

Advertiser Portrayal of Consumer Time in the Late 20th Century U.S.: An Update

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ABSTRACT

The study extends previous work by Gross and Sheth (1989), providing evidence of continued U.S. advertiser emphasis on time-oriented advertising appeals. Additionally, the specific character of time-oriented appeals has changed consistent with recent societal developments. In addition to themes such as “fast to use,” “saves time,” “portrays the consumer as busy,” and “specifies amount of time required,” recent advertising sometimes attempts to reflect consumer desire to achieve “balanced use of time” and “reprieve from a time-oriented lifestyle.”

Gross and Sheth (1989) examined advertising appearing in the *Ladies' Home Journal (LHJ)* magazine over a roughly 100-year period from 1890 and 1988. Consistent with the notion that industrialization is associated with time pressures, perceived time scarcity, and concern about precise measurement and efficient use of time (Lewis and Weigert, 1981; Zerubavel, 1982), they found increasing advertiser emphasis on time-related concerns and product benefits. They also found the characteristics of time-oriented advertising to vary over the decades, reflecting corollary societal values and trends.

Advertising both reflects and influences societal values (Fox, 1990; Pollay, 1984, 1986). As observed by Pollay (1985, p. 24), one role of advertising is to articulate the “rationale for consumption.” The present study updates Gross and Sheth’s (1989) analysis, warranted because consumer and societal developments since the mid-1980s have led to probable further evolution of consumers’ time-oriented concerns. As advertisers perceive changes in both general and specific concerns with time, it is expected they will reflect them in advertising appeals.

Four developments that might lead to changing consumer concerns are discussed in the following section. The list is not represented as exhaustive and the section is not represented as presenting formal hypotheses to be tested. Rather, the discussion merely presents *a priori* observations and propositions giving rise to the current study.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS AND RELATED PROPOSITIONS

Slowed Growth of Women’s Workforce Participation

Gross and Sheth (1989) observed that, as compared with earlier decades, ads appearing in the *LHJ* during the 1960s and 1970s showed pronounced emphasis on the ability of products to enhance time productivity. Women, and particularly married women with young children, entered the U.S. workforce in unprecedented numbers (Hayghe, 1990, 1997; Hayghe and Bianchi, 1994). Society felt the shock of women taking on new roles and aspiring to new statuses while also attempting to maintain traditional homemaker roles. Advertisers emphasized that products could relieve working wives’ busy schedules. This was consistent with economic views of time emphasizing the substitution of goods for time spent in housework (Becker 1965). Numerous researchers investigated the effects of changing women’s roles on the consumption of convenience products (e.g., Nickols and Fox, 1983; Reilly, 1982).

During subsequent decades it became the norm for wives and mothers to be employed (Fullerton, 1999; U.S. Department of Labor, 1999, 2000). Family structures and roles evolved in support of this expectation (Robinson and Godbey, 1997). By the 1980s,

segments of the female population most likely to join the workforce had largely done so, and so growth in women’s labor force participation slowed (Hayghe, 1997). Though working women still felt time-pressured, society became more accustomed to the demands of juggling work and family. What were previously experienced as new time pressures became expected. Convenience products were used routinely, and less perceived as representing fresh solutions to family time pressures.

Gross and Sheth observed in their analysis of early-1980s advertising what may have been the beginning of advertisers placing less emphasis on products as time-saving solutions for the new female workforce. Whereas earlier advertising had explicitly “sold” consumers on the necessity of using time-saving products, often providing a fully articulated rationale, the tone of 1980s time-oriented ads implied that consumers had already integrated time-saving products into their lives. The expectation that this trend should continue gives rise to Proposition 1.

Proposition 1: Advertisers will de-emphasize explicit rationalization of time-saving product benefits, particularly as they pertain to pressures faced by working wives.

