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## Looking through Outdoor Advertising Images for Beauty in Argentina, Chile, Hungary, and Romania

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**Looking through outdoor advertising images for beauty in  
Argentina, Chile, Hungary, and Romania**

Abstract

This investigation expands scholarship on beauty and cross-cultural communication through the unique perspective of outdoor advertising. With a content analysis method 1,700 portrayals of men and women in outdoor advertisements, from four different cultures, including Argentina, Chile, Hungary, and Romania, were examined through a framework of advertising and consumer culture, globalization, and theories of beauty. The findings reveal differences across cultures and that beauty ideals are culture specific. Implications are important for practitioners in marketing communications to better understand subtle cultural variations in order to develop effective promotional programs required in the globalized economy.

Key words: beauty, gender, advertising, content analysis, Argentina, Chile, Hungary, Romania

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Advertising is a significant social institution. Specialists have shown how advertising reflects culture and serves as a distorting mirror that emphasizes certain attitudes and behaviors, thereby reinforcing selected lifestyles and values (Pollay & Gallagher, 1990). Mass media play a central part in defining cultural standards, particularly the more ephemeral qualities of attractiveness, femininity, and beauty. Advertising has long been criticized for stereotyping women in narrowly defined social roles (Danesi, 2006, Jhally, 1995; Uray & Burnaz, 2003) and for perpetuating unrealistic beauty ideals that privilege being young, being thin, and being white (Frith, Shaw, & Cheng, 2005, 2009; Kilbourne, 1999).

The literature on women's images and beauty styles in advertising is heavily biased toward the United States. However, the global economy demands more multi-country explorations for a thorough understanding of the social impact of advertising in general (MacRury, 2009), and on gender categories specifically (Cheong, Kim, & Zheng, 2010; Skorek & Schreier, 2009).

With the rise of globalization, cross-cultural research has become more important not only for scholars, but for practitioners too. Despite the recent recession, global advertising expenditures reached a record level in 2014 with \$520 billion, and are projected to increase 4.9 percent in 2015 (Johnson, 2014). Relevant to this research, Eastern Europe and Latin America are identified as high-growth markets (Bruell, 2013). With more worldwide advertising, practitioners will be tasked with being more culturally sensitive and understanding different locales.

This exploration extends the research on beauty and cross-cultural communication by taking an advertising perspective, as well as contributes to the literature on gender, globalization, and the emerging economies of South America and Eastern Europe. The investigation is unique in its examination of the outdoor media platform and of the cultural groups included, specifically, Argentina, Chile, Hungary, and Romania.

### **Literature Review**

Scholars across the disciplines consider advertising to be more than bare communication about consumer products; it is also a carrier of cultural values (Albers-Miller & Gelb, 1996; Cheong et al., 2010; Pollay, 1983). According to Williamson (1978) advertising operates through a complex system of signs to ascribe meaning to objects. She identifies advertisements as signs, the basic units of language and meaning. Advertising works by translating between systems of meaning and interchanging values from different areas of life. By correlating emotions and other intangibles with physical objects, advertisements link possibly unattainable feelings and lifestyles with things that can be acquired (Williamson). Advertising messages promise youth, confidence, beauty, happiness, and sexual appeal through the purchase and use of particular brands. Advertising does not invent these emotions and connotations; rather, it transmits culturally salient meanings via sign systems already known to a certain group of people.

Moreover, in order to keep their brand relevant and credible for the target audience, advertisers continually refresh product messages and images. In the context of increasing global marketing pressures, Western conventions and ideals are disseminated across cultures and circulated into social values and everyday life (MacRury, 2009).

The literature documents how local societies adapt, reinterpret, and respond to Western consumer culture, striving to make Western concepts culturally meaningful. Üstüner and Holt

(2010) called this *indigenization*; other terms that are used include *crealization*, *syncretization*, *domestication*, and *glocalization*. Indigenization “involves not only constructing local identity in a dialectic engagement with Western cultural power, but also constructing status for class factions that lack the cultural capital to compete in the global consumption field” (Üstüner & Holt, p. 53). Although advertising shapes consumer preferences, globally expanding corporate marketers have also found that inclinations molded by cultural and social norms are often resistant to change (Jones, 2011).

Beauty is culturally constructed based on norms, experiences, and socialization to create standards among ages, races, and nationalities (Bjerke & Polegato, 2001; Shepherd & Deregowski, 1981). Society continuously makes standards for how we should dress, style our hair, behave, interact with others, and for the roles we take on in the form of employment, family, hobbies, recreation, and other lifestyle choices. For women, these characteristics contribute to what culture considers beautiful. Beauty is fluid and changes over time (Solomon, Ashmore, & Longo, 1992), yet the perception leads to identity, making it an essential concept to study, especially in context of globalization pressures. This paper explores beauty through two main dimensions: gender roles and physical beauty types.

### **Gender Roles**

Previous studies of women’s roles in advertising have identified interesting variations among cultural representations of women. Wiles, Wiles, and Tjernlund (1995) found in a multiple-country investigation that Swedish advertisements most often portrayed both men and women in family and recreational situations, while American advertisements showed a more marked distinction between gender roles, with a greater prevalence of women in more decorative portrayals, where they have no obvious role or contribution to the message beyond merely

appearing in the image. In a comparison of women's fashion magazines, Morris and Nichols (2013) observed that advertisements in American publications presented more nonworking women and women in decorative roles than advertisements in similar French magazines.

