

A Frame Analysis Approach To Cross-Cultural Television Advertising

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Abstract

The role of visuals in advertising research is examined. An argument is developed to support a theory of frame analysis for cross-cultural television advertising. Frame analysis is explained and commercials from Japan and the Dominican Republic are used to illustrate application of the theory. It is hoped that frame analysis will supplement content analysis as a methodological approach to cross-cultural television advertising.

Introduction

I first ascribed this taste for stills to my lack of cinematic culture, to my resistance to film; I thought of myself as like those children who prefer the pictures to the text, or like those clients who, unable to obtain the adult possession of objects (because too expensive), are content to derive pleasure from looking at the choice of samples or a department store catalogue (Barthes, 1970).

The use of visual reproduction artifacts has had a mixed reception in scientific endeavor. The long history of photographs in ethnography reads as a struggle between their uses as an illustrative resource versus as a topic of investigation in their own right (Zimmerman and Pollner, 1971). Photographs have been used in anthropology to demonstrate visibly different aspects of cultures such as religious iconography, costume, and self-decoration (Collier and Collier, 1986). Indeed, from 1896 to 1916, the *American Journal of Sociology* published 31 articles using ethnographic photographs. These photographs however, were used more for evidentiary than for analytical reasons (Ball and Smith, 1992). Photographs in many instances can authenticate better than words, placing the scientist at the scene of the investigation and confirming the existence of artifacts. By the 1920s, sociology attempted to differentiate itself from neighboring disciplines, particularly documentary photography, and fewer instances of photos were seen in support of research in its major journals. Nonetheless, there were some important exceptions to this general trend away from the use of photographs. Batesan and Meads "Balinese Character: A Photographic Analysis," in 1942 is a monumental ethnographic study supported with 759 photographs. Specialist journals such as the *International Journal of Visual Sociology* continued to publish articles using photographs, though these journals existed on the fringe of a profession seeking validation from neighboring disciplines such as psychology.

Photography is a dominant creative element in much of print advertising and especially in magazine advertising – a medium particularly suited to exploiting the full palate of colors available in four color printing techniques. The leading analytic technique for print advertising research is content analysis.

Analysis of Visuals in Print Advertising

The majority of published articles using content analyses in advertising research focus on print advertising, rather than on television commercials (Kolbe and Burnett, 1991). The popularity of print advertising research is probably reflected in the relative ease of data collection for print advertising versus television research. Content analysis attempts to meet the standards of traditional, positivistic scientific method. Critical evaluation of content analysis studies thus focus on methodological rigor with respect to criteria such as researcher objectivity, the establishment of an a priori design, hypothesis development, reliability of measures, construct validity,

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generalizability of findings, and replicability of results. In content analysis, the unit of analysis is the message, either the print ad or the television commercial. The strengths of content analysis thus lie in its constitution as a standardized technique that facilitates the analysis of a large amount of data. Content analysis is a nomothetic approach – it summarizes rather than reports the details.

There are however, a number of limitations to content analysis which reduces its usefulness as an analytic tool in advertising research. Although content analysis has an over 50 year history of use in related fields such as communication, journalism, sociology and psychology, much of the focus in these related fields has been on text analysis rather than visual communication (Neuendorf, 2002). Text based material is uniquely suited to content analysis, since text can be analyzed in discrete components. Visuals in advertising however are typically polysemic. The image may contain both latent and manifest content. The iconic and symbolic character of the image contains two, very often different meanings. Content analysis with its emphasis on manifest content – the obvious and self-evident – focuses on systematic, objective, and quantitative analysis of discrete message characteristics. This approach sacrifices important latent meanings and risks what the ethnologists would call “losing the phenomenon”. Waksler (1986) argues that approaches to message analysis which emphasizes counting of message fragments, atomizes the data and decontextualizes the message of its more complete meaning. This limitation is particularly important in magazine print advertising where the message from the dominant visual is typically polysemic. Quantification alone cannot appreciate the symbolic character of the communication. Repetition or frequency of message elements is a poor guide to meaning. This is particularly true in analyses of ethnic representation in advertising. The mere presence or absence of ethnic minority figures in advertising says little of the substance of their roles.

