

Marquette University

e-Publications@Marquette

---

College of Communication Faculty Research  
and Publications

Communication, College of

---

2020

## Coke and the Digital Age

Tao Deng

*Marquette University*

Daradirek Ekachai

*Marquette University, daradirek.ekachai@marquette.edu*

Jean Grow

*Marquette University, jean.grow@mu.edu*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://epublications.marquette.edu/comm\\_fac](https://epublications.marquette.edu/comm_fac)



Part of the [Communication Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Deng, Tao; Ekachai, Daradirek; and Grow, Jean, "Coke and the Digital Age" (2020). *College of Communication Faculty Research and Publications*. 556.

[https://epublications.marquette.edu/comm\\_fac/556](https://epublications.marquette.edu/comm_fac/556)

Marquette University

**e-Publications@Marquette**

***Communications Faculty Research and Publications/College of Communications***

***This paper is NOT THE PUBLISHED VERSION.***

Access the published version via the link in the citation below.

*Decoding Coca-Cola*, Chapter 6 (2020): 89-110. [Publisher link](#). This article is © Taylor & Francis (Routledge) and permission has been granted for this version to appear in [e-Publications@Marquette](#). Taylor & Francis (Routledge) does not grant permission for this article to be further copied/distributed or hosted elsewhere without the express permission from Taylor & Francis (Routledge).

# Coke and the digital age

Tao Deng, Daradirek Ekachai and Jean M. Grow

## Introduction

Coca-Cola is the quintessential American brand. The story of its rise to global prominence parallels the growth of American capitalism and expresses American capitalistic values. For as 'consumerism and democracy spread, the fizzy brown drink is never far behind' (Standage, 2005, p. 265). And with the rise of social media technologies, Coca-Cola's ability to reinforce its brand messaging around the world is greater than ever before.

In this chapter, we explore Coca-Cola's global brand presence on Instagram, and the degree to which their gender portrayals differ when catering to different cultures. This study encompasses Coca-Cola's global account as well as regional accounts from six individual countries: Brazil, Canada, Italy, Nigeria, the Philippines, and Russia. The Hofstede's cultural dimensions model is engaged to tease out patterns, while the analysis is shaped by social and gender theories. We tell the story of Coca-Cola's dynamic balancing act: an iconic brand adopting a globalised yet specialised approach to spreading their bubbly beverage across the globe.

## Literature review

### Capitalism and gender: An uneasy pairing

Gender portrayals in mass media have been studied extensively for more than 50 years, with research interest stemming from the rise of feminism in the 1960s (Grau & Zotos, 2016). Communication researchers have extensively examined how men and women are portrayed in mass media, particularly in advertising, to see whether they conform to gender stereotypes or traditional roles. Often using content analysis as a research method, gender roles studies have looked at various parameters of gender portrayals, such as physical characteristics, occupational status, leadership roles, and personality traits.

While discussing the role that advertising plays in society, particularly where stereotypes are concerned, Grau and Zotos (2016) mentioned two opposing views: the 'mirror' versus the 'mould'. The 'mirror' view argues that 'advertising reflects values that exist and are dominant in the society', while the 'mould' view sees advertising as 'a reflection of society and its prevailing values' (Grau & Zotos, 2016, p. 762). However, Grau and Zotos suggested the two views should be seen as a continuum, because gender roles can both reflect social values as well as construct gender identity.

Findings from Levy's (2007) research support Grau and Zotos. Levy examined the role of women in adverts and the effect of marketing strategies on consumers through the lens of social learning theory, and found that advertising plays a role in our retention of information as well as our attitudes toward products. Further, they discovered that portrayals of women in advertising can reinforce gender perceptions and the roles women and men should play in society. They concluded that advertisements both mirror and mould society, indicating that while adverts reflect societal norms, they also reinforce existing stereotypes.

Researchers have also conducted meta-analyses of gender roles in attempts to identify themes portrayed in advertisements. Whipple and Courtney (1985) reviewed nine studies conducted in the 1970s and early 1980s that examined female role portrayals, product category interactions, and communication effectiveness as perceived by consumers. Based on the findings, they suggested four strategies. First, advertisers should match the gender of the model with the image of the product. Second, the setting should be appropriate to the product use. Third, non-traditional role depictions are more effective than traditional ones. Fourth, any depiction should be realistic and natural, avoiding stereotyped portrayals.

More recently, Eisend (2010) conducted a meta-analysis of 64 studies on the effects of gender stereotypes in advertising and discovered that stereotypes are still salient in advertising, particularly concerning the portrayal of female occupational status. However, the results also indicated that the degree of stereotyping had decreased over time as advertisers and companies reacted to changes in society, and was also often dependent upon the culture in question. As such, Eisend's work indicates that adverts mirror rather than mould societal expectations.

Another longitudinal study by Grau and Zotos (2016) found similar results. The researchers reviewed a range of gender stereotypes studies conducted in several countries and cultures over the previous decade and found that gender stereotyping in advertising still persists and is prevalent in many

countries. They also outlined the need for more gender stereotypes research into social media advertising.

Scholars have also looked at how a product category might alter gender stereotypes. Hatzithomas et al. (2016) conducted a longitudinal content analysis of Super Bowl commercials from 1990–1999 and 2000–2009, evaluating a total of 447 commercials. The results found that stereotypes of both men and women were present in the majority of Super Bowl commercials across both decades. However, the authors also found that men were more likely to be stereotyped. This was attributed to the underrepresentation of women in Super Bowl commercials. The results also demonstrated a slight shift away from the traditional stereotypes used to depict both men and women.

Extensive research has also been conducted into how portrayals of women in advertisements could be affected by target audience. Plakoyiannaki and Zotos (2008) explored the portrayal of women in advertisements from three different categories of magazines in the United Kingdom: women, men, and general audience. They examined whether the representation of women differed between magazine categories as well as product categories. Their content analysis of 3,830 adverts found that women were most likely to be portrayed in decorative roles across all three categories of magazines. However, women's magazines were more likely to depict women in non-traditional roles, while men's magazines more often depicted women in decorative and traditional roles. In addition, general audience magazines tended to show women in roles equal to men. In terms of product categories, hedonic products tended to be associated more with women in decorative roles while utilitarian products portrayed women in a variety of roles.

