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American Cars: Patriotic Consumption After September 11th

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campaigns, combined with leaders' speeches promoting the relationship between shopping and patriotism, supported such behavior and reflected a widespread desire to bring American consumerism back from the brink. A subcategory of consumer products arose within this time period, focused on products related to the September 11 attacks. Around the attack sites, especially at Ground Zero, patriotic products, images, and souvenirs of the Twin Towers, and other September 11 memorabilia proliferated. Images of New York pre-September 11—with the Twin Towers standing watch over the city—became especially popular and were reproduced as framed photographs, post-cards, T-shirts, and posters (Heller, 2005).

Technology also played an important role in the events of September 11. Cell phones recorded images of the events as they unfolded, and photos were quickly

AMERICAN CARS

Beginning September 20, 2001, the same day President Bush reiterated his call to participate in the U.S. economy, General Motors provided an outlet for patriotic consumption with a commercial that read:

On September 11, the world as we knew it came to a halt. We sat glued to our televisions, watching events unfold that shook us to our very core. And, suddenly, the little things that had previously divided us became wholly insignificant. Now, it's time to move forward. (Garfield, 2001, p. 49)

Luckily for those in the market for a new car, "moving forward" meant 0 percent financing on every new GM car and truck. GM (and all other auto manufacturers) may well have offered such incentives as a result of slumping car sales throughout 2001, but the message of this advertising campaign was clear. It was patriotic to buy a car. Not just any car, an American car. Invoking a GM tagline, which coincidentally was eerily similar to the reported final words from Flight 93 that crashed in Pennsylvania, consumers were told to "Keep America Rolling." According to GM, an American's patriotic duty was to buy a GMC Suburban.

The Ford Motor Company quickly followed GM's lead. The maker of the nation's most popular sport utility vehicle, the Explorer, as well as the gas-guzzling Expedition and Excursion, offered its own moral imperative to purchase a vehicle. Ford offered to "do their part to move America forward" by offering interest-free financing on new vehicles. Yet, moving America forward did not necessarily mean moving American workers forward. In January 2002, just three months after these commercials began airing, Ford announced plans to close five plants, leaving 22,000 Americans out of work (Nicklaus, 2002).

—Lori Bindig and M. Bosau

References

- Garfield, B. (2001, October 15). Patriot games. *Advertising Age*, 72(42), 1.
 Nicklaus, D. (2002, January 16). Excess plant capacity forces Ford's hand. *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, p. C1.