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Empowerment through femvertising - Evidence from Mexico and Hungary

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the paper is to understand the concept of femvertising in a cross-cultural study for countries that have not been examined in previous research. Twenty semi-structured in-depth interviews with women from Mexico and Hungary were analyzed using thematic content analysis. The novelty of this study is that it sheds light on culturally bounded aspects of femvertising and provides an extended definition of female empowerment. Contrary to expectations, lower-gender-equality countries with diverse backgrounds show similar patterns in the perceptions of female empowerment. The main difference is that Mexican interviewees considered sorority to be an important element of empowerment whereas Hungarians placed the self in the center. Mexican women admitted that femvertising had a positive effect on them; Hungarian women stated that others were more affected by femvertising than they were. Academics and practitioners should recognize cultural differences given that attitudes toward femvertising in both countries were both positive and negative. This study also offers new critical insights about femvertising that still uses gender stereotypes, such as gender roles mainly associated with men, implying that empowered women must behave like men.

Introduction

Although the portrayal of women in advertisements remains mostly unequal (M. Pilar Matud, Inmaculada Espinosa and Carmen Rodríguez Wangüemert 2021), there is no denying that female empowerment and the appropriate portrayal of women have become increasingly important topics in advertising (Neema Varghese and Navin Kumar 2022). In this regard, "femvertising"—a term used to denote advertisements that encourage female empowerment—has been attracting marketers' and academics' attention. Femvertising calls into question the usage of traditional female stereotypes and their impact on the target female audience (Nina Åkestam, Sara Rosengren and Micael Dahlen

2017). Thus, the primary purpose of femvertising is to develop conscious thinking that avoids gender stereotypes and discrimination (Deepa Kapoor and Alka Munjal 2019). In addition, femvertising may increase a brand's bottom-line revenue (Francesca Sobande 2019) and elicit favorable reactions from a female target audience (Sara Champlin, Yvette Sterbenk, Kasey Windels and Maddison Poteet 2019). Contemporary branding and advertising focus more on immaterial things, including feelings, emotions, and values, than on tangible, actual goods, thereby commodifying empowerment (Sarah Banet-Weiser 2012).

By conducting a cross-cultural study of countries not previously examined, this paper aims to comprehend the idea of femvertising, thereby filling several knowledge gaps. First, femvertising and female empowerment, along with its various elements such as decision-making and financial control (Knud Knudsen and Kari Wærness 2008; Sabina Alkire, Ruth Meinzen-Dick, Amber Peterman, Agnes Quisumbing, Greg Seymour and Ana Vaz 2013) have not been studied concurrently. Second, few qualitative studies have explored femvertising (see, for instance, Valentine Hainneville, Amélie Guèvremont and Élisabeth Robinot 2023; Sangeeta Sharma and Arpan Bumb 2022). Third, despite recent recommendations (Champlin et al. 2019; Fei Teng, Hu Junsheng, Zhansheng Chen, Kai-Tak Poon and Yong Bai 2021), cross-cultural research on the attitudinal effects of femvertising has not yet been conducted. Finally, the majority of femvertising and female stereotype research (e.g., Alan Abitbol and Miglena Sternadori 2020; Na'ama Klorman-Eraqi 2017; Silke Knoll, Martin Eisend and Josefine Steinhagen 2011; Olga Fedorenko 2015) is conducted in countries with high gender equality, such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, South Korea, and New Zealand (Statista 2020).

Few femvertising studies have been conducted in Latin America and Eastern Europe, particularly in countries with low gender equality indexes and contrasting regional positions, such as Mexico and Hungary. Despite the fact that gender equality is higher in Europe than in Latin America, Hungary remains one of the lowest-ranking European nations, ranking 32nd of the 35 countries in the region. In addition, although gender equality in Latin America is lower than in Europe, Mexico continues to be one of the leading Latin American nations, ranking fourth of the 22 countries in the region (Global Gender Gap Report 2022). The indexes used to select these countries (Global Gender Gap Report 2022; Pew Research Center 2020; Statista 2020) take several factors into account, such as economic participation, educational attainment, health accessibility, and political empowerment. Based on the results of the Global Gender Gap Report (2022), Mexico was closing 76% of its gender gap whereas Hungary was closing only 70% of its gender gap. In addition to using the framework assessed by the aforementioned indexes, the research also considered as a criterion the degree of similarity in attitudes toward gender equality. According to the Research Center (2020), 80% of Mexicans and 85% of Hungarians believe women should have the same rights as men in their countries. Thus, this research aims to explore the cultural factors of femvertising that drive female empowerment in two contrasting countries.

