
RESEARCH ARTICLE

Changing Masculinity, One Ad at a Time

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This paper takes a rhetorical perspective on how ads address the current debate of toxic masculinity and attempt to change its hegemonic ideals. We compare rhetorical strategies in two purpose branding campaigns, Lynx's *Is it ok for guys* (2017) and Gillette's *The Best a Man Can Be* (2019), to demonstrate how respective uses of formal and narrative tropes create vastly different narratives about masculinity and therefore also very different audience agency. We argue that Gillette repeats older versions of hegemonic masculinity ideals and call for men to take responsibility and act as protector of the weak, whereas Lynx invites the audience to embrace and identify with less stereotypical identities. We suggest that Gillette's polemical rhetorical approach may generate more public debate on the issue of toxic masculinity, while Lynx's approach builds on a more embracing strategy that encourages the audience to empathise with non-stereotypical forms of masculinity.

Keywords: advertising and gender; masculinity; rhetorical analysis; purpose branding; brand narrative

Introduction

In this paper, we address how brands participate in discourses on toxic masculinity through advertising. Specifically, we analyse and compare the new brand narratives from Gillette and Lynx to understand the rhetorical strategies these two brands use in their communication on toxic masculinity. Historically, both Lynx and Gillette have had strong brand narratives that portrayed masculinity in particular and stereotypical ways. Since 1989, Gillette has portrayed the dependable, yet sexy man through their slogan 'The Best a Man Can Get'. However, in 2019, Gillette turned its brand narrative upside down and began a conversation on toxic masculinity and men's responsibility to change it through their new slogan 'The Best a Man Can Be'. Similarly, Lynx had a well-known brand narrative focused on 'laddish' charm and 'getting the girls' (Feasey, 2009), yet in 2017 Lynx changed their brand narrative to addressing less stereotypical masculinities (Radley, 2017).

Recently, more and more brands have engaged in different societal debates, a phenomenon called 'purpose branding' (Holt 2016, Godin 2019). This phenomenon is a concept mainly propagated by marketing practitioners, for example Seth Godin (2019), but aligns

somewhat with strands of consumer culture theory and approaches such as 'cultural branding' (Holt 2016, 46). Purpose branding based on societal issues have been employed with varying results: in some cases, the brands have been critiqued for not being sincere. In other cases, the purpose strategy has backfired because a campaign missed the point of the purpose. This happened with Dove's campaign *Real Beauty Sketches* (2017), where the attempt to convince women that they are more beautiful than they think was met with critical perspectives: whether beauty is still the most important characteristic to women. Thus, when brands engage in societal causes and debates, it is fraught with good intentions but also complications. In this paper, we analyse how two brands (Lynx and Gillette) both participate in the current societal debate on toxic masculinity and how they construe a new brand narrative to eliminate it. We show the rhetorical strategies employed in the ads and the possibilities for audience agency (Just and Christiansen, 2012) these rhetorical strategies facilitate. Finally, we discuss their potential in motivating behavioural changes among men and facilitating changing definitions of masculinity. We contribute to the area of ideology and advertising and discuss the value and interventionist perspectives of two opposing communicative strategies: the polemical rhetorical approach that Gillette engaged with, and the open and exploratory rhetorical strategy of Lynx. The motivation of this paper is to understand the transformative potential of advertising's call to action and how different rhetorical strategies inscribe different subject positions for the audience to enter into.

Theory

In this paper, we work with a social constructivist understanding of masculinity (Connell, 2005). That is, masculinity is a construction that emerges in the meeting of a variety of discourses and ideologies. As such, masculinity in itself does not exist, but is 'constructed, reproduced, and contested at structural, interactional and individual levels' (Scheibling and Lafrance, 2019). Building on Connell's definition of hegemonic masculinity, Thomas (2013) explains how ideas of masculinity emerge in contradiction and juxtaposition to other ideas of gender, as well as other identity categories, such as colour and class. Thus, hegemonic masculinity is the construction of an ideal, the most powerful form of masculinity (Connell, 2005), and it only exists as a construct that defines and is defined by other constructions of masculinity and femininity. Thus, ideas of masculinity are socially, culturally and historically situated (Risman, 2004). Yet, changes to masculine ideals emerge slowly and with resistance.

