English advertisements fits the situation in Antwerp quite well: 'The triumph of the printed advertisement was a strictly limited one ... what these advertisements suggest is a sellers' market in which considerable difficulty could face the consumer in gaining access to goods of the required specification' (Styles, 1993, p. 541). We are indeed a far cry from the extensive marketing of nineteenth-century branded products, or typical twentieth-century concern for the consumer's mental well-being. Despite the unmistakable growth of advertisements in the eighteenth-century *Gazette van Antwerpen*, newspaper notices probably did little to influence consumer choice or construct consumer discourse. They were not recognised as such but were used in a more straightforward manner to mediate information barriers and reduce asymmetries in knowledge.

In section I we attested to continuous absolute growth of retail notices during the eighteenth century – notices of different middlemen, and especially notices for public auctions – which could have resulted from stiffening competition between Antwerp's diverse commercial circuits. Rather than stimulating, or even reflecting an emerging consumer society (which was already well established), increasing commercial advertising in Antwerp mirrored rising retail competition, especially during the period of renowned economic growth after 1770. Modern advertisement research stresses how promotional material is in some sense 'self-generating': 'Advertisers advertise to stay abreast with competitors, who are also advertising' (Fowles, 1996, 166, n. 9; also see Schudson, 1993, pp. xiv–xvi). Despite its dubious success in influencing consumers, a non-advertising business venture in an advertised market would seem increasingly implausible. Thus, even then, commercial advertising was less about manipulating or moulding consumers than about claiming a market share. This self-enhancing business rationale could have pulled more and more Antwerp retailers to the promotional pages of the *Gazette*.

But even so, the majority of Antwerp retailers did not use the commercial pages (the fashion shops are a case in point). Rather than an anonymous medium like a newspaper, they preferred direct contact in the shop, the street, or at the market. Trust and reputation were easier to enforce through longstanding and personal ties between a retailer and his customers; and luring a client into buying new or fashionable products relied first and foremost on physical and audible contact of a commercial transaction. Especially during a time of alterations in taste and demand, a wary shopper needed a retailer who could provide meaning and context to the products on offer. It appears to have been more important to provide information about the whereabouts of the retailer in the advertisements rather than detailed specifications about the products.

As our arguments in section II demonstrate, the gradual (but by no means general) use of persuasive vocabulary in describing advertised goods was more a side effect than a direct or indirect cause of consumerism. To a certain extent advertisements organised consumer choice around variability, novelty and fashion, but they did so in an established and recognisable jargon; the rhetoric of advertising adjusted to changing sensibilities rather than



the other way around. The rise of specialised discourse for certain products, such as paintings, manifested itself only in an incomplete and downgraded manner, as compared to other, more specialised promotional material (like auction catalogues). This underlies our analysing newspaper advertisements not so much in terms of seduction or desire, but to consider the phenomenon as a novel tool for dealing with imperfect market conditions. The sworn criers in particular made widespread use of newspaper announcements to tackle key difficulties in their sector, including coping with larger and more impersonal market segments. Since the economy as a whole tended to evolve in this direction, it was inevitable that commercial announcements would become a sensible business strategy for growing numbers of retailers. The prime function of such announcements, however, was not commercial indoctrination but reducing transaction costs via stressing elementary facts (such as the seller's name, the sort of handled goods, and the place and time of transactions). Commercial rhetoric was minimised, and only a minority of the advertisements revealed terms of sale (product prices) in an openly competitive spirit.

Indeed, newspaper advertisements helped reduce transaction cost problems between buyers and sellers, but for most people they remained too abstract or educated a means of commercial seduction. Of course, this does not mean that retailers were ineffective in targeting the expanding material output. Retailers of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century were not as traditional and passive as historians once believed. They did not need radical innovations or a 'retail revolution' to bring the consumer society home. There existed techniques to influence and even manipulate their customers' buying practices, namely, strategies of seduction and enticement. But such strategies were bound to direct, physical experience of the goods and to the personal, verbal contacts between buyers and sellers. It was precisely the familiarity of these old and daily practices that mediated changes in taste and demand during this period.

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### Notes

1. As implied, for instance, by Porter (1982, p. 206), who states: 'Advertising's magic whipped up demand for knick-knacks, curios, and the disposable, and increased turnover in fashion.'
2. Also see Lemire (1991, p. 61), who states: 'Judicious advertising had the same effect on the domestic market as the liberal use of manure had on farm-land over the same period. Returns were improved, standards of comfort raised, and the country enriched.'
3. Our database of the *Gazette van Antwerpen* consists of some 4774 advertisements for 19 sample years throughout the eighteenth century (1700, 1701, 1703–1705, 1723–1727, 1730, 1743–1747, 1750, 1770 and 1790). These were collected in the course of two individual PhD researches, thus reflecting a certain randomness in the chosen sample years. The studied time frames are however proven to be representative for the eighteenth century as a whole. These commercial advertisements from the *Gazette van Antwerpen* were, until recently, rarely used as source material (for a notable exception, see Delsaerdt & Vanysacker, 1999; Spiessens, 1983–1993).
4. City Library Antwerp (CLA), nr. 568713, *Gazette van Antwerpen* (GvA).
5. This large category of informative, factual announcements comprised obituary notices; 'lost and found' objects; notices of missing persons; lotteries; alerts of upcoming annual fairs; and vacancies for midwives, executioners, vicars and so on.
6. In the case of Brussels, several newspapers served as a forum for cultural novelties in the second half of the eighteenth century (see e.g. Cornaz, 2001; Van Aelbrouck, 1987).
7. Older research already indicated an increase in sales of books from the 1770s onwards (see Remeysen, 1947; and for Ghent see Vernooij, 1983, pp. 14–15).

