

## How to successfully stage men in advertising

**Many studies show that the man of today is insecure in his self-image. Who does he want to be, who should he be? Macho or softie? What does his social environment expect from him? This conflict is also reflected in the new and much-discussed Gillette campaign, which calls for a change in the self-image of the man.**

With a raised moral index finger, Gillette urges the man of today to change. The man of today should no longer live out his wishes and feelings and should have himself under control at all times. In this context, the "world" speaks of a "toxic unmanliness" and wonders whether masculinity does not fall by the wayside somewhere.

### The basic conflict of the man

We have seen that there is a fundamental conflict for the man. This conflict arises from the fact that, as psychology tells us, two areas of consciousness are often in conflict with each other.

On the one hand, our SELF demands the satisfaction of our emotional needs, as especially with men: "I want to be loved, I want to be desirable, I want to succeed, I want admiration and recognition." The I tries to keep these needs under control in the sense of general values and norms. In other words, the I tries to prevent us from behaving like primeval people who simply "get" what they want. The I is therefore responsible for the social correctness of our actions. For advertising, this results in a special dilemma: Our behavior is largely determined by the SELF. We buy something because we want it, because it satisfies our deep desires. At most, the I provides the rational justification for our actions.

Here lies the particular problem of the new Gillette campaign: the raised index finger can sometimes achieve the consent of our I, but our SELF is not activated. "Men still want to be real men." Accordingly, it is not surprising that this campaign not only represents a decisive break with the image of the Gillette brand, but also evokes strong reactances. In the sense of a social statement, the campaign can be seen as positive, in terms of marketing it does not affect Gillette's customer. "Wet razors see themselves as real men."

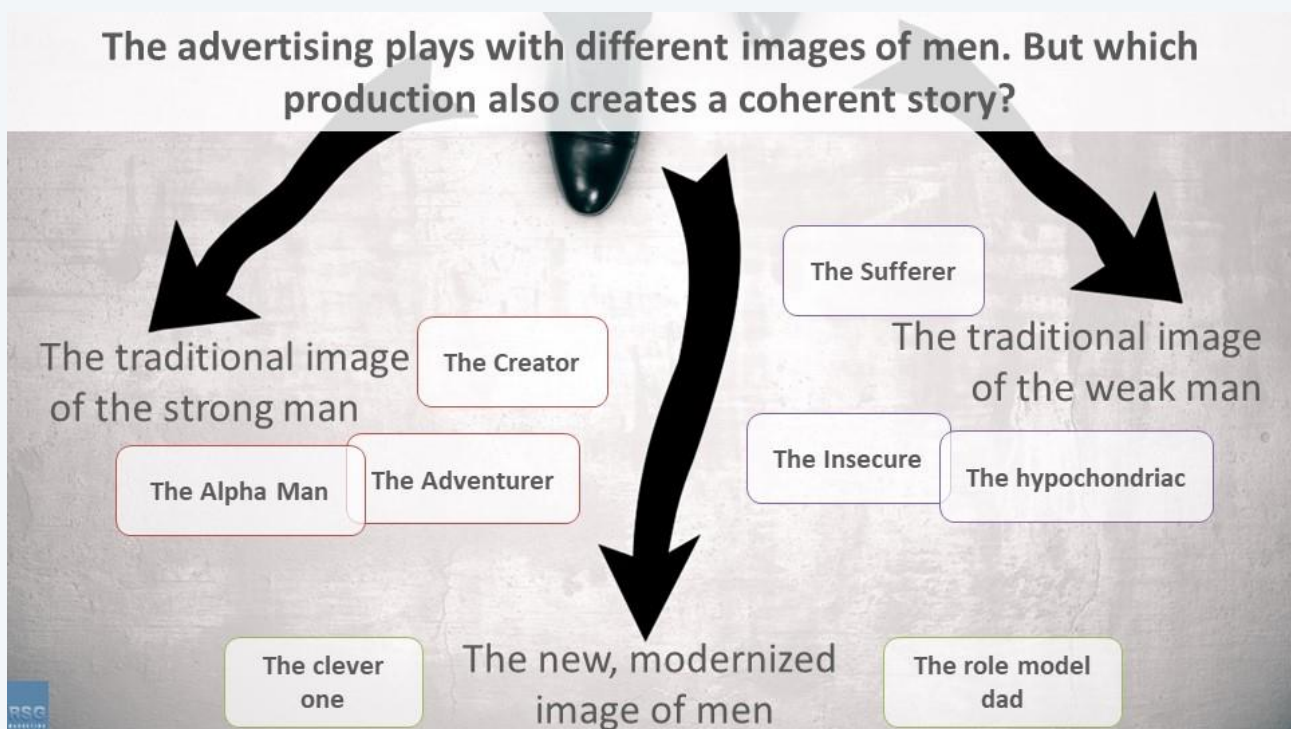
### Storytelling as a form of effective communication

Advertising is only successful if it succeeds in telling attractive stories that allow "man" to identify with the story and the protagonist: "That's exactly how I want to be." The starting point is always a conflict. The protagonist represents the brand that resolves or at least alleviates the conflict.