The current study makes several important contributions. First, and contrary to expectations, lower-gender-equality countries show a similar pattern on the perceptions of female empowerment concerning the essence of the concept and its components. Culture may influence some variables more than others in particular countries. In Mexico, the significance of sorority (sisterhood) was identified as a key element; in Hungary, the self remained in the center. Second, this study provides an extended

definition of female empowerment rooted in culture. Third, emotions, which are culturally dependent, appear to reflect the positive effect of femvertising. Mexican women admitted that femvertising has a positive effect on them whereas Hungarian interviewees answered that others are more affected by femvertising than they are. Thus, female empowerment advertising, or femvertising, which aims to represent diversity in advertisements, might still use stereotypes that are associated mainly with men, thereby raising several different biases, especially in countries in which gender equality has not yet reached the highest degree.

Literature review

Femvertising as a part of popular feminism

The concepts of feminism and female empowerment have become more popular in North America and Europe. This phenomenon, named "popular feminism" by Sarah Banet-Weiser (2018), refers to behaviors and situations related to feminism that are open to the general public, such as organized marches, hashtag activism, and commodities. Most issues advocated by popular feminism are not novel. They include questioning the regulation of the female body, the commodification and hypersexualization of women, inequality in the workplace, and individual self-esteem asymmetry based on gender. Popular feminism is not a recent phenomenon, so it is important to talk about how prominent it is today and how female empowerment first appeared in advertising.

This study argues that the second wave of feminism marked the beginning of women's empowerment in advertising as it was used to replace the passive portrayal of women with more sophisticated representations (Pauline Maclaran 2015). During the third wave of feminism, empowerment was linked more to sexual expressiveness and purchasing power (Pauline Maclaran 2012). The newest wave of feminism, the fourth wave, began to flourish with the rise of the digital era; it is characterized by the adoption of several communication sources in social media (Prudence Chamberlain 2017). Consequently, the rise of diversity equity and inclusion social movements, such as #MeToo and #BlackLivesMatter, which are linked to feminist ideologies, emerged. This evolved ideology subsequently influenced advertising, and femvertising (female empowerment advertising) was developed (Varghese and Kumar 2022). Brands can use female empowerment by breaking traditional gender stereotypes, talking about body-image issues and women-related taboo topics providing help to overcome negative "self-talk" (Champlin et al. 2019). Femvertising can be seen as an example of popular feminism, including its philosophies, content, and criticism. Femvertising is also present and used more and more in social media, such as by influencers—a phenomenon that can be called "femluencing" (Sharma and Bumb 2022).

On the other hand, femvertising has been criticized as "faux feminism" (Sobande 2019) or a new form of CSR-washing (i.e., fempower-washing or femwashing) in the context of gender equality (Yvette Sterbenk, Sara Champlin, Kasey Windels and Summer Shelton 2022). According to research by Hainneville, Guèvremont, and Robinot (2023), consumers' minds coexist with the ideas of femwashing and femvertising. Transparency, consistency, identification, diversity, respect, and challenging stereotypes are characteristics of authentic femvertising, whereas femwashing uses postfeminist discourses that

disempower rather than empower women (Kasey Windels, Champlin Sara, Shelton Summer, Sterbenk Yvette and Poteet Maddison 2020).

Based on the work by Ana Marina Lima and Beatriz Casais (2021), consumers condemn corporations that adopt a femvertising strategy that is full of hypocrisy and exploitation to promote items if authenticity—brand cause fit does not exist. Although femvertising may achieve certain aims related to diversity and equality, in many cases, the visual themes bear many similarities to campaigns characterized by traditional objectification (Couture Bue, C Amelia and Kristen Harrison 2019). The narratives continue to replicate the essential relationship between femininity and beauty, although beauty is sometimes portrayed in unexpected ways as guided by the local culture. It is no longer merely a set model that women must adhere to; "feeling attractive" is rather a personal endeavor that can be achieved through consumption. As a result, although ideas have shifted, the links supporting the notion of women's devotion to beauty endure (Banet-Weiser 2018; Varghese and Kumar 2022).

