Gender Stereotyping in Kenyan Media: The Representative Codes of Women in Print Media Advertisements in Kenya.

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ABSTRACT

The appearance of women in print media is symbiotic to creating attention, interest and desire to purchasing product, services or ideas that they sell on the advertising copy. In this media semiotic study, we seek to explore the overall connotative messages and examine what these advertisements represent women as in advertisements by establishing how various codes haven been combined to create a certain meanings associated with women. These associations can therefore the basis of gender stereotyping even in countries that are considered progressive in nature.

The goal of the study is to explore the impact of messages in print media advertisements on the attitude towards women and their role in society. The objective of the study is to investigate what kinds of codes are used in the Kenyan print media magazine industry and how the codes contribute to the stereotypical impressions created by the media.

This was a qualitative study that focuses on media semiotics hence an interpretative research process is undertaken. The sample size for this research were 20 print media advertisements with women as the main subjects or symbols used in the message. It involved the evaluation, interpretation and construction of the qualitative aspects of communication experiences. Data collection tools that were used in this
study included responding to brief self-administrated questionnaire, observation schedules and focus group discussions.

Key findings indicated that advertisements were a representation of real life social norms that governed the gender roles for women in society. Key conclusions exhibited that in spite of the belief that women abide by social norms, the reality is that they are also just as defiant in following the rule defined as social norms of the society. Key recommendations that emerged indicated societal norms be should be adhered to in all forms of adverts as they are bound to create certain divisions in meaning, hence lose the recognition of society as well.

Key words: advertisements, semiotics, codes, symbols, print media

INTRODUCTION

The appearance of women in print media is symbiotic to creating attention, interest and desire to purchasing product, services or ideas that they sell on the advertising copy. Media semiotic studies seek to explore the overall connotative messages and examine what these advertisements represent women as in advertisements. This is a semiotic study which seeks to establish how various codes haven been combined to create a certain meaning that is associated with women. These associations are therefore the basis of gender stereotyping even in countries that are considered progressive in nature. The goal of the study is to explore the impact of messages passed through the media, on the attitude towards women and their role in society. The objective of the study is to investigate what kinds of codes are used in the Kenyan print media magazine industry and how the codes contribute to the stereotypical impressions created by the media.
Ferdinand de Saussure, in his ‘theory of the sign’ he presents the duality of a sign as being made up of the matched pair of signifier and signified. He talks of signification that helps society define what is of value and what is not. These values depict dissimilar things can be exchanged for pre-determined value or similar things that can be compared to create values. In our study, we seek to examine the typology of communication that exists in codes used in advertisements particularly in magazines. Reid, Heerden (2009) define codes as ‘a recipe or technique according to which signs are combined to convey meaning’. In apropos to this, the different codes signify representative cues that are associated with women.

This is a qualitative study that focuses on media semiotics hence an interpretative research process is undertaken. This involves the evaluation, interpretation and construction of the qualitative aspects of communication experiences. This aims at exploring authentic experiences of respondents while visually interacting with print media advertisements through the observation and focus group discussions on the salient codes that they are able to discern during a slide show viewing of 20 advertisements with women as the main subjects or symbols used in the message.

The research, having inquired about socially acceptable behavior, saw the respondents generally reflect that women actually defined the social norms and the behavior expected from them in society. Therefore the advertisements were a representation of real life social norms that governed the gender roles for women in society. From the findings, we concluded that in spite of the belief that women abide by social norms, the reality is that they are also just as defiant in following the rule. This is seen by the way respondents acknowledged that at times women advertisers go beyond societal norms in some adverts. We therefore recommend that societal norms be should be adhered to in all forms of adverts as they are bound to create
certain divisions in meaning, hence lose the recognition of society as well. All this is in line with the approach of signs creating meanings.

**Key words:** Advertising, Gender, Social norms, Media

### INTRODUCTION

The appearance of women in print media is symbiotic to creating attention, interest and desire to purchasing product, services or ideas that they sell on the advertising copy. Media semiotic studies seek to explore the overall connotative messages and examine how these advertisements represent women.

