Exploration of Tiktok's Masculinity Representations in Influencing Gender Attitudes Among Selected Kenyan Male Youths in Nairobi County

Mariam Mwikali Francis[1*], Collins Wagumba[2], Virginia Wangari Ndungu[3]

[1]*Master's Student, Department of Journalism and Communication, Multimedia University of Kenya, Nairobi, Kenya*
[2]*Head of Department, Department of Journalism and Communication, Multimedia University of Kenya, Nairobi, Kenya*
[3]*Lecturer, Department of Journalism and Communication, Multimedia University of Kenya, Nairobi, Kenya*

Abstract: **This qualitative research study explored how masculinity is represented on TikTok and how these portrayals influence gender attitudes and behaviours among selected Kenyan male youth in Nairobi County. The study was guided by Gender Performativity Theory and Framing Theory, which provided a framework for understanding how masculinity is constructed, performed, and interpreted in digital spaces. The study pursued the following specific objectives: (1) to analyse the diverse representations of masculinity on TikTok portrayed by selected Kenyan youth in Nairobi County, (2) to explore the perceptions of Kenyan male youth in Nairobi County regarding masculinity representations, and (3) to examine the impact of masculinity representations on gender attitudes and behaviours of selected Kenyan male youth in Nairobi County. Using purposive sampling, ten male TikTok influencers aged 18–34 with over one million followers and based in Nairobi were selected. Data were collected through non-participant observation of their videos and accompanying viewer comments, analysed using a detailed coding manual and thematic content analysis. The findings revealed that modern masculinity (marked by emotional openness, stylish grooming, and inclusivity) was the most dominant representation, while traditional and fluid masculinities were also evident. Viewer reactions varied widely: some celebrated non-conforming portrayals, while others expressed hostility rooted in traditional gender expectations. The study found that TikTok content significantly influenced viewers' gender attitudes and behaviours, as evidenced by comments reflecting admiration, desire to emulate influencer styles, and adoption of their expressed gender ideologies. This underscores TikTok's dual role as a space for both challenging and reinforcing gender norms. The study concluded that TikTok is a site of cultural negotiation, where progressive and conservative masculinity ideals coexist and contest. Recommendations include integrating media literacy and gender education into youth programs, empowering influencers to foster inclusive content, and promoting collaborative initiatives among researchers, media professionals, and policy actors. The study contributes to digital media and gender studies by highlighting TikTok's role in shaping evolving masculinity narratives within African urban contexts.**

Keywords: **TikTok, Masculinity Representations, Influencing, Gender Attitudes, Male Youth, Nairobi County.**

1. Introduction

A. Background Information

Media often reinforces gender stereotypes and presents role models that shape how masculinity and femininity are perceived (StudySmarter, 2025). This study focuses on how masculinity is represented on TikTok by male youth in Nairobi County. Masculinity representations refer to how male identity is portrayed and expressed in media, influencing social norms, behaviours, and attitudes.

The study explores four types of masculinity which are traditional, modern, fluid and toxic masculinity. Traditional masculinity emphasizes toughness, emotional restraint, dominance, discipline, and minimal yet intentional grooming. Modern masculinity blends strength with emotional openness, mental health awareness, equality, and self-care, including fashion and grooming. Fluid masculinity embraces flexibility, combining masculine and feminine traits, self-expression, and authenticity through style and grooming. Toxic masculinity promotes harmful norms such as emotional suppression, aggression, dominance, and disdain for anything seen as feminine.

B. Statement of the Problem

Previous studies, such as Perloff (2014), have shown that platforms like Instagram reinforce idealized forms of masculinity—muscularity, dominance, and hyper-heteronormativity—leading to body dissatisfaction and negative mental health outcomes (Perloff, 2014). Unlike Instagram's curated, static content, TikTok allows for real-time, dynamic engagement through music, dance, and humour, offering a potentially more authentic and diverse portrayal of masculinity.

The influence of TikTok in Kenya is especially significant given the country's high usage rates, with the 2023 Reuters Institute Digital News Report indicating that Kenya leads globally in TikTok adoption (Rédaction Africanews, 2023).

