

# Clash of Civilization: Portrayal of African Cultures in Advertisement in Kenya

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**Abstract:** Advertising as a means of promotion is capable of influencing culture. In this era of globalization it is evident that advertising finds itself at a very peculiar position as it tries to strike a balance between trans-culture across borders. African culture is known for being reserved when subjected or compared to western culture. Even though there may be no straight cut definition of what defines Africanity or African culture, the definition can be based on the values and beliefs enshrined in the African continent.

The purpose of this paper was to look at how African cultures are portrayed in advertisements in Kenya and how exactly different portrayals of cultures especially the Western culture in the Kenyan market results to a clash of civilization. The paper assessed the impact of different portrayals of cultures through advertisement in Kenya, under the following three parameters: sex and nudity in advertising, sexual orientation and advertising and masculinity/femininity in advertising. The research looked at how the above three are represented in African cultures, and where the clash comes in.

The methodology used in this desertion was purely content analysis of advertising in Kenya, advertising literatures and consumer reactions to various advertising. It took a purely qualitative approach.

**Keywords:** Culture, Civilization, Advertisement.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Advertising industry is diverse depending on the task at hand. It is dynamic in the sense it has to be strategic depending on the task at hand. For an advert to achieve effective communication it has to put in mind the consumers. These are the same consumers who have a definite way of thinking, values and believe. Diverse cultures are brought and presented through advertising, hence the capability of advertisement to influence culture. When talking about culture we refer to the characteristics based factors such as values, beliefs, language, social habits, music and art of a particular group of people (Kim Ann Zimmermann July 09, 2012)

With the world becoming a global village new cultures are easily acquired through the internet and most precisely through advertising. Globalization is seen as the coming together of fundamentals borders that initially had separated the political, economic and cultural atmosphere (American University in Cairo 1998)

African culture to a larger extent has been affected by the western culture, the African cultures have been watered down, and there is an embrace of the western culture, with the belief that western is better than African (Orville Boyd Jenkins 1991). With the rise of influence from the West, Africa is finding itself at a compromising situation of losing in terms of its values and beliefs, civilization, religion, art, literature and customs. This watering down of African culture can to a large extent be credited to advertising because it is one of the most forceful modes of cultural transmission from the West to Africa. Most of the products consumed in Africa for instance are from other continents despite the same products being produced locally. All this can be credited to the assumption that products from other areas are superior to our own.

We cannot clearly state what entails African culture in totality because Africa is regarded as the most diverse in culture among the seven continents of the world (Orville Boyd Jenkins 1991). For the sake of this paper though, African culture will be looked at in terms of beliefs and values that cut across the continent. In Kenya alone, there are over 47 different ethnic groups, posing a great challenge in targeting as far as advertising and cultures are concerned. The average individual in Kenya is bombarded with several hundred adverts per day for example from: billboards, TV commercials, radio commercials, placement in films, Internet ads, radio blurbs, and newspaper and magazine ads.

Globalization has impacted on Africans cultural behavior in many different ways. To the extent that people have had to change the living standards and ways. There is an embrace of western culture and a disregard of African culture in the behaviors of people and how such ideologies are encrypted in the various adverts. According to Muyale .F. (1998) the youth prefer the western beats to the local African artists and hair styles, shoes and clothing keep to the trends on the western fashion scene.

Advertising is one of the major agent's of socialization, just like other agents such as: family, religion, and education. This is so because it tells consumers how to think and feel and what is normal or abnormal, or what you need to worry about or not (Mill, 2007).

In the process of attracting customers to a product or service advertisements also communicates messages on: race, social class, gender, values and family. Advertisements also go further to prescribe behaviors and way of living through targeting a specific population for specific products and services. As a result impacting on social norms or what is considered acceptable. Advertisement contributes heavily to the ways of social construction of the Africa's image adopted by consumers drawn from all walks of life. According to Goldman (1992), advertising has a strong effect on culture.

## 2. PROBLEM OF THE STATEMENT

In November 2014 in Kenya some women were reported to having been stripped naked apparently for wearing, what was deemed indecent clothing in regard to micro miniskirts? Such kinds of dressings are not perceived to hold high moral value as expected in African culture. Because it is assumed a lady should show respect through grooming decently. Decent clothing in this case means grooming in kind of clothing that covers your body appropriately. But then foreign clothe companies are known to come in and advertise a well known celebrities in revealing clothes, influencing many Kenyan young women to desire such revealing clothes despite them not being acceptable to all.