Symbolist and structuralist approaches to print advertising attempt to deal with some of the limitations of traditional content analysis and its failure to address latent meanings in communications. The classic contribution in this area is Williamson’s “Decoding Advertisements: Ideology and Meaning in Advertising (1978). Williamson uses a structuralist approach to analyze over 120 print advertisements. For structuralism, the basic unit of analysis is the sign (Saussure, 1959). Symbols may cluster as codes that stand for something else. By the same process of metonymy in which warriors acquire attributes of their prey by wearing their victim’s pelts, so too can the modern day consumer become the “voice of a new generation” by acquiring a Pepsi. Structuralism assumes a social organization of visual experience. Consumers experience a real world that is culturally shaped and socially constituted and mediated. Hence, beliefs that consumers hold and which are mirrored in advertising are manifestations of deeper structures. The fragmented ego of the consumer can only be complete when re-united with the advertised product. For example, by a process of the absence technique where the visual implies the existence of a person outside the advertisement, the viewer is invited to place him/herself inside the dominant visual and assume the characteristics and attributes of the implied absent person. Williamson has on occasion been criticized for over theorizing texts. Indeed one of the difficulties with structuralism is that the quality of the analysis is highly dependent on the individual analyst’s ability to read signs (Neuendorf, 2002). Goffman’s *Gender Advertisements* (1976) examined more than 500 print advertisements in his research on behavioral representation of our cultural assumptions about gender. His analysis deals with the properties of gender displays and interpersonal rituals. Although Goffman’s work on the social organization of visual experience has been influential, his approach – tied so closely to the ingenuity of its author - has been difficult to replicate in a systematic manner. Recent theoretically grounded work in print advertising has attempted to combine content analysis with more latent constructs. Maynard and Taylor (1999), for example, examine the use of “girlish images” in print advertisement in Japan versus the U.S. The conceptualization of “girlish rapport” is a good example of how content analysis approaches can be adapted to the measurement of latent constructs. Indeed, Leiss et al. (1997) call for a combined semiotic/content analysis approach to print advertising. The combination of approaches however, risks losing some of the unique interpretative contributions of each method. Structuralist and symbolist analyses of visuals in advertising have focused almost exclusively on dominant visuals in print advertising, leaving analysis of television commercials squarely rooted in traditional content analysis approaches.

Analysis of Visuals in Television Advertising

Cross-cultural content analyses of television commercials appear less frequently in the literature than those of print advertising. The logistical difficulties of taping commercials simultaneously in multiple countries, for example, may require the principal investigator to arrange for an international team of data collectors – a daunting task. In contrast to print advertising, content analyses of television advertising typically focus more on audio text than on visual text. This conclusion is particularly true when the goal of the study is to identify differences in creative strategy among commercials from different countries, such as those of Bongjin et al. (1999), Ji and McNeal (2001) and Murray and Murray (1996) reviewed below.

Bongjin et al (1999) examined cultural values reflected in U.S. and Korean television commercials. A major goal of the study was to identify differences between the two samples in the latent constructs of individualism/collectivism, time orientation, relationship with nature, and contextuality. Measurement of indicators of these latent constructs in the commercials however primarily focused on discrete elements of audio text rather than visual text. For example, evidence of the presence of individualism in a commercial would be supported with findings of audio text indicating appeals about the individuality of the audience, emphasis on the uniqueness of the product or user, and appeals to self fulfillment, self development, or self realization. Ji and McNeal (2001) looked at children's television commercials in China and in the U.S. They were primarily concerned with identifying cultural, economic and social differences between the two sets of commercials. Once again the major dependent variables were audio text rather than visual text. Presence or absence of hypothesized values and appeals was measured by type of message argument. Some visual elements in the commercials were measured including gender, ethnic status and age of talent. The major focus of the study however is clearly based an analysis of text. Murray and Murray (1996) investigated the role of music and lyrics in television commercials in the Dominican Republic and in the U.S. The major objective of the authors was to identify differences in the types and frequency of music use and to examine the role of music lyrics in supporting product appeals. All of the major variables measured in the study related to audio text elements in the commercials.

