

CREATIVELY EXPRESSING ADVERTISING THROUGH CULTURE

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ANALYSIS

To understand how Hispanic heritage impacts the creative process I interviewed nine Hispanic advertising professionals. The participants of the study answered six pre-interview questions and 12 questions from an interview guide. Each interview was then transcribed and analyzed for participants' responses and established common themes. Based on McCracken's theory this study attempted to investigate the impact of culture on the creative advertising process. McCracken's theory suggests that advertising is a way for creators to communicate their culture's values and insights.

Participants

The participants for this study included an associate creative director, art supervisor, bilingual copywriter, vice president creative director, public relations specialist, advertising specialist, art director, executive creative director, creative director and an account executive. Before the interview, participants were asked six pre-interview questions to make sure they were qualified to participate in the study. Questions covered ethnic background, Hispanic background, level of Spanish proficiency, job description, and confirmed that they have worked on campaigns targeting the Hispanic demographic in the United States. Participants' current employment ranged from advertising agencies in New York City, New York; Chicago, Illinois; Kansas City, Missouri; Springfield, Missouri; and Columbia, Missouri. Many of the participants were originally from another country such as Colombia, Mexico, Uruguay; and a few were Mexican-American or Venezuelan-American. Several participants work for multicultural advertising agencies, the cross-

cultural department, or the advertising department of a corporation. Participants' experience levels ranged from entry level to seasoned professionals of the industry for more than ten years. To keep their identities anonymous, they were either given or had chosen pseudonyms.

The purpose of the wide selection of participants was to get as many diverse perspectives as possible. A wide selection of participants was vital since the Hispanic American demographic in the United States is an extremely diverse group in itself, and a pool of participants from different backgrounds help provide insights as diverse as the demographic. Advertisers were contacted through LinkedIn, networking events and by word of mouth. When contacted they were informed of the study's purpose and requested to meet or talk via telephone for 30 to 40 minutes to discuss the questions in the interview guide. New York City was the main site for interviews because of the diverse nature of the city and a large number of advertising agencies. However, several interviews were conducted via telephone and through Skype.

Methodology

Using long informal interviews, I spoke with nine creative advertising professionals about the impact of their Hispanic background on their work targeting the Hispanic American demographic in the United States. Interviews were conducted in English. However, there were times Spanish words were used to explain a situation or the language used in a campaign. After interviewing nine participants, there was an obvious pattern in the data and based on the research model created by Taylor et al. (1996) the ninth interview was considered sufficient data for the research project because of the clear pattern that the data had formed.

The interviews were transcribed as soon as each was completed. The method used was method similar the one used by Taylor et al (1996) and completed an analytic induction and comparative analysis. By analyzing the transcript thoroughly and focusing on constructs instead

of enumeration, or negative responses that do not fit the beginning construct. I attempted to keep transcriptions true to the spoken word of the participant. However, I omitted common phrases such as, "you know," "umm," or sentences that started an initial thought then abandoned for a better way to phrase the idea.

Findings

Analysis of interviews produced four overarching categories: universal truth, intuition/experience, bi-cultural perspective, and cultural competency, that stood out as significant to Hispanic American advertising according to the advertising professionals who create the campaigns. Intuition/experience refers to how advertiser uses personal knowledge and understanding of the Hispanic culture to decide something. Universal truth denotes how advertisers find common ground that resonates with everyone. In other words, advertisers use colloquialisms to resonate with the target audience. Bi-cultural perspective indicates how advertisers relate to the demographic by maintain a broad perspective of the world and considering things from a minority perspective. Cultural competency signifies how advertisers relate to the importance of cultural values for family, tradition, and language to resonate with the Hispanic demographic. These codes were established based on the nine transcripts of the advertising professionals and the common themes and ideas they spoke about.

