

Coca-Cola's Chinese Values

Commercial advertising, which has become a natural constituent in a globalized China, not only constructs cultural identities, but also reflects a target-group's environment, providing insights into the complexity of everyday life. Focusing on lifestyle ads which due to their lack of informational content revert to emotional devices in order to attract the consumer's attention, I attempt to trace reflections of public discourses beyond the product message.

Held against discourses going on since 1989, it is quite striking to which extent the behavior promoted in e.g. beverage ads a decade later contribute to supporting social harmony and national consciousness. How strongly politically charged some seemingly unoffending product ads are, can only be guessed from those contributions which have become victims of censorship.

Particular attention is paid to the ambiguous role of advertisers: Acting as both consumers and representatives of the official line, they follow trends while creating them in a reciprocal process on basis of a culturally pre-assigned understanding – in constant consideration of their confined creative freedom. Ads for trend-items are thus turned into a system of reproducing politically correct cultural values, which makes it an interesting field for investigating various aspects of deliberate constructions of (and thus trends in) cultural identities.