Beneath the Anthropomorphic Veil:
Animal Imagery and Ideological Discourses in British Advertising

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ABSTRACT

Anthropomorphic advertising – advertising that uses human-like animal characters – has of late seen a surge in popularity in Britain, with some anthropomorphic brand icons even having their own fan pages on social media. Breaking away from the traditional marketing focus of anthropomorphic advertising research, this study aims to understand the growing use of anthropomorphism in advertising by looking into its sociological aspects. Advertising's ideological function is widely recognised and a review of the historical examples of mediated anthropomorphism reveals its repeated use as an ideological tool as well. The use of humorous undertones seems to accompany these anthropomorphic representations very often. On the basis of this insight, it is being premised that anthropomorphic advertising uses funny animal characters to engage in ideological discourses.

The study involves the visual analysis – semiotics and discourse analysis – of six recent British television advertisements that use anthropomorphic animal imagery. Two advertisements each are analysed for ideological discourses of class, gender and nationalism. The analysis reveals that beneath the humour and visual appeal of anthropomorphic advertising, there exist discourses that relate to dominant ideologies. Though each advertisement is analysed for evidence of a particular ideology, it is revealed that these ideologies do not operate in isolation and in each advertisement there is evidence of multiple ideologies. The growing culture of political correctness or PC in Britain has meant that ideological discourses in popular media often have to be stifled. This study indicates that figurative advertising practices such as anthropomorphism help by-pass the PC debates and further ideological notions unnoticed. Anthropomorphic animal characters thus act as substitutes for humans, engaging in politically incorrect discourses humans no longer can.

INTRODUCTION

Baa Baa Black Sheep,
Have You Any Wool?
Yes Sir, Yes Sir, Three Bags Full;

Unknown

Rhymes and stories featuring animals have been an integral aspect of popular culture for a very long time. The long-term appeal of these works and the recall enjoyed by them can, at least, in part, be ascribed to anthropomorphism, or the custom of attributing human characteristics and emotions to animals. So prevalent is this practice that it has become almost natural for media content of any kind to feature anthropomorphised animals. And advertising is no exception.

As an all-pervasive persuasive form of communication, advertising 'both reflects and creates social norms' (Schroeder, 2002: 27). However, along with technology, platforms and content, advertising has witnessed several significant shifts over the years, with one such shift being towards figurative advertising[1]. And anthropomorphism has, in recent years, emerged as a key tool in figurative advertising.

An archival search of British advertisements[2] shows a considerable increase in the number of advertisements (henceforth, used interchangeably with 'ads') that use anthropomorphic animal characters in the 2000s as compared to the previous decades. As advertising's primary goal is to cause a specified customer response (McQuarrie and Phillips, 2008: 7), the use of cute and funny talking animals, at one level, can be explained as a tried and tested gimmick to attract the audience. A well-known advertising cliché goes, 'if the ad campaign is not working, first show the kid, then show the dog' (Spears et al, 1996: 87). However, the increasing and repeated use of animal imagery in advertising brings to the fore questions that go beyond mere marketing objectives, for, as pointed out at the start, advertising doesn't exist in isolation, but reflects and creates social norms.

The inherent ability of advertising to naturalise the image is what makes the ideology of advertisements so powerful (Dyer, 1982: 130). Given this aspect of advertising, an inquiry into anthropomorphism within advertising automatically raises the ideological question.

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[1] In figurative advertising, a message claim which could have been expressed in a direct or literal way is translated into figurative terms (Dingena, 1994: 17).

[2] Source: Advertising archives website www.advertisingarchives.co.uk (Accessed on 15th July, 2012)

More so, because of what is revealed by historical examples of mediated anthropomorphism. For instance, popular literary works, such as 'Wind in the Willows' and 'Animal Farm', featuring animals were not necessarily about animals. Forging a link between this background information on anthropomorphism in popular culture and the proliferation of anthropomorphism in British advertising is the basic premise of this research project.

The study of anthropomorphism in the advertising context is of more interest than its study in other media genres because of advertising's fundamental function as a marketing tool. This adds a new dimension both to the study of anthropomorphism and to the study of advertising because to accept advertising's selling message is to accept the value it presupposes and by representing these values as part of the visual furniture, the ad naturalises them (Wernick, 1991: 23). The possible impact of current socio-cultural changes on Britain's strong ideological views and the growing popularity of anthropomorphism in British advertising make Britain a good place and now a good time to do this study.

Having been a fan of books and movies featuring talking animals since childhood, I have had a long-standing creative interest in anthropomorphism. A short career stint in advertising saw this turn into a marketing interest and the recent surge in anthropomorphic advertising (with some anthropomorphised mascots being elevated to celebrity status[3]) has resulted in the manifestation of a research interest in the area. As a recent immigrant to Britain, I have often been intrigued by Britain's unique take on ideologies of class, race, gender and the like. Not being British, I believe, helps me maintain a certain degree of objectivity and engage in academic study that is relatively free of ethnographic bias.

Academic studies on anthropomorphic advertising have mostly had a marketing focus. By looking beyond the obvious visual appeal of anthropomorphic animals in advertising and by relating it to ideology, this paper hopes to bring anthropomorphism within the purview of mainstream social science research. It is hoped that this study will bring to the fore new areas of inquiry within anthropomorphism and pave the way for future research on the relevance of mediated anthropomorphism.

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[3] An increasing number of brand managers are reportedly instructing their advertising agencies *'...find me a meerkat!'* referring to the unprecedented popularity of an anthropomorphised meerkat brand icon (Marketing, 2009 cited in Brown, 2010: 210)

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Literature Review

The scope of this study necessitates a multi-dimensional literature review that looks at the areas of anthropomorphism, advertising and ideology in conjunction. This chapter explores some of the relevant contributions within each of these topics and also examines the role of humour in these areas.

The Rise and Rise of Anthropomorphism

As a practice, anthropomorphism has often been viewed in a non-normative light. Daston and Mitman (2005) point out that the act of attributing human characteristics to electrons, ants or primates was often seen as unscientific and primitive (2005: 3). Academically, most studies of anthropomorphism have concentrated on its use in religion and environment. However, despite the negativity and narrow academic focus, anthropomorphism in practice continues to thrive. From the attribution of child-like or friend-like emotions to their pets by people to the humanisation of gods and spirits, there is ample evidence of anthropomorphism in our day to day lives. In fact, it is believed that anthropomorphism tends to come naturally to us (Serpell, 2005: 128). This study specifically looks at animal anthropomorphism or the practice of attributing human physical traits and/or emotional characteristics to animals.

Many ideas have been put forward to account for the human affinity towards animals and our tendency to anthropomorphise them. The fundamental hypothesis is 'biophilia' which states that humans have a natural affinity for other living things. Baker says that animals are often viewed as the 'Other' of humans (1993: 123-4) whereas Norris believes that anthropomorphism exists to serve human psychological needs (1985, cited in Spears et al, 1996).

Mediated anthropomorphism is not a recent phenomenon. The Bible is perhaps the most well-known ancient example, with the serpent appearing both as a symbol of evil and sin and one of hope and life. Over the years, cartoon strips, children's books and fairytales have been replete with animal characters that can talk, walk and think. So much so that in some cultures children are taught the fundamental moral lessons of life through myths about animals (Daston and Mitman, 2005: 1) such as Aesop's Fables in Europe and the *Panchatantra* in India. The association between children and animal stories is legendary but

advertising is, arguably, one of the genres that has taken mediated anthropomorphism to the adult realm.

There is evidence of anthropomorphic advertising in British media as early as the 19th century[4]. And of late this trend has been increasing rather than decreasing in intensity (Balcombe, 2010 cited in Brown, 2010). However, despite the above psycho-sociological arguments on the reasons for anthropomorphism, most of the recent research on anthropomorphic advertising has focussed on its relevance from a marketing point of view. Brown's work on popular anthropomorphic brand icons (2010) uses content analysis to establish a relation between the human-like characteristics of animals and their consequent use by marketers. He finds that the closer an animal is to humans, the greater are its chances to be used as a brand icon. Audience reception of anthropomorphic ads is the focus of Lancerdorfer et al.'s research (2006). Using quantitative techniques, they measured consumer response to the presence of companion dogs in advertisements. Staying with the marketing theme, Spears et al.'s 1996 study queries why certain animals are used to sell particular categories of products. Through a content analysis of over 500 advertisements, the study proposes a framework for understanding the symbolic function of animals in advertising. Philips (1996) looks at the cultural aspect associated with animals and its relevance in advertising by using word association techniques. Thus, most of the research so far has concentrated on the specific characteristics of animals and their effectiveness as marketing tools, or in other words the ability of anthropomorphised animals to sell products. The portrayal of these animals is taken as a given, a part of the ad's storyline and what they say and do is often dismissed as humorous. Animal presence is, in fact, consistently explained away (Baker, 1993: 136) and the common view is that anything to do with animals is somehow funny (ibid: 23). Humour is thus considered to be a natural extension of the animal form without any independent function of its own.

