

UOKM8? Mental Health Campaign to Break Social Stigma

M. Bilal Akbar¹, Muniza Shaikh-Kamal², Awais Akbar³ and Alison Lawson⁴

(1)Nottingham Trent University, Nottingham, UK

(2)Brunel University London, London, UK

(3)Honda Atlas Cars Pakistan Limited, Lahore, Pakistan

(4)University of Derby, Derby, UK

M. Bilal Akbar (Corresponding author)

Email: bilal.akbar@ntu.ac.uk

KeywordsMen's mental health -Social stigma -Behavior -Stereotypes -Audience

Background, Purpose, and Focus

Mental health is a growing public health concern in the UK, accounting for 7% of all ill health and resulting in an estimated annual cost to the economy of £117.9 billion (Mental Health Foundation, [2022](#)). It is a particularly worrying concern among young adults aged 20–34, for whom suicide, injury, or poisoning of undetermined intent has been the leading cause of death for several decades (Office for National Statistics, [2020](#)). Men suffer almost three times higher rates of suicide, injury, or poisoning of undetermined intent than women (Bachmann, [2018](#)). Despite this, there appears to be a scarcity of attention and resources directed toward men's mental health problems.

Stereotypes around gender roles and conventional attitudes regarding the behavior and conduct of men act as a barrier to reporting mental health problems (McKenzie et al., [2022](#)). Men are expected to be strong, dominant, and self-sufficient; such demands force men to hide problems/emotions. These behaviors act as obstacles to seeking help for mental health difficulties, resulting in the use of harmful coping methods, such as drugs and alcohol (Ridge et al., [2011](#)), to deal with depression and anxiety which ensue or are the root causes of the mental health problem in the first instance.

These and related concerns have propelled organizations such as the Mental Health Foundation, Mind, the Men's Health Forum, CALM, the Samaritans, and Movember to strive toward tackling men's mental health issues. Such organizations aim to erase the stigma around mental health issues for men, hoping that this will encourage them to recognize the symptoms of depression and anxiety, communicate their problems to family or friends, and seek support from relevant sources. In 2016, the popular British digital media organization LADBible which targets a young-adult audience, launched the UOKM8? campaign aiming to draw public attention toward men's mental health problems (Keane, [2022](#)). The core objectives of the UOKM8? are to inform, educate, and change people's behavior toward mental health issues by eradicating misconceptions and stereotypes about men, which make them less likely to seek help. The campaign addresses depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, obsessive-compulsive disorder, eating disorders, and borderline personality

disorder. The campaign encourages men to communicate about their mental health with their “mates” (friends) (LADBible, [2022](#)).

Situation Analysis

Strengths: LADBible was founded in 2012 and has grown to be one of the UK’s most prominent digital media sites, with a global audience that reaches nearly one billion (LADBible Group, [2022](#)). The group’s scope is deep and wide, with content presented across five websites, including LADBible, UNILAD, Tyla, SPORTbible, and GAMINGbible, covering sports, entertainment, politics, and social causes. They are followed by almost half of all UK adults and have 69 million monthly users across major social media platforms, including Facebook, TikTok, Snapchat, Instagram, YouTube, and other digital channels (LADBible Group, [2022](#)). Their audience profile matches the target population for addressing men’s mental health issues, and their digital/social media platforms provide strong inroads to reach them. The social media usage in the UK, reported by Statista ([2022](#)), shows that the platforms used by LADBible have a significant penetration and usage rate among 18–34 year olds.

Weaknesses: Mental health is a complex and challenging issue; many interventions/brands have failed to successfully represent mental health concerns as their priority in marketing (Wainberg et al., [2017](#)). In a similar context, Bacon ([2015](#)) highlighted that one-fifth of marketers (21%) believe there has been very little progress regarding mental health issues over the past decade, perhaps due to the sensitive nature of the topic or the stigma attached. This can be compounded by the internalization of shame and negative attitudes, and discrimination toward mental illness, and adversely affect campaigns related to men’s mental health (Mehta et al., [2015](#)).

Opportunities: One of the key opportunities for LADBible was to try and create a new social norm by encouraging people (men) suffering from mental health issues to start a conversation about their feelings and concerns. The desired behavior was to normalize a discussion around mental health and remove the related stigma. Initially, the UOKM8? campaign was planned to run for only 3 months, but it continued well beyond that period and is still operational today because of its success (Reid, [2018](#); LADBible Group, [2022](#)). Its importance is even more acute now than before due to the concerning levels of depression and anxiety following the Covid-19 pandemic. According to Vahratian et al. ([2021](#)), since the Covid-19 pandemic, one in every five adults has started to feel symptoms of depression and anxiety. As a result of lockdowns and restrictions, people suffering from mental health issues experienced three times more suicidal thoughts than during prepandemic times (Salari et al., [2020](#)). Large proportions of the population increased digital consumption during the pandemic (Golinelli et al., 2020); thus, targeting the audience through digital channels became more effective. Additionally, the alarming suicide rates among men due to mental health-related issues in the UK further solidify the requirement for more campaigns on mental health to offer well-needed support.