Widespread Acceptance of Convenience-Oriented Products

One purpose of advertising is to articulate the rationale for consumption (Pollay 1985). Thus, as new time- and labor-saving products were introduced over the past century, advertisers explicitly urged readers that the use of these products could improve their lives. Gross and Sheth (1989) observed that ads accompanying the introduction of vacuums, washing machines, prepared foods, and the like typically emphasized time savings as the most salient product benefit. Sometimes the desire to save time was seen as controversial, and advertisers promoting what amounted to a lifestyle change no doubt felt challenged to convince consumers of the acceptability of using products to save time. For example, convenience foods initially met with resistance as consumers associated their use with laziness (Haire, 1950).

In contrast, consumers today readily accept and use a wide array of convenience-oriented products (Berry, 1990). Consumers buy them *specifically* because they are fast to use. Thus, other appeals (e.g., health and taste in the case of convenience foods, efficacy in the case of appliances) may now be more salient than time in differentiating these products. These observations give rise to Proposition 2.

Proposition 2: With saving time now an accepted and well-understood benefit, advertisers will emphasize other benefits even when promoting products perceived and traditionally advertised as time-saving.

Post-Industrial Society

The time period covered by Gross and Sheth’s analysis was one in which the U.S. experienced a rather gradual transformation from an agrarian and largely rural economy to an advanced industrial and urbanized society. By contrast, the 1980s and 1990s saw a comparatively sudden transformation from a U.S. economy dependent on manufacturing to one variously called an information-, service-, or post-industrial economy. It is said the U.S. experienced a technological and information revolution akin to, but more accelerated than, the earlier industrial revolution. Foreseeing

the coming of a post-industrial economy, social commentators such as Bell (1973) and Toffler (1980) predicted less dependence on the precise accounting of time so necessary in a manufacturing economy. As such, they predicted consumers would enjoy a return to more personal discretion over time.

To some degree and for some consumers this prediction has come to pass. However, consumers generally report feeling no less time pressured. Recent polls (e.g., Roper Center, 1998) consistently report a sizable percentage responding that time pressure is getting worse. Consumers have also acquired a new time-oriented vocabulary indicating a new type of, and perhaps even heightened, time sensitivity. Terms such as “multitasking” and “24-7” suggest not a lessening of perceived time pressure, but rather possibly time pressure of a different type. Consumers increasingly blur the distinctions between personal and work time (Oechsle and Geissler, 2003). It might be argued consumers are adjusting to a new and perhaps uncomfortable time reckoning based on polychronicity (combining activities simultaneously, and possibly blurring the distinctions between work and discretionary time) as compared with monochronic time reckoning (doing one thing at a time and dividing time into discrete units) that has traditionally characterized industrialized societies (Graham, 1981; Kaufman et al., 1991). Various authors have suggested that today’s consumers feel *more* pressured due to a sense of time fragmentation and inability to immerse oneself in just one activity (e.g., Robinson and Godbey, 1997). These trends give rise to expectations associated with Proposition 3.

Proposition 3: Advertisers expressing empathy with consumers’ time concerns will increasingly reflect concerns associated with the post-industrial society (e.g., desires for leisure time distinct from work time, and pressures associated with multitasking or polychronicity).

Living in the Present and Desire for Balanced Use of Time

Popular media suggest that, as compared with the past, consumers today express a greater longing for balanced and present-oriented lives. This may be in reaction to earlier forces that rendered the U.S. time-oriented. For example, as compared with older cohorts, Generation X has been observed to be less willing to sacrifice current family and personal pursuits for the sake of longer-term career aspirations (Ritchie, 1995). Working mothers have largely abandoned the so-called “superwoman myth,” and expect to re-balance priorities as they pass through various life stages. Fathers express the desire to nurture as well as provide economically for their families. Regular columns on “Work and Family” in the *Wall Street Journal* (Schellenbarger, 1999) focus on the desire of even hard-driving professionals to establish balance between career, family, and personal pursuits; and report that many say they would choose more free time over money.

