

# Persuasion, Symbols, and Alfajores: A Qualitative Study of Unique Advertising Approaches in Argentina

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## ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to gain a deeper understanding of how symbols are used in Argentine advertising and how Argentines interpret these symbols. Expanding on past research, the researcher took a deeper look at how identification is achieved with the use of symbols. The researcher investigated a particularly popular brand of dessert products called Havanna alfajores. Because of the immense popularity of the Havanna organization, the researcher interviewed 300 Argentine participants about their experiences with Havanna alfajores. Employing Strauss & Corbin's (1990) data analysis technique, the constant comparative analysis, the researcher engaged in a structured and rigorous process of combing the messages from the interviews into five themes that addressed the research questions. The five themes that emerged from the data analysis were: the Sense of Trust that Havanna provides, Havanna facilitates relationships, Havanna is Symbol of Escape, Havanna is the Taste of Argentina, and Havanna Packaging Represents a Gift. The results of this study indicate that Havanna alfajores' marketing effectively established identification with consumers to the point that they felt a relationship with the company and product. These findings extend Gennaro's (2007) contention that the majority of meanings humans attach to symbols are not innate. Humans learn meaning as they grow into adulthood while the meanings are passed along members of a culture to younger generations.

## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the United States' ethnically diverse population has rapidly increased to represent 30% of the entire population (Rose, 2002). Because there is no reason to believe that the number of people immigrating to the U.S. will do anything but grow, the ethnic market is increasingly important to public relations and advertising agencies (Rose). As the United States becomes more diverse, businesses are expanding and thriving to reach out to new cultures by either campaigning to a new target audience in the U.S. or by going global (Thomas, 2007). The problem organizations may run into is that while intercultural communication is becoming more important in the workforce, intercultural business communication literature has not been growing and is hard to find (Thomas).

Due to the lack of literature on intercultural business communication (Thomas, 2007), the researcher performed a study that investigates the unique advertising approaches for Argentine products. Although studies involving the media in Argentina have been done, little to no research has investigated how symbols are used in the media and how the Argentine public identifies with the media through these symbols. Argentina is an important country to research for this study because Argentina one of the largest media markets in South America (BBC News, 2007)

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the influence of culture and advertising in Argentina, the researcher interviewed local Argentines with questions that pertain to the reason behind their support of the Havanna Company. According to the Havanna website (2008), the Havanna Company was started in Mar del Plata, Argentina in 1947. Havanna is most famous for its recipe of the Havanna alfajor. An alfajor is a popular Argentine desert that consists of two cookie-like biscuits filled with dulce de leche. Over time, Havanna expanded outside of Mar del Plata and is now considered an important symbol of Argentina (Havanna, 2008). The researcher examined message related behaviors by investigating the type of cultural related content being communicated from Havanna to the Argentine public through the use of symbols. Havanna plays an important role in this research project because one of the goals of the researcher is to uncover why Havanna is so important to Argentines. While discovering the importance of Havanna, the researcher hopes to understand Argentine cultural values and how local Argentines identify with Havanna through symbols.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In this literature review the researcher will examine what type of research has been done in the past that covers communicating identification through symbols in Argentina. The researcher will begin by identifying the different types of identification and explain why humans tend to identify themselves with others. Secondly, symbols will be defined and the way in which we use symbols will be inspected. The use of symbols and identification will be explored a little more while understanding the importance of cross cultural communication and how effective it can be in the world of advertising. Ultimately, the researcher will inspect the culture of Argentina and will reveal the importance studying this country.

### *Identification*

Before narrowing in on identification, it is important to note that identity can fall into three types of categories (Rorty, 1976). The first type is the master identity, which is aspects of a person that are concrete such as gender, age, and race. Interactional identity refers to the role a person takes on while communicating with certain people. The third type of identity is personal or individual identity. Personal identity tends to be unique towards the individual...and is the type of identity that is most questioned by us, and others (Rorty, 1976). According to Sarbin and Scheibe (1983), our personal identity remains the most intriguing because it gives us an "individual sense of self that we have all our lives, despite enormous changes in other identity through time or space. In this sense our individual identity is one aspect of our identity that transcends, connects, and gives substance to our multiple and ever changing social identities" (p. 289).

According to Burke (1989), before identification can occur there must be divergence because "if men were not apart from one another, there would be no need for the rhetorician to proclaim their unity" (p. 181-182). Because there are differences among people, humans have a tendency to find a common ground with others. The reason why people can understand each other is due to discovering this type of common ground or some kind of overlap in a person's experiences, language, or goals (Burke, 1950).

