

A Content Analysis of the Portrayal of Men in Safaricom Corporate Advertisements

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ABSTRACT: Previous research on gender portrayals in advertisements has focused on the portrayal and stereotyping of women, leaving men in the periphery. To address this gap, this study evaluated the portrayal of men in Safaricom's corporate advertisements posted on Facebook. Safaricom is a well-established Kenyan brand that regularly releases corporate advertisements as part of its brand campaigns. It was determined that studying Safaricom's corporate advertisements would increase knowledge on how Kenyan corporates engage with the concept of gender. The theory of social construction was used as a theoretical framework specifically to discuss the mold versus mirror role of advertisements in the social construction of gender. Content analysis research method was used for this study. Advertisements were purposively sampled to select the adverts that fit the study's definition of a corporate advertisement. Overall, the study found that Safaricom's corporate advertisements work as a distorted mirror by portraying male stereotypes and idealistic concepts of men, some of which challenge currently held social constructs of male gender roles. This study recommends more research on gender portrayals in corporate advertisements, and especially in the ever-expanding social media space to enhance knowledge in communicating about corporate brands using the gender lens.

KEYWORDS : *Corporate communication, Corporate advertising, Gender portrayals, Portrayal of men*

I. INTRODUCTION

Corporate advertising is a type of communication that is designed to elicit certain responses from audiences to create a desired corporate image and manage corporate reputation^[1]. Corporate advertisements are not done for any specific product or service but focus on defining and describing the corporate entity^[2]. The display of gender is common in advertisements done by corporate brands. This is because advertisers who depict their consumers in a way that closely resembles how they live receive positive acceptance of their advertisement^[3]. Cornelissen^[2] asserts that stakeholder expectations of corporate brands are not static but evolve over time. An organization must therefore analyze evolving societal trends, such as gender, to align its corporate communications to stakeholders' expectations which may be influenced by these trends.

According to Mate^[4], there has been much advocacy for women's rights in Africa since women are viewed as a vulnerable group. Mate argues that men's concerns on the other hand have been left on the periphery due to the assumption that they benefit from socio-economic advantages of patriarchal societies. In Kenya, the Ministry of Public Service, Youth and Gender^[5] ratified a national gender and development policy in 2019 whose aim is to achieve gender equality by creating a just society where all citizens have equal access to opportunities in the political, social cultural and economic spheres of life. This policy identifies the promotion of women empowerment as key in achieving gender equality in Kenya. Despite this national stance on women empowerment, the National Gender and Equality Commission^[6] in a report on the status of the boy child in Kenya reported there was a public perception that the boy child needs more inclusion in the Kenyan gender agenda to address the challenges they face due to negative interpretations of masculinity. It is indeed strange, particularly to those of the feminist disposition, that men and boys are crying foul in a patriarchal society. There is however no denying that this is an evolving discourse that is gaining traction in the Kenyan society. The rallying call is that men are facing issues that need to be addressed.

A report done by the UK Advertising Standards Authority^[3] revealed that society has become aware of how gender stereotypes propagated by corporate brands have potential for negative effects on men and boys. These effects are created through the exertion of pressure to achieve certain body images and conform to stereotypical behavior portrayed in advertisements. The interpretation and portrayal of gender in brand advertisements is therefore an important factor to consider when creating a brand's corporate advertisements. In

fact, misrepresentation and stereotyping of gender in brand advertisements can cause negative reputation and negate intent of purchase for a brand as it occurred to Gillette. Gillette, a global brand that deals majorly with men's shaving products, released an advert in January 2019 dubbed '*We believe: The Best Men Can Be*' as part of a campaign to address toxic masculinity. The advert featured boys as bullies, men harassing women and encouraging their sons to fight under the guise of the adage *boys will be boys*. It also showed other men stepping in to correct their counterparts' behaviors^[7]. The brand received mixed reviews following the advert.