The orientation toward living a balanced and present-oriented life was not discussed in Gross and Sheth’s (1989) analysis of time-oriented ads. However, it is readily seen in ads today. For example, a recent real estate ad stated, “The rest of your life isn’t somewhere in the future. Or what remains after you’ve worked your heart out. It’s a part of every day if you strike the right balance.” This apparent emphasis on balance gives rise to Proposition 4.

Proposition 4: Advertisers will increasingly appeal to consumers’ desires for balanced time use, focusing on making time available for personal pursuits; and products will increasingly be promoted as enhancing scarce leisure time.

RESEARCH METHOD

Prior to embarking on the current study, a pilot study was conducted in which ads from recent issues of general interest and women’s magazines were analyzed. Of 589 ads analyzed, 122 (21%) were judged to be time-oriented. The pilot study confirmed that time-oriented advertising is still prevalent. Further, all coding categories used by Gross and Sheth were observed. The results of the pilot study, coupled with observations discussed in the previous section, led to the development of additional coding categories.

Because the purpose was to extend Gross and Sheth’s (1989) analysis, the present study used similar methodology. As in their investigation, the current study analyzed advertising appearing in the *LHJ*. Gross and Sheth explained their rationale for choosing magazine advertising in general (based on content characteristics and accessibility) and *LHJ* advertising in particular (based on the magazine’s prominence, audience characteristics, editorial and audience stability, and history of use in documenting social and marketing trends). They noted in 1989 that *LHJ* had ranked among the top ten circulated magazines since its inception. According to Magazine Publishers of America, it was ranked ninth in 1998. The magazine’s target audience and editorial emphasis have remained stable, with focus on the practical work- and family-oriented pursuits of American women.

Gross and Sheth analyzed advertising appearing over ten decades from 1883 to 1988, and examined three issues per decade. As shown in Table 1, the current investigation began with 1986 issues and continued through 2000, thus overlapping slightly with the previous analysis. Three to six randomly selected issues were sampled during each even-numbered year, allowing analysis of at minimum 300 ads per sampled year. In total, 31 issues and 3,012 ads were analyzed. All ads one-fourth page or larger were studied. Each was examined first to determine if it reflected an orientation toward time. Ads containing no time-oriented elements were simply tallied and received no further analysis. Roughly 19 percent (561 ads) were judged to contain time-oriented elements and were subjected to further analysis.

Each ad was examined to determine if it used time as a primary appeal. Time-oriented elements were judged to be primary if headlined, listed first and with prominence, presented in larger/bolder type, illustrated through photograph or drawing, afforded a substantial proportion of copy, and/or otherwise emphasized as prominent. Two or more appeals could be judged to be primary when they received relatively equal emphasis (e.g., quick and delicious). Thus, to be coded as primary, an ad did not have to use time as *the* primary appeal, but only as *a* primary appeal. Time-oriented appeals were considered secondary in the absence of such observations (e.g., when merely included as one of several appeals in the fine print). A few ads were judged to use time-oriented appeals in only a tertiary manner.

Following the coding of each time-oriented ad as primary, secondary, or tertiary, ads were further coded based on categories of appeal. The following categories developed by Gross and Sheth (1989, p. 78) were used as *a priori* categories:

- Presents the advertised product as *fast to use*.
- Presents the advertised product as a means of *saving time*.
- Presents the *consumer as busy* and as regarding *time as scarce/valuable*.
- Specifies the *amount of time* required to use the product.
- Presents the product as a means of making *double use of time*.
- Presents the product as a means of *escaping a typically time-oriented lifestyle*.