Eun-Ju (2007) argues that people tend to view others in a positive light when they can identify themselves with that particular individual. When two people can find a common ground with each other, there is a better understanding between the two and the individuals are more likely to agree with one another. Eun-Ju is not saying that completely different people cannot get along or have positive relationships, but the chances of clarity and positivity occurring are stronger in relationships that share strong identification.

### *Symbols*

Symbols are defined by Wood (2004) as "arbitrary, ambiguous, and abstract representation of other phenomena" (p. 23). Burke (1989) argues that "man is the symbol using animal" (p. 3) and that we depend on symbols throughout our everyday lives. Meadow (2006) claims that the way humans depend on symbols is through communication. In every message a person sends to another, the message is communicated through a series of symbols. Burke (1989) believes that symbols are used to create order in situations that are complex and clarify things that may have remained unclarified. Symbols "provide a terminology of thoughts, actions, emotions, and attitudes for codifying a pattern of experience" (Burke, 1989, p. 110). In some cases, symbols are used to send manipulative messages (Burke, 1989).

Through the use of symbols humans are able to achieve identification (Fraim, 2003). Fraim argues that symbols are used when both creating identification and communicating identification to others. However, Meadow (2006) argues that in order for symbols to obtain their intended meaning, there must be a common base of understanding. Without this common base of understanding, the symbolic meaning may be altered or lost.

According to Wood (2004), losing a sense of the symbolic meaning is common in communication between cultures due to different cultures attaching different meanings to different symbols. Gennaro (2007) argues that symbolic meanings differ because the majority of these meanings are not innate and are learned as we grow into adults. Meanings for words, pictures, and other symbols are passed down from members of a culture to younger generations. According to Gennaro, as long as cultural differences exist, so will a difference in symbolic meanings.

### *Intercultural Communication*

Although intercultural communication is not a new area of study in the United States, the importance of it has dramatically increased over the years because more Asian, Indians, Latinas and Latinos have immigrated to the United States (Wood, 2004). Intercultural communication is particularly important to advertising because past research shows that effective advertising begins by identifying with the customer's needs (Czerniawski & Maloney, 1999). In order to understand the customer's needs, one needs to be able to identify with the customer (Czerniawski & Maloney). Because different cultures attach different meanings to different symbols (Wood, 2004) and people create their identity through symbols (Fraim, 2003), companies must learn to understand the appropriate symbols of

the particular target audience when advertising (de Mooij, 2005). Although there have been studies done in intercultural communication concerning the differences between nonverbal communication and language barriers (de Mooij, 2005), little research has been done on effective advertising in different cultures. Today organizations in all types of fields are moving in an intercultural direction while research and literature are not keeping pace with this change (Thomas, 2007). According to Tuleja (2008), it may be easy to obtain information on how businesses operate in other countries but it is difficult to find cultural information for understanding why foreign businesses operate in a particular manner.

While ethnic diversity is increasing in the United States, it is especially important for the public relations and advertising industry to take note of the Latino/Latina culture (Rose, 2002). Latinos/Latinas are considered the largest minority in the United States (Rose) and there is no research that indicates what causes effective advertising in Latino/Latina culture. It would be very beneficial to investigate what is unique about the advertising in a Latino/Latina culture so that one can learn to adapt to the culture's wants and needs. By recognizing a culture's wants and needs one will be able to understand that particular ethnic market better.

### *Argentina*

Argentina is seen as an important country to consider while looking at the Latino/Latina community because Argentina is viewed to be one of South America's leading media markets and has one of the largest Latino/Latina economies (BBC News, 2007). According to an article published by BBC News (2007), Argentina "has well over 150 daily newspapers, hundreds of commercial radio stations, dozens of TV stations and one of the world's highest take-up rates for cable TV" (p. 1). Boczkowski and de Santos (2007) demonstrate that until recent years, Argentina was home to the largest Spanish speaking print paper in the world and has one of the most well known online Spanish speaking news source. Researchers believe that Argentina's media has potential to affect other nations in the near future.

Although studies involving the mass media in Argentina have been done, little to no research has investigated the symbols used in the media and how the Argentine public identifies with the media. Previous studies on Argentina include examining the role television plays in the media (Varela, 2007), determining the content covered in the daily news (Boczkowski & de Santos, 2007), and how rhetoric has been used to promote historical Argentine figures such as Eva Perón (Guevara & Waryas, 2002). Very little research has been done from the view of the consumer, which is especially important when trying to understand the Argentine culture because in order to understand another culture, one must listen to the stories that come from the lives and experiences from a person of the particular culture (Guevara & Waryas).

## **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

Because there is little research done in intercultural communication and advertising while the importance of it increases (Thomas, 2007), the researcher investigated how symbols are used to create identification in Argentina. Argentina was chosen because of its large media influence and its potential to influence other nations (Boczkowski & de Santos, 2007). The researcher chose to investigate how the Argentine population identifies with the Havana Company because of its national popularity.