Advertising as vehicles of cultural myths (Kenney and Scott, 2003) is one genre where ideals of masculinity are particularly visible. Advertising, especially for large brands, are shared cultural texts where pervasive cultural ideas are used to communicate dreams and wishes of better lives. Thus, advertising is a genre where ideals and stereotypes come together to portray culturally acceptable versions of desirable lives. As such, advertising campaigns 'are a visual presentation of a version of gendered behaviour' (Smith, 2005, online only). Advertising is, therefore, a specific place to observe ideas about masculinity because it is both 'aesthetic and political' (Schroeder and Zwick, 2004, 24). Asserting the social constructivist perspective on masculinity, advertising as a genre both constructs and reproduces ideals of masculinity, where the inherent promise is that through consumption, men can come to embody the hegemonic type of masculinity portrayed in advertising (Kimmel, 2003). Thus, advertising discourse feeds on the experience of inadequacy that real living men (and women) experience, and promises to help ameliorate this lack through consumption choices. In recent years, several advertising campaigns have developed a critical perspective on female stereotypes and ideals. A couple of very prolific examples are Dove's *Campaign for Real Beauty* (Lachover and Barak Brandes, 2009; Windels et al, 2020) or Always' *Like a Girl* (Abitbol and Sternadori, 2016). These, and similar campaigns have entered a feminist discourse on women and representation, suggesting how advertising participates in the construction of ideals of

femininity. Where these ads have been criticised for commercialising feminism in an effort to sell more products (Windels et al., 2020), they have also been celebrated for raising questions about negative stereotypes of women (Castillo, 2014). Thus, there has been a strong debate about the effects of advertising stereotypes on women (Rudloff, 2016) and advertising's role in changing those stereotypes (Abitbol and Sternadori, 2016). The same, however, cannot be said for the masculine stereotypes portrayed in advertising (Kimmel, 2003), even if the ideals of masculinity have changed over time.

In advertising, masculine ideals are reproducing old stereotypes that are visible already in the 1930s. Men should be middle or upper class, educated and worldly (Kervin, 1990). For a long time, whiteness and heterosexuality were unquestionable parts of the ideal, so much so that the only way black masculinity was portrayed in advertising was as a ridiculous and childish juxtaposition to the white ideal (Thomas, 2013). Homosexuality was even more invisible until 1998, when Virgin Cola presented a gay male couple kissing (Tsai, 2010). Even if there have been changing tendencies such as ironic advertising, these campaigns still emphasised that the ironic shift was only motivated by addressing a younger segment, yet still maintaining the middle-class, white heterosexual male (Smith, 2005). Thus, 'new lad' advertising (Benwell, 2004; Cortese and Ling, 2011) may employ irony to address men in a different way, but still maintain a hegemonic version of masculinity that is contradictory to homosexuality and femininity (Benwell, 2004). Sexism is, therefore, still a pervasive quality of the stereotype portrayed in more recent developments of advertising masculinity (Cortese and Ling, 2011). Furthermore, ads portray the male body as slim yet muscular, and (hetero)sexually attractive (Östberg, 2010). A particular area is grooming advertising: these ads invert the male gaze onto men themselves (Patterson and Elliott, 2002) with their attention to the male body, thereby invoking the allure of male-male desire.

Since the 1970s, hegemonic masculinity has been defined by four characteristics: 'No Sissy Stuff', 'Be a Big Wheel', 'Sturdy Oak', and 'Give 'Em Hell' (Brannon, 1976). These characteristics are not specific to the 1970s, but rather reflect the main ideals of masculinity throughout the 20th century that are both produced and reproduced by advertising. Traditional advertising portrays hegemonic masculinity in a rather limited number of ways. The mythological Marlboro man with his 'virtues of individualism, autonomy, and self-sufficiency' (White et al, 2012, 528) is one major stereotype in advertising. Yet, before the Marlboro man came heroic doctors (White et al, 2012), heroic soldiers (Grandstaff, 2004) and confident, successful, sturdy sportsmen (Kervin, 1990). The early stereotypes continue alongside the Marlboro man, and as such the Marlboro man is primarily an addition to existing stereotypes, demonstrating an emphasis on particular values of independence and freedom (White et al., 2012).