Only when the focus of the study is to examine portrayal of central characters in commercials, as is instanced in gender and ethnic stereotyping research, does analysis focus on visual communication content. This is the case in two recent studies of Brown (1998) and Milner and Collins (2000) reviewed below. In gender stereotyping research visual analysis plays a more central role in content analysis. Brown (1998) examined sex role stereotyping in television commercials targeted at children in the U.S. and in Australia. The author's central concern was to identify and compare the levels of gender stereotyping in the two countries as evidenced by verbal and non-verbal behaviors of the characters. Many of the variables central to the analysis required visual inspection including activity level, aggression, licensed withdrawal, deference/dominance, function ranking, and object contact. Milner and Collins (2000) examined sex-role portrayals in television commercials from Japan, Russia, Sweden, and the U.S. Drawing from Hofstede's framework which predicts that countries can be characterized along a framework ranging from masculine to feminine, the authors investigated whether such concepts would be associated with relations among males and females, as depicted in television commercials in their respective countries. Two classes of variables were coded: those related to each commercial and those related to each character. Three of the four variables relating to the commercial were audio text. Only the variable relating to commercial setting required a visual analysis. Many of the variables relating to each character however required visual analysis, including sex, age, employment, occupation, role, and frustration level.

From the above review, it is clear that content analysis of television commercials deals with more than mere manifest content. Several studies address latent constructs such as gender stereotyping and cultural values. However, the coding instruments for these studies show that audio text and visual text are coded *separately*. The entire message communication unit is fragmented into its visual text and its audio text. For content analysis researchers, the visual text and the audio text are two different information streams, each capable of being broken down into essential message elements. Semiologists on the other hand, have emphasized the relationships among different parts of the message or communication system (Barthes, 1973). They contend that it is only through the interaction of information elements that meaning can be formed. In many instances the role of the audio text is not to merely elaborate on the concurrent visual text, but rather to provide an alternative text, in more cryptic form. This second text may serve as the key to unlock latent meanings in the visual text, or alternatively, the visual text may serve as a

second text to unlock the audio text, each in a palimpsest relationship to each other. For television commercials, decoding the message structure may require a method more sensitive to these nuances. Such a method must allow for the analysis of visual and audio texts *simultaneously*. Content analysis is ill suited for this endeavor given its requirements for reliability of measures which entail a separation of texts for coding purposes. In content analysis reliability is enhanced at the expense of fragmentation of the complete text; resulting in the separation of message streams phenomenologically experienced as one by the viewer. The visual and audio texts are thus decontextualized, failing to respect the originary right of all data, as called for by Waksler (1986).

Toward a Frame Analysis Approach to Visuals in Television Advertising

Semiotic and symbolist approaches to the study of print advertising are frequent in the literature; for television advertising they are not. It is difficult to justify this methodological asymmetry based on product coverage since most major product categories – cigarettes and hard liquor excepted - are advertised on television as well as print. Both print and television advertising contain manifest and latent content. Each form of advertising contains signs that are organized and related to each other, both within the advertisement and through external reference to broader belief systems. The answer to this asymmetry puzzle lays in the fact that semiology addresses the interaction of message components. These message components – visual and written texts - occur simultaneously in print advertising, in a form that is frozen in time. The researcher is presented with data already cooked and ready to serve.

For television advertising the researcher is presented with a fleeting target. For print advertising, the written texts allow for a reading time that is free. This is not so for television advertising, where film cannot go faster or slower without losing its perceptual figure. In print advertising the photographs scorns the logic of time, whether a past memory or future desire. All these elements are suggested in the print photograph since they are all present at once – nostalgia for example, is often created through a particular photographic style. There is no real presence in print photographs since we are either pushed back into the past or forward into the future (Williamson, 1978). Indeed when a print advertisement features people, they are like the characters on Keats' Grecian urn, trapped in their expectation of the future.