Advertising and Meaning Making

A key characteristic of the economy today is image (Schroeder, 2002: 4). It is image that drives 'cognition, interpretation and preference' and finally leads to consumption. And as one of the key vehicles involved in the creation of images, advertising has taken over our lives in unprecedented ways. As Jhally says, 'it is the air that we breathe as we live our daily lives' (2003: 250-1). In its attempt to push the market logic, advertisements do much more than

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[4] Source: Advertising archives website www.advertisingarchives.co.uk (Accessed on 15th July, 2012)

sell products and services. Thus, not just our consumption habits, but our thoughts, feelings yardsticks for judging others and indeed ourselves have been influenced by advertising messages.

Given the ubiquitous presence of advertising, its actual purpose has often been the subject of academic debate. Adorno and Horkheimer contentiously referred to advertising as a 'pure representation of social power' (1972: np). Another argument is that by creating a desire for a particular lifestyle, advertising creates 'structures of meaning' (Williamson, 1978: 12) that manifests itself in particular representations which then become the norm. In keeping with its primary function as a marketing technique, Goldman asserts that the ideology of advertising is the ideology of commodity fetishism (1992: 35). Hall reasserts that products take on the role of a fetish but suggests that advertising's role is much larger by pointing out that in imperialist times advertising was relied upon to further the dominant ideologies of power and racism (1997: 240).

The ideological role of advertising is thus widely recognised but advertising today has moved on from its imperial days. Advertisers now understand that there are an overwhelming number of images out there and this interferes with the individual's ability to reflect upon individual messages (Schroeder, 2002: 12) and their meanings. There has therefore been a concerted move towards advertising that employs attention-grabbing techniques. In a bid to be distinctive, ads are employing figurative techniques more and more and as a result there is a greater reliance on the visual image (Dingena, 1994: 1). Figurative advertising involves indirect communication through the use of verbal and visual rhetoric to convey the advertising message. Dingena's work persuasively explores consumer comprehension and evaluation of figurative advertising but does not touch upon the ideological aspect of such advertising. Ideology, however takes on added significance in the realm of figurative advertising because, unlike before, it is now discursively cloaked within figurative imagery.

Ideology and Discourse

Despite often being spoken of in conjunction, discourse and ideology have been theorised in divergent ways. Foucault, inarguably, the most well-known discourse theorist, believed that discourse constituted knowledge. He asserted that it is constant, ongoing and is how we make sense of the world. He rejected the concept of ideology because ideology assumes a true knowledge and creates what Marx called a 'false consciousness'. Foucault opined that there was no such thing as true knowledge and believed that even science is discursively constructed (Macdonald, 2003: 36). Laclau and Mouffe interpret discourse differently from

Foucault but agree with him in regarding it as distinct from ideology (Purvis and Hunt, 1993: 492).

However, later theorists have often seen discourse and ideology as inseparable. Notable among them is Hall who was inspired by Althusser, the latter being credited with having made the first significant move to bring ideology and discourse together in his conception of 'interpellation'. By putting language and culture as essential to 'meaning' (1997) Hall effectively married the concepts of ideology and discourse.

Macdonald describes discourse as 'a system of communicative practices that are integrally related to wider social and cultural practices, and that help to construct specific frameworks of thinking' (2003: 1) while Fairclough defines ideologies as 'propositions that generally figure as implicit assumptions in texts, which contribute to producing or reproducing unequal relations of power, relations of domination' (1995: 14). Together, these definitions imply that discourse is a process of which ideology is the effect. All texts, including advertising texts, are therefore discursive constructions of ideology.

Ideology is an expansive term that refers to many dominant ways of thinking that result in self-evident truths or 'common sense'. However, from a research point of view, it is important to identify finite ideological components for analysis. The ideologies being considered in this project relate to class, gender and nationalism. As a 'highly class-conscious culture' (Fox, 2005: 15), Britain has always used class as a key social stratifier. Britain's long history of gender struggle continues to this day with issues such as equal pay and maternity rights. And owing to the socio-political changes taking place in Britain today, national identity is a much contested issue, making nationalism an interesting subject for study.

Class

As an ideological construct, class has been much discussed and theorised. Class differences based on economic factors have been the founding principle of Marxist thought. Recent theories of class, however, draw more from the work of Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu coined the term 'distinction' to define class as a socially constituted system that takes into account not just economic capital but also cultural capital (1984: 316). Distinction, which he describes as a sum total of class, status, lifestyle and taste, defines a person's thoughts, perceptions, actions and expressions (Weininger, 2005: 83). Consumption thus forms an important aspect of Bourdieu's definition of class. This close association between class and consumption is echoed by Hayward and Yar in their work on the 'chav' phenomenon. They say that while the

underclass used to be defined in terms of production, today, the new underclass, or the 'chavs', are identified by their distinct consumption patterns (2006).

Britain has often used class as a key definer of social placement. This is evident from the multitude of class-related terms that have found its way into popular usage, such as 'toff', 'chav', 'yob' and so on. Reaffirming the consumption angle, Fox says that in Britain it is impossible to talk about class without reference to homes, gardens, cars, clothes, pets, food, drink and so on (2005: 16). The heightened class awareness notwithstanding, British society has been getting increasingly uncomfortable with issues relating to class. Bromley says that class has now become 'the ghost in the machine of contemporary British politics' (2000: 51) and that despite all the obvious signifiers, discourses of class largely remain an 'absent content' (2000: 63).

British media has mirrored the class consciousness of British society, with particular soap operas, such as 'Eastenders' and 'Coronation Street' being branded as 'working class content for working class viewers.' Films like 'The Full Monty', 'Ladybird Ladybird', 'Four Weddings and a Funeral' have been marked out by scholars for their strong statements about class. Research in the area has largely dealt with the working class and their representation. Dodd and Dodd's work (1992) focuses on the changing representation of the working class in British media. Haylett, who looks at the cinematic representations of the working class, points out how working class representations in film have typically centred on 'dangerous masculinities and dependant femininities' (2000: 72). Advertising has consistently mirrored the class driven aspect of consumption by customising their messages for the intended consumer classes.

Gender

As one of the primary stratifiers in society, gender cuts across cultures. Haraway describes it as a field of 'structured and structuring difference' (1990: 195). Gender is, arguably, one of the most 'natural' of social stratifiers with many gender theorists agreeing that a majority of us 'do gender' without even realising that we do so. At the root of many gender, and particularly feminist, discourses lies the contention that the man is considered to be the norm and the woman a deviation from the norm. As de Beauvoir puts it:

> 'She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute – she is the Other' (1993 (1949): xxxix-xl)

Bartky, however believes that gender is more than just othering. Taking a Foucauldian approach, Bartky explains that the patriarchal ideology disciplines women to 'produce a body which in gesture and appearance is recognizably feminine' (1988: 64). Talking about Britain, Charles points out that gender has its genesis in the capitalist mode of production and the consequent division of labour along gender lines (2002: 6). From the suffrage movements of the early 20th century to the equality in pay campaigns of today, Britain has been no stranger to expressions of gender struggle. However, these campaigns notwithstanding, the fact remains that gender inequality issues continue to persist in Britain with the country falling behind other Western nations in narrowing the career divide between men and women (Beckford, 2008: 16).

Media has had more than a supporting role to play in furthering gender discourses. Theresa de Lauretis called cinema, television and magazines as the 'technology of gender' (1989, cited in Gill, 2007). From the macho Hollywood Westerns to the 'women's genre' of soap operas, media content and consequently media audience have always been classified along gender lines. To the extent that certain norms of womanhood, such as the 'Cosmo Girl' are entirely media created. Increasingly, the media has been coming under fire in Britain for its stereotypical representation of women[5] on the one hand and their under representation on the other.

Jhally argues that gender is the social resource that is used most in modern advertising (1987: 135). At varying points of time, advertising has through its narrative and imagery reflected the current hegemonic masculinity[6] and arguably even facilitated the creation of new hegemonic masculinities. Goldman's concept of 'commodity feminism' is indicative of the role played by advertising in furthering popular trends in gender. He believes that advertising representations of women have over the years conditioned women's consciousness of everyday life (1992: 130).

Nationalism

Globalisation theorists often dwell on the death of the nation state, but if world-wide expressions of nationalism are anything to go by, the nation state seems to be alive and well.

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[5] http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-16704575

[6] Hegemonic masculinity is used to convey the idea that different masculinities are not equal – some are more dominant or powerful than others (Gill, 2007: 30).