More recent advertising stereotypes reflect a stronger focus on male sexuality (Bordo, 1999), but also have a younger presentation than previous masculinity ideals (Cortese and Ling, 2011). Moreover, where these new images of men add layers of being carefree, boyish playfulness and male bonding to our ideals of masculinity, they do so in a way that distances men from women in humorous ways (Smith, 2005). However, even if these new images seem to share an ironic disposition, irony only works on surface level to allow for an even stronger stereotypical and sexist discourse (Benwell, 2004). Similarly, next to the ironic discourse on masculinity, traditional stereotypes such as the heroic sportsman are still prevalent (Wörsching, 2007) and more nostalgic images of men and traditional masculine behaviour are also widespread (Gee and Jackson, 2012). Further, where companies might be perceived to engage in 'gender-bending' of traditionally male products such as the Porsche, part of the consumer base actively address and counter the gender-bending in favour of more traditionally male categorising (Avery, 2012). Thus, the idea of hegemonic masculinity in advertising does not seem to change but rather strengthens its adoption of traditional male virtues of strength, sexual potency, competence, freedom and heroism. Recently, however, there have

been changes in how masculinity is construed in advertising and how consumers participate in this construction. For example, in a recent paper, Zayer et al. demonstrate that consumers on a global scale resist and delegitimise masculine stereotypes in advertising (Zayer et al., 2019). We argue that this change in the consumer response to advertising is also visible in few but important examples of advertising campaigns.

Therefore, in this paper, we analyse two campaigns that both address masculinity in new ways. Both of our examples represent major international brands, and as such they are highly visible in large parts of the world. These ads actively engage in a discussion of what masculinity is and how it is performed by men. As such, both campaigns present a new direction in advertising presentation and the construction of ideal masculinity, yet their presentations employ very different strategies and the public response has been equally different. Below, we detail how we methodologically approached the analysis of the respective rhetorical strategies that Lynx and Gillette adopt, and what the results of their strategies are.

Methods

We approach the advertising texts through a rhetorical perspective (Scott, 2008) and analyse how the texts construe and communicate masculinity ideals. Scott's perspective on rhetorical analysis rests on an idea of rhetoric that addresses more than the formal elements of a text. Rather, she includes the context and the historical situation of a text in the rhetorical analysis: the rhetoric of a specific text is construed to elicit particular responses and is therefore designed in a way that is meaningful to the audience (Littau, 2006, 106).

The implication of our methodological perspective is that we analyse, compare and contrast the specific advertising texts and their respective rhetorical structures. However, we do not subscribe to a 'stimulus-response' reductionism based on an isolated analysis of specific texts and responses, but rather consider an ad or brand video as polysemic fragments of larger contexts and discourses (McKerrow, 1989; McGee, 1990). Thus, we also discuss the text in relation to previous campaigns by the same and other brands, the intertextual relations (to related YouTube responses as video or texts in traditional media) and the historical context they are part of (McKerrow, 1989). Clearly, the situated analytical strategy poses analytical challenges of where to set the boundaries of 'text' and context. We draw on a wide selection of popular cultural, symbolic and formal traditions to demonstrate how these texts have shaped the particular advertising and what the implications are for the particular expressions of masculinity.

Glocalised audiences

We consider both campaigns to be part of a global discourse on masculinity because both brands are part of a glocalised 'brandscape' (Thompson and Arsel, 2004). Drawing on Appadurai, Jenkins et al (2013) argue that media consumption is becoming increasingly 'glocalised' by transnational audiences appreciating, curating, discussing and dissipating local media globally, even disregarding copyrights. As the brand videos are appreciated and recirculated by a global media audience, these texts (to some degree) transcend their original time and place. The brand videos are intended to engage online media users; they are designed to be what Jenkins et al (2013) term 'spreadable media', and engagement by circulation and recirculation is considered part of the media strategy (Jenkins et al., 2013; Holt, 2016). This is not to say that the local contexts of the UK and US are irrelevant, but too much analytical focus on understanding the texts in relation to the local cultural contexts might misconstrue the rhetorical potential of the brand videos. For example, when a young American male watches the Gillette video online, he might become part of a global audience and choose to comment on a post by commentators from Brazil or the UK. He may even be reflecting on

his masculinity as 'American', 'rural', 'globalised', 'anti-LBTG' or 'toxic', but he would do so as part of a globalised discourse on masculinity. If he were then to subsequently discover the Lynx brand videos on YouTube, he would experience these also in light of #metoo discourses that were not present at the time of the production of the Lynx videos. Thus, in global media, culture, time, place, meaning and authorial control is ephemeral and constantly negotiated (Jenkins et al., 2013).

While our approach may be of pragmatic interest to marketers, we will also follow McKerrow (1989, 91) in suggesting that rhetorical criticism offers potential to 'unmask or reveal the ways in which discourse helps to create social and/or political oppression, thereby establishing the conditions for emancipation'. Building on Scott and Kenney (2003), we argue that brands are cultural products that communicate with a specific voice that consumers come to recognise and are familiar with. For example, when a brand changes their core message on masculinity, audiences have to participate in re-establishing the familiarity and shared construction of masculinity (Schroeder and Zwick, 2004). Further, the way a brand addresses an audience is in itself an ethical act: it is a central point to understand the communication's potential for audience agency (Campbell, 2005) because the address has implications for the audiences' co-construction of ideals and worldviews. Thus, in our analysis we focus both on gender stereotypes and also on how the text constructs advertiser-text-audience interrelations (Just and Christiansen, 2012).