In conclusion, despite the criticism, when viewed from a cultural standpoint, femvertising remains an effective empowering brand strategy. These empowering benefits are summarized in the next section.

Empowering effects of femvertising

According to social cognitive theory, people learn from social experiences, including media experiences, by identifying with other individuals, observing such models, processing their behavior, and later imitating such behavior—most often in a way that society considers gender appropriate (Neema Varghese and Navin Kumar 2020). Advertising has been used to persuade consumers' purchase consumption while they seek personal transformation and the improvement of their selves (Daniel Belanche, Flavián Carlos and Pérez-Rueda Alfredo 2020; Kim Jooyoung 2021). In the case of femvertising, its impact on the individual and society is based on its empowering element and its avoidance of stereotypes (Åkestam, Rosengren, and Dahlen 2017; Kapoor and Munjal 2019).

The term "empowerment" has been applied to a variety of politicized issues, including social movements (Jon M. Jon M Corbett and C Peter Keller 2005), such as gender initiatives and the feminist movement (Maclaran 2012) and adult education in Latin America (Paulo Freire 1970). Empowerment has been relevant to feminist groups since the late 1970s. Most definitions of the term are similar to the definition offered by Ayesha Aziz, Meenaz Shams, and Kausar S. Khan: female empowerment is "the authority to exercise one's free will and decision-making, especially concerning marriage, education, work, and life of children and family" (Aziz Ayesha, Meenaz Shams and Kausar S Khan 2011, 315). The different aspects of female empowerment include decision-making, control over income, freedom of mobility, self-esteem (Shireen J Jejeebhoy 2002; Mahmud Simeen, Nirali M Shah and Stan Becker 2012), time management, and leadership in the community (Knudsen and Wærness 2008; Alkire et al. 2013; Hazel Jean L Malapit and Agnes R Quisumbing 2015).

Although individual empowerment is important, there should be also a collaborative process at the collective level. Through societal transformation, individual freedom should assist others in achieving their own liberation (Bell Hooks 2000; Paulo Freire 1993).

Exposure to media and advertising can also be perceived as a means of inspiration and education about female empowerment (Mahmud, Shah, and Becker 2012), as empowerment principles consist of the "use of freeing educational experiences, by encouraging and creating empowering situations, and by keeping the dialogic process permanently alive" (Freire 1993, 12). Empowerment, in conjunction with other components of social justice (e.g., liberation, equal access), is required to assist individuals and communities in addressing the larger socioeconomic causes of oppression and poor health. As a result, empowerment education requires people to develop critical thinking about their ability to impact their personal and social worlds (Freire 1993). In line with this, feminist movements have fought for female empowerment, rights, and roles in society as well as the end of social marginalization of women (Maclaran 2015), which is now reflected and advocated by femvertising (Åkestam, Rosengren, and Dahlen 2017).

Literature suggests that messages about female empowerment are positively accepted by consumers (Samer Elhajjar 2022; Teng et al. 2021) and that femvertising can truly empower women (Champlin et al. 2019). Varghese and Kumar (2020) found that femvertising helped improve adolescents' self-esteem. Victoria E Drake (2017) concluded that femvertising was more powerful than non-femvertising advertising, especially due to its ability to evoke emotions and feelings (Kapoor and Munjal 2019).

The other main component of femvertising, besides female empowerment, is the avoidance of gender stereotypes (Kapoor and Munjal 2019). Gender stereotypes do not always have a negative effect on the individual and society as they can frequently serve to simplify interactions. However, they can also lead to oversimplification. The usage of gender stereotypes in advertising can be also problematic by bringing forth judgments and expectations, thereby restricting opportunities for women (Martin Eisend 2010; Ulrich R Orth and Denisa Holancova 2004) by showing them mainly as mothers caring for children and performing housework, such as cleaning and cooking food for their husbands (Knoll, Eisend, and Steinhagen 2011). Eisend (2010) stated that, rather than attempting to change societal norms, marketers appear to respond to gender-related shifts in society by using existing values to sell their brands. Although there are some shifts in advertising in favor of women and other "minorities", they are more often the responses of the brands to allegations from vulnerable groups rather than self-motivated changes in sexist/racist ideologies (Banet-Weiser 2012).