TABLE 1
Proportion of Ads Containing Time-Oriented Appeals
(Sampled Issues 1986-2000)

Year	Number of Issues Sampled	Number of Ads Analyzed	% Containing Time-Oriented Appeal(s)	% of Time-Oriented Ads Using a Time-Oriented Appeal as Primary
1986	3	348	18.4%	45.3%
1988	3	345	17.4	51.7
1990	5	469	16.2	57.9
1992	3	362	13.8	44.0
1994	4	362	16.9	52.5
1996	4	341	21.1	45.8
1998	3	315	21.6	52.9
1999-2000	6	470	23.4	54.5
Total		3,012		

TABLE 2
Proportion of Time-Oriented Ads Using Each Coded Category of Appeal

Category	1986	1988	1990	1992	1994	1996	1998	1999-2000
Fast to use	58%	58%	78%	70%	75%	44%	54%	48%
Saves time	20	23	28	24	49	24	27	17
Presents consumer as busy	19	27	13	26	31	19	31	26
Specifies amount of time required	23	17	38	30	53	33	24	22
Double use of time	2	2	1	2	3	6	3	2
Escape time-oriented lifestyle	5	0	5	2	5	11	9	16
Desire for balance	0	3	4	8	7	6	16	22
Value scarce leisure time	5	7	5	2	10	10	15	17
Control over time	6	7	11	2	10	3	7	10
Immediate/timely results	28	30	20	12	8	15	19	18

Additionally, four new categories were identified. The first three were informed by the observations discussed at the beginning of this paper and were observed during the pilot study. The fourth was observed in the pilot study and believed to reflect a time benefit/concern not specifically addressed by the other categories.

- Represents a desire to achieve *balance between work and non-work pursuits* (i.e., leisure, time for self and personal interests, time for family and relationships).
- Represents a high *value* placed on scarce *leisure* time.
- Presents benefits related to consumers' desires for *control over time*.
- Presents the product as providing *immediate or timely results*.

Coding was conducted by the author and by a trained but independent judge (the same methodology used by Gross and Sheth). Few disagreements occurred between coders, and all were resolved through discussion. The author also replicated the coding a few weeks following the initial analysis to ensure test-retest reliability. Reliability rates were slightly lower than those reported by Gross and Sheth, but all were greater than the 85 percent and most exceeded 90 percent.

RESULTS

Table 1 shows the proportion of ads from each sampled year judged to contain time-oriented appeals. The proportions from 1986 and 1988 (18% and 17%, respectively) are comparable with those reported by Gross and Sheth for the late-1980s. During the early- to mid-1990s, the proportions declined somewhat, ranging from roughly 14 to 17 percent. This is consistent with the observations leading to Propositions 1 and 2. The proportions were greatest during the late-1990s, ranging from roughly 21 to 23 percent. Table 1 also shows the proportion of time-oriented ads using time as a primary appeal (roughly 45 to 55 percent) to be consistent with the high proportions found during the final years of the Gross and Sheth analysis.

Gross and Sheth (1989) observed that a wider range of time-oriented appeals was employed during the latter decades of their sample. The current analysis similarly found a wide range of appeals. The proportions of time-oriented ads using each category of appeal are presented in Table 2. Most notable, and consistent with Propositions 3 and 4, is the increased use of appeals coded as "desire for balance," "escape time-oriented lifestyle," and "value scarce leisure time." The appeals "fast to use," "saves time," and "amount of time," were used with most frequency during the early- to mid-1990s. Though no numerical trend is evident for the cat-

egory “presents the consumer as busy,” qualitative differences regarding this appeal are substantial and consistent with observations leading to Propositions 1 and 2. This is discussed in the following section. The nature of ads reflecting the categories “double use of time,” “immediate/timely results,” and “control over time” are also discussed.

DISCUSSION AND QUALITATIVE OBSERVATIONS

The 1980s

Gross and Sheth (1989, p. 81) observed that, in comparison with advertising from earlier decades, advertising during the 1980s:

... largely implies that consumers *expect* products to facilitate time savings and need not justify this expectation. Time-oriented concerns and benefits are communicated with unprecedented simplicity, suggesting time-orientation is a well-understood value.