Data material and analytical strategies

The Lynx campaign (*Is it OK for guys*, 2017 [Video 1]) is developed in a British context and marks a distinct break with Lynx's previous brand narrative of young, free and (hetero) sexually aggressive masculinity (Feasey, 2009, 365) in an effort to address toxic masculinity (Fleming, 2018). Similarly, Gillette (*The Best a Man Can Be*, 2019 [Video 2]) breaks with their long-standing narrative of stereotypical masculinity (Bui et al., 2019). Gillette's campaign was constructed by Grey London as part of a wider effort to become more relevant to younger segments (Bedo, 2019). However, the American context of a polarised gender debate and #metoo in particular posed a challenge to the reinvented brand narrative. Where we, and previous advertising researchers, consider Western media culture to reach beyond national borders (Jenkins et al., 2013), the changes in space and time between the reception of Lynx's and Gillette's campaigns (with developments of #metoo beginning in October 2017 and Donald Trump's instatement as president in January 2017), were locally different. Where Gillette's campaign followed up more directly on #metoo, Lynx responded more generally to toxic masculinity.



Video 1: The 'boys will be boys will be boys' mantra in 'The Best a Man Can Be', Gillette (2019).



Video 2: ‘is it OK ... – to have long hair?’ Real questions posed in ‘is it ok for guys?’ Lynx (2017a).

The campaign strategies were different, and the response to the campaigns have also been vastly different. Below, we analyse the textual communication and the visual structure to understand how they influence the communication of hegemonic masculinity.

Visual analysis entails both analysing visual composition and formal aspect (Schroeder, 2008) of the campaign videos and the symbolic and discursive aspects (Carroll, 1998). However, we only broadly address the reception of the campaigns through media reports and other written accounts. Due to the changes to YouTube algorithms, it is highly difficult to systematically collect the audience response from viewers. Thus, we decided to draw on traditional media texts reporting on the issue. The difficulty here is to weigh the response properly, as it would be in relation to comments on YouTube. Several studies report a tendency for stronger perspectives and emotions to create more attention and spreading than less strong expressions (Kozinets, Patterson and Ashman, 2017; Kramer, 2013). Therefore, reporting on both online and traditional media response might not reflect the variations in responses, but only those (strong) responses that work with algorithmic logics.

Analysis

The following analysis will compare the Gillette and Lynx campaigns. First, we will describe and analyse each of the central brand videos of these campaigns as visual rhetoric, unpacking persuasive strategies, ideologies, and stereotypes. Second, we will discuss how each of the videos facilitate audience agency.

In the Gillette campaign, one communication is pivotal: the ‘We Believe: The Best a Man Can Be’ YouTube ad that runs at one minute and forty-five seconds. A companion website ‘thebestamancanbe.org’ was also set up with testimonials from a diverse set of men on a wide range of subjects such as men working with firefighting, mentoring kids, dealing with addiction, abuse, suicide, etc.

Gillette description

The ad is a long and highly complex montage of situations and visual metaphors held together by a male voice-over. The basic overall structure of the ad constitutes a formulation akin to classic detergent ads of the informational ‘problem-solution’/‘problem-avoidance’ format. This is a format designed as a pertinent communication strategy in cases of problem