Threats: Communicating mental health concerns requires great sensitivity due to stigma, a significant threat to a campaign’s success. Rössler ([2016](#)) explained that a lack of understanding and primary education around the subject has led to many misapprehensions regarding mental health issues. Moreover, the expectations of society from men and their roles have made them less likely to discuss their mental health problems. Stereotypes and prejudice challenge people who are suffering

from mental health issues. This stigma deprives people with mental health problems of the opportunity to lead a good quality of life (Corrigan & Amy, 2021).

Market Segmentation and Target Audience Selection

The LADBible group has an audience approaching one billion, comprising around half of all adults in the UK (LADBible Group, [2022](#)). Thus, UOKM8? is closely aligned with the target audience profile (i.e., men suffering poor mental health outcomes). Before the start of the campaign, LADBible surveyed 50,000 members of its online community (Cardwell, [2016](#)). This research revealed that around 39% of respondents had considered suicide on more than one occasion. Based on the survey results, the online publisher decided it was well-placed to target its followers with the UOKM8? campaign to offer motivation and inspiration for its audience to talk about their problems relating to depression, anxiety, and isolation. In addition to the overall campaign message, LADBible specifically targeted 15 million followers on Facebook to increase awareness regarding suicide since this was and still is a major cause of death for young men in the UK (Office for National Statistics, [2020](#)). LADBible also surveyed its online audience to enquire which causes they most cared about. The results revealed that mental health was rated in the top three as an issue the audience felt needed the most attention.

Marketing Objectives and Goals

The campaign was launched with the following two core objectives:

- *Inform, change attitudes, and remove misconceptions about men's mental health conditions*
- *Educate and simplify mental health conditions so they are easy for the audience to understand and empathize with*

Existing behavior: The common behavior among men regarding mental health problems is that they do not talk about their mental well-being or seek help when necessary due to social and cultural stigma (Boysen, [2017](#)).

Desired behavior: The campaign desired to influence men, especially those experiencing mental health issues, to shift from internalizing their feelings to sharing their concerns with friends and normalizing discussions around mental health problems. The campaign attempted to destigmatize the stereotypes attached to men by normalizing discussions around mental health, depression, and anxiety. Additionally, the campaign encouraged people to look out for their friends and family by checking on them to ensure they felt OK and had no mental health concerns.

Factors Influencing Adoption of the Behavior

Some notable barriers identified among the target audience which influenced their behavior:

A stigma attached to mental health: The stigma attached to men that they should display masculine behavioral traits by keeping a stiff upper lip while exhibiting strength in all situations was the most significant factor preventing men's behavior change (Mehta et al., [2015](#)).

Culture and traditions: The traditional gender roles, as well as social and cultural norms, made men less likely to report mental health problems (Smith et al., [2018](#)). They are expected to be strong, dominant, and self-sufficient, but expectations like these prevent men from reaching out for help and sharing their mental health problems.

Nonmonetary costs: Two parties engaged in this campaign incurred a cost. First, the men who spoke about their mental health issues paid an emotional price which could include feelings of embarrassment, vulnerability, or shame due to sharing their personal mental health experiences with others. Second, the person enquiring about their friend's well-being (mate) paid the price, which was also emotional, by potentially having some disturbing or upsetting information shared with them (for example, that their friend was suffering from depression or anxiety or had attempted suicide).

Positioning Statement

The campaign aimed to normalize men's tendency to talk about their mental health problems with others and seek help when required. Additionally, it encouraged people to ask their friends and family members whether they felt OK or not, regardless of gender.

Marketing Mix Strategies

The strategic approach was to develop original content featuring real stories from a mix of well-known and unknown people, delivered via multiple social media and offline channels. The campaign was branded UOKM8? (meaning, Are You OK, Mate?) with the intent to start a conversation.

Promotion: A series of videos branded *Everyday Heroes* was developed, featuring well-known and influential men such as Olympian Louis Smith, who appeared highly successful, confident, and carefree but had a mental health story to tell (LADBible, [2022](#)). The videos revealed that anyone could experience mental health issues, regardless of fame, fortune, or who they are. Another campaign was launched with a five-part video series titled *In My Experience*. Each episode featured two people speaking openly and honestly about a mental health condition and then providing detailed information on how they overcame their challenges.

