

Communalism to Consumerism: Consumer Culture in Samoa

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Abstract

Communalism is a system of living where the good of a total group is prioritized over individual wealth or wellbeing. Consumerism is a fascination with the act of purchasing and acquiring goods. This paper attempts to find out how consumer culture might clash or coincide with a tradition of communalism within the Pacific island nation of Samoa. It looks at the history of communalism within Samoa, and how communalism has been interpreted in Samoa's modern society, manifesting in the form of remittances and formal gift exchanges.

With the introduction of a cash economy from the West, the paper looks at how the notion of prosperity has been handled by Samoa as a communal society. It also studies consumption as a product of the West to find what forces have brought consumerism to Samoa, and contends that media advertising and the Samoan government's regulations (or lack there of) on imports are the two major factors most influencing consumers' options and decisions.

Finally, the paper considers a Samoan sociologist's perspective of consumerism and of her own culture in the face of change. The paper concludes that education on a personal, local, and national scale should become part of Samoa's consumer experience. Once aware of their options, rights, and responsibilities as consumers, Samoans can make informed decisions in order to blend and adapt aspects of communalism to cooperate with the inevitable materialization of consumer culture.

Dedication

To my *aiga Amerika*, whose love and support has led me to all important points in life, including Samoa. Thanks to the Hills, Sagans, and Neptunes everywhere in the world. My home is with you.

Acknowledgements

This project owes a huge thank you to all those who accepted interviews with a confused American student wanting to talk about strange and often unrelated issues. Thanks to Maria Kerslake for sharing both her passionate points of view and academic advice. To Sharon Lauina for giving me the inside scoop and government documents for free. Thanks to Suzie Schuster for being an endless source of great ideas. Thanks also to the Samoan public transportation system for getting me to every interview on time, and allowing me to ride in style all the while.

On a personal level, my deepest *fa'afetai* to all of Samoa for hosting me this semester, challenging my concepts of reality and questioning my ideas of normal. Thanks for showing me how very overrated comfort is. To my host families in Faleula and Lotofaga, thank you for welcoming me into your homes and guiding me to a deeper understanding of the *fa'asamoa*. Grandma Fa'aso'o, thanks for keeping an eye on me.

My fairly shallow *fa'afetai* to American Samoa for being more culture shock than I expected, but a valuable experience to write home about nonetheless. Vinaka to Fiji and especially Abaca for giving us a break from the mayhem and absurdity that is Samoa.

Jackie Schmackie... Mama Jack.... Schmackalack, you are shmack-tastic. Thank you for sharing your home with us so intimately and letting us be buffoons around your country. Your advice and guidance kept me going, your stories and experience inspired me, and it was truly an honor to have you as advisor and friend during the past few months. If you ever want to reconsider my marriage proposal, I'll be waiting.

To SIT Samoa Fall 2004, my beloved traveling compadres: don't worry guys, it's just part of it. You are all amazing. Clearly. And thanks for sharing. Team Manono, thanks for holding my hands and singing so beautifully. Kate, thanks for being my better half and my sanity. I probably could not have done this without you.

Manuia—Cheeyas!
No laughing. I'm serious.
Love, Ameria

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Introduction

Considered “The Heart of Polynesia,” the Independent State of Samoa lies at the center of the South Pacific Ocean. The small nation formerly known as Western Samoa is home to 177,000 citizens within the largest four of the country’s nine islands¹. Almost that many Samoans have emigrated to live and work abroad in New Zealand, Australia, American Samoa, Hawaii, and the continental United States. Many historians argue that Samoa is among Polynesia’s oldest cultures², with traditions dating back thousands of years. In the early 1830s, the London Missionary Society came to Samoa aiming to convert people mistaken for “godless.”³ Samoans accepted Christianity into their hearts and homes, and today Samoa considered one of the most Christian nations on earth. In 1899, the Tripartite Treaty divided the Samoas. Germany took Western Samoa as its colony and Eastern Samoa became an American territory. In 1917, Western Samoa was handed over to New Zealand as a mandate. With the creation of the United Nations after World War II, Samoa became a trusteeship under New Zealand, until the nation gained independence in 1962.

Many aspects of the *fa’asamoa*, or the Samoan way, that held the culture together before European contact still exist here today. The traditional chiefly system, or *fa’amatai*, has been adapted into Samoa’s own modern form of a democratically elected parliament, and is still the foundation of Samoa’s political system as it was thousands of years ago. Despite outside pressure to switch to freehold land, Samoa has kept its customary land system. Eighty percent of land in Samoa is still communally owned by families or villages.⁴ Since independence, Samoa’s economy has shifted from primarily subsistence-based agriculture to cash-dependent.

¹ Bennett, Michelle, et al. *Lonely Planet Guide: Samoan Islands*. 2003. p. 20

² Hunt, Terry. Lecture. August 26, 2004. University of Hawaii

³ Holmes, Lowell D. “Cults, Cargo and Christianity: Samoan Responses to Western Religion.” 1980. p.473

⁴ O’Meara, Tim. *Samoa Planters*. 1990. p. 21

Subsistence is still a way of life for many Samoans, but a commodity-based concept of wealth has begun to challenge traditional Samoan standards of living. With growing amounts of technology and media entering Samoan society, new “needs” are introduced daily, needs that are only met through the consumption of Western goods and food. Despite its strong traditional values and cultural customs, Samoa is fast becoming a member of the global economy, with Western influence bringing rapid change to almost every part of Samoan life.

This paper analyzes Samoa as a relatively new consumer society. Looking at the history of communalism in Samoa and its evolving of concepts of need and wealth, it shows what aspects of the West are most influencing Samoan consumption, the impact of these changes, and where Samoa can go with its development as a consumer society.

Methodology

Intrigued by how a communal society might adapt to a cash economy, I set out to learn how Western consumer culture has blended with the *fa'asamoa*. I wanted to learn about consumer opportunities and rights in Samoa as well as consumer behavior among Samoans. I was curious to know what agents of change are pushing Samoa away from communalism toward consumerism, and why. More than anything, I wondered if the two isms clash or if they will be able to coincide while consumer trends continue to develop further.