In another study comparing outdoor advertisements in six distinctive Asian and Eastern European locales (Morris, 2014), findings revealed women were portrayed more in occupation, family, and recreational roles in Bulgaria, Poland, and Turkey, compared to Japanese and South Korean advertisements where women were depicted more as decorative or ambiguous. The exception within the Asian locations was in Hong Kong, where women were portrayed more in the active roles like those seen in Eastern Europe.

On another dimension relevant to gender roles is the authority women have in a society. The more authority, the more she is free to make her own decisions and to move around. Advertising messages provide a way to identify and measure a type of authority through review of models' affiliation to the promoted product. For example, Furnham and Imadzu (2002) found that Japanese messages cast men more often than women in authoritative roles and providing scientific or factual arguments for products. The females in these advertisements tended to be young users of the product in question and offered opinions rather than facts. In the outdoor advertisement study previously noted (Morris, 2014), women portrayed with decorative or symbolic product affiliations were particularly common in Japan and South Korea where there is a traditional patriarchal society. In comparison, women in Bulgaria and Poland were depicted more as users, perhaps due to the propaganda under Soviet leadership where women needed to be strong and work hard. Again, Hong Kong differed from the other two Asian nations as visuals included a high proportion of women as users and speaks to a culture where women are asserting themselves.

## Beauty Types

To explore body language and representation in advertising, Solomon et al. (1992) identified beauty types and used a multidimensional scale to sort and examine photographs of professional fashion models. Their research revealed six distinct styles of good-looking women: classic/feminine, cute, sex kitten, sensual/exotic, girl-next-door, and trendy. Englis, Solomon, and Ashmore (1994) subsequently reviewed beauty types in magazine advertisements and found that the trendy, classic/feminine, and sensual/exotic styles were portrayed most frequently.

Several studies have used these categorizations of beauty to explore differences across cultures. Maynard and Taylor (1999) compared Japanese and American versions of *Seventeen* magazine to find that girls in Japan were portrayed almost exclusively as smiling, giggling, cute, and girl-next-door types, while girls in the American publication were depicted with serious expressions making for defiant and independent personas. In a study of magazine advertisements in Singapore, Taiwan, and the USA, Frith et al. (2005, 2009) also reported visual differences. While classic portrayals were the most prevalent in all three locations, the sensual/sex kitten style appeared in the USA more than in the other two cultures, cute/girl-next-door images were most frequent in Taiwan, and trendy types were preferred in Singapore.

In the previously mentioned study comparing six Asian and Eastern European cultures (Morris, 2014), Japan was the only location where women were most often portrayed with classic/feminine images although cute/girl-next-door types were a close second. The author argued that characteristics keep within the traditional Japanese society. Cute/girl-next-door visuals accounted for the highest percentages in Turkish and South Korean advertisements indicating the masculine nature of these cultures. Sensual/sex kitten renderings topped the list in

Bulgaria and Poland. Women in trendy styles led in Hong Kong, reflecting the modern and progressive urban culture.

### **Local Factors**

For the present study locations were selected to provide variations in South American and Eastern European cultures, with differences in historic, economic, and political characteristics, and to also include locations that are rarely reviewed. The places needed to offer plenty of outdoor advertising, and had to be accessible to the researchers. To fulfill these goals, this investigation includes Argentina, Chile, Hungary, and Romania. The following provides relevant cultural attributes of the particular sites for context.

#### **South America**

In Latin America machismo is a major influence on gender and identity in general, and more specifically, “plays a large part in South American’s beauty obsession” (Ballve, 2006, p. 19). Melhuus (1996) suggested three dimensions of machismo: (1) the continuous evaluation of men and the discrete categorization of women, (2) a man’s reference is through other men and where a man’s manhood is confirmed, while it is through women that it is reflected and enacted, and (3) the precariousness of being a man underscores the ambiguity of being a woman, with women’s sexuality an ambivalent source of virtue (p. 241). Masculinity and femininity are linked and the identity of one affects the other. Masculinity is about power, the power of a man as head of his household, the breadwinner for his family, and as the protector, while women are in contrast.

According to Melhuus (1996), Latin America has a preoccupation with the idea of purity and virginity. For men to be macho, they need a pure, virtuous woman. The stereotypical man “is the violent, often drunk, unfaithful husband, or the hard-drinking, aggressive, sexually assertive



young man” (Melhuus, p. 240). In another perspective, a macho man is a man of power and aggression, but he is also respected, honest, and a man of integrity and family. In contrast, the stereotypical woman in Latin America is “the self-effacing, suffering and enduring mother and the demure, withholding young lady” (Melhuus, pp. 240-241). Following are studies specific to Argentina and Chile.

**Argentina.** Argentinians are obsessed with body image (Forbes et al., 2012). So important is a woman’s body that cosmetic surgery has become a common way for women to fix perceived flaws or unpopular features in order to create the perfect figure (Meehan & Katzman, 2001). Forbes et al. (2012) argued that Argentina’s culture encourages body perfection. Unlike the adjacent countries, Argentinians are primarily from white European roots, more specifically Italian and Spanish decedent. They have a tendency to strongly identify with Europe and have come to prefer “an exaggerated form of U.S. and Western European thin body ideal” (Forbes et al., p. 680; Meehan & Katzman, 2001).