*Bold Lover, never, never canst thou kiss,
Though winning near the goal yet, do not grieve;
She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,
Forever wilt thou love, and she be fair!*

In television advertising the complete text cannot be captured in the film in its natural state, but only in its major artifact, the still frame. The still and the film are in a palimpsest relationship to each other; it is not possible to say which one is on top of the other (Barthes, 1970). In a sense the still is a fragment of a second text – the film – whose existence never exceeds that of the fragment. A benefit of analyzing commercial stills is that the frame throws off the constraint of filmic time, an artificial constraint which is only an operational time. The frame may be viewed not as a specimen chemically or digitally extracted from the film, but the sketch of a superior distribution of traits. The still should be viewed not as a sample in a traditional sense, since this would presuppose a statistical nature of film elements, but rather as a quotation of vital element.

The analysis of still frames should not be viewed as a focus on some remote sub product of the commercial film. For television commercials, the frames exist in an isomorphic relationship to the storyboard, the architectural design for the complete message system (Wells et al. 1995). Indeed commercials are planned around scenes with a key frame summarizing the essence of the message. Wells argues that “television is a visual medium; the message is developed from a key visual that contains the heart of the message” and only when key visuals are tested and revised and “When the concept seems promising, the writer and art director move to a rough script and storyboard” (p.500). A frame analysis approach to television advertising thus allows us to place a microscope on the commercial's DNA. Indeed the great film director Eisenstein once said that film is not only to be seen and heard but needs to be scrutinized – a call that Barthes (1970) interprets as an exhortation for a mutation of the reading of its object, the film.

A Frame Analysis of Cultural Syndromes in Television Commercials from Two Countries

Next, I will illustrate the use of frame analysis in advertising research. Specifically, I will focus on two cultural syndromes as represented in television commercials from two countries. The first cultural syndrome is the role of *uchi/soto* in Japan. The second cultural syndrome is the role of *familismo* in the Dominican Republic.

Uchi/soto in Japanese Society

Uchi/soto expressions are used in Japan to communicate inside/outside contexts. The main reason for focusing on *uchi/soto* expressions is that a record of its uses indicates a wide range of Japanese life that is routinely symbolized as inside or outside (Quinn, 1994). *Uchi* expressions signify a world that is enclosed, indoors, family, shared, familiar, informal, private, experienced directly, known, sacred, and primary. *Soto* expressions indicate a world that is open, out-doors, non-family, formal, not shared, unfamiliar, public, observed, profane, and secondary. These inside/outside coordinates are critical to understanding the role of self and society in Japan (Bachnik 1994). For the Japanese, inside/outside is a basic scale along which relationships can be indexed via varying degrees of more or less. Indeed, virtually any type of relation can be mapped in relation to this scale including bowing, gift giving, politeness or formality in speech, social space, choice of dress, or topic of conversation. In Japan the greatest amount of socio-cultural information is keyed implicitly through language use. For English speaking cultures, semantic or referential meaning is a way of focusing on culture as an accumulation of lexical, or general knowledge (the what of culture). For the Japanese, pragmatic meaning is far more meaningful. Pragmatic meaning focuses on establishing connotation through cultural practices that are learned, and carried on, through a process of doing (the how of culture).

Since television commercials often represent a hyper-ritualized version of cultural reality they serve as fertile ground to examine cultural praxis (Tanaka, 1994). The following television commercial (see appendix) from Japan is for a food product, called Yamaki. Six frames from the 30-second commercial are presented for frame analysis. Both original Japanese advertising copy and the English translation are provided. By way of background for the reader, in Japanese, *Mentsuyu-men* means noodles and *tsuyu* means soup. This word is used for the product, which is a type of sauce for a noodle dish. *Ichiban* is a key word in the commercial, and refers to number one. *Katsuo* is a type of fish and *Dashi* refers to a type of soup that is soaked in fish or beef.