The project began by completing background research on the role of communal living in Samoa's culture, past and present. Secondary resources, informal discussions, and class lectures throughout the semester were helpful in seeing how communalism has manifested in Samoa's past.

Interviews were conducted with four members of the Samoan government, two in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade focusing on imports to Samoa, and two in the Ministry of Commerce, Industry, and Labor (MCIL) focusing on consumer rights, price control, and retail regulations. This provided ideas on where Samoan consumers' products come from, and what options are available to the Samoan supplier.

One wholesaler and two retailers in Samoa were interviewed to get a feeling for the history of Samoa's food and commodity market, and to get their perspectives on growing trends of consumption within Samoa. In addition to the three in-depth interviews, twenty-five short surveys were conducted of shopkeepers within Samoa's capital city of Apia. The surveys inquired about stores' sales, where their products come from, and whether or not they ever advertise. Of the twenty-five surveyed, ten shops answered an additional survey concerning their customers, giving insight on Samoan consumer tendencies from the store-owner's point of view.

The two owners of Samoa's larger advertising production companies, Skylite Productions and Adz Up, were also interviewed to learn about the companies, brands, and products being advertised to Samoans and about the targeted Samoan audience. Advertisements from the local newspaper, the *Samoa Observer*, and commercials shown during the evening news on Samoa Broadcasting Channel One were collected or recorded, and then analyzed in order to familiarize with the frequency and style of advertising available to the Samoan public. The advertisements were tallied to see how many ads in Samoa focus on brand recognition, specific product promotion, or corporate/company image to see where the priority lies within the Samoan advertising market.

It was originally intended that random surveys from the general public in Apia would be a main source of information for this project. A survey about shopping preferences and practices was prepared and distributed. Many people misunderstood the questions or the purpose of the survey, giving unrelated answers or related but biased answers. To make any valid generalizations about the average Samoan's shopping preferences, several hundred surveys would need to be completed, many more than realistically feasible in this project's time frame. While the findings from fifteen of the conducted surveys are included with this paper, they are not a definitive or accurate representation of Samoan consumer habits or preferences.

Finally, it is important to include a sociologist's perspective of changing consumer trends in Samoa. Maria Kerslake, professor of Sociology at the National University of Samoa shared her opinions on the issue of development and unsustainable consumption in Samoa. Through her, this research attempts to give a voice to concerned citizens of Samoa and to critics of consumption everywhere.

COMMUNALISM

*“In Samoan eyes, the presentation of a formal gift...is giving a part of one’s self
...the gift serves as an extension of the self.”-Leulu Felise Va’a,⁵*

Historically, Samoan culture has always placed an emphasis on the importance of giving. As members of a communal society, Samoans learn to share their food and belongings with neighbors, extended family, pastors of the church, and almost anyone. Along with this willingness to give is a cultural acceptance of being able to ask for things when needed. In the Samoan language, “give” and “take” can both be described using the word ‘*avatu*’.⁶ Exchanging food and goods is not only accepted in Samoa, it is culturally expected.

One of Samoa’s traditional manifestations of communal living is the ceremonial gift exchange involved in the *fa’alavelave*, such as weddings, funerals, births, and titles. In a traditional *fa’aipoipoga*, or Samoan wedding, the entire extended family of the man offers *oloa*, “wealth such as money, boats, houses, and lands” to the family of the woman, while her family presents *toga* (fine mats), *fagu u’u* (scented coconut oil), *ili* (fans), and *fala lili’i* (sleeping mats) to his. Gifts are also offered from the families of the bride and groom to other parties involved in the wedding ceremony, including church officials, orators, junior chiefs, and bridesmaids. In a Samoan funeral, or *maliu*, the funeral arrangements and level of exchanges “depend on the social status of the deceased,” but are always “more subtle than ... weddings.” Guests offer *si’i*, or gifts of food, mats, and cash to the family of the deceased, and the family returns many offerings to the guests and normally provides a feast at the end of the ceremony.⁷

⁵ Va’a, Leulu Felise. *Saili Matagi : Samoan Migrants in Australia*. 2001. p. 180

⁶ Allardice, R.W. *A Simplified Dictionary of Modern Samoa*. 1985. p. 15

⁷ Va’a, Leulu Felise. *Saili Matagi : Samoan Migrants in Australia*. 2001. p. 151-167

The act of giving and being able to give is a sign of wealth in traditional Samoa.⁸ While a Western ideal of wealth is confirmed by the act of owning and keeping money or belongings, the traditional Samoan ideal placed little importance on mere possession. In a culture where “wealth is dynamic, and prestige comes through its use rather than simply its ownership,” gift-exchanges are a crucial aspect of society.⁹ Historically and today, gift-giving is an opportunity for social status to be enhanced.¹⁰

A modern manifestation of Samoa’s communal living is remittances. Although so many Samoans live and work outside of Samoa’s borders, the communal mindset has led most migrant Samoans to send remittances home to families and communities in Samoa. Following independence, “remittances increased at ten times the rate of agricultural revenues in the late 1960s and early 1970s.”¹¹ Today, remittances compete not only with agriculture, they also bring in three times what Samoa receives in foreign aid each year.¹² In 2003, private remittances from Samoans living abroad totaled SAT \$190 million.¹³ If an individualistic mindset were to replace communalism in Samoa, a major aspect of the Samoan economy would dissolve.

⁸ Fa’asisila, Jackie. Class discussion on Village Economics, September 20, 2004.

⁹ Holmes, Lowell D. *Quest for the Real Samoa*. 1987. p. 36

¹⁰ Va’a, Leulu Felise. *Saili Matagi : Samoan Migrants in Australia*. 2001. p. 151

¹¹ Shankman, Paul. “The Samoan Exodus.” No date. p. 162

¹² Easton, Brian. “Fa’asamoa: Is the Future of Samoa in New Zealand?” October 9, 2004.