Comparing ads from the 1980s sample with later ads, the trend toward simpler communication of time-oriented appeals appears to have continued. By later standards, even late-1980s advertising appeared copy-heavy. As compared with the more minimalist style evidenced in recent advertising, ads from this period contained more explicitly rationalized time-related claims.

As in the Gross and Sheth sample, a large proportion of ads from the 1980s presented the sponsors’ products as “fast to use.” For example, the Dirt Devil vacuum was promoted as allowing “quick clean-ups,” and Hershey’s chocolate advertised “quick and easy recipes.” Ads frequently made reference to “saving time.” Hunt’s canned sauces advertised, “all pre-simmered to save you cooking time.” Some ads implied that products saved time because they were “the fastest” or “faster” than other alternatives. For example, Hormel canned chili claimed “quicker to fix than a peanut butter and jelly sandwich.”

A large number of ads specified the short amount of time required to use the product. Stove Top stuffing, for example, advertised “ready in just 15 minutes.” Often the amount of time was headlined or featured as part of a time-saving recipe. Advertising for personal care products frequently specified an amount of time (e.g., Epilady promised smooth hair-free legs in “only a minute or two”). Many advertisers capitalized on time benefits associated with the microwave oven. Whirlpool offered the TimeMaster “because we know the value of your time;” and Pillsbury advertised “just 7 minutes in your microwave.”

Particularly prominent in the late-1980s were appeals to working women as being busy and as regarding time as scarce and valuable. For example, Legg’s hosiery was advertised as for “non-stop legs” ... “throughout your hectic day.” This type of appeal was also sometimes communicated through testimonial. Advertising for Lightdays pantliners and ExLax laxatives featured working women discussing their busy lives.

Ads often appealed to the competing demands on women’s time. An ad for the Correctol laxative stated, “A woman’s day never seems to stop. Between family and work, time’s just not her own.” Nivea face cream stated, “You work hard at work, you work hard at home. You’re under a lot of pressure.” Ads also referred to busy families. Rubbermaid advertised its cookware as “perfect for families on the go,” and Black & Decker advertised the company’s small kitchen appliances by featuring a family “too busy for breakfast.”

Though more prevalent in more recent years, a few 1980s ads promoted products as providing control over time by allowing flexibility in scheduling. The Roto Rooter plumbing service adver-

tised “any time ... 24-hour service;” and Black & Decker promised “coffee’s ready when you are. Just set the 24-hour timer.” A few products promised consumers “double use of time.” The Black & Decker cordless can-opener was promoted as “leaving hands free to do other things around the kitchen.”

Perhaps appealing to demands for immediate gratification, many cosmetics and personal care products promised immediate or at least timely results. Revlon introduced a skin-care product as “the 10-day turnaround,” with results “ten days from today.” Coty introduced Overnight Success, pledging improved skin “in just three nights.” Weight loss products made similar claims; and over-the-counter medications emphasized that busy women need “fast relief.”

Finally, a few advertisers offered products as means to temporarily “escape a time-oriented lifestyle.” Royal Caribbean cruise lines enticed, “You can leave the pressure behind, and renew the energies sapped by all those years of full-speed-ahead.” As precursor to advertising themes more prevalent in the late-1990s, Parliament cigarettes were advertised as “the perfect recess ... a break from activity for rest and relaxation.”

The Early-1990s (1990-1994)

As compared with the majority of decades examined by Gross and Sheth, the early 1990s saw time-oriented appeals used with relatively high frequency. However, as shown in Table 1, the overall rate was lower than during the late-1980s. This is consistent with Proposition 1, which anticipated that explicit rationalization of time benefits might be de-emphasized as women’s workforce participation became routine and commonplace. It is also consistent with Proposition 2. The study found that convenience-food ads appearing during the early 1990s frequently omitted time-oriented claims or made them secondary in emphasis to such benefits as health, taste, and ease of preparation.

