

Kingo Magazine

Is humor effective in educating the public?



Key Findings

- In the past two years, 1.5 million copies of *Kingo* magazine (comprised of six different issues) have been distributed on 70 different inter-city bus lines.
- Most people preferred the *Pororo Live* section of the magazine – a comic-book style commentary and report on current issues.
- In focus group discussions in Dar es Salaam and Arusha, Tanzanians reported liking the magazine, appreciating the mix of drawings and cartoons and serious commentary, and finding the issues addressed relevant and useful to them.
- The message of citizen's participation and responsibility in bringing change was well understood and considered to be the central idea raised by the magazine.

Introduction

Kingo magazine covers current Tanzanian topics through a mixture of cartoons and writing, blending serious issues with humor, satire and wit. It is produced by Gaba Africa. Its overall purpose is to provide ordinary Tanzanian citizens with engaging and critical commentary on relevant political and social issues. *Kingo* was started in 1995 and has been in circulation since. Twaweza has partnered with Gaba Africa since December 2012 to improve the reach and circulation of *Kingo*, as well as to support the coverage of topics relevant to Twaweza's work (such as the crisis in education in Tanzania, and the low availability of improved water sources). To increase the reach of *Kingo*, Gaba Africa developed innovative partnerships with travel companies which operate inter-city buses along major routes of Tanzania. So far, six different issues of *Kingo* have been printed and distributed across Tanzania in this manner. On a daily basis about 60 magazines are distributed in 70 different buses that depart from Dar es Salaam Ubungu Terminal to various destinations across the country. In total these buses cover about 70% of all bus routes, and with 250,000 copies of each issue distributed on the buses, an estimated 1.5 million people read *Kingo* this year.

Methodology

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Main findings:

Who could access the magazine?

During the discussions, very few respondents reported ever having seen the magazine. This is not surprising, as the circulation of the magazine is not very large. On the other hand, 55% of the respondents on the buses reported having read the magazine before (most likely attesting to the fact that they are frequent bus travelers); nearly all (95%) of these respondents reported they would take the magazine home and share it with family and friends.

After asking whether they had seen the magazine before, participants in the groups were given the opportunity to read two different issues of the magazine, and the remainder of the questions were posed afterwards.