This raises important questions about how the platform is shaping local understandings of masculinity and gender roles. TikTok's participatory nature and viral trends enable male youth to engage in self-expression and identity negotiation in ways not typically afforded by more polished platforms.

C. Objectives

1) Main Objective

This study aims to examine the relationship between representations of masculinity on TikTok and gender attitudes among selected Kenyan male youth in Nairobi County.

2) Specific Objectives

1. To analyse the diverse representations of masculinity on TikTok portrayed by selected Kenyan youth in Nairobi County.
2. To explore the perceptions of Kenyan male youth in Nairobi County, regarding masculinity representations.
3. To examine the impact of masculinity representations on gender attitudes and behaviours of selected Kenyan male youth in Nairobi County.

D. Research Questions

1. What are the predominant representations of masculinity portrayed on TikTok in Kenya?
2. How do Kenyan male youth perceive different masculinity representations on the TikTok platform?
3. In what ways do masculinity representations on TikTok influence the gender attitudes and behaviours of Kenyan male youth in Nairobi County?

2. Literature Review

A. Theoretical Review

For this research study, two theories will be adopted; the gender performativity theory and the framing theory.

1) Gender Performativity Theory

Judith Butler's gender theory (1990) introduced gender performativity, the idea that gender is not innate but learned and enacted through behavior, language, dress, and other social cues (Shul, 2019; Boundless, 2020). Butler contends gender is not biologically fixed but constructed through repeated actions (Dino, 2002; Allen, 2023). Different societies have varied expectations for these performances, making gender fluid and complex (Dino, 2002). Though rooted in feminist theory, performativity is increasingly used in communication studies to analyze how platforms like TikTok enable users—such as Kenyan male youth—to perform and renegotiate masculinities through language, visuals, and movement. This lens offers deeper insight than traditional media theories.

2) Framing Theory

Framing theory, grounded in Berger and Luckmann's Social Construction of Reality (1966), suggests that reality is shaped by socialization and past experiences, not pure objectivity (Zamith, 2023). People construct different realities even in similar contexts. This study uses framing theory to examine how Nairobi-based Kenyan youth frame masculinity on TikTok, revealing dominant narratives, cultural influences, and varied gender expressions.

B. Conceptual Framework

The figure 1 shows the conceptual framework indicating the independent and dependent variables of the study accompanied by the attributes of each variable.
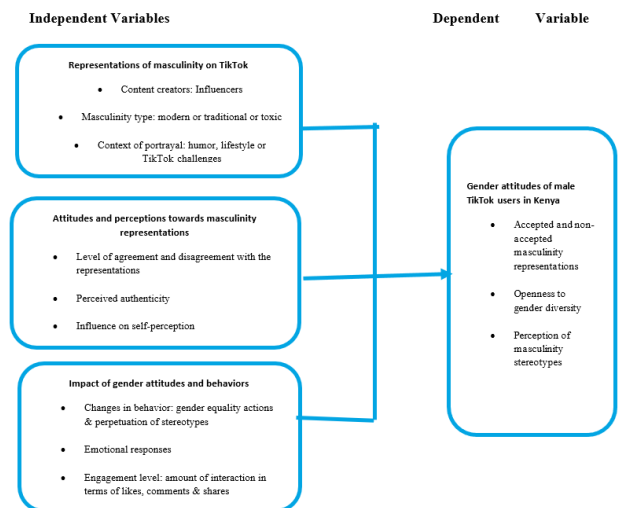

Fig. 1. Conceptual framework

1) Representations of Masculinity on TikTok

This section explores existing literature on masculinity representations on TikTok, one of the study's key variables. Maya and John (2021) found that influencers use social media to portray specific modes of masculinity reflective of societal norms. Their study revealed a shift among some male influencers from patriarchal masculinity toward metrosexual masculinity, marked by interest in grooming, fashion, and self-presentation. Metrosexual masculinity, as Matthew (2014) explains, blends traditional masculine traits with stylistic and lifestyle elements typically seen as feminine.

Similarly, Jordan and Jayne (2022), in their study on muscles, makeup, and femboys, observed that TikTok content—particularly videos featuring men wearing jewellery and dancing—signals a growing acceptance of gender non-conformity and challenges to traditional masculinity.