Skorek and Schreier (2009) analysed gender roles across the same three categories of magazines, but drew the 1,861 adverts for their study from three different countries: Germany, Poland, and the United States. The results of this study showed that, while the proportions of men and women portrayed in working, family, and recreational roles are lower than in previous years, there has been a dramatic increase in the proportion of women in decorative roles. Furthermore, the results revealed that a gap has widened in that more women are portrayed in family roles while men are more frequently portrayed in sports and athletic roles. Findings also suggested that the representation of gender in Germany and Poland is much more balanced than that of the United States, which appears to favour more stereotypical gender representations. This is of note, in that American brands play a dominant role in the global landscape, as do the American advertising agencies that support them.

Odekerken-Schroder et al. (2002) analysed advertisements from the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, investigating the relationship between perceived masculinity, as proposed by Hofstede (discussed in detail below), and gender stereotyping in print advertisements. Analysing a total of 946 adverts from six different British (high masculinity) magazines and six different Dutch (low masculinity) magazines between October 1999 and December 1999, the results show that adverts in the United Kingdom portrayed female characters less frequently in working roles and more frequently in decorative roles. This study indicates that there may be some direct associations between a country's perceived masculinity and gender stereotyping in advertising.

Expanding on the scope of earlier studies, Matthes et al. (2016) conducted research examining gender roles using 1,755 adverts from 13 countries across Asia, Europe, and the United States. They used

Hofstede's masculinity/femininity index and GLOBE's gender egalitarianism, while taking into account each country's culture in respect to gender. The researchers discovered that stereotypes were alive and well. However, they also found that local culture played a smaller role in advertising than previously thought. This is a very important finding when we consider the power of global brands. They explained that this may be because advertising often lags behind societal changes and developments. We suggest that this lag in adverts embracing societal change may be driven, in part, by the lack of diversity, gender, and otherwise, within multinational advertising agencies.

While all the previously discussed studies help us understand explorations of gender stereotypes, we also need to be clear that feminist theory tells us that organisational structures, including advertising agencies and brand holding companies, are not gender-neutral (Acker, 1990). In fact, we should view 'bureaucracy and hierarchy as male-created and male-dominated structures' (Acker, 1990, p. 141). These structures often require women to enact and support masculine ways of working, being, and expressing themselves (Lewis, 2014). Further, advertising creative departments, the very place where these advertisements are created (including social media brand images such as those on Instagram) are often dominated by men. We know that globally only 23.5 per cent of all those working within advertising creative departments are women (Deng & Grow, 2018). Thus, it should come as no surprise that gender stereotypes are alive and well in global advertising imagery. Nor should it surprise us that many adverts still employ images that minimise and/or subvert the power of women, while sexualising and celebrating women as decorative objects.

### Gender, power, and aspiration through a symbolic lens

Clearly, advertising is intimately intertwined with consumption. At the same time, consumption has evolved to become the symbolic exchange of signs, including gendered signs, rooted in culture. In this sense advertising takes cultural and social experiences and uses them to create symbolic referents, spinning brands into global aspirational cultural icons that usurp local culture as they march across the globe. In the process, brands take on greater and greater degrees of significance, outstripping the actual material products themselves. Advertising creates a structure of meaning that allows for the consumption of brands as part of our social relationships (Elliot & Wattanasuwan, 1998; Domzal & Kernan, 1993; Dyer, 1982). Contemporary consumption is all about 'the expression of identity through the display of sign values' (McFall, 2004, p. 4). These aspirational values are 'rooted in, and perpetuated by, consumption; and with the pervasive nature of technology their influence spreads across international borders' (Grow, 2017, p. 59).

Signs are selected and organised into codes or bundles that create a paradigm, 'a set of signs from which the one to be used is chosen' (Fiske, 1990, p. 56). These series of signs create chains, which form paradigmatic structures. Branded signs are often bundled and simplified as they move across cultures, making them easily chosen and thus easy to integrate into local culture. Thus, it is not surprising that Coca-Cola positions its brand under simple, unifying, and aspirational paradigmatic codes, supported by taglines and images that can be embraced the world over. With just the slightest changes to their branded messages, brands like Coca-Cola create meaningful and relevant messages that fit well within local social and cultural contexts, while maintaining, in the case of Coca-Cola, the brand's uniquely American aspirational values.

Tracing branded semiotic expressions within Western brands, we often see expressions of power and privilege. These expressions of power tend to privilege one type of culture, often shaped by Western male identities, over other expressions which typically lack power, often female and non-Western cultural expressions. Thus, it was not surprising to us as we surveyed the content analysis literature to see gender representations so profoundly defined across time. The paradox of practice and its muting of non-Western, non-male culture (McFall, 2004), was well demonstrated in the previous section. Further, Goldman (1992) argues that social realities are often corrupted by advertising because of its inherent and historical development within a capitalist political economy that privileges Western masculinity over all other identities. In this sense, advertising is just as hegemonic as it is sexist, as was also demonstrated by the studies in the previous section. As a successful global marketer, Coca-Cola has mastered the dynamic balancing act that allows their brand messaging to be simultaneously globalised (maintaining the same overall advertising theme) and specialised (tailoring messages to local preferences) as its adverts roll out across the world.

### Culture values through the lens of Hofstede

Internationally based cultural dimensions models are frequently used by global marketers as tools to examine and compare cultural variations from one market to another. The Hofstede's cultural dimensions model is one of the most used large-scale worldwide models by marketers and researchers. Originally designed to understand culture's impact on values in the workplace, the Hofstede's model (Hofstede, 2001) has since developed into an important framework in analysing consumption motives and advertising. Established in 1963 and replicated by scholars around the world, the Hofstede's model now contains dimensions values for 76 countries (Hofstede-insights.com, no date). The value scores (ranging from 0 to 100) indicate the relative differences between cultures regarding a given cultural dimension (such as individualism, indulgence, or masculinity), which in turn impacts both the content of the paid messages and the creative strategies employed by advertisers when targeting that culture. Our discussion of the Hofstede's model mainly focuses on the social implications of gender roles as a tool that helps explain variances of gender portrayal across cultures, and as such we will be focusing exclusively on the masculinity dimension.