<http://www.eastonbh.ac.nz/article610.html>> November 28, 2004.

¹³ NZ Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. *Samoa Country Paper 2004*.

<http://www.mfat.govt.nz/foreign/regions/pacific/country/samoaprogram.html>> November 28, 2004

The Evolution of Wealth in Samoa

“Today that search for money is profoundly changing Samoan Culture, even in the more remote and traditional villages of Savaii.” -Tim O’Meara¹⁴

Prior to European contact, the closest thing to currency in Samoa was the fine mat, hand woven from the leaves of the pandanus plant. Exchanged at *fa’avelave* and considered a standard of value, mats were also utilized by Samoans to sit upon, sleep upon, and the finest of which were used as clothing.¹⁵ The need for a cash currency came to Samoa even before the missionaries, with the European whalers and sailors who traveled the Pacific with cargos of Western belongings previously unknown to Polynesia. Along with all of their material possessions, Europeans brought with them the idea that “any introduced thing is superior to the local thing” says sociologist Maria Kerslake.¹⁶

In the case of the missionaries, materialism came to Samoa hand in hand with Christianity. Samoans, who noticed “a positive correlation between supernatural power and wealth and abundance” were “greatly impressed with the high quality of the Westerner’s material wealth, and believed that the white visitors must have a superior god indeed.”¹⁷ Since this introduction to cash-based wealth, Samoans have joined the search for monetary gain, and have grown increasingly dependent on an import/export cash economy. Maria offers the ironic story of today’s Samoan fisherman who spends all day on the seas fishing. He collects “heaps of fish” and comes home to sell it in the market. Once he has earned enough money, the fisherman goes to the supermarket to buy tinned herring to feed his family.¹⁸ With new desires and newer

¹⁴ O’Meara, Tim. “The Cult of Custom Meets the Search for Money in Western Samoa.” No date. p. 137

¹⁵ Jackson, Moelagi Vaasiliifiti. Lecture/demonstration. October 7, 2004

¹⁶ *Ibid*

¹⁷ Holmes, Lowell D. “Cults, Cargo, & Christianity: Samoan Response to Western Religion.” 1980. p. 478

¹⁸ Kerslake, Maria- Professor of Sociology, NUS. Personal Interview. November 15, 2004

concepts of what is necessary, Samoans are growing more accustomed to less sustainable sources of sustenance.

In addition to introducing materialism and foreign sources of sustenance, “capitalism, at least in its Pacific manifestation, emphasizes the individual profit motive and accumulation.”¹⁹ Consumer and capitalistic endeavors generally support an individualism mindset of personal gratification. More often than not, regulations within an economy reflect this bias. Fair trading laws and consumer rights in Samoa were adapted from the Fair Trading Acts of Australia and New Zealand, using what is applicable to the Samoan market.²⁰ Samoa’s regulations are similar to other nations’ but are often handled differently due to strict traditional customs that prioritize family relationships, including extended family members. Sharon Lauina, a Fair Trade Officer in the Ministry of Commerce, Industry, and Labor, (MCIL) admitted “you have to deal with the *fa’asamoa* first, before dealing with the law.”²¹ She cited several examples of legal situations between consumers and suppliers in Samoa that had been complicated by cultural obligations to family or community. One example consists of a woman who wanted a refund on a major automobile purchase that had proven to be falsely advertised. Officially, she was able to go to the MCIL for legal action after the auto dealer had rejected her, but the woman was distantly related to the auto dealer and her family would not allow her to make the claim. Other examples include related customers and shopkeepers who faced misunderstandings about payments or prices, because the expectation to care for one’s family clashed with the ambition for personal capital prosperity.

With the acceptance of a cash economy and consumer culture in Samoa, credit has been a necessary common method of payment. Credit is a compromise between the clashing ideologies

¹⁹ Hau-ofa, Epeli. “The Future of Our Past.” 1985. p.160

²⁰ Lauina, Sharon- Fair Trade Officer, MCIL. Personal Interview. November 12, 2004

²¹ *Ibid*

of communalism and individualism, and a logical extension of the tradition of sharing. Some businesses have struggled to make a profit because they extend credit too often and are not paid back.²² Mike Mahimkar, head of Sales and Marketing at Ah Liki Wholesales, bragged that his company has been a stronger business because they accept cash payments only and have never been wrapped up in credit debts. Ah Liki began in the late 1980s as a small, family-owned exporter of taro to New Zealand, and has evolved into a full-fledged manufacturer and wholesaler. Today Ah Liki sells food and non-food items to retail shops and individuals throughout Samoa, and is Samoa's only wholesaler without its own retail chain. According to Mike, Ah Liki's competitors "try to compete by under talking the price or offering credit" but he says that Ah Liki is "more efficient and more economic."²³

²² Calkins, Fay G. *My Samoan Chief*. 1962. p. 70

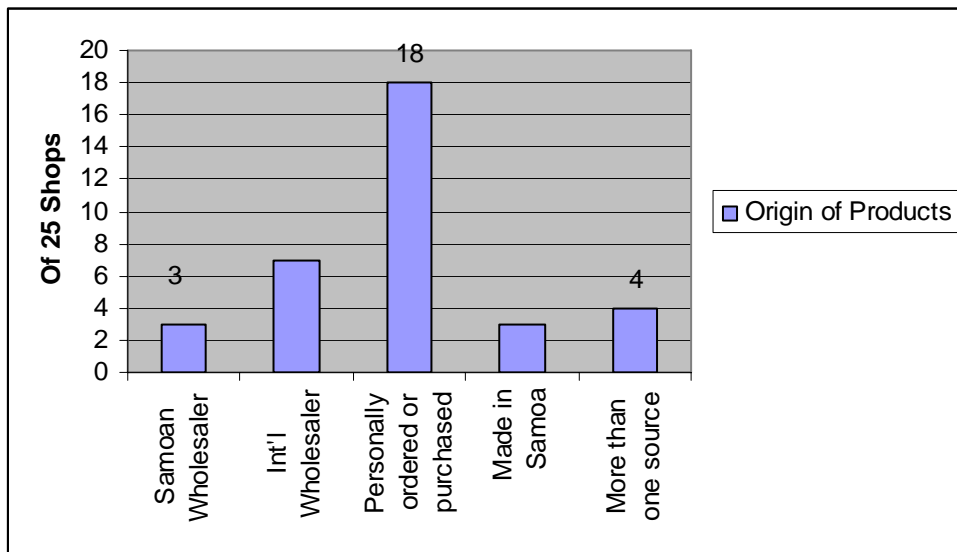
²³ Mahimkar, Mike- Head of Sales and Marketing, Ah Liki Wholesales. Personal Interview. November 11, 2004