As shown in Table 2, all categories of appeal observed in 1980s ads were also observed in early-1990s ads. However, they occurred in different proportions and with different qualitative emphasis. Simple claims promoting products as “fast to use” were most prevalent. From 1990 through 1994, a substantial 70 to 78 percent of sampled time-oriented ads included this claim. For example, Del Monte canned fruits advertised “think quick, think delicious;” and Fantastik household cleaner promised a “quick fix,” making “short work [of] hardcore messes.”

Many ads promising time saved also specified the “amount of time required.” Food advertisers very frequently included this appeal. For example, Hormel advertised “heats in two minutes so you can put your favorite dish on the table in record time,” and Betty Crocker advertised “non-stop from simmer to sensational ... [ready] in 15 minutes.” Non-food product advertisers used it too. Johnson & Johnson introduced a home cholesterol test requiring “only 15 minutes;” and Quick Lube offered car service in “29 minutes guaranteed.”

Sometimes the benefit of saving time was communicated by drawing relatively subtle comparisons with alternative brands. Bounty adopted the now long-running slogan “the quicker picker upper.” Others made more direct claims. Swift headlined “If you have to wait around for the great taste of sausage, you bought the wrong sausage.” Some food ads emphasized that consumers can save time while appearing to have prepared a time-consuming dish. Ore-Ida claimed, “even though they look like you spent all day in the kitchen, you can prepare them fast, fast, fast.”

Most time-oriented food ads used simple claims as compared with those from the 1980s, often communicating “fast to use” and “time-saving” benefits by merely stating the required preparation time or by offering quick recipes. Quaker oatmeal straightfor-

wardly claimed “cooks in 1 minute;” and Tyson chicken featured recipes with such headlines as “From 0 to fajitas in 8 minutes flat.” Others merely presented recipes with “prep time” and “cook time” prominently featured in bolded and blocked print.

Advertisers during the early 1990s continued to emphasize that consumers were busy. However, the overall look and tone of such ads differed from those appearing in the 1980s. Substantially less copy was devoted to explaining *why* the consumer was busy, and ads contained fewer specific references to women in the workforce. Advertisers may have perceived that women had become accustomed to juggling work and family and so those pressures no longer needed to be described. For example, whereas 1980s ads for the Correctol laxative specifically delineated the various components of a busy woman’s life, in 1992 the company simply stated “with all the demands in a woman’s life.” Food advertisers often depicted consumers as too busy to cook but did so with little explanation. Campbell’s soups offered “recipes that fit your busy lifestyle,” and Quaker oatmeal headlined “for moms who have a lot of love but not a lot of time.”

A few ads depicted consumers as not only busy but as also desiring more balanced use of time. S&W advertised its canned vegetables and sauces with “quick” recipes for “when you have more to do than dinner.” The ad promised “will get you out of the kitchen and back to your family in less than 15 minutes.” A few offered temporary reprieve from a typically time-pressured lifestyle. An ad for the Jeep sport utility vehicle read “designed to leave the hassles and commitments of everyday life behind.”

Some advertisers emphasized control over time and its scheduling. First Response and Johnson & Johnson promoted the convenience of in-home medical tests by stressing that they require no pre-scheduled and time-consuming doctors’ office visits. Similarly, the discount store Kmart highlighted the convenience of consulting an in-store pharmacist “any time.” As compared with the 1980s sample, fewer early-1990s ads emphasized immediate or timely results. Particularly noticeable was the decreased emphasis among cosmetics and skin-care advertisers.

Late-1990s (1996-2000)

A marked change was observed in the most recent sample. Though “fast to use,” “saves time” and “amount of time” appeals continued to be popular, increased proportions also reflected a desire for balanced use of time, appreciation of scarce leisure time, and desire to escape a typically time-oriented life-style. Advertising more frequently articulated consumers’ desires for balance between time for work and personal pursuits. Some presented products as allowing the savoring of small increments of leisure time. These focuses are consistent with Propositions 3 and 4. Further, consistent with Propositions 1 and 2, time-concerns were presented with less explanation and rationalization, and some advertisers who earlier consistently addressed the time-concerns of busy working mothers (e.g., Hunts Manwich sauces) used time in only a portion of their ads.