Presentation, style and language of the magazine

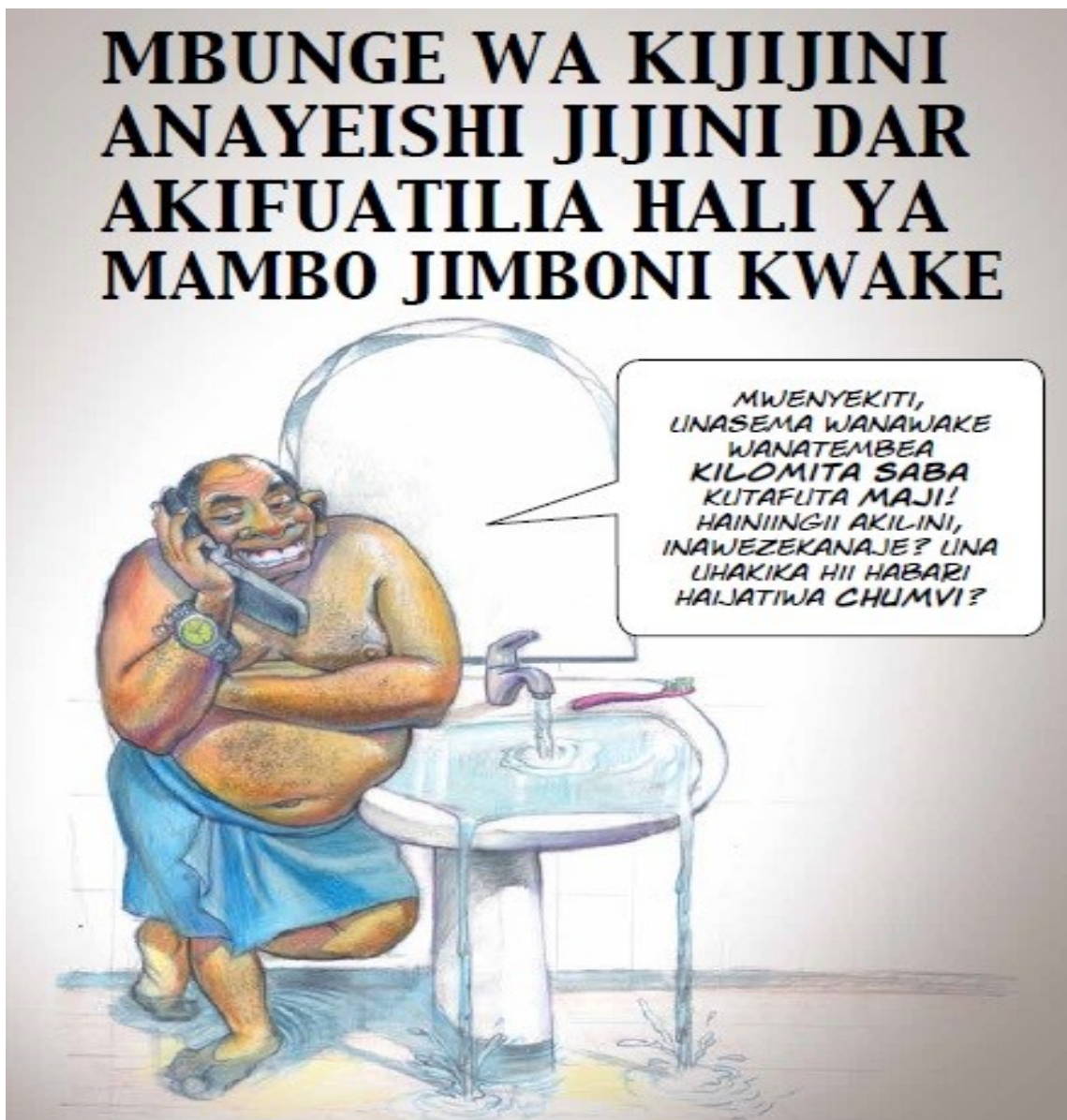
Opinions were mixed on the cover illustrations. Participants in Arusha liked them, while a majority of participants in the focus groups in Dar es Salaam did not like that the covers appeared "too political."

Respondents in all the groups generally liked the presentation inside the magazine, particularly the use of cartoons and large text, which made it easier to read. The use of pictures and cartoon stories reflecting reality was found to be entertaining and funny. However several of the participants (in older and younger groups) misinterpreted the symbolism used in the pictures (e.g., a child in a graduation cap and gown holding a large key), and a number found them exaggerated and nonsensical.

In Arusha and Dar es Salaam all groups agreed that the language used was easy to understand. The use of humor and proverbs made the articles easy to read without getting bored. Particular participants in the older groups appreciated that no offensive language was used, so they would not have to feel embarrassed about reading it in public or giving the magazine to others.

The participants did point out a picture in one of the magazines that portrayed a male teacher and a female student, noting that such pictures make the reader fearful of reading the magazine in public, even if the intent of the picture was to criticize, not condone, the behavior.

The most popular picture was of an MP asking about water in his constituency. In the words of a respondent from Arusha “[it] shows the reality of MPs and makes you laugh. It also makes you angry with the MP.”



MP, living in Dar es Salaam being told about issues in his constituency

“Chairperson, you are telling me that women walk seven kilometers to find water! I cannot imagine such a thing. How is it possible? Are you sure about this information and that it hasn’t been exaggerated?”

The most popular character was the journalist / host in Porojo Live. As one participant explained “*He asks good questions and gives explanations which help people understand what should be happening, although the leader is trying to cover up the truth.*”

In Arusha the young people said the use of slightly changed names for well-known personalities would make the reader think but, at the same time, remain respectful to the real people. In Dar es Salaam they said the message was very clear, even if the names of those targeted were not specifically stated.