Attitude toward femvertising

Several factors can influence women's attitudes toward femvertising. Attitude can be influenced by demographic variables, including age, income, education, and marital status (Susan DeYoung and F. G Crane 1992), attitudes regarding female autonomy, and the perceived offensiveness of the portrayal of women in advertisements (John Ford and Michael S Latour 1996). However, recent research has demonstrated that educational level and age do not affect attitudes toward femvertising (Elhajjar 2022). Women who seem highly receptive to femvertising are more likely to be supporters of women's rights and be self-identifying feminists (Sternadori Miglena and Alan Abitbol 2019). Furthermore, consumer reactions to advertising are influenced by the fact that, although consumers are aware of the persuasive agendas of advertising or media sources, they believe that others are more affected by these agendas (Albert C Gunther and J Douglas Storey 2003).

Michael Harker, Debra Harker and Stuart Svensen (2005) suggested that the relationship between these elements is complex and that cultural differences shape attitudes. Gender stereotypes in advertising are common across the globe (Prokopis K Theodoridis, Antigone G Kyrousi, Athina Y Zotou and George G Panigyrakis 2013), as brands and companies are becoming increasingly global. However, gender-stereotyping practices are still bound culturally (Durriya H. Z. Durriya HZ Khairullah and Zahid Y Khairullah 2009). Therefore, to better understand the attitude of consumers (Abitbol and Sternadori 2020; Varghese and Kumar 2022), the cultural aspects and differences between Mexico and Hungary are discussed in the next section.

Cross-cultural comparison of Mexico and Hungary

Mexico and Hungary represent lower-gender-equality countries in Latin America and Eastern Europe in this study, with the goal of understanding the concept of femvertising based on cultural responses in a cross-cultural study for countries that have received little attention in previous research.

Mexican culture faces class and race polemics that began during Spanish colonization. Classes were categorized in a hierarchical system of racial categories called castes: Spanish-born people were in the highest caste, having most rights, while indigenous people were in the lowest castes (Carl W Jones 2019). Later, races began to mix, creating a new Mexican-born group named "mestizo," which represents 62% of the current Mexican population (Statista 2016). Three primary ideologies shape the Mexican gender system: gender stereotypes, androcentrism, and heterosexism (Luis Ortiz-Hernández and José Arturo Granados-Cosme 2006). Inequality between the genders is seen in politics, the economy, health, and education. Because gender inequality is still normal in Mexico, psychological barriers limit individuals' choices and prevent them from taking advantage of the available possibilities. These impediments to human, economic, and social progress can be traced back to the social structures and cultural norms that support them (Anna-Emilia Hietanen and Susan Pick 2015). Through participation in non-governmental organizations and urban popular movements, women have increased their influence in the policymaking process. The most commonly accepted approach for Mexican women to carry out their duties and accomplish their objectives, as well as to improve their status and that of all women in Mexican society, is undoubtedly building alliances and achieving a "critical mass" (Victoria E Rodríguez 2019).

In advertising and the media, the concept of lighter skin superiority still persists today. Advertising reinforces gender stereotypes in a traditional role setting, where women are not viewed as equal to men (Marta Mensa and Verónica Bittner 2020). The most commonly used female stereotypes are related to household cleaning, cosmetics, personal hygiene, and food (Instituto Federal de Telecomunicaciones 2019). In recent years, some brands have become aware of changing gender roles in society and have relayed messages promoting gender equality (e.g., the #HazTuParte campaign by Cloralex), while others have been criticized for tall, skinny, white models (e.g., the #SoyTotalmentePalacio campaign of El Palacio de Hierro).