Anderson famously described the nation as an 'imagined community' (1983). Willemen says that nationalism seeks to bind people to identities and is a question of address and not of origin (2006: 30), whereas Giddens views nationalism as something that comes to the fore when national security is threatened or when ordinary life is disrupted (1985: 215). However, nationalism is today viewed as having a more far-ranging meaning. Foucault calls it a 'discursive formation' (Calhoun, 1997: 3). This is seconded by Wodak et al who think that national identities are produced and reproduced, as well as transformed and dismantled, discursively (2009: 4). Nationalism is therefore a process and a work-in-progress – one that could be in evidence anywhere at any time. Billig uses the term 'banal nationalism' to refer to these ideological habits of everyday life which enable Western nationhood to be reproduced (1995: 6).

British national identity is today viewed in a different light from a few hundred years ago. With the end of colonialism, many consider the days of glory of the British Empire to be a thing of the past. Unrest in parts of the country, the growing accent on European-ness (Calhoun, 1997: 2) and controversies surrounding immigration have made nationalism a subject of contention, in recent times. Today, 'more and more people are wondering whether and where they belong and to what they owe their allegiance' (Brown, 2009: 25). With the result that public displays of nationalism in Britain are now largely restricted to international sporting events and Royal milestones, and public discourses on nationalism are almost non-existent.

Among popular media, film has traditionally been the genre of choice for the expression of nationalistic sentiments. While there are several examples of American jingoism in Hollywood ('The Day after Tomorrow', 'Independence Day'), British nationalistic films tend to be true stories about historic figures, such as Queen Elizabeth ('Elizabeth'), William Wallace ('Braveheart') and so on. This trend, arguably, reflects the overall British attitude towards nationalism and national pride, as outlined above. Amidst all of this, there is also growing resentment against the colonising power of Americanisation in popular culture which, some feel, has displaced authentic British folk culture and communally oriented working class culture (Edensor, 2002: 14). In terms of advertising, ads promoting Britain ('Visit Britain' ads) have been aired on international television channels from time to time. However, these campaigns fall within the tourism discourse and therefore cannot be considered nationalistic in the strict sense.

Humour and Its Role in Advertising

Studying humour helps us better understand our serious social world (Mulkay, 1988: 1). The role of humour, laughter and joking in addressing and diffusing harsh social realities has been examined in a variety of ways. Bakhtin points out how the carnival-grotesque was used 'to liberate from the prevailing point of view of the world, from conventions and established truths, from clichés, from all that is humdrum and universally accepted' (1984: 34). Humour, thus, is largely acknowledged as a social coping mechanism – a catalyst in the meaning-making process.

Humour has been a defining aspect of British life and a sense of humour is often considered to be a quintessentially British trait. As Palmer explains, 'not to have a sense of humour is a deep criticism of anyone in this country' (1988: 109). Stephen Fry asserts that humour is top of the list as far as British qualities go (2009: 111). British media has amply reflected the British penchant for humour. Be it 'Punch' and PG Wodehouse in print, 'Fawlty Towers' and 'Are You Being Served?' on television or the 'Pink Panther' series and 'Monty Python' on film, humour has had a dominant presence in British popular culture.

British advertising too has, from the earliest times, relied on humour for impact. Many pub signs of the 16th century chose to stand out from the competition by using humorous illustrations – interestingly, many of these featured anthropomorphised representations of animals such as the *Goat in Boots* and the *Dog in Doublet* (Gulas and Weinberger, 2006: 8-9). One of the key ideas behind such representations is the conception of humour through incongruity. As Gulas and Weinberger point out, incongruity is the most commonly used humour device in advertising (2006: 198). The persistent use of humour in advertising is strongly indicative as to its effectiveness, as concluded by Perry et al, who found that higher humour levels in a commercial increased purchase intention overall (1997: 36).

Mapping the Research Area

Anthropomorphism, advertising and ideology form the three corner-stones of this research. As anthropomorphic advertising is the entry point for the study, the existing research on the topic has been already reviewed. The remaining empirical overlaps are presented below.

Research on Advertising and Ideology

That advertising seeks to further dominant ideological discourses is a view that has been espoused by scholars over the last several decades. From Adorno and Horkheimer to Stuart Hall to Sut Jhally, much has been written about the discursive practices inherent in advertising and the role they play in pushing dominant ideological views. There has been a significant amount of empirical work done on exploring these discourses. Williamson's (1978) seminal work 'Decoding Advertisements: Ideology and Meaning in Advertising' is arguably one of the most comprehensive studies on the subject and one that this research draws inspiration from. It uses semiotic, discursive, hermeneutic and psychoanalytical tools to unpack a wide range of underlying ideological discourses in advertisements. This has paved the way for more varied research into decoding advertisements, notable among them being the works of Goldman (1992) and Gill (2007).

As far as specific ideologies within advertising are concerned, research has predominantly focussed on discourses of race and gender. Gill, Goldman and Williamson have to varying degrees examined the metaphors of power and control used to further particular discourses of femininity. Gill and Wernick have also explored representations of masculinity in advertising. Other notable works include those of Livingstone and Green (1986) and Furnham and Bitar (1993), both of which specifically looked at gender representations in British television advertisements. However, despite the fact that British advertising often mirrors the class divisions persistent in British culture (Nevett, 1992: 65), research on the subject has been limited. There is no dearth of research on the depiction of national identity in ads, in both countries in the West and the East. However, nationalism, as mentioned earlier, has largely been an absent content in British media and advertising and hence there isn't much by way of research either. Besides these well-known studies, several researches have been undertaken at smaller scales to understand specific aspects of advertising ideology, employing a variety of methodologies. However, not many studies on the subject have specifically looked at the use of anthropomorphism in advertising and their role in propagating ideological discourses.

Research on Anthropomorphism and Ideology

Inquiries into the ideologies behind mediated anthropomorphism outside of advertising are, however, not without precedent. Dorfman and Mattelart in their polemic on Donald Duck and the Disney empire state that behind Donald Duck's laughing mask is the scowl of the capitalist ideology – one that forces all the people of the world into a vision of the dominant classes (1975: 11,54). This thought is echoed in Giroux's work on Disney where he focuses on the ideological power of media culture. He asserts that representations assume the force of ideology while at the same time serving very specific political interests and policies (1999: 8). However, while these studies use the popularity of anthropomorphic characters such as Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck as the starting point for their research, their focus is more on the political economy of media than on anthropomorphism itself. DeLeon's study (2010) that looks at the ideological notions informing the representation of animals in Western media briefly touches on the topic of anthropomorphism.

The Conceptual Framework

As seen above, while there have been empirical overlaps between advertising and anthropomorphism, advertising and ideology and also anthropomorphism and ideology, there isn't evidence of one comprehensive study that has looked at these three areas in conjunction. Having reviewed the existing literature and given the proliferation of anthropomorphic advertising today, this research gap is being upheld as a significant one. This study seeks to plug this research gap *(See Appendix A)* by drawing on the above theoretical interdependencies and applying it to new empirical material. Set within the conceptual area of anthropomorphic advertising, this research takes the marketing strengths of anthropomorphic animal imagery as a given and attempts to widen the scope of studies in the field to include an ideological focus.

The rationale for this study is based on the fundamental assumption that ideology is constituted by discourse – that media texts, through their discursive practices, shape dominant ways of thinking, which eventually become the 'common sense' of society. As already mentioned, in the interests of brevity and focus, this research will focus on the specific ideologies of class, gender and nationalism. In terms of class, the conceptual backbone will be provided by Bourdieu's concept of 'distinction'. This is because in today's consumer culture, class is no longer about wealth, but is the sum total of tastes, consumption choices and lifestyle. Despite the strides made by Britain towards gender equality, popular conceptions of manhood and womanhood are still guided by dominant markers of gender.

The concepts of 'hegemonic masculinity', 'stereotyping' and 'Othering' capture these dominant markers in a comprehensive way and will guide the analysis on gender. Billig's idea of 'banal nationalism' will be the predominant conceptual angle in the analysis of nationalism. As substantiated, nationalism in Britain is no longer about pompous statements on national identity but is perhaps observable in the day-to-day. Banal nationalism is precisely about looking for nationalistic discourses in the mundane.

During the literature review and the background research for this study, humour emerged as a significant factor in both advertising as well as anthropomorphism. Thus, though not part of the main analytical focus, the role of humour in the discourse will be highlighted, where relevant. Theories of humour abound, but this research will take into account the humour as incongruity and humour as defence mechanism approaches.

Research Objectives and Research Question

Through the logic of appropriation, advertising turns culture into consumer signifiers by drawing upon symbolic referent systems (Schroeder, 2002: 29). This paper will explore the validity of this claim through an analysis of the practice of anthropomorphism.

The objectives of this research are as follows:

- To draw from the research on advertising and ideology, advertising and anthropomorphism, and anthropomorphism and ideology, and initiate an empirically grounded understanding of the underlying themes in the representation of anthropomorphic animals in advertising.
- To examine how practices of figurative advertising help foster the current dominant ideological thinking.