Hofstede's masculinity dimension measures the degree of gender role differentiation attributed by the society (as opposed to biology), as well as the degree to which a society values achievement and assertiveness over caring for others and quality of life. Cultures that score high on masculinity are driven by stereotypical 'masculine' traits – competition, achievement, material success, assertiveness, and status. Cultures that score low on masculinity emphasize 'feminine' traits – relationships, caring for others, quality of life, overlapping roles, and modesty. Gender role differentiation is strongly presented among high masculinity societies. Men in these societies are presented as having stereotypical male traits such as being strong, outgoing, and bold, while women are presented as soft, nurturing, and accepting. By contrast, feminine societies value minimum role differentiation. For example, males and females can share household roles such as child care, cleaning, and shopping. Advertisements in a particular culture reflect the culture's dominant masculinity/femininity values. In addition, Milner and Collins (2000) also found that adverts designed for consumers in feminine countries feature a greater proportion of characters in relationships than those for masculine countries.

## Research questions

Building on past studies and literature on gender norms and stereotypes in advertising, this study explores the extent to which Coca-Cola, via its various international Instagram accounts, portrays stereotypical gender roles. Providing cultural context, the study also examines whether Hofstede's masculinity/femininity dimension affects gender stereotyping in masculine and feminine countries. The overarching question we explore is how Coca-Cola has or has not employed gender stereotypes within the online world, specifically on Instagram, to maintain its prowess as the quintessential aspirational American brand. More specifically, we aim to answer three questions:

RQ1: What are the differences between men and women's portrayals within each of Coca-Cola's seven international Instagram accounts?

RQ2: What are the differences between Coca-Cola's global Instagram account and six of its regional accounts in terms of men's and women's portrayals?

RQ3: How is gender stereotyping depicted differently in Coca-Cola's Instagram posts between masculine and feminine cultures?

## Methods

Content analysis is used in this study because it is a widely used method in the investigation of gender stereotypes (Neuendorf, 2011; Plakoyiannaki et al. 2008; Zotos and Lysonski 1994; Lysonski, 1985).

## Sample

We chose the photo and video sharing platform Instagram as our sampling media because it is a valuable social media marketing tool for global brands. With over one billion monthly active users worldwide, Instagram is one of the most popular social networks (Instagram, 2019). Due to its visual nature and interactive features, Instagram is also popular among businesses. An estimated 75 per cent of US companies were on Instagram in 2019 (eMarketer, 2017). As of January 2019, Coca-Cola owns one corporate Instagram account, one official global Instagram account and 35 regional accounts dedicated to different countries and regions around the world.

For this study, we chose six countries from across five continents (so as to best represent the major regions of the world) that have high and low scores on Hofstede's masculinity/femininity index. We also chose countries for which the corresponding official regional Coca-Cola Instagram account had more than 100 posts. In order of decreasing masculinity value, the six countries whose Instagram accounts we chose to sample were: Italy (70), the Philippines (64), Nigeria (60), Canada (52), Brazil (49), and Russia (36). For the purposes of this study, the former three were designated as high masculinity countries, while the latter three were designated as low masculinity countries. Additionally, we also examined Coca-Cola's global Instagram account to provide a global context and baseline for analysis.

Of the seven Instagram accounts included in our study, the Coca-Cola global account has 1,075 posts and 35,000 followers; the Brazil account has 1,243 posts and more than one million followers; the Canada account has 1,756 posts and 5,427 followers; the Italy account has 849 posts and 83,000 followers; the Nigeria account has 2,864 posts and 138,000 followers; the Philippines account has 1,164 posts and 111,000 followers; and the Russia account has 1,621 posts and 93,000 followers (as of

January 2019). Internet addresses for each of the above accounts are listed at the end of the references.

Research on Instagram is skewed (in terms of literature produced) toward user-generated content and hashtags rather than marketing messages. We chose to focus on Instagram not only because of its popularity, but because of its global reach, its standardised user interface across nations, and its high advertising potentials. Traditionally, gender role researchers have used print adverts or television commercials as media to analyse gender roles and stereotypes. Instagram is the closest social media platform to print or TV advertisements that would allow us to explore our chosen research questions.

In order to derive the sample used in our study, we began by retrieving all of the posts made by our chosen six regional Coca-Cola Instagram accounts, as well as Coca-Cola's global Instagram account, between January 2014 and January 2019. We only used official, Instagram-certified accounts (as indicated by the tick mark and the account description) because fan-made or imitated accounts do not necessarily reflect Coca-Cola's marketing strategies. From the initial five-year sample period, a total of 100 Instagram posts were selected for each of the seven accounts, which were then screen-captured in high-resolution and saved in JPG format for analysis. This led to a total of 700 posts for the study's sample.

### Intercoder reliability

Three independent coders (two female and one male, all unaware of the purpose of the study) were recruited and trained to content-analyse the Instagram posts from the seven accounts, with each coder analysing approximately 233 posts. To ensure intercoder reliability, the three coders analysed a subsample of 70 Instagram posts from Coca-Cola's global account (unused in the main study), which represented 10 per cent of the total sample of 700 posts (Wimmer & Dominick, 2013). Codes were entered into Microsoft Excel sheets and reliability coefficients were determined by using ReCal (Reliability Calculator), an online utility that computes intercoder reliability coefficients (Freelon, 2013; Freelon, 2010). The average measure of agreement for the initial 13 variables was .69, which was considered unsatisfactory, so we revised and clarified our coding definitions to the coders. Another subsample of posts was then analysed by the coders for which the average pairwise percentage agreement reached .88, which was deemed satisfactory (Krippendorff, 2004).