- RQ 1: What messages are Havana advertisements promoting?
- RQ 2: How do Argentines identify with Havana?

## **METHOD**

The researcher employed qualitative data collection methods. Anderson and Schofield (1987) claim "Qualitative research is directed toward the explanation of social action in order to unpack the jointly held meanings which constitute the reality of that action" (p. 268). Anderson and Schofield's claim can be used to justify the use of qualitative research for this project in that the purpose of this project was to unpack the meanings behind why Argentines identify themselves with Havana. This research project describes observations in terms of words, stories, and experiences. Because Reinard (2001) argues that qualitative research describes observations in non-numerical terms, the qualitative research paradigm was chosen for this study. Given that the purpose of this research was to gain a deeper understanding of how symbols are used in Argentine advertising, qualitative methods were the most appropriate because Wood (2004) claims that qualitative research methods are valuable when we "wish to understand the character of experience" (p. 69).

The qualitative data collection method used in this project was critical incident technique (CIT) interviews. Anderson and Schofield (1987) describe qualitative interviews as "conversations with informants" (p. 330). During this conversation, the interviewer is being instructed on the ways of the interviewee's world (Anderson &

Schofield). In particular, the CIT interview requires interviewees to describe both a positive and negative experience. While interviewees describe their experiences, the interviewer is responsible for asking as many probing questions as possible so that a deeper understanding can be obtained. Karner and Warren (2005) argue that researchers choose interviews as a means of data collection in order to uncover how other people think and feel about a certain situation. Karner and Warren's reasons for choosing interviews for collecting data can be applied to this project in that the researcher wanted to find out how Argentines both think and feel about the Havana Company.

### *Participants*

The researcher interviewed 300 Argentine volunteers including 113 males and 187 females from the ages of 18 to 82. The reason behind the researcher choosing Argentines over the age of 18 as the sample is because the sample should "seek in respondents only the criteria specified in the research questions" (Karner and Warren, 2005, p. 128). Since the research questions for this project involve Argentine consumers, all Argentines, whether male or female, should be a part of the sample. The reason why the researcher chose to interview people who are over the age of 18 is because the age of 18 is when a person is legally considered adult and could make an adult decision on his or her Havana purchase.

### *Measurement*

The researcher collected data through semi-structured interviews. In particular, the researcher used the critical interview technique (CIT) where the researcher asked the interviewee to describe his or her most positive experience with the Havana Company. Depending on the responses, the interviewer asked the participant a series of probing questions. Then the volunteer was asked to describe their most negative experience with Havana and again was followed up with probing questions by the interviewer.

### *Procedures*

The researcher conducted interviews in Buenos Aires, Argentina. The researcher chose to interview people in Buenos Aires because this city is the capital of Argentina and is filled with Havana stores. Karner and Warren (2005) argue that "a common means to finding people to interview involves locating a social setting in which they can be found" (p. 130). For the purpose of this project, Buenos Aires served as an appropriate setting to find people because Argentines, who are familiar with Havana, were the sample.

In order to recruit participants, the researcher asked local Argentines through email or in person to participate in an interview. Interviews were scheduled with participants so that the interview took place during a convenient time and occurred in social and public settings such as at a park, on a bench, or at a coffee shop. All of the interviews were audio taped.

Because it is important to build rapport with the participant (Karner & Warren, 2005), the researcher began the interviews with basic questions so that the interviewee became comfortable. Research has shown that respondents tend to be more reluctant with answering certain questions at the beginning of an interview as opposed to answering them after having a conversation with the interviewer (Karner & Warren). Once rapport was built with the interviewee, the researcher asked the participant to describe his or her most positive experience with Havana. The researcher followed this question up with probing questions depending on the response. After learning about the participants' most positive experience with Havana, the researcher asked the participants to describe their most negative experience that they have had with the company. Again, the researcher followed up with probing questions.

### *Data Analysis*

The data of this project was analyzed using the constant comparative analysis technique. This technique was chosen because the constant comparative analysis gives meaning to the data collected while seeing past the biases that the researcher will inevitably bring to the project (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). After analyzing the data with the constant comparative analysis, small themes that explain the data were produced (Strauss & Corbin). According to Strauss and Corbin, the themes produced by analyzing the data help give meaning to the participants' experiences. According to Karner and Warren (2005), identifying reoccurring themes does not just reveal the stories of individuals' experience, but is also linked to identifying concerns or issues in a particular society. By discovering reoccurring themes in the case of this project, the researcher found the symbols Havana uses to identify with the Argentine public and why Argentines value these particular symbols.