Yamaki Commercial (Japanese)

Mother: Uchino papa wa ichiban zuki.
Ichiban dennshade.
Father: Ichiban de naito.
Mother: Kaerunomo ichiban.
Daughter: Mada mizu dashi.
Mother: Ofuro mo yappari
Father: Ichiban de naito.
Mother: Onabemo yappari Katsuo
Ichiban Dashi no mentsuyude.
Father: Ichiban!!
Daughter: Mada namadashi.
All: Ktsuo Ichiban Dashi!!
Father: Mentsuyu wa **YAMAKI**

Yamaki Commercial (English)

Mother: My honey likes to be a number one.
He gets the train "#1".
Father: I should be a number one...
Mother: He leaves for home the earliest in
his company.
Daughter: The water is not heated yet.
Mother: He wants to be the first person to take
a bath, too.
Father: I should be a number one.
Mother: We eat hot pot with MENTSUYU,
Katsuo Ichiban Dashi. My honey
really likes the word number one.
Number one!!!
Daughter: The food is not cooked yet.
All: Number one with fish soup!!!
Father: MENTSUYU is **YAMAKI**.

The commercial opens on the first key frame, a close-up head shot of the husband about to take the #1 train to work. The lens pulls back to reveal that the husband is alone at an isolated train station (on track #1 – the price to

be paid for being #1 into work. In frame two, the dutiful husband leaves the office to go directly home. The implication here is that he is a good husband who resists the temptation to be either a workaholic company-man by staying late, or to go out drinking sake with the other company-men after hours. Key frames indicate that a distinction is being drawn between the coldness of the *soto* context work environment and the warmth and playfulness of the *uchi* context home environment. Color symbolism is used to connote coldness and warmth. In frame #1, the camera filter produces a cold blue/grey scene at the train station. In frame #2, the even more *soto* location of work, becomes almost de-saturated of color, connoting an almost antiseptic work environment. From this unfriendly *soto* work environment our male hero must seek refuge in an *uchi* location. Once home, the frames become gradually warmer in color until in frame #6 we have bright yellow (the table cloth) and fire engine red (the father's shirt). *Uchi* is a place where people can retreat "to be themselves" free from the constraints of a non-domestic society outside. The Japanese television audience would recognize signs in the key frames that contribute to an *uchi* environment such as the bath and the relaxed postures at the dinner table, where of course the husband is #1, with his head occupying the optical center of frame number six. In Japanese society, women are associated with the generative *uchi* orientation of facilitating solidarity. The female head of the household is the facilitator for her husband (and children) to enjoy the benefit of an *uchi* like relationship on which the emotional solidarity of the family is based. It is tempting from an English-speaking perspective to understand husband/wife relations in terms of Western notions of status hierarchy or equality/inequality dimensions. Such perspectives are however, misleading since, no matter what the locus of the situation along the *uchi/soto* continuum, unequal relations exist in the form of *amayakasu/amaeru*. To *amayakasu* another is to allow the indulgee freedom of expression, to give active love, to allow the other to be sweet or dependent. Note that the husband is quite literally #1; he is #1 to take a bath, and he is #1 at the dinner table. To *amaeru* is to be sweet, to accept the indulgence offered by another and to receive love passively. This dyadic relationship between husband and wife, of giving and receiving indulgence or dependence is born and reproduced in relations of hierarchy (Doi, 1973).

In the Yamaki commercial, the father and child are both on the *amaeru* side of the relationship and are able to enjoy the relaxed atmosphere of a prepared bath (husband) and evening dinner. The wife endures tension at the level of the individual in the form of *amayakasu* to husband and daughter for the sake of creating meaning at the level of the relationship and family. The mother maintains enough detachment to clean the kitchen (frame five), draw the bath (frame four) and serve the meal (frame six). The mother is responsible to everyone for supplying the material objects that helps makes the situation relaxing and engaged. She exhibits a special responsibility towards the father's needs, thus creating an *uchi* atmosphere. Most of her actions towards the husband are characterized by disciplined action – more of *soto* context. The father may behave in *uchi* like behavior toward the mother. He soaks in her attention and plays out his hierarchical role as #1 to the hilt. At the level of the relationship, the disciplined actions of the mother are juxtaposed to the spontaneous, playful actions of the father. What are the feelings of the mother involved in this juxtaposition of a *soto* relationship in an *uchi* context? For Japanese society these relations create tension and subordination. The wife endures tension at the level of the individual for the sake of creating meaning at the level of the family (Lebra, 1976).