According to The Guardian^[8], viewers who gave positive reviews of the advert opined that Gillette was forward thinking in their role as a brand which understands that consumers are demanding for brands to go beyond just selling products and stand for a cause in society. These viewers saw Gillette as a brand that was representing a younger generation of men who are in the process of redefining their masculinity by challenging traditionally held concepts of masculinity. Negative reviews were centered on the view that Gillette's advert criticized men, their main razor buyers, through portraying negative stereotypes of men as a normative form of masculinity in society^[9]. Men who were used to previous advertising by Gillette that portrayed them as being celebrated by society for having machismo were now facing an advert that portrayed them as having toxic behavior and requiring to evolve into better people^[10]. This sudden change in messaging from a brand they were attached to elicited a strong negative reaction. Many people took to Gillette's YouTube feed where the video was posted to air out negative reviews of the advert, some declaring an intent to boycott Gillette razors^[11]. In defense of this campaign, the President of Procter and Gamble Global Grooming which is the parent company that owns Gillette stated that the brand recognized the need to have a conversation on modern masculinity, and would not relent in portraying respect, accountability and role modelling in their adverts^[7].

Safaricom describes itself as a leading Kenyan communication company and digital innovator whose vision is to be a leading digital services provider that empowers a connected society^[12]. The corporate has won a string of advertising and brand campaign awards from the Marketing Society of Kenya. Safaricom is also a member of the Unstereotype Alliance. This is an international platform created by UN Women that works to eradicate harmful stereotypes from advertising and media through harnessing the power of advertising to shape positive perceptions of empowering women and addressing harmful masculinities^[13]. Globally, members include brands such as Alibaba, Cannes Lions, Diageo, Facebook, Twitter, Google, Unilever, Johnson & Johnson, Mars, World Federation of Advertisers among others^[14]. In 2021, the Unstereotype alliance highlighted Safaricom's *TwendeTukiuke* brand campaign as one that was stereotype-smashing and whose stories were deliberately chosen to challenge harmful stereotypes^[15]. Safaricom's commitment to gender equality is a sustainable business practice that is embraced both locally and globally, and Safaricom has pledged to continue its commitment to champion gender equality through challenging gender based stereotypes in their media and advertising content^[16]. This study considered Safaricom as a recognized Kenyan brand which has prominent corporate advertisements. The study therefore analyzed Safaricom's corporate advertisements on Facebook, its most populated corporate social media channel, to determine how men were portrayed in these advertisements.

II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Due to an increase in social advocacy, consumers in recent years have increasingly made purchasing decisions based on a company's corporate stance on certain salient social issues^[17]. One such issue is gender which cannot be ignored by corporates because it cuts across social, political, cultural and commercial spheres^[18]. It is no longer enough for corporates to just push products and brands for sale. They must also, through their corporate communications, show how they are advocating for and contributing towards significant social issues such as gender as a legitimate part of the society within which they operate. In the Kenyan context, the Media Council of Kenya^[19] reported that advertisements, commercials and news items carried a significant number of gender stereotypes in the Kenyan media, with 44% seen in advertisements while 33% were seen in commercials. As creators of advertisement content, Kenyan corporates can either reinforce, challenge or avoid gender stereotypes while portraying gender in their corporate advertisements leading to positive or negative associations of their corporate brands.

Researchers have been interested in studying the portrayal of gender in advertising, particularly of women, for more than fifty years^[20]. The problem is that in comparison to discussions on the portrayal of female gender stereotypes in advertising, the portrayal of men has been discussed as an afterthought and as a benchmark for emphasizing of gender inequality^[21]. Generally accepted stereotypes of men as a dominant gender can conceal the need to study and address emerging issues and challenges that men face due to changes in their societies^[22]. The study of the portrayal of women in advertising remains important. However, as Mason^[21] argues, the portrayal of men should be examined just as much as the portrayal of women to gain a more holistic understanding of the relationship between advertising and gender.

III. STUDY OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this research was to determine how men were portrayed in corporate advertisements of Safaricom. Consequently, this study aimed to provide in depth analysis into corporate advertising practices in Kenya as relates to the evolving gender context. The study was guided by three specific objectives:

- a) To determine the frequency of the portrayal of men as main characters in Safaricom corporate advertisements posted on Facebook.
- b) To identify the dominant roles attributed to men who were portrayed in Safaricom corporate advertisements posted on Facebook.
- c) To establish the extent to which male stereotypes were portrayed in Safaricom corporate advertisements posted on Facebook.

IV. LITERATURE REVIEW

The role played by advertisements in the social construction of gender is often discussed as the mirror versus mold debate. The mold perspective asserts that people's social reality is affected and shaped by advertisements while the mirror perspective asserts that advertisements can only reflect society for what it already is^[20]. In the mold perspective for example, brand personalities when depicted through gendered advertisements can be avenues through which brands can affect and shape consumers' views and beliefs on gender. This is because consumers tend to see themselves in the brand personality and therefore use the brand not only to construct their sense of self internally, but also to express their sense of self to others externally^[23].