### Coding procedure

Building on prior studies into gender stereotypes, this study investigates the various types of female and male stereotypes depicted in Coca-Cola's Instagram posts and how these stereotypes vary across countries. The unit of analysis was the primary or central character or model shown in each Instagram post. If two primary characters were present in a single post, each character was coded separately. If there were more than two characters, only the two most primary characters were coded. The following guidelines were used to identify the primary character in a given post: the focus is on the body and/or activity of that person, the person holds the branded product, the person takes up more space, or the person is in the centre spot.

Regarding coding schemes, the study adapted gender role categories used in previous research (Hatzithomas et al., 2016; Knoll et al., 2011; Eisend, 2010; Skorek & Schreier, 2009; Plakoyiannaki & Zotos, 2008). The following categories were used: primary character (yes, no, and appear as equal), gender (male, female), race (White, Black, Hispanic, Asian, and multiracial), age (child 12 years or younger, adolescent 13–19, young adult 20–39, mature adult 40–64, elderly 65 or older), location (workplace, home, social/transportation, social/indoors, social/outdoors, and others), degree of dress (fully dressed, suggestive dressed, partially dressed, and nude), physical presentation (skinny, fit, full-figured, and obese), sexually suggestive poses (behaviours that arouse sexual desire or interest), female stereotypes



(traditional roles, decorative roles, and non-traditional roles), and male stereotypes (sexualised man, and nontraditional roles).

## Data analysis

Frequencies and percentages were calculated for each variable. Chi-square tests were performed in IBM SPSS to determine statistically significant differences between groups.

## Results

In the final sample of 700 Instagram posts from the seven official Coca-Cola Instagram accounts, 1,075 primary characters were coded. The majority of the primary characters were female (67.6 per cent), Caucasian/White (51.9 per cent), and young adults from 20–39 years old (82.9 per cent). The most common predominant setting was social/outdoors, representing 43.4 per cent of the total posts.

There were two noticeable findings regarding the global Coca-Cola account. First, it had the most women as primary characters at 76.6 per cent. This is consistent with data that show women are the dominant Instagram users worldwide at 68 per cent (Aslam, 2018). Second, most of the posts were set in social settings with 40.6 per cent outdoors and 30.3 per cent indoors; the same applied to most of the other Instagram accounts. In terms of post setting/location, the accounts from Brazil and the Philippines contained many images in a studio setting; thus many were coded as other. Detailed descriptions for each country can be seen in Table 6.1.

Table 6.1 Breakdown of Coca-Cola Instagram post demographics by country

	<i>Characters</i>	<i>Women%</i>	<i>Predominant race/%</i>	<i>Predominant age/%</i>	<i>Predominant setting/%</i>
Global	175	76.6	White / 47.4	Young adult / 82.3	Social, outdoors / 40.6
Brazil	139	63.3	White / 28.1	Young adult / 87.1	Other / 57.0
Canada	190	71.1	White / 77.4	Young adult / 83.2	Social, outdoors / 55.3
Italy	137	65.7	White / 94.2	Young adult / 94.2	Social, outdoors / 43.5
Nigeria	142	62.0	Black / 100.0	Young adult / 81.7	Social, outdoors / 51.5
Philippines	166	62.0	Asian / 67.5	Young adult / 74.1	Other / 47.7
Russia	126	70.6	White / 88.9	Young adult / 79.4	Social, outdoors / 65.9
Total	1075	67.6	White / 51.9	Young adult / 82.9	Social, outdoors / 43.4

## Gender portrayals of men and women in the seven Coca-Cola accounts

Research question one asks about the differences in gender portrayals within each of the seven Coca-Cola Instagram accounts being analysed. For each account, we compared the depictions of men and women in five aspects: (1) degree of dress (or undress), (2) physical presentation, (3) the setting/location, (4) primary positioning of characters within post, and (5) characters' display of sexual suggestiveness. For most of the cases, men and women were portrayed differently.

As shown in Table 6.2, women were depicted as skinny more often than men across all seven accounts. This was especially apparent for the global account (53.3 per cent women versus 7.1 per cent men), followed by the Philippines account (49.4 versus 9.6) and the Brazil account (45.6 versus 12.5). Similarly, data indicated that women were more likely to be shown in suggestive clothing than men in most countries except Italy and Nigeria. In fact, in Nigeria, the majority of women were shown fully dressed in a non-suggestive manner (59.3 per cent). Our analysis found no difference in terms of the setting/location of posts between men and women in all countries. Since most of the posts were set in outdoor environments, they offered more opportunities to show women with less clothing. Further, Brazil and the Philippines' tropical climates may also have influenced the ways people dressed. However, there were also more women in suggestive dress in colder regions such as Canada (21.2 per cent women versus 4.2 per cent men) and Russia (30.2 versus 4.0), suggesting climate might not play a significant role in how characters dress. Finally, most accounts showed no significant difference between men and women when it came to characters being primarily featured or appearing in sexually suggestive poses. The only exception was the Brazil account, where women were both more likely to be depicted in sexually suggestive poses (13.8 per cent women versus 2.2 per cent men) and more likely to appear as the primary character (37.8 per cent women versus 14.8 per cent men).

## Portrayal of men and women across global and regional accounts

Research question two aims to investigate the differences in the portrayals of men and women between Coca-Cola's global Instagram account and its six regional accounts. Using the global account as the baseline, we compared female characters' depictions in the regional accounts in terms of (1) primary positioning, (2) degree of dress, (3) physical presentation, (4) whether they are in sexually suggestive pose, and whether they are in (5) traditional female roles, (6) decorative roles, or (7) non-traditional roles. For male characters, we compared the six regional accounts against the global account to see if they were portrayed as (1) sexualised, and (2) in non-traditional roles. We organised the following results by country.

The Brazil account scored statistically significant differences in six out of nine variables when compared to the global account (see [Table 6.3](#)). Specifically, the Brazil account had more women as the primary character (58.6 per cent versus 37.3 per cent), and they were more likely to be seen dressed in suggestive clothing (36.4 versus 25.4), partially dressed (22.7 versus 0), in sexually suggestive poses (21.6 versus 1.5), and in decorative roles (23.0 versus 3.0). None of the women in the Brazil posts were seen in traditional female roles, compared to seven in the global account, while four out of the 87 Brazilian women were seen engaging in non-traditional roles, compared to zero in the global account. However, despite the significant p values, these results should be taken with a grain of salt because of the small number of cases – this applies to other significant findings with small number of cases as well. Finally, there was no difference in the portrayal of men between the Brazil account and the global account.