8. See University Library of Antwerp, Archive of the Collegiate Church of Our Lady of Antwerp (1791), *Testamenta Nova*, volume XIV: Franciscus Antonius Stephanus Bruyninx, loose papers.
9. The improved transport infrastructure in Brabant was also reflected by the higher number of advertisements at the end of the eighteenth century placed by commercial middlemen outside of the Duchy of Brabant (in which Antwerp was situated).
10. Around the middle of the eighteenth century, important Dutch newspapers such as the *Oprechte Haerlemse Courant* and the *Amsterdamsche Courant* printed some 4000 to 6000 copies per issue for an international audience. The *Gazette van Antwerpen*, however, remained first and foremost a regional newspaper. In 1808, the *Gazette van Gend*, a comparable newspaper to the one in Antwerp, listed some 1975 subscriptions (see Broersma, 2002, p. 39; Vernooij, 1983, p. 13).
11. In 1804 printer P.J. Franck had to end his *Gazette van Antwerpen* for lack of interest. His more successful opponent P.J. Janssens and his *Antwerpsche Gazette*, published since 1800 as an exact copy of the much older *Gazette*, sold 630 subscriptions in 1808 and 760 in 1810 (see Merecy, 1943).
12. The following categories were used in Tables 2a and 2b: Books = alerts of booksellers/printers; Quacks = advertisements of quacks/physicians; Retail = notices on retail transactions of consumables; Luxury products = retail of 'luxuries' (such as furniture, paintings, books, jewellery and carriages) by way of public auctions; Other products = retail of residual goods (such as shopping stocks, fabrics, livestock, wood, ship cargoes, raw materials and so on) by way of public auctions; H = announcements on the selling and rent of real estate; F = the selling of financial interests, tithes and shares; T = notices on the transport of people and goods; E = advertisements on educational services; Factual alerts = informative alerts.
13. The 'Rest-category' of advertisements concerns firstly the informative or factual alerts – quickly waning in importance to alerts of a commercial nature, as already mentioned. Notices on the selling of real estate (H) and financial assets (F), on the transport of people and goods (T) and advertisements on educational services (E), all had clear commercial intentions. They concern, however, not a retail transaction of a consumer good as such, which is the reason they will not be analysed further on in this article.
14. Sometimes the actual book authors could also own the copyrights themselves; they were, however, not using the promotional pages in the *Gazette*.
15. For instance CLA, nr. 568713, *GvA*, 12/3/1790 ('en voorders by de voorname boekverkopers').
16. CLA, nr. 568713, *GvA*, 21/11/1724 ('wilt geen geldt ontfanghen, als naer dat men is genesen') and 11/2/1727 ('hy en begeert geen geldt, als naer de genesinghe'). (For similar results, see Burnby, 1988; Cody, 1999.)
17. For instance CLA, nr. 568713, *GvA*, 16/1/1750 or 2/6/1750.
18. See CLA, nr. 568713, *GvA*, 25/8/1750.
19. Still other persons, however, held specific rights to organise public sales in early modern Antwerp. The overall influence of these sales on the second-hand markets was limited in comparison with the activities of the *oudekleerkopers*. Moreover, they did not advertise (see in more detail Van Damme, 2007, p. 66).
20. A persuasive advertisement typically contains 'compound' or connotative material that, besides the commodity information, also communicates 'non-commodity messages': a cluster of symbolic elements that constitutes the appeal of the product. 'Happiness', 'freedom', 'respectability', 'manliness' and so on, are all 'non-commodity' traits, which can, in some way or another, be associated with a product (see Fowles, 1996, p. 11).
21. Gieszinger (2001, pp. 92–95) describes this change as an evolution from a 'producer-oriented' consumption to a 'product-oriented' consumption. For a recent discussion, see Wischerman (2000) and Church (2000).
22. Gieszinger (2000) makes the same remark. She distinguishes between the eighteenth-century text markers, which she calls 'secondary', and the nineteenth- and twentieth-century ones, which are described as 'primary text markers'.
23. In English advertisements, too, this distinction between 'evaluative' and 'descriptive' advertisements is often made (see Gieszinger, 2001, pp. 129–144).
24. Compared to Tables 2a and 2b two differences should be noted. Firstly, the total number of advertisements is lower since repetitions of the same retail advertisement were not counted. Adding recurrences of the same advertisement would not make much sense in analysing the specificity and uniqueness of the persuasive adjectives used. Secondly, the category 'Public auctions/Other products' is omitted, since some of the products auctioned in this residual category were not casually catered on the retail market of new consumables (like for instance firewood or ship cargoes). By neglecting this category, any distortions in comparing retailers of

