

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

# The Virgin Mary With a Mobile Phone: Ideologies of Mothering and Technology Consumption in Philippine Television Advertisements

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*In the Philippines, mobile phones are actively used across the population, including the large numbers of Filipino citizens working abroad, a majority of them women. This article investigates how television advertising of mobile phones engages culturally relevant roles of mothers to attract women as technology consumers. Using semiotic analysis, the article explores how these promotional messages perpetuate mothering ideologies and propose how best to harness communication technologies in the service of motherhood in this global setting. Within a predominantly Catholic and Marian nation, images of the efficient, nurturing, and self-sacrificial mother should not be viewed as benign or power-neutral. Strategies to increase market share in an increasingly competitive sector perpetuate multiple subjectivities.*

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Motherhood is a socially shaped ideological construct that represents patterns of values and moral beliefs that reflect specific expectations of societal groups (Geertz, 1964). For example, the ideal of “intensive mothering” in the late 20th century, which defined the “ideal mother” as a woman who puts her child’s needs above her own, is an emotionally absorbing and financially costly endeavor that is influenced by the demands of modern capitalism (Hays, 1996; Lynch, 2005). The ways in which mothers use ICTs to perform their “affective” duties have also been studied extensively (see, e.g.,

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Lim & Soon, 2010; Madianou & Miller, 2011a, 2011b; Thomas & Lim, 2011; Wajcman, Bittman, & Brown, 2008, 2009). However, there is limited understanding of how gendered ideologies of ICTs have interacted with the ideology of mothering. We explore this interaction through a semiotic analysis of television advertisements for mobile phones. Once a lifestyle gadget for the rich, the mobile phone has become a mainstay in the everyday lives of Filipinos with mobile phone subscription reaching over 90% of the population (International Telecommunication Union [ITU], 2012).

In the Philippines, mobile communication advertisements are targeted at working males, the elderly, teenagers, and also at women, with mothers being one such focal point (Soriano, Rivera, & Sreekumar, 2012). We chose to study mobile phones because prior studies have demonstrated their importance in the production and construction of gender roles (Haddon, 2003; Lemish & Cohen, 2005; Wajcman *et al.*, 2008) and in the performance of domestic rituals to “preserve the home” (Dobashi, 2005; Lim & Soon, 2010; Madianou & Miller, 2011a, 2011b; Uy-Tioco, 2007). We opted to analyze television advertisements because as sites of material culture, they provide insights into mainstream conceptions of motherhood, serving as barometers for the ideologies of motherhood in the wider social landscape (Lynch, 2005, p. 34; Munshi, 1998, p. 575). Advertisements convey the collective knowledge that advertisers assemble about what is effective or appealing to a particular society, reflecting and shaping ideology in their production and dissemination. Advertising associates products with culturally valorized qualities and showcases material objects in relation to idealized values (Goffman, 1979; Ju, 2009; Kang, 1997; Lury, 2011; Sassatelli, 2007).

In the Philippines, 98% watch television, 68% listen to radio, and 48% read newspapers (Dizon, 2011). The vast majority of Filipino women (85.4%) aged 15–49 watch television at least once a week (National Statistics Office [NSO], 2010). Television also accounted for the lion’s share of advertising spending at 76.1% in 2011 (The Nielsen Company, 2012).

In this study, using Philippine television advertisements that feature maternal figures, we identify the dominant tropes with which mother-consumers of ICTs are represented, and elucidate how each of them offers prescriptions for mothering and the use of ICTs in performing maternal duties. In so doing, we investigate how such advertising engages culturally relevant roles of mothers to attract Filipinas of varied social classes as technology consumers, and consider how these promotional messages serve to perpetuate particular mothering ideologies (including even ideals that no longer exist), as well as idealized representations of the relational uses of mobile communication.

## **Advertising: Reflecting and shaping cultural and gender ideologies**

Previous studies have explored how advertising distorts reality to create aspirations for consumer goods, thus stifling people’s capability to think rationally by oppressing them with consumerist values (Slater, 1997). Such critiques focus on advertising’s overt content, thus overlooking the role it plays in constructing

or perpetuating particular ideologies (Lynch, 2005; Williamson, 1978). Indeed, Williamson (1978, p. 12) argues that advertisers create cultural ideologies by translating “thing statements to us as human statements,” or as sign systems with humanly symbolic exchange value. In the process, advertisements serve an ideological function by creating identities and social distinctions among people (i.e., a good woman or an ideal mother) as these present a picture of people’s interaction with products. Advertisements thus convey the notion that by purchasing and using goods in a certain way, people can find a “social place” of belonging and acceptance while products embody a “way of life” to which people should aspire.