However, not all digital portrayals are progressive. Scarcelli and Manolo (2024), in their work on young people negotiating gender online, found that social media often reinforces existing gender stereotypes. Both male and female users tend to conform to societal expectations, maintaining traditional gender norms in their online personas.

Salma and Eva's (2024) study on the "boy math" trend showed how satire on TikTok serves as a critique of toxic masculinity. Originating as a counterpart to "girl math," the trend evolved into a broader condemnation of misogynistic behaviours. Users employed the trend to expose toxic masculinity and promote gender equality, revealing how online communities actively resist regressive gender norms.

Adisa (2023), examining masculine and feminine communication on TikTok, highlighted how both verbal and nonverbal cues in videos reveal underlying masculine

portrayals. His findings confirm that masculinity on TikTok can be analysed through content creators' behaviour and presentation, aligning with the current study's objectives.

2) Attitudes and Perceptions Towards Masculinity Representations

This variable examines how TikTok audiences respond to different portrayals of masculinity. Jordan and Jayne (2022) found that TikTok users favour male creators who align with widely idealized standards of appearance. Their study, based on the platform's most followed men, showed that creators emphasizing physical attractiveness were rewarded with significant symbolic capital—likes and comments. Even the least liked video in their sample garnered 12.5K likes, while the most popular received over 4.8 million (Jordan & Jayne, 2022). However, this popularity often reinforced hegemonic masculinity and limited the space for more inclusive, metrosexual representations.

Jordan and Jayne also observed that when male influencers experimented with metrosexual traits, they frequently masked these with traditional masculinity cues—using dominant themes in music and body language—suggesting an ongoing tension between traditional and modern expressions of masculinity.

Haley's (2023) research on gender expression in TikTok dance videos revealed mixed reactions to gender fluidity. While some users embraced non-traditional gender displays, others responded with hate speech, particularly on content tagged with #queerdancetrends and #transdancetrends. These reactions often included homophobic and heteronormative sentiments, showing that public perception and self-identity significantly influence how different masculinity types are received.

Haley's findings, alongside those of Jordan and Jayne, highlight the complex and often contradictory attitudes toward masculinity on TikTok—where both acceptance and resistance coexist.

3) Impact on Gender Attitudes and Behaviours

This variable explores how TikTok influences gender-related behaviours and attitudes. Defi and Achmad's (2024) study found that while users are selective in the content they consume, TikTok videos have minimal influence on users' actions, suggesting a negligible behavioural impact from gendered content.

Contrastingly, Yang's (2022) cross-cultural study on TikTok (Douyin) revealed that influencer content can significantly shape user decisions, especially regarding purchases. The impact varied by country, gender, and age—Chinese users were more influenced than Americans, older users more than younger ones, and gender dynamics revealed male influencers were more persuasive in the U.S., while female influencers had greater impact in China. This indicates that gendered messaging on TikTok holds persuasive power depending on context.

Zhang's (2023) research on male beauty bloggers showed that over 66% of respondents reported changes in their aesthetic perceptions of men due to such content. Only 10% viewed this influence negatively, suggesting that younger audiences generally respond positively to diverse representations of masculinity and hold more open gender views.

Meanwhile, Diana and Rachel (2024) examined how social media shapes adolescents' gender norms. They emphasized that the influence of social media varies widely depending on the platform, content type, usage patterns, and individual context. Adolescents demonstrate agency in engaging with content, with some using platforms to experiment with less stereotypical gender expressions. Their review of multiple studies found that social media use can correlate with more gender-equitable attitudes, though not consistently.

Diana and Rachel also note that adolescents' online experiences are closely tied to their offline lives, with peer groups, family norms, and existing attitudes playing a major role. Influencers, due to their popularity, often contribute to identity formation in adolescents—a view echoed by Maya and John (2021), who also highlight the role of visual content in shaping self-perception.

Collectively, these studies show that while behavioural influence from TikTok is not uniform, its role in shaping gender attitudes—especially among youth—is significant and warrants further exploration, particularly within the context of Kenyan male youth in Nairobi County.

3. Research Methodology

A. Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative visual content analysis approach to explore masculinity representations on TikTok and their influence on gender attitudes among Kenyan male youth in Nairobi County. It will examine subjective meanings, social context, and visual elements within selected videos from top male TikTokers in the region.