The first step that the researcher took when analyzing the data was re listening to all of the interviews. After becoming familiar with the data set the researcher listened to the data once again and created a list of comments that helped explain the Havana phenomena. The researcher translated the list of comments from Spanish to English. Once a long list of English comments was made, the researcher pulled out similarities between the comments and

will create labels for the comments. When all of the comments were labeled, the researcher categorized the labels. Then, the categories were separated into themes. The ultimate goal was to create 5-7 main themes that helped understand the meaning behind the Havanna phenomena. The final step the researcher took while analyzing the data was explaining the results through the voice of the interviewees so that one can understand the participant's view.

## RESULTS

The interviews resulted in 384 messages that contributed to answering the research questions. The researcher used constant comparative analysis to find similarities among the messages and combined the similar messages into themes, which were further analyzed. Five main themes were developed from the interview responses that pertain to research questions one and two. Table 1 identifies the themes that were developed from the interview responses.

**Table 1.**  
*Themes Regarding How Argentines Identify With and Perceive Messages Sent by Havanna*

Themes
Sense of Trust Havanna provides
Havanna facilitates relationships
Symbol of Escape
Taste of Argentina
Packaging

These themes were created from analyzing the messages from the interviews. These messages derived from the participant's stories and personal experiences with the Havanna Company. The following will address the five core themes by using examples and quotations provided by the participants.

### *Sense of Trust Havanna Provides*

According to many of the participants, Havanna is an old company and through withstanding so many years the company has proven itself to Argentines. Participant 71 explained how important Havana's longevity is to the country by comparing the Havana factory in Mar del Plata to a historical museum. A number of other participants expressed that Havanna's age contributes to its uniqueness and has helped locals develop a sense of trust in the company. Participant 76 explained Havanna's importance by saying "they are more important than other brands because they have a history" while Participant 11 stated "I have trust in Havanna for being here for so long." This trust that Argentines have had in Havanna throughout the years has carried over to not just alfajores, but to all products Havanna sells. Participant 13 supported that for all Havanna products the trust is strong by stating "There are other products also that contribute to the popularity. The important thing is that you know that you can buy whatever you want with trust."

By developing trust through its stability in Argentina, Havanna has created loyal customers. When asked to provide a negative experience in relation with Havanna, a great number of participants refused. A particular example of a person refusing to provide a negative experience can be seen in Participant 28's response while exclaiming, "I love that place too much to say something bad about it to you!" Participant 69 expressed her commitment to Havanna when stating "I cannot say anything bad about this brand; I am loyal."

Along with loyalty, Argentines demonstrate their trust in Havanna by describing the company as "Simply Havanna." The term "Simply Havanna" appeared in numerous interviews, and while the researcher tried to gain a deeper understanding of what it meant to be simply Havanna, she received responses similar to Participant 53's, which stated, "Well, Havanna is just another thing. It is distinct. And it is distinct because it is Havanna." In attempting to explain how Havanna is another thing, Participant 70 compared Havanna to a popular perfume. She justified Havanna's popularity while saying "It is like how some people cannot help but liking a certain perfume compared to others. You don't know what it is about that scent, but it just suits you. Havanna is kind of like my whole family's favorite perfume."

Through strongly believing in and trusting Havanna for being "Simply Havanna" despite its vagueness, Argentines are willing to overlook Havanna's negative aspects. A reoccurring negative theme for Havanna is its price. Although Argentina is a relatively poor country, Havanna remains in business regardless of its high prices. Although participants recognized Havanna's alfajores as being overpriced, a term that the researcher became very familiar with while interviewing was "se vale la pena," which translates to "it is worth the pain." The majority of

participants did not seem fazed by the high priced alfajores and believed that they are worth the high prices. A number of participants even looked at the price in a positive light by explaining that the prices make the alfajores more special. While explaining how the price influences the experience of eating a Havanna alfajor, Participant 38 stated, "It may be expensive, but it is not something you buy on any occasion. Plus, it feels good to buy something a little special every once in a while." Participant 49 demonstrated her trust in the company and dismissed the price while stating, "It is a little expensive, but I don't care because it is so old and I know that I can trust them. You pay for what you get so the price is not that big of an issue."