Many works have identified the role of advertising discourses in the social construction of gender ideologies. Goffman’s (1979) classic work highlighted how men and women take their cues about gender behavior from advertisement images and their idealized portrayals of masculinity and femininity. The pattern of female subordination, infantilization, and objectification in advertisements has also reinforced perceptions of men as naturally dominant and women as naturally subordinate. The influence of advertisements on men’s and women’s self-image has been explored (Shields & Heineken, 2002), as well as their destructive implications for violence perpetrated against women (Kilbourne, 1999).

As the role of women in society evolves, efforts have also been made to trace how images of women in advertising have changed over several decades (Belkaoui & Belkaoui, 1976; Courtney & Lockeretz, 1971; Lindner, 2004; Mager & Helgeson, 2011). While advertisements from the 1950s to 1970s depicted a woman’s place as the home, showcasing females who do not oversee responsibilities or decisions (Courtney & Lockeretz, 1971), typically unemployed homemakers with limited purchasing power (Belkaoui & Belkaoui, 1976), advertisements from later decades do present women in active roles in both private and public settings, but still dependent on men and in want of their protection (Mager & Helgeson, 2011). Egregiously, in fashion magazines such as *Vogue*, products have been and continue to be advertised as remedies for women’s inadequacies and inferior status, thus relegating them to a subordinate consumptive position rather than an enactive one (Lindner, 2004).

### **The scripting of motherhood in advertising and consumer culture**

Given their pervasiveness, advertisements become cultural products that can shape both ideologies and practices of mothering (Lynch, 2005). Further studies observe the increasingly evident ideal of “intensive mothering” in which mothers are represented as almost entirely responsible for the emotional and physical development of children and their families (Dela Cruz, 1988; Johnston & Swanson, 2003b; Lynch, 2005). Many advertisements continue to represent a “good mother” as a woman who puts her child(ren)’s needs above her own (Lynch, 2005), thereby perpetuating patriarchy and outdated female stereotypes (Dela Cruz, 1988; Johnston & Swanson, 2003a, 2003b; Kang, 1997; Lynch, 2005). They ultimately seek to persuade mothers to purchase products that bolster their fulfillment of familial obligations.

More recent advertisements reflect “fresh” inflections of women and motherhood, where their sense of identity is derived less from being a caring mother, and more toward possessing a sexy body. While past advertisements showed women’s bodies to “ritualize their subordination” through “bashful knee bends” and “problematic body parts” that make women unattractive to their spouse, the use of “midriff advertising” in recent advertisements represents an important shift in the depiction of women “in ways that emphasize pleasure, playfulness and empowerment rather than passivity or victimization” (Gill, 2009, p. 94). The ideological message is that women, be they homemakers or professionals, mothers or singletons, are able to exercise “choice,” gain “control,” and feel “empowered,” even though such empowerment is strongly tied to a particular look or body (Goldman, 1992, cited in Gill, 2009, p. 100).

However, following Butler’s (1990) theorization, gender is not a primary or “real” category, but an attribute that is performed and shaped by social rules and the continued transformations that the social construction of femininity and maternity undergo. An analysis of gender roles such as maternity in advertising and consumer culture thus requires a historicization of social phenomena surrounding consumer goods. In terms of the role of maternity in producing consumption, it is therefore necessary to probe more deeply about how consumer goods, such as communicative devices, and the mother’s performance of her gender role are co-constructed from a social, economical, and political point of view.

Notably, prior studies on advertising and domestic consumption have largely been conducted in the Global North. They analyze mothers as individual consumers, paying only minimal attention to the social and relational aspects of mothering and their influence on consumption. Furthermore, applying the same Western-based feminist frameworks to the analysis of mothering and advertisements in other contexts may be problematic (Mohanty, 1988). Thus, addressing the advertising practices of the Global South may help disrupt particular assumptions about the limited role of mothers in consumer culture and open possible avenues for conceptualizing culturally entrenched relational aspects of consumption.

Within Asia, there are also varying representations of mothering in the media—ranging from the “tiger mom,” “modern mom,” “new woman,” to the “martyr mom” (Hung, Li, & Belk, 2007; Libed, 2010; Munshi, 1998). Nonetheless, across the region, mothers take on functions critical not only in child rearing, or in preserving the home, but also perform symbolic roles in maintaining societal cohesion or nation-building. Thus, the use of the mother figure and cultural repertoires of mothering in marketing strategies deployed in the Philippines provides an interesting case for analysis.