B. Study Site and Population

The study will be conducted on the TikTok app, focusing on ten videos from the most followed male TikTokers in Nairobi County: @moyadavid1, @mc.gogo, @tileh_pacbro, @onlylitboy, @just.call.me.klaus, @crazy_kennar, @flaqoraz, @tomdaktari, @mulamwah, and @_officialkinuthia.

C. Sampling Frame

As defined by Villegas (2023), the sampling frame consists of male TikTokers aged 18–34, based in Nairobi County, with over 1 million followers. Selected videos must be posted in 2024 and have at least 50,000 likes and 1,500 comments. This ensures the sample is relevant and data-rich.

D. Sampling and Sampling Technique

1) Sampling Size

The study will analyse ten videos, aligning with qualitative methods focused on depth rather than generalization, allowing detailed examination of masculinity portrayals.

2) Sampling Technique

Purposive sampling will be used to select videos specifically from the identified male TikTokers, ensuring relevance to the study's objective on masculinity representation and perception.

E. Data Collection Methods

The researcher will watch each selected video repeatedly,

noting visual, verbal, and behavioural cues of masculinity—particularly clothing, appearance, and language (Frejsjö & Noah, 2023). A qualitative content analysis of 40–70 filtered and purposively selected male-authored comments per video will follow. Criteria include relevance to masculinity themes such as fashion, emotions, and gender roles. Commenter gender will be identified through usernames or profile photos.

F. Data Collection Instruments

A smartphone (TikTok account: @mwikali_mariam8) will access and archive the selected videos. A coding manual—developed from section Two literature—will define the themes, provide examples, and guide consistent application of codes across video and comment content.

G. Data Collection Procedure

The selected videos will be analysed through repeated viewing. Observations will be coded based on the pre-developed scheme. Frequency and context of themes will be recorded to identify patterns. Findings will be used to infer how TikTok masculinity portrayals relate to gender attitudes and behaviours among Nairobi's male youth.

H. Data Analysis and Presentation

Using the coding framework, themes from videos and comments will be identified and organized. The analysis will interpret how masculinity is portrayed and perceived, and how it potentially influences youth attitudes. Trustworthiness will be ensured through triangulation, comment-based feedback, and peer debriefing. The final research report will include supporting comment excerpts and be structured to suit the target audience.

4. Research Findings, Analyses & Discussions

A. Response Rate

The response rate for this content analysis study was 100%. All ten selected TikTok videos from the ten most followed male TikTokers in Nairobi County were successfully accessed, reviewed, and analyzed in accordance with the predetermined sampling frame.

B. Results and Discussions: Analyses of Study Variables

The results of the study on exploration of TikTok's masculinity representations in influencing gender attitude and behaviors among male Kenyan youths in Nairobi County are presented first through a table. Then ordered according to the study variables, which take the following structure:
- Variable 1 Representations of masculinity on TikTok
- Variable2 Attitude and perceptions towards masculinity representations
- Variable 3 Impact on gender attitudes and behaviors

The following table presents the findings of the ten observed TikTok videos.

1) Representations of Masculinity on TikTok

The findings of the study reveal diverse masculinity representations on TikTok among selected Kenyan male youth in Nairobi County. The videos analyzed showcased modern masculinity through dance. An example being @just.call.me.klaus, @tileh_pacbro and @onlylitboy who expressed modern masculinity through dance. @tomdaktari on the other hand expressed modern masculinity through engagement where he went ahead and encouraged viewers to have healthy and loving relationships which included apologizing to your partners if you have wronged them.

This study connects with Butler's (1990) theory of gender performativity, which says that gender is not something we are born with, but something we learn and do through our actions (Allen, 2023). A good example is TikTok user @_officialkinuthia, who shows this idea through his style. In the TikTok video, he wears tight jeans, a black and white striped blouse, high heel stilettos, and a neat black wig—clothes often seen as feminine. However, Kinuthia (@_officialkinuthia) shows that how someone expresses their gender doesn't have to match their biological sex. Kinuthia's video challenges the idea that there are fixed rules about what is masculine or feminine, proving that gender can be performed freely, without limits.