In general, food advertisers in the late 1990s tended toward minimalist execution of time-oriented appeals. Consistent with Proposition 2, time appeals were frequently secondary to nutrition or taste appeals. Some ads simply featured large product photographs with short headlines such as “quick and hearty” and “immediate gratification.” Numerous food brands (e.g., Campbell’s, French’s, Eagle, Jell-O, Comstock, Baker’s) merely presented recipes with close-up photographs, headlines such as “quick dinner recipes,” and “prep/cook time” prominently featured.

As compared with the early-1990s sample, there was a noticeable increase in the number of personal care products using “fast to use,” “saves time,” and “amount of time” appeals. New formula-

tions were promoted as faster to apply or as saving time by allowing substitution of one product for two. A wide range of other product categories also emphasized speed and saving time. For example, Dryel home dry cleaning claimed to require “only 30 minutes.” Whirlpool advertised its clothes dryer by stating that “drying clothes is a job that’s never finished but now it can be an *easier, simpler, quicker* job that’s never finished.”

As in earlier periods, advertisers in the late-1990s offered time-saving tips for working mothers. However, there was a new emphasis on family members being self-reliant. An ad sponsored by America’s Dairy Farmers featured the headline “Uh-oh, mom’s working late. Cheese to the rescue,” implying dad and kids would prepare dinner. A few portrayed the busy woman juggling work and family demands. Schilling seasonings presented the scenario “Your client cut your deadline. At least dinner can go as planned . . . ready in just 25 minutes.” However, more often the ads did not specify *why* the consumer was busy. For example, Campbell’s soups asked, “only have a pinch of time?” without explaining why the consumer would be time pressured.

Ads from the late-1990s sometimes specifically articulated control over time as a benefit. The online health site, Selfcare.com, advertised, “because you can’t squeeze 30 minutes of questions into a 10-minute doctors visit.” The office supply store Office Depot highlighted products that “today’s busy woman needs,” emphasizing “24-hour ordering” and “everything you need, when you need it.” Several sampled ads offered consumers “double use of time” by freeing them from monitoring household tasks. Reynold’s cooking bags claimed “just put [dinner] in an oven bag and forget about it.” Whirlpool advertised “laundry is a fact of life, but it doesn’t have to *be* your life.” Sometimes the promotion of double use of time was accompanied by suggesting the product could provide the reprieve of a few moments leisure or some “balance” between work and personal time. An ad for the Whirlpool dishwasher pictured a woman relaxing in a bath, and read “virtually eliminates soaking . . . as for all that soaking, you might want to save it for yourself.”

As in earlier periods, ads from the late-1990s expressed empathy regarding time pressure and acknowledged that consumers regard time as scarce and valuable. Most used minimal copy to articulate the nature of consumers’ time pressures. Liz Claiborne clothing simply asked “A full day ahead? Are you dressed for it?” In contrast, several ads portraying consumers as busy were quite copy-heavy, suggesting a return to the practice of detailing the specific sources of time pressure. However, unlike the earlier ads, the more recent ads treated the topic with humor. While sensitive to time demands, the ads expressed a sense of amused resignation. As an example, the department store retailer J. C. Penney humorously asked:

“Can you type 60 words a minute, pay bills, fix a hangnail, call your best friend, finish an expense report, call your child’s teacher, organize your calendar, balance your checkbook, call your mother, fight with your mother, meditate, solve the dinner dilemma, pick up your husband’s dry cleaning, make hotel reservations, survive a step class, eat your tuna sandwich and repair a run in your hose during the 15 minutes you have for lunch?”

An ad for Wisk liquid detergent began “the 10 million thousand things we have to do everyday,” and listed roughly 150 humorously stated tasks, goals, and interruptions, including “make a list of a million other things to do.”

