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Sounding Off: Tony D'Andrea "Originality and Transculturation beyond Translation"

Nov 18, 2011



When developing Hispanic ad campaigns, marketing executives must make key decisions over language, content and media channels. The trend in creative development has been in producing **original targeted Hispanic spots** that integrate cultural insights into messaging, talent and media behavior, or in

transculturing general market ("universal" truth) assets in ways that incorporate cultural nuance into a relevant conversation with Hispanics. And results are tangible. In fact, recent studies by AHAA demonstrate a positive correlation between Hispanic media spending and general corporate revenues.

Yet, the road is long and many marketers still prefer to learn by trial and error. Let's consider two radical scenarios and some likely results. In the first case, you decide to save money by merely translating your general market assets into Spanish with no further considerations over messaging, talent or production. Result: the performance of your ads may suffer by more than 40%, according to recent research by Millward Brown. Still, let's consider a more drastic scenario, in which you bluntly decide to reach Hispanics via English-language media only, "after all, most Hispanics are bilingual and they must be watching tons of TV in English". As a rule of thumb (based on Nielsen), roughly half of Hispanics spend

half of their TV time in each language (even as only 17% of all Hispanics prefer to speak English at home). However, **when bilingual Latinos watch English-language TV, ad recall and likeability drop by more than 20% and 30% on average compared to Spanish-language media**, according to a study by Nielsen AIG. In addition, reach across the Hispanic population is lower in general market TV, covering 38% of all Hispanics over one month (instead of 50% in Spanish media), and among Spanish-dominant Hispanics the reach is 20% instead of 80%!

Given such striking differences, **what is the right model for advertising to Hispanics?** We recognize that some translated ads can be successful in Spanish media, and that English ads in the general market media can also catch their attention. Nonetheless, as a basic generalization, we can say that *if a brand seeks to positively connect with bilingual Hispanics, advertising in Spanish is necessary by means of original or transculturated messages*. If true, what is to be gained with this approach? Based on our analysis of Nielsen AIG and Millward Brown data, *on average*

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- **Hispanic reach** is 12% higher when Spanish-language media is used (and it may be up to 300% higher with Spanish-dominant Hispanics)
- **Ad recall** is about 30% higher in Spanish-language media. Curiously, *recall also increases among English-dominant Latinos* (by about 15%), likely because Hispanic media is less saturated, in addition to the emotional connection (think of "retro-acculturation" among assimilated Americans)
- **Ad likeability** is 50% higher in Spanish-language media when compared to similar brand ads in the general market.
- **Targeted ads** give an extra boost of almost 40% in ad recall and over 20% in ad likeability when compared to translated ads. As noted, targeted ads are often transculturated productions of general market truths, successfully adapting them to the Hispanic reality.
- In sum, your chances of achieving a **top performing ad** in Spanish media increases by 85% if it is original or transculturated advertising, one that directly connects with Hispanic needs, values and aspirations

Beyond statistical evidence, our direct experience with English-dominant Hispanics is also revealing. As noted in domestic interviews and focus groups, they are hugely in favor of commercials in Spanish language and explain that, unlike themselves, their parents and neighbors may not speak English. But this is not just about language but rather in reaching a consumer segment meaningfully. **A marketer that advertises original or transculturated messages in Spanish will most probably yield superior results among the 51 million Hispanics in the U.S.** As such, the nuances of multicultural marketing call for an effective and culturally relevant approach.

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