

Chapter 8

Unlikely Dinner Guests: Inviting “Everyday” People to the Table of Visual Imagery

Consuelo Carr Salas

University of North Carolina at Charlotte, USA

ABSTRACT

This work opens a space where Visual Rhetorics, Cultural Rhetorics, Food Studies, Technical Communication, and Critical Race Theory can expand and work together to understand how visuals associated with racial and ethnic groups and their food products contributes to perception of cultures. This work is necessary because food product packages are largely unexamined spaces within the field of Rhetoric; however, because one image associated with a food product is so intimately connected with the home culture it has the potential to create, a single essentialized interpretation, of a group.

Mexican food in the United States has exponentially increased in popularity within the last century. “Doritos and Tostitos tortilla chips [are] the second and third most popular-selling snack chips in the country (behind Lay’s Potato Chips)” (Bentley, 2004, p. 209) Hirsch (2013) reported.

Salsa overtaking ketchup as America’s No. 1 condiment was just the start. These days, tortillas outsell burger and hot dog buns; sales of tortilla chips trump potato chips; and tacos and burritos have become so ubiquitously “American,” most people don’t even consider them ethnic.

The continued acceptance of these food products, however, has not necessarily translated into the acceptance of the plurality of Mexican people.

Even though there are numerous Mexican food products within our grocery stores, limited representations of Mexicans persist across a variety of different media and contexts. These limited representations create a homogenous illusion of a group that is actually very heterogeneous. While at first it may seem that there is some variety in the images used to signify that said product is “Mexican,” taking a closer look reveals that the perceived variety is actually an illusion.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-2808-1.ch008

For example, you may see actual foodstuff plated enticing the consumers' eye. See Figure 1.

Or, there may be the Madonna v. whore binary with either a motherly or sultry Mexican women (see Figure 2 and Figure 3).

When Mexican men are portrayed they are depicted as either sleeping or riding a horse in a *charro* suit (see Figure 4).

These dated representations of Mexicans have continued long after other images, such as the Aunt Jemima and “Mammy” figure, have been discarded, and this raised the question of why these particular images still resonate with consumers. The handful of stereotypical images of Mexicans and subsequently of Mexican food have been replicated and re-mixed for close to a century and sparked the question of why and what they communicate to consumers. This led the author to questions, why do women waitresses dressed in folklorico dresses, both within a restaurant space and as a product brand, resonate a sense of authentic Mexican food with some consumers but with others is simply kitsch or “unauthentic?”

To begin to untangle the complexities that come with such a question, the author asks the reader to consider the construction of a restaurant space and product packaging and how the visual imagery of both influence their interpretation of the foodstuffs. A restaurant is a business that attempts to communicate their product to their consumer. The owner of a restaurant, through the foodstuffs that are sold, is attempting to sell not only an experience but also a sense of place with their food product. This sense of place is constructed first with the logo or marquee of the restaurant. As the consumer moves into the restaurant space, the décor of the restaurant and the layout of the menu help create an atmosphere for the consumer. These micro moments work together so that when a consumer sits at table to peruse

Figure 1. Plated Food on a Canned Food Label



18 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage:

www.igi-global.com/chapter/unlikely-dinner-guests/187329

Related Content

Is Schema Theory Helpful in Teaching and Learning Based on Visualizing Research?

Xinhong Xia, Xianglan Chen, Jing Zhang, Hongliang Lou and Yachao Duan (2022). *International Journal of Technology-Enhanced Education* (pp. 1-15).

www.irma-international.org/article/is-schema-theory-helpful-in-teaching-and-learning-based-on-visualizing-research/300332

Investigating the Experiences of Mathematics Teacher Technology Integration in the Selected Rural Primary Schools in Namibia

Clement Simuja and Hilya Shikesho (2024). *International Journal of Technology-Enhanced Education* (pp. 1-15).

www.irma-international.org/article/investigating-the-experiences-of-mathematics-teacher-technology-integration-in-the-selected-rural-primary-schools-in-namibia/340028

Personalized Education for a Programming Course in Higher Education

Arturo Rojas-López and Francisco José García-Peñalvo (2022). *Research Anthology on Computational Thinking, Programming, and Robotics in the Classroom* (pp. 344-367).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/personalized-education-for-a-programming-course-in-higher-education/287345

Tracing Online Lecturer Orchestration of Multiple Roles and Scaffolds Over Time

Bronwen Cowie and Elaine Khoo (2018). *Online Course Management: Concepts, Methodologies, Tools, and Applications* (pp. 258-275).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/tracing-online-lecturer-orchestration-of-multiple-roles-and-scaffolds-over-time/199213

Student Engagement Awareness in an Asynchronous E-Learning Environment: Supporting a Teacher for Gaining Engagement Insight at a Glance

Abdalganiy Wakjira and Samit Bhattacharya (2022). *International Journal of Technology-Enabled Student Support Services* (pp. 1-19).

www.irma-international.org/article/student-engagement-awareness-in-an-asynchronous-e-learning-environment/316211