oriented motivational structure in the target group (Percy and Rosenbaum-Elliott, 2016, 187). The problem element presents the audience with an emotional compelling scenario of a recognisable problem, for example: 'oh no – a stain on my new shirt'. The second part is the solution element, which demonstrates (often with hyperbolic visual evidence) the solution to the problem 'wow – the stain is all gone'. This second part needs to convey the feeling of relief, but the evidence does not have to be rationally convincing or credible in simple, low involvement product categories such as detergents or personal hygiene products (Percy and Rosenbaum-Elliott, 2016). This structure is reflected in the Gillette ad, beginning with a montage of men looking at themselves in the mirror whilst a chorus of voices presents problems of bullying, sexual harassment and #metoo. A voice asks: 'is this the best a man can get?'. The classic Gillette jingle with a male choir singing the slogan 'the best a man can get' can be heard the background. Then follows a series of situations that show toxic masculinity unfolding: bullying by text messaging, boys fighting, catcalling, a man groping a woman, mansplaining and a long line of men barbecuing saying 'boys will be boys'. All these scenes constitute a presentation and information of the problem of toxic masculinity. Around 40 seconds in, the video shifts to presenting the solution, which occurs when the voice-over states 'something finally changed' and switches to a newscast about the #metoo movement. The newscast turns into a visual mosaic of many newscasts about #metoo while the voice-over states: 'there will be no going back, because we believe in the best in men'. Then, a montage of similar situations in the presentation of the problem-montage follows, and this time the problematic toxic behaviour is interrupted by other men, thus avoiding that the situations escalate into toxic masculinity. The ad concludes with a series of blank male faces looking into the camera. A text in white capital letters appears over the face of a young boy: 'THE BEST A MAN CAN GET'. Then, the final sign off is presented on a blue background: 'IT'S ONLY BY CHALLENGING OURSELVES TO DO MORE THAT WE CAN GET CLOSER TO OUR BEST, WE ARE TAKING ACTION AT THEBESTAMANCANBE.ORG JOIN US'.

Analysis

Formally, the Gillette ad begins with a visual metaphor, that we could call 'Tearing up the Gillette of the past'. When the voice-over asks, 'is this the best a man can get?', referencing the long running slogan of Gillette, the visuals are also quoting classic Gillette ads by showing a man being kissed on the cheek by a woman next to the Gillette logo and slogan. The image suddenly appears to be projected on a (cinema) screen and is abruptly torn by a horde of boys jumping through the screen and running diagonally towards the viewer, screaming, and chasing a boy trying to escape. This constitutes the first part of Gillette's depiction of the problem of toxic masculinity. The informational advertising using hyperbolic emotional reactions to 'the stain on the shirt' problem is abiding to codes of realism. Here, the modality of the metafiction is more complex: it is a visual trope in which the author (Gillette) presents a self-quote on 'a screen of the past' (the old TV ad projected on a cinema screen), a central piece of brand-identity, and 'tears it up': it is destroyed in front of the audience. It is a speech act of self-correction or self-reformation as the iconic quote destroyed was once pivotal to Gillette's brand identity. In contrast to this overt symbolism and self-commentary, the following montage is constructed of emblematic scenarios of toxic masculinity, abiding to the conventional codes of realism.

The key axis of the ad is the climax of the problem (30 seconds): a realistic scenario of boys fighting in a back yard, where men watch passively and shrug it off with a 'boys will be boys' comment. This scene breaks the realism by subtly sliding into a visual trope: it is not just one or a few men, but a long row of men barbecuing. The men are all striking the same pose, arms crossed, and speaking their mantra as a choir 'boys will be boys will be boys will be boys...' (ad

lib). The camera pans the row of men and their barbecues in a movement that is diagonally extending the line of men beyond visibility, seeming endless. In the same way, the mantra of toxic masculinity, 'boys will be boys will be...' is a rhythmic repetition, anchoring a trope of circular eternity.

This segment draws on the cinematic style of the 1930s Hollywood musicals of Busby Berkeley. Building on his experience in military propaganda, Berkeley became a master of producing escapist entertainment in Hollywood (Pattullo, 2007). His classic Hollywood musicals were spectacular displays of chorus girls dancing in elaborate geometric formations constructed by their bodies, or often just body parts (legs, smiling faces). These visual schemes (visual rhyme) and tropes (women as flowers, fireworks, fragmented body parts as geometric or figurative shapes) is a mode of objectification still in use in music videos (Hansen, 2017). They echo schemes and tropes made infamous through other historic and iconic examples of visual propaganda, from Soviet agitprop to Leni Riefenstahl's Nazi Hymn *Triumph Des Willens* (1935): lines of soldiers or groups of factory workers marching in accord, shouting or singing propaganda slogans as 'a representation of *the people*' (Haskins 2003, 101). The visual composition of a diagonal line extending beyond sight, and the camera moving along the seemingly endless number of soldiers, athletes, or workers, is almost a cliché, a grand manifestation of 'the power of the masses' or 'the power of the people' or, in the case of Gillette's ad, the (toxic) power of male hegemony.

We suggest, that by invoking the visual trope of 'the people' and the stylistic cues of visual hyperbole, Gillette is turning the male individual into a faceless toxic mob by building on the same visual language that the classical Hollywood musical used for objectifying the female individual into the anonymised category of 'women' (Hansen, 2017, 175). The most common effect of this visual trope is as a gesture of tribute (by/to the people) of grandness, spectacle and excess (Fischer 1976). Yet, in this context, it seems almost sarcastic as a hyperbolic manifestation of 'excess of toxic masculinity'.