CONSUMERISM

“While agriculture provides adequate subsistence for villagers as well as some cash, it does not provide the income level that Samoans want and need as consumers in an increasingly cash-based economy.”-Paul Shankman²⁴

Sources of Consumer Goods

Of twenty-five shop-owners who answered surveys, eighteen answered that most of their products are “personally ordered or purchased overseas” or sent by family members living abroad. Most of these eighteen are variety shops, none dealing with food and only a few specializing in specific consumer interests, two in hardware, one in music, and one in office supplies. Four shops also received goods from other sources. The survey’s other options were “Samoa Wholesaler,” “International Wholesaler,” “Made in Samoa,” and “other.”²⁵



Sixteen of the total shop-owners ordering personally or through international wholesalers mentioned specifically which countries their products come from, ten of which answering the United States. Joe Chan-Ting from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade presumes that

²⁴ Shankman, Paul. “The Samoan Exodus.” No date. p. 159

²⁵ Appendix B: Survey Results.

Samoa's close relations with American Samoa also makes it easy for Samoan consumers to find American products here, more so than in other neighboring Pacific Islands.²⁶ Three of the ten shops selling American goods are older than ten years, two are between two and five years old, and the remaining five shops selling American goods have all opened within the past year, implying that the availability of American products may be a new trend.²⁷

Those who do order through wholesalers say that they often order through both Samoan wholesalers and international wholesalers. Several of Samoa's wholesalers, including Ah Liki Wholesales, import raw materials and manufacture some of their food products in factories here.²⁸ Three of the twenty-five surveyed stores (all non-food) answered that some of their products are made in Samoa.²⁹ Samoa's government has set up an assistance program for Samoan manufacturers, allowing duty-free importing of raw materials for approved applicants. The catch however, is that all of products manufactured under this "Duty Suspension Scheme" must be for export only.³⁰ Although material goods and food are being produced in Samoa, only some are for the Samoan market, while most goods bought and sold within Samoa are made elsewhere.

Agents of Change: Advertising

Advertising is a recent genre to Samoan audiences, but one that is growing fast and gradually affecting rates of consumption. Of twenty-five shops in Apia who answered surveys, fifteen advertise in the newspaper, radio, or television. Nine of the fifteen advertise in more than one of the above mediums. Of those who do not advertise, several shop owners explained that

²⁶ Chan-Ting, Joe- Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Personal Interview. November 12, 2004

²⁷ Appendix B: Survey Results.

²⁸ Mahimkar, Mike –Head of Sales and Marketing, Ah Liki Wholesales. Personal Interview. November 11, 2004

²⁹ Appendix B: Survey Results.

³⁰ Mangroff, Kunta-Ministry of Industry, Commerce, and Labor. Personal Interview. November 12, 2004

Samoa's small size makes advertising unnecessary. Levine Siemu, the Merchandise Manager of Apia's Ace Hardware says that "the market is just too small here" and that people already know about their purchasing options.³¹ On the other hand, Heidi Paul, co-owner of H & H Holdings, parent company of Apia's two branches of the Rup's Big Bear chain variety store and of their own second hand clothing store, Mr. Lava Lava, says that she advertises for her stores both on the radio and television. Although the TV ads are more expensive, Heidi thinks they are worth it. "It's like everything in life," she says, "the more you put in, the more you get out."³²

The products Heidi sells at Rup's Big Bear, a chain originating from Fiji, are often new to the Samoan market. Advertising is a way that she and her husband Harry Paul introduce these new products to Samoan consumers. One example Heidi shares are goods related to Valentine's Day, a consumer holiday Samoa is largely unfamiliar with. With new products to sell, including chocolates, cards and decorations, Heidi and Harry have to introduce new desires, and essentially, new needs. Using advertisements to familiarize consumers with Valentine's Day and other consumer interests has been a significant venture for H & H Holdings.³³

Cinematic advertiser Mac Mailo of Adz Up says that Samoa is a difficult market for the advertiser. Most Samoan businesses, he says, "see advertising as a waste of their money."³⁴ Television advertising producer Rico Tupai of Skylite Productions agrees that "word gets around quickly and easily here without advertising" but thinks that "companies are starting to realize the value of advertisements. The influx of international companies is waking up local Samoan companies."³⁵

³¹ Siemu, Levine-Merchandise Manager, Ace Hardware. Personal Interview. November 12, 2004