#### *Havanna Facilitates Relationships*

A strong theme that remained consistent throughout the participants' responses is that of associating Havanna with a relationship of someone special. Food is a very important part to Argentina's culture and people view meals, as a time to spend with loved ones and often last from two to four hours. A large number of participants linked sharing time with loved ones during a meal with Havanna alfajores. Participant 23 demonstrated this strong link between Havanna and sharing a meal when stating "When I think of alfajores from Havanna, I think of when I eat dinner with all of my family. When my whole family comes together to eat dinner, afterwards we eat one Havanna alfajor as a special treat. It is a really nice feeling." Participant 76 went as far as to say that he believed that the reason his mother buys Havanna alfajores is to ensure that he and his brothers will visit her for dinner. An elderly woman, Participant 70, cannot bake as much as she used to due to back pain and invested in Havanna instead of making desert. She stated that "my grandchildren absolutely love them and I let them each have one after I make a family dinner."

Along with spending lengthy meals together to maintain relationships with family, another cultural practice that participants associate Havanna with is sharing a coffee with a friend. Participant 9 described the importance of sharing a coffee with a friend by explaining that sharing a coffee or tea with a friend gives you a chance to care for you relationship and take a break from the busy life. Havanna seems to be automatically associated with this tradition not only because the company provides sweets to eat with coffee, but now alfajores are actually sold in Havanna cafes that serve coffee and tea as well. Participant 61 demonstrated how Havanna has aided her in maintaining her relationship by responding, "I have a really good friend who I meet with once a week to catch up and we meet in the Havana café right around this corner. We catch up over coffee and we always treat ourselves to an alfajor. We usually share it, every once in a while we will get our own."

Another Argentine tradition, which Havanna has become the center of, is gift giving. The act of giving a gift to someone to show that an individual is special is a very strong custom and is directly linked with Havanna alfajores. Before Havanna expanded and was available throughout Argentina, the only place one could buy Havanna alfajores was in Mar del Plata, a popular vacation area on the Atlantic coast. The Havanna gift giving tradition is that when a person travels to Mar del Plata, he or she must bring back boxes of alfajores for his or her family and friends. Out of all of the responses from the participants, the tradition of buying alfajores for family and friends was the most common response. Participant 73 explains how this custom reflects the importance of relationships by saying "More than anything, I enjoy being a part of the tradition. When you buy a box to give to someone else, you are showing that you care and that they deserve something special." Through gift giving, people are able to make others feel important. Person 45 has never been to Mar del Plata with her friends due to having to work during the summers. She was comforted after receiving a box of alfajores from Havanna and stated, "It was nice to know that I was thought of when someone was there." This custom has grown into such a strong tradition that some participants replied that one did not have a choice when it came to buying Havanna Alfajores while on vacation because it is a must. Participant 38 expressed the strength in this tradition while expressing "Even if I do not want to buy an alfajor for myself, I still need to go buy them for my family. It is kind of like an obligation. If you come back from the coast empty handed, someone is going to bother you."

#### *Symbol of Escape*

Although Argentina's economy has improved over the years, the nation still remains a relatively poor country and continues to feel the effects from their economic crisis. Mar del Plata, where Havanna was created, remained a fairly inexpensive travel destination where families were able still to treat themselves to both a vacation and to Havanna alfajores. Participant 44 expressed his belief that Havanna's location has contributed to its popularity by stating "If it was started in Bariloche, where it is more expensive to travel to, they probably would have never been so famous because it is hard for us to travel to the mountains. It has always been much easier for us to travel to the coast." Because of being located in a popular travel destination such as Mar del Plata, Argentines associate Havanna with the opportunity to flee from their hectic and hard life to a vacation. Participant 38 compared Havanna alfajores to a souvenir while saying "They are a good souvenir for creating good memories from when times were rough. We

never had that much money. No one here has ever had that much money. But when we went to the coast it felt like we were royalty.”

Along with being able to physically escape from the rough reality of the crisis by vacationing and visiting Havana, the alfajores offer a manner of escape from reality mentally as well. Many participants claimed that they buy Havana while on vacation because being on vacation is a good reason to splurge and live, what a number of participants claimed to be, the “luxurious” life. Participants argued that it was okay to spend a little more on Havana’s sweets while on vacation because it was a special occasion and not an everyday thing. Participant 32 stated, “It is something I splurge on while on vacation. Why not? I am on vacation! I do not usually buy them here because they are too pricy. They are more for special occasions.”

### *Taste of Argentina*

A number of participants referred to Havana as being something that represents Argentina. Participant 9 described the way Havana reflects the country when bluntly saying, “If you have the likes of an Argentine, you like Havana.” After probing participants to understand why Havana is considered to represent Argentina, the researcher discovered that the answer lied in one of the main ingredients of the alfajor. Whether found in the middle of an alfajor or in a jar on the shelf of the grocery store, Argentines consider dulce de leche to be a key ingredient to Argentina’s culture. It is a sweet condiment that many locals believe originated from Argentina. When trying to compare the importance of dulce de leche to the United States, Participant 66 claimed, “Havana is the best because of its dulce de leche. You have to understand that dulce de leche here in Argentina is like mayonnaise in the United States.” Whether or not the comparison of dulce de leche and mayonnaise was completely accurate, the researcher was able to understand the importance of this ingredient by the effort the participant put into describing it. Participant 55 expressed the importance of dulce de leche to the country while saying “The dulce de leche is very good. And this is important here in Argentina. It is our food!”