The TikTok platform allows users to explore and express their identities openly in one's personal preference, thus breaking away from traditional gender norms. For instance, TikTokers like @moyadavid1 and @jut.call.me.klaus displayed modern masculinity through emotional vulnerability and public displays of affection, showcasing expressions often previously considered feminine. This aligns with the findings of Maya and John (2021), who highlighted that TikTokers engage in performance modes that both reflect personal identity and influence societal perceptions of masculinity (Maya & John, 2021).

This study also supports Jordan and Jayne's (2022) perspective that TikTok creators display a blend of traditional and modern masculinity, such as those embodying metrosexual traits—stylish, well-groomed, and engaged in self-care (Jordan & Jayne, 2022). This is evident in @mc.gogo TikTok video which displayed both modern and traditional masculinity. The song use in the video perpetuated traditional masculinity gender stereotypes of men as the financial providers while @mc.gogo showed open emotional vulnerability through his expressive facial expressions of happiness, which contradicts the song use.

Contrarily, the literature also notes the persistence of traditional masculinity traits within many TikTok videos, as some creators employed strength muscularity dominance to gain an audience (Jordan & Jayne, 2022). This is evident in @crazy_kennar and @mulamwah TikTok videos which show traditional masculinity gender stereotypes of men as the leaders and men being opted to perform the heavy tasks like lifting heavy objects.

These findings reflect the complexity of modern masculinity representations on the TikTok platform. The findings indicate that while some TikTok content challenges traditional masculine norms, reinforcing the notion of fluidity and diversity, like @_officialkinuthia who has shown fluid masculinity by wearing clothes and stiletto heels regarded for women, others continue to prioritize heterosexual norms, demonstrating resistance to more progressive representations (Scarcelli & Manolo, 2024). This is evident from video contents

Table 1

Video ID	TikToker Username	Followers	Video Likes	Comments Count	Posting Date	Masculinity Type (MT)	Emotional Vulnerability (EV)	Context Portrayal (CP)	Fashion & Grooming (FG)	Gender Stereotypes (GS)	Inclusivity (IR)	Cultural Context (CC)
V1	@moyadavid1	4.9 million	104.9 thousand	1900	12-02-2024	MT-M	High	Dance	Trendy, Styled, Groomed	None	None	Low
V2	@mc-gogo_	1.7 million	738.7 thousand	6,783	14-03-2024	MT-T and M	High	Humor	Casual wear, Short Hair	High	None	None
V3	@tileh_pacbro	1.1 million	236.3 thousand	1,812	04-08-2024	MT-M	High	Dance	Official wear, short hair	None	None	Moderate
V4	@onlyitboy	2.2 million	73.6 thousand	2,268	05-11-2024	MT-M	High	Dance	Trendy casual, dyed hair and dreads	None	None	None
V5	@just.call.me.klaus	2.2 million	215.7 thousand	3,364	31-10-2024	MT-M	High	Dance	Trendy official, long kempt hair	None	None	Moderate
V6	@crazy_kennar	1.8 million	1.6 million	57.7 thousand	05-09-2024	MT-T	High	Humor	Official wear, short hair	High	None	None
V7	@flaqoraz	2.4 million	432.2 thousand	7,144	27-12-2024	MT-M	High	Humor	Casual, dreads	None	None	None
V8	@tomdaktari	1.6 million	149 thousand	2,231	20-11-2024	MT-M	High	Humor	Trendy casual, short hair	None	None	None
V9	@mulamwah	1.3 million	66.9 thousand	1,727	21-02-2024	MT-T	Low	Lifestyle	Casual, short hair	High	None	None
V10	@_officialkinuthia	1.3 million	265.3 thousand	3,016	27-10-2024	MT-F	Moderate	Dance	Trendy casual	None	None	None

TikTokers like @mulamwah and @crazy_kennar who have portrayed gender stereotypes in their video that portray men as the heavy task doers and leaders.

Generally, the representations of masculinity on TikTok reveal a tension between embracing modernity and retaining traditional notions, indicating that while there is a growing acceptance of diverse masculinities, traditional ideals still significantly influence representations.