Moving on to Hungary, over the last two decades, Hungarian society has seen significant changes due to the shift from a post-totalitarian and post-communist state to a democratic one (Mark R Thompson 2002). Such movement meant starting at gender

equality in the socialist system, which was limited to women and men participating equally in the labor force, and shifting to a market economy, in which competitiveness was a prominent notion. In the context of business, competition among women and competitive women are seen more negatively than competition among men (Márta Fülöp and Mihály Berkics 2015). Hungarian politics is currently seen as being more traditional and conservative than that of Western nations as it places a strong emphasis on the value of families and childbearing as well as the traditional roles of men and women (Éva Fodor 2022). In connection with this, at the level of attitudes, the rather traditional gender roles are considered ideal. Inequalities are also characteristic of men's and women's social involvement, such as in relation to education, paid work, and time management (Olga Tóth 2007). In addition, the level of employment among women is very low compared to Western countries, especially for those of childbearing age and those in families raising children under the age of three, which affects the gender roles within the family, as well as the financial situation of the families (Zsuzsanna Makay 2018).

Hungarian women are underrepresented in the media (Gábor Kovács, Petra Aczél and Tamás Bokor 2021). Ágnes Hofmeister-Tóth and Erzsébet Malota (1999) distinguished the following women stereotypes in Hungary: a woman as a symbol of beauty, a woman as a sex symbol, an interesting girl in her 20s, an average housewife, a grandmother, a careerist, or a masculine woman. Women are mainly addressed in the product categories of hygiene, beauty care, housing, clothing, cooking, and food.

In conclusion, a comparison between Mexico and Hungary shows substantially different patterns due to their cultural, economic, and social disparities. However, the comparison of these two nations, which, in some ways, reflects their respective areas of Latin America and Eastern Europe, offers intriguing, novel, and unexpected outcomes.

Methodology

Semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with predetermined questions were used for this study, as interviews provide in-depth information about participants' experiences and opinions on a particular topic (Daniel W Turner 2010). As previously stated, Mexico and Hungary were chosen based on the lack of research data from Latin America and Eastern Europe. These two countries were selected because there are few comparative femvertising studies between geographical regions, particularly for nations with low gender equality indices and contrasting regional positions, such as Mexico and Hungary. Economic participation, educational attainment, health accessibility, and political empowerment were also considered while selecting the countries (Global Gender Gap Report 2022; Research Center 2020; Statista 2020).

Sample selection

Based on the work of Anthony J Onwuegbuzie and Kathleen M.T Collins (2007), the sample selection was conducted in three steps. First, different associations of women in Mexico and Hungary were contacted, such as women entrepreneurs, women running clubs, and other Facebook groups of runners and mothers. All women who met the requirements were asked to voluntarily participate.

The current study aimed to collect a sample of women who exhibited the majority of the factors defined by female empowerment in order to learn about their attitude, opinions toward femvertising, and various individual relationships and interactions as they are a critical part of the target group for many businesses dealing with femvertising in different cultural settings (Sterbenk et al. 2022). In addition, the explicit goal of the sample demographic selection was to fit the theoretical concepts under study (David Silverman 2021). Thus, based on the criteria, which assumed higher social role empowerment, a narrow group of adult women were chosen from Mexico and Hungary to examine the cultural influences related to empowerment and femvertising. Also important is the presupposition that women who have all the factors desired by many (i.e., family, work, me-time) (Aziz, Shah, and Khan 2011; Jejeebhoy 2002; Mahmud, Shah, and Becker 2012) are the ones who are the most empowered. The study also used the framework of Mahmud, Shah, and Becker (2012), which required that the women be in the labor force, between the ages of 30 and 50, and in a committed relationship with at least one child. Thus, different variables of female empowerment—including decision-making, control over income, and freedom of mobility—could also be investigated within this relationship. Furthermore, the me-time that exists through regular sporting activity (Crystal N Steltenpohl, Shuster Michael, Peist Eric, Pham Aber and A Mikels Joseph 2019) was also an entry criterion, which presupposes a more determined, purposeful personality.

Fifteen women in Mexico and 14 women in Hungary were willing to participate. For the last step, to identify a set of women who best fulfilled the sample requirements, individuals were asked to answer a screening questionnaire. Based on the recommendation of Costas S Constantinou, Maria Georgiou and Maria Perdikogianni (2017), with an initial sample of 10 interviews, the final sample size from Mexico consisted of 10 women, mainly from Monterrey, and the sample size from Hungary comprised 10 women, mainly from Budapest.