It's important to acknowledge that not all advertisements promote or imply acceptance of social values and beliefs that everyone would agree in an enlightened and civilized society. Some advertisements may appear to degrade images of ourselves, our language, and culture.

Advertising information is centralized and monolithic resulting to communication becoming only one way. Advertisement from without and within the African continent not only promote goods and services but also instill behavioral change resulting to direct impact on culture and social fabric. Most of cultural attitudes and values are imported and therefore not originally African. Such cultural imperialism via advertisements hinders the creation of a national identity in Kenya.

Therefore this paper aims to provide insight on the cultural clash brought about by advertisements in Kenya, with the use of specific examples of ads and their depiction of westernized culture vis-a-vis African culture.

## 3. OBJECTIVE

The objective of this paper was to determine the portrayal of African cultures in ads and the impact of other cultural ideologies especially the Western in Kenyan adverts.

### CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

*Independent variable*

*Dependent variable*

**Audience Culture** → **Advert** → **Audience response**

The above conceptual frame work indicates that the audience response to adverts, directly depends on the cultural background of the audience.

## 4. LITERATURE REVIEW

### Theoretical Framework:

This study was based on the Social Learning Theory and The Agenda setting theory. Social learning theory is related to the Pavlov's dogs experiment. Pavlov trained his dogs to associate the arrival of food with the ringing of a bell; a sound that alone would lead to the salivation response among the dogs. Just like the bell in Pavlov's experiment, repeated

advertising is seen as a stimulus that gives rise to a cultural response, just like the dogs' salivation response (Karlson, 2007).

Social learning theory is significant in explaining how individuals learn new things and in the process tend to develop new behaviors by observing others (<https://explorable.com/social-learning-theory>). Consumers tend to learn and with time change their behavioral patterns after continuously getting exposed to various types of adverts. In this case what consumers tend to observe in advertising gets assimilated in them and eventually start aping what is observed.

Social learning theory is grounded on the concept of observational learning where by individuals learn from observing others as they perform various behaviors. According to Bandura (1977) in the Bobo Doll experiment, where he placed an adult who acted aggressively towards the doll while children were observing. It was noted that when the same children were exposed to the Bobo Doll they also acted aggressively towards the doll imitating the adult aggressive behavior towards the doll.

Individuals mind contributes enormously on assimilation of what is being observed. This is sometimes referred to as intrinsic reinforcement as opposed to external factors to learning. In this sense for example after an individual has observed a particular advert lets a cologne, and goes ahead and buys that particular cologne and feels good about it. The individual has just received intrinsic reinforcement or internal reward, a sense of satisfaction. According to Bandura (1977), however learning does not mean that there will be a change of behavior and that is why there occurs a clash of civilization in the event an advert tends to go against the locals ideals, beliefs and values.

In order for us to say either the social learning has been successful or not the following four modeling process should be put in mind: attention, retention, reproduction and motivation. Social learning theory demonstrates that attention is vital for learning to occur. Those ads that can have implication on individual's culture either positive or negative must have been paid attention to.

After observing a particular ad, retention of what has been observed is crucial, without retention learning of the behavior would not be established due to lack of storing the information about the behavior.

After an individual has retained a particular behavior observed in an ad, the individual then demonstrates the behavior observed, this is referred to as reproduction, where an individual practices the behavior observed by repeatedly doing it.

The final step is motivation where by reinforcement and punishment comes in the sense that a particular behavior observed in an advert and reproduced can be supported by the community surrounding the individual or punished if it is not in tandem with individual's society.

By putting consumption as the only key message in advertisements, advertising also sets the agenda. Every commercial portrayed in advertisement are molded to give a particular perception of what they want the consumer to see regardless of whether the information is true or not. The attention of the consumer once it has been captured develops into interest in that particular product which with time turns into a burning desire to have the product resulting into the actual action of buying the product advertised. In most cases the agenda setting theory in advertising looks at consumers as people who cannot think for themselves therefore it does the thinking for them. Advertising gives the consumer a trigger on what to think about thus setting the mental agenda.