On the basis of the objectives, the main research question has been identified thus:

> How do British television advertisements use anthropomorphic animal characters and to what extent do they perpetuate ideological discourses?

For conceptual clarity and analytical ease this has been operationalised into the following two sub-questions:

- What are the key themes involved in the representation of anthropomorphic animals in advertising?
- How does the genre of advertising aid in the propagation of ideological discourses and does it fit in with advertising's larger role as a marketing tool?

Past research on advertising and ideology, though extensive, has mostly steered clear of individual practices, such as anthropomorphism. This research, recognising the general shift towards figurative advertising and the specific increase in the instances of anthropomorphic advertising, specifically looks at ideology in advertisements that use animal anthropomorphism. Given the focus of this study, it is hoped that the possibilities for future research will be two-fold. On the one hand, it is hoped that this study will open up research within advertising to include specific practices and on the other, take the research on anthropomorphic advertising away from its marketing focus and towards a critical sociological one.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Selection of Methods

The research involves visual analysis of six British television advertisements that use anthropomorphic animal characters.

Television advertising is more amenable to a study of this kind than print advertising because television's specific characteristics and modes of reception inherently work ideologically to promote certain meanings of the world (Fiske, 1987: 19-20). Besides, as discussed, anthropomorphism in advertising more often than not involves the use of humour and broadcast media are most suited for humour as the tele-visual allows for the use of voice, sound effects and comic timing which add to the effectiveness of humour (Gulas and Weinberger, 2006: 195).

As the genre being investigated is television advertising, which is audio-visual in nature, visual analysis is being selected as the research method. However, visual analysis comprises multiple methods and it is imperative to select one that is most appropriate for the research question in hand. Visual content analysis is a popular quantitative method to study trends in visual media and one that has been used often in the study of anthropomorphic advertising. However, because the aim of this study is not to understand trends or make generalisations about the frequencies (Bell, 2001: 10) of certain aspects of anthropomorphic advertising it is not the most relevant method in this instance.

The aim of this study is to look beyond the surface of obvious meanings in anthropomorphic advertisements and a dominant approach in cultural studies for analysing the meanings of ads has been semiotics (Matheson, 2005: 39). One of the most well-known researches into the meaning of advertising, Judith Williamson's 'Decoding Advertisements' uses this approach to very successful effect. Semiotics, which is based on the idea that 'signs are never arbitrary' (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996: 7), is a broad area covering the work of many scholars. Though Saussure is considered to have laid the foundation of semiotics, this study will mostly draw from the work of Barthes and Pierce. Barthes identified two levels of meaning-making: denotation and connotation. Connotation, which he also called 'myth' is fundamentally used to perpetuate the interests of the hegemonic groups (1972). Pierce on the other hand, added a further level to the interpretation of signs, which he called the icon, index and symbol (1991, cited in Messaris, 1997: viii). Together Barthes and Pierce's provide the analytical tools that are most relevant for analysing signs in advertising.

A pilot was conducted earlier in the year to evaluate the research design and methodology. The semiotic tools outlined above were used to analyse an advertisement that had anthropomorphic animal characters. While these tools helped identify some of the signified meanings of the visuals, they were not fully effective in unearthing key themes that lay beneath the advertisements. In short, though some of the specifics could be deciphered, the big picture remained hidden from view. The recommendation that was made on the basis of the pilot was to expand the analytical repertoire to include tools that would help look beyond the semiotic. Given the purpose of the study, discourse analysis was identified as a method that could enhance the findings from semiotics.

Like semiotics, discourse analysis too comprises many different approaches and techniques. The approach being used here derives from the notion of discourse as articulated through various kinds of visual images and the ways in which these images construct specific views of the social world (Rose, 2007: 146). It views discourse analysis as being concerned not only with the production of discourses but also with the effects of discourses (ibid: 147). As this research takes the view that discourse is one of the key ways through which ideology is constituted, the inclusion of discourse analysis into the methodological repertoire is thus justified.

The analysis will, therefore, be a two-step one. In the first step, semiotics will be used to identify individual signifiers of meanings. This is helpful because of semiotics' ability to help us understand two things – representation and the hidden meanings of images (Van Leeuwen, 2001: 92). At the second step, discourse analysis will be employed to pick out key discursive themes that emerge in relation to particular ideologies. Macdonald points out that the benefit of approaching media through discourse analysis is one of exploring the varied and subtle guises that the power/knowledge relationship adopts (2003: 51). Discourse analysis will thus supplement semiotics by looking beyond representations, into identities and relations (Fairclough, 1995: 17). Together, it is hoped that this two-step analytical approach will not only help identify representational tropes and how they contribute to the articulation of specific ideological discourses but also serve as a means of triangulation.

Selection of Data

Given the proliferation of anthropomorphism in British advertising, there was no dearth of ad samples to choose from. However, keeping the research objective in mind, it was important to select ads that were fairly recent in origin. For this reason, the universe was confined to advertisements that are less than five years old, i.e. those that first appeared on

TV on or after 2007. It must be mentioned here that the only rationale for five years is the researcher's subjective interpretation of what is considered 'recent', taking into account the socio-political developments in Britain.

Next, the advertisements were put through two sets of filters for a process of elimination. Firstly, advertisements that necessitated the use of animal characters, because of the very nature of the product being advertised, were eliminated. These included pet food, pet insurance, dairy products and the like. This was because, for such ads, anthropomorphism would be a natural creative practice to employ. Secondly, advertisements of non-British brands were also eliminated. This filter was added later on. Initially all anthropomorphic advertisements that appeared on British television, regardless of the country of origin of the product being advertised, were part of the consideration set. However, it was later decided that to make the research more robust it was not just important to consider advertisements on British TV, but those that are also British in origin.

From the remaining sample, advertisements were selected in keeping with the research objective. To achieve a wider coverage, no two ads from the same campaign were chosen. As the ads will be analysed for the specific ideologies of class, gender and nationalism, the samples have been chosen accordingly. While it is acknowledged that a larger sample would have meant greater reliability, taking the research constraints into consideration, a total sample of six ads have been chosen – two for each individual ideology. These ads are:

Brand Name	Advertisement Name	Ideology
Comparethemarket.com	Laptopamabob	Class
Cravendale Milk	Cats with Thumbs	Class
Vodafone Freebies	Top Up and Get Talk	Gender
Andrex Toilet Tissue	It's the Little Things	Gender
Fox's Biscuits	Vinnie the Panda	Nationalism
Churchill Insurance	Wimbledon	Nationalism

Table 1 – Data Sample

The sampling method used was purposive sampling, which involves selecting specific units based on a specific purpose rather than randomly (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2003: 713). This method of sampling, though subjective, was necessitated by the nature of the study which required specifically selecting samples that were amenable to the objective at hand. A random sampling method, though more objective, would not have yielded a sample appropriate for the study.

As far as possible, the ads were sourced directly from the product's website or the product's YouTube page. However, this was not always possible as not all ads were available on the product websites. In such cases, the ads were sourced directly from YouTube.

Design of Research Tools

The six ads have been chosen purposefully from an analytical point of view. Thus the ads have been chosen, divided and analysed for the three themes of class, gender and nationalism. These ideologies thus form the primary level of code.

Each individual ad will then be analysed using the two-step method that was outlined earlier. This secondary level of code has been developed on the basis of the semiotic tools and discourse analysis tools that would be employed to carry out the analysis. The two levels of code together constitute the analysis code for this study *(Appendix B)*. This code has been necessitated by the need to keep the analysis focused, while allowing for a wide coverage.

As each ad is of a different length and has a varying number of scenes, it is important to ensure that uniformity is maintained and that some ads are not analysed more than others simply because of their longer running time. Consequently, individual ads are not going to be analysed scene by scene, but as complete visual presentations. Guided by the codes, key aspects of the ad schema will be analysed. Though dialogues and catch lines will be taken into account, by and large the analysis will focus on the visual aspect of the advertisements. Since the chosen samples vary widely in terms of their schema, not all analyses will give equal importance to each aspect. The idea is to use a selection of tools from the basket of tools (as determined by the code) in the most logical and appropriate manner.

RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION

Analysis and Findings

The ad samples have been selected on the basis of the ideologies of class, gender and nationalism and these categories also form the primary level of analysis. The results are also, therefore, being presented ideology-wise. Within each category, the ads have been subject to semiotic and discourse analysis. These secondary level analyses are not presented separately, but have been combined into loosely defined groups and themes for two reasons. Firstly, often the distinction between the two methods is not clear and there can be significant overlaps, with semiotics being very close to certain discourse tools, such as iconography (Rose, 2007: 154). Secondly, by not focussing overtly on every detail, such a presentation is deemed to be more effective in highlighting the key findings and facilitating interpretation.