This study seeks to investigate what kinds of codes are used in the Kenya print media magazine industry and how these codes contribute to the stereotypical impressions that audiences have been socialized with by the media. This semiotic study seeks to establish how various codes have been combined to create a certain meaning that is associated with women. These associations are therefore the basis of gender stereotyping even in countries that are considered progressive in nature.

This study further on seeks to establish which signs are frequently used in print media advertisements to create codes that define the outlook that audiences have about women as modeled by the media. It seeks to explore the impact of these messages on the attitude towards women and their role in society. It also wishes to establish whether these advertisements inform the behavior of women in understanding their role in society.
The research is done within a spread of four months. We get to sample a set of Kenyan newspapers and magazines in an effort of selecting the advertisements we shall work with. Once selected, we put them on slides and approached universities to allow for the research to be done on their grounds and with their students.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The goal of this study is to investigate how codes and signs used in a variety of magazine and newspaper advertisements blend with the social norms and gender roles of women in Kenya. Our objectives are centered on identifying the codes predominantly used in depicting associative social roles of women in Kenyan magazines and newspapers. We also sought to determine the extent to which, various signs used within these codes in magazine and newspapers advertisements model prescribed social roles for women. Another objective of our study is to establish the role of these codes and signs on the perceptions of either sex on their gender roles in society today. We also sought to reveal to what extent the printing production process contributes to creating meaning through the magazine and newspaper advertisements.

The key assumptions in this study are that:

a. There are definite codes and signs existing in the production of magazine and newspaper advertisements.

b. That these aspects are measurable and easy to identify.

c. That these codes and signs subtly create certain meanings that define social norms and behaviour.
d. That the respondents will be capable of distinguishing the existence of codes and signs categorized earlier describe on this paper.

7. GOAL AND OBJECTIVES

The goal of this study is to investigate how codes and signs used in a variety of magazine and newspaper advertisements blend with the social norms and gender roles of women in Kenya. The specific objectives of this study are:

a. To identify the codes predominately used in depicting associative social roles of women in Kenyan magazines and newspapers.

b. To determine the extent to which, various signs used within these codes in magazine and newspapers advertisements model prescribed social roles for women.

c. To establish the role of these codes and signs on the perceptions of either sex on their gender roles in society today.

d. To what extent does the printing production process contribute to creating meaning through the magazine and newspaper advertisements.

8. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following are the research questions
1. What roles of women do the advertisements represent in terms of gender roles in society?

2. From the advertisements, has the production process contributed to creating the following meanings in the advertisements?

3. Look at the following advertisements and identify whether they prescribe any of the following ideas associated with women in the Kenyan society.

4. From the advertisements, what aspects or signs can you depict in terms of social roles for women in the Kenyan society?
LITERATURE REVIEW: THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913), the acclaimed Father of Linguistics presented the idea that language need not be considered only as a naming system but also as a means to create shared meaning. In his ‘theory of the sign’ he presents the duality of sign as being made up of the matched pair of signifier and signified. He talks of signification that helps society define what is of value and what is not. In his study, he pre-dominantly used the language system of independent terms or signs that were assigned as being valuable by society. These values depict dissimilar things can be exchanged for pre-determined value or similar things that can be compared to create values. Using the model below he depicts this analogy what demonstrate the duality of aspects that create value in society:

In his study, the value of a word was as determined by its environment. Accordingly words as part of a system have enclosed signification and value. In this study, I seek to examine the typology of communication that exists in codes used in advertisements in magazines. Reid, Heerden (2009) defines codes as ‘a recipe or technique according to which signs are combined to convey meaning’. Different codes signifying representative cues that are associated with women.

Some of these codes prescribe behavior that defines general social norms within a private or public context. Use of euphemisms is also one way of showing what codes of behavior entail. They revolve around the behavioral nature of people either in private or in the company of others. Signifying codes communicate certain
rules to follow in a specific sign system. On during television viewing, some programmes require parental supervision. There are also restrictions on when to broadcast certain content for certain audiences.

Habermas founded the paradigm of communicative action where he creates convergence and synthesis of the action theory with the system theory. In Habermas’s new social paradigm; the Theory of Communicative Action identifies various social formations used for collective learning. This, he asserts is based on new relationships between man and nature/environment. He distinguishes four social formations as: high culture, traditional, capitalist and post capitalist. Key assumptions in the ‘postmodern’ social formation are that there will emerge a “mind-created society” in the spirit of the critical social theory requirements.

