

Synthesis of Learning across 3 Years of Concept and Message Testing among Asian American Tweens and Parents

Formative audience testing has been a critical component of the VERB™ campaign's development, driving its content, tone, and implementation. Before new advertising is launched, concept testing is conducted to validate the communication strategy and aid in the selection of concepts that resonate strongly with the target audience; are acceptable, understandable, culturally appropriate, and motivating; and that have few unintended effects. After an advertising concept is produced, message testing is conducted to explore the target audience's reactions to specific concepts; to determine which messages the target audience finds understandable, relevant, appealing, unique, and motivating; and to identify anything that is confusing or controversial. Though much of this information gleaned from the testing is specific to each ad, these data contain a wealth of valuable information about key target audiences—tweens and parents—that can be used to help shape other health communication efforts on physical activity.

Two reviewers from the VERB evaluation team independently analyzed qualitative investigation reports from both the concept and message testing to identify recurrent themes and recommendations among each audience segment. In this report, findings are presented for the African American, Hispanic/Latino, Asian American, and American Indian tweens, their parents, and other adult influencers. Health communication practitioners can utilize these findings to assist them in developing more effective, culturally competent, and appropriate messages that encourage physical activity among youth.

Findings for Asian American Audiences

The following thematic summary is generated from focus groups and individual interviews with Asian American tweens and their parents that were conducted as part of the VERB campaign's message development process. These themes were derived from the reports that were generated from five rounds of data collection conducted between July 2002 and May 2004. The reports covered both concept and message testing for ads promoting physical activity among tweens (children aged 9–13 years) and their parents. Table 1 summarizes participant characteristics and methods for each investigation. Participants took part in focus groups or in-depth interviews in which they shared their responses to television, print, and radio ads. The resulting reports were then analyzed for their overarching themes and concepts, which are presented here. It is our hope that these findings can be used to support and inform the development of concepts and messages that promote physical activity among Asian American tweens and encouragement from their parents to be physically active, leading to more culturally sensitive messaging and effective physical activity promotion for this audience.

Please note: Qualitative techniques have certain limitations. These investigations are exploratory in nature; that is, they are used to stimulate dialogue, elicit a range of

responses, generate ideas, and drive message development. Because of the limited number of participants, unstructured questioning procedures, and the potential for one respondent's opinions to influence those of other respondents, the formative investigation findings reported here should not be considered conclusive or generalizable. The findings contained in this report represent insights gleaned from 3 years of qualitative investigations for the development of messages for a physical activity campaign. When applying these findings within your community and situation, they should be viewed within the context of their limitations.

Table 1. Methods and Participant Characteristics

| Location and Date | Method | Number Conducted | Target Audience | Length of Interview/Focus Group |
|--|--------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------------|--|
| Los Angeles, CA July 2002 | Focus group | 1 | 4th and 5th grade boys | 75 minutes |
| | Focus group | 2 | 6th and 7th grade boys | 75 minutes |
| | Focus group | 1 | 4th and 5th grade girls | 75 minutes |
| | Focus group | 2 | 6th and 7th grade girls | 75 minutes |
| | Focus group | 1 | Asian Indian mothers (in English) | 1 hour |
| | Focus group | 1 | Filipino mothers (in English) | 1 hour |
| | Focus group | 1 | Vietnamese mothers (in English) | 1 hour |
| | Focus group | 1 | Chinese mothers (in Mandarin) | 1 hour |
| | Focus group | 1 | Korean fathers (in Korean) | 1 hour |
| | | | | |
| Pasadena, | In-depth interview | 2 | 6th and 7th grade girls | 20 minutes |

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|---|--------------------|---|--|------------|
| CA September- October 2002 | In-depth interview | 3 | 6th and 7th grade boys | 20 minutes |
| | In-depth interview | 2 | 4th and 5th grade boys | 20 minutes |
| | In-depth interview | 3 | 4th and 5th grade girls | 20 minutes |
| | Focus group | 1 | Filipino mothers (in English) | 45 minutes |
| | Focus group | 1 | Vietnamese mothers (in English) | 45 minutes |
| | Focus group | 1 | Chinese mothers (in Mandarin) | 45 minutes |
| | Focus group | 1 | Korean fathers (in Korean) | 45 minutes |
| | | | | |
| Los Angeles, CA June 2003 | Focus group | 2 | Filipino/Asian Indian mothers (in English) | 1 hour |
| | Focus group | 2 | Chinese mothers (in Mandarin) | 1 hour |
| | Focus group | 2 | Vietnamese mothers (in English) | 1 hour |
| | Focus group | 2 | Chinese mothers (in Cantonese) | 1 hour |
| | Focus group | 2 | Korean fathers (in Korean) | 1 hour |

| Los Angeles, CA | Focus group | 1 | Filipino/Asian Indian mothers (in English) | 1 hour |
|------------------------|-------------|---|--|--------|
| | Focus group | 1 | Chinese mothers (in Mandarin) | 1 hour |
| | Focus group | 1 | Vietnamese mothers (in Vietnamese) | 1 hour |
| | Focus group | 1 | Chinese mothers (in Cantonese) n = 6 | 1 hour |
| | Focus group | 1 | Korean fathers | 1 hour |
| March 2004 | | | | |
| Los Angeles, CA | Focus group | 1 | Chinese mothers (in Mandarin) | 1 hour |
| | Focus group | 1 | Vietnamese mothers (in Vietnamese) | 1 hour |
| | Focus group | 1 | Chinese mothers (in Cantonese) | 1 hour |
| | Focus group | 1 | Korean fathers | 1 hour |
| May 2004 | | | | |

* Focus groups comprised at least six participants, mini focus groups comprised four participants, and in-depth interviews were conducted one-on-one.