These four categories influenced how the participants interpreted data and established big ideas or creative concepts for campaigns. It was common for participants to compare the approach to Hispanic or Latino American advertising to the general market, a term that refers to the whole of the United States population which is primarily Caucasian (Ferrer, 2007; Nielsen, 2016). Although there are differences between the two markets participants indicated, the two approaches had a common goal: to find a universal truth that resonated with the targeted demographic. Pablo,

a Creative Director and bilingual Copywriter based out of New York City, indicates that universal ideas are campaign concepts that can resonate with both demographics and is the common ground between the two approaches. According to Pablo,

“ Most of the time for advertising the best campaigns are the ones that can find the common insight that is appealing for everyone so even if I'm working in the Hispanic market my conclusion after all these years is that the best campaigns or the best ideas are the ones that are Universal.”

Consistent with Ricky, a Vice President Creative Director in New York City, the tactics used for developing creative strategies for Hispanic Americans and the general market is similar. However, the Hispanic approach is altered to resonate with the Hispanic culture. According to Ricky,

“Okay so it's [approach to Hispanic American advertising] very similar, and I've done General market work as well, so there is one aspect that we add to the process so basically the same process, but we add the cultural Dimension to it which is like sort of an extra filter [extra step to the Hispanic American approach].”

Intuition

Intuition and a thorough knowledge of the Hispanic culture plays a vital role in the approach to Hispanic American advertising for the participants of this study. Intuition was referenced by seven participants as vital to their creative career (see Appendix B and C). Due to their thorough knowledge of Hispanic culture, many participants question and analyze the creative brief. The creative brief is a document prepared with the campaign's main objectives and demographic insights based on research that is meant to inspire the creative strategy of a campaign. Miguel, questioned the data given to him in a creative brief because intuitively he knew something

was wrong or that there was a deeper cultural aspect missing from the insights based on his insider knowledge of the Hispanic demographic. According to Miguel,

“Sometimes in the work we do we are given stacks of information and insights from strategy about groups of people and every now, and then I read something that shows what our audiences are like and I am skeptical about it just because I know this community and I do not think this is true and then maybe the data hits too but maybe I think there is a deeper thing going on or something.”

Other participants stated that being a Hispanic minority impacted the way they might see minor details in campaigns. For example, Nico, an Account Executive based in New York City talked about the imagery used in campaigns he worked on and his constant efforts to represent minority groups.

“We should be using diverse image for that [ad], so we're representing other diverse people affected by this because you know sometimes we tend to overlook the minute details so making sure that the color balance is there with fair representation.”

Miguel and Nico’s comprehension of the Hispanic culture developed from their childhood. According to nearly all participants, their Hispanic background had a big impact on their life and ultimately their career. Alejandro, an advertising professional based in Springfield, Missouri indicates that his heritage not only hugely impacted his career but also how he approaches life in general with the lenses of both cultures. According to Alejandro,

“Honestly it had a huge impact. I grew up in the United States and growing up I knew that most of my friends were White or Caucasian but I knew that I had this ability to relate to my Caucasian friend and that I can relate to my Latino friends

and that really evolved when I sought my career goals, my life goals and how I really wanted to live a life knowing that I can be a Latino in the United States.”

Bi-cultural Perspective

Overall, participants continually mentioned how a bi-cultural perspective impacted their creative process. Bi-cultural perspective was referred to by all nine participants (see Appendix B). Thoroughly understanding Hispanic and American culture while also experiencing life as a minority group in the United States heavily influenced how participants approach campaigns targeting the Hispanic American demographic. According to Ricky, a Creative Executive in New York City,

“When I do cross-cultural projects for other segments having two cultures give me the frame of reference to understand other realities nuances on not only language but culture and that can be equated to having a Global Perspective versus single-minded one country one language perspective.”

A bi-cultural perspective allows interviewees to fit into multiple worlds and essentially impacts their creativity. Miguel believes his Hispanic background influences the way he sees art and the sources of inspiration he uses for campaigns, “I think a lot of probably the influences comes from the way I see art and culture just general some of the things I pull out, in general, are different from someone else might pull out for inspiration to begin their approach to something.”