In the mirror perspective, Pollay^[24] posited that advertisements play the role of a distorted mirror in society. According to Pollay, this premise is based on the view that advertising is a part of culture and must therefore use languages, symbols and values that are already accepted and understood by people in this culture. Therefore, to find faults in an advertisement is to find faults in the culture it originates from. However not all values within a culture will be relevant in the context of the advertising message, the advertiser must choose which values to amplify as more important than others to catch and maintain its viewer's attention and buying power. In this way, advertisements distort the value of some aspects of a society by elevating some while ignoring others, thus the reference to its role as a distorted mirror.

The display of gender in corporate advertising is key in helping Safaricom achieve one of its strategic message styles which is the symbolic association message style. According to Cornelissen^[2], symbolic association message style involves creating a psychological distinction from other competitors by associating the corporate brand to cultural concepts that are valuable to the society it operates in. When it comes to associating itself with specific societal concepts related to men, Safaricom creates corporate advertisements celebrating men and discussing the importance of their roles in society on Father's Day and International Men's Day which are days set aside globally and in Kenya to celebrate men and their roles in society. Safaricom also uses gendered corporate advertisements to communicate to its stakeholders. To get a positive reception of these advertisements, Safaricom must portray men and women in ways that resonate with and are acceptable to the Kenyan society. This means that when it comes to the portrayal of men in their scripting and storytelling, they need to draw from already accepted societal concepts of men and boys to create their corporate advertisements. In 2019, when Safaricom announced its membership to the Unstereotype Alliance, they released a press statement stating that producing nonstereotyped advertisements is not only about getting positive reception of advertisements by consumers, but also a business strategy which provides Safaricom global access to network and partner with other corporates that are invested in growing sustainable business through addressing gender issues^[16]. It was therefore determined that studying Safaricom's advertisements would contribute to increasing knowledge of corporate communication practices, especially as concerns the issue of gender.

V. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study entailed a content analysis of the portrayal of men in Safaricom corporate advertisements on Facebook. Data collected was triangulated with previous research on male gender roles and gender portrayals in advertisements, and other available data on Safaricom's commitment to produce advertisements that are stereotype free. This study took place on Safaricom's Facebook page which is their most populated online advertising platform in terms of followers. The study population was purposively sampled to select adverts that fit the study's definition of a corporate advertisement, that is, those that focused on communicating about the corporate brand, and not its products. Additional criteria that was used in identifying the study population included that they must be gendered, audio-visual, and storytelling advertisements. This is because these types of advertisements need to go through a scripting process within which content creators must think of how to portray the different genders featured. Other corporate advertisements that were considered were those created specifically to mark men's days such as Fathers' day and International Men's day. The unit of analysis for this study was main characters portrayed in Safaricom corporate advertisements published on Facebook between

January 1, 2015 to December 31, 2020. For purposes of this study, a main character was defined as any person with a line of speech and /or someone who appears for at least three seconds^[25,26]. It also included someone who was specifically spoken about in the advert narration.

To compile the study population, corporate advertisements were identified from hash tags used by Safaricom's corporate Facebook page @Safaricom. A hashtag is a word or phrase preceded with the symbol “#” used to organize massive amounts of data found in social media platforms by linking them to specific topics^[27,28,29]. It is common social media practice for brands who carry out social media campaigns to use hashtags to ease identification of, engagement with, and access to campaigns^[30,28]. The content that was analyzed was sourced from the hashtags linked to Safaricom's corporate brand campaigns that ran from 2015 to 2020 namely: *Nawe Kila Wakati, Thisis For You, Naweza Safaricom, Keep the Connections Going, The Safaricom Guarantee, Safaricom For You and TwendeTukiuke*.

