Creating model consumers: producing race, ethnicity, and class in Asian American advertising

By Shalini Sankar

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Intro: Steve, Account executive for asian collaboration and marketing agency

- Although icons such as dragons and numerology certainly could suggest images of Asia and asian americans more particularly, Steve indicates that he, like his target audience, would see them as simplistic and ineffective.
- Prides himself on staying away from the complex icons that lessen the individuality of Asians in the US but instead focus on the wide-scale social historical and cultural history of Asian Americans
- Main goal is to satisfy their clients who want to preserve the brand identity of Asian American culture
  - Replaced names of individuals and agencies
Metaproduction

- Says that metaproduction presents a way of understanding how Asian American executives transform their marketing methods in order to suit their target audience by adding indications of ethnicity and class.
- Metaproduction connects the small-scale cultural and linguistic significance with broader categories of brand identity of racial meanings.
Niche

- Asian American market is considered niche because it’s content is geared specifically toward a certain group of people in the US population
- It is also expected to contain cultural and linguistic signs that attract Americans with Asian descent.

http://www.dae.com
https://www.facebook.com/hello.DAE/
Demographics within Asian Americans

- Executives also have to keep in mind the wide range of vastly different cultures and Asian American backgrounds.
- 5 most profitable ethnic groups are Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, Filipino, and South Asian
- They have to make sure they are meaningful and recognizable among themselves, their clients, and their audiences
Building an Identity

- There are about 10 major agencies that specialize in Asian American advertisements
- Produce all forms of advertisements catered towards Asian Americans
- Majority of execs working at these agencies are themselves first or second generation Asian Americans
- Greatly helps the Agency market and relate to their audience
Shankar Case Studies

- Shankar did several case studies at several Ad agencies
- One of the agencies she spent time with was “Asian Ads” out of New York
- Their client was Allied Country (AC)
- AC requested them to make versions of a general market print ad for each segment
- AC deals with Dividends, so the ad focused on security and protection of your financial well being
- The ad they chose was of a father and son peering into a bird's nest filled with eggs
- Decided it was a powerful ad because it signified stability and hard work for your loved ones
- Gave the message of how first-generation immigrants want to make a good future for their children
Model Consumers

- In the 1960’s due to racialized capitalism, Asian Americans were considered ideal when compared to other minorities.
- Articles by the New York Times promoted stereotypes that portrayed Asian Americans as self-sufficient and hard working.
- Seen as productive members of society.
- This made them the ideal consumers to target through specialized advertising.
Japanese Americans: MODEL MINORITY?
Those Asian-American Whiz Kids
Going Back

- Before their model consumer phase, Asian Americans were seen as dangerous invaders, mostly during WWII
- “Yellow Peril”
- Also more recently with Vietnam and the middle east
- Xenophobia was widespread throughout White America
The Shift

- Metaproduction plays an important role in remaking the racial category of Asian Americans by challenging simplistic racial beliefs.
- Executives use metaproduction to shape individual ethnic groups as they create new campaigns, and show Asian Americans as a unified entity in order to overcome the struggles with ethnic differentiation.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CT8BXAWEgFU
1:34-2:56
Incorporating Niche into Mainstream

- Although many of the ads geared toward Asian Americans focus on targeting their niche audience, she says that executives are making ads with “crossover potential”
- Meaning that the ad could effectively reach their audience and maintain brand identity, while also marketing toward the mainstream audience
- McDonald’s frozen strawberry lemonade ad

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rSDMVckMRRa
Questions

1. Do you agree with Steve that agencies should refrain from using specific cultural Icons in ads?

2. Can you think of any popular or recent ads that have “crossover potential”? 