Women were more likely to appear as equal to men in posts from the Canada account (70.4 per cent versus 52.2 per cent). There were also more women in suggestive clothing in the posts from the Canada account than the global account (29.6 versus 25.4), but they were shown as more fit or muscular than their global counterparts (67.4 versus 29.7). Similar phenomena were found in the accounts from Italy (86.7 versus 29.7) and Nigeria (64.4 versus 29.7), where women appeared more fit

than skinny compared to the global account. The Italy and Nigeria accounts also shared other common findings, as both showed more women as the primary characters (81.1 for Italy and 77.3 for Nigeria versus 37.3 for global) and both accounts also showed more fully dressed women (93.3 for Italy and 96.5 for Nigeria versus 75.6 for global) than the global account. However, in posts from the Philippines account, women were more likely to be wearing suggestive clothing (30.3 versus 25.4) and appeared as skinny more often (79.4 versus 70.3) than the global account.

Finally, in posts from the Russia account, there were more women in primary positions (68.5 versus 38.3 per cent), in suggestive clothing (42.7 versus 25.4), in sexually suggestive poses (11.2 versus 1.5), and in decorative roles (51.7 versus 3.0) when compared to the global account. Women were also portrayed as less skinny (43.8 versus 70.3), but more fit (56.2 versus 29.7) compared to the global account. Men from the Russia account were depicted as sexier than their global counterparts (63.9 versus 0), though this also held true for most of the other regional accounts, albeit to a lesser degree (ranging from 13.5 to 3.2 per cent). The Italy account was the only exception, with zero per cent of men depicted as sexualised.

Table 6.2 Degree of dress and physical presentation between men and women

		Degree of dress				Physical presentation			
		Fully dressed	Suggestive dressed	Partially dressed	Nude	Skinny	Fit or muscular	Full-figured	Obese
<b>Global</b>	Men %	23.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	7.1	17.2	0.0	0.0
	Women %	57.1	19.4	0.0	0.0	53.3	22.5	0.0	0.0
	$\chi^2 (N)$	<b>12.91***(175)</b>				<b>21.86***(169)</b>			
<b>Brazil</b>	Men %	28.1	7.9	.7	0.0	12.5	21.3	0.0	1.5
	Women %	25.9	23.0	14.4	0.0	45.6	16.9	1.5	0.0
	$\chi^2 (N)$	<b>19.07***(139)</b>				<b>22.46***(136)</b>			
<b>Canada</b>	Men %	24.7	4.2	0.0	0.0	1.6	26.8	.5	0.0
	Women %	47.4	21.1	2.6	0.0	23.2	47.9	0.0	0.0
	$\chi^2 (N)$	<b>7.47*(190)</b>				<b>17.44***(190)</b>			
<b>Italy</b>	Men %	33.6	0.0	.7	0.0	0.0	34.3	0.0	0.0
	Women %	61.3	.7	3.6	0.0	8.0	56.9	.7	0.0
	$\chi^2 (N)$	<b>1.42 (137)</b>				<b>6.87* (137)</b>			
<b>Nigeria</b>	Men %	33.6	5.0	0.0	0.0	.7	36.9	.7	0.0
	Women %	59.3	2.1	0.0	0.0	21.3	39.7	.7	0.0
	$\chi^2 (N)$	<b>4.49* (140)</b>				<b>20.69*** (141)</b>			
<b>Philippines</b>	Men %	36.0	2.5	0.0	0.0	9.6	23.7	4.5	0.0
	Women %	40.4	18.6	2.5	0.0	49.4	10.9	1.3	.6
	$\chi^2 (N)$	<b>16.66*** (161)</b>				<b>46.47*** (156)</b>			

<b>Russia</b>	Men %	24.6	4.0	.8	0.0	1.6	27.8	0.0	0.0
	Women %	38.9	30.2	.8	.8	31.0	39.7	0.0	0.0
	$\chi^2$ (N)	<b>10.75* (126)</b>				<b>17.57*** (126)</b>			

Statistically significant chi-squares were bolded, meaning that men and women were portrayed differently for that variable.

Table 6.3 Comparing the regional portrayal of women and men against the global account

	Global%	Brazil%	Canada%	Italy%	Nigeria%	Philippines%	Russia%
<b>FEMALE CHARACTERS</b>							
<b>As primary character (N)</b>	(134)	(87)	(135)		(88)	(103)	(89)
				(90)			
Yes	37.3	58.6	26.7		77.3	31.1	68.5
				81.1			
No	10.4	2.3	3.0		22.7	14.6	0.0
				18.9			
Appear as equal	52.2	39.1	70.4		0.0	54.4	31.5
				0.0			
$\chi^2$		<b>12.02**</b>	<b>11.62**</b>		<b>67.16***</b>	<b>1.51</b>	<b>25.03***</b>
				<b>68.60***</b>			
<b>Degree of dress (N)</b>	(134)	(87)	(135)	(86)		(99)	(89)
				(90)			
Fully dressed	75.6	40.9	66.7		96.5	65.7	55.1
				93.3			
Suggestive dressed	25.4	36.4	29.6		0.0	30.3	42.7
				1.1			
Partially dressed	0.0	22.7	3.7		3.5	4.0	1.1
				5.6			
Nude	0.0	0.0	0.0		0.0	0.0	1.1
				0.0			
$\chi^2$		<b>42.47***</b>	6.01*		<b>29.51***</b>	6.57*	<b>11.05*</b>