2) Attitudes and Perceptions Towards Masculinity Representations

The findings demonstrate that attitudes and perceptions toward masculinity representations on TikTok among Kenyan male youth are multifaceted and vary significantly among viewers. The engaged comments and reactions to the analyzed videos indicate a notable divide in acceptance between traditional masculinity and progressive representations, echoing Jordan and Jayne's (2022) observations regarding audience preferences (Jordan & Jayne, 2022).

The findings suggests that there is strong support for modern masculinity and fluid representations, as evident in viewer comments that showed appreciation for vulnerabilities expressed by influencers like @just.call.me.klaus, @moyadavid1, @tomdaktari and @tileh_pacbro. This aligns with Haley's (2023) findings that some TikTok comments embrace gender fluidity and celebrate diverse expressions of masculinity (Haley, 2023). However, the presence of hate speech and derogatory comments directed at creators showcasing non-traditional gender expressions highlight a stark contrast to the positive feedback and underscores the persistence of rigid gender norms. Examples being comments under @_kinuthiaoficial TikTok video which were derogatory. For instance, @hunter_g411 who commented *Sasa nitaexplain aje huyu ni mwanaume,* translating to; how will I explain that @_officialkinuthia is a man. @www.chati also commented *Umetoboa pua, msenge wewe.* Translation; you (referring to @flaqoraz) have pierced your nose; you are a call boy. This aligns with Haley's (2023) findings, which noted that while there were positive insights into gender fluidity, a significant portion of the audience expressed disdain, revealing entrenched biases against non-conformity (Haley, 2023).

The framing theory that is rooted in the social construction of reality, also provides a valuable lens for understanding the varying perceptions of TikTok viewers toward masculinity representations. For instance, in @tileh_pacbro TikTok, despite the viewers watching the same content, their comments exhibit diverse interpretations that reflect their individually constructed realities and sociocultural conditioning. This is evident in the following comments made by the viewers under @tileh_pacbro TikTok video: @_bigshorty_ commented *Dressing code with an approval tick and fire emoji.* @foodethuasiast commented *Si uvaange nguo kama mwanaume. We sio dem,* which translates to; wear clothes like a man, you are not a girl. @therealtonybestsnr commented *hiyo looku bro, then physique ni fire with fire emojis* which translates to; your outfit is amazing brother, I'm lost for words, and your physique is also exceptional. @erickmunene254 commented *Honestly hukai poa na hiyo toja, vaa zile bagi,* which translates to; Tileh you

don't look nice with that trouser, wear loose-fitting trousers.

This illustrates how @_bigshorty_ and @therealtonybestsnr frame Tileh's appearance positively, associating his dressing and physique with strength and admiration, which aligns with more progressive or modern representations of masculinity. In contrast, @foodethuasiast and @erickmunene254 invoke a traditionalist frame, criticizing the outfit and calling for more "masculine" or conventional male attire, thus reinforcing normative gender expectations. Meanwhile, @paranoid.wheelson's comment expresses admiration for Tileh's style, yet frames it through a lens of aspiration and personal taste. These differing responses illustrate how TikTok users filter and frame representations of masculinity through personal experiences, cultural norms, and internalized gender constructs, thereby demonstrating framing theory's assertion that reality is not passively perceived but actively constructed.

Additionally, the findings of this study resonate with Scarcelli and Manolo's (2024) conclusions, which illustrate that despite the potential for platforms like TikTok to challenge and reshape societal attitudes toward masculinity, many viewers are still strongly influenced by traditional stereotypes (Scarcelli & Manolo, 2024). The comments reflecting confusion or discomfort regarding male influencers who embody fluid masculinity, for example @_officialkinuthia, indicate that not all audiences are ready to embrace changing gender norms. This dichotomy reveals an ongoing struggle within societal perceptions of masculinity, where advances in gender expression coexist with resistance rooted in traditional expectations. For instance, some viewers perpetuate tradition masculinity expectations like @foodethuasiast commented *Si uvaange nguo kama mwanaume. We sio dem.* Translation; wear clothes like a man. You (referring to @tileh_pacbro) are not a girl. And @chelegut who commented *We ni mwanaume na huna ndevu? Ungesema tu unataka kuwa dem.* Translation; you (referring to @mc.gogo) are a man and you have no beards. You should just say you wanted to be a girl. @ogarokelvin also commented *Nipate mtu akinidancia ety ametumwa naeza muokota ngumi,* translating to; let me find someone dancing for me in the name of being hired to do so. I will punch them.