Advertising strategy is to make the consumers capable of generating mental agendas of a lot of things. These things are carefully placed so that when the consumers reach to their minds among the many items the consumer has, the advertisers always want to make sure that their items are on top of the mental agenda of their consumers. Reason being the probability of the items at the top of the mental agenda to be chosen is high and the most likely item the consumer will remember first (M. Sutherland et al 1981).

## 5. CULTURE AND CLASH OF CIVILIZATION IN ADVERTISING

Understanding cultural differences is a prerequisite in understanding how clash of civilization comes to advertising. In Kenya most of what is considered western culture conflicts significantly with the African indigenous culture. What is embraced in most of the western countries is not particularly embraced in Kenya; however most of the cultural values in Kenya are influenced by advertising (Belk, R.W 1985). When consumers grow up in a particular culture they tend to become accustomed to that culture's value systems, beliefs and perception processes. In return they respond to advertising

messages in a manner messages that is congruent to their cultural values and norms. Consequently the social values and cultural characteristics of the target audience may limit the choice of advertising themes used in one particular culture.

## 6. SEX AND NUDITY IN ADVERTISING AND AFRICAN CULTURE

Sex in advertising has been claimed as the reason for increased consumer interest and sales. Sex in advertising is the use of sexual or erotic imagery in advertising to draw interest to and to help sell a particular product. The use of sex in advertising can be obvious or concealed. It ranges from relatively explicit displays of sexual acts, to the use of basic cosmetics to enhance attractive features (Newmann, 1998).

The western view on sex is very different from the African view on the same. Some situations that may be alarming to Africa with regard to how sex is portrayed in adverts will not call for the same reaction in Western countries. For example the earliest known use of sex in advertising in Kenya was in the early 80's with "Satin Sheen Hair oil" advertisement, where a girls' beautiful figure showing bare shoulders and beautiful hair was seen rotating in a way that could put one in a daze. It was rumored that this particular girl coming from a Muslim background was killed by her uncle for embarrassing the family which was a conservative Islamic one.

In African setting it's wrong to groom in clothing's that expose your body whereas in Western Culture it is okay to expose your body. The habit of exposing one's body parts especially in ladies when it comes to grooming has picked up pace in Kenya, most of the people of the female gender are now wearing dresses which expose their bodies generously with no reservations. This behavior can be credited to advertising since some adverts in Kenya use more of nudity to sell their products. For example in the year 2010, the Vaseline advert featuring radio and TV personality Sheila Mwanzyigha in Kenya, was seen by many as offensive. Many thought that it was "un-African" for women to pose without clothes for whatever cause. And some of the public's took it personally. Following a complaint by a concerned Kenyans over the billboard by Vaseline, the Consumer Federation of Kenya, (COFEK), pledged to take action, categorically stating court action and call for consumer boycott as some of the options they were exploring.

Open discussion of sexual content and female hygiene products, was a role that was previously played by specific people in the African Society for example the role of grandmother in educating girls on gender issues as per customary preferences. Hence it was not something to be discussed in public. In 2013 a "Trust Condom" ("weka" Condom "mpangoni" meaning "put condom in your plan") advert depicting two married women one of them admitting to an extra marital affair with a younger looking man, as her friend advises her to include a condom in the affair, was not welcomed in consumers point of because it was not African. This kind of American way of advertising is considered to be immoral in Kenya. However the media did not question the advertisement and were only too happy to air it on prime time in exchange for the exorbitant amounts they get from the advertiser. This is a sign of the proliferation and intrusiveness of advertising in Kenya today. Such advertisements cause three types of cultural effects: materialism, value corruption and falsity.

## 7. SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND ADVERTISING

Sexual themes are very common in today's world of advertising. Western countries are on record supporting same sex marriage and ideology they want to force down the throats of Africans. In most recent cases where nations such as Uganda and Zimbabwe passed laws against gayism, faced a lot of opposition from the western nations and sanctions. According to (Peñaloza, 1996) with the gay male and lesbian numbers growing there is need to target this market hence in the U.S this market representing a significant buying power adverts featuring gay male and lesbian models are commonly used.

In Kenya issues on same sex marriage are not even spoken publicly because it majorly conflicts with the native African culture where it believed a man belongs to a woman and a woman belongs to a man, not vice versa, as a matter of fact advertisements aired in Kenya be it on radio, television or print have got know gay male or lesbian connotations. For a very long time the gay community in Kenya have been fighting for recognition to no avail, since that is a culture not been accepted and considered a taboo.