There are several social indicators that reflect Argentinian’s obsession with being thin and having a perfect body, including that the nation is known for its extremely skinny fashion models (Forbes et al., 2012). Teen clothing sizes larger than 38 (size 8 in the USA) was so limited that Buenos Aires enacted a law in 2009 requiring teen fashion stores to stock sizes 38 to 48 (Meehan & Katzman, 2001). There are also high proportions of girls and women who are dissatisfied with their body image. One study reported that only 20 percent of adolescent girls from Buenos Aires were satisfied with their weight, the lowest percentage of the countries (Argentina, Guatemala, Cuba, Peru, Panama, and Chile) in the investigation (McArthur, Holbert, & Peña, 2005). The authors also found that gender impacts body satisfaction as 62 percent of females, but only 28 percent of males, preferred to be thinner in Buenos Aires, the largest

difference of the six cultures. Another exploration that compared Argentinians and Swedish adolescents found that Argentinian girls dieted and tried alternative weight loss approaches more frequently than their Swedish counterparts. Girls in both locations had higher body image dissatisfaction than did boys (Holmqvist, Lunde, & Frisé, 2007).

Characteristics of Argentina's turbulent history with military dictatorships, changes in economic policies, and consistent high unemployment have also influenced identity (Forbes et al., 2012). The multitude of these conditions along with the obsession for a perfect body based on European ancestry and the prevailing concept of machismo is proposed to cause insecurity and a sense of helplessness among Argentine women, especially young women (Meehan & Katzman, 2001).

**Chile.** The South American country has had a strong centralized presidential system that has made for a relatively stable economic and political atmosphere in comparison to other nations in the region (Porath, Suzuki, & Ramdohr, 2014). Even so, the authoritarian nature of the government created a patriarchal discourse through its power and the underlying social norms. To get their voices heard women have used alternative and mainstream media to bring awareness to key issues, such as domestic violence, sexual harassment, and women's equality (Torres, 1999).

There are limited studies about Chile, in general, and particularly for women and advertising. However, Chile was one of the locales featured in the six country investigation previously mentioned (McArthur et al., 2005), and where adolescent girls in Santiago, Chile had the second highest (55%) proportions, after Buenos Aires, Argentina, preferring to be thinner, and above the 49 percent average for all locations.

### **Eastern Europe**

Hungary and Romania were both connected with the former Communist state beginning in the 1950s, but Soviet Union influence was uneven and locally specific (Johnson & Robinson, 2007). Although Communism rhetoric promoted emancipation for women through higher education, work opportunities, and childcare, women's true social position was veiled by government manipulation. Instead, women became overburdened with domestic and occupational responsibilities, and began to resent the very notion of women's rights, as they saw the idea as exploitive and ideologically based (Grigar, 2007). Notes for the two cultures in the investigation follow.

**Hungary.** After the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989, Hungary made a peaceful shift to a democratic parliamentary system (Mathew, 2015), and joined the European Union in 2004 (Annus, 2011). In the absence of Soviet rule, Hungarians have had to construct an identity and, even with their position on the eastern edge of Europe, they consider themselves Europeans (Annus).

In an investigation of women opinion leaders about cosmetics (Coulter, Feick, & Price, 2002), respondents described how during the socialist regime Hungarian women were not conscious about appearance and cosmetics, and instead they were concerned about having a place to work and fulfilling the requirements of the socialist society. As one interviewee explained, being beautiful was difficult, involved extra effort, and required an imagination. In addition, there were few choices in consumer goods, including personal care and cosmetic products. While that has changed, there is still little written or studied about Hungary.

**Romania.** As a former Soviet satellite nation, Romania was long under the influence of a vicious dictator, Nicolae Ceacescu, who was overthrown and killed in 1989 when the Communist system eventually broke apart. The nation has been slow to recover compared to

other Eastern European countries, such as Hungary, Poland, and the former Czechoslovakia, due to the psychological impact of Ceacescu's harsh rule (Seitz & Razzouk, 2005).

Romania is in transition, moving from a centrally planned socialist system where consumer advertising was absent, to a market-based economy that is increasingly integrated into global activities (Stoica, Miller, & Ardelea, 2011). The nation received full European Union membership in 2007 (Central Intelligence Agency, 2015). Romanians have embraced advertising and well-known multinational agencies, like Leo Burnett and Saatchi and Saatchi, have offices in Bucharest (Stoica et al.). Outdoor advertising, in particular, is thriving and companies are using the latest sophisticated technologies (Stoica et al.).

### **Research Questions**

The previous investigations show that women's images and the types of beauty used in advertising vary and visuals reflect cultural preferences. The purpose of this paper is to expand the literature on beauty and culture through the perspective of communication. The research compares portrayals of gender and beauty in outdoor advertisements from seldom studied cultures in South America and Eastern Europe, specifically Argentina, Chile, Hungary, and Romania. Three research questions are proposed.

RQ1: How do men and women's activities/roles depicted in advertisements differ within each of the four cultures?

RQ2: How do women's activities/roles depicted in advertisements differ across the four cultures?

RQ3: How do women's beauty types portrayed in advertisements differ across the four cultures?

### **Method**

Content analysis has been a popular option for analyzing communication, particularly for studies of advertising (Ji & McNeal, 2001). The method of investigation provides an opportunity to compare media content to the real world (Wimmer & Dominick, 2000). In this case, a quantitative content analysis was used to examine portrayals of culture, specifically gender roles and beauty ideals across four culturally diverse nations: Argentina, Chile, Hungary, and Romania. Countries were selected as they are high-growth markets in Latin America and Eastern Europe, offer a prevalence of outdoor advertising, and provide variance in historic, social, political, and economic attributes.

Visual portrayals were reviewed for statistically significant differences between genders and across locations, and then, using discourse analysis, a method for interpreting communications and revealing how they create and maintain societal power relations (Johnson, 2008). The process considers how discourse is interconnected with political, economic, and social conditions. It proposes that communicative events, such as advertisements, are unique discourse moments created through texts, discourses, and everyday activities that combine to make social meaning and impact (Johnson). In this paper, critical discourse analysis is used to examine portrayals of people to uncover beauty ideals within and across the four locations.