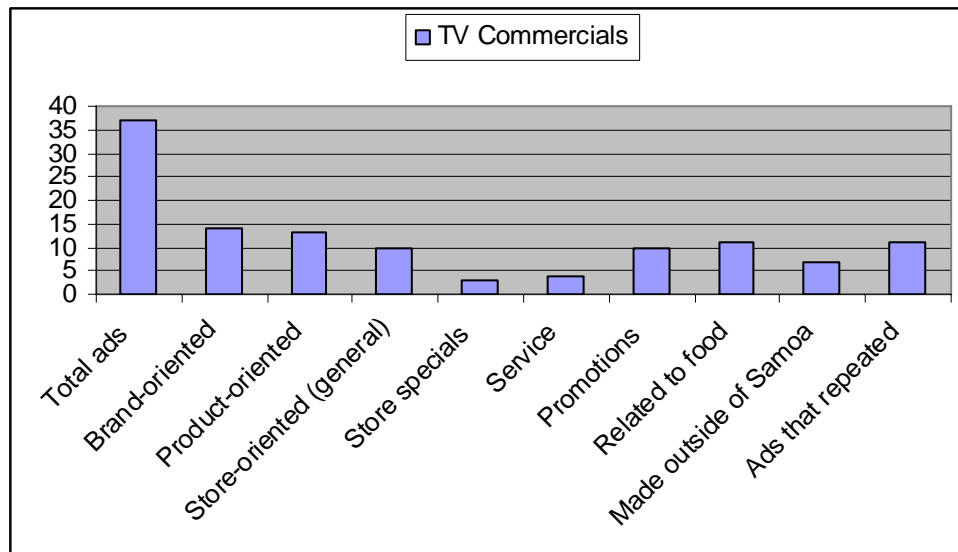
³² Paul, Heidi- H&H Holdings. Personal Interview. October 13, 2004

³³ Paul, Heidi- H&H Holdings. Personal Interview. October 13, 2004

³⁴ Mailo, Mac-Sales Executive, Adz Up. Personal Interview. November 12, 2004

³⁵ Tupai, Rico-Skylite Productions: Personal Interview November 18, 2004

In four days' editions of the *Samoa Observer*, the total number of consumer-targeted advertisements (advertising consumable material goods or food that are available in a store setting) was thirty-one, over a total of 136 pages.³⁶ Seven of the thirty one ads were advertising food, and ten advertised store specials or clearances. During a single night of evening news on Samoa Broadcasting Channel One, (SBC 1) a total of thirty-seven commercials were aired in about two hours.³⁷



Thirteen of the thirty-seven commercials advertised specific products, ten advertised stores in Samoa, four advertised services, and ten advertised company promotions. Three of the ten store-oriented commercials were advertising store specials or clearances, and the rest were for general awareness. Fourteen of the thirty-seven total focused on brand image, either combined with product or company promotions. Four commercials aired twice and one advertisement played three times within the two-hour-time-period. Advertising is no doubt an influential factor in consumption, despite how new the genre is to Samoa. A second influential factor is international trade, affecting availability and prices of Samoa's consumer goods.

³⁶ Appendix C: *Samoa Observer* Newspaper Advertisements.

³⁷ Appendix D: SBC 1 Evening News Commercial Advertisements.

Agents of Change: Trade

International trade is still a minimal source of income to Samoa's economy. Among its largest exports are auto wiring harnesses and coconut oil.³⁸ Its large-scale imports compete with small, private endeavors and family remittances. Samoa is a member of two international trading agreements, PICTA and PACER. The Pacific Island Countries Trade Agreement (PICTA) allows free trade between all Pacific island countries, excluding New Zealand and Australia. The Pacific Agreement for Closer Economic Relations (PACER) includes Australia and New Zealand and provides a similar service to the countries of the Pacific.³⁹

Within the next year, however, Samoa is hoping to become a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO), "the only global international organization dealing with the rules of trade between nations."⁴⁰ With an emphasis on free trade, the WTO aims to assure that "consumers and producers know that they can enjoy secure supplies" and that "producers and exporters know that foreign markets will remain open to them" whether by "liberalizing trade" between nations or "maintaining trade barriers."⁴¹ It seems that one of the bigger changes in Samoa's consumer culture has yet to come, but is on its way.

According to Julia Salofa of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, by joining the WTO, Samoa would "gain access to the international market," which would strengthen competition within the Samoan market. Joining the WTO would also make the Samoan market, including its resources, consumers, and local products, accessible to international investors. She argues that the benefit of this change would go to Samoan consumers, who would have "more

³⁸ NZ Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. *Samoa Country Paper 2004*.

<http://www.mfat.govt.nz/foreign/regions/pacific/country/samoaprogram.html> November 28, 2004

³⁹ Lauina, Sharon-Fair Trade Officer, MCIL. Personal Interview. November 12, 2004

⁴⁰ World Trade Organization. 2004. <http://www.wto.org> November 24, 2004

⁴¹ *Ibid*

and better things available to them here.”⁴² In theory, lower prices will make commodities of improved quality accessible to Samoans, and will regenerate the Samoan economy, strengthening the country as a whole.

For the small private business owner in Samoa, however, allowing international companies to enter Samoa’s market and forcing local businesses to compete with foreign products and prices will bring unequal competition favoring outside suppliers and producers. The WTO could potentially put most small local-scale companies out of business. According to sociologist Maria Kerslake, Samoa is “a small fish that will be swallowed by the globalized world” if it joins the World Trade Organization. She says that she is relieved that Samoa has not been able to become a member yet, and would prefer her country to stay independent and hold control over its own resources.⁴³ Other critics of the World Trade Organization have condemned the organization for various reasons, including dismantling environmental protections, blocking labor and human rights regulations, illegalizing local policies that encourage local hire or the use of domestic materials, and many others.⁴⁴ Samoa is one of eight “least-developed countries” in the world that is currently in the process of joining the WTO.⁴⁵ Consumption in Samoa has been introduced by several forces and is now here to stay. The implications of consumerism are still being realized in Samoa, and the country is faced with the challenge of consuming responsibly.

⁴² Salofa, Julia-Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Personal Interview. November 12, 2004

⁴³ Kerslake, Maria- Professor of Sociology, NUS. Personal Interview. November 15, 2004

⁴⁴ Beck, Juliette and Kevin Danaher “Is the World Trade Organization a blessing or a curse?” *San Francisco Gate*. 1999: <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/chronicle/archive/1999/11/29/ED68118.DTL> November 24, 2004

⁴⁵ World Trade Organization. 2004. <http://www.wto.org> November 24, 2004

Analysis

“Patterns of consumption must be sustainable not only for our environment but for our cultural heritage also. We must learn to consume in such a way that we don’t change the face of our culture.” –Maria Kerlake, Sociologist⁴⁶

With the majority of products available to the Samoan market coming from outside origins, Samoa’s consumer culture is hardly self-sufficient within the island nation. Like consumer cultures everywhere, Samoa’s is also far from sustainable. Many consumer products, from houses to shoes, are not catered to Samoa’s unique climate, environment, or culture. As more mass-produced goods enter the country, aspects of Samoa are facing major changes. Where the open *fale* once stood as Samoa’s only and most logical form of housing, Western style homes first introduced by missionaries have infiltrated the market, proving to be less practical in the heat, more expensive to build, and much more problematic to keep up in the harsh tropical climate of Samoa. This ‘need’ was introduced because it was presumed safer against cyclones, and to accommodate and uphold Western ideals of possession and privacy.