### **Mothers, the home and consumer culture in the Philippines**

In the Philippines, the family is believed to be the foundation of the nation and the cornerstone of Philippine culture (Cabanes & Acedera, 2012; Uy-Tioco, 2007). At the heart of the family unit is the mother, wherein cultural conceptualizations of “mothering” in this predominantly Catholic nation, the largest Catholic denomination in Asia, stem from worship of *The Virgin Mother* and a strong tradition of Marian

devotion (Aguilar, 1998; Feliciano, 1994). Folk Catholicism represents the mother as the central node that brings together not only the family, but the entire society, which has in turn inspired the formation of persistent ideological gender roles. Just like *Mother Mary* in the Christian faith, the Filipina mother is expected to possess certain qualities such as kindness, piety, obedience, care, and virtue, essentially a sacrificial being who puts God's will above her own needs (Soriano, 2014). This Virgin Mary persona is the model Filipino women need to aspire to in order to be characterized as "good women" and "good mothers" (Libed, 2010, pp. 58–59). As a result of gendered socialization through religious and state institutions, most Filipino women have internalized this Virgin Mary image into their roles as wives and mothers (Aguilar, 1998). Given such a context, we ask the following:

RQ1: How do advertisements of mobile communication services represent the family and mothering?

Despite these traditional notions of motherhood, many Filipino mothers have embraced more transgressive roles (Libed, 2010), notably with former Philippine President Corazon Aquino becoming a feminist role model for Philippine women, inspiring the broader participation of mothers in other realms of society, including the workforce (Komisar, 1987; Libed, 2010). Other challenges to traditional "ideologies of mothering" have been globalization and migration. Consistent with the trend worldwide, there is increasing feminization of migrant labor in the Philippines. In 1992, 129,000 Filipina female workers worked overseas versus 130,725 males, compared with 208,278 females versus 77,850 males in 2002 (Philippine Overseas Employment Agency [POEA], 2012). This increasing number of Filipinas migrating to foreign lands to seek employment opportunities has led to the shift in the role of women from homemakers to economically active "transnational mothers" (Soriano, 2014).

With more Filipina workers dispersed in more than 187 countries across the globe (Parrenas, 2001), the traditional roles of men as providers and women as vanguards of the household have been reversed. Interestingly, the mobile phone has been identified as being central in migrant Filipino families' attempts to retain traditional ideologies of family life despite the realities of their reversed social positions (Cabanas & Acedera, 2012; Parrenas, 2001; Uy-Tioco, 2007). Given this shifting sociocultural and economic climate, we ask the following:

RQ2: To what extent, if at all, do advertisements of mobile communication services produce particular "mothering ideologies" to influence consumption, and/or take into account the evolving socioeconomic position(s) of Philippine mothers?

### Mobile communications and enacting motherhood

Studies have found that women's uses of the telephone fit the spheres of activity and interests socially designated to them, such as taking responsibility for the emotional

and material needs of husbands and children, the elderly, the handicapped, the sick, and unhappy (Rakow, 1992; Zainudeen, Iqbal, & Samarajiva, 2010), while men used phones for work or business (Huyer, Hafkin, Ertl, & Dryburgh, 2006). However, while some studies assert that mobile phones function within the traditional gendered division of labor, others present it as a potential site of power struggle, or as a source for liberation of women (Lemish & Cohen, 2005, p. 512). Yet, other studies have found that while mobile phones contribute to the maintenance of patriarchal gender roles, in other contexts, they were found essential for broadening the women's social space, leisure, and other forms of personal gratification (Rivera, Walton, & Sreekumar, 2012; Wearing, 1999).

The mobile phone is also instrumental in mothers' microcoordination of domestic responsibilities, schedules, and family relationships (Brown, Harper, & Green, 2002; Ling & Haddon, 2003; Wajcman *et al.*, 2008). However, mothers have been found to feel simultaneously liberated by the enhanced connectivity the phone facilitates, yet burdened by the persistent familial responsibilities that such connectivity enables (Lim & Soon, 2010; Thomas & Lim, 2011). Indeed, while mobile phones are lauded for strengthening our capability to connect, concerns also persist about how the mobile phone (like other ICTs) dissolves the boundaries separating work from home, thus threatening family intimacy (Epstein, 2004). With the "perpetual contact" (Katz & Aakhus, 2002) afforded by mobile phones, mothers' "double work" (home and paid labor) environment (Fortunati, 2009) becomes even more pronounced, making work and family life ceaseless 24/7 endeavors. Nonetheless, other studies (Lemish & Cohen, 2005; Wajcman *et al.*, 2008, 2009) found that beyond work commitments, mobile phone calls predominantly serve social, interpersonal, leisure, and household management purposes. For women, in particular, the mobile phone is used predominantly for "performing intimacy" with significant others so as to hold together the fabric of the family and the community by building and maintaining relationships (Wajcman *et al.*, 2008, pp. 646–647).