Data collection

For the interview process, the advice of Turner (2010) was followed The interviews were conducted in the autumn of 2019. Two pilot interviews were conducted totest the quality of the interview protocol and to identify potential researcher bias (Ronald J Chenail 2011). A consent form and a confidential information form were provided. A semi-structured interview guide was used based on the research question, investigating the cultural factors of femvertising that drive female empowerment in two contrasting countries.. A projective technique was used to measure the attitudes toward femvertising. Projective techniques enable researchers to understand what people think and feel about a specific matter (Ross B Steinman 2009). To accurately measure women's attitudes toward femvertising, as recommended by Elika Kordrostami and Melika Kordrostami (2020), an industry should be chosen that is gender-neutral (Nathalie Koivula 2001). Accordingly, the sports industry was selected, which is one of the most researched sectors in the related literature (Alan Abitbol and Miglena Sternadori 2019; Miglena and Abitbol 2019; Åkestam, Rosengren, and Dahlen 2017). Within this industry, a 90-second femvertising type of advertisement, Nike #Dream Crazier (Nike News N.D 2019), was used for the interviews in Mexico and Hungary.

After watching the advertisement, the interviewees were asked what they thought about the advertisement, whether they related to the main characters, and what they felt about the females portrayed in the advertisement in general. The interviews were conducted in the local language and lasted between 40 minutes and 1 hour and 30 minutes.

Data analysis

The interviews were analyzed using NVivo12 Plus Software to keep the data as grounded as possible to the context; therefore, the local languages for data analysis were retained in the earlier stages. Then, as the data progressed conceptually and findings were observed and recorded, the English language was used. Based on Susan Spiggle's (1994) work, first deductive and then inductive coding were applied for the thematic content analysis. The deductive coding included seeking previously established themes from the literature, including main themes such as the definition of female empowerment, empowering effects of femvertising, and attitude toward femvertising. Other codes also emerged for each category at different depth levels from the inductive coding as outlined by Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin (1998). Prominent inductive codes along the main categories were as follows: female empowerment (life purpose of the individual—free decision-making, family, work; adaptive capacity; support of society), empowering effects of femvertising (empowering and non-empowering factors; influence on feelings and behavior), and attitude toward femvertising (positive and negative; relation to reality; stereotypes—female and male roles).

The content analysis was performed in several different stages. To ensure coding consistency, double expert coding and a coding manual based on the work of Robert Philip Weber (1990) were used, which consisted of category names, definitions, rules, and examples for coding. The process started with coding the first three interviews to develop and validate the coding scheme at the beginning of the process. The coders continuously negotiated the scheme, followed by the coding of the remaining seven interviews in both countries. The relationship between the existing and new codes was then discussed. Finally, the categories and the relationships between the categories were identified and analyzed.

Results

The two main topics are discussed in the following order: (1) the empowering effects of femvertising and (2) attitudes toward femvertising. Similarities and differences between Mexico and Hungary are highlighted.

Empowering effects of femvertising

To understand the empowering effects of femvertising, participants in Mexico and Hungary were first asked what female empowerment meant to them. In general, the results of the interviews in both countries regarding the core meaning of female empowerment were related to the exercise of one's free will and decision-making in different

fields of their lives and not being at a disadvantage simply because of being female. By exercising their right to make their own decisions, women are able to focus more on themselves, particularly their health; they are able to actively pursue their goals themselves, such as doing something meaningful that contributes to a high quality of life:

> Empowerment means having the freedom to decide in all aspects of your life, which is to say, you feel capable, and you use this capacity to achieve your goals. [Rosa, Mexico]

> For me, empowerment means that women feel safe and confident in the decisions they make on their own. [Monica, Mexico]

> Being empowered means when you find your purpose and pursue it. And you align everything to it, or try to organize your whole life to be able to fulfill your dreams. At that moment you feel that you can do everything, right? In other words, it makes you feel empowered having the certainty in which you can decide to stop doing any of the facets. [Raquel, Mexico]

> Women empowerment means to me that women would not be at a disadvantage simply because they are female. [Vera, Hungary]

> A woman should be able to decide on her time, for instance on how much to work, which would let her do other things and realize herself. Although women are willing to do all things at the same time until the very last moment, this way they will not go crazy by having one more shift (meaning the family) before and after eight hours of work. [Emma, Hungary]