He bases his basic tenets on Parsons’ theory that created general categories of human knowledge and action and uses this to deduce social categories based on concepts such as social action, interests, life world, social system, regulation as facets of communication. He asserts that the social systems are maintained by the instrumental action exerted upon the external surroundings, as well as by specially regulated stereotyped communicative action with respect to the internal surroundings, to the nature of its members. Habermas recognizes the role of speech acts as being central in creating contexts that are assumed to rationalize action.

The Social Learning Theory that was developed by Albert Bandura in 1977 focuses on the learning that occurs within a social context. It considers that people learn from one another, including such concepts as observational learning, imitation, and modeling. Observational learning occurs when the actual individual
demonstrates or acts out behavior. Learning also occurs when actions are described or explained through verbal instructions.

Learning also occurs through anticipation of intrinsic reinforcement like intrinsic rewards like pride, satisfaction, and a sense of accomplishment. Here, behavior is directed toward particular goal and therefore individuals self-regulate their behavior. People also learn through interacting with symbolic model like real or fictional characters on various media. Learning occurs when people observe their actual and outcomes of their behavior.

These behavior can be modeled though the media leading to the audiences’ identification with the model. This can lead to the adopting of observed behaviors, values, beliefs and attitudes of the model by the observer. Identification can however, lead to the adoption of a number of behaviors unlike in imitation where just a single behavior is adopted

RESEARCH DESIGN

This is a qualitative study that focuses on media semiotics hence an interpretative research. That evaluates interpret and construct the qualitative aspects of communication experiences. This aims at exploring authentic experiences of respondents while visually interacting with print media advertisements through the observation and focus group discussions on the salient codes they are able to discern during a slide show viewing of eight advertisements with women as the main subjects or symbols used in the message. The issue in my study is relevant to communication as I seek to see and understand how women are used in print media by evaluating different codes.

The issue is researchable because women are used in many advertisements in Kenya and advertising is a communication branch. The
research is feasible because the people to be interviewed are around us, the newspapers and magazines are also readily available in the market. The research is ethical because the participants we used to answer the questioner were briefed on what the research is all about. They willingly volunteered to participate. Confidentiality was given to all participants. The environment that we used to answer the questioner was safe, thus we looked into the safety precautions. The problem was researchable and it was relevant to the communication studies.

The research is done in Kenya, Nairobi city. The publications used are two newspapers, The Standard and The Daily Nation. The magazines used are True Love and Drum (all Kenyan print). The research is done within a period of four (4) months. This is because the research is a portfolio that is marked and one is able to know if they are doing their research as required or not. Having received my books early January and having worked on the assignment since then, it makes four months.

The respondents will fill in a self-administrating questionnaire to get demographic information and initial attitude and beliefs of how women are depicted in print advertisements. They shall then view the eight advertisements and respond to a checklist of various signs and codes they can isolate from the advertisements. This will then culminated into a focus group discussion of the issues.

**POPULATION**

The population intended for this study is university students. This will be my accessible population. The target population will be mainly undergraduate students from KCA, Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture & Technology University & United States International University in their 2nd or 3rd year of
study. The sample frame will be based on convenient sampling based on student contacts in the same field of study. The population parameters are undergraduate students in their second and third year of study. These will be studying Bachelor of Commerce, Journalism and business, in the age group of 18-25 years, single and living with their parents.

The Data Analysis process will be based phenomenological in nature as it will be based on recordings of the aforementioned proceeding. The findings will be transcribed and categorization of the content will be done under the codes that will determine the observation criteria.

DATA COLLECTION METHODS AND TECHNIQUES

The research method that was used in this study is via using questioners. The sampling of the required advertisements was done. The population parameters such as size, nature, and the unique characteristics of the target population were done (Du Ploy 2001:108). Due to constraints such as time, cost and personnel the accessible population was sampled out as undergraduate students at KCA University. A research review was done, historical data was looked through. A focus group was organized, a moderator was present to explain the reason for the research and give answers to any ethical questions that were mentioned. Measurement was done by using the Likert questionnaire item, respondents specify their level of agreement or disagreement on a symmetric agree-disagree, neutral, disagree or strongly disagree scale for a series of statements (Du Ploy 2001:74). Thus, the range captures the intensity of their feelings for a given item. A scale can be created as the simple sum questionnaire responses over the full range of the scale. In so doing, Likert scaling assumes that distances on each item are equal. Importantly, “All items are assumed to be replications of each other or in other words items are considered to be parallel instruments’
The sampling method that was used in the study was stratified in the sample in the proportion they occur in the population random sampling because it was easy to draw because the target population was small and the sampling frame existed, a representative sample could be obtained and the sample is from a homogeneous sub-group.