Another way advertisers use their bi-cultural perspective to impact their creative process is through the media they choose to consume news or gather insights. According to Pablo,

“When you have a different background, you can also have access to the news that is outside and a point of comparison and you know and having a broader

perspective of what is going on in the world... specifically in your career and it tends to be easier to find different insights that come from your culture."

Additionally, participants indicated understanding the importance of family, tradition, and in-depth knowledge of the different dialects of Spanish characterized their creative process.

Cultural Competency

Cultural Competency, or thoroughly understanding the Hispanic culture and its values, can be broken down into two topics, family and language. These values characterized participant's campaign examples, how they approached the creative process and even in some cases how they interacted with colleagues.

Family

According to participants, family value is central to Hispanic American advertising. Jackie, a Public Relations Specialist from Columbia, Missouri indicated that the sense of family could also be converted to the idea of community. Jackie said,

"Latinos really value family and have a strong sense of family ties and that you don't mess with my family kind of thing, and we always have each other's backs, and they want to raise their kids with discipline but also with an idol professionally but they want to have their kids look up to someone who they admire and who they will want to be like and emulate or what not, and they want their kids to have role models, so the two biggest things were that but the family values and that parents want their kids to have these great role models as they grow up that's how we position what the brand will do for their campaign."

Jackie indicates that her sense of community plays a vital role in the brainstorming process. Brainstorming is the process of coming up with several ideas to solve the communication problem for the brand.

“Like when you asked about my creative process...in the creative process the brainstorming process trying to get everybody speaking and involved that I think might also come from just wanting everyone to participate and the strong sense of community that I want to build in my team I think that ultimately that community leads to big success and I think that is something that comes from my cultural background having a strong sense of community and family and while your team isn't necessarily going to be your family that's for sure. Throwing that sense of community in right away builds a level of trust in which you can throw out ridiculous ideas and laugh at you and then move forward with it.”

Language

Spanish is another tricky aspect of a campaign targeting the Hispanic American demographic because there are so many different dialects and connotative meanings to phrases and words. According to Miguel, “Latinos are an incredibly diverse group of people from many different countries and backgrounds many different heritages and race”. Establishing the correct colloquialisms for scripts and the copy is an important part of the creative process for participants. According to Ricky,

“For instance, whenever clients want to Translate I love this or I love that they Google translate it using *te amo* where in most cases it is *me encanta* so those nuances you can't really explain without having a personal understanding.”

In some cases, words that are in English, but have a Spanish meaning, have confused the bi-lingual reader. According to Ricky,

“I worked for a client whose tagline was it's a network and in Spanish that translates to *es la red* and the colors of the brand were red so when they tested the line in context people were confused they thought that they were talking about the color although they were reading the word in Spanish they Associated the word with the English word because we live in a bilingual country.”

Another example of the importance of an intimate knowledge of the Hispanic culture and Spanish is when Miguel and his team attempted to translate a commercial from English to Spanish,

“I did a TV spot where it was kind of a comedy piece and the delivery in English was a little bit more snarky and clever feeling and it was funny but when we translated it into Spanish, and we tried it that same way it wasn't exactly working the groups of people that I had with me that were of a Hispanic background that spoke Spanish all agreed that it was not going to have the same message.”

Miguel's team ended up re-writing the television commercial to portray a humorous tone that would resonate with the Hispanic American audience.

Advice to Advertisers

General market advertisers who wish to target the growing Hispanic American demographic should understand that first and foremost there is no one size fits all solution to targeting this group. Understanding that the Hispanic demographic is a diverse group with strong ties to their community, family, and language is essential for the creative approach to target this demographic. General market advertisers should do their research when targeting the Hispanic American demographic to further learn about key values and cultural insights. Miguel uses Twitter

to gather further insights into the Hispanic culture and learns about common phrases, popular sentiments and overall what the trendsetters of this demographic are saying. Additionally, general market advertisers should be critical and ask questions about the data they receive regarding Hispanic Americans. Advertisers should question stereotypes and ask if there a deeper meaning to insights, or if it could potentially be wrong? Outsource research to professionals who specialize in the Hispanic American demographic or test your campaigns with the demographic. According to Miguel,

“I would just say do the work maybe take a step back from the data you are given and make an effort to look a little deeper make an effort to look at the history. In my own personal attempt to try to understand what being Latino means I also read and look back into things that are important historically and try to understand that because I feel like that gives me an understanding of what culture is more and I think that advertisers could too and understand the history behind the culture.”

