

‘Cooking’ Masculinity in The Digital World: A Look At @Amerix’s #MasculinitySaturday

*Maina T. Sammy
Moi University*

Abstract

Through technology, the digital world has birthed a new space where people can connect with each other. This space has resulted in a shift where concepts are no longer static but constantly shifting. One of these concepts is masculinity. A social construct, the concept of what constitutes masculinity continues to shift as the digital world moves towards both diversity and inclusivity. This paper seeks to explore how a medical consultant, Eric Amunga, has appropriated the digital space to make commentary on various social aspects. Using his X (formerly Twitter) handle @amerix, Amunga runs #MasculinitySaturday, whose ‘teachings’ range from health, relationships, sex to parenting, all in a bid to ‘equip’ men with means with which to navigate manhood. With a following of over 1.2 million followers, this article argues that Amunga has not only created a platform for his ‘teachings’ but also an avenue for the world to engage. Through the ‘replies’ section, members are allowed to comment on the topical issues thus engaging in debate. I thus examine the aesthetics of this discourses and demonstrate how Amunga draws in, engage and sustains his following through New Media and how this relates to the postcolonial experience of the contemporary period in East Africa.

Keywords: *Masculinity, Digital Spaces, X (Twitter), Aesthetics, #MasculinitySaturday*

Introduction: The Digital World and Masculinity

The digital world refers to the entire space hosted by, accessed through or mediated by and operated via electronic gadgets such as laptops, computers, tablets and smartphones. The great transition into the digital world from the pre-digital era has seen scholars studying a landscape that is rapidly changing before their eyes (Lane & Levy, 2019) notwithstanding the unforeseen transformation of societies, markets economies and the everyday life driven by digitalization (Hofacker, 2019). Globally, the evolution of digital technology is already profoundly impacting almost every corner of the modern life at unprecedented pace. While it is generally daunting for most people to keep up with the speed and intensity with which digital transformation, an understanding and having access to the digital world has become increasingly important for an effectively participative society as it brings immense potential for growth and population’s well-being.

Today, the internet has become one of the most sought after spaces with online communities setting centre stage for discussion of key societal issues. Tannenbaum et al. (2019) for instance while focusing on how to create knowledge through gender dynamics, integrates gender and sex into their research with an aim to promote excellence in science and technology through automotive technology. In a report on computer and information literacy, Fraillon et al. (2018) point out that the use of data driven digital technologies has changed how people inform themselves, communicate with others as well as relate to one another. In essence the digital world shapes individual experiences expanding existing and creating new forms of activism. The latest digital technology being Artificial Intelligence (AI) underpinned by machine learning and algorithms has now become the driving force to digital revolution. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) report emphasizes on the importance of digital platforms and the internet in fostering social wellbeing and economic growth through knowledge sharing achieved in how people connect with each other (OECD). The digital world has seen emergence of numerous web platforms among them X, a case in

this paper through the works of Amunga (@Amerix on X) who has drawn multitudes in discussing men's agenda on the internet (De Coning, 2020).

Masculinity is a collective term that describes all the attributes, habits and roles that are conventionally regarded as definitive of or essential to men or boys. Sheshan (2018) avers that the term masculinity is socially constructed since most of the so-called manly attributes result from both biological and socio-cultural factors. Besides, the attributes of masculinity uniquely vary across time as well as physical and socio-cultural space.

Stanovsky (2007) argues that postcolonial theory, emerging in recent years out of debates within literary theory and anti-colonial literature and discourse theory, has come to play an increasingly important role in an ever-expanding range of intellectual pursuits, including discussions of gender and of masculinity. The term 'Postcolonial theory' itself describes a heterogeneous set of theories and discursive practices aimed at theorizing and explicating the texts, cultures, and politics arising out of Third World contexts after their hard won independence from colonial rule.

Eric Amunga Aka Amerix and #MasculinitySaturday

Eric Amunga is a social media influencer, professionally a reproductive medicine specialist known by his famous X handle @Amerix, that has seen him move into the space of becoming a men's health consultant and a weight loss coach. Amunga, gained social media popularity for having brought into being issues that affect men in society through a hashtag #MasculinitySaturday. In this, he gives counsel to men on pertinent issues in respect to relationships and other aspects of life. Notably, @Amerix is vehemently vocal on matters personal health after his success story on battling obesity. With a following of 1.4 million as of August, 2023, @Amerix continues to provide tips to men across the world through social media to magnify their masculinity in a range of practices including; career growth, wealth, health and fitness, gender roles and fatherhood. With such a massive following, Amunga's have also raised criticisms for encouraging toxic masculinity.