### **Sampling and Data Organization**

Outdoor advertising images of 939 female and 761 male models were collected between March and July of 2015 from neighborhood districts, heavy-traffic streets, and dense urban areas of four major cities: Buenos Aires in Argentina, Santiago in Chile, Budapest in Hungary, and Bucharest in Romania. All were selected with guidance from local contacts and communication specialists. As in other studies of this type (e.g., Morris, 2005, 2014), the author walked the selected areas and took photographs of all the outdoor advertising that could be seen from street

view. These included billboards, posters, banners, bus shelters, kiosks, wall paintings, transit cards, and other signage with the goal of promoting a commercial message. The location of each outdoor visual was noted in project journals. Upon returning home, photos were downloaded onto a computer, and jpgs were created and filed by culture.

The primary researchers identified and labeled the outdoor advertisements that were appropriate for investigation. For this study, only messages that contained people, specifically adult males and females, the investigation's unit of analysis, were employed. Photographs were condensed and incorporated into PowerPoint slides to facilitate viewing, labeling, sharing, and coding. Slides also could be printed for coders to mark up, as suggested by Neuendorf (2002).

### **Coding**

The author developed the initial coding scheme based on a review of the literature and past investigations as previously outlined. The coding plan included five primary variables relevant to this paper. Culture was identified as Argentina, Chile, Bulgaria, or Romania and gender was coded as male or female.

Several variables were used to measure dimensions of women's beauty, including women's activities/roles. For one, and as was done in previous content analyses (Morris, 2014; Morris & Nichols, 2013), models were coded into five role categories: (1) occupation (dressed in a uniform or business clothes, or seen in an occupational setting), (2) family (pictured inside or outside the home with children or a partner), (3) recreation (portrayed in sports or other leisure), (4) model/celebrity (wearing or showing the product), and (5) decorative/ambiguous (displayed in an unrealistic setting, in an awkward position, or not part of the scene). Authority-like depictions were also reviewed with respect to three product affiliation groups: (1) user (model is

using the product), (2) endorser (model is recommending or demonstrating the product), and (3) symbolic (model is detached from the product or using it in ways not intended).

For comparison to women's portrayals, men's images were also coded into the five activity/role groups and the three product affiliation categories using the coding scheme for the two variables described above. Differences for men and women's characterizations within cultures were compared (RQ1) and visuals of women were analyzed for variations across cultures (RQ2).

For distinctions between beauty types for women (RQ3), the scoring was based on previous research by Frith et al. (2005, 2009) and Morris (2014), and used four styles: (1) classic (elegant, feminine, glamorous, sophisticated, or professional; dress is usually soft, demure, not heavily accessorized), (2) sensual/sex kitten (sexy in appearance or attire, revealing, tight clothes; dressed in normal clothes but posed in an unnatural or uncomfortable way, such as "cheesecake" pose), (3) cute/girl-next-door (cute, casual attire, youthful appearance, or casual), and (4) trendy (faddish clothes; displays oversized accessories; tousled hair; a sense of chaos overall for an "I don't give a damn" attitude). Men's images were not coded on this variable.

### **Coder Training**

Experts from each culture (both male and female) were consulted for the translations and helped to organize the coding. Neuendorf's (2002) procedure for training coders was closely followed. Four groups of two to three high-achieving undergraduate research assistants (two males and nine females), knowledgeable in advertising strategy gained from advanced courses and internships, with majors, minors, life experiences, or other multi-cultural interests, and blind to the study's purpose, were assembled for the project. Each hand-picked member met with the author and discussed the coding scheme, reviewing each question with trial advertisement

visuals and different response scenarios. The author also provided an Excel spreadsheet template and directions for how to record coding scores.

The coders were given a sample of five advertisements selected at random from each culture to practice coding independently. Once finished they returned their completed Excel files via email and later, at an arranged appointment, visited with the primary researcher to talk over their decisions and work out misunderstandings and issues. Then coders discussed their results among their team members, particularly to come to agreement on coding inconsistencies and, again, reported back to the primary researcher. A few minor alterations were made to the coding instructions to help ensure consistency. A second set of five sample visuals were provided to coders and the process was repeated using a new Excel spreadsheet created from the master template. When satisfied, a third set of five sample advertisements selected at random from each location was provided to coders to compute pilot reliabilities.

For reliability assessment Cohen's kappa was used as the variables were all nominal and as done in other content analysis studies of media and advertising (e.g., Frith et al., 2005, 2009; Heuer, McClure & Puhl, 2011; Xue & Ellzey, 2009). Lombard, Snyder-Duch, and Bracken (2002) also recommend this reliability test while acknowledging its limitations, particularly, even with perfect agreement the index can result in a maximum value of less than 1.00. Still, the researchers suggest that Cohen's kappa is often recommended and cite Dewey's (1983) thorough argument that it is "the measurement of choice" (p. 487).

Neuendorf (2002) provides a comprehensive analysis of several intercoder reliability techniques and acceptable levels of agreement. Lombard et al. (2002) summarize the adequate intensities of agreement with statistics .90 or greater being satisfactory for all, .80 in most



situations, and .70 being frequently used for exploratory research (p. 593). In addition, they argue that Cohen's kappa is a more conservative measure.

For the pilot test, coders' data were transferred from Excel to SPSS files for calculations. Reliabilities used Cohen's kappa and scores were averaged. The kappa results for each variable were: culture = 1.00, model's gender = 1.00, role = .70, product affiliation = .71, and beauty type = .71. Although three of the test outcomes were at the low end (.70 and .71), they were still within the conventional limits of an exploratory study. Moreover, it could reflect variations of culture, and considering that the test is conservative, the results were determined acceptable.