The findings from this study illustrate a compelling narrative that mirrors Jordan and Jayne's research regarding the influence of physical appearance and traditional masculine traits on viewer engagement (Jordan & Jayne, 2022). The significant number of likes and comments @crazy_kennar video which perpetuates traditional masculinity has the highest amount of like standing at 1.6 million which indeed appeals to established ideals that reinforce the idea that TikTok users are likely to reward those embodiments with social approval, indicative of the underlying societal preference for traditional masculinity which is the hegemonic masculinity.

The findings show, while there is an emerging acceptance and appreciation for diverse masculine representations on TikTok, the dichotomy in attitudes and perceptions demonstrates the complexities involved in navigating between traditional and modern masculinity norms. The audience's mixed reactions signify a critical intersection where progressive masculinity faces resistance posed by enduring traditional views.

3) Impact on Gender Attitudes and Behaviors

The findings of this study suggest a significant but complex impact of TikTok masculinity representations on gender behaviors among male youth. The mixed results indicate varying degrees of influence.

Defi and Achmad's (2023) research argued that TikTok content had little influence on users' behaviors; however, the present study suggests a more refined outcome (Defi & Achmad, 2024). While some findings indicate that viewers may choose not to change their offline behaviors following their TikTok usage like in the case of @onlylitboy, @crazy_kennar, @moyadavid1 and @_officialkinuthia, there is evidence that social media, particularly TikTok, shapes gender behaviors through the impressions and interactions it fosters. For instance, @paranoid.wheelson commented @tileh_pacbro *mi nipatie tu luku zako zenye umeboeka nazo juu hizi officials joh. I'm serious with love emojis,* which translates to; @tileh_pacbro just give me your outfits that no longer interest you. Because your official outfits are superb. I'm serious. And @luckywaachira commented *I would like to take lessons from you* (referring to @just.call.me.klaus video where he dances with his female partner) guys. @mc.chimwaga255 also commented *Wanna be like you* (referring to @mc.gogo) *bro,* which translates to I want be like you (referring to @mc.gogo) brother.

Yang's (2022) findings regarding the persuasive nature of influencers in shaping purchasing behaviors highlight the broader implications of influencer culture in establishing norms and behaviors among users based on gender (Yang, 2022). This aligns very well with this research study findings. This is because one of the viewers, @koech_dan, who commented *I bought TCL 55 inch. It's very very clear.* @koech_dan commented this under @tomdaktari's TikTok video in which he was advertising and trying to convince the viewers to purchase a TCL television.

Similarly, Zhang (2023) reported that male beauty bloggers positively influenced their audience's perceptions of masculinity, suggesting an openness among younger demographics to challenge the stereotype of traditional masculinity (Zhang, 2023). This is corroborated by the present study's results, which show that comments celebrating diverse male presentations. For example, @muigakelvin3 commented I love @_officialkinuthia, a TikToker who exhibited fluid masculinity through his TikTok video. @tonyshitanda also commented *I love your content brother* (referring to @tomdaktari); *I even dropped out of school to create enough time to concentrate on your content with laughing emojis.* @adebah001 commented *big bro* (referring to @tomdaktari) *you are my mentor forever; I will be happy to meet you please.* And @luckywaachira commented *I would like to take lessons from you* (referring to @just.call.me.klaus video where he dances with his female partner) guys. This indicates that social media influencers can have significant impacts in shaping favorable perceptions of gender fluidity and diversity.

On the other hand, Diana and Rachel's (2024) findings resonate with the observations in this study regarding the

complexities of social media's role in reinforcing existing norms (Diana & Rachel , 2024). While there are indications of increased acceptance of non-traditional expressions among certain demographics, outright rejection of fluid masculinity by others showcases the dual potential of TikTok to either reinforce or challenge gender stereotypes. For instance, @hunter_g411 commented *Sasa nitaexplain aje huyu ni mwanaume,* which translates to; how will I explain that @_officialkinuthia is a man. @johnombogap also commented under @_officialkinuthia TikTok video, *how can a man be like this?* @foodethuasiast commented *si uvaange nguo kama mwanaume. We sio dem* which translates; wear clothes like a man, you are not a girl. This highlights the necessity of examining social media interactions, whereby individual experiences can vary widely based on existing societal norms and personal beliefs (Diana & Rachel, 2024).