Each category begins with a brief summary of the storyline of the ads being analysed. It is reckoned that this is essential for a better understanding of the analysis that follows. *(For more details on the ads, please refer Appendix C).*

Class – Making Distinctions

The two ads chosen for this category are Comparethemarket.com – Laptopamabob (henceforth, CML) and Cravendale Milk – Cats with Thumbs (henceforth, CCT).

In CML, Aleksandr the meerkat, the owner of the 'Compare the Meerkat' website questions his sidekick and aging IT-man Sergei's ability to cope with his increasing workload. After building up a suspense, in which both the audience and Sergei are led to believe that Sergei is going to be fired, Aleksandr springs a surprise by revealing that he has bought a state-of-the-art computer for Sergei (called Laptopamabob) who can now continue to perform his duties well at all times of the day.

In CCT, a man in his dressing gown sits down at the dining table of his home, ready to eat breakfast. As he pours milk into the cereal bowl, his cat begins to stare at him intently. The voice-over says that the reasons cats stare is because they know it's just a matter of time before they grow thumbs and can steal the bottle of milk. Meanwhile the visual shows the house cat (who has now grown a thumb) ganging up with street cats and opening the kitchen door with their thumbs ready to grab the bottle of milk.

'Taste is the practical operator of the transmutation of things…in which class condition signifies itself…' (Bourdieu, 1984: 174-5). In keeping with Bourdieu's idea of distinction, both these ads discursively construct class through signifiers of taste, consumption and lifestyle.

In CML, this is primarily evident in the manner in which the class of the two characters is established through the spaces they occupy. Thus Sergei as the workaholic IT man is shown surrounded by computers, papers and the general mess of an IT room. This is his universe and what defines him. His plain shirt and tie are reflective of his modest consumption habits. On the other hand, as the bourgeois owner of a website, Aleksandr is dressed in an exquisite smoking jacket and his space is replete with an assortment of props that are indicative of his expensive tastes. Heavy drapes, a telescope, globe, antique lamps and the mod cons of today establish Aleksandr not just as a moneyed businessman, but as an aristocrat. The lifestyle thus depicted is a symbolic product of his class which is in sharp contrast to Sergei's class, thus clearly delineating them into two different social strata. Taste can be made evident through a variety of choices and 'symbolic sub-spaces, furniture, clothing or body hexis' are some of them (Bourdieu, 1984: 173). CCT too uses the concept of space to evoke class, but does so by making a distinction between the indoors and the outdoors. The inside of the house, occupied by the man, connotes security, a space of order and in this case, a middle-class home. The cats, on the other hand, are seen as organising themselves into gangs outside the house, in alleyways with graffitied walls, thus marking the outside as distinctly opposite to the inside. The outdoors is connotative of the darker side of the working class in Britain. Here, the ad calls upon intertextual knowledge of British society and mediated depictions of the yob culture (dark alleys and graffitied walls in rough neighbourhoods) to make these connections. These observations seem to validate O'Barr's contention that one of the most frequently depicted aspects of social relationships in advertising are hierarchy, dominance and subordination (1994, cited in Frith and Mueller, 2003: 123)

In both the ads, there is evidence of objects standing in for the idea of class aspiration. Thus, in CML, as Aleksandr tells Sergei that he needs to 'enjoy his twilight years' (00.36 – 00.38), he gently flicks a golf club. The golf club here is symbolic of the good life in Western culture. Arguably a rich man's game, it is generally associated with a relaxed retired life for the wealthy. However, it is something that the salaried Sergei cannot aspire for. He is briefly shown the promise of a comfortable retired life, only to have it taken away from him moments later. In CCT, this evidence is more visible and built into the narrative – namely the bottle of milk. It is what the (working-class) cats yearn for – figuratively, it is their passport to the promise of middle-class life. The bottle of milk is a metaphor for class aspiration. Unlike CML, where all the characters are anthropomorphised, in CCT, it is cats versus the

human, thus making the distinctions between the classes even more pronounced. As the Other of humans (Baker, 1993: ix-x), the cats, and through them, the working class, are relegated to the position of the out group.

Music plays a part in adding to the discursive emphasis. In CML, the long strains of the violin heighten the tragedy of Sergei's plight as an aging over-worked salaried person. The violin is also used in CCT to enhance the sense of 'threat' of a takeover that the middle-class human senses from the working-class cats. Here, music intertextually relies on the background scores of horror movies and murder mysteries to evoke that feeling of 'evil just around the corner'.

Both ads exemplify the idea of using incongruity as humour for challenging the normal order (Gulas and Weinberger, 2006: 191). In the case of CML, the ad is part of a highly successful campaign and the audience has already bought into the ludicrous idea of a bourgeois meerkat and his geeky side-kick. Datson and Mitman point out that human beings often 'recruit animals to symbolize, dramatize, and illuminate aspects of their own experiences' (2005: 2). In that context, the fact that the two primary characters in CML are meerkats, and funny ones at that, seems to help take the edge off the classist and ageist statements the ad makes. In CCT, the ad develops the incongruity on the basis of the familiar cat behaviour of staring at people. The absurdity of the suggestion (of cats growing thumbs) proves as an effective cover to, what otherwise appears to be, an obvious discourse of class differences.

Gender – Of Stereotypes and Others

The two ads that comprise the data sample for this part of the analysis are Vodafone Freebies – Top Up and Get Talk (hereafter, VFT) and Andrex Toilet Tissue – It's the Little Things (hereafter, ALT).

In VFT, a group of ants, presumably friends, are seen in the domestic setting of a home. One of the ants, a female, is busy flipping through a gossip magazine and sharing interesting bits of celebrity gossip with her friend on her mobile phone. The two male ants are sat on the sofa watching a game of football discussing match details with their friends on the mobile. There is a lot of gendered banter between the males and the female.

In ALT, a male puppy prepares for the arrival of his special female friend. As she lands, exits the airport and gets into a taxi, the male puppy tries to get the house in order. He busies

himself in domestic chores, such as baking a cake, arranging flowers and changing the toilet roll. She reaches home, is touched by his effort and rewards him with a Frisbee.

'Advertising mirrors society, and therefore ads that use stereotypes not only reflect but also tend to reinforce the stereotypical representations that are already present in a culture' (Frith and Mueller, 2003: 227). What marks the discourse of gender from those of class and nationalism is the use of tried and tested representational tropes and the reliance on well documented stereotypes. The result is an overall discourse that is less nuanced and for that reason more perceptible. These representations are presented here in two categories. First, the manner in which the two genders are visually represented and second, the way in which gender is constructed in terms of the activities males and females are seen to engage in.

Holland uses the literary term 'marked item' to describe how the female gender is often visually represented – where the addition to an image indicates a deviation from its basic form (2004: 184). Thus, in VFT, the male ants are visually portrayed in a particular way and the female is depicted by an addition of certain features to this male form – she is 'marked' by the addition of the pink eye shadow, the flower on the hair and the bangles on the arm. In a similar manner, in ALT, the female puppy is differentiated from the male puppy by the addition of a single pink flower on her head. The connotation of the flower – female, through its repeated use in anthropomorphic ads, has become naturalised to such an extent that it has now taken the place of a denotation. In both VFT and ALT, we also see the stereotypical use of colour – pink eye shadow in VFT and the pink flower in ALT for the females and blue eyes in VFT and a blue watch in ALT for the males. This is in keeping with the gender appropriate colour stereotype, which is now universal convention.

The gendering also extends to the body language of the characters involved. Thus in ALT, the female puppy uses her feminine charm to tease the boys. In VFT, the male ants are sprawled about on the sofa, while the female ant is confined to her chair with her arms and legs together in a lady-like manner. This is the disciplining of female bodies that Bartky talks about – where the surveillance of patriarchy makes women adopt a certain body language. Unlike men who expand into available space, a woman's space is an enclosure by which she is confined (Bartky, 1988: 66-67).

In terms of what the male and female characters are seen doing, there is a reliance on gender appropriate activities. In VFT, a female ant is shown reading a celebrity gossip magazine – an activity considered typical of women in Britain, arguably, more so among working-class women. The TV watching male ants, on the other hand, are engaged in behaviour that is in

line with what is considered to be stereotypical male behaviour in football-crazy Britain. Like 'The Sturdy Oak' of the 1930s and 'The Big Wheel' of the 1980s (Frith and Mueller, 2003: 242), the glued to television, football crazy British man could arguably be one of the hegemonic masculinities of today.