With no further changes required of the coding scheme, the test advertisements were added back into the sample. The outdoor advertisements were then divided between the coders, specifically visuals were given in sets of 20 to help manage the process, and working independently of each other and the author, the coders coded the entire sample. For a final reliability check, five advertisements from each of the four cultures were chosen randomly from the sample excluding advertisements used in the first intercoder assessments. Again, Cohen's kappa statistics were calculated and resulted in: culture = 1.00, model's gender = 1.00, role = .71, product affiliation = .75, and beauty type = .71.

### **Data Analysis**

To establish whether particular depictions of men and women yielded statistically significant differences within and across the locales, a chi-square analysis was conducted for each variable that was identified as relevant to the complex concept of beauty. Specifically, cross-tabulations were calculated to compare means of the variables by gender within cultures and across cultures. Cramér's *V* was used to test the strength of the association. Statistical results are reported in the following sections with analyses provided in the discussion.

## Results

To explore beauty ideals across cultures, 1,700 model images from 1,334 outdoor advertisements from South America and Eastern Europe were content analyzed. A little more than a third of the visuals came from Chile (31%), followed by Argentina (28%), Romania (22%), and Hungary (19%).

Women (55%) slightly outnumbered men overall. Within countries, Hungarian and Chilean advertisements featured the first and second largest proportions of female images (61% and 58% respectively). Gender was more equally split in Argentina and Romania with 51% women in both locations.

### Men and Women's Differences Within Cultures

The first research question explored both genders within each of the four areas. Two variables tested for differences: activities/roles and product affiliations.

Men and women's activities/roles within countries were found to be statistically different for all four of the characterizations analyzed. Men by far were more commonly depicted in occupational portrayals, specifically 63% in Hungary, 46% in Argentina, 40% in Romania, and 36% in Chile, and next in recreational situations, 28% in Argentina, 27% in Chile, 23% in Romania, and 19% in Hungary, compared to women within each location. Women were portrayed in occupations 35% in Hungary, 33% in Romania, 31% in Argentina, and 24% in Chile, and in recreational environments 21% in Argentina, 15% in Hungary, 14% in Chile, and 10% in Romania. In contrast, women were more than likely to be a model or celebrity, with 35% in Argentina and 37% in each of the three other areas. In contrast, men were shown as models or celebrities 16% in Chile, 14% in Argentina, 11% in Romania, and 8% in Hungary.

Family portrayals represented noteworthy proportions in Romania, and where men were more frequent than women, specifically 22% versus 18% respectively. Men also were slightly more apparent in family roles in Chile (15% men and 14% women) and Hungary (10% men and 9% women), and both genders registered 10% in Argentina.

While decorative or ambiguous characterizations were least common, women were shown in these portrayals more than men in Chile (10% versus 6% for men) and in Hungary (4% of women) where no men were coded as decorative or ambiguous, on the other hand, men were twice as likely to be portrayed in the category in Romania (4% of men compared to 2% of women). Both men and women were shown as decorative or ambiguous 2% in Argentina.

For the product affiliation variable within cultures, women were portrayed as product users more than men in each of the four locales, however, depictions were only significantly different in Hungary and Argentina, where female product users accounted for 55% and 47% respectively, compared to men with 40% and 33% for those nations. Women were still represented more as product users compared to men in the other cultures, specifically 56% of women compared to 52% of men in Chile, and 43% of women versus 34% of men in Romania.

In contrast, males were shown the most as the endorser of the product, specifically 48% in both Argentina and Hungary, while 32% of women were shown in the portrayal in each of the two areas. The same tendency, although not significantly different, was seen in Chile where 30% of men were endorsers versus 24% of women, and in Romania with 40% of men in the endorser role compared to 37% of women.

Women were slightly more likely to be represented as symbolic in Argentina compared to men (21% versus 19% respectively), while 12% of both men and women's images in Hungary were symbolic. Although not significant, 20% of women were shown in symbolic product

affiliation appearances compared to 18% of men in Chile, and the roles were reversed in Romania with 26% of men in the symbolic role, versus 19% of women. Cross-tabulations for activity/role portrayals and product affiliations within cultures are reported in Tables 1 and 2.

[TABLES 1 AND 2 ABOUT HERE]

### **Women's Activities/Roles and Product Affiliations Across Cultures**

The second research question inquiring if women's activities/roles depicted in advertisements varied across the four cultures resulted in statistical differences on both points analyzed, including activities/roles and product affiliations. In the review of women in the five role portrayals, variations were found across the locations even with model or celebrity depictions the most frequent in all nations (37% in Chile, Hungary, and Romania, and 35% in Argentina). The Eastern European cultures had the largest proportions of women in occupations, specifically 35% in Hungary and 33% in Romania. Argentina and Chile followed with 31% and 24% of women in occupations respectively. Argentina showed the largest number of female models in recreational settings (21%), and the role accounted for 15% in Hungary, 14% in Chile, and 10% in Romania. Family percentages were robust in Romania (18%) and Chile (14%), with Argentina and Hungary following (10% and 9% respectively). Women in decorative or ambiguous images were 10% in Chile, 4% in Hungary, and 2% in both Argentina and Romania.

While women were most frequently portrayed as product users in all locales, their user role was amplified in Chile and Hungary (56% and 55% respectively), and the depiction represented 47% in Argentina and 43% in Romania. Romania reported the highest proportion of women as product endorser (37%), contrasted with 32% in Argentina and Hungary, and 24% in Chile. The symbolic portrayal was the least common image across all four cultures, although Hungary showed the lowest share (12%), versus about 20% in the three other locations.