Before understanding how the key ingredient of dulce de leche transforms Havana into representing Argentina, participants educated the researcher on how not only does this specific alfajor represent the taste of Argentina, but other types of alfajores represent the tastes of different provinces throughout the country. Participants explained that each province has its own special ingredient that is put into the alfajor to reflect that specific area. When Havana selected dulce de leche as their key ingredient, they selected an ingredient in which the whole country took pride. As a result, the dulce de leche Havana alfajor evolved from being the alfajor that represented Mar del Plata into representing the whole country of Argentina. An explanation of how different regions possess different variations of alfajores can be seen in Participant 27’s response, “If you go north to Salta, they have a certain type of fruit in the middle, in Bariloche they have berries from the forests, and Mar del Plata has dulce de leche. They made the dulce de leche alfajor famous. Now there are many different variations.” Participant 59 summed up Havana being the taste of Argentina by saying, “Each province has their particular alfajor, but the grand alfajor for the country is Havana.”

Because Havana created an alfajor that Argentines believe represent their country, locals take pride in Havana. According to the participants of this study, Havana’s availability is limited to Argentina. As a result, Argentines take pride in having a popular product that is available strictly in their host country. Participant 64 stated “I have family in Spain and they get jealous of me that I can have Havana whenever I want to. I kind of like making them jealous! It is good for our country to have others want to buy things from us because we need the money.” Participant 3 also explained how the availability of Havana creates a sense of pride when saying, “I have lived in a lot of other places, but there are no other Havannas. None is Spain, or France, or where you are from in the United States. So if you want Havana, you come here!” A large number of participants related Havana’s availability to the tradition of buying the little boxes of alfajores as a gift. In the same way Argentines bought alfajores in Mar del Plata when availability was limited to that particular city, foreigners are able to buy alfajores in Argentina and bring them back to their country. Whether this has become a tradition amongst tourists in Argentina or not, the pride in representing their country through taste and tradition was strongly shown throughout the participants’ responses. While Participant 6 simply claimed that, “Alfajores from Havana are a gift from Argentina,” Participant 46 explained “It is kind of like how we buy little boxes when we go to Mar del Plata. But now other countries can buy them no matter what city they are in.”

### *Packaging*

Through the participants’ responses in this study, it became clear that Havana’s packaging has an influence on its consumers. An important trait of Havana’s packaging is the boxes. When speaking of boxes of alfajores, participants referred to them simply as “cajitas,” or “little boxes.” By selling alfajores not only individually, but also in little boxes, the consumer thinks of it resembling more of a gift. Participant 50 summed it up while saying “I love

the little boxes because they resemble a gift,” or Participant 14, “Those little boxes are just perfect to give as gift.” The design of the boxes is also something that stands out to Argentines. A large number of participants described the look of Havanna as being “distinct” or “classic.” Participant 19 stated, “I like the look. I love the colors because they look classic. I don’t know much about the origin of the company, but I can easily pick out its design and colors.” Participant 21 reflected on how the colors make her feel when saying, “It is very bright; the boxes are yellow and remind me of the summer sun while on the coast.”

Along with the little boxes of Havanna’s alfajores having importance, what lies inside them remain significant as well. Havanna’s classic alfajores are wrapped in either a gold or silver wrapper with no glue. This style of wrapper is important to its consumers because they view the alfajores as being fresher and homemade compared to other brands. Participant 57 even described her best experience with Havanna through the wrappers used in packaging. She enjoys smelling the wrappers when she is done eating them because the smell lasts for so long. She even had a wrapper in her purse during the interview and explained the importance of the wrappers while saying “These wrappers show that they are fresh. Others are wrapped in plastic and you do not know how long they have been in there for. But these look like they are handmade and you can tell that they are fresh and a little more natural.” Participant 68 related the wrapper back to the gift-giving theme when saying “The wrapper is something important because it is like a little gift wrapper. It is special to eat.”

The packaging of the Havanna alfajores is so important that various participants described their worst experiences as assuming that other alfajores, whose packaging was similar to Havanna’s, tasted similar to Havanna. The researcher was informed of another brand of alfajor, called El Cafachaz, which is also wrapped in a gold wrapper. A number of bad experiences related to either confusing the brand with Havanna or expecting the same quality out of El Cafachaz simply because of its wrapper. Participant 3 described his worst experience as “Assuming that El Cafachaz tasted like Havanna just because of the wrapper. It was just like a tease!”