<b>Physical presentation (N)</b>	(128)	(87)	(135)		(87)	(97)	(89)
				(90)			
Skinny	70.3	71.3	32.6	12.2	34.5	79.4	43.8
Fit	29.7	25.4	67.4		64.4	17.5	56.2
				86.7			
Full-figured	0.0	2.3	0.0		1.1	2.1	0.0
				1.1			
Obese	0.0	0.0	0.0		0.0	1.0	0.0
				0.0			
$\chi^2$		3.14	<b>34.41***</b>		<b>27.63***</b>	<b>7.91*</b>	<b>15.28***</b>
				<b>72.15***</b>			
<b>Sexually suggestive pose (N)</b>	(134)	(88)	(135)		(88)	(102)	(89)
				(90)			
Yes	1.5	21.6	2.2		9.1	6.9	11.2
				5.6			
No	98.5	70.5	97.8		90.9	92.2	88.8
				94.4			
$\chi^2$		<b>38.13***</b>	1.96		<b>7.13**</b>	5.94 <sup>†</sup>	<b>9.97**</b>
				2.94 <sup>†</sup>			
<b>Traditional roles (N)</b>	(134)	(85)	(133)		(87)	(98)	(87)
				(90)			
Yes	5.2	0.0	2.3		1.1	1.0	1.1
				0.0			
No	94.8	100.0	97.7		98.9	99.0	98.9
				100.0			
$\chi^2$		<b>4.59*</b>	1.63		2.51	3.00 <sup>†</sup>	2.51
				<b>4.85*</b>			
<b>Decorative roles (N)</b>	(134)	(87)	(133)		(87)	(98)	(87)
				(90)			
Yes	3.0	23.0	6.0		0.0	5.1	51.7
				0.0			
No	97.0	72.4	94.0		100.0	94.9	48.3

				100.0			
$\chi^2$		<b>29.25***</b>	1.43		2.65	.68	<b>72.62***</b>
				2.74†			
<b>Non-traditional roles (N)</b>	(134)	(87)	(132)		(87)	(99)	(87)
				(90)			
Yes	0.0	4.6	9.1		0.0	1.0	0.0
				0.0			
No	100.0	95.4	90.0		100.0	99.0	100.0
				100.0			
$\chi^2$		<b>6.27*</b>	<b>12.76***</b>		NA	1.36	NA
				NA			
<b>MALE CHARACTERS</b>							
<b>Sex appeal (N)</b>	(40)	(49)	(52)	(47)	(52)	(62)	(36)
Yes	0.0	8.2	9.6	0.0	13.5	3.2	63.9
No	100.0	91.8	90.4	100.0	85.6	96.8	36.1
$\chi^2$		3.42†	<b>4.07*</b>	NA	<b>5.83*</b>	1.32	<b>36.65***</b>
<b>Non-traditional roles (N)</b>	(40)	(49)	(51)	(47)	(52)	(62)	(36)
Yes	0.0	4.1	3.9	0.0	0.0	0.0	11.1
No	100.0	95.9	96.1	100.0	100.0	100.0	88.9
$\chi^2$		1.67	1.60	NA	NA	NA	<b>4.69*</b>

Statistically significant chi-squares were bolded meaning that the regional account was different from the global account for that variable.

## Differences between masculine and feminine cultures

Research question three asks if there are differences between the gender portrayals from the accounts for the more masculine cultures and the accounts for the more feminine cultures. To answer this question, we grouped three countries which scored relatively high in Hofstede's masculinity/femininity index – Italy (70), Nigeria (60), and the Philippines (64) – and compared them against a group of three countries with relatively low masculinity scores – Brazil (49), Canada (52), and Russia (36).

The results indicated that although the accounts for the feminine cultures had more women and men sharing equal placement within posts than their masculine counterparts (50.5 per cent versus 19.9 per cent), women were less likely to be the sole primary character (47.6 versus 61.6). Women were also more likely to be dressed in suggestive clothing, and even be depicted partially dressed, in the accounts for the feminine cultures (35.3 versus 11.3). In addition, the accounts for the feminine countries tended to display women in decorative roles more so than those for the masculine countries (23.8 versus 1.8). Yet, there were slightly more women shown engaging in non-traditional roles in the feminine country posts than in the masculine country posts (5.2 versus 4). In terms of the physical presentation of female characters, whether they are depicted in sexually provocative poses, or whether they are depicted in traditional roles, there was no difference found between the accounts for masculine and feminine cultures. However, male characters not only appeared as sexy and more macho (23.4 versus 5.6), but were also shown engaging in more non-traditional roles (5.9 versus 0) in the accounts for feminine countries than in the accounts for masculine countries (see Table 6.4).

Table 6.4 Comparing the portrayals of women and men between masculine and feminine countries

	<i>Masculine %</i>	<i>Feminine %</i>
<b>FEMALE CHARACTERS</b>		
<b>As primary character (N)</b>	(281)	(311)
Yes	61.6	47.6
No	18.5	1.9
Appear as equal	19.9	50.5
$\chi^2$	<b>85.02***</b>	
<b>Degree of dress (N)</b>	(275)	(312)
Fully dressed	84.4	56.1
Suggestive dressed	11.3	35.3
Partially dressed	4.4	8.3
Nude	0.0	.3
$\chi^2$	<b>56.30***</b>	
<b>Physical presentation (N)</b>	(274)	(311)
Skinny	43.1	46.6
Fit	55.1	52.7
Full-figured	1.5	.6
Obese	.4	0.0
$\chi^2$	2.65	



<b>Sexually suggestive pose (N)</b>	(280)	(312)
Yes	7.1	10.3
No	92.5	87.5
$\chi^2$		5.93 <sup>†</sup>
<b>Women in traditional roles (N)</b>	(275)	(305)
Yes	.7	1.3
No	99.3	98.7
$\chi^2$	.48	
<b>Women in decorative roles (N)</b>	(275)	(307)
Yes	1.8	23.8
No	98.2	74.9
$\chi^2$	<b>64.92***</b>	
<b>Women in non-traditional roles (N)</b>	(276)	(306)
Yes	.4	5.2
No	99.6	94.8
$\chi^2$	<b>12.12***</b>	
<b>MALE CHARACTERS</b>		
<b>Sex appeal (N)</b>	(161)	(137)
Yes	5.6	23.4
No	94.4	76.6
$\chi^2$	<b>19.69***</b>	
<b>Non-traditional roles (N)</b>	(161)	(136)
Yes	0.0	5.9
No	100.0	94.1
$\chi^2$	<b>9.73**</b>	