Additionally, creative advertising professionals should expand their knowledge and experiences beyond their cultural comfort zone. One of the assets of the Hispanic American advertising professionals in this study is their ability to consider multiple perspectives. For example, Pablo, a native Colombian, watches international news and reads authors from other countries; this allows him to encounter other perspectives that are different from the ones he meets in the United States and gain insights and inspiration from unexpected sources. Also, general market advertisers would benefit from traveling and meeting people with diverse backgrounds. Juan considers himself American and Hispanic but at the same time neither, because as he explores the world, he is learning about other cultures and in some cases picking up traditions and values that align with him as a human. According to Juan, “Just being more open I guess to everything

and everybody”. The more advertisers expose themselves to the culture they are targeting the better they will understand and communicate with that demographic.

However, the best choice for advertisers looking to target a minority group is to ultimately hire more diverse creative advertising professionals. According to Nico, diversity in advertising agencies is a big problem. Lack of diversity in agencies means that campaigns are missing the bi-cultural perspective, intuition and cultural competency that is key to the creative process used by Hispanic advertising professionals. No matter how much research or diversification there is no substituting the intuition and years of experience these advertising professionals have developed throughout their life which then naturally impacts their creative process. Ingrained in their subconscious and the conscious mind is the bi-cultural perspective and cultural competencies that assist them in their work as advertising professionals. Ricky compares advertisers without diverse employees as someone lost in the dark.

Limitations and Future Research

The main limitation in this study was due to the limited pool of possible participants. One of the reasons this study is so important is because there is alarming lack of diversity in the advertising industry. However, that caused complications for this study. As a result, only one of the participants were women. Overall, there were very few women found throughout the recruitment phase of the study. The lack of female participation in the study might have some impact on the study’s results. Future studies should attempt to get an even ratio of men and women participants.

Another limitation of this study was that many of the participants found it hard to verbalize ideas and concepts that they are intuitively part of their consciousness. Many participants responded that a question was hard to answer due to the broadness of the question. In this study,

the questions were meant to be broad to allow the participant to respond in whatever manner they felt appropriate to the question. However, future studies might benefit from creating interview guides with questions with a narrower focus. It would also be beneficial if future studies focused on one part of the Hispanic American demographic since this demographic is still a broad example of people with cultural connections to many different countries.

Additionally, while all participants spoke English, there was a slight language barrier. Several times the participants would mumble, "como se dice," or "how do I say..." in Spanish in reference to how to say something in English. The participants always figure a way to express exactly what they wanted to say, however, future studies might benefit from conducting this project in both Spanish and English.

Conclusion

This findings point out valuable insights from Hispanic creative advertising professional, which are invaluable to their creative process when targeting the Hispanic American demographic. Through informal interviews with Hispanic creative advertisers, the results demonstrate the impact their cultural background has on the creative process. Intuition was a vital tool used by the creative advertising professionals in this study to create campaigns that resonated with the Hispanic American demographic. Advertising professionals used intuition to critically analyze or find deep meaning in the data presented in creative briefs. Bi-cultural perspectives were used to create campaigns with a diverse perspective instead of a singular one. Additionally, bi-cultural perspectives impacted the inspiration used in campaigns. Cultural competency impacted the use of language and family. Distinguishing the difference between *te amo* and *me encanta* or *el red* and English version of red were key to the creative process for the participants of this study.

Intuition, bi-cultural perspective, and cultural competency greatly impact the creative process for the participants of this study when creating campaigns targeting the Hispanic American demographic. For general market advertisers looking to target minorities to utilize these tools, it is essential for them to hire more diverse creative advertising professionals. Advertising is a representation of culture, but that culture can only be properly depicted by someone who fully understands the nuances of that culture.

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