

America, How do You Suck?

In February of 2020, Sabra Dipping Company aired its first Super Bowl commercial. Although the company received much praise on social media for their many celebrity cameos, it didn't take long for a specific demographic of viewers to criticize the commercial's catchphrase: "America, how do you 'mmus?'. In Arabic, "mmus" means suck, this strange translation; "How do you suck", thus alienates a large population of potential consumers: those who speak Arabic.

In the creation process of products and technologies, designers consider potential users and how the different users would use the product. In its creation, the product is scripted for these potential users. The same can be said for commercials. In the creation process of a commercial the company considers specific viewers and how they would interpret the commercial, thus the commercial is scripted for these viewers. Oftentimes specific users or viewers are left out of the script. These users do not use the products as the designers intended and these viewers interpret the commercials differently than intended.

In the case of Sabra's Super Bowl commercial, the company may have been very proud of themselves for coming up with such a fun play on words that could easily be used as part of a social media campaign in which users share how they eat hummus using "#howImmus". However, they made the mistake of only scripting the commercial for English speaking consumers. Arabic speakers do not follow the script because to them "muss" means suck and should have nothing to do with hummus. Thus, English speakers are the preferred users, or viewers, and Arabic speakers are non-preferred viewers.

In Madeline Akritch's *De-Scripton*, Akritch discusses the photoelectric lighting kit and how the designers of it only considered the docile user and "excluded other actors such as

technicians or businesspeople who might normally have been expected to contribute to the creation of a technico-economic network” (Akritch, 211). Similarly those who created Sabra’s catch-phrase for the Super Bowl commercial only considered users, or viewers, who would accept the English assumption of “mmus” as a fun play on words. Sabra did not consider viewers who might not only recognize mmus as the Arabic word suck but may also be completely discouraged from ever buying Sabra’s hummus and feel the need to attack the company online, thus bringing to light the unfortunate translation to those who otherwise would have remained oblivious.

Sabra’s “preferred users” follow the script. They watch the commercial and may feel inspired to share how they eat hummus on social media or to eat hummus in a way it is eaten in the commercial by the numerous celebrities. The “non-preferred users” do not follow the script. They watch the commercial and instead of wanting to enjoy some hummus they are prompted to consider Sabra’s lack of connection to and consideration of the Arabic speaking community. One Twitter user tweeted soon after Sabra’s commercial aired: “I guess if Sabra was at all connected to the origins of Hummus & not just appropriating, they’d know “Muss” means SUCK in Arabic #HowImmus” (@imAK48). Sabra has been accused of cultural appropriation in the past for products such as chocolate hummus prompting the company to be accused of just appropriating instead of considering hummus’ roots. Some argue that Arabic speakers probably weren’t Sabra’s target audience with their Super Bowl commercial for “American hummus”(Darwish). But that would make the target audience Americans and as of 2016 1.1 million Americans spoke Arabic (this number grew 29% between 2010 and 2014) (Italiano). So Arabic speakers should be considered as part of the target audience and should have been considered as preferred users during the creation (inscription) of the commercial. Also, considering one of Sabra’s parent

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November 17, 2020

companies, Strauss Group is located in the Middle East and they are selling a Middle Eastern delicacy, Sabra should have paid attention to Arabic speaking viewers.

Overall, although Sabra's first Super Bowl was, in general, a success, they faced backlash that could have been avoided had they simply considered all potential viewers of their commercial when creating their commercial and its seemingly harmless catch-phrase, "America, how do you 'mmus?'".

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November 17, 2020

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