Note: \*\*\* p <.001, \*\* p <.01, \* p <.05, † p <.1

## Discussion

### Coca-Cola on Instagram: An iconic and still gendered brand

The overarching question we have explored is whether or not Coca-Cola has employed gendered stereotypes within its worldwide Instagram accounts, in an effort to maintain its prowess as the quintessential aspirational American brand. While there has been some variation in our findings, we nonetheless suggest that the brand is continuing its long history of targeting women through the lens of masculinity, which still dominates corporate structures (Lewis, 2014; Acker, 1990). Coca-Cola's active presence on Instagram, which has a high rate of female users, is not surprising and suggests that our work may offer some useful insights. There is little cross-cultural research on major brands using Instagram, despite the fact that consumers and brands are making connections in the social realm at an ever-quickening pace. Further, our results suggest that Coca-Cola is using Instagram in ways that are consistent with its long-term strategy of global expansion within a standardised approach. In other words, Coca-Cola continues to adopt appeals that can be spread, with a fair amount of uniformity and consistency, from country to country with only modest regard for local norms. In the process, Coca-

Cola privileges a single type of culture. As McFall (2004) would argue, it is a culture that often minimises non-Western, non-male cultural norms. This strategy allows Coca-Cola to streamline its embrace of global capitalism, as it shares its quintessentially American brand of happiness across world markets.

Masculinity appears to be the emphasis within Coca-Cola's imagery across Instagram, even in countries that have low masculinity values according to Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimensions model. High masculinity markers are not surprising on Coca-Cola's regional Instagram account for the Philippines, with its high scores on Hofstede's masculinity index. However, to some it might be surprising to see high masculinity markers in Brazil and Russia, which have low scores for masculinity. Yet Brazil is known for its sensuous culture, including open displays of sexuality, suggesting that an embrace of images defined as masculine may not be so surprising. And according to Hofstede, Russia's low masculinity score may be more an indicator of its citizens' deferential preference for authority figures and status symbols, rather than a tendency towards traditional feminine values such as relationships, caring for others, and quality of life. This deference for authority and status may also explain why we saw more sexualised men on Russia's Instagram account. All one has to do is to remember Vladimir Putin half-naked on his horse to understand the draw. Paradoxically, this may also explain why a more feminine country would find comfort in more masculine images within branding. In essence, Coca-Cola's international Instagram accounts tend to 'mirror' the dominant masculine, Western cultural world (Grau & Zotos, 2016), illustrating the power of Coca Cola's American roots.

Following this paradoxical path, it is also not surprising that Cola-Cola's global account functions as a role model for regional Instagram accounts in terms of how women are depicted, which is often as skinny and wearing suggestive clothing. Only the accounts from Nigeria and Italy, both countries which rate high in masculinity, seemed to push back with images that were dominated by fully clothed women. For both countries, this may be rooted in more historically conservative religious values. Given that five of the seven accounts explored demonstrate depictions of women as skinny and suggestively dressed, it seems the global Coca-Cola account may function as a 'mirror' (Grau & Zotos, 2016), thus demonstrating the power of hegemonic global capitalism. For as Goldman (1992) argues, social realities are often corrupted by advertising because of their development within a capitalist political economy that privileges Western, male identities over all others.

Countries with low masculinity scores (thus considered feminine societies), appear to focus more on posts that show women as primary characters, but demonstrate less focus on clothing as a marker of equality. This suggests that, at least within these countries, femininity has more to do with better work-life balance and aspirations for more leisure time. In other words, the Instagram posts from the accounts for feminine countries focus on social relationships, just as the work of Domzal and Kernan (1993) and Elliot and Wattanasuwan (1998) would suggest. Paradoxically, the focus on leisure and social relationships may also provide another explanation for the more revealing clothes and more macho masculine appeals that were noted in the results for these countries' accounts. It seems the emphasis for Coca-Cola's branding strategies in these countries is not about matching the local culture. In fact, the local culture appears, in general, to take a back seat to the standardisation of Coca-Cola's

global brand. Instead, it appears the emphasis is on providing incentives that are framed by visual appeals focused on leisure, all while increasing brand engagement on Instagram.

While exploratory, our study suggests that Coca-Cola continues to use gendered stereotypes within Instagram; stereotypes that feel Western and masculine, subtly seeding aspirational American cultural values. This aspirational branding, rooted in a standardised approach, maintains Coca-Cola's prowess as the quintessential aspirational American brand.

## Looking to the future and concluding thoughts

Future research surely calls us to look more deeply into other areas on Instagram, because the images tell only part of the story. This, along with a repeat study across a different timeline, may help explain some of the contradictions that arose from our data. Further, still images truncate our ability to understand more deeply the interactions between or among primary characters in the posts. The rapid growth in technology, allowing quick and easy video content uploads, suggests that studies of video content on Instagram or other social media platforms are also an emerging, pressing need. Additionally, our scholarly knowledge could benefit from cross-cultural explorations of other social media platforms.

Today, as consumers around the world 'share happiness' on Coca-Cola's Instagram accounts, we argue that they often do not mirror the 'prevailing values' of the local culture as Grau and Zotos (2016) suggest. Rather, they mirror the masculine, hegemonic values of the global brand. In the end, Coca-Cola is not just the quintessential American brand, but also, indeed, the icon marker of globalised gendered social norms.

## Acknowledgements

The authors gratefully acknowledge the diligent work of our coders: Ashley Buss, Reece Harty, Michaela Maday, and Olivia Menzia; and the thoughtful copyediting of Carrie Hu. Thank you all.