In a study conducted by Elliot (2020), men seemed to have lost their place in society, partly as a result of feminism achievements which according to him, depict a loss of men's roles traditionally the postcolonial and contemporary age. This supposedly gave birth to an identity crisis as men felt excluded due to shifting roles in modern society, that left them disenfranchised and persistently seeking to redefine the 'masculinity' meaning and 'manhood' they ascribe to characterised by the roles, behaviour and male attributes.

In an interview with Kinyanjui, (February, 2020), Amunga narrates the origin of #MasculinitySaturday, emanating from a conversation he had with a follower who was on the verge of depression for having been disrespected by his wife. This for him created a discovery of how men struggle to cope with themselves and with insecurities around them. Having helped the man to overcome his confrontations, this became Amunga's greatest motivation towards 'Making Men feel great again'. However, while Amunga's movement may seem like an organised reaction to feminism, his X platform has largely created a social interaction platform that enables men to connect, gain support thus promoting the Men's rights ideology (Schimtz & Kazyak, 2016).

#MasculinitySaturday is a trend feed managed by @amerix. Its mantra is "Making men great again." This mantra presumes that there was a time when men were 'great'. Now, the official meaning of this 'greatness' is unclear. However, going by the remarks of one of the commentators on the feed, men were, perhaps, great when they were properly "masculine, stronger", knew the "secrets of the game and attracting beautiful women" and could unleash their "inner alpha". #MasculinitySaturday weaves ideas from religion, politics, socio-cultural norms, among other forays of life, to create a framework for re-examining the place of men in society. For instance, in one of the tweets, @amerix cites Bible scripture in Isaiah 3:16-24, and declares that "in the end, all uncouth women will be severely punished. If you marry her, you will also be part of the consequences" (@amerix 2023, July 8). He then proceeds to urge men to "protect yourself, focus on your goals, build your value, be righteous, guard your fame". This rallying call represents the general tone of #MasculinitySaturday.

Themes in #MasculinitySaturday

Masculine Identity Construction

The recent push for women seeking to attain cultural, economic and social power has altered the equilibrium in gendered oppression with men becoming veracious casualties of gender oppression and mistreatment (New, 2001). Masculine identity has been influenced by the loss of masculine features (attributes, behavior, roles) in a man's space thus the concept of 'retrieving' becoming crucial if masculinity is to be whole again. According to Yaeger (2020), both men's and feminist ideologies have placed more emphasis on the aspect of power, a fact upon which Mwela (2022) argues that "the most succinct way to describe masculine identity 'crisis' is the forced surrender of power by men" (p.24) and its psychosocial effects. In this respect, @amerix seeks to reclaim masculine identity in society through his tweet, "A man is defined by his ability to make tough decisions without the intimidations of circumstance" (Oct 16 2021). In spite of everything, Amirex is clear in helping men in their careers by swallowing their pride to acting on decisions that are helpful in their lives. He says,

Dear Men, Ego can't feed you. Pride can't pay bills. Macho can't match your expenses. So swallow them. If the only jobs available are nursing, air host, waiter, teaching, receptionist, take it. Doing them does not make you a woman. It makes you employed! (#MasculinitySaturday, Dec 11, 2021).

Relationships

Besides the metaphorical power contestation between men and women in relationships, in his tweets #MasculinitySaturday, showcase men's oppression with respect to marriage and relationships. Marriage for instance is compared to an unending conflict between a terrorist and hostage. In this women are attributed to as being terrorists who in warfare manipulate hostages as a means of reward or token (Mwela, 2022). This in what staiger also refers to as simp versus pimp is an embodiment of sexual prowess, manipulation and generalized power. Amerix's tweets in this respect point towards the unacceptable attributes and behavior of men in relationships and marriages. He says, "Men, the less you care about the future of a relationship...the harder the woman will work to make it work. No school will teach you this. Stay dangerous!" (#Masculinity Saturday, Oct, 16 2021). In his advice to men, Amunga says that men should not show commitments to a woman who is not ready to surrender to them, "Men sex first, relationship later. No sex, no relationship" (@amerix Dec 11, 2021).

Societal Stereotypes

However detrimental, another theme that has highly been promoted under the hash tag #MasculinitySaturday is the stereotype that women are impulsive in regards to money matters, that women remain dependant to their husbands. The new age woman in relationships is portrayed as only having interest in a man's money. Amunga thus warns men that before spending money on a woman, they must prove to deserve it. In one of his tweets he notes, "Men, do not send her money. Use the money to hit a gym, build up your own frame and 5M's. Women must work hard to prove that they deserve to be a part of your prize" (Nov. 27th 2021).