The videos encouraged the audience to talk to their "mates" about mental health and directed viewers to support sites. The campaign continued in 2018 with the launch of a documentary titled *Change the Record*, in which a musician talked about the loss of two of his friends to suicide. In 2019, the campaign featured five short videos of young people discussing a mental health issue they had experienced or were still experiencing. This series, called *In My Experience*, laid personal experiences bare and encouraged viewers to seek help and support via charity websites. The campaign was revived on a smaller scale during the UK's first lockdown with the name *8 K with an M8*. The aim was to encourage people to share their mental health problems during the social-distancing restrictions.

Videos were shared on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube. All content was gathered together on a hub at LADBible's website. A modest budget of £20,000 covered video production costs and minimal outdoor print media (LADBible, [2022](#)). Also, LADBible promoted its content to an offline audience, including a partnership with the fashion retailer Boohoo Man, for a limited-edition T-shirt of UOKM8? (LADBible, [2022](#)).

Implementation and Campaign Management

The campaign reached more than 36 million people, the videos were viewed more than 4.8 million times, and there were more than 825,000 engagements on social media (Awards Analyst, [2018](#)). The campaign was recognized as a *Campaign of the Year in the Marketing Can Change the World Awards 2017*. Campaign managers reported that, by seeing and reviewing comments on social media, it was clear the videos had achieved their intent to be actual conversation starters (See Fig. [1](#)).



If you need to edit the image, please use the original: 480394_0_En_169-1_Fig1_Print.tif

Fig. 1

Facebook post to spread awareness on mental health using celebrity endorsement. (See the link for video: <https://www.facebook.com/hashtag/uokm8>)

The engagement with the ads and messages on social media importantly provided evidence of an increase in the intended behaviors of speaking to their male friends, helping each other, and offering advice (See Fig. [2](#)).



If you need to edit the image, please use the original: 480394_0_En_169-1_Fig2_Print.tif

Fig. 2

People's response to the campaign. (See the link for more comments:
<https://www.facebook.com/hashtag/uokm8>)

Commentary

In addition to targeting adults regarding mental health issues, it would be beneficial to have more of these conversations in an age-appropriate manner with secondary school children during PSHE (Personal, Social, Health, and Economic) lessons as part of the UK national curriculum. This would help to address stereotypes that pose challenges later in life. Charities should lobby the government to bring about such changes nationally, striving to shape social norms positively before adolescents reach adulthood. They could work together to devise appropriate lesson plans, including learning materials and techniques such as role-playing, which can develop confidence, empathy, and self-efficacy around mental health issues.

Moreover, the popularity of digital technologies among the target population could be utilized more widely to share information (as in the case of UOKM8?) and provide mental health support through apps and online (remote) counseling. Evidence highlights the counseling used at governmental and local levels in campaigns targeting men's mental health (Athanasiadis et al., 2018). Such services at discrete points would be useful to improve access to services confidentially and relatively cost-effectively. Using digital tools could also remove the emotional costs of seeking help for mental health difficulties.

Lastly, more social marketing principles, such as codesign and citizenship, can be used as proven tools for developing and delivering solutions and evaluating success for sustainable results (Akbar et al., 2021; Deshpande, 2019). The program designers should focus on elaborating on the stages of change (i.e., what to expect), identifying potential competing behaviors (e.g., social stigmatization), and offering support to mitigate the impact of potential consequences (e.g., social embarrassment) to give more power to the target audience (Akbar et al., 2022).

Cross-References

- . [Freedom from Fear Campaign in Australia](#)
- . [Increasing School Enrollment and Combating Classroom Hunger in India: The Mid-day Meal Scheme](#)
- . [Safe Manitoba to Injury Prevention](#)
- . [The Use of Digital Media and Innovative Ways to Change Social Norms to Address Sexual Harassment in Egypt](#)

References

Akbar, M. B., Ndupu, L. B., French, J., & Lawson, A. (2021). Social marketing: Advancing a new planning framework to guide programmes. *RAUSP Management Journal*, 56(3), 266–281.

<https://doi.org/10.1108/RAUSP-08-2020-0186>.

[CrossRef](#)

Akbar, M. B., Lawson, A., & Turner, N. (2022). Lauterborn's 4Cs. In C. Fourali & J. French (Eds.), *The Palgrave encyclopaedia of social marketing*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

Athanasiadis, C., Gough, B., & Robertson, S. (2018). What do counsellors need to know about male depression? *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, 46(5), 596–604. issn 0306-9885.

[CrossRef](#)

Awards Analyst. (2018). *LADBible: Destigmatising mental health through their powerful content campaign*. Available at: <https://www.thedrum.com/news/2018/07/03/ladbible-destigmatising-mental-health-through-their-powerful-content-campaign>. Accessed 16 Oct 2022.

Bachmann, S. (2018). Epidemiology of suicide and the psychiatric perspective. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 15(7), 1425.

<https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph15071425>.