Along with changes in the physicality of Samoa’s material goods, outside products are bringing changes in Samoa’s system of knowledge. Maria warns that in this previously self-sufficient culture, now “people buy things to substitute the old way of life because it is much easier. They start to neglect traditional knowledge and it stops being passed down because instead of seeing their parents live the old way, children watch them go to the store and buy things.”⁴⁷ The concern is one of balance, that eventually Samoa will lose knowledge of all traditional ways of living, as many cultures have already done, and become completely dependent on foreign nations providing foreign products, inevitably also producing long-term waste and pollution problems.

⁴⁶ Kerlake, Maria-Professor of Sociology, NUS. Personal Interview. November 15, 2004

⁴⁷ *Ibid*

With the power of technology, media, and globalization, the invasion of outside goods is becoming an unavoidable fate for Samoa. As trade barriers are lifted, imports are flooding into the nation, brought not only by large companies but by individuals trying to earn a daily earning. Joining the WTO will bring more goods into the country, and more businesses from abroad. Hopefully these changes will in fact bring better and safer consumer options to the Samoan public, as it doesn't seem likely that consumerism will fade from Samoa any time soon.

The advertising industry is on the rise in Samoa, and as it continues to develop Samoan audiences also develop as audiences and as consumers. As awareness increases, desires will be amplified, standards will rise, and consumption in Samoa will certainly multiply. The important concern is that consumers be educated about their options, rights and responsibilities, along with their options as shoppers. Fair trading officer Sharon Lauina wants to make sure that the Samoan consumer is not taken advantage of by companies of any size, and in return will not abuse their rights by manipulating companies, organizations, or government bodies such as her own ministry. The Ministry of Commerce, Industry, and Labor conducts workshops in Samoa, traveling to villages to inform people about their rights to assure that the market runs smoothly for Samoan consumers.

The educational system in Samoa can also teach children to become responsible consumers, about the environmental and social consequences of their actions, and about the variety of options that most consumers often forget they have. Adults should be made aware of their rights and responsibilities as well, through local programs and even store-sponsored functions. Audiences should be taught media literacy, especially how to view advertising critically and actively, rather than as passive onlookers. Nutrition should be an educational priority, and the nutritional value of consumable goods available to Samoa should be made

known. Waste management and the environmental impact of packaging and the production of products should become common knowledge to Samoan consumers. Finally, it is important for consumers to know their buying options, and of the power they hold in utilizing those options. Staying informed about companies and supporting ones with higher standards of production and materials is an important choice for consumer to make. The causes and effects of consumption are significant not only to Samoan consumers, but to consumers, producers and suppliers everywhere. It is the duty of governments, companies, institutions, and individuals to educate themselves and each other about their rights and responsibilities as members of a consumer culture.

Conclusion

“Changes in technology and in population must in the long run be accompanied by changes in value systems” –Epeli Hau’ofa⁴⁸

Since European contact, Samoa has faced countless changes and pressures to change in the likeness of the West. The core components of the *fa’asamoa* have stood firm against these changes. The *fa’amatai* has adapted into a modern political system. Land tenure is, for the most part, still in place after hundreds of generations. Subsistence lifestyles continue to struggle to adjust to a cash economy and a western standard of living. Western concepts of wealth that emphasize individual gain and accumulation challenge aspects of communal living.

Consumption sits at the heart of these new standards and is the basis of this cash economy.

Despite its political independence from colonial powers, Samoa is still subject to foreign influence, and continues to be interdependent in many ways. The media, as it floods into the homes of Samoan consumers on the screens of foreign televisions, induces new desires and

⁴⁸ Hau’ofa, Epeli. “Future of Our Past” 1985. p. 159

needs daily. The government, as it aims for stronger international relations, turns to trade as a means of participating in the global market. The consumers of Samoa are at the end of these global transactions, subject to the standards and priorities of trading agents. If the government of Samoa succeeds in becoming a member of the WTO, Samoa will most likely see many new changes in its national market and international relations. Trading opportunities for the country should increase, and more consumer options will result.

Consumption brings several social and environmental changes. Lifestyles and systems of knowledge adjust to new goals and aims. The introduction of material and capital wealth puts social statuses in a new light, adding new criteria for social hierarchy. Societies become more susceptible to new forms of crime with the introduction of new possessions. New goods result in pollution and waste that must be taken care of in a way that biodegradable waste did not have to be looked after in pre-colonial times. At the same time, new technologies and products bring the globalized world and all of its options to Samoa. Increasing patterns of consumption can bring new opportunities, new knowledge, and new standards to the Samoan consumer, for better or worse. With a proper understanding of their options, rights, and responsibilities, consumers can use their roles to make these changes for Samoa's better.