### **Mobile phone communication trends in Philippine society**

In the early 2000s, Filipinos became some of the most fervent adopters of mobile technologies worldwide as the country saw cheaper versions of phones being launched and cellular networks offering highly affordable subscription plans with unlimited texting (Mendes, Alampay, Soriano, & Soriano, 2007; Pertierra, 2005). Branded the "text capital of the world" (Goggin, 2006, pp. 74–75), the average Filipino mobile phone user sent a monthly average of 600 texts in 2009, or 43% more than their U.S. counterparts (Dimacali, 2010). In recent years, mobile phones have become even more crucial in bridging migrant Filipinos and their families (Cabanés & Acedera, 2012; Madianou & Miller, 2011a, 2011b; Parrenas, 2001; Thomas & Lim, 2011; Uy-Tioco, 2007). However, recent studies suggest that the impact of the mobile phone on migrant women goes beyond "discourses of empowerment" and that its use has the potential to disrupt the status quo (Cabanés & Acedera, 2012; Madianou & Miller,

2011a, 2011b). In light of these prevailing trends in Philippine society, we ask the following:

RQ3: How do advertisements of mobile communication services portray the interaction(s) between motherhood and mobile communication in light of the competing pulls of traditional and modern Filipino values, social roles, and other societal dynamics?

## Research method

We conducted a YouTube search of mobile network television commercials from the Philippines using the following key words: advertisement, commercial, and *patalastas* (local term for commercial) combined with the names of the major mobile network providers in the Philippines, namely *Smart Communications*, *Smart Buddy*, *Globe Telecom*, *Talk n Text*, *Touch Mobile*, *Red Mobile*, and *Sun Cellular*. All videos suggested by YouTube in the top right corner of the screen that carried the network names in full or abbreviated forms were then reviewed for the appearance of mother figures. This corpus construction process (Aarts & Bauer, 2000) first yielded 115 videos, all of which were reviewed. Guided by constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2000; Strauss & Corbin, 1998), we used open and axial coding to analyze the content of the advertisements, and engaged in memo writing to construct conceptual analyses. Upon observing interesting aspects related to the depiction of mothers in some of the advertisements, we conducted further sampling to refine our conceptual ideas. Eventually, a corpus of 18 advertisements was constructed for semiotic analysis based on the following inclusion criteria:

1. Motherhood was verbally referenced through the use of the terms “mother,” “mom,” “ma,” “mommy,” “*inay*,” or “*nanay*,” with the last 2 being Filipino terms for mother.
2. Motherhood was visually referenced (for advertisements without dialog) if the female figure appeared in the presence of child(ren) and if the image explicitly depicted or implied that the female figure performed activities typically performed by mothers (Lynch, 2005), such as nurturing, feeding, cooking, grocery shopping, helping with homework, doing laundry, and/or decorating the home.
3. The advertisement contained stories/narratives (rather than a straightforward presentation of offers and promotions), given our intention to explore the embeddedness of the mobile phone within the social structures of motherhood and mothering.
4. The advertisement promoted communicative products offered by mobile networks: voice calls, SMS, MMS, IDD, ringtone, phone cards, and mobile phone credit-sharing services.

We then conducted a semiotic analysis of these advertisements to explore how motherhood and the interaction between maternity and mobile communication are

represented in the advertisements. Semiotics theory, a study of sign systems, analyzes “the structures of meaning-producing events” and addresses the question of how our reality—words, products, and actions—acquire meaning (Mick, 1986, p. 197). Semiotics has been widely used as an appropriate foundation for the analysis of social meaning, including social relations and cultural ideologies embedded within advertisements (Alden, Steenkamp, & Batra, 1999; Mick, 1986; Williamson, 1978).

Again, using open and axial coding of emerging data (Charmaz, 2000, pp. 515–517; Strauss & Corbin, 1998), we generated action codes representing the following dimensions that allowed us to compare and contrast the advertisements: (a) the depiction of the mother figure, including the role(s) performed; (b) the situational context; (c) family members’ attitudes toward the maternal figure; and (d) dominant ideology being advanced by the advertisement. We then developed a matrix (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) summarizing the advertisements according to the above elements.