The choir of toxic men is interrupted by other voices. These voices are coming from a multitude of images of media reporting, the #metoo movement and prosecutions, when the voice-over states that 'something finally changed' (40 seconds). Again, this is a 'mass-movement' of protest indicated by split screen display forming the 'flood of mass-media' about #metoo. The flood of images signals the start of the solution part of the advertising. We are revisiting previous scenarios to see how men can solve the problems of toxic masculinity by ending toxic behaviour of other men and boys. Just as in detergent ads, Gillette offers visual evidence of how to make the problem vanish, and how men can become better men by intervening when catcalling, bullying or sexism unfolds around them. At the end of the brand video, the call to action is to 'join' by participating on the campaign website. This website is a highly branded Gillette space, with a menu offering information on Gillette products and shaving tips. The site also contains links to Instagram posts of Gillette, more specifically, a series of highly curated video-portraits of traditionally masculine men working to help other men become 'the best men can be'. The video on YouTube also presents the user with a link to the same brand video in a shorter version.

Lynx description

The Lynx ad is also a montage of scenarios presented in the visual style of handheld Point Of View-camera (POV). POV is a cinematic convention whereby the camera functions as the eyes of a main character of a narrative, suggesting a closure of the gap between the viewer and depicted world (Morgan, 2016). The advert states the theme and the following montage in a text message in white all capital letters on a black background: '57% OF GUYS HAVE BEEN TOLD HOW A REAL MAN SHOULD BEHAVE'. The montage starts with a POV shot looking

down at legs of a man putting on a pair of jeans. The camera tilts up to reveal a mirror, and in the mirror is a skinny young man getting dressed, looking at himself and his naked torso. A voice-over asks, 'is it ok to be skinny?'. The next shot is a POV looking at a group of young men playing football. The POV character kicks the ball, but it heads in the wrong direction. A different voice-over asks, 'is it ok to not like sports?'. The next shot is of a young girl walking down a narrow hallway: she turns around, walking backwards while looking into the camera (eyes of POV character). She reaches her hand out and the POV character takes her hand (the camera tilts down to the hands). A new voice-over asks, 'is it ok to be a virgin?'. The next shot is a matching image of two people holding hands. The camera tilts up to reveal a young man looking into the camera whilst smiling and holding the hand of the POV character, walking backwards down a narrow alley. Yet another voice-over says, 'to experiment with other guys?'. Continuing, the editing is accelerating in pace with POV-shots and voice-over questions in rapid sequence: 'is it OK to wear pink? – to be nervous? – to have long hair?'. This culminates with a black frame and a text message in all caps: 'THESE ARE THE REAL QUESTIONS GUYS ARE SEARCHING EVERY DAY.' The image then changes to a computer screen with a search bar (similar to that of Google). Someone off camera is typing 'is it ok for guys to...' into the box, and the dropdown suggestions to complete the sentence are changing rapidly with multiple ways to finish it. A voice-over says, 'go online to search for yourself'. Then follows a brand sign off with logo 'LYNX – *find your magic*'. Two thumbnail images of videos with men reacting to 'is it ok for guys' questions appear. These are links to some of the follow up videos with LYNX ambassadors (for example, boxer Anthony Joshua) discussing different 'is it ok' questions. In these videos, men look into the camera, share their opinions and air any potential doubt about the question, although the final answer is always that 'sure it is ok for men'. They also encourage the viewer to respond to the video by commenting, but few actually do, even if there are tens of thousands of views. Almost all comments are in the line of 'sure it is ok', yet there are comments that underline the questions to be real and problematic issues. For example, on the video 'is it ok for guys to wear skinny jeans?' (Lynx 2017b), one user writes 'One of my friends wears skinny jeans and gets called gay, I like them but I dont want to get made fun of like that.'[sic].

Analysis

In the Lynx video, the emphasis is put on an open and exploratory way to understand masculinity. Rather than defining ideal types of masculinity, the ad employs different voices to investigate many ways to be masculine. These are often in opposition to traditional ideals such as the sportsman (Wörsching, 2007) or the sexually aggressive masculinity that was previously part of the Lynx brand communication (Feasey, 2009). The video consistently uses POV which construes the viewer as the subject of the video, creating the experience of presence within the narrative (Cummins, 2009; Cummins et al., 2012). That is, POV structures the video and its different open questions about masculinity as questions that might as well have been posed by the viewer (himself). Thus, POV in this case creates the possibility for identification with the search for a masculine identity that goes beyond the stereotypical versions. Further, asking variations of the same question in many different voices means that the stereotypical understandings of masculinity are undermined slowly but surely. Where the voices are all male, the ad validates their enunciations of doubt by exploring what constitutes masculinity and challenging traditional definitions.