Using the procedure outlined above, the researcher identified 68 Safaricom corporate advertisements that fit the criteria for the study's content analysis. A total of 159 characters were coded in the 68 adverts. Census method is not a popular method of research; however, it is appropriate for research populations that are very small^[31,32]. This study used the directed approach in content analysis which entailed creating coding schemes sourced from previous research and theory^[33]. Based on the research questions, the coding scheme was sourced from McArthur and Resko^[34] and Gilly^[26]. McArthur and Resko created one of the first coding schemes used to decode characters in advertisements and their scheme has remained largely intact and widely used with variations from other researchers including Gilly. Operational definitions were custom made for this study therefore some differed from the original authors' definitions. A coding book was created using Microsoft Excel containing detailed operationalized descriptions of codes and coding sheets to be used for coding specific categories observed in the advertisements. Intercoder reliability was established by first having a separate coder inter-code a subsample (n = 15 or 22.1%) of the total advertisements. Average intercoder percent agreement was 92% for both male and female categories. Coding was then completed by one researcher.

VI. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study found that over the timeline of 6 years, men were portrayed more frequently than women in Safaricom advertisements posted on Facebook between 2015 and 2020. A total of 95 (60%) main male characters were coded as compared to 64 (40%) main female characters. When they appeared together, disparity in men's and women's positions occurred only when men and women appeared as a couple. In these scenarios, men were more likely to be portrayed as working while their wives/partners were more likely to be portrayed in domestic settings as home makers. The study also found that the most dominant roles in which men were portrayed included *community leader* (66% men; 34% women), *family bread winner* (62% men; 38% women) and *head of the home* (60% men; 40% women). There was equal portrayal of both men and women as parents. The least dominant role that men were portrayed in was *home maker* (12% men; 88% women). Overall, Safaricom portrayed men as financially, physically and emotionally present in their families' lives in their scripted advertisements. However, in the advertisements that featured real life conversations between fathers and their children, fathers were portrayed by their children as financially and physically present, but emotionally distant. The study found that Safaricom used male stereotypes in their advertisements. Specifically, men were stereotyped as not being involved in homeschooling of children as they worked from home, a situation that both male and female parents faced due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Men were stereotyped as people who did not need any financial assistance as compared to women and children and more likely than women to become real life successful celebrity entertainers and athletes. Finally, the study found that from 2015 to 2019, men were stereotyped as more credible than women since they were more likely than women to be portrayed as authorities on the Safaricom corporate brand. From 2015 to 2020, a total of 74.3% men were portrayed as authorities on the brand as compared to 25.7% women. However, in 2020, portrayal of women as authorities on the brand increased from 11% in 2019 to 67% in 2020 while the portrayal of men as authorities on the brand decreased from 38% in 2019 to 15% in 2020.

The study concluded that the finding that men were portrayed more frequently than women in Safaricom corporate advertisements resulted from both directly mirroring normative social constructs of male gender roles in Kenya and the use of male stereotypes. This is because the overall focus of Safaricom's corporate advertisements was to portray inspirational stories of everyday people especially community leaders, or local role models whose stories of resilience would resonate with their brand campaigns. Particularly in 2017, the *Naweza Safaricom* brand campaign sought to position Safaricom as a brand that supported Kenyans to accomplish their dreams through providing connectivity and business creating innovations^[35]. In 2019, the *Ndoto Zetu* campaign was inspired by everyday people who were making a positive change in their society^[36]. These campaigns told real stories of real people, specifically community leaders who were using Safaricom to make a difference in their lives, businesses and communities. Even though both men and women were portrayed as community leaders, men were more likely than women to be portrayed in this role in the adverts thus

mirroring that it is a traditionally masculine role. Researchers have found that men in Kenya and most African societies continue to define themselves and be defined by the following traditional male gender roles: being financially independent by establishing a source of income, providing for both nuclear and extended family, showcasing wealth by paying bride price, marriage, siring children, family headship, and community leadership^[37,38,39,22]. Therefore, by mirroring normative social constructs of male gender roles in Kenya in their corporate communication strategy to tell stories of inspirational community leaders, Safaricom increased the frequency of the portrayal of men in their advertisements.

In 2018, Safaricom launched *Nawe Kila Wakati* campaign to mark its 18th anniversary and renew its commitment to support Kenyans every step of the way by providing more affordable services to make communication, business and social connections easier^[40]. In this campaign, Safaricom chose to use celebrities and the Safaricom Chief Executive Officer (CEO) to endorse the campaign. All celebrities chosen by Safaricom to endorse their campaigns were men. In addition, all athletes portrayed in the coded advertisements were men. Therefore, by stereotyping men as more likely than women to be athletes and celebrities, Safaricom increased the frequency of the portrayal of men in their advertisements. Considering that Kenya has both female and male celebrity athletes, comedians and musicians, it is not clear why Safaricom preferred to use male celebrities for these corporate advertisements.