In another tweet he warns, "If you must meet a woman's needs, meet your mother's needs. Many have mothers who don't even have an iPhone 1, yet you buy iPhone 13 for your partners in fornication. Respect the breast you sucked for food, not the one you suck for pleasure!" (Dec 11, 2021). The satirical use of iphone 1 and iphone 13 may be particularly aggravating for women in the social circle but drives home the stereotype that a woman will make a man want to spend hugely on them when they cannot even afford take care of their parents. This stirs up a discussion with one of the followers commenting that "in today's society, there is almost no benefit at all for a man to get married" since it has become all about their financial security. He continues, "All it takes is her to wake up one morning and want to a divorce and your life is over" (Jan 1, 2022).

Value of Men in Traditional Society

The value of men in society is a widely discussed as men perceive women and society as not valuing traditional masculinity. Nevertheless, what is perceived as to be valued by society according to Duckworth and Trautner (2019) is not necessarily seen as being valued by all subgroups (men and women). Even though the issue of whether men perceive traditional masculinity as being valued by

the two gender groups has been scantily researched, #MasculinitySaturday makes society believe that men do not perceive women and men as valuing traditional masculinity to the same extent. As portrayed in #MasculinitySaturday, it is paramount that men must understand their value in society. While being a man is a thing of envy coupled with pride in being one @Amirex argues that there are specific values that man has to embody. Proponents of #MasculinitySaturday point out some of the values to include self-respect, dignity, stoicism and avoiding feminism behavior that might threaten his self-ego. He tweets, “Men, You are your ownself in everything, In your house, your bed, your hustle, in your conversations... Don't simp, be a legend.....” (#MasculinitySaturday).

A case in this example is the pressure on adolescent males in society today to endorse traditional masculinity when they are in the company of other boys (Duckworth and Trautner (2019). Men feel greater discomfort when they imagine themselves performing a behavior typical of women (which is proscribed by traditional masculinity norms) in front of other men than when they do so in front of women (Iacoviello et al., 2022). More so, traditionally, masculinity forms are less valued by women than by men.

Weaving Masculinity into the Digital Space

Gender is one of the most exquisite constructions that are constantly evolving through social affirmation and acceptance. A major space for this transformation is the digital sphere where masculinity is perpetually in the process of negotiation and redefining to influence the future of masculine recognition (Mendoza & Morgade, 2018). The digital space therefore continues to present a platform where devotion to the rights of men and sustenance of the traditional perspective of masculinity is respected in an effort to help men adopt to the shifting gender balance in the contemporary society (Larghi, 2021). Scholars across the globe have used various strategies, approaches and aesthetic styles in presenting masculinity through digital technology (Patterson, 2013; Roberts et al., 2021; Larghi, 2021).

Gender Symbolism

The growth of men in the digital world just like numerous other online communities is premised on their common interests. Social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram and X as in the case of @Amirex’s hashtag MasculinitySaturday a reference point in this paper have been dedicated to attracting a multitude of followers to promote the concept of being a ‘man’. Gramigna (2022a) and Fowler (2022) in their studies argue that this development is now shifting from feminism backlash to digital media conversations through extreme misogyny and controversial jokes that enable exposure to ideas that then become normalized for male consumers. Traditionally the concept of masculinity has significantly compelled boys in being accountable, patriotic and aggressive with a do-it-yourself mentality (Kimmel, 2018). For instance, the legend of the ‘American cowboy’ became the romanticized face of masculinity in US, glamorizing the tough, rough, stoic and hard-working attributes (Kimmel 2018; Kobes Du Mez 2020; Thompson, 2023). In these studies the idea of ‘being a man’, is equated to violence and patriotism thus a man who refuses to go to war is would be in denial of both his country and self (Kobes Du Mez 2020).

Symbolism in the digital space in communicating masculinity is portrayed through the misogynistic opinions among men’s online groups with a motive for gender-based attacks (Regehr 2022b). Through #MasculinitySaturday for instance, it is seen how the men have quickly spiraled into using languages that reflects misogynistic attitudes of hatred towards women in the sense of social power entitlement which gives them a space to freely voice threatening thoughts (Thompson, 2023).