### **Women's Beauty Types**

In response to the third research question about how women's beauty qualities vary across the four cultures, results indicated statistically significant differences for the four types coded. While the classic beauty style was the most frequent in all spots (46% in Argentina and Chile, and 42% in Romania), they accounted for over half (56%) of women in Hungary. The cute/girl-next-door quality was noteworthy with 30% and 29% in Chile and Romania respectively, compared to 24% in Argentina and 21% in Hungary. Argentina stood out with a quarter of females coded as sensual/sex kitten, contrasted with 20% in Romania, and 14% in both Chile and Hungary. While trendy images were the least common, the style represented 10% in Chile, 9% in Hungary, 8% in Romania, and 6% in Argentina. Percentages and cross-tabulations for female models across cultures are given in Table 3.

[TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE]

### **Discussion**

In this study that compared 1,700 visuals of men and women in outdoor advertisements from Argentina, Chile, Hungary, and Romania, beauty was reviewed on multiple dimensions, including activities and roles, affiliation with the promoted products, and beauty types. Both men and women were analyzed within cultures on the first two variables to gain a perspective for gender differences, while review of female models, including beauty styles, also were assessed across locations. The combination attempts to learn what society values and how women should look and behave, leading to beauty and subsequently identity. Here advertisements are used as a picture of the society at one point of time and as a lens to focus on depictions beamed through advertising's reflection of culture (Pollay & Gallagher, 1990).

### **Women are Less Active than Men**

For the first research question about differences within cultures, the data show that females are more than twice as likely as males to be portrayed as models and celebrities in all four locations, suggesting that women are to be looked at. In comparison, men are shown in active roles and embedded in society. Men's images in occupations and recreational situations, two categories representing independent and lively individuals, accounted for 82% in Hungary, 74% in Argentina, and 63% in both Chile and Romania. Here the numbers illustrate that in both South America and Eastern Europe, males are depicted in roles, like occupations, that can lead to income, knowledge, and stability, as well as recreational activities, symbolizing freedom, adventure, and leisure. In addition, compared to women, men are portrayed more as endorsers of products, a sign of credibility, authority, and respect (Furnham & Imadzu, 2002; Stocia et al., 2011), particularly in Argentina and Hungary. On the other hand, females are predominantly depicted as users of the products in all cultures.

A reason why traditional gender stereotypes are displayed across these four locations may be that there is a universal subordination of women, as suggested by Gilly (1988; as cited in Stoica et al., 2011). However it may also be due to the promotional medium and where traditional gender roles may be the preferred portrayal. Stoica et al. provide three explanations: (1) local companies want to make advertisements that depict customary roles, (2) foreign companies, or organizations promoting products outside a business's home nation, may want to create more traditional messages, and (3) multinational businesses may use global or standardized approaches that employ conventional or conservative values in messages so as not to offend locals in any one area (p. 246).

What may these images mean for women? Social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1971) suggests that modeling from mass media is an efficient way to acquire a variety of actions and

solutions to problems. The impact of these portrayals can create the perception that working or having leisure time are not viable choices for women, and as beauty is an overall “look” that incorporates physical characteristics, consumer goods and services, and all sorts of activities (Englis et al., 1994), these images become part of the discourse and standard for judging masculinity, femininity, being handsome, or being beautiful. As people’s self-concepts develop from observing what others think about them (Dion, Berscheid, & Walsters, 1972), and media portrayals reinforce the idea that women’s appearances are related to self-worth (Englis et al., 1994), these perceptions of beauty are important to self-esteem.

### **Women’s Activities Vary Across Cultures**

Addressing the second research question, the data demonstrate that women’s depictions vary across nations to reflect cultural differences. Interpretations incorporate men’s images and beauty portrayals that are discovered and explored through research questions 1 and 2.

**Occupations and experts.** As was found in another study (Morris, 2014), Eastern European nations showed high percentages of women in occupational roles, particularly 35% in Hungary and 33% in Romania. Moreover, in these two locations, women are seldom coded as decorative or ambiguous (4% in Hungary and 2% in Romania), and for the product affiliation variable, symbolic portrayals of women are the lowest of the four areas (12% in Hungary and 19% in Romania). The data paint a picture of women who are not idle. An explanation for why this is may be that it is a residual of the socialist structure of society during the Communist era and when women needed to be strong and work twice as hard as men (Grigar, 2007). As cultural ideas are ingrained and resilient to change (Jones, 2011), advertisers have developed the images because they are still relevant to locals, and visuals connect and resonate with the target

consumer. These locations may be well suited for marketers employing promotional messages that embrace modern roles that show equality among genders.

**Traditional portrayals.** In contrast, Chile shows the lowest proportions of women in occupation, recreation, and endorser roles (24%, 14%, and 24% respectively), as well as the highest percentages of women as product user (56%) and in decorative or ambiguous (10%) depictions. Females pictured as models or celebrities resulted in 37%, as was the case for both Hungary and Romania, and a fifth of Chile's female models were also portrayed as symbolic, about the same as Argentina's 21%. The data seem to suggest that women hold traditional roles in Chile, and an explanation for why this may be could be due to the Latin culture. Machismo can help understand how people perform gender day-to-day to create a social order in Latin cultures, and Stobbe (2005) described machismo as when men are in charge, have the last word, give orders, and sustain a household financially. The data in Chile exemplify these ideas: men are presented in occupations, recreation, and as product endorsers, and visuals illustrate that men generate the income, are the experts, have freedom, and make the decisions, while women are models, celebrities, and product users.