The earnest male puppy of ALT who attempts domestic chores could, at one level, be perceived as an attempt to portray the new age man who is not afraid to venture outside his comfort zone or, at a more plausible level, a funny inversion of a gender stereotype. Working as a defence mechanism, humour is one of the most common devices for defusing the threat to normative heterosexual gender relations (Gill, 2007: 104). Thus, in showing the male puppy as engaging in activities that are traditionally considered to be in the female domain, the advertisement relies on humour as a means of overcoming the role reversal, thereby confirming the pressures that masculinity is put through comply with the understanding that the 'underlying theme of masculinity is irresponsibility and not nurture' (Lancaster, 1995 cited in Charles, 2002: 179).

In VFT, the positionality of the opening shot, where the female ant is seen flipping through the magazine, gives the impression that she is being looked at. The rest of the ad has the two male characters in the foreground and the female character in the background. In the volley of words between the two sexes, such a placement of the characters seems to indicate that the predominant point of view is the male point of view. In ALT, the entire narrative is told from the male perspective. The story begins with the male puppy thinking of the arrival of his female companion. The world of the ad is his world, where he blunders his way through the house getting it in order to impress the female puppy. These observations seem to reinforce the fact that the symbolically constructed 'Other' and the patterns of exclusion entailed by it are distributed in sign and language, discourse and representation (Pickering, 2001: 72).

A notable absence in both the ads is the human form. Thus, in VFT, not just the main characters, but the football players on TV are ants too. The same goes for ALT where all the supporting characters too are dogs. Daston and Mitman observe that animals simplify the narrative to a point that would be flat if the same tales were recounted about humans (2005: 9). The animal characters in these ads, thus, aid in conveying the blatantly gendered message in an engaging, albeit innocent, manner.

Nationalism – Banal but not Innocent

Fox's Biscuits – Vinnie the Panda (hereafter, FBV) and Churchill Insurance – Wimbledon (hereafter, CIW) are the two advertisements that are being analysed for ideologies of nationalism.

FBV is a single scene advertisement. We see a panda slouched on a chair against a stark white background. He (who we later come to know is called Vinnie) tells us, the audience, that he has now arrived in life and is, consequently, in a position to enjoy the finer things in life such as Fox's biscuits. He takes a bite of Fox's biscuit, makes appreciative noises and urges us to buy Fox's biscuits.

The CIW ad is part of the long-running popular Churchill campaign featuring Churchill, the bulldog. This ad, not uncommonly for the campaign, does not have a linear narrative or a sales message, but was aired to commemorate Wimbledon season in Britain. Churchill along with other spectators is seen enjoying a game of tennis, with the volleys getting quicker and quicker. The ball eventually lands on Churchill's head and the spectators' attention turns to him.

Talking about banal nationalism, Billig points out that banality is not to be confused with powerlessness – 'banal nationalism can hardly be innocent' (Billig, 1995: 7). Thus, the representations of national identity in these ads, though seemingly casual and light-hearted, can be regarded as emphatic statements of British-ness. In Vinnie's appreciation of English biscuits and in Churchill's enjoyment of a game of tennis, the idea of nationhood is, as Foucault said, being discursively created. The British penchant for understatement and disdain for chest-thumping earnestness is the reason for these nuanced discourses of nationalism. However, as there is 'no such thing as one national identity' (Wodak et al, 2009: 4) the two ads invoke these discourses in very divergent ways.

In FBV, Vinnie, by way of his Italian-American accent, dialogue and accompanying music is established as a gangster, presumably with Mafioso connections. The use of a foreign spokesperson is testimony to the fact that 'the national community can only be imagined by also imagining communities of foreigners' (Billig, 1995: 78). It is therefore being argued that this advertisement invokes a kind of nationalistic discourse where national pride is established by getting the approval of 'us' by the 'Other'. The fact that a foreigner who prides himself on his impeccable taste puts his seal of approval on an English product could be interpreted as a case of nationalism by foreigner endorsement. This same idea of nationalism

through outsider approval is taken further within the narrative of the ad where English craftsmanship (of the biscuit) is put on par with established, well-known foreign markers of quality, such as French furniture and Italian shoes. Vinnie's characterisation and the music intertextually forge an association with cult mafia movies such as *The Godfather* and their suave characters. Thus, by getting a cool Mafioso panda to endorse an English brand, England/Britain[7] is constructed as a hip place very unlike its usual stiff upper-lip image. This use of the foreigner, or the Other to piece together one's own national identity has been an important aspect of the nationalistic project. Nationalists live in an international world and constant observation and obsession with the lives and outlooks of foreigners is an integral aspect of their ideology (Billig, 1995: 80).

While in FBV, an effort is made to defy stereotypes and reposition England, by contrast, CIW capitalises on the commonly accepted positive signifiers of British-ness. Most country images are stereotypes and extreme simplifications of reality (Kotler and Gertner, 2002: 251) and it is these stereotypes that CIW works on to build the nationalistic narrative. CIW creates this discourse through two aspects of the ad schema – the anthropomorphic icon itself and the narrative. The anthropomorphic icon, a bulldog, is itself a symbol of British national pride. The British bulldog, like the American eagle, is a known animal symbol of the national self (Baker, 1993: 43). The bulldog's name Churchill, being the same as that of one of Britain's most high-profile Prime Ministers, further enhances his role as a national icon. The entire campaign thus plays on this nationalistic connection and this ad, in particular, with its Wimbledon setting, embodies it completely.

As one of the most widely recognised annual British events, Wimbledon, helps in evoking British-ness through a symbol that cuts across social stratifiers. As Hall notes, one of the functions of nationalism is to create the discourse of a 'national family' by eliminating differences of class, race and so on (Cited in Wodak, et al., 2009: 24). As a non-partisan international sporting event, Wimbledon helps in perpetuating this 'myth' of a national family. Unlike in the other ads being analysed, there is physical human-animal contact in this ad, as the other spectators pause to stroke Churchill when a ball falls on his head. Nationalism is not just a doctrine, but a basic way of talking, thinking and acting (Calhoun, 1997: 11). One such instance of thinking and acting that is symbolic of being typically British is what is evoked here, namely the British love for animals. This is once again a safe symbolic choice; widely regarded as a pan-British trait that cuts across all strata of society. This is evident from O'Farrell's surprised observation – 'it seems bizarre that the patron saint of the

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7 Though fully aware of the geographical and political differences, for analytical ease, this research considers

English is someone who is famous for killing an animal' (2009: 175). In its bid to forge a coherent national identity, FBV discursively constructs Britain as a middle class[8] nation of animal lovers, sport enthusiasts and one that is proud of its past (as implied by the name, Churchill). What probably describes only a very small part of the British population is depicted as the normative British identity – an exemplification of the nationalistic 'syntax of hegemony', by which the part is claimed to represent the whole (Billig, 1995: 88).

The reliance on humour is evident here as in the case of the other ideologies. In FBV, humour is built into the characterisation of the panda. His body language, accent and the very fact that he is a panda help one easily reconcile his dubious criminal background. Humour also help trivialise the blatant class statement that he makes – the fact that he makes it known that he has come into money and is therefore able to enjoy the finer things in life. 'Within the realm of humour, almost anything is allowed and implausibilities do not have to be camouflaged' (Mulkay, 1988: 21).

Discussion

Anthropomorphism, Advertising and Ideology: The Nexus

A common myth is that non-human animals are not 'real' persons but only metaphoric ones, and, as a consequence, we can use them in many ways without being impeded by moral sensibilities (Milton, 2005: 266). The above analysis seems to reiterate this observation. Anthropomorphic animal characters in advertising, it has emerged, are more often than not, being used in such a manner.

Throughout the literature review for this study, a consistent finding was a tension between the existence of strong ideologies of class, race, gender and so on in Britain and an increasing discomfort with any acknowledgement of these ideologies in popular culture. Some scholars attribute it to the new PC – politically correct – culture that is plaguing the country. Hall refers to PC as a 'strong strain of self-righteousness' which is the result of 'the culturing of politics' (1994: 167,168). Viewed predominantly non-normatively, some scholars attribute the recent surge in PC to the growing multiculturalism in Britain. The era of PC is marked by conflicts around race, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, class, inequality and so on (Hall, 1994: 167). As a result, all forms of public communication, advertising included, has had to watch

England and Britain synonymously.

[8] Please refer http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/jun/19/tennis-wimbledon-middle-class-malaise

what is said and portrayed and ideological views on the above can no longer be expressed with the same candour as before.

However, history stands testimony to the fact that popular culture has found an outlet for prohibited discourses in one way or another. And anthropomorphism has often aided in providing this outlet. For instance, in its widespread popularity as a nursery rhyme, it is often overlooked that 'Baa Baa Black Sheep' was reportedly composed as a sign of resentment against the heavy taxation of wool in medieval England[9]. An anthropomorphised black sheep was thus used to speak the unspoken.