The study concluded that even though Safaricom advertisements mirror Kenyan social constructs of male gender roles, in some instances, they seek to challenge normal gender roles. For instance, the advertisements mirror the evolution of the modern father by celebrating the father who breaks stereotypes by styling his daughter's hair and doubling up as a mother. The scripted advertisements also portray men as emotionally close to their families while the non-scripted father's days advertisements show that in reality, this is not always the case. One of the advertisements also shared a father's perspective that he is only harsh and unflinching because society expects him to be this way. However, Safaricom advertisements were still overall less likely to portray men as home makers in their advertisements. It is likely that similar to other corporates in these modern times, even though Safaricom has considered the commercial benefits of shunning gender stereotypes and instead investing in learning their consumers' view of gender and depicting this in their advertisements^[3], they find that some traditional aspects of masculinity and femininity continue to appeal to some of their audiences. Safaricom therefore cannot challenge normative gender roles in their context too aggressively.

As for the use of stereotypes in Safaricom's corporate advertisements, it is not clear if this is because the audience relates to certain gender stereotypes which according to Akestam^[41] is one reason why corporates use gender stereotypes. However, when it came to use of real-life employees as authorities on the brand, the study concluded that the finding that men were more likely than women to be portrayed as brand spokes persons reflected the actual gender composition of Safaricom employees. For instance, brand spokes persons in the advertisements were mostly high-level employees such as CEOs all of whom in Safaricom's case have been men. The trend of having more men than women as authorities on the brand however changed in the year 2020 when Safaricom expanded the pool of spokes persons to include other staff apart from the CEO and senior management. The study concludes that the increase of the use of women as brand spokes persons and subsequent decrease of the use of men for the same in this year may have been as a result of Safaricom's membership of the Unstereotype alliance. Being a member of this alliance places Safaricom adverts under the spotlight and may therefore have led to deliberate action to break the trend of mostly using men as brand spokes persons.

VII. CONCLUSION

In conclusion overall, while Safaricom advertisements mirror certain societal male gender roles, they also seek to challenge others in their gender portrayals. The advertisements portray an ideal picture of men. Realistically, not all men are financially, physically and emotionally present in their families' lives, neither are all men community leaders, family bread winners or heads of their homes. However, let's face it, no brand will use a character, whether fictional or real, that is frowned upon by society to pitch its brand campaign. Even brand ambassadors who find themselves out of good graces with the public e.g. due to a scandal are quickly dropped and the brand publicly distances itself from both the individuals and the scandal to maintain positive acceptance of their brand. However, as much as Safaricom's portrayal of men is idealistic, some of Safaricom's advertisements use inspirational stories of real people to associate its brand with real values that the Kenyan society is proud of therefore amplifying these ideals as real standards that do exist among some Kenyan men and that other men watching the adverts can aspire to achieve. Safaricom's corporate advertisements therefore work as a distorted mirror by portraying male stereotypes and portraying idealistic concepts of men, some of which challenge currently held social constructs of male gender roles.

For corporate communication practice application, the study recommends that it is important for corporates to equip their corporate communications staff to be aware of male and female gender stereotypes portrayed in their advertisements. At times it is not easy to spot gender stereotyping, especially of men when a corporate is vested in women empowerment. Corporate Social Responsibility projects should tell stories of impact on the whole community, including men. This is because men are also vulnerable and showing only the plight of women and children marginalizes the group of men who need financial and social help. Finally, corporates should aim for equal representation of both genders when choosing corporate brand spokes persons.

For future research, this study recommends more research on gender portrayals specifically in corporate advertisements as opposed to blanket sampling of all corporate advertising including those marketing products. This will enhance knowledge of best practices in communicating about the corporate brand, and especially through the gender lens. Research on the portrayal of modern masculinity in corporate advertisements is recommended. This should be done to understand how corporates are adjusting their advertising to evolving gender contexts. This study recommends research on the various strategies corporate communication teams use to counter stereotyping while scripting advertisement stories. This study also recommends further research on members of the Unstereotype alliance to evaluate if this membership translates to un-stereotyped advertising, and what strategies these corporates are using to eradicate stereotyping in their advertisements. Finally, considering the increasing use of social media by corporates for corporate communication, this study recommends further research on what strategies are considered by corporates in choosing particular social media platforms to place their corporate advertisements.

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