## DISCUSSION

Based on the responses given by the research participants, assumptions can be made relating to how Argentines identify with Havanna and what messages Havanna sends to its consumers. This study relates to past research in that symbols are an important factor while understanding the ultimate goal of messages sent between two parties. The following addresses how the results of this study are related to research on the manner of achieving identification as well as encoding symbolic messages.

Gennaro (2007) remains important when understanding the importance of Havanna’s longevity in Argentina. Gennaro believes that the majority of meanings humans attach to symbols are not innate. Humans learn meaning as they grow into adulthood while the meanings are passed along members of a culture to younger generations. The idea that Havanna is an old company is very important to Argentines. Even though many of the participants were not alive when Havanna was originally created, they all knew that it is a very important and old company due to learning about it from people older than they. The symbol of longevity remains important to Argentines because it has been communicated as an old company for years and has proven itself to be a brand that Argentines can trust. Although Havanna may communicate their identity to Argentines as being old and traditional, it is just as important to recognize that the people of Argentina maintain Havanna’s traditional identity by passing it on to further generations in their culture.

Within successfully identifying with the Argentine public, Havanna demonstrates that the company is a part of Argentina’s tradition. Burke (1950) believes that a sense of understanding is achieved through finding a common ground between two parties. Whether this common ground is a language, an experience, or a goal, it creates means for identification to occur. Havanna is able to find a common ground with the people of Argentina through their cultural beliefs and practices. Havanna alfajores demonstrated the shared value of time spent with family and friends over long meals by being present for dessert during a number of these special meals. Havanna expanded their company and created cafés, which allowed for Argentines to carry on their tradition of sharing a coffee with a friend while having a Havanna alfajor. By providing places for Argentines to not only eat an alfajor, but also to have a coffee at the same time, Havanna promotes the Argentine tradition of coffee time. Havanna is also a part of one of Argentina’s strongest traditions, which involves gift giving. When Argentines responded that they directly related Havanna with this tradition, it showed that Havanna values a tradition that overlaps with the people of Argentina. Through sharing these types of traditions and cultural values with Argentines, the people of Argentina achieve identification with the Havanna alfajor.

While it is important to recognize how Argentines achieve identification with Havanna, the messages sent from Havanna in order to communicate its identity remains important as well. The way Havanna sends its messages is through symbols, which supports Meadow’s (2006) theory that every message is communicated through a series of symbols. The challenge in this study is to understand the meaning behind Havanna’s symbols so that one can fully



understand its message. Through the participants' response in this study, the researcher found that the symbols Havanna uses to send their messages to Argentines are Havanna's packaging, the location of Havanna stores, the style of Havanna stores, and Havanna's recipe. By recognizing Burkes (1989) theory that symbols "provide a terminology of thoughts, actions, emotions, and attitudes for codifying a pattern of experience" (p. 110), one can understand that each of Havanna's symbols has a separate and significant meaning.

When examining the symbols in Havanna's packaging, it is important to understand that the symbols are found in both the physical aspects of the packaging and the language used to describe it. Fraim (2003) argues that symbols include both visual representation and language. Symbols are found in Havanna's visual representation by both the boxes and wrappers for Havanna's alfajores. By providing its consumers with boxes of alfajores that are already packaged in bulk, Havanna is encouraging the customer to buy alfajores and bring them outside of the store to share them with their family. The design of the box was described by many participants as a classic design that was perfect for gifts. By designing a package of alfajores that resemble a gift through its decoration and geometric shape, Havanna is sending the message for Argentines to carry on the tradition of buying a box of alfajores as a gift. The gold and silver material that the alfajores are wrapped in also serves as a symbol because they are seen as valuable and precious. This is another symbol of gift giving because the individual alfajores are wrapped, as described by participants, as little gifts and is also sending the message that alfajores make perfect gifts. The language used by Argentines to describe the packaging of Havanna alfajores is symbolic as well. Instead of referring to Havanna's bulk product as "boxes of alfajores," Argentines simply use the term "little boxes" to describe Havanna. The usage of little boxes demonstrated how well Havanna communicates its message of gift giving to Argentines through their packaging. Through coining a term for Havanna's packaging, Argentines demonstrate that Havanna's boxes of alfajores are unique.

Along with the style of packaging, the styles of Havanna's stores are symbolic as well. By evolving from an alfajor factory into a café, Havanna sends the message to Argentines that they care for the Argentine way of living. By creating a space for the people of Argentina to practice their tradition of spending time with friends over a cup of coffee and sweet, Havanna adapts to the needs of its consumers.

