

The Cultural Commodification of Identity: Hip-Hop Authenticity

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Abstract

Using the framework of symbolic interactionism, the concept of meaning, when discussing the relationship between hip-hop cultural members and how hip-hop culture is represented in advertisements, can be shaped by certain elements concerning a cultural authenticity. This is shown by how hip-hop cultural members make meaning of the images and messages that derive from commercial advertisements with a hip-hop influence on claims of what is an authentic cultural hip-hop identity. The present study investigated how portrayals of hip-hop artists in U.S. television commercials represented a hip-hop identity, using the analysis of McLeod's (1999) dimensions of hip-hop authenticity. A content analysis of 102 commercials was conducted to explore the relationship between each dimension of hip-hop authenticity and the categories of rap genre, race, and gender of the hip-hop artist featured in the advertisement. There were four significant findings. First, political hip-hop artists geared their message to the Black audience, and secondly, emphasized their connection to the community from which they came more than popular hip-hop artists. Third, Black hip-hop artists' exhibited masculine mannerisms more than White hip-hop artists. Lastly, male hip-hop artists significantly presented more masculine mannerisms than feminine, and female hip-hop artists expressed more feminine mannerisms than masculine; which suggests that there are certain elements involved in gender role performances surrounding hip-hop culture.

Key words: Identity, authenticity, assimilation, hip-hop, subculture of consumption, and commodification.