**Family.** The family is represented more often in Romania and Chile where women are in domestic situations 18% and 14% respectively. The pattern is also echoed with men's images, and Romania and Chile not only have the highest frequency of men depicted with family (22% and 15% respectively), the proportions are slightly larger than those of women. The basis for this may be that family is highly cherished in Latin societies (Buzzanell, Waymer, Tagle, & Liu, 2007) and, like Chile, Romania can be considered a Latin culture (Stocia et al., 2011). Advertisers projected these family values and lifestyles as they are important to the cultures, and make messages more likely to influence positive perceptions and consumer behavior.



**Active but different.** Argentinian women are also active but in a different way than those in the Eastern European nations described earlier. While 31% of women are portrayed in occupations, slightly lower than in Hungary and Romania (35% and 33%), and 32% in endorser roles, like Hungary but lower than Romania's 37%, recreation represents 21%, the most of the places. On the other hand, symbolic roles in Argentina represent 21% of women, and highest of the areas. A reason for these mixed portrayals may be that in the machismo culture, while men are the providers as explained previously, they also look for women to be prepared to work as required, inside and outside of the home (Cianelli, Ferrer, & McElmurry, 2008). In addition, as Argentinians identify with Europe (Forbes et al., 2012; Meehan & Katzman, 2001), the active images may seem more European, modern, and aspirational. Therefore, it may not be surprising to find noteworthy proportions of women in occupation and recreation, while at the same time high proportions of non-active roles, as women also need to conform to conventional standards.

### **Beauty Types**

The third research question focused on beauty styles for women across locations. Hungary stood out with 56% of women in classic portrayals, and might suggest how Hungarians strongly identify with Europe (Annus, 2011). However, the classic style was most prevalent in all four locations reviewed, as was also the case in similar studies (e.g., Frith et al., 2005, 2009). The high proportions may be due to the idea already mentioned that global advertisers think they need to portray conservative, classic styles so as not to offend or be perceived as silly (Stoica et al., 2011). The findings illuminate an opportunity for marketers to employ more progressive styles, if the target market is open to them, to break through the clutter and attract attention.

Cute/girl-next-door type is the next most common portrayal in Chile and Romania (30% and 29% respectively). As noted earlier, both these places can be considered machismo cultures,

and where men are providers and protectors (Stobbe, 2005), women should be physically and mentally subordinate to men (Cainelli et al., 2008), and men need a pure, virtuous woman to enact their maleness (Melhuus, 1996). This may suggest that cute/girl-next-door portrayals may be more appealing to these audiences, and global advertisers will want to be cautious when creating messages as it might mean that overly sexy portrayals may be a disadvantage in these cultures.

Argentina is the only location to boast high frequencies of sensual/sex kitten type images (25%), and could also reflect the machismo nature of the culture, particularly the part characterized by men's virility and promiscuous behavior, exemplified by a common Argentinian myth that there are "six women to every man" (Stobbe, 2005, p. 111). While this seems contradictory to the cute/girl-next-door styles found in Chile and Romania, scholars argue that in Latin cultures women confront a "double standard," and need to fit into one of two groups: good mothers and wives or bad women who are sexually available (Cianelli et al., 2008, p. 299). Similarly, Melhuus (1996) suggests that a woman's sexuality is ambiguous and relative to men in machismo cultures (p. 241). Argentina also may differ from other Latin locales as it looks to Europe for beauty styles (Forbes et al., 2012; Meehan & Katzman, 2001). These findings provide an example of how advertisers and marketers need to assess their product type and brand promise, and understand the subtle differences of the locations to strategically select portrayals, styles, and images that are appropriate for the target audience. One approach across multiple locations, even within a particular region, may likely be ineffective.

### **Implications**

The similarities and differences within and across Eastern European, South American, former Soviet, and machismo cultures illustrate that each of the locations under study has its own identity despite globalization pressures. The results have important implications for marketing,

advertising, and communication practitioners and business managers contemplating introducing and promoting products and services in Argentina, Chile, Hungary, Romania, as well as other places. Practitioners need to have global awareness while at the same time be culturally sensitive to create messages and promotional campaigns that are in some manner relevant with the value systems of the target consumer.

Clearer understanding of the cultural values connected to beauty, attractiveness, and gender roles that influence consumer behavior in global markets will help practitioners design effective communication and avoid visuals and portrayals that could be negatively interpreted. Advertisers will want to clearly understand and align their brand's goals with particular local market particularities and long standing cultural inclinations when constructing promotional messages, and to ensure models, portrayals, and styles deliver the appropriate image and tone.

Although the term at first glance seems shallow, beauty is part of gender, and the center of identity. Beauty is mainstream, we talk about it, internalize and incorporate images into our routines, and it is through this discourse that there is an implicit power process at work (Stobbe, 2005). How society pressures women to behave and look has consequences (Englis et al., 1994).

This study also can provide a foundation to begin awareness and dialogue of gender inequalities that have implications for social welfare, such as public health and education, and identity. Exposure to USA and western European appearance standards is an important contributor to body dissatisfaction as is rapid social change (Forbes et al., 2012), making markets in this study important for social justice advocates and organizations that are interested in the quality of life of the world's people, particularly women.

### **Limitations and Future Studies**

Like all research, this investigation has its limitations. Given that some of the final intercoder assessments are low, but according to Neuendorf (2002) still considered satisfactory for an exploratory study, the results need to be used with caution. Furthermore, outdoor advertisements are only one form of communication, and while they can be impactful with reach, size, creativity, and new eye-catching technologies, examining images in other media platforms can offer different perspectives and additional visuals that the public has the opportunity to see. Print and broadcast, such as fashion magazines and runway shows, can have loyal and specific audiences that are worth studying, especially for images of beauty.