I collected advertisements in the different newspapers and magazine. I came up with the eight advertisements that I would use for the study by looking at the creative concepts which are promise, curiosity, amplification, claims, endorse, proof action, brand name, slogan, appeals and the factual approach (emotional approach) (Du Ploy 2001:261-263). These made my guide lines for the choice of advertisements I used to in the slide show as the respondents filled in their questionnaires.

The sample size used was a group of 33 undergraduate students, both sexes, in the age group of 18 to 25. The data was collected via way of filling in a questionnaire with the help of a moderator. The respondents were not coaxed to fill the questionnaire in a certain way. They did it at will and whatever they were not comfortable to fill was ignored. The moderator explained the creative concepts to the group in order for them to fill in the relevant questioners with the right information at hand.

DATA ANALYSIS

The frequency table was made for each question depending on the answer the respondents gave and the percentage per element was given after the relevant calculation. I used the SPSS computer package to assist me calculate the same.
Out of the 33 respondents we had, we recorded their responses on a tallying table depending on the responses they gave us. We coded and categorized them.

Some questions were answered and some were not. It seemed some questioned made the respondents uneasy either due to their upbringing, socialization, and exposure to certain things in society to mention but a few.

FINDINGS

74.2% of the respondents agreed that women in the advertisement were used to represent expectations of them socially. They defined the social norms and the behavior expected from them in society. Therefore the advertisements were a representation of real life social norms that governed the gender roles for women in society.

Women are good abiders of rules set by society. According to 57.6% of the respondents, women were considered to be good followers of rules prescribed to them in society. It is interesting to note that 24.2% of the respondents did not volunteer their opinion on the issue. This is an indication of the sensitive nature of the issue of whether women abide to the social norms expected of them. These findings give an indication that in spite of the belief that women abide to social norms, the reality is that they are also just as defiant in following the rule.

74.2% of the respondents were of the opinion that women were often used to communicate issues in society they are depicted as a symbol that reflects societal norms, beliefs and values. They act as vessels to pass on messages prescribed by the society.

According to 72.8% of the respondents, women are guided to communicate through non-verbal cues often. They are expected to express their emotions non-
verbally and rarely speak out aloud. This indicates their feelings non-verbally. Verbal expressions by women especially about how they feel is contrary to what is the expected social norm.

51.7% of the respondents were of the opinion that the women in the advertisement depicted that they were not confined to the traditional roles of care-giving and nurturing in society. They are depicted as having more elaborate roles as professional or outside the confines of the home. It is important to note that 32.3% of the respondents declined to answer the question indicating that this question was sensitive and that they probably were uncomfortable with the view that women had more complex roles in society other than being care-givers and nurturers.

75.1% of the respondents agreed that women mirrored that nature of a society. They were symbolically used in the advertisements to initiate, to encourage or discontinue certain behaviors as defined by the social norms of the society.

Based on the viewed advertisements, 60.6% of the respondents agreed that women are often subjects of social abuse. However, 30.3% again declined to respond to the question which appeared to be sensitive in nature. It could also indicate inability to identify some behaviors that can be teemed as social abuse or intolerance to the thought of women as subjects of abuse in society.

65.6% of the respondents agreed that women were better subjects for advertisement than men. A significant 15.6% refused to respond to this question. The findings could indicate that women as a choice for many advertisements is purposely to reflect the beliefs, norms and values of society. They are symbols used to depict what the socially defined norms and behavior expected in society or gender stereotypes. The no response depicts that there may have been discomfort of pitching women as being better than men as choices of subject in advertisements.
Based on the advertisements, 48.5% of the respondents were of the view that society tends to restrict women behavior and roles through socially defined norms. Again 30.3% of the responses gave no response. This can be an indication of discomfort in articulating their views about the issues or that they did not see a link between social norms and the content in the advertisements. It is also probably an indication of intolerance to whether women adhere to social norms or not.