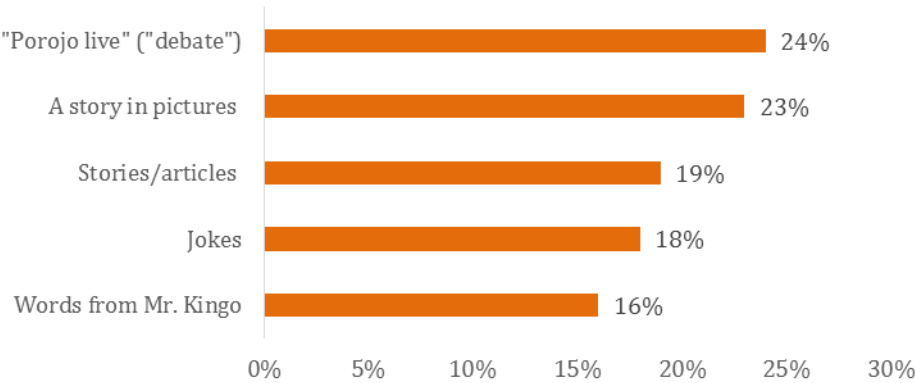
Interestingly, while overall the respondents were very disillusioned by their leaders, they still believed that such leaders deserve respect. Hence, they liked that *Kingo* did not name and shame leaders directly. There is still a strong element of ‘decorum’ in Tanzanian life, which is reflected in the respondents’ approval of the use of respectful language, and disapproval of any picture showing “risky” topics – even if the point was to criticize the depicted behavior. This is curious given the countrywide popularity of tabloid magazines, but it is a useful cautionary note with regard to how issues are portrayed.

What features are most—and least—popular?

Overall, most respondents preferred cartoons with only a few words, such as *Huu ni Mji* (This is Town). Many respondents also liked the *Porojo Live* cartoon because of its realism, and the jokes of the presenter at the expense of those he is interviewing. The young people in Arusha also said that the dialogue encouraged them to want to know the actual answers to the questions posed by the journalist in the cartoon. Others liked the *Ukweli Mtupu* (The Naked Truth) series because it talks about policies in a thoughtful way.

The bus-based respondents were also asked to indicate their favorite section of the magazine; their answers are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Respondents’ favorite section in the Kingo magazine* (n=496)

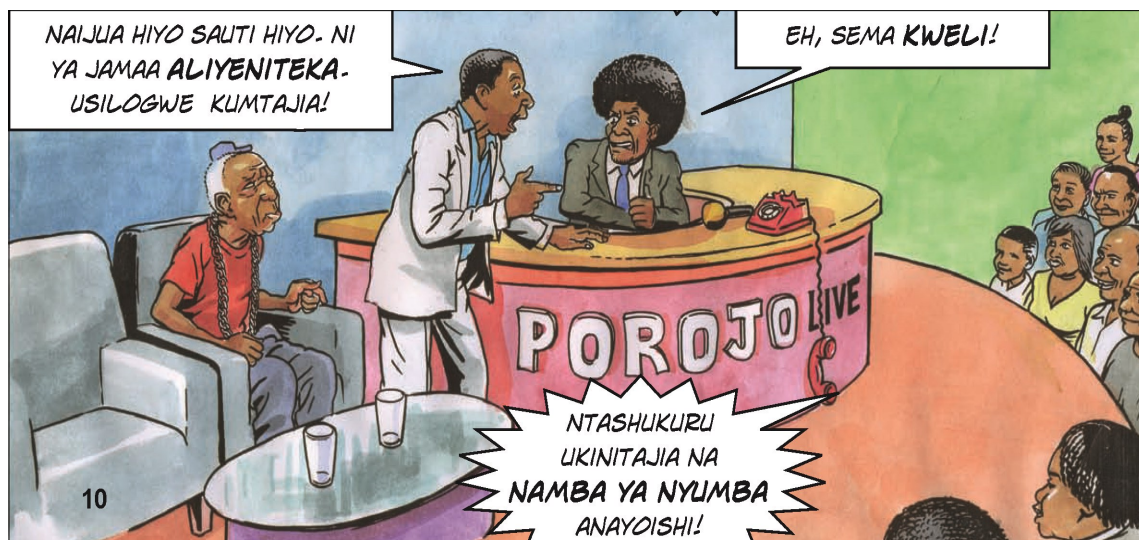


There was general agreement among group respondents that the *Kasavumba*, *Adili* and *Malaika Wawili* stories were least liked. Many discussants struggled with the stories with a lot of text; the older generation complained about the typeface being too small.