The findings from this study seem to indicate that anthropomorphism in advertising too performs a similar function. They show that anthropomorphic animal characters are being represented as humans with human emotions but shorn of the ideological correctness that is required of humans today. They are seen as engaging in fairly forceful discourses of class, gender and nationalism. The animal form, it appears, together with the rhetoric of humour that is traditionally associated with animal characters, provides a veil that helps in furthering the ideological aspect of advertising. The marketing function of advertising, where these anthropomorphic characters play the role of brand icons, further helps in masking their ideological role from view.

In Britain, humour is very often used as a knee-jerk reaction to overcome uncomfortable or awkward situations, the maxim being when in doubt, joke (Fox, 2005: 402). The use of animals and humour in conjunction to drive home bitter truths is fundamentally the idea behind carnival. Cosslett speaks about how the carnival in children's stories involved an inversion of hierarchy akin to Bakhtin's carnivalesque. This inversion, she says, gave an opportunity for animals to temporarily assume a position of responsibility, often with comic effect (2006: 2). Anthropomorphism in advertising is perhaps, arguably, the modern-day carnival. In advertising, animals, humour and absurdity come together to deliver discourses that are human and forbidden.

For conceptual clarity, the data samples were analysed for individual ideologies. However, an interesting, but not wholly surprising, finding has been that these ideologies cannot be confined to water-tight compartments. While the aim was to look for evidence of a particular ideology, in the course of the analysis, multiple ideological discourses emerged, within the same ad. Thus, it was revealed that CML advanced class discourses by using age as a

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[9] Source: http://www.rhymes.org.uk (Accessed on 9th August 2012)

reference point. In a similar vein, though FBV is mostly about nationalism, there are also discernible discourses of class. Gill's observation of the 'intimate interrelationships between gender, race, class and other forms of oppression' (2007: 29) seems to authenticate this finding.

Talking about the prerequisites of advertising, Fowles says:

> 'The human mind has two components of interest to the creators of advertising. One is the area of the mind governing the individual as a social creature, and the other is the area of the mind housing basic instincts, impulses, drives, and needs. The most successful advertising will incorporate symbolizing appeals to both' (1996: 93).

The move towards figurative advertising is perhaps indicative of this attempt to include 'symbolizing' marketing appeals that resonate with inherent social beliefs. Ideological codes work to organise a congruent and coherent set of meanings that constitute the common sense of society (Fiske, 1987: 6) and as a platform that lends itself to such discourses, advertising works on this 'common sense', packaging them in appealing figurative symbols, anthropomorphism being one of them. However, due to the current PC culture, these discourses are being increasingly stifled in the public domain. The growing popularity of anthropomorphic advertising is strongly indicative of a possible vehicle for a back-door entry for these 'common-sense' discourses.

Reflections on Methodology and Results

While the chosen methodology has to a great extent helped in answering the research question, it cannot be overlooked that images have an inherent degree of ambiguity which makes them unsuitable to precise scholarly meanings (Lemke, 2002: 321). Further, as Rose points out, a problem with discourse analysis is not knowing when to stop making intertextual connections (2007: 169). The fact that both semiotic analysis and discourse analysis are subjective methods with significant degree of researcher bias and the fact that this research is based on a small sample of British television advertisements, limit the generalisability of the findings. Advertising does not work by creating values out of nothing, but it draws upon and rechannels concerns that the culture already shares (Jhally, 2003: 251). The findings and the conclusions can therefore only be indicative.

In the discussion, the rationale for the increased use of anthropomorphism was attributed largely to the recent surge in PC culture in Britain. However, this interpretation is challenged

in the light of Stourton's observation that the idea of ideological correctness has a long pedigree in Britain (2008: 8). There is also the issue of focussing too much on the visual. Firstly, this could have resulted in interpretations that have ignored the larger advertising context and secondly, ways of seeing are historically, geographically, culturally and socially specific (Rose, 2007: 16). Thus, my cultural background, fondness for animals and long-standing interest in mediated anthropomorphism could have resulted in the privileging of certain readings of the advertisements over others, inadvertently narrowing the focus of the research. While it was mentioned in the methodological chapter that my not being British was an advantage for this study, it cannot be denied that, not having been raised in this culture, I could have misinterpreted certain signs or missed out on some minute nuances of British life and popular culture.

The nature of this study necessitated an expansive literature review spanning many subject areas and it may appear that, at times, depth has been compromised for breadth. A pre-study content analysis of anthropomorphic advertisements in the UK would have been helpful in providing a macro picture on the trends in the use of anthropomorphic animal characters and some interesting insights into how these have changed over time. This could have provided a stronger empirical context for the study.

CONCLUSIONS

This study has looked at the ideological discourses that lay veiled beneath the imagery of funny anthropomorphic animal characters in advertising. The methodology involved visual analysis (semiotics and discourse) of six British television advertisements that use anthropomorphism. The ads were analysed for discourses of class, gender and nationalism. By looking at the underlying themes in the use of anthropomorphic animal characters in advertising, this study has attempted to bring together and build an empirical bridge between the three broad conceptual areas of anthropomorphism, advertising and ideology.

Advertising's ideological function is well established, but in an increasingly politically correct Britain, public discourses of class, gender and nationalism are frowned upon and often censored. However, the dominant ideological discourses of our times, the 'common sense' is so much a part of our societal fabric that despite the accent on political correctness they still make their way into our mediated discourses, in this case advertisements. This study seems to indicate that anthropomorphism, and the flexibility accorded by the accompanying humour, provides a clandestine means to this end.

Anthropomorphism has, historically, often been used for the articulation of suppressed discourses, as seen in the example of 'Baa Baa Black Sheep'. However, the fact that there is now a move by politically correct teachers to ban the rhyme in schools, because of its supposed racist undertones (Hall, 1994: 173), points towards the possibility that mediated anthropomorphism too has begun to come under the radar of political correctness. Only time will tell what implications this will have, if at all, for the future of anthropomorphic advertising.

It is hoped that this study has in a small way opened up the research and discussion on anthropomorphism in advertising to include interests outside of marketing. It has applied the learning from historical examples of mediated anthropomorphism to the genre of advertising with the aim of unearthing hidden ideological discourses. This study is firmly set in the British context and an interesting extension to the study would be a cross-cultural one set across multiple cultures. Such a study could either help validate the findings of this work or open up new areas for investigation. Also, as the very existence of advertising as a genre is justified by its sales function, a study that combines an inquiry into the ideological aspect of anthropomorphism and relates it to the marketing success of such advertisements could provide an interesting insight into what this 'common sense' of ideology ultimately translates to. However, the most ambitious project of all would be one that studies anthropomorphic advertising at three levels – the production level, the textual level and the reception level. Such a study would help understand the predominant role played by anthropomorphism, be it as a figurative tool, a marketing tactic or an ideological cloak. On a more macro level, it is being hoped that any study on mediated anthropomorphism, through an understanding of our relationship with animals (who some authors argue are our 'Other') could, perhaps, help us understand a little more about ourselves.
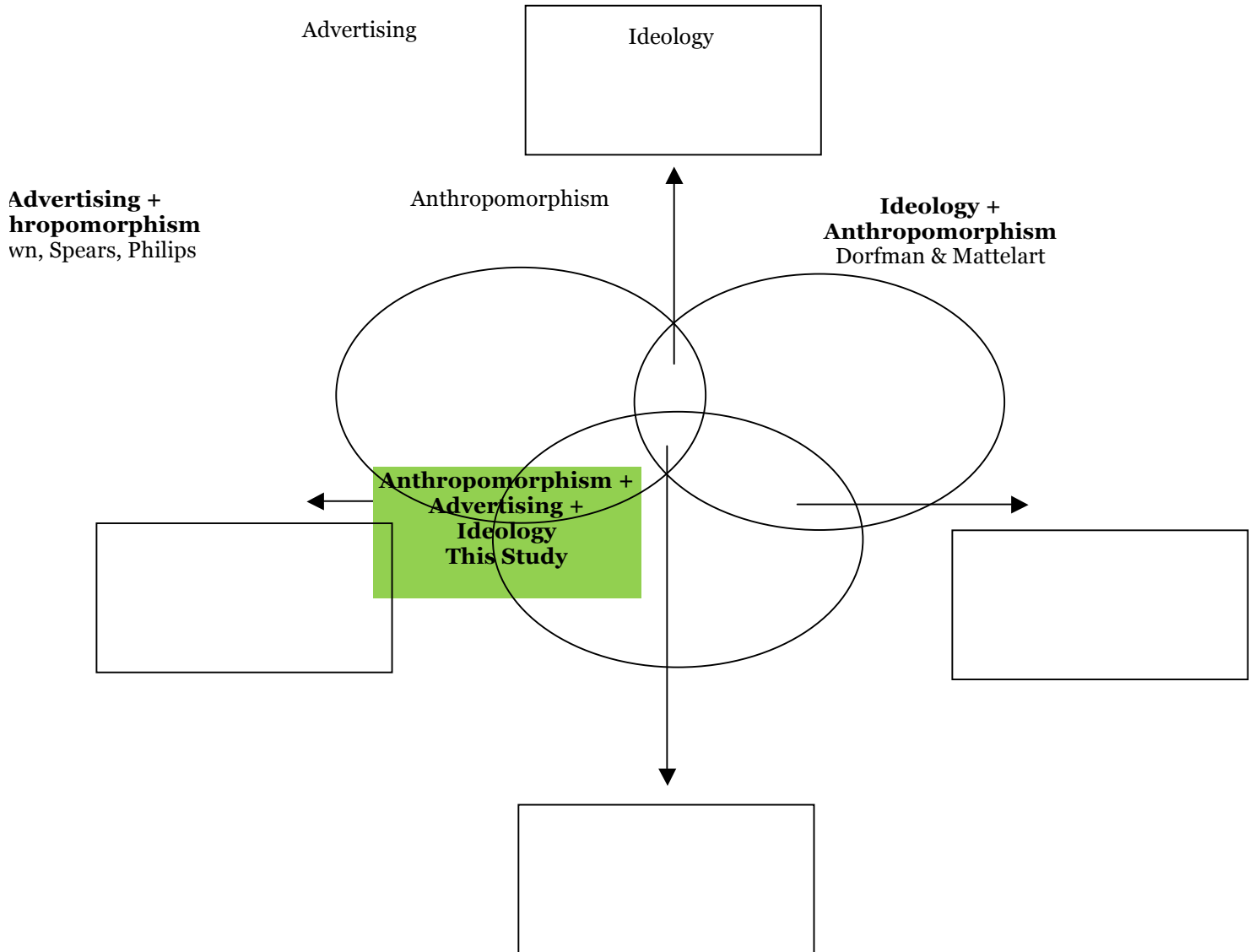
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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A – The Research Area