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ABM Apia Machines*
Ace Hardware†*
Alberta's Gifts
Blue Bird Lumber & Hardware
California Connection*
Cash Converters*
CCK
Chan Chui & Sons, Ltd.*
Cheryl's Variety*
D's Selection
Elaine M.A.R. Enterprises Limited
Essentials
Helita's Boutique
Horizon Boutique*
Lamolga Collection
Lamolga Collection Fashions
Lober Industries
Lucky Foodtown
Mr. Lava Lava†*
Music Hut*
Pat Ah Him Co.*
R and L Lober and Co.
Rups Big Bear†
Samoa Pharmacy
The Cal*
Treasure Garden Store
Trendy Kid's

*Shops who completed second survey on customers

†Shops whose owners were interviewed at length

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Glossary of Samoan Terms

aiga Amerika—American family

'avatu—to give or take

fa'afetai—thank you

fa'aipoipoga—Samoan wedding

fa'alavelave—ceremonial gift exchange such a wedding or funeral

fa'amatai—chiefly system

fa'asamoa—The Samoan way

fagu'u—scented coconut oil

fala lili'i— hand woven sleeping mats

fale—house

faleoloa—a shop or store

ili—hand-held fan

maliu—Samoan funeral

matai—chief

oloa—goods

palagi—person of non-Samoan heritage

si'i—gifts offered to the family of the deceased

toga—hand woven fine mats

Appendix A: SURVEYS

Shop Keeper's Survey on Stores

Store Name: _____

Store type:

- Food
- Clothing (New Used)
- Variety
- Electronics
- Office/school supplies
- Department
- Other: _____

How long has your store existed? _____

Do you advertise?

- No Yes

If yes, where?

- TV
- Radio
- Newspaper
- Other: _____

If yes, who do your ads target?

- Anyone
- Children under 15
- Ages 15-25 female
- Ages 15-25 male
- Adults over 25
- Whole families
- Other: _____

How often do you have sales?

- Holidays
- When business is slow
- When new products come in
- When there is an excess in older products
- Other: _____

Where do your products come from?

- Samoan wholesalers
- International wholesalers
- Personally ordered/purchased overseas
- Made in Samoa

Shop Keeper's Survey on Customers

Store Name: _____

Store type:

- Food
- Clothing (New Used)
- Variety
- Electronics
- Office/school supplies
- Department
- Other: _____

Do you advertise?

- No Yes (TV Radio Paper)

How many people usually come to your shop each day? (please estimate)

- less than 30 people
- 30-60 people
- 60-100 people
- more than 100 people

What gender are most of your shoppers?

- mostly male shoppers
- mostly female shoppers
- even male/female ratio

How old are most of your shoppers?

- under 18 years old
- 18-30 years old
- 30-50 years old
- over 55 years old
- haven't noticed a majority

Who do shoppers usually come with?

- they shop by themselves
- they come as families/ with children
- they come with friends/ people their age
- haven't noticed a majority

How much does the average person spend in one trip to your shop?

- \$10-\$50
- more than \$100
- don't know

Consumer's Survey on Shopping Preferences

Do you enjoy shopping?

- Yes No

What are your favorite things to buy? (check all that apply)

- Clothing
 Kitchen ware
 Books
 Office/School supplies
 Music
 House decorations
 Electronics
 Other: _____

How often do you go shopping for things other than food?

- Every day
 Once a week
 Once a month
 Only when I have to
 Never
 Other: _____

Who do you most often shop for?

- Myself
 Children in my family
 Adults in my family
 Friends
 Other: _____

Why do you usually go shopping?

- I want something specific
 I'm bored
 I want to be in a better mood
 My friends are going
 When I have money to spend
 Other: _____

What are your favorite stores?

Your age: _____

- Female Male

Appendix B: SURVEY RESULTS

Store Owner's Survey on Customers

Number of Surveys Conducted: 10

Numbers of each store type:

0/10 ___ Food
3/10 ___ Clothing
3/10 ___ Variety
0/10 ___ Electronics
1/10 ___ Office/school supplies
1/10 ___ Department
1/10 ___ Music
1/10 ___ Hardware

Numbers who advertise:

6/10 ___ No
4/10 ___ Yes
 1/10 ___ TV
 4/10 ___ Radio
 2/10 ___ Paper

Numbers of customers on average per day: less than

4/10 ___ 30 people
1/10 ___ 30-60 people
3/10 ___ 60-100 people
2/10 ___ more than 100 people

Numbers of genders of most customers:

2/10 ___ mostly male shoppers
3/10 ___ mostly female shoppers
5/10 ___ even male/female ratio

Numbers of ages of most customers: (can check more than one)

3/10 ___ under 18 years old
5/10 ___ 18-30 years old
6/10 ___ 30-50 years old
1/10 ___ over 55 years old
2/10 ___ haven't noticed a majority

Who customers normally shop with: (can check more than one)

4/10 ___ they shop by themselves
7/10 ___ they come as families/ with children
4/10 ___ they come with friends/ people their age
1/10 ___ they come with coworkers
0/10 ___ haven't noticed a majority

Amount that average customer spends in one trip to shops: (can check more than one)

- 1/10 ___ less than \$10
- 3/10 ___ \$10-50
- 4/10 ___ \$50-\$100
- 2/10 ___ more than \$100
- 2/10 ___ don't know

Store Owner's Survey on Stores

Number of Surveys Conducted: 25

Numbers of each store type:

- 1/25 ___ Food
- 10/25 ___ Clothing
- 12/25 ___ Variety
- 0/25 ___ Electronics
- 1/25 ___ Office/school supplies
- 1/25 ___ Department
- 3/25 ___ Hardware
- 1/25 ___ Music
- 2/25 ___ Fabric
- 1/25 ___ Pharmacy
- 1/25 ___ Toys

Years that stores have existed:

- 8/25 ___ Less than six months
- 0/25 ___ Less than a year
- 4/25 ___ Between 1-5 years
- 1/25 ___ Between 5-15 years
- 3/25 ___ More than 15 years
- 5/25 ___ More than 30 years
- 4/25 ___ Unsure

Numbers who advertise:

- 10/25 ___ No
- 15/25 ___ Yes
 - 10/25 ___ TV
 - 11/25 ___ Radio
 - 8/25 ___ Paper
 - 9/25 ___ Advertise in more than one of the above

If yes, who ads are targeted toward:

- 5/25 ___ Anyone
- 3/25 ___ Children under 15
- 4/25 ___ Ages 15-25 female
- 0/25 ___ Ages 15-25 male

5/25 ___ Adults over 25
0/25 ___ Whole families

How often sales and specials occur:

9/25 ___ Holidays
2/25 ___ When business is slow
6/25 ___ When new products come in
6/25 ___ When there is an excess in older products
5/25 ___ Other: Back to school, Never, Special Occasions (Teuila)

Where most products come from:

3/25 ___ Samoan wholesalers
7/25 ___ International wholesalers
18/25 ___ Personally ordered/purchased overseas
3/25 ___ Made in Samoa

Specific mentions: -10/25 USA, -3/25 NZ, 1/25 -Aus, Fiji, 2/25 -Thailand, China, Singapore.