## Findings

Practices of advertising and technology consumption involve attachment to powerful cultural signs and symbols. From our analysis, we identified interrelated dominant ideologies concerning maternal use of mobile communication services. Each of these tropes represents motherhood and maternal use of mobile communication services in ways that are culturally situated, and which prescribe how communication technologies are to be best harnessed for these mothers’ enactment of their maternal duties.

### Mobile communication and performance of obligations by the selfless domestic manager

A traditional Filipino saying holds up the mother as the “light of the home” (*ilaw ng tahanan*), a veritable force for order, happiness, belonging, and comfort from fear. One cluster of advertisements tapped into this sentiment, using the mother as the metaphor for the home. In these advertisements, the mobile phone is depicted as a vital link to the mother, enabling her to steadfastly shine as the “light of the home” for all in her family. These advertisements generally present an image of a “domestic mom”—a full-time homemaker who finds contentment in caring for her home and family. Notably, unlike in other media representations of mothers (see, e.g., discussions by Lynch, 2005; Rabiner, 1990; Steinhauer, 2005), the image of the “supermom,” the archetypal working mother holding both briefcase and child, or the “new woman” who openly and radically resists domestic roles and stereotypes (Munshi, 1998), did not feature in the advertisements in our corpus. Instead, these advertisements proffer idealized projections of the stay-at-home mother who proudly presides over the domestic realm, preparing the children for school, cooking all meals, and receiving the working husband’s call over the mobile phone. The settings of these advertisements are thus largely domestic (kitchens or living rooms), with only a few advertisements showing the mothers actually handling a mobile



phone. Hence, the mother exists principally for her family and to serve their needs. Even when depicted as being outside the home, the family's needs still come first for these Philippine mothers. In one advertisement, the mother uses the mobile phone to assure her husband that the household and children are fine. Another advertisement depicts the mother sending the son a text message to remind him to pay the electric bill.

In these advertisements, the mother is never shown using the phone to chat with or text her friends, play a game, or even read the news, as modes of personal gratification. Instead, these advertisements propagate the ideology that for the Filipino mother, her personal gratification and sense of empowerment can be sufficiently derived from her successful performance of these domestic obligations, aided always by the mobile phone. In so doing, these advertisements help to produce not only notions of motherhood but also conceptions of "productive" and "responsible" use of the communication device.

An advertisement presents the mobile phone as a substitute for the beloved mother. In *Smart Telecommunications'* advertisement entitled *The Son* (piccachiu, 2008a), the already deceased mother takes center stage in the commercial despite never appearing. In it, the mobile phone performs the relational and nurturing aspects of mothering by serving as a sounding board for the son's idle musings and expressions of happiness and disappointment, all of which he conveys to his late mother via text messages that appear onscreen. Despite the omission of a visible maternal figure, the advertisement clearly seeks to convey the gravity of a mother's role as a pillar of support for her family, and to underline how the mobile phone can help mothers play crucial emotional roles (ideally, while they are still alive). Again, it is not the mother's own emotional needs that are represented but those of her significant others. By implication, mobile phones are to be deployed not for the benefit of mothers but of everyone else.

### **Maternal availability, mobile communication, and "good mothering"**

Another dominant and compelling trope is that of the geographically distant Filipino mother who is physically removed, and yet through her mobile phone, is as emotionally connected to her family as if she were right by their side. This is depicted in 2 scenarios: when the mother is home-based and the children are working overseas, or when the mother is herself working overseas.

Mothers of overseas children are shown as being adored by their children. In one advertisement, *Globe Kababayan IDD's "Luto" (Dish)* (Flaminiano, 2009), a son, a professional, calls his mother from the Golden Gate Café (presumably in San Francisco). "Hi Mom, what are you cooking today, pork or chicken *adobo*?" The advertisement promotes 5-minute IDD *Short Calls* by *Globe Telecom*, and shows that a "short call" to one's mother about simple matters like her cooking can make her son's or daughter's day. The *Globe Telecom* company tagline finally states, "Make a short call with *Globe Kababayan* phone cards, for as low as 11 cents per minute. It will make you smile." Here the relational relevance of mobile communication is prominently

highlighted, emphasizing the comfort that the child receives from the call, rather than the gratification of the mother. Mobile service advertisements advance the ideology that short calls that sustain “perpetual contact” (Katz & Aakhus, 2002; Wajcman et al., 2008) facilitate the maintenance of intimacy in the family between the home-based mother and overseas children. Such perpetual contact facilitated by mobile communication serves to prescribe the level of availability that mothers must maintain for their children even for seemingly mundane matters, and in the Philippine context, even when children have grown into adults.

