

Marketing

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Most of us have heard the new slogan, more than some of us have been exposed to the commercials and the social networking campaign that spread throughout the internet faster than wildfire and a virus; like a viral wildfire. “ It’s More Fun in the Philippines! ” But, after we laughed at the wit, marvelled at the creativity of the pictures with the now eponymous tagline on the internet, we are left to wonder; Is it Really more Fun in the Philippines? I’ve lived my entire life in the Philippines, not so much a feat I know, but more than that, I have dined with kings and queens on steaks and lobsters, and have eaten balut and fishballs with peasants and mobsters. So I can fairly say; I’ve seen a whole lot of the Filipino society. And if there’s one thing I have learned in all those years is that the worst critics of the Philippines and the Filipinos are not the racist Western Caucasians, nor are the high and mighty, (because of their oil) Middle-Easterners nor the blustering Americans, no! Their criticism is nothing compared to that of the Filipino’s scorn upon himself. How many of us have heard others, and even ourselves say these words and phrases, “ ang mga Filipino kasi eh (insert negative characteristic/s here)” or “ tayong mga Pinoy kasi... ganito, kwan... (insert negativity here) or SIMPLY say this in an EXASPERATED manner: “ HAY PILIPINAS! ”or “ PINOY NGA NAMAN OH! ” There are many possible explanations for this kind of self-condescending and self-deprecating attitude. The one I favour most is that it is the by-product, nay! The product itself of more than 400 years of Western domination! It was said that the Filipino spent 350 years locked up in a convent, and 50 years in Hollywood, (the fact that we’re not totally maniacally insane is a miracle in itself) but in that 400 years in the convent, we were told consistently by a fat friar while

pounding the big black book of Catholicism on our heads while telling us we're idiots and "bobos" and over-all inferior add to that the glam and glitter of America's Hollywood, dictating to us what is beautiful: the image of a blonde, blue eyed and white-skinned person, has left a deep mark on our psyche as a society. Is it any wonder then that Patricia Evangelista (the award winning writer) began her award –winning speech at London with the story that she wanted to be blonde and blue-eyed? It was true when she said that it was what every Filipino child wanted, true for myself anyway. I must confess, when I was little, I once thought of dying my hair blonde and getting blue-eyed contact lenses (despite having perfect vision at the time) just because I envied the children of our American pastor with their Caucasian looks. The point is, we have learned throughout the centuries to have an innate distrust of ourselves, of most things Filipino, how many among us have, at some point or another preferred IMPORTED goods/brands over LOCAL ones? We have automatically assumed that those imported goods are inherently superior to the locally produced product. We are cynical and critical towards the local, towards ourselves, and towards our country. So now we have this new ad campaign, it's a rather bold, if not outright audacious claim, " it's more fun... " hence we scrutinize it, hence this seminar, to evaluate the slogan, the campaign and naturally, the product it is promoting. The Philippines, as expected, was portrayed in the seminar as having a great variety of facets, whether it is in the area of festivals, food and cultures. First off, we were made familiar with the vast number of " Festivals" and/or " Fiestas" in the country, I myself, growing up in Marikina is not a stranger to these " pistas. " The presentation regarding the Festivals

was actually putting it mildly when it declared every town/city has its own Fiesta, in my experience in both Marikina and Antipolo, every BARANGAY has its own Fiesta (mostly dependent on each locality's patron saint) As mentioned, religion plays a crucial role in these celebrations, and to some extent, historical and social events are also highlighted. There was the Sinulog, the Ati-Atihan, Higantes, and Moriones etc. As mentioned, most of the festivities are based in religious beliefs, Western again, based on our Colonial history, in fact the only exception in the aforementioned fiestas was the Higantes festival, which was based on local Pre-Hispanic folklore. Ultimately however, our most famous festivals are the religious ones. Of course, there are other fiestas celebrating not just religion or history and folklore but of a town's product, there's the Tuna Festival in the South (GenSan City) and the Local Sweets Festivals in Bulacan. This is further promoted by the government's campaign of " OTOP" or one town, one product policy, where every town has a specific product it specializes and promotes the heck out of it and seizes the product as its own identity, the end result is that A few years ago, a campaign was launched to find out the most iconic, if not " national" Filipino dish, and surprisingly, the eponymous " adobo" lost out to Sinigang, in terms both of notoriety and acknowledgment. It came of course as a shock to many, however given some thought, it's not too far -fetched a claim at all. Never mind that our adobo basically came from the Spanish " adober" and hence had foreign origins, I personally think it all boils down to economic necessity; as my mother told me: by nature, sinigang is a stew, whose broth base alone can serve as a viable viand along with rice, thus meaning the same size/portion of sinigang can potentially

serve and feed more people than adobo. And granted the economic conditions of our country, such economic efficiency has to count for something. And in any case, sinigang's flavour and ingredients are more local to our tastes. Nevertheless, many people still swear that adobo should be the national dish, perhaps given its prevalence in popular culture and cultural sentiment, reinforced by the media. Then it would also be worth noting that among the OFW population, adobo serves as a comfort food of sorts, perhaps because the ingredients can easily be as accessible abroad as it is here? however, it is that myriad of faces that tend to make it difficult for the Tourism Department to market our country. The highlight of the afternoon was the talk from the Department of Tourism, regarding their new marketing campaign, " It's More Fun In The Philippines", incidentally, the difficulty of finding a single identity or selling point for the country was mentioned, given the other talks that preceded it, it was not hard to deduce the source of the said difficulty, we have too many diverse facets.