The original location of Havanna stores is an important symbol also. By opening their original store in Mar del Plata, which already was a popular vacation destination for Argentines, Havanna sent the message to Argentines that the Havanna alfajor was a luxury to enjoy while vacationing. Havanna could have located itself in other vacation destinations, but the most popular place for Argentines to spend vacation time is in Mar del Plata. The message of Havanna representing a vacation is so strong that even after Havanna expanded and was available throughout the country, the public of Argentina continues to associate the brand of alfajores with Mar del Plata and vacationing.

In the same way that the original location of Havanna symbolizes vacationing, the original recipe of the Havanna alfajor symbolizes the country as a whole. Dulce de leche was already considered the food of Argentina and served as a symbol before Havanna even existed. By choosing a national main ingredient for the Havanna alfajor, Havanna sent the message that the Havanna alfajor doubles as the alfajor of Argentina. Havanna has successfully communicated the message of their company representing Argentina in that today Argentines believe that the taste of a Havanna alfajor is the taste of Argentina.

The responses provided by the participants supported research done on symbolic meaning and achieving identification. On a deeper level, the responses failed to either support or negate research on how Argentines identify themselves to products with the use of symbols because there have been no studies done to test this. Other than examining identification and how symbols are used in sending messages between two parties, there is a lack of literature to compare this study's results to. The responses from the participant provided answers to both research questions. In response to research question 1, Havanna advertisements are promoting the messages that Havanna is a trustworthy organization that cares about the traditions and cultural practices of Argentines. In response to research question 2, Argentines identify with Havanna by including Havanna alfajores into their cultural practices and traditions.

### *Future Research*

The results of this study have provided opportunities for other areas of research. Because there has been little to no research done on the way in which companies use identification and symbols to relate to its consumers in Argentina. More research done on this topic could either confirm this study's results or introduce new findings. The results from this study can also be used for companies who are interested in catering to the Argentine market. Because the United States has a global market that continues to grow, it could be beneficial for companies to better understand the culture and influence that symbols have on such an important Latin American country. The same study could be done using a different Argentine product and brand to determine whether or not these results remain consistent throughout different organizations.

Future research can also use the results of this study to compare how symbols and identification used in the Argentine culture differ and are similar to other countries. By comparing the results of this study to a similar study done with another country, one may find certain symbols that are universal or that contradict each other. Depending on the results, a similar study done on a different culture could promote the use of certain symbols or explain the reason behind cultural differences. By understanding differences and similarities between cultures, one may discover a deeper understanding of their own culture.

## LIMITATIONS

A main limitation that can be found in this project is that the researcher was seen as a foreigner to the participants. This may have affected the participants' responses because they may have had a greater need to explain how Havanna is related to their country or may have overstated certain ideas versus speaking with a native. Also, it is possible that some participants responded in a language cautious fashion. The researcher had noticed that certain participants spoke more slowly than others and believed that it could have been due to them thinking that she was not proficient enough in Spanish to understand the responses at a normal rate of delivery. Perhaps the participants who responded with a lower rate of delivery limited their vocabulary for the researcher as well. If the researcher had been seen more as an insider, the responses may have varied.

Another limitation is that the researcher was limited in the time of day and area to conduct research. Because the researcher traveled alone, she was advised not to visit certain areas at certain times of the day due to her safety. Although the majority of Argentina is very poor, the researcher only spent about 1/5 of her stay in Argentina interviewing in extremely poor areas. Speaking with a noticeable accent and carrying a voice recorder while walking alone made the researcher an easy target to take advantage. As a result of keeping her safety in mind, the researcher was only able to interview in extremely poor areas while being accompanied with an older Argentine male.

## CONCLUSION

The purpose of this research was to gain a deeper understanding of how symbols are used to achieve identification in Argentine advertising. By looking at Havanna, which served as a popular brand of an important Argentine product, the researcher was able to uncover how Argentines identify themselves with Havanna. This study also uncovered what messages Havanna sends to its consumers. By recognizing the messages Havanna sends to its consumers, one can predict what types of messages are effective to send to the public of Argentina when advertising in this country. This study demonstrated that Argentines hold their cultural values and traditions close to their hearts and identify with those who share the same cultural experiences as them. Havanna was able to communicate that they shared particular cultural values and traditions to Argentines with the use of symbols. These symbols occurred through their packaging, location of company, the style of their company, and their recipe for their product.

This study can benefit future scholarship in communication studies because it broadens the understanding of another culture. It is important to have a deeper understanding for other cultures so that people know how to adapt their communication skills to learn more from each other. If people understand how to effectively send messages across cultures, a communication barrier can be broken and our knowledge pool of research will strengthen.

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