In the advertisements that feature parents working overseas, Filipino migrants are seen using mobile technology to maintain relationships with their left-behind families. In an advertisement for affordable 5-minute calls offered by the *Globe Kababayan IDD Card* (Globe Philippines, 2010), the mobile phone and International Direct Dialing (IDD) service are the mother’s allies as she calls her son to wake him up for school. The advertisement shows the mother calling from a seemingly affluent neighborhood in a foreign country, faithfully performing her maternal responsibility by ensuring that her son goes to school on time. On the mother’s side of the world, it is dark and the street lamps are on, juxtaposed against the crowing of the rooster in her son’s (less developed) part of the globe. He bargains with her for a few more minutes of sleep and she is shown to call again, every 5 minutes, to wake him up for school. Neither father, grandparents, nor siblings are shown in the advertisement. It is as if only the mother can perform this particular role, and that she does it despite being in another continent. Prior research has in fact probed the dilemmas of overseas working mothers who find the heightened connectivity with their families back home both a boon and a bane, simultaneously comforting yet taxing because these women can never seem to divest themselves of their maternal duties (Cabanes & Acedera, 2012; Madi-anou & Miller, 2011a, 2011b; Parrenas, 2001; Thomas & Lim, 2011; Uy-Tioco, 2007). By depicting how the mother stoically and cheerfully continues to “raise” her child through the phone, advertisements such as these suggest that mobile phones allow women to parent long distance and even to participate in family rituals despite their absence. However, such depictions also set lofty expectations that all mothers must perform intense mothering despite and *in spite of* geographical distance, thus reinforcing traditional gender stereotypes.

### **Maintaining relational hierarchies and role divisions in the home**

The role of the mobile phone in maintaining relational hierarchies and role divisions in the home can also be gleaned from the advertisements: The father calls the wife/mother to check if she has successfully “managed” the household finances; the wife/mother sends the husband an SMS to assure him that they have adequate savings for their children’s college education; the mother calls the children to check on the condition of the household while she is away. In these scenarios, the phone is depicted as a conduit for the many household responsibilities that she must necessarily shoulder, and therefore complicit in reifying the status quo. These advertisements present the Filipino mother as a saintly presence in the household whose needs and priorities

are secondary to those of her family, effectively a “Virgin Mary” with a mobile phone. This resonates with findings from Latin America, where women derive guidance for ideals of femininity and motherhood from *marianismo* (Toro-Morn & Alicea, 2003, p. 203) or the venerated celestial Virgin Mother of *Guadalupe* (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 2003, pp. 320–321; Rodriguez, 1994), which are characterized by placing family and community above her own needs and being nurturing and protective of her children.

Yet, despite what these advertisements suggest, the Filipino mother’s presence in the home is no longer a given. In fact, despite the growing prevalence of geographically distant mothers, the advertisements seem averse to showing this reality in any way, shape, or form; and this cultural unacceptability surrounding overseas working mothers is reflected in other advertisements in our corpus. For instance, in advertisements featuring overseas mothers, she is never depicted as a domestic worker even though the grim reality is that more than half of Filipina migrants work as domestic helpers, caring for other people’s children (POEA, 2012). It would appear that the very notion of a Filipina who leaves her own brood to mother other people’s children is so diametrically opposed to the idealized role of Filipino mothers that advertisers choose to ignore it. Moreover, most of the advertisements featuring a parent who is overseas choose to depict the father (in 6 of the 8 advertisements) rather than the mother (in only 2 of 8). In actuality, however, left-at-home fathers are becoming a common phenomenon because a growing percentage of overseas workers are mothers (Cabanes & Acedera, 2012; Parrenas, 2005). This focus of the advertisements on the father as the overseas worker suggests that mobile networks are shying away from portraying the reality of parenting patterns in the Philippines due to the stigma attached to fathers performing the mothering role while their wives work overseas (Cabanes & Acedera, 2012). According to Parrenas (2001), the reality of transnational mothering “ruptures the ideological foundation of the Filipino family” (p. 361) and “transnational households are considered ‘broken’ because the maintenance of this household diverges from the traditional expectations of cohabitation in the family; they do not meet the traditional division of labor in the family” (p. 381). In the Philippines, a masculine society with well-entrenched gender roles, the impact of overseas labor migration of mothers is greater with the reversal of the “father’s traditional role of breadwinning and the mother’s traditional role of nurturing” (Cabanes & Acedera, 2012, p. 3; Parrenas, 2005). The advertisements are thus crafted to reflect a “perfect” image of mothering that no longer prevails because the reality may not be palatable to target consumers.