## References

- Acker, J. (1990) 'Hierarchies, jobs, bodies: A theory of gendered organizations', *Gender & Society*, 4 (2), pp. 139–158.
- Aslam, S. (2018) Instagram by the numbers: Stats, demographics & fun facts. Available at: <http://www.omnicoreagency.com/instagram-statistics/>.
- Deng, T. & Grow, J.M. (2018) 'Gender segregation revealed: Five years of data tell a global story', *Advertising & Society Quarterly*, 19 (3), doi:10.1353/asr.2018.0024.
- Domzal, T.J. & Kernan, J.B. (1993) 'Mirror, mirror: Some postmodern reflections on global advertising', *Journal of Advertising*, 22 (4), pp. 1–20.
- Dyer, G. (1982) *Advertising as Communication*. London: Methuen.
- Eisend, M. (2010) 'A meta-analysis of gender roles in advertising', *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Sciences*, 38 (4), pp. 418–440.
- Elliot, K. & Wattanasuwan, K. (1998) 'Brands as symbolic resources for the construction of identity', *International Journal of Advertising*, 17 (2), pp. 131–144.
- eMarketer. (2017) US companies using social networks for marketing purposes, 2015–2019. Available at: <http://totalaccess.emarketer.com/chart.aspx?r=212967>.

- Fiske, J. (1990) *Introduction to Communication Studies*. New York: Routledge.
- Freelon, D. (2010) 'ReCal: Intercoder reliability calculation as a web service', *International Journal of Internet Science*, 5 (1), pp. 20–33.
- Freelon, D. (2013) 'ReCal OIR: Ordinal, interval, and ratio intercoder reliability as a web service', *International Journal of Internet Science*, 8 (1), pp. 10–16.
- Goldman, R. (1992) *Reading Ads Socially*. New York: Routledge.
- Grau, S.L. & Zotos, Y.C. (2016) 'Gender stereotypes in advertising: A review of current research', *International Journal of Advertising*, 35 (5), pp. 761–770.
- Grow, J.M. (2017) 'American Advertising and the Politics of Consumption', in Crawford, R. & Brennan, L. (eds), *Global Advertising Practice in a Borderless World*. New York: Routledge, pp. 59–72.
- Hatzithomas, L., Boutsouki, C., & Ziamou, P. (2016) 'A longitudinal analysis of the changing roles of gender in advertising: A content analysis of Super Bowl commercials', *International Journal of Advertising*, 35 (5), pp. 888–906.
- Hofstede, G. (2001) *Culture's Consequences: Comparing Values, Behaviors, Institutions and Organizations Across Nations*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Hofstede-insights.com. (no date) National culture. Available at: <https://www.hofstede-insights.com/models/national-culture>.
- Horowitz, A. (2011) These are the killer ad campaigns that transformed Coca-Cola into the world's favorite soda. Available at: <https://www.businessinsider.com/how-great-ads-made-coca-cola-the-world-champion-of-soft-drinks-2011-2>.
- Knoll, S., Eisend, M., & Steinhagen, J. (2011) 'Gender roles in advertising', *International Journal of Advertising*, 30 (5), pp. 867–888.
- Krippendorff, K. (2004) *Content Analysis: An Introduction to Its Methodology*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publishing.
- Instagram. (2019) Info center. Available at: <https://instagram-press.com/our-story/>.
- Levy, J.C. (2007) 'Advertising to women: Who are we in print and how do we reclaim our image?' *Journal of Creativity in Mental Health*, 2 (4), pp. 75–86.
- Lewis, P. (2014) 'Postfeminism, femininities and organization studies: Exploring a new agenda', *Organization Studies*, 35 (12), pp. 1845–1866.
- Lyonski, S. (1985) 'Role portrayals in British magazine advertisement', *European Journal of Marketing*, 19 (7), pp. 37–55.
- Matthes, J., Prieler, M., & Adam, K. (2016) 'Gender-role portrayals in television advertising across the globe', *Sex Roles*, 75 (7–8), pp. 314–327.
- McFall, L. (2004) *Advertising: A Cultural Economy*. London: Sage Publishing.
- Milner, L.M. & Collins, J.M. (2000) 'Sex-role portrayals and the gender of nations', *Journal of Advertising*, 29 (1), pp. 67–79.
- Morris, L. (2017) How Coca-Cola became digital marketing rock stars! Available at: <https://www.zazzlemedia.co.uk/blog/coca-cola-digital-marketing/#gref>.
- Neuendorf, K.A. (2011) 'Content analysis – a methodological primer for gender research', *Sex Roles*, 64(3–4), pp. 276–289.
- Odekerken-Schroder, G., De Wulf, K., & Hofstee, N. (2002) 'Is gender stereotyping in advertising more prevalent in masculine countries?: A cross-national analysis', *International Marketing Review*, 19 (4), pp. 408–419.

- Plakoyiannaki, E. & Zotos, Y. (2008) 'Female role stereotypes in print advertising: Identifying associations with magazine and product categories', *European Journal of Marketing*, 43(11–12), pp. 1411–1434.
- Plakoyiannaki, E., Mathioudaki, K., Dimitratos, P., & Zotos, Y. (2008) 'Images of women in online advertisements of global products: Does sexism exist?' *Journal of Business Ethics*, 83 (1), p. 101.
- Skorek, M. & Schreier, M. (2009) A comparison of gender role portrayals in magazine advertisements from Germany, Poland and the United States. In annual meeting of the International Communication Association, Chicago, IL. Available at: [http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p295758\\_index.html](http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p295758_index.html).
- Standage, T. (2005) *A History of the World in Six Glasses*. New York: Walker & Company.
- Whipple, T.W. & Courtney, A.E. (1985) 'Female role portrayals in advertising and communication effectiveness: A review', *Journal of Advertising*, 14 (3), pp. 4–17.
- Wimmer, R. & Dominick, J. (2013) *Mass Media Research: An Introduction* (10th edn). Belmont, CA: Thomson Wadsworth.
- Zotos, Y. & Lysonski, S. (1994) 'Gender representations', *Journal of Euromarketing*, 3 (2), pp. 27–47.

## Instagram accounts

Global: <https://www.instagram.com/worldofcocacola>.

Nigeria: [https://www.instagram.com/cocacola\\_ng](https://www.instagram.com/cocacola_ng).

Brazil: [https://www.instagram.com/cocacola\\_br](https://www.instagram.com/cocacola_br).

Canada: <https://www.instagram.com/cocacolaquebec>.

Italy: <https://www.instagram.com/cocacolait>.

Philippines: <https://www.instagram.com/cocacolaph>.

Russia: <https://www.instagram.com/cocacolarus>.