

CULTURAL CONSTRUCTS IN ADVERTISING: ETHNICITY IN THE AMERICAN CONTEXT

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Abstract. *This article introduces the analytical concept of metaproduction which refers to the material and linguistic process of signification that links micro-level expressions of language and culture to broader social meanings and values through cultural and linguistic meta features. The article examines the ideological foundations of racial and ethnic formation, placing particular emphasis on the production processes and practices within mass media. By connecting various stages of development and production, the concept of metaproduction is proposed as a means to reveal how final advertisements influence emerging racial and ethnic imaginaries within the media landscape.*

Key words: *advertising, race, ethnicity, language, mass-media social class, semiotics, metaproduction.*

Introduction. In advertisements targeting the Asian American market in the United States, American advertisers often use elements such as the color red, the numbers eight and nine, as well as symbols like gold and dragons all of which are traditionally associated with Chinese culture. Therefore, advertisers approach their creative work at a meta level, demonstrating their awareness of historical and cultural narratives about Asian Americans, their understanding of linguistic diversity and speech styles, and their ability to create culturally specific indices for various Asian ethnic groups. As an analytical tool, metaproduction helps illuminate how advertising specialists who target Asian American audiences transform census and marketing data into commercially viable representations. In doing so, they employ indices that reflect markers of ethnicity and social class.

Analysis and results. Meta production is a process of material and linguistic signification that draws on values already recognized as meta. These values are particularly characterized by metacultural (i.e., reflective thinking about culture) and metalanguage (i.e., reflective thinking about language and its use) features. Metaculture refers to the act of thinking about culture, while metalanguage refers to speaking about language and its usage both of which are standard components of the advertising production process. However, the creation of racially and ethnically specific communications demands an even more heightened level of such reflexivity. "Metaculture draws attention to a cultural object, turning it into a subject of interest and thereby facilitating its circulation or dissemination. Metaculture is considered an

addition to culture itself.” [1]. As we consider the metacultural dimensions of advertising development and production, Daniel notes: “Meta-symbols such as Coca-Cola are manifested as elements of material culture.” The meta-level is especially significant, as it reveals how signs (i.e., meanings and symbols) are coordinated across various stages. This, in turn, provides an important theoretical foundation for understanding how social meanings are constructed through advertising and mass communications [2]. Metaproduction begins with social evaluations of language and culture and uses these as the basis for constructing racial and ethnic representations. In advertising, metaproduction engages not only with content, but also with form. Jane H. expands the notion of poetics by analyzing how a message is conveyed not only through words but also through nonverbal communication. She explains the concept of the message as it appears in political discourse as follows: “The message consists of speech and text, but it is primarily marked by its poetic function. Thematic material is delivered through short, memorable phrases and slogans. Constructing a message is an art form that involves colors, lighting, music, clothing, body posture, and many other signs, all of which are just as important as the text itself.” [4]. Focusing on the affective aspects of advertising statements, Richard Parmentier referred to this feature as “puffery” as exaggerated claims [4].

Metacultural and metalinguistic levels work in tandem, as advertising aimed at Asian Americans is shaped by both cultural and linguistic considerations. Language is already a deeply studied aspect in advertising. Thus, metaproduction functions as a theoretical tool for understanding the complex interaction between linguistic and material signs, as well as their effectiveness and resonance within the advertising context. Creative professionals in advertising agencies aim to reach Asian American consumers through specialized forms of communication - a process in which they transform mainstream brand identities into ethnically and racially specific advertising forms. Understanding the regional ideologies, values, and norms specific to a target audience is a crucial factor in effectively shaping consumers and markets.

Asian American advertising creators produce in-language advertisements meaning that the content includes either an Asian language or a variety of English commonly spoken among Asian communities. They also develop in-culture advertisements - ads that employ non-linguistic signs (such as images, colors, or symbols) that resonate with one or more Asian American ethnic groups.

An example of this process is a commercial by Prudential Insurance targeted at Asian immigrant families in the United States. In the advertisement, a father and son are shown walking together through a park. During their walk, they notice a

bird's nest in a tree and stop to gaze at it. As the camera zooms in, the nest becomes a metaphor for a warm, safe home. This visual metaphor conveys the father's long work hours, the family's celebration of Lunar New Year, and the son's eventual graduation. At the end of the commercial, both the father and son silently look back at the nest. A message appears on the screen: *For generations who protect the future. Prudential - helping you build your nest.* The text is shown both in English and Mandarin. The in-language features of this advertisement include the presence of Mandarin-language text, Mandarin subtitles, and the use of culturally relevant phrases such as family protection and future.

The in-culture features include: the symbolism of the bird's nest, a common metaphor for home and care in many Asian families; emphasis on intergenerational responsibility, particularly the role of parents in immigrant households; an emotional tone that highlights sacrifice and aspiration

To resonate with first-generation Chinese American parents by appealing to their desire to protect and provide for their children while also blending the immigrant experience with traditional values.

Conclusion. In order to effectively apply in-language and in-culture features, advertisers must possess the ability to accurately interpret and decode visual signs in advertising, ensure cultural appropriateness especially for Asian American audiences and engage in collaborative critical thinking and creative dialogue, as well as strategically define new creative directions. Recognizing and addressing the ethnicity of the target audience is a crucial factor in resonating with cultural values and enhancing the effectiveness of product marketing

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