For the husband, at work he is in a *soto* context, where people are self-disciplined, detaching themselves from their personal feelings to focus on representing their group in relation to other groups. Thus in frame one and two the husband wears formal business attire. When the husband returns home to an *uchi* context, he takes a bath, and changes into the more informal attire of a button-down sweater and open-neck red shirt for dinner (frame six). Gender relations in Japan do not easily fit into Western notions of superior, inferior, or hierarchical. From the perspective of individual rights and obligations to have economic and political control, gender relations in Japan are unfair – they subordinate and cause tensions for women (Phar, 1982). From the perspective of rights to nurture family and self, gender relations are unfair – men are deprived. Thus the wife is free to indulge herself in creative activities at home, to spend time taking care of the daughter, while the husband must deal with an unfriendly *soto* context of the work environment. The nature of hierarchy in Japan is that unequal relations take the form *amaeru/amayakasu* and these relations shift positions along an axis ranging from private to public, spontaneity to discipline (*uchi/soto*). It is possible for example, for a woman to be on the *amayakasu* side of an *amaeru/amayakasu* relationship in a *soto* situation. For example, if we change the situation in frame six from a cozy dinner at home (*uchi context*) to dinner at an exclusive restaurant (*soto*), the husband may take responsibility for directing the proceedings, placing the woman in the *amayakasu* side of the relationship. Similarly, position trumps gender when women head corporations or po-

litical parties (Bachnik, 1984). The distinction between public and private places is critical to indexical meaning in Japan, and to decoding the meaning of gender relations. A permutation of this flipping of roles seems to occur in the commercial in the relationship between father and child. Here - in an *uchi* context – the father may play the indulging (*amayakasu*) role to the young daughter who shines through her cute dependence (*amaeru*). In the commercial, the daughter takes liberty with her father by shouting at him (playfully) “the water is not hot yet” and “the food is not cooked yet”. However, the relationship could flip in an instant if an issue were to arise such as the daughter not willing to eat her dinner. This could prompt her father to shift to a more authoritarian mode – the relationship would now have a more *soto* cast. Hence the meaning of *uchi/soto* is constantly changing and can only be grasped in situ.

Familismo in the Dominican Republic

The Dominican Republic, like many Latin cultures adheres to *familismo*, a sense of family centrality and importance (Druckman et al. 1996). The significance of *familismo* as a defining characteristic of Dominican culture is represented by a number of distinguishing features of family structure, goals, and relationships. First, the family exists to provide material and economic support to other family members. In the Dominican Republic, the family may function as an insurance company of last resort. Indeed, in Latin cultures that have experienced long periods of economic and political stress, the extended family network functions as a buffer to economic peril for the nuclear family unit. Political and economic crises have being a defining trait of Dominican history since the time of the Trujillo dictatorship. Economic and material support is therefore, provided by a system of intergenerational family ties extending well beyond the nuclear family (Smart and Smart, 1995). Second, *familismo* is manifested through the reliance on family members as referents for attitudes and behavioral norms, (Knight et al. 1993). Family norms and expectations play a powerful role in dating rituals, as we will see in the Mistolin commercial. Parental approval of potential male dating partners is to be expected by daughters. The female head of house can be expected to vet all potential dates for appropriateness. If dating is permitted, then the daughter can be expected to have the date chaperoned. Given that unmarried daughters are likely to live in the parental household, opportunities for unsupervised dates may be limited. The parental desire to have all unmarried children live at home is strong in *familismo*. A decision by a daughter to attend college away from home may be perceived as an act of rebellion and a rejection of the family support system (Drackman et. al., 1996). Third, *familismo* requires the subordination of individual needs to the collective needs of the family (Keefe and Padilla, 1987). If there is conflict between individual preference for dating partners and family preferences, then obligations to family are paramount. Hence, males seeking the attention of females must do so within the constraints of parentally endorsed dating boundaries. Fourth, *familismo* entails the acceptance of authority of parents and the strong discipline of children (Gloria and Rodriguez, 2000). Children are assumed to occupy a less than adult status until marriage (Sabogal et al. 1987). Fifth, *familismo* requires the recognition of patriarchal gender ideology of men as breadwinners and women as housewives (Georges, 1992).