81.8% of the respondents agreed that from the advertisements that women depicted expected adherence to social norms that define behavior. 63.6% of the respondents agreed that society did define rules to be followed by members of the society. 30.3% of the non-respondents could indicate disinterest in what society sets as rules sand that respondents think that they follow independent rules of life. This indicates that people are basically conformists but there are a few independent minded persons who do not like based on societal expectations.

54.8% of the respondents agreed that women were more fluent and better communicators than men. However, the 27% non-responses could still indicate discomfort with gender stereotyping on who is better than the other in communication.

78.8% of the respondents agreed that women were better at communicating through non-verbal cues than men. This could indicate that in their training, women are encouraged not to verbally express emotions and feelings and need to be passive in nature. They however can express themselves with non-verbal cues that can sometimes be ambiguous.

72.6% of the respondents agreed that in the advertisement, women are depicted to defy social norms restrictions. They appear to depict behavior contrary to what is defined by the society. They do not therefore, necessary show conformity to social norms at all times.
69.4% of the respondents agreed that women were used to set trends in society. This is because they mirrored ideal roles and behavior expected of them in society. 24.2% indicated on-response. This again indicates discomfort in the view that women set trends in society. It could mean that women just communicate trends as defined by men because they mirror what is expected of them in society.

69.7% of the respondents agreed that women participated in advertisements because they were more outgoing. They went out to get opportunities to be on advertisements more than men. Again 21.2% were non-responses which could indicate intolerance to comparisons being made between men and women in society.

71% of the respondents agreed that women in advertisement mirrored the expectations and norms of the society. They represented behavior to conform to the societal expectations.

66.7% of the respondents agreed that the advertisements reflected social roles for women as defined by society. 18.2% of the respondents gave no response which could indicate that they did not find that assertion valid.

66.7% of the respondents deduced that the advertisement also defined socially accepted behavior. 18.8% were non-response that could indicate their intolerance to the defining of roles in society. It could also depict that they do not see the link between advertisements and definition of socially acceptable behavior.

65.7% of the respondents agreed that women were more competent in verbal communication. Again 28.1% of the respondents gave no response. This could be an indication that they did not appreciate gender stereotyping or did not believe that
women could out-do men in non-verbal communication. It could also indicate intolerance to comparison between the two gender roles.

51.5% of the respondents agreed while 30.3% gave no response to the assertion. This could indicate that the assumption that women are better verbal communicators lends them tools of society to communicate defined social behavior and norms. The non-responses are probably an indication of discomfort with the comparisons made, intolerance of the competitive view between sexes or discomfort with the question.

48.5% of the respondent agreed that advertisement conformed with societal expectations. They were designed based on what is socially acceptable in society. The non-response was 18.25% could indicate no link between advertisement and society.

60.6% of the respondents agreed that women were subjects on advertisements to set trends by selling new ideas, products or services. Again 18.2% of the respondents did not respond to this question which could indicate that they were intolerant to comparisons between male and females. It also indicates discomfort in accepting women as better in some ways.

This question elicited the highest non-response rate at 38.7%. It also demonstrated 48.4% agreed that the advertisement depicted women as objects of social abuse. The former percentage indicate either inability to articulate what social abuse is, intolerance to the view that women are socially abused or lack of link to the advertisements. The respondents were uncomfortable with the question. The latter indicates that the content of advertisement signals and models behavior that could be abusive in nature. It however reflects the view of the society.
63.6% of the respondents agreed that women were better placed in advertisements than men. They are most probably used as a channel to express expected societal norms and values. They may not necessarily be representing their own view of life as women but what the society has defined as norms and expected behavior.

69.7% agreed that the advertisement conformed to the norms set in the Kenyan context. 24.45% non-response indicated that that was probably not the case as the advertisement may be communicating other norms that are not necessarily Kenyan.

51.5% of women agreed that women in Kenya tended to abide with the rules set by society. However, 24.2% of the respondent did not give a response and similar number 24.2% disagreed. This could indicate that the Kenyan women are considered defiant when it came to conforming to societal rule they are not independent minded and make their own decisions.