Advertising

Ideology

Anthropomorphism

**Advertising +
hropomorphism**
wn, Spears, Philips

**Ideology +
Anthropomorphism**
Dorfman & Mattelart

**Anthropomorphism +
Advertising +
Ideology
This Study**

APPENDIX B – The Analysis Code

Level of Analysis	Codes		
Primary Level	Class	Gender	Nationalism
Secondary Level	Step 1 Signs and Symbols – To decipher signified meanings through an examination of: • Dress • Accessories • Props • Colour • Facial features • Context Step 2 Discourse – To unearth recurring themes and discursive practices through an examination of: • The narrative/story of the ad • Characterisation of the animals • Intertextuality • The use of space/location • The visible and the invisible • Positionality/field of vision • Hierarchy • Music		

APPENDIX C – Data Samples

The narratives of the ads vary widely – while one has dialogue and background music, another has only a jingle and yet another, neither dialogue nor jingle. Hence, for the sake of uniformity, instead of a transcription, a detailed storyline for each ad is provided, along with two relevant screen shots.

Advertisement 1 – Comparethemarket.com, Laptopamabob

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iBcmJYKbUaw

Year: 2011, Running Time: 1.00 minute

Sergei, the IT specialist is having a hard time in the IT room, dealing with the requests for credit card deals that are mistakenly being placed at the website he manages – www.comparethemeerkat.com. His boss and owner of the website, Aleksandr pops in and instructs Sergei to come to his office. In Aleksandr's office, while Sergei finds a chair to sit on, Aleksandr looks at web reports and remarks that things are getting worse. He adds that he is worried that it's getting too much for Sergei to manage, especially now that he is getting on in age. Aleksandr suggests that Sergei should now consider taking it easy and Sergei is seen looking nervous like someone who is on the verge of losing his job. Aleksandr adds to the suspense by saying that he has taken an important decision. He then springs a surprise as he reveals that he has bought a new 'laptopamabob' for Sergei who, he says, can now continue to carry out his duties all day and all night. The last scene shows both the characters in their night-clothes. While in the foreground, Aleksandr implores the audience to know the difference between the two websites, in the background, Sergei is sat on his bed working and falling asleep on his laptopamabob.

Advertisement 2 – Cravendale Milk, Cats with Thumbs

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h6CcxJQq1x8

Year: 2012, Running Time: 00.56 minute

A man in a dressing gown is sat at his dining table pouring milk into the cereal bowl. As he does so, his cat stares at him intently. The voice over explains that the reason cats stare thus is because they know it's just a matter of time before they grow thumbs. Meanwhile, the house cat who is now playing with a ball outside suddenly realises that it has grown a thumb.

This is followed by a montage of shots that show different cats engaged in various activities that require a thumb, such as filing finger nails, knitting, turning the page of a book and so on. The voice over then says that if these cats got together, they would be a gang of cats with thumbs, a formidable army with only one thing on their mind. The visual in the mean time shows gangs of cats in alleyways and the garden, some of them with hats on, snapping their thumbs and opening the door to the kitchen. From inside the house, the man sees the door open, revealing the gang of cats ready to grab the bottle of milk with the help of their thumbs. Sensing that an attack is imminent, he jumps out of his chair, bottle of milk in hand.

Advertisement 3 – Vodafone Freebies, Top Up and Get Talk

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1xYVF-008GI

Year: 2011, Running Time: 00.30 minute

A female ant is at her dining table flipping through the pages of what seems to be a gossip magazine. She is busy discussing the contents of the magazine first with one friend (Jen) and then immediately another (Suzie), on her mobile – her many arms helping her to make the two calls almost simultaneously. Listening to this the two male ants who are watching football on TV, ask her in a sarcastic manner if this is indeed vital news to share with the whole hive. The female ant explains that she can make free calls to everyone on Vodafone. A goal is scored in the football game and this gets the two male ants excited. They give each other first bumps and get busy on their mobiles discussing the goal with their mates. The female ant asks them if this is vital news indeed, to which one of the male ants replies that he too can make free calls to everyone on Vodafone. Unimpressed, the female ant pulls a face. The voice-over takes over with the marketing message.

Advertisement 4 – Andrex Toilet Tissue, It's the Little Things

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=brZ88Byh544

Year: 2010, Running Time: 00.40 minute

As the music starts, a puppy is seen working on his laptop, checking his watch and looking out of his window at an aeroplane. As he shuts his laptop, the camera pans to a photograph on his table that shows him with two other puppies, one of them a female. The female puppy walks out of the airport with her luggage and the male puppy is shown baking a cake. The jingle begins 'little things...that you do...' The female puppy is now in a taxi and gets playful with puppies in an adjacent taxi. The male puppy meanwhile trips over while trying to arrange some flowers. As the taxi pulls in, the male puppy is seen getting the bath ready and replacing the toilet roll. As he pulls out a toilet roll, it unrolls and creates a mess. The female puppy is now at the gate and the male puppy has finally managed to get his act together. The female puppy walks into the bathroom, is touched by how impeccable it is and gives a Frisbee

to the male puppy to show her appreciation. The jingle meanwhile has come to an end (the gist of the lyrics is how the little things mean a lot) and the voice-over completes the advertising message.

Advertisement 5 – Fox's Biscuits, Vinnie the Panda

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wP0mXUCqOCc&feature=related

Year: 2008, Running Time: 00.30 minute

Against a stark white background, a panda is slouched on a black leather sofa. The table next to him has an old-style telephone and a bottle of milk. As the panda puts down a glass of milk on the table, he says in an Italian-American accent that he has reached a stage in his career where he can enjoy the finer things in life. Conscious of his surroundings, he knocks on wood and looks from side to side as he says he wouldn't want to say anything he would regret on a telephone. The finer things in life he names are handmade shoes from Italy, furniture from France and Fox's biscuits from England. He then pulls out a packet of the biscuits and says these guys (Fox's) know a thing or two about biscuits. Looking at a biscuit he marvels at its craftsmanship. He then takes a bite of the biscuit and impressed by its taste tells the audience to go to the supermarket to get some biscuits. He instructs us to tell them at the supermarket that (he) Vinnie sent us for the good stuff. As Vinnie continues to enjoy his biscuit, dunking it into the glass of milk and making appreciative sounds, the Mafia-esque music takes over.

Advertisement 6 – Churchill Insurance, Wimbledon

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-BEvCAwFQC0

Year: 2012, Running Time: 00.34

Churchill the dog, along with a few humans, is intently watching what appears to be a game of tennis. There are sounds of the racquet hitting the ball as Churchill and the others move their heads from left to right following the ball. The same shot is then shown in close-up as Churchill's eyes roll in slow motion from left to right as it follows the ball. The spectators on either said and at the back are doing the same. The volleys get faster and faster and Churchill's eyes move at speed from left to right. This continues until the ball lands on Churchill's head to sounds of 'aww' from the spectators. The two spectators on either side of Churchill (one male and one female) pat Churchill on his head and tickle his chin. Churchill, who is embarrassed by this attention, says the ball is out and out of order as the scene fades out.

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