Metaphorical Representation

Women have been objectified in digital platforms to demonstrate masculinity status. Through a tweet from @Amirex for instance, he warns men against ‘Marrying a fat woman’ in which case a ‘fat’ is being used to denote gluttonous. He continues, “Pick a lean, fit woman who is not gluttonous”. (#MasculinitySaturday, April 4, 2022). Core to the masculinity studies is the overriding argument that homosociality is tightly bound up with and an extension of ‘hegemonic masculinity’, the historically mobile pattern of practice characterized by men’s collective interest in maintaining patriarchal gender relations (White, 2019). Men’s homosocial relations are particularly crucial to the perpetuation of

hegemonic masculinity, because it is in these spaces that, through the sexual objectification of women, maleness is established as ‘not only as *different from* female but as *better than* female’ (White, 2019; Gichohi & Nirmala, 2022). “Men, when your dog starts barking at you someone else is giving it food. This tweet isn’t about dogs” as Amunga notes. (#MasclinitySaturday, Nov 6, 2021). Developments in technology have largely influenced the practices and production of young men’s lives with digital spaces being understood as sites of ‘exploration, expression and experimentation’ in this regard (Dobson et al., 2018). Relatedly, sexting, defined as the ‘creation and sharing of sexual images or text messages via mobile phones or internet applications’ (Hasinoff, 2014) particularly in the contemporary youth cultures (Roberts & Ravn, 2020).

Physical Self-Presentation and Stereotyping

In order to gauge their expectations and responses from the communicator, individuals in the digital space often seek to obtain information about others to create an impression of them. Research has shown that social media groups associated with male dominated groups tend to reinforce the idea that masculine traits and behaviours are more valued than feminine traits and behaviours, as a result, men who consume these media messages are more likely to exhibit masculine beliefs and behaviours. According to a study conducted by Mendoza Pérez and Morgade Salgado, they found out that most teenagers’ enactments of masculinity on the internet depends on their collective imagination of bodily images and “looks” of men, as well as the discomfort and tensions created in the male dominated subgroups on media. More so, masculinity is driven by the relationships and dialogues that emerge between the aesthetic and bodily expressions of the masculine characters on the internet (Mendoza Pérez & Morgade Salgado, 2018).

In their study, Wang and Degol (2017) agree that while the stereotype of engineering and technology as being male domains is pervasive across educational contexts, it has largely shaped their confidence in such technical skills, shaping their perception of their identity (and proficiencies) and therefore a push for them to prove their masculinity by becoming involved in such fields. Cultural associations between masculinity and technological skills, and a belief in femininity as ‘incompatible’ with technical pursuits, have therefore persisted across the digital space.

Nevertheless, the contestation on the digital space on construction and meaning of masculinity and manhood reflects cultural production in the modern world particularly portrayed through how men respond to the crisis of masculine identities. For instance on X, a follower referring to Amerix as the Mighty Oak of #MasculinitySaturday says, “You’re a ‘knight of unflinching honesty and extraordinary honor’. Continue misleading men into heroism and positivity (#MasculinitySaturday, 03.00, 1 Jan 2020), further reporting that men are invincible warriors. This is what Yaeger (2020) also refers to as being a man in the modern world.

Conclusion

This paper discusses masculinity in the digital world harnessing the potential benefits and challenges of digital revolution where attention needs to be paid particularly to the factors that underpin masculinity recognition through digital technologies. This may include data-driven technologies like machine learning and artificial intelligence (AI) that is likely to change the perspective of men as domains of technology and engineering in an education context. As depicted in this paper, digital platforms provide accessibility through digital channels, such as computers, mobile devices and the internet in all aspects of life including MasculinitySaturday. With the rapid transformation it has on society, the digital space has allowed unprecedented advances in the human condition giving rise to pro-found new challenges. For instance, in respect to men’s body image and drive for muscularity, this paper documents the existence of masculine muscular ideology in popular culture that is hypothesized to pressure men to adopt muscularity motives.

This paper, with reference to @Amerix’s MasculinitySaturday hashtag on X has analysed the evolving nature of masculine norms, noting that the topic of masculinity has developed over the past few decades and therefore the need capture the rapidly shifting trends in masculine norms and ideologies in contemporary society. However, with some controversial issues concerning the nature of masculinities, there is need to further address criticisms of the constructs of masculinity and explain

why it should remain vital to the psychology of men. Needless to say, the question of whether research on masculinities reflects social constructionist or essentialist perspectives on gender creates an avenue for future research.