64.5% of the respondents agreed that women were better communicators than men in Kenya. This could indicate that they either have the competency as communications or are frequently used to communicate and model behavior expected by society.

72.8% agreed that women often use non-verbal cues which indicates how they have been socialized to behave in society as passive expression of their feelings or emotions. This could be useful in maintaining societal norms.

57.6% of the respondents agreed that women were defiant to societal regulation. They are independent minded and act according to their wish. The 24.2% non-response could indicate the same however; it shows either discomfort or intolerance to the view that women in Kenya are defiant by nature.
51.5% of the respondents agreed that women are depicted as daring while setting new trends through advertisements in print media. 24.2% gave no response either choosing to ignore the sentiments or are reserved in nature.

75.8% of the respondents agreed that women willingly participated in advertisement. It could indicate that they were interested to portray roles probably because they confirmed with societal expectations, norms and modeled socially accepted behavior. They enhanced gender roles and glamorized them.

81.8% of the respondents agreed that women in the advertisement reflected the norms, regulations, restrictions of society well. They were conducts used as model appropriate behavior and image expected of women in society.

75.7% of respondents agreed that the roles depicted in the advertisement were reflective of what was expected of them in society. 21.2% were non-responses which could indicate that there was no link between advertisement in social norm, behavior defining or that they though the role were not necessarily relevant to the society.

**CONCLUSION**

The study revealed the following:

i. Advertisements in the Kenyan context have tended to depict real-life social norms that govern the gender roles of women as outlined by social norms. It was interesting to note that in spite of the belief that advertisements depicted that women are abided to social norms. The findings depict that women in modern times appear to be defiant of the social norms.

ii. Many advertisements depicted that women were not confined top traditional care-giving or nurturing roles. They were depicted as professional women and other
complex roles in the society. Some of the advertisements depicted women as defying social norms in a bid to set new trends in society. Women have been used to depict ideal roles and behaviors in modern society. Women appeared to be depicted as more independent minded and able to make their own decisions.

iii. Women in this advertisement were symbolically used to initiate, encourage, discontinue certain behavior such as them being subjects of social abuse. Many respondents tended to agree that advertisements depicted women in roles and behavior as guided by socially defined norms. Women rarely reflected norms as guided by their own views. Women in advertisement were depicted as tools of communication of roles prescribed by society. Women in fact, were depicted as the better choice of subject to depict prescribed social norms in society.

iv. Gender stereotyping that depicted women as better and fluent communicators was found as an explanation for their use in advertisements. They were depicted as better at expressing non-verbal cues based on the fact that in the Kenyan context, women are discouraged from verbal expression of their issues.

v. Further to, women are favored as subjects of advertisements because they are outgoing hence easily get the opportunities to participate in adverts. They participated in these advertisements so that they participated in enhancing gender roles by glamourizing them. New roles that were depicted did not necessarily conform to those defined by societal norms. In the advertisements, non-verbal communication was used to express women’s emotions by appearing to be subdued, excited, and empowered more than they appeared to depict roles as defined by social norms.

RECOMMENDATIONS
The following are the recommendations from the study:

i. Advertisements in Print Media depicted real-life social norms as defined by society. However, it was not clear if it is the traditional or modern perceived reality

ii. Advertising in Print Media used women as subjects as trend-setting initiators to encourage social and perception changes in gender stereotyping. Specifically:

a. Women are currently depicted as professionals and holding complex positions in society and less as care givers and nurturers
b. Women are used to play communicative and prescriptive roles to encourage socially acceptable perceptions about social norms and discourage social abuses

iii. Women are perceived as favoured subjects in Print Media advertisements because:

a. they solicit and participate in the production of advertisements
b. They are considered as better non-verbal communicators which is an ability that has been enhanced by their being subdued from being vocal about their views in the Kenyan society.

**FURTHER RESEARCH**

The following are recommended as areas for further study:

I. Exploring the impact of Print Media Advertisements in institutionalizing changes in gender roles in the Kenyan society
II. The salient issues that create cognitive dissonance unexpressed in analyzing the depiction of women in Print Media Advertisements

III. Advertising as a deterrent to social abuse in the Kenyan Society

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