Let's remember the campaigns for Coca-Cola Zero or AXE, where the man received unlimited admiration and the women lay at his feet. The conflict: "I want to be admired, but am I also admirable?" is dissolved by the protagonist and the brand. With Coca-Cola Zero or AXE you become a "woman" hero. Would these campaigns still activate our SELF today? Or would the reactances of our I as a result of the zeitgeist now be so great that this advertising would lose its effect?

## Cases of advertising with men

If one analyzes male images in advertising with psychological approaches, then it is not surprising that the traditional image of the strong man still dominates advertising. The second cliché of the weak man and the eternal mother's son also occurs frequently. Here, however, it is not the man but usually the woman who is the target person of communication. The woman should identify with the depicted woman and thus become the buyer of the respective product. New and more modern images of men still remain the exception in advertising. Even if one considers the behaviors of the "new" man to be correct, the identification potential remains low. In reality, one behaves in this way, but it does not correspond to one's own desired image. "As a father, you drive the staid wagon and dream of a sports car."



Traditional images affect the characteristics of a man. (Image: Traditional images influence a man's characteristics. (Photo: RSG Marketing Research GmbH))

## The Strong Man

If we take a closer look at the traditional image of the strong man, then the campaigns for the Mercedes S-Class and the Hornbach campaign can serve as good examples. The lion becomes the archetype of the S-Class driver who leads the pack. Men want to create something, no matter how big the task is and how much sweat it costs, Hornbach says.

## The Alpha Man

The man as a predator.  
Alpha animals are allowed again!

The SELF feels superior and becomes frustrated by the incompetence of its environment. The I ensures a minimum of control.

The archetypal representation of the protagonist creates a high level of identification with the target group.

With the S-Class, Mercedes offers the solution to the frustration that must be experienced by the man in power.



The strong man shows dominance and is a leader. (Photo: RSG Marketing Research GmbH)

## The Creator

A man must have created something in his life. Build a house, plant a tree, father a child.

The SELF wants confirmation. It wants to be loved for its actions.

The I legitimizes one's own actions by creating value for posterity.

Hornbach supports us in being able to live out exactly this creative urge.



The Creator wants to create something and is also looking for recognition. (Photo: RSG Marketing Research GmbH)

## The Weak Man

If men cannot be "real" men because they are sick or are supposed to do something that they as a man do not really understand, then they are offended in their masculinity and feel helpless, only the partner or the mother can help. The "weak" man is a common male image that man accepts with a wink. Good examples of

this are the campaigns for Nasivin and Actimel. In both cases, the woman becomes the actor who asks him to finally do something.



The weak man wants to be taken care of. He needs security and attention. (Photo: RSG Marketing Research GmbH)



The hypochondriacs do not get along with their environment and fail accordingly in everyday life. (Photo: RSG Marketing Research GmbH)

## The modern man

Modern images of men are rather rare in advertising and we now understand why. Often it is about a father image or the role of the man in the family. The man lovingly takes care of one or more children. However, one almost always wonders, what role does the brand play in the story? In the example of Nivea, does the man become a better father? Does he decide on the purchase at all? Or is it just about beautiful pictures that have little effect? Let's remember, in storytelling, the brand has to be the conflict solver. In the Nivea campaign, the baby and not Nivea is the conflict solver for renunciation.



Often it is about a father image or the role of the man in the family. (Photo: RSG Marketing Research GmbH)

## Conclusions for market research

Insights that affect men must almost always be based on the needs controlled by the SELF. These usually correspond to the age-old wishful thinking of men. This increasingly requires a psychological methodology that makes it possible to look behind the scenes and not to be deceived by superficial self-images.

Stories that are told about men in advertising today must correspond to the spirit of the times. A clumsy masculinity would also lead to reactances in men. A more subtle storytelling is necessary. Only psychologically differentiated test procedures show whether the balancing act between addressing male needs and social correctness has been successful. Whether you like something or not is of secondary importance.

*About the author: As a psychologist, it is important to Melanie Sommer to uncover the psychological and often unconscious mechanisms of consumer behavior and to translate them into actionable recommendations for her customers. RSG Marketing Research sees itself as a problem solver for the client, with the aim of really understanding the customer and making his actions comprehensible and deriving adequate action strategies based on this. Our work is based on the proven psychological model of the SELF & I, which enables a differentiated explanation of consumer behavior.*

Published on: 05.03.2019

The original article on german was published on [marktforschung.de](http://marktforschung.de)

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