[CrossRef](#)

Bacon, J. (2015). *Marketing's diversity problem*. Available at: <https://www.marketingweek.com/an-utter-disgrace-marketings-diversity-problem/>. Accessed 16 Oct 2022.

Boysen, G. A. (2017). Explaining the relation between masculinity and stigma toward mental illness: The relative effects of sex, gender, and behavior. *Stigma and Health (Washington, DC)*, 2(1), 66–79.

<https://doi.org/10.1037/sah0000041>.

[CrossRef](#)

Cardwell, P. (2016). *Charities join forces with The LADBible for mental health campaign*. Available at: <https://tfn.scot/news/charities-join-forces-with-theladbible-for-mental-health-campaign>. Accessed 16 Oct 2022.

Deshpande, S. (2019). Social marketing's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT): A commentary. *Social Marketing Quarterly*, 24(4), 1–12.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1524500419881770>.
[CrossRef](#)

Keane, L. (2022). Marketing: 10 mental health campaigns that are making a difference. Global Web Index Blog. Available at: www.blog.globalwebindex.com/marketing/mental-health/. Accessed 15 Oct 2022.

LADBible (2022). *UOKM8?*. Available at: <https://www.ladbible.com/uokm8>. Accessed 15 Oct 2022.

LADBible Group (2022). *The Numbers*. Available at: <https://www.ladbiblegroup.com>. Accessed 15 Oct 2022.

McKenzie, S. K., Oliffe, J. L., Black, A., & Collings, S. (2022). Men's experiences of mental illness stigma across the lifespan: A scoping review. *American Journal of Men's Health*, 16(1).
<https://doi.org/10.1177/15579883221074789>.

Mehta, N., Clement, S., Marcus, E., Stona, A., Bezborodovs, N., Evans-Lacko, S., Palacios, J., Docherty, M., Barley, E., Rose, D., Koschorke, M., Shidhaye, R., Henderson, C., & Thornicroft, G. (2015). Evidence for effective interventions to reduce mental health-related stigma and discrimination in the medium and long term: Systematic review. *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 207(5), 377–384. <https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.bp.114.151944>.
[CrossRef](#)

Mental Health Foundation. (2022). *The economic case for investing in the prevention of mental health conditions in the UK*. Available at: <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/2022-06/MHF-Investing-in-Prevention-Full-Report.pdf>. Accessed 15 Oct 2022.

ONS. (2020). *Leading causes of death, UK: 2001 to 2018*. Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/causesofdeath/articles/leadingcausesofdeathuk/2001to2018>. Accessed 15 Oct 2022.

Reid, C. (2018). *Your mental health: How to ask for help*. Available at: <https://www.ladbible.com/mental-health/inspirational-hussain-manawer-shares-his-experience-on-speaking-about-mental-health-20181105>. Accessed 16 Oct 2022.

Ridge, D., Emslie, C., & White, A. (2011). Understanding how men experience, express and cope with mental distress: Where next? *Sociology of Health & Illness*, 33(1), 145–159. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9566.2010.01266.x>.
[CrossRef](#)

Rössler, W. (2016). The stigma of mental disorders: A millennia-long history of social exclusion and prejudices. *EMBO Reports*, 17(9), 1250–1253. <https://doi.org/10.15252/embr.201643041>.
[CrossRef](#)

Salari, N., Hosseini-Far, A., Jalali, R., Vaisi-Raygani, A., Rasoulpoor, S., Mohammadi, M., Rasoulpoor, S., & Khaledi-Paveh, B. (2020). Prevalence of stress, anxiety, depression among the general population during the COVID-19 pandemic: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Globalization and Health*, 16(1), 57–57. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12992-020-00589-w>.
[CrossRef](#)

Smith, D. T., Mouzon, D. M., & Elliott, M. (2018). Reviewing the assumptions about men's mental health: An exploration of the gender binary. *American Journal of Men's Health*, 12(1), 78–89. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1557988316630953>.
[CrossRef](#)

Statista. (2022). *Social media usage in the United Kingdom (UK)*. Available at: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/507405/uk-active-social-media-and-mobile-social-media>. Accessed 15 Sept 2022.

Vahratian, A., Blumberg, J., Terlizzi, EP., Schiller, JS. (2021). Symptoms of anxiety or depressive disorder and use of mental health care among adults during the COVID-19 pandemic — United States. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*. Available at <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/70/wr/pdfs/mm7013e2-H.pdf>. Accessed Oct 2022.

Wainberg, M. L., Scorza, P., Shultz, J. M., Helpman, L., Mootz, J. J., Johnson, K. A., Neria, Y., Bradford, J. E., Oquendo, M. A., & Arbuckle, M. R. (2017). Challenges and opportunities in global mental health: A research-to-practice perspective. *Current Psychiatry Reports*, 19(5), 28–28. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11920-017-0780-z>.
[CrossRef](#)

