

Ads, Consumers, Media

(Media 75 Conference résumé by Al Baker, York University, of panel discussion on May 25. Panel members were Pamela Sigurdson, Canadian Association of Consumers; Ralph Davis, Advt. Mgr. of Kellogg-Salada Company and a director of the Advertising Council of America; Jock Ferguson, CBC; Al Baker, Moderator.)

Sigurdson: The advertising industry had come a long way in the matter of self-regulation but it should be relegated to the role of giving information only. Sponsorship should replace the TV clutter of commercials. She said advertising often capitalized on the inherent credulity of consumers, e.g. impulse buying in the supermarkets. She felt legislation under the Combines Investigation Act re misleading advertising could be stronger. Consumer groups and individuals should complain directly to the government. She said consumers were still too passive.

Davis: We are all consumers and advertising is a necessary and constructive part of our present marketing system. He felt that advertising increased efficiency and reduced costs. He outlined the various forms of self-regulation and governmental regulation and showed how, say, a drug ad would have to be approved before going on TV. Codes of advertising ethics of the CAB and the Advertising Standards Council were explained. Mr. Davis refuted the "subliminal Seduction" theory of J. W. Key and denied that there was a "built-in sexual overtone" in many ads. A bikini-clad girl next to car was there merely as "attention-getter" and nothing more. The consumer was capable of making rational choices.

Ferguson: He stated flatly that advertising, in his view, was "Useless, wasteful, and a cause of crime." He said the consumer was too passive and "an ally of advertising". The consumer should resist buying substandard products. Advertising promoted waste even though we were at the end of the "expansionist economy".

The influence of advertising on the media was raised by Ferguson who claimed the CBC was still, in some cases, (e.g. Hockey Broadcasts) "bowing" to the wish of the advertiser. As a former producer of CBC "Marketplace", he felt the program has now "softened" its attacks on deceptive advertising and poor quality products. The search for the largest possible audience for advertising had a deleterious effect on the quality of the media.

Sigurdson said prime responsibility lay with the media to free themselves from advertising influence and pressure. This applied especially to smaller local media. Davis agreed that media should take more responsibility in examining the type of advertising carried.