*Multiple choices were possible.

In the words of one participant from Dar es Salaam *“We older people preserve these magazines so that in the village if someone comes back from farming, it is a way of relaxing but text like this makes it impossible for them to read.”* Furthermore, many participants found the mixture of jokes and text in Cheka Upasuke (Split your Sides Laughing) confusing. In Dar es Salaam, several commented that the extracts from the TAMASHA booklets were too short to be meaningful: *“Sometimes we can’t understand where the story is coming from and what the ending is.”*

These were stories extracted from longer publications and shortened for the magazine format. A lot of the depth was lost in this exercise but the idea was to try to convey key messages through a short series of cartoon frames.



How do readers engage with the main messages of Kingo?

Of the two issues of *Kingo* distributed for reading during the group discussions, one focused on water, and one on education. Overall people thought that the messages were clear and relevant. One participant in Dar es Salaam noted *“This message is very relevant to us. Look at the issue of water. We get so many problems then someone else opens up the tap in his bath until water is overflowing. And this man is an MP!”*

While there was a general agreement that the magazine appeals greatly to the younger generation, the older participants also reported that they enjoyed reading it and considered it relevant to their lives. In the words of an Arusha participant *“Just reading this today will cause discussions for a whole week.”*

Younger participants in the group discussions noted that that the use of humour makes readers want to read more. Even if they were not interested to begin with, they will start with the cartoons and at the end of the day they will have read the story and got the message. The message of citizen’s participation and responsibility in bringing change was well understood and considered to be the central idea raised by the magazine. This is reflected in the following quote from a young person in Arusha: *“The use of questions has made me ask myself a lot about my own responsibilities as a citizen in my own community. What are we as citizens doing to change the situation?”*

At the same time, respondents noted that they lacked specific understanding of policies, and requested that information be provided in the magazine, in simple language. Furthermore, participants commented that they would not know what to do to address the challenges raised, and suggested that the magazine could “show them” how to take action.

The bus-based respondents were asked to write in one or two lines what they had learned from the issue of *Kingo* magazine. Among these 494 responses

- 218 provided general comments about the quality of magazine, a preferred cartoon or section, or thematic areas such as corruption and practices of traffic police
- 200 learned about politics and governance issues (constitutional review process, bureaucracy, leaders & MPs issues)
- 66 learned about social issues, such as like customs and traditions, and the effects of domestic violence
- 10 mentioned learning about education

Why do respondents buy the magazine?

Kingo is distributed for free. One way to gauge how much value people place in a product is to ask whether they would be willing to pay for it, and how much. In Dar es Salaam, all respondents were willing to pay for the magazine, and most would buy it for TZS 1000-2000 (USD 0.60 – 1.40). In Arusha, respondents who were willing to pay for the magazine would pay at most TZS 500 (USD 0.35); they also suggested that in schools and outside of urban areas, the magazines ought to be free.

Conclusion

The findings from the focus group discussions and the bus-based questionnaire suggest that *Kingo* is a well-liked, well-received communication product, which manages to entertain, inform and stimulate readers. The use of simple language, colors and pictures to tell a story or communicate important information seems to be an effective way to get people’s attention, to attract them to reading and thinking about more serious issues.

While it is debatable as to whether *Kingo* has opened readers’ eyes to new issues, most participants agreed that the issues covered were relevant to their lives.

Participants clearly understood the main messages in the magazine and some stated that they would take action based on what they read in the magazine. This could partly be attributed to courtesy bias (with respondents knowing what the “desired” answer is and so providing it). On the other hand, a number of respondents gave concrete examples as to how they thought they would take action, for example using the ideas in the magazine at the village meetings, in particular in addressing leaders who are hiding the truth or covering up their own wrongdoing.

This brief focused on the perceived quality of *Kingo*, and reader’s understanding and engagement with it. On both fronts, *Kingo* scores highly. The broader question remains what specific role can compelling, interesting – and humorous – information play in inspiring active citizenship? This is what Twaweza, and we hope *Kingo* as well, will explore in the future.