References

- De Coning, A. (2020). Men's Rights Movement/Activism. *The International Encyclopedia of Gender, Media and Communication*, 1-9. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119429128.iegmc023>
- Dobson, A., Robards, B., & Carah, N. (Eds.). (2018). *Digital Intimate Publics and Social Media*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Fraillon, J., Ainley, J., Schulz, W., Friedman, T., & Duckworth, D. (2018). Preparing for Life in a Digital World. *IEA International Computer and Information Literacy Study 2018, International Report*. IEA Springer Open. doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-38781-5
- Gichohi, S., & Nirmala, D. (2022). The Construction of Masculinity Identities through Metaphors on the Kenyan Twitter Discourse: A Conceptual Metaphor Perspective. *International Journal of Innovative Research and Development* 11(1), 139-145 DOI:10.24940/ijird/2022/v11/i1/JAN22043
- Hasinoff, A. A. (2014). Sexting as Media Production: Rethinking Social Media and Sexuality. *New Media and Society*, 15(4), 449–465.
- Hofacker, C. F. (2019). The Growing Importance of Software as a Driver of Value Exchange. *Review of Marketing Research*, 16, 85-95 [doi: 10.1108/S1548-64352019000001600].
- Iacoviello, V., Valsecchi, G., Berent, J., Borinca, I., & Falomir-Pichastor, J. M. (2022). Is traditional Masculinity Still Valued? Men's Perceptions of How Different Reference Groups Value Traditional Masculinity Norms. *The Journal of Men's Studies*, 30(1), 7–27. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10608265211018803>
- Itulua-Abumere, F. (2013). Understanding Men and Masculinity in Modern Society. *Open Journal of Social Science Research* 1(2), 42-45 DOI:10.12966/ojsr.05.05.2013
- Kinyanjui, J., (February 28th, 2020). Meet the Medical Consultant who is Changing Men's Lives through Twitter. *Nairobi News*.
- Lane, K. E., & Levy, S. J. (2019). Marketing in the Digital Age: A Moveable Feast of Information. *Review of Marketing Research*.
- Larghi, S. B. (2021). *Gender Dimension of Digital Technologies*. GenderInSITE
- Mendoza Pérez, K., & Morgade Salgado, M. (2018). Doing Masculinity: The “Look” of Unaccompanied Male Migrant Teenagers from the Maghreb. *Men and Masculinities*, 21(3), 403–422. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X17748169>
- Mwela, E. K. (2022). *Masculine Ideology in the Kenyan Digital Landscape: An Analysis of Masculinity Saturday Hashtag on Twitter*. Unpublished Dissertation, The University of Nairobi, Nairobi.
- New, C. (2001). Oppressed and Oppressors? The Systematic Mistreatment of Men. *Sociology*, 35(3), 729–748. <https://doi.org/10.1177/S0038038501000372>
- OECD. (2018). *Bridging the Digital Gender Divide: Include, Upskill, Innovate*. OECD Publication.
- Patterson, J. (2013). Constructions of Violence and Masculinity in the Digital Age. In C. Fowley, C. English, & S. Thouësnny (Eds.). *Internet Research, Theory, and Practice: Perspectives from Ireland* (113-133).
- Roberts, S., Ravn, S., Maloney, M., & Ralph, B. (2021). Navigating the Tensions of Normative Masculinity: Homosocial Dynamics in Australian Young Men's Discussions of Sexting Practices. *Cultural Sociology*, 15(1), 22-43. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1749975520925358>
- Schimtz, R. M., & Kazyak, E. (2016). Masculinities in Cyberspace: An Analysis of Portrayals of Manhood in Men's Rights Activist Websites. *Soc. Sci.* 2016, 5 (18) doi:10.3390/socsci5020018
- Schreiber, M. (2016). Tiny Life: Technology and Masculinity in the Films of David Fincher. *Journal of Film and Video*, 68(1), 3-18.
- Stanovsky, D. (2007). Postcolonial Masculinities. *International Encyclopedia of Men and Masculinities*, (493-496). ACM Digital Library.
-

- Tannenbaum, C., Ellis, R. P., Eyssel, F., Zou, J., & Schiebinger, L. (2019). Sex and Gender Analysis Improves Science and Engineering. *Nature*, 575(7783), 137–147. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-019-1657-6>
- Thompson, C., (2023). Digital Masculinity: An Analysis of How Masculine Values are Manifested in Online Spaces. *Honors Projects*. 187. <https://digitalcommons.spu.edu/honorsprojects/187>
- Wang, M. T., & Degol, J. L. (2017). Gender Gap in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM): Current Knowledge, Implications for Practice, Policy, and Future Directions. *Educ Psychol Rev*. 29(1),119-140. doi: 10.1007/s10648-015-9355-x.
- White, M. (2019). *Producing Masculinity: The Internet, Gender, and Sexuality*. DOI:[10.4324/9780429054914](https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429054914)
- Yaeger, D. A. (2020). Directions for the Study of Masculinity: Beyond Toxicity, Experience and Alienation. *British Journal of American Legal Studies*, 9(1), 81-113.