Many recent ads portraying the consumer as busy offered the advertised product as a brief reprieve from a typically time-pressed lifestyle, with leisure portrayed as an occasional “stolen” moment.

As shown in Table 2, an increased proportion of time-oriented advertising has used “escape” and “value scarce leisure time” appeals. Nips candies depicted a harried office worker juggling phones and a spewing fax with the headline, “Had enough? Have a Nips.” Nivea skin care products promised, “it makes a five-minute shower feel like a spa.” An ad for Coca Cola’s caffeine-free cola showed forsaken reading material next to a hammock and headlined “there are times you don’t want caffeine.”

Such appeals have also been combined with appeals to the “desire for balance” (see Table 2). While stressing that consumers are busy, ads encouraged readers to occasionally slow down. For example, an ad for Mattel Barbie Doll Collectibles read “You graduated at the top of your class, married . . . , had 2.3 children, and just made partner at the firm. . . . It’s time to play. Take a breath. Treat yourself.” An ad for General Foods International Coffees read, “It’s that moment when the world becomes still and the most pressing thing you have to do is nothing.” Ads for Maxwell House coffee read “Study a cloud. Finish a novel in one sitting;” and “Stay in the bath until your toes wrinkle. Finish the crossword puzzle.” Some advertisers simply expressed empathy. Lee jeans headlined “what women dream about,” indicating 82 percent dream about “more free time.” An L.L. Bean ad read, “To do: Throw out to do list.”

Similar to several ads sampled from the 1980s but nearly absent in the early-1990s sample, the late-1990s sample contained ads emphasizing the busy woman’s need to “keep going.” These ads usually also suggested the benefits “immediate results” and “control over time.” For example, Vicks cold medicine depicted women who had “worked nonstop all day,” and concluded “keeps on going so you can too.” Emphasis on “immediate/timely results” was also seen in ads for exercise and weight-loss products. Finally, though the proportions were lower than in the 1980s, the late-1990s sample included cosmetics and skin-care ads promising results in a specific amount of time.

CONCLUSION

This study extended prior work by Gross and Sheth (1989). The study analyzed advertising appearing from the mid-1980s through the year 2000. As such, it examined advertising produced during in a period during which women’s workforce participation became established as the norm, during which convenience-oriented products were broadly accepted and routinely used, and during which the U.S. was largely transformed from an industrial to a post-industrial economy. These factors, as well as observations regarding consumer desire for balanced time use, led to interest in an updated analysis of time-oriented advertising.

The present study found, first, that advertisers have continued to use time-oriented appeals, including, “fast to use,” “saves time,” and “amount of time” appeals. However, consistent with observations leading to Propositions 1 and 2, these appeals were often communicated more simply during later years, and they represented lesser proportions of time-oriented advertising. Advertisers also continued to portray busy and time-scarce lifestyles, often expressing empathy regarding consumer time pressure. However, consistent with Proposition 1, ads from the early-1990s made less explicit reference to the juggling of work and family than did those from the 1980s. Further, though the late-1990s sample showed a return to the practice of detailing the causes for consumer time pressure, the later ads treated the topic with humor.

Perhaps the most significant change was an enlarged emphasis on consumer desire to achieve balance in use of time. Recent ads reflected a sensibility toward living a balanced life involving time for self and personal relationships. Along with the focus on balance is an increased emphasis on the value placed on scarce leisure time.

Leisure was sometimes presented as only a brief and “stolen” respite, and products were advertised as allowing temporary reprieve from a typically time-pressured lifestyle. These changes are consistent with observations that led to Propositions 3 and 4.

This study represents an initial inquiry chronicling *observed* advertising appeals. In presenting these findings, the author does not intend to suggest that consumers necessarily perceived the meanings of the ads in the ways suggested by the study. The analysis is based on interpretations of meaning. Though coders interpreted the ads quite consistently, this does not mean that target audiences would necessarily do so. A promising area for future inquiry is to collect consumer interpretations of time-oriented ads.

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