Survey on Shopping

Number of Surveys Conducted: 15

Numbers who enjoy shopping:

13/15 ___ Yes 2/15 ___ No

Numbers of favorite things to buy: (checked all that apply)

6/15 ___ Clothing
1/15 ___ Kitchen ware
2/15 ___ Books
2/15 ___ School supplies
7/15 ___ Music
0/15 ___ House decorations
0/15 ___ Electronics
5/15 ___ Other: Jewelry, Gifts: Samoan Arts, Smokes

How often consumers go shopping for things other than food:

7/15 ___ Every day
6/15 ___ Once a week
2/15 ___ Once a month
0/15 ___ Only when I have to
0/15 ___ Never
0/15 ___ Other:

Who consumers most often shop for:

6/15 ___ Self (4/12 only self)
1/15 ___ Children in my family
3/15 ___ Adults in my family
8/15 ___ Friends

1/15 ___ Other: Business

Why consumers usually go shopping:

3/15 ___ They want something specific

0/15 ___ They are bored

2/15 ___ They want to be in a better mood

3/15 ___ Their friends are going

7/15 ___ When they have money to spend

2/15 ___ Other: "cause I have to"

Favorite stores listed:

7/12-Frankies

1/12-Amau

1/12-CCK

3/12-Chan Mow

4/12-Molesi Samoa

2/12-Market

1/12-95 I

1/12-Fugalei

1/12-Foodland

Ages: 20, 30, 20, 18, 25, 24, 17, 15, 20, 22?, 36, 18, 18, 17, 18

Number of Females: ___ 9/15

Number of Males: ___ 6/15

Appendix C: Samoa Observer Newspaper Advertisements

<u>Date</u>	<u>Total advertisements in paper</u>	<u>Food Related</u>	<u>Ads concerning store specials</u>
Total:	31		7
Friday, 11/12/04	11		3
	AQM	AQM	Dick Smith Electronics
The Complete Window Center	AQM	AQM	AQM
Dick Smith Electronics, sales	Le Well		Le Well-pre xmas special
Western Auto Spares			Molesi Hardware Star Buys
Haleck Apia Motors- car dealer			Cash Converters 6 week layby
AQM-soft drink specials			
AQM- thanksgiving turkey			
Le Well Company Ltd-liquors			
Molesi Hardware Star Buys			
Polynesian Airlines gift fares			
Cash Convertwers			
Rota Tanks			
Monday 11/15/04	6		1
	Le Well		Dick Smith Electronics-Bargains
The Complete Window Center			Le Well Company Ltd-liquors
Dick Smith Electronics-Bargains			
Fatu O le Alofa-CD on sale			
Western Auto Spares			
Haleck Apia Motors- car dealer			
Le Well Company Ltd-liquors			
Tuesday 11/16/04	7		2
	AQM	AQM	AST Industries, Clearance (excess stock)
AQM- Whole tegel Chickens	Le Well		
Dick Smith Electronics-Bargains			
Western Auto Spares			
Haleck Apia Motors- car dealer			
The Complete Window Center			
AST Industries, Clearance (excess stock)			
Le Well Company Ltd-liquors			
Thursday 11/18/04	7		1
	AQM		AQM-soft drinks and chips spc.
AQM-soft drinks and chips spc.			Morris Hedstrom Star Buys
Dick Smith Electronics- new stock			
The Complete Window Center			
Fatu O le Alofa-CD on sale			
Morris Hedstrom Star Buys			
Western Auto Spares			
Haleck Apia Motors- car dealer			

Appendix D:

SBC 1 Evening News Commercial Advertisements

Monday, November 15, 2004. 6:00-8:00pm

Brand-oriented
14 of 37

Wahoo
Cold Power
Punjas
Wahoo
Top it Up
Everready batteries
Telecom Samoa
Krissy Snacks
Huggies Diapers
Eat & Win Maggi

McDonalds
Twisties
CCK coffee
McDonald's WC Day

Product-oriented
13 of 37

Wahoo
Mortein
Cold Power
Wahoo
Snugglers Diapers
SPC fruit Salad
Everready batteries
Zap Mosquito Coils
Huggies Diapers
Harpic Toilet

CCK Coffee
Flooring Down Under
Rota tanks

Store-oriented (general)
10 of 37

Indoors (clothing)
iPasifika (computer)
AST industries
Maria's Healthcare Pharmacy
Chan Mow Supermarket
Auto Supacenter (variety)
Western Union
Flooring Down Under
Lucky Foodtown
Auto Supacenter

Store specials
3 of 37

Auto Supacenter
Western Union
Auto Supacenter

Related to food
11 of 37

Wahoo Chef's Choice
Cereal Bonanza
Chan Mow Supermarket

Punjas

Wahoo Chef's Choice
SPC Fruit Salad
Krissy Snacks
Eat & Win Maggi
Twisties Promotion
CCK Coffee
Lucky Foodtown

Made outside of Samoa
7 of 37

Mortein
Cold Power
Snugglers Diapers

SPC Fruit Salad

Everready batteries
Zap Mosquito Coils
Huggies Diapers
Harpic Toilet Cleaner

Ads that repeated
5 commercials, 11 of 37

Wahoo (2x)
Drug Abuse Infomercial (2x)
Polynesian Airlines (3x)

Auto Supacenter (2x)
McDonald's World
Childrens Day (2x)