POV is a mechanism that creates the possibility for empathy, what is often labelled 'walking in someone else's shoes' (Jones and Dawkins, 2018, 1). POV allows the audience to see the world through the eyes of another person. At the end of the video, where it introduces new ways of learning about what it means to be a man, the advert has the potential for the viewer to feel the insecurity and self-doubt that the search represents. The online search for

whether or not something is OK for guys highlights the way new media has changed socialisation. Where previously mainstream media and local communities were the main sources for finding role models to mirror yourself in, today peer groups also form online and the possibilities of meeting liked-minded individuals has expanded. Thus, the video echoes how online communities have become a source of freedom and liberation for likeminded people to meet and share their identities. Where one's local community was the place where possible and passable identities were learned, the possibilities of meeting other people online means that minorities and subcultures have found new reference groups (Bennett, 2014), and thus, online participation has also had the effect of expanding ways of performing identities.

By reiterating the way younger segments find information and investigate identity questions, the advert suggests that this is a legitimate way of looking for alternative role models. Through the POV camera, the video also enables the understanding of other groups and their struggles with forming identity. As such, the video portrays young people in a vulnerable state and shows the audience how to empathise and maybe open up passages of support for non-stereotypical masculinities. Thereby, more ways of identifying have become imaginable, eliciting empathy and support for these non-stereotypical identities.

Discussion

The LYNX and Gillette campaigns seem different in many respects, but they both claim to address the issue of 'toxic masculinity'. For example, Rik Strubel, the Lynx global vice president at Unilever, discusses the 'Is it ok for guys' campaign: 'we want guys to see there's no holds barred on what men can or cannot be. We need to help more men by tackling toxic masculinity, head on' (Hinde 2017). Toxic masculinity as a theme has emerged out of current debates about feminism in society: how genders have different opportunities and can engage in distinct patterns of practice. These themes have long been part of the address of women, for example in Dove's *Campaigns for Real Beauty*, but also in older campaigns that less directly discuss female empowerment yet show women in non-stereotypical ways (Bremer, 1994). The discussion of toxic masculinity has long been a part of the societal debate on feminism and gender equality but has not to the same degree been a part of the address in advertising. Brands have addressed issues of masculinity, for example in 2015 Dove ran the Father's Day campaign #realstrength, however did so with reliance on very traditional gender norms where men are categorised as 'sturdy oaks' (Connell, 2005; Brannon, 1976). Dove did not in particular change the masculine ideal, rather they underlined the positive aspects of the existing ideal. With Lynx and subsequently Gillette, the discussion of masculinity in advertising has changed significantly. With the differences in time and space between the two campaigns, Gillette became the poster for more than a cultural change in the way masculinity is portrayed, whilst also seeming to become a participant in the #metoo movement. Thus, the brand purpose seemed to take sides in an already dichotomous debate.

Gillette and Lynx both address the question of what it means to be a man in their changed brand narratives, however, as the analysis demonstrates, the ads' rhetorical structure, formal properties and expressive capacities are notably different. Where both campaigns address young segments, Lynx is sympathetic to questions and insecurities about being a man and embodying masculinity. Gillette, however, is less supportive of the viewer and their issues of masculinity but confronts and accuses men of being representatives of toxic masculinity or passive bystanders. The Gillette video only offers participation in a highly controlled and self-referential mode: the video is referencing and commenting on previous Gillette advertising; the video's call-to action is a URL to a product-oriented website; and all links refer back to the Gillette branded platforms on YouTube and Instagram. This seems a mode of discursive closure – a branded echo chamber of well-groomed Gillette masculinity.

Even before the 'Is it ok for guys' campaign, LYNX's use of laddish, sexist humour could be seen as exploring male insecurities in the grotesque and exaggerated effects of 'spraying more to get more' (Feasey, 2009, 1). Compared to the 'straightforward' metonymical approach of depicting a specific male ideal by Gillette, the dream world of LYNX advertising is far more open, ironic and polysemic. Both brands seem to extend these modes of advertising rhetoric in their approach to toxic masculinity.