The Mistolin television commercial will be used to illustrate the role of *familismo* in the Dominican Republic. Nine frames of what are in fact are two separate Mistolin commercials are presented for analysis. The two commercials for Mistolin – a popular household cleaning product – are in a *novella* form. The first commercial ends with frame five. The second commercial begins with frame six, containing the video super “Recuerdo” (remember). The advertising agency of record for the Mistolin commercial is McCann-Erickson Dominicana. This is significant since the creative idea for the *novella* approach to the advertising campaign was adapted from the popular U.S. advertising campaign for Taster’s Choice coffee, produced by McCann-Erickson, U.S.A. (Personal correspondence with McCann Erickson Dominicana). Three still frames are presented in the appendix from the Taster’s Choice commercial.

Taster’s Choice Commercial

Woman: Thank you for a lovely dinner.
Male: Are you going to ask me in? (pause)...for coffee?
Woman: Hmm...I do have Taster’s Choice.

Male: Well then, how can I refuse?
Voiceover: Savor the sophisticated taste of Taster's Choice.
Female: Well...?
Male: Just one more cup?
Female: Eh, you said that two cups ago.
Male: You know how much I love your coffee.
Female: Then...by all means...take it with you!

Mistolin Commercial #1

No dialog or voiceovers. Only music track and visuals.

Mistolin Commercial (Spanish) #2

La Madre (Donna Dulce):
 Purita (La criada),
 este muchacho joven que traje
 el Mistolin está en amante.
La Criada (Purita):
 Con Flor?
La Madre (Donna Dulce):
 Tu viste cómo él la
 miro?
Angel: Hola, soy Ángel. Me
 recuerdas?
Flor: No, no.
Angel: No recuerdas a mi
 sobrina?
Flor: Ah, si, si, ya.
Angel: Has pensaba en mi?
Flor: No.
Angel: Bueno, yo sí. Me
 encantaría volver a verte.
Flor: Quizá


Mistolin Commercial (English) # 2

Mother: Purita, this young boy who brought
 the Mistolin is in love!
Maid: With Flor?
Mother: Did you see how he looked at her?
Angel: Hi, I'm Angel. Do you remember
 me?
Flor: No, no.
Angel: Don't you remember my niece?
Flor: Ah, yes, yes. Now I do.
Angel: Have you thought about me?
Flor: No
Angel: Well, I have (thought about you). I
 would really like to see you again.
Flor: Maybe.

The U.S. Taster's Choice (TC) commercial is presented for analysis since it offers a unique opportunity to see how cultural syndromes represented in one commercial, that is individualism in the U.S. – are adapted to fit with the dominant cultural syndrome in the Dominican Republic (D.R.) – *familismo*. The choice of talent in the TC commercial is demographically different from that in the Mistolin (M) commercial. The TC commercial features a couple in their late 30's or early 40's. The viewer is expected to infer that the man and woman are each divorced and back in the dating market for a second time. Divorce rates in the U.S. and the D.R. are similar at about 50% of all marriages. *Familismo* however, implies that the public presentation of divorce is less culturally acceptable in the D.R. Previously married women would not be depicted in *familismo* as being "back on the market again" since this would be perceived as a threat to the stability of the institution of marriage. So for the M commercial a younger couple is chosen as the protagonists for the storyline. Flor, the young lady in the M commercial, resides at the home of her parents. Consistent with *familismo*, she will be expected to live at home until such time as she married. The female protagonist in TC commercial, significantly, lives alone and thus is free to invite her new acquaintance in to