Interestingly, interviewees did not mention all of the aspects of female empowerment defined by the previous literature and, for them, female empowerment does not necessarily mean having all these factors. Decision-making and self-esteem were highlighted; time management, leadership in the community, and women's ability to control income were only partially covered. However, the freedom of mobility of women nowadays seems not as relevant in Mexico and Hungary, as it was not even mentioned by the interviewees. According to the interviewees, empowerment can take several forms, such as having a career or staying at home as a homemaker:

> Even if that decision is to stay at home, you can feel empowered only for your own will. You can decide to be a housewife. I feel very proud of those women because their dreams come true. Everyone does her own thing and has her very strong weapon, which can be freedom, tasty food, economic power, or maybe her own business. These are all things that they do by themselves, and I really admire them. [Marisol, Mexico]

> Different types of women have different types of empowerment—some have one particular important thing in her life, while others have another. She fulfills her life and can realize her childhood dream. For me, being empowered means that I also realize myself in addition to my career and family. [Alina, Hungary]

> For me, female empowerment does not mean material goods and a career. My family and my chosen partner are the types . . . who value it as a success if I'm able to create harmony. [Evelin, Hungary]

The main difference between the results in Mexico and Hungary was that Mexican women underscored the importance of sorority, helping each other, and taking part in leadership positions to build alliances and achieve a critical mass. However, Hungarian women did not emphasize these community aspects; rather, they mainly explained the self and

described the self as an individual person. The difference can be seen in the following quotes:

> Empowerment means helping other women to believe that they can achieve more. It is to create self-confidence for yourself and other women. You can do everything you want. I trust you, and I am going to be there for you to help you. [Ana, Mexico]

> I don't see myself as being any different from other women. I will always assist other women if they need my help. [Marisol, Mexico]

> I visualize an empowered woman strong and as someone who is very purposeful and knows what she wants from life, in private life and at work, and in the field of leisure. [Vivien, Hungary]

> I think a woman should not be excluded from the life of society—that is, from work, sports, politics—like in the past. She should be treated as equal, such as by receiving the same salary as men. [Barbara, Hungary]

Interviewees in both countries agreed that femvertising in general might have a positive effect on many aspects of life and empower them. However, the difference between the two countries revealed that, whereas Mexican interviewees had a more positive attitude toward femvertising and highlighted that femvertising promotes gender equality, Hungarian women declared that they are not directly affected by this type of advertisement and that it only affects other women:

> This type of advertising is telling us that we are the same. No matter if you are a woman or a man, we are all the same and we all have the same potential to achieve our goals. [Linda, Mexico]

> I would never believe that brands could empower me this way, so I don't think that would help me. Or that it would affect me. Maybe for other women it would work. [Vivien, Hungary]

> I would not think that brands' advertisements can influence or help my empowerment. But I think it can help other women. [Evelin, Hungary]

Attitude toward femvertising

The attitudes toward femvertising were examined by watching Nike's "Dream Crazier" advertisement. The results reveal that femvertising can empower women in both cultures as it breaks traditional stereotypes and discrimination and encourages women to make a difference by showing an example of challenging social expectations:

> There is no doubt I want to be like the women shown in the advertisement. I want to be seen as someone who can achieve all kinds of goals in life. [Monica, Mexico]

> Nike wants to get rid of gender stereotypes. [Raquel, Mexico]

> This is our challenge in society. Women empowerment and gender equality should be something that we already have. [Rosa, Mexico]

> This advertisement is probably for everyone, and it is about how to challenge social expectations. [Evelin, Hungary]

> Real and true roles are shown. I feel that these types of fighting and empowered women are needed. I feel close to them. [Alina, Hungary]

Although femvertising intends to break traditional gender stereotypes and communicate body image concerns, the topic of faux feminism also arose in the interviews. Instead of its attribute of promoting gender equality, women in both countries in many cases reacted unfavorably to femvertising, as they believed that it did not demonstrate awareness of true feminist ideas because stereotypes were still present. The interviewees declared that femvertising still uses stereotypes, although not traditional ones, such as being a professional sportswoman or showing roles that are associated mainly with men. While watching these characters, women felt that, in order to be successful, they might need to behave like men, including emotional expressions and fighting, although this is not the goal of women empowerment:

> I would like to find a brand that represents me, not only in my role as an athlete but in my role as a mom and as an entrepreneur. [Ana, Mexico]