Building on the perspective, that choices of film style are also expressions of ideology, we argue that the choice of style in brand videos that pose as critique of toxic masculinity are clearly harnessing marketing techniques for the benefit of this cause. Nevertheless, these choices of visual rhetoric are themselves ideological choices that may function as a 'symptomatic form of ideological maintenance in its own right' (Blakesley 2007, 6). Both campaigns are offering agency to their audiences, though of vastly different kind: while the explicit justification of both videos are to challenge toxic masculinity, only LYNX seems to embrace a more diverse (re)construction of masculine ideals. The POV-style is a manifested expression of the identification(s) offered: the multitude of voices, insecurities, questions and invitations to explore these and the doubt of others. In contrast, Gillette is maintaining a classic 'heroic' ideology of masculinity as an 'authoritative problem solver', Gillette is stepping in to confront evil through physical intervention. Gillette is setting itself centre stage, and the 'problem-solution' structure of the video echoes the decades of advertising strategy where the 'product-as-hero' solves domestic problems, often backed by authoritative (male) voices (Percy and Rosenbaum-Elliott 2016). The Gillette video is a representation of 'the right masculinity' and an explicit call to join the brand in the action against 'the wrong masculinity'. A mode of instructive visual rhetoric directing the audience to see themselves as part of a movement: as 'one people' under the leadership of Gillette. LYNX, on the other hand, is acknowledging the many different anxieties of the individual and the right to interpret masculine ideals. In all the different segments and follow up videos of the LYNX campaign, there is never anyone who is correcting the wrong masculinity of other men. Thus, in the LYNX video, the laddish voices of the audience are questioning masculine ideals. In contrast, in the Gillette video, the deep, fatherly voice of Gillette is performing the masculine ideal by correcting masculinity.

Where Lynx experienced growth following their campaign (Fleming, 2018), Gillette experienced a veritable backlash (Godin, 2019). According to Brian Weston from Grey, the backlash to Gillette's campaign was unexpected (Bui et al., 2019). Both brands were aiming at younger demographics with their campaigns, yet it is hard to know whether they were successful in getting their messages against toxic masculinity across to these segments. Arguably, the two campaign strategies inscribe different subject positions and possibilities for identification. However, in terms of addressing toxic masculinity on a societal level, Gillette has most likely had a more visible impact on the current debate, whereas Lynx probably impacts on a more individual level. Thus, from a social constructivist perspective, both campaigns influence and create some change to the current image of hegemonic masculinity.

Conclusion

Before we conclude this paper, we must outline the limitations of this study. First and foremost, this is a rhetorical investigation into the communicative strategies employed in two purpose branding texts. This suggests that, where we can speculate as to the audience agency inscribed in the campaigns, we cannot detail actual audience responses. Future research into purpose branding could investigate the ways in which different segments respond to different kinds of purpose branding and how these campaigns translate into changed understandings of masculinity. Further, these campaigns were early adopters of a trend that had previously been targeting primarily women (Lachover and Barak Brandes, 2009; Abitbol and

Sternadori, 2016; Windels et al, 2020), adopting a feminist perspective to address and change the stereotype of toxic masculinity. Thus, longitudinal studies of the changes that masculinity ideals undergo will shed more light on the level of success that these campaigns achieve, and how they influence future campaigns addressing hegemonic masculinity.

The value of a rhetorical analysis is to demonstrate how audience agency is inscribed in texts, thus allowing us to anticipate part of the response to texts like the above. The contribution of this study is to demonstrate the combination of rhetorical analysis and a text-agency perspective (Just and Christiansen, 2012) in explaining both the inherent ideology of the campaigns and the potential value to society. Our point is that the societal value is not simply seen as a functional and measurable communication-effect on society or specific groups, but is inscribed in the text-agency of the rhetorical strategies in the texts themselves. We have shown how purpose branding can work at different levels depending on their communicative strategies. That is, Gillette may not change our core concept of the hegemonic masculine ideal of reliable father figures that take responsibility for society's weaker member (Brannon, 1976). However, Gillette did manage to bring the discussion of toxic masculinity and #metoo to new societal levels and attention. Further, Gillette also firmly put responsibility to address and change toxic masculinity in the hands of men, which has been a feminist agenda for years – now men's own brand adopted that agenda. Compared to this, the purpose branding strategy of Lynx was less outspoken, however changing the image of masculinity into masculinities on an individual level. Further, the strategy Lynx employed enabled empathy and openness between different generations and different enactments of masculinity. Both of these campaigns attempt to address and change masculine stereotypes and they each accomplish raising awareness and creating debate at different societal levels. Thus, the arena for masculine performances has widened, bringing new (less toxic) ways to identify and do masculinity to the table.

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Competing Interests

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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