Therefore, the study findings suggest that while TikTok has the potential to promote positive shifts in gender attitudes, the influence of gender representations is complex and can lead to both progressive and conservative outcomes. This complexity reinforces the need for further exploration of how the dialogue surrounding masculinity evolves on platforms like TikTok, highlighting the capabilities and limitations of social media as a catalyst for societal change in gender behaviors.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

A. Conclusions

Drawing from the findings, the following conclusions are organized according to the study's specific objectives.

1) To analyze the Diverse Representations of Masculinity on TikTok portrayed by selected Kenyan Youth in Nairobi County

The findings conclude that modern masculinity is the most predominant form of masculinity portrayed on TikTok by the selected Kenyan male youth. Influencers frequently displayed traits such as emotional vulnerability, stylish grooming, open affection, and inclusive engagement with their audience. While traditional masculinity was still present—emphasizing strength, dominance, and leadership—it was less common. Fluid masculinity was also observed, though to a lesser extent, with individuals like @_officialkinuthia challenging rigid gender norms through expressive and non-conforming fashion. These representations reflect an evolving understanding of masculinity that blends traditional and progressive traits, allowing for more individualized and diverse gender expressions.

2) To explore the Perceptions of Kenyan Male Youth in Nairobi County Regarding Masculinity Representations

Viewer attitudes and perceptions toward masculinity representations were found to be highly varied, reflecting both acceptance and resistance. There was strong support for modern and fluid expressions, particularly where influencers showed emotional openness or challenged stereotypical masculine appearances. However, these progressive views were often met with backlash, hate speech, and derogatory comments from other users who held on to traditional gender expectations. This contrast demonstrates a cultural tension between emerging progressive ideologies and deeply ingrained norms. The use of framing theory revealed that viewers interpret content based on their own cultural background, social conditioning, and personal beliefs, resulting in diverse and sometimes conflicting perceptions of the same TikTok videos.

3) To Examine the Impact of Masculinity Representations on Gender Attitudes and Behaviors of Selected Kenyan Male Youth in Nairobi County

The study concludes that masculinity representations on TikTok have a significant but complex impact on gender attitudes and behaviors. While not all users replicate influencer behaviors in real life, there is evidence of behavioral influence through aspirational comments, mentorship references, and admiration expressed in the comment sections. Influencers were seen to shape both consumer choices and personal aspirations among their viewers. At the same time, the presence of derogatory comments toward non-conforming masculinity reveals that social media also reinforces traditional norms for some users. Therefore, TikTok serves both as a platform for challenging gender stereotypes and as a space where traditional masculinity remains reinforced by segments of the audience.

B. Recommendations

These recommendations aim to maximize TikTok's potential as a positive force for reshaping gender norms when paired with strategic, inclusive efforts.

i. To integrate digital media literacy and gender sensitivity programs in schools and communities. This should include programs that teach critical thinking, empathy, and gender diversity to counter rigid and toxic masculinity views.

ii. Empowering content creators against online hate. Creators should be trained in content moderation and digital safety to manage hate and promote respectful spaces for diverse gender expressions.

iii. Fostering collaboration among stakeholders. Researchers, media practitioners, and policymakers should collaborate through forums and policy engagement to promote inclusive masculinity and cultural transformation.

iv. Promotion of inclusive brand partnerships with influencers who model progressive masculinity—fostering respect, emotional health, and gender equity among youth.

C. Suggestions for Further Research

These research directions can expand insights into gender and digital media, supporting more inclusive online environments for Kenyan youth.

i. Future research should explore how female and non-male creators impact masculinity narratives to offer a more inclusive understanding.

ii. Longitudinal studies are needed to measure if exposure to diverse masculinity content on TikTok influences offline behavior and gender identity development.

Further studies should explore regional differences in attitudes toward masculinity to understand geographic

influences on gender representation acceptance.

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