### **Appropriating mobile communication in self-sacrifice**

Another salient trope is that of the self-sacrificial mother who, quite apart from being selfless, must bear extreme suffering and display martyrdom to keep the home intact, pursuant to traditional expectations (Aguilar, 1998; Libed, 2010). In *The Father* (piccachiu, 2008b), a *Smart Telecommunications*’ advertisement, the mother is shown feeding warm soup to her paralyzed husband, as she cheerfully tells him

about having completed her chores for the day: buying groceries, paying the utility bills, settling the children's university matriculation and hiring someone to fix the leaky faucet. Finally, she reminds him of their upcoming visit to the hospital for therapy. In the performance of all these chores, she is depicted as uncomplaining, willingly sacrificing herself to preserve the domestic sphere despite the challenges of her husband's medical condition. At the end of the advertisement, her phone beeps, and a message from her husband flashes on the screen, "Thank you, Ma. Love you." The husband has expressed gratitude toward his wife, referring to her as "mother," underlining her position as a martyr-like maternal figure rather than a romantic life partner with personal wants and needs.

To illustrate with another example, in one of the rare commercials depicting a Filipina mother leaving the country to work overseas, *Smart's Jasmine Trias* (Florence, 2006), a mother and her children are seen at an airport, bidding tearful goodbyes. She tells her children about her need to leave them temporarily despite not wanting to go, and assures them that she will return shortly. Onscreen a narration flashes, "As mommy goes abroad ... she needs to sacrifice ... she needs inner strength ... she needs to work hard" (phrases translated from Filipino). Thereafter, her life as a nurse is one of drudgery and she is portrayed as having the strength of character to endure the sacrifice, with her suffering alleviated only when her mobile phone rings and she is happily comforted by the call from her children, who appear in a split screen. The mobile phone is then seen to miraculously bind the entire family together, weaving them into a warm physical connection.

Crafted to reflect the idealized image of motherhood, these advertising discourses associate mobile phones with acts of self-sacrifice. Consistent with the martyr persona of the *Virgin Mary*, the mothers in these advertisements are seen to nobly overcome all tribulations for the sake of their family. Given the reality of contemporary challenges faced by mothers, advertisers strive to make motherhood seem manageable through these personas of strong women withstanding every hardship to preserve the home. In these images of the self-sacrificial mother, she is not depicted as meek, helpless, obedient, or submissive. Her performance of her duty is depicted as willingly given, and can be interpreted as agency, although this exercise of agency does not necessarily oppose the structures and expectations of traditional mothering in any substantial way. While these discourses may be seen as fostering domination and subordination, these can also be analyzed as depicting women with "power from below" (Foucault, 1980, p. 94), or mechanisms that multiply and generate our energies (instead of subduing them) and help in the construction of notions of normalcy (Munshi, 1998). In analyzing the cultural significance of these advertising discourses of self-sacrificial mothering, we invoke the Foucauldian interpretation of modern power relations as constantly in flux and "dispersed through lived networks of relationships" (Munshi, 1998, pp. 586 and 588), where spaces of subjectivity have to be read as a component of the whole dominant structure, as a site for both domination and subordination operating simultaneously in a given domain.

## Discussion and conclusion

This study has sought to identify how advertisements of mobile services present, produce, or challenge particular ideologies of mothering, and represent the intersections of maternity and mobile communication, through a nuanced analysis of the social and cultural landscapes that construct such mothering roles. We then make inferences about how such representations produce “technologically constructed mothering ideologies.”

Our review of mobile advertisements affirmed the importance of particular mothering images and roles in foregrounding the deeply relational aspects of mobile consumption. The extensive use of the image of the selfless domestic manager, the physically distant but emotionally connected mother, or of the self-sacrificial mother, can be interpreted as resting on the assumption that the intended audience views domesticity for Filipino women positively. The mother is consistently portrayed as bringing the family together — regardless of her age, social status, or location — and the mobile phone is central in her performance of these multiple roles. The engagement of mothering narratives in mobile phone advertising can be understood as a strategy for strengthening brand image, and for lodging advertising strategies within salient cultural repertoires. This remains central in framing domestic life in the Philippines and the relevance of mobile phones to this consumer society rooted in strong Marian devotion.