In addition, reviewing these as well as other promotional images in qualitative terms can help paint a richer picture of culture. Interviewing practitioners for why they created the advertisements and what they wanted the audience to encode also would help in learning what the creative producers considered the standards for beauty in each nation. Moreover, in-depth interviews of the local audiences in attempt to understand from their reality what they see and identify as beautiful may be the most meaningful to marketers.

As males are also starting to be seen in unflattering stereotypical images in the media (Stoica et al., 2011), a review of their portrayals in terms of attractiveness is important (Englis et al., 1994), and would provide contrast to women's depictions. For studies involving Latin cultures, identifying and analyzing dimensions of machismo, such as how men and women are shown in authoritarian, virility, and protective portrayals, would add to the literature. The exercises would better illustrate how individuals perform gender across the masculine/feminine spectrum and help show how advertisements create standards and behaviors that establish ideas of attractiveness and beauty for both genders.

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Table 1 Cross-tabulation of model's role by gender within culture.

	Male	Female
<b>Argentina</b>		
Occupation	45.8%	31.3%
Family	9.6	9.9
Recreational	28.4	21.4
Model or Celebrity	14.0	35.3
Decorative or Ambiguous	<u>2.2</u>	<u>2.1</u>
	100.0%	100.0%
	(n = 229)	(n = 243)
$\chi^2 = 30.50, df = 4, p < .001, \text{Cramér's } V = .25$		
<b>Chile</b>		
Occupation	36.3%	24.3%
Family	15.0	14.4
Recreational	26.8	14.1
Model or Celebrity	15.5	37.4
Decorative or Ambiguous	<u>6.4</u>	<u>9.8</u>
	100.0%	100.0%
	(n = 220)	(n = 305)
$\chi^2 = 40.68, df = 4, p < .001, \text{Cramér's } V = .28$		
<b>Hungary</b>		
Occupation	62.8%	34.9%
Family	9.7	8.7
Recreational	19.4	14.9
Model or Celebrity	8.1	37.4
Decorative or Ambiguous	<u>--</u>	<u>4.1</u>
	100.0%	100.0%
	(n = 124)	(n = 195)
$\chi^2 = 44.22, df = 4, p < .001, \text{Cramér's } V = .37$		
<b>Romania</b>		
Occupation	40.4%	32.7%
Family	21.8	17.9
Recreational	22.9	10.2
Model or Celebrity	11.2	37.2
Decorative or Ambiguous	<u>3.7</u>	<u>2.0</u>
	100.0%	100.0%
	(n = 188)	(n = 196)
$\chi^2 = 39.33, df = 4, p < .001, \text{Cramér's } V = .32$		

Table 2 Cross-tabulation of model's product affiliation by gender within culture.

	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>
Argentina		
User	33.2%	47.3%
Endorser	47.6	31.7
Symbolic	<u>19.2</u>	<u>21.0</u>
	100.0%	100.0%
	(n = 229)	(n = 243)
$\chi^2 = 13.58, df = 2, p < .01, \text{Cramér's } V = .17$		
Chile		
User	51.8%	56.1%
Endorser	30.0	23.9
Symbolic	<u>18.2</u>	<u>20.0</u>
	100.0%	100.0%
	(n = 220)	(n = 305)
ns		
Hungary		
User	40.3%	55.4%
Endorser	47.6	32.3
Symbolic	<u>12.1</u>	<u>12.3</u>
	100.0%	100.0%
	(n = 124)	(n = 195)
$\chi^2 = 8.10, df = 2, p < .05, \text{Cramér's } V = .16$		
Romania		
User	34.0%	43.4%
Endorser	39.9	37.2
Symbolic	<u>26.1</u>	<u>19.4</u>
	100.0%	100.0%
	(n = 188)	(n = 196)
ns		

Table 3 Cross-tabulation of female model's role across cultures.

	Argentina	Chile	Hungary	Romania
<b>Model's Role</b>				
Occupation	31.3%	24.3%	34.9%	32.7%
Family	9.9	14.4	8.7	17.9
Recreational	21.4	14.1	14.9	10.2
Model or Celebrity	35.3	37.4	37.4	37.2
Decorative or Ambiguous	<u>2.1</u>	<u>9.8</u>	<u>4.1</u>	<u>2.0</u>
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	(n = 243)	(n = 305)	(n = 195)	(n = 196)
$\chi^2 = 46.11, df = 12, p < .001, \text{Cramér's } V = .22$				
<b>Model's Product Affiliation</b>				
User	47.3%	56.1%	55.4%	43.4%
Endorser	31.7	23.9	32.3	37.2
Symbolic	<u>21.0</u>	<u>20.0</u>	<u>12.3</u>	<u>19.4</u>
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	(n = 243)	(n = 305)	(n = 195)	(n = 196)
$\chi^2 = 18.02, df = 6, p < .01, \text{Cramér's } V = .14$				
<b>Model's Beauty Type</b>				
Classic	45.7%	46.3%	56.4%	42.3%
Sensual/Sex Kitten	25.1	14.4	14.4	20.4
Cute/Girl-Next-Door	23.5	29.8	20.5	29.1
Trendy	<u>5.7</u>	<u>9.5</u>	<u>8.7</u>	<u>8.2</u>
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	(n = 243)	(n = 305)	(n = 195)	(n = 196)
$\chi^2 = 23.10, df = 9, p < .01, \text{Cramér's } V = .16$				