## 8. MASCULINITY/FEMINITY

Masculinity and femininity refers to the distribution of roles between the genders. For example masculine traits which are associated to the male include assertiveness, materialism/material success, self-centeredness, power, strength, and individual achievements. Femininity on the other hand consist of attributes labeled on girls or women such as gentleness, empathy, and sensitivity

The concept of masculinity and feminity are usually socially constructed but at the same time determined by socially-defined and biologically-created factors. Making it different from the definition of the biological female sex or male sex, as both men and women can exhibit feminine traits and vice versa.

According to (Sirgy 1982) consumers are attracted to products used by persons with similar lifestyle and personalities to their own. In this case masculinity and feminity entails aspects of personality and social orientation (Wiggins & Holzmuller, 1978, 1981). When advertisement characterizes product users along the dimensions of masculinity and femininity, the consumers who view themselves alongside those dimensions are more inclined to be attracted to the advertisement and eventually the product (Chang, 2005; Jaffe, 1990, 1994).

Traits traditionally cited as feminine or masculine vary depending on geographical location, context, social and cultural factors. For instance in Kenya it is masculine for a man to have more than one woman, but that is not the case with women. This was evident with a condom advert showing a woman who confesses to having an extra marital affair with a man slightly younger than her and she is advised by the friend not to forget to use condom. This advert raised a lot of discomfort in the Kenyan community as opposed to other condom adverts showing men having extra marital affairs with other women who are not their wife's or girlfriends. The reason for the discomfort which eventually led to the advert being terminated was culturally speaking a woman is not supposed to have more than one man. The reaction after the advert depicted that it is expected for women to be submissive and faithful to their husbands.

In Africa the gender roles associated with people of particular gender for example home management by dads as portrayed by the actor in the "Soko Ugali" advertisement is a foreign notion brought to Kenya through Advertising. The ad shows the father, in the kitchen with a cooking spoon singing. The African culture does not apportion men roles in the kitchen this brings a discord between two cultures when the actor in this particular advertisement is portrayed as being the entertainer of the family and also using the wooden cooking stick as a prop. This is not African men are not allowed to touch the cooking stick let alone go to the Kitchen.

## 9. METHODOLOGY

This study relied heavily on secondary data obtained through critical review of existing literature, including published books, articles and journals. The basis on which data was collected and upon which analysis and interpretations were done was purely content analysis.

## 10. CONCLUSION

Gradually, the public consensus on the nature of shopping has slowly shifted as people no longer consider shopping a conscious, needs-driven activity, but rather an intrinsic feature of standard urban living. To reinforce this constant and relentless reality of consumption, the average consumer is in near constant contact with engaging and provocative advertising through all forms of media that make use of a wide range of other motivational tools, most of which combine product placement with an appeal to other facets of human culture that may have little to do with the product at all. Advertising lends value to the faulty mirror theory that claims that advertisements borrow cultural values selectively and use them to lend credit to their products.

## 11. RECOMMENDATIONS

Responsible advertising should try to achieve its economic goals while keeping them in proportion with greater human values. This can be achieved by listening more attentively to critical views and taking suggestions from them in order to improve advertising, and adhering to ethics in advertising so as not to have a negative image of an organization.

In order to achieve successes in advertising campaigns, we need reliable and valid assessment of cultural differences so that shared attitudes, beliefs, motivations and values can be capitalized on while avoiding aspects of culture which might lessen the impact of advertising investment.

## 12. SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

There is room for the presentation of critical papers and research on impact of advertising on culture. Further research is required into looking at other areas not covered in this paper where there is culture clash in advertising.

Further research is also required in looking into suggestions in the development of code of ethics that govern advertising to ensure an open leveled playing ground that would enable advertising take place without really eroding the positive indigenous culture of the audiences who are being target by the advertisers.

Consumers today are exposed to more sexual themed advertisements than ever before. Advertising copy writers maximize on sexual themes in their adverts to seek attention from consumers (Danielenko, 1974). Despite the significance of sexual themes in advertising more research should be directed towards assessing the impact of such ads on consumer awareness, attitudes, or behavior.

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