To use this ideology for marketing purposes, advertisers seek to channel extant notions of maternal nature and maternal instinct into the parameters of consumer culture. The narratives of interaction between maternity and mobility invoke the following dominant ideologies that underscore the relevance of mobile communication in constructing notions of an ideal mother which the mobile networks use as a selling point: facilitating harmonious communication and perpetual contact within the family, recasting the mobile phone as a consumer practice as the expression of “motherly love” even at a distance, and mobile communication as indispensable for connecting the mother to her home and fulfilling her nurturing and domestic obligations. These representations of motherhood and maternal use of mobile communication services prescribe how communication technologies are to be best harnessed for these mothers’ enactment of their maternal duties.

In the process, these advertisements also contribute to the production of motherhoods. As cultural products, the advertisements show that mobile services support various forms of domestic communication, coordination, and performance of familial intimacy that may cater to moments of self-determination and self-valorization for mothers. Through these representations, implicitly or explicitly, the advertisements offer specific ideas about who mothers are and what their behavior should entail. The social milieu suggested to women across ages and income groups is that fulfillment can be derived from their work as loving wives, prudent housekeepers, and devoted mothers who are able to maintain a happy home with the aid of technology, surmounting contemporary challenges. Despite recognizing women’s changing roles in society,

the advertisements reinforce the ideological message that even if women have to work or leave their families, they are mothers first and must perform their domestic obligations to keep the household together. However, this depiction trivializes the double shift of working away from home but still managing the home (virtually) by phone. These advertisements also reveal how advertisers interpret the role of mothers and reinforce particular images and roles that are more socially acceptable, even when some of these representations no longer conform to present-day reality in our globalized world.

In these representations, the mother's roles are performed in the midst of power relations that are unchallenged, and which perpetuate gender role ideologies that may constrain women to act in certain ways. These power relations operate not only at the economic but also at the cultural and political levels and are situated within the crossroads of globalization and migration that foreground mothering in contemporary developing societies. By examining the social functionality of these representations in the context of this particular economic and social system, we invoked Butler's conception of gender identity as "performed" (1990), and Foucault's (1980) notion of "power from below." In this manner, our study moves away from the minimalist and instrumental frames by which the role of women in the domestic sphere had been analyzed as "irrelevant" or "stereotypical." In our dual focus on the mother as an individual and as the heart of every family, we find that these images of the efficient, nurturing, and self-sacrificial mother should not be viewed as benign or power-neutral. Instead, these advertisements, as strategies to increase market share in an increasingly competitive sector, perpetuate multiple subjectivities that construct the Filipino mother as ultimately subordinate to prevailing power structures and sociocultural expectations, while strategically adjusting these personas into evolving socioeconomic conditions and in ways that remain acceptable to consumers.

By looking at the engagement of maternal images in the advertising of technological services in a non-Western context, we have sought to add a different cultural dimension to the wealth of literature on consumer culture and the production of motherhoods. It is important to note, however, that although we examined a relatively understudied geographical area, the advertisements send messages about traditional feminine behaviors that resonate with findings about advertising and ideologies of mothering in other parts of the world. Particularly in the context of the expectations toward transnational mothers as rooted in the ideals of the *Virgin mother*, our findings about the mothering ideologies advanced by the advertisements were similar to mothering ideals in North and South America (Carling, Menjivar, & Schmalzbauer, 2012; Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 2003; Toro-Morn & Alicea, 2003).

In analyzing the historical and cultural developments that construct maternity and mother roles in Philippine society, we gain greater acuity into how salient gender formations are tied to mobile advertising and consumption and understand how technologies obtain meaning in the domestic sphere. Social class plays a profound role in the construction of motherhoods, such as who will be mothering from afar and how mothering shall be performed. Future research can delve into social class distinctions

in the realm of mothering ideologies in advertising. Moreover, the ideal mothers represented in the advertisements seem devoid of sexuality. When women become mothers, the representation seems to focus on being “Virgin mothers” — they are depicted as partners with no personal wants and needs. This representation of maternal sexuality (or lack thereof) in advertisements and its relationship with Catholic conventions of motherhood could be a line of inquiry that requires further analytical consideration. Finally, other research in this area should assess the impact of advertising strategies reliant on cultural representations of domestic roles of women, both in terms of commercial success of marketers as well as the social and cultural impact of these efforts.

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