her apartment for a late evening coffee. Possibilities of sexual license are implied in the cozy romantic setting, with the fire glowing to the side in frame #2. By contrast, the relationship between Flor and Angel is highly ritualized and externally supervised. In frame #2, Angel sees her on the balcony of her home, like the medieval damsel in distress. Behavioral norms for a young woman in *familismo* prevent her being perceived as taking the aggressive role in gaining the favor of Angel (whom she obviously likes). The storyline requires her to gain his attention in a highly conventionalized way. Mistolin becomes the hero of the commercial as a result of her metaphorically transforming the product into a messenger, carrying the secret communication of her interest in Angel by deliberately letting the Mistolin fall off the balcony. The coded message is of course easily deciphered by her eager suitor. Angel dutifully returns the Mistolin to Flor, in behavior analogous to that of a Jane Austin society man who retrieves a handkerchief for an admiring lady. Significantly, the first M commercial is purely visual; it contains no spoken words, and is accompanied only by a romantic soundtrack.

All of the talent in the M commercial have names rich in symbolic meaning. Purita, the housemaid is literally “pure”. Since the housemaid is the primary user of the product, the Mistolin, by a process of association becomes anthropomorphized, acquiring the human characteristic of purity. Given the role of classism in the D.R., it is significant that only the maid is depicted using the product (frame #1) while the female head of household supervises the cleaning (frames #1 & #6). Flor, the daughter, is literally like a “flower” in full bloom. The obvious symbolism intended is one of romanticism and of sexual awakening. *Familismo* however suggests other meanings - of a delicate life form that must be protected to preserve the dignity of the family unit. Within the tightly prescribed dating ritual depicted in the commercial, Angel should not be considered a threat. He is an honorable man – quite literally an “angel”. Honorable or not, it will be a long time before the couple in the M commercial will be permitted the license of an un-chaperoned love nest, depicted in frame #2 of the TC commercial. Dona Dulce, though she may be “sweet”, will allow no danger to come take the bloom off her flower. The relationship in TC reflects the norms of an individualistic society. The focus of the relationship is the dyad; the male and female are equally independent in their decision making. In M, *familismo* requires that the emerging relationship be supervised by other family members. In frame #4, the maid opens the door to Angel, symbolically representing the role of first gatekeeper. Also in frame #4, Flor’s mother, from a distance, monitors the burgeoning relationship. In frame #7 Dona Dulce and Purita are seen discussing the relationship. Importantly, in frame #7, when Angel decides to phone Flor, his mother is listening in to the conversation in the background. In *familismo*, the coming together of two families is the business of all concerned.

The phone conversation between Flor and Angel reveals a highly ritualized verbal dance. Angel asks if Flor remembers him. She replies coyly (and untruthfully) that she does not. The ritualized dating game requires that Flor play hard to get. Angel continues to press Flor by inquiring if she remembers him from his niece; thereby establishing a link between the two families. Flor now admits that she remembers Angel in the Mistolin encounter (of which she was the prime architect). Later in the conversation, after some feigned prevarication, she tentatively agrees to see Angel again. Her true eagerness to see Angel is clear from her expression in frame #9. In the TC commercial there is considerably more sexual license in the word play between the couple. In the hallway in front of her apartment (frame #1), he asks her “are you going to ask me in”? Only after a pregnant pause, does he add “for coffee?” The sexual double entendre is clear to the viewer. Indeed, in the celebrated Seinfeld show, the character George berates himself for failing to understand the true meaning of the phrase “Do you want to come up for coffee?” The sexual license in the banter in the TC commercial would not occur under *familismo*; other family members would play a protector role as evidenced in frames #4 and #8. The intimacy of unsupervised handholding depicted in Taster’s Choice (frame #3) will not be permitted for Flor and Angel. 

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Appendix

Japan: Yamaki