- 'old' and 'new' products are practically bypassed. Moreover, the sworn criers leading and advertising these residual public dealings were usually the same as the ones advertising the public auctions of luxuries. Thus, the commercial semantics used by these retailers were in fact comparable for both categories of retail via public auctions.
25. The question remains, however, if the adjective '*schoon*' can really be considered a rhetorical attempt to convince customers to buy, rather than an integral part of the description of objects. Especially for the latter half of the eighteenth century it is clear that '*schoon*' became part of the vocabulary of plainly describing goods.
  26. In England too, notions of newness and fashionability became widespread in eighteenth-century newspaper advertising (see Swaim, 1977; and more recently, Stobart, Hann, & Morgan, 2007, p. 182).
  27. CLA, nr. 568713, GvA, 8/6/1770 ('*eenen goeden welgeconditioneerden Coupée, gemaakt na de aldernieuwste goesting*').
  28. Two Gold Leathers, one as fine as new ('*twee Goudeleiren waer van een zoo schoon als nieuw*', CLA, nr. 568713, GvA, 9/4/1790); A fine Bedstead as good as new ('*Eenen schoonen Imperiael zoo goed als nieuw*', CLA, nr. 568713, GvA, 11/5/1790); A 'Post Chaise' as good as new ('*Postchaise zoo goed als nieuw*', CLA, nr. 568713, GvA, 17/8/1790).
  29. CLA, nr. 568713, GvA, 1/6/1790 ('*een schoonen groenen stoffen Imperiael, over 2 jaer nieuw gemaakt na de nieuwste smaek*').
  30. CLA, nr. 568713, GvA, 5/11/1790 ('*een schoone moderne koets na de leste goesting gemaakt*').
  31. See also Cox and Walsh (2000, p. 108): 'Although once established the provincial newspaper did indeed become a vehicle for advertisement used by a wide variety of customers, well established retailers using convention methods of selling were generally not among them, unless they were announcing changes in circumstances such as a removal or death.' Indeed, the same also seems to apply for Antwerp.
  32. CLA, nr. 568713, GvA, 21/8/1750 ('*om dat in de Pieter Pot-straet weynige passagie is*').
  33. For instance CLA, nr. 568713, GvA, 26/3/1790 ('*verzekeren een ieder van goede, civiele en prompte bediening*'); and 19/2/1790 ('*een ider ordentelyk te bedienen*').
  34. Of all 48 advertisements of different retail transactions in 1750, 22 contained references to a price, but only 10 made this price notation specific. Equally, in 1790, only 19 advertisements of a total of 110 mentioned prices, and only 4 of them did so in a detailed way.
  35. For instance: sworn criers were allowed to refuse credit facilities to certain buyers; or strict formal procedures had to be adhered to before an auctioned object could be hammered of (see Van Damme, 2007, pp. 176–177, 182).
  36. Similar remarks can be found in Styles, 1993, p. 540; Walsh, 2000, p. 89: 'The language in the lengthy newspaper advertisements of fast-selling shops, an enticing compilation of fashionable items, perhaps echoes the sales patter of shopkeepers.'
  37. Authors of books for example did not serve the same convincing function in the *Gazette*: on a total of 55 advertisements for sales of second-hand books in the eighteenth century, only two mention an author (or even title) of a book, namely an ecclesiastical history in 30 volumes by Fleury (CLA, nr. 568713, GvA, 20/8/1790) and a history of France in three volumes by Mezefay (CLA, nr. 568713, GvA, 4/5/1790).
  38. CLA, nr. 568713, GvA, 7/5/1790 ('*Een partye Schilderyen, waer onder dat er een van Rubens is zoo men zegd*'). A similar description can be found 50 years earlier: CLA, nr. 568713, GvA, 12/8/1740, 'a set of Paintings, consisting of the 12 Apostles with our Lord, said to be painted by the famous Painter P.P. Rubbens' ('*eene partye Schilderyen, bestaende in de 12. Apostelen met ons Heer, soo men seyt door den fameusen Schilder P.P. Rubbens geschildert te wesen*').
  39. This process of 'specialisation' was accompanied by a decreasing control of the sworn criers over the second-hand luxury market, in favour of art and book dealers (see Lyna & Vermeylen, forthcoming).
  40. The Antwerp second-hand markets for books also witnessed an enormous boom in the 1760s (see Delsaerd & Vanysacker, 1999, p. 8; for an overview of the emergence of art auctions, see Lyna & Vermeylen, forthcoming).

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