> This is not me. I am an amateur. I have not seen a brand that shows a mom doing sport with their children. [Paola, Mexico]

> It portrays women in such a way that you can easily identify this advertisement for male roles, as if it was made for women only, but featuring men. That women can do the same things as men... They behave the same, experience the same feelings, express their anger in the same way. They do everything for success in the same way, they struggle in the same way. [Vivien, Hungary]

> It shows roles that are usually played by men and, here, they are played by women. It suggests that women who are becoming similar to men can succeed. However, the goal should not be for women to resemble and become men, but to be able excel as women in all areas and situations. However, this is practically non-existent at the moment. [Vera, Hungary]

Discussion

The current study explored the cultural factors of femvertising that drive female empowerment in two contrasting countries. Based on the results, femvertising helps define the differing meanings of empowerment, as it was found to be culturally bound. As such, a critical definition is offered that extends the value of culture in this concept of empowerment. Accordingly, the current study proposes an extended definition first produced by Aziz, Shah, and Khan (2011) for female empowerment: Female empowerment is culturally bounded, and one's perception and experience of it vary depending on each individual's attitude. It may also include free decision-making, control over income, freedom of mobility, self-esteem, time management, and leadership in the community, including sorority.

First, interviewees in each country defined female empowerment through particular variables that influence perceptions. Some key variables were found to be culturally bound, and women did not mention all aspects of female empowerment defined by the literature (e.g., Jejeebhoy 2002; Mahmud, Shah, and Becker 2012; Malapit and Quisumbing 2015). In Mexico, the significance of sorority proved to be important (Rodríguez 2019), probably as a counterbalance to the otherwise dominant androcentrism (Ortiz-Hernández and Arturo Granados-Cosme 2006). The

findings are in line with the view of Freire (1993), who emphasized that there should be a collaborative process at the collective level of empowerment as well. In Hungary, the self was placed at the center of empowerment, presumably due to the determinative influence of the individualistic approach of the West after Hungary's transition from a post-totalitarian and post-communist state (Fülöp and Berkics 2015). Second, emphasizing how femvertising empowers women, the possible effects are also culturally dependent. Although femvertising ads seemed to empower women in both nations due to their ability to elicit emotions and feelings (Drake 2017; Kapoor and Munjal 2019), the interviewees perceived the advertisements differently according to particular cultural dimensions. Women from Mexico admitted that femvertising had positive effects on them, most probably welcoming the messages as support for women to increase their influence and fight back against the traditional Mexican gender system (Ortiz-Hernández and Arturo Granados-Cosme 2006); meanwhile, interviewees from Hungary reacted more passively, stating that others are more affected by femvertising (Gunther and Douglas Storey 2003), thereby accepting Hungarian leaders' more conservative view on the traditional roles of men and women (Fodor 2022). Finally, the findings regarding interviewees' attitude toward femvertising were counterintuitive. Contrary to what salient literature asserts (Champlin et al. 2019; Elhajjar 2022; Teng et al. 2021), femvertising might not always represent diversity and use appropriate gender portrayal and stereotypes to empower women. In the sports-related, award-winning femvertising advertisement by Nike that was used in this study, the stereotypes and roles shown are associated mainly with men, thereby raising several biases among the Mexican and Hungarian respondents. This finding raises the question of whether empowered women need to behave like men. Alternatively, empowered women should pursue gender equality first, in line with the findings of Chung-Kupe Jennifer Chung-Kue Jennifer Hsu (2018), who stated that women should be more present in traditionally male-dominated areas, such as sports participation. Thus, in countries with low gender equality, it is necessary to establish a stronger link between femvertising and women's culturally bound empowerment.

Among the limitations of this study, the sample includes only a small and specific part of the populations from Mexico and Hungary. The attitudes of women may vary across different regions of these countries, amongst different demographic variables (DeYoung and Crane 1992), and the perceived offensiveness of women's portrayal in advertisements (Ford and Latour 1996). Moreover, all attitudinal measures were self-reported, which might have led to distortions.

Larger samples and other social groups, preferably involving other countries from the region, should be investigated in the future. The focus could be on further understanding femvertising and its effects on women, especially on consumer behavior (e.g., purchase intention). The representation and effects of the lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender/queer community and of the black and minority ethnic populations on femvertising should also be investigated.

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