Thematic Summary of Asian American Findings

✓ **Use Action to Promote Physical Activity.**

Asian American parents and tweens responded more favorably to ads that used sounds and images to project action. Sounds of children laughing and playing were easily understood. Children especially enjoyed seeing other children having fun being active. Alternatively, respondents were often confused when ads used spokespeople and characters that were merely talking or standing still wearing sports equipment to promote the concept of being active. Audio cues should project the excitement of being active!

✓ **Use audio and visual cues that convey a positive tone.**

Asian American tweens responded favorably to ads that featured upbeat music. Most preferred ads with fast-paced, contemporary music. However, some tweens were averse to music reflecting pop culture, noting that they did not want to conform to the social image such music often projects. Parents also liked upbeat music, describing it as “adding energy” to the message. They reacted positively to ads that conveyed an overall positive tone. Asian American parents appreciated the sound of children laughing and ads reflecting “warmth” and “happiness.” Print ads that used bright colors were most successful in expressing this tone, whereas ads that used dark colors received a negative response from parents.

✓ **Healthy bodies make healthy minds!**

Asian American parents demonstrated a consistent interest and tendency to relate physical activity and having a healthy body to having a healthy mind. Messages that emphasized this connection generated an overwhelmingly positive response across ethnic subgroups. This audience valued scholastic achievement very highly and preferred ads that balanced physical activity with academics and the arts, such as learning to play an instrument. Parents were also enthusiastic about ads that related physical activity to future success. Ads that emphasize the importance of scholastic achievement, academics, and the arts should be carefully balanced to ensure that these elements do not distract the viewer from the intended physical activity message.

✓ **Messages should be consistent with Asian values.**

Asian American parents responded negatively to ads that showed children talking out of turn, especially interrupting adults; being noisy; and running indoors. These were interpreted as rude behaviors and distracted parents from grasping the intended message. Physical activity messages should align with traditional Asian values that promote respect for ones' elders, family togetherness, parental involvement, and parental responsibility for their children's development.

✓ **Realistic ads target the message to the audience.**

It was important for children to be able to imagine themselves doing the activities demonstrated in the ads. Tweens responded favorably to ads that showed other children participating in exciting physical activities that they enjoyed doing themselves as well as in new activities that they had never tried. However, both the tweens and their parents requested more realistic ads in response to ads that featured activities that exceeded their abilities or reach. For example, tweens mentioned ads depicting "unrealistic sports," such as motorcycling, which they viewed as both dangerous and mature for their age group. Similarly, parents responded negatively to activities that were too expensive and unachievable in their community/environment, such as skiing.

✓ **Put safety first!**

Asian American parents responded negatively to ads that displayed unsafe environments. Parents were particularly alarmed by images depicting desertion or isolation, such as children biking alone. These scenes were interpreted as threatening and reminded parents of the importance of supervising their children. While tweens enjoyed ads that encouraged outdoor activities, most of the parents did not allow their children, especially their daughters, to engage in outdoor physical activity. Mothers also responded negatively to ads that showed sports that could be dangerous, such as hockey.

✓ **Messages should be clear enough to reach diverse audiences.**

The diversity of Asian languages, dialects, and cultural practices makes it difficult to develop in-language ads capable of reaching all segments of the Asian American audience. Recognize that not all Asian nationalities will interpret and respond to materials in the same way. For example, in response to one ad, Filipino/Asian Indian parents understood the intended message as “encouraging” them to get their children active, whereas Vietnamese parents interpreted the same message as motivating them to “allow” their children to be more active. The different interpretations of the same message could reflect translation inconsistencies, differences in parenting styles, or other cultural ethos. To assure that intended messages are clearly understood by target audiences, conduct audience testing in the language of the final ad. It is insufficient to present an English copy to a non-English-speaking audience using an interpreter to translate the advertisements.

✓ **Avoid gender biases!**

Many Asian American mothers were touched by the image of a father running after his children in a park. Some mothers (Chinese and Filipino), however, pointed out that the ads tended to be male-centered. In their perception, the ads exaggerated the level of involvement of fathers in their children’s lives, making the role of mothers seem less significant. They believed that mothers have the strongest influence on their children’s lives, but that it is most important for concepts to promote equity when depicting parent’s involvement in their children’s activities. These responses were more pronounced among the Chinese and Filipino single mothers and were less acute among Korean fathers and Vietnamese mothers, who overall regarded the father as the central figure of the family. Similar parental reactions occurred when ads focused on male, but not female, tweens.

✓ **Pro-social messages are inspiring.**

Parents responded favorably to messages that instilled a sense of self-confidence in children. They recommended messages that encourage their children to get involved in group activities. Tweens also preferred messages that promoted a sense of inclusion. They appreciated ads that included children from diverse ethnic backgrounds and with varying levels of physical ability. Some tweens requested that print ads display children with physical disabilities alongside children without physical challenges. Tweens enjoyed activities in which all children could participate.