BRAND ANTHROPOMORPHISM:
THE LITERARY LIVES OF MARKETING MASCOTS

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Abstract

There is no end to the brands that lend themselves to anthropomorphic comparison. As an area under researched, the ultimate aim of this thesis is to improve our understanding of the phenomenon of brand anthropomorphism via focusing on one of the most prominent tactics currently being used by industry – the use of marketing mascots.

This research begins by theoretically positioning the topic in a rich body of literature. Drawing on branding literature, the multidimensional nature of brands is explored as a starting point for understanding brand mascots. The fundamental theories referred to are integrated to form the *Brand Puzzle*. Next, the phenomenon of anthropomorphism is examined by referring to literatures from the disciplines of anthropology, animal behaviour, English literature and religion. To complete the extensive literature review, this thesis draws on marketing, advertising, psychology and consumer behaviour literature to reveal any existing classifications for brand anthropomorphism prior to introducing a new typology. Additionally, an investigation into the use of mascots is carried out paying particular attention to their conceptual development and their 'humanity'.

By designing an interpretive case study methodology that relies on a variety of research techniques, including netnography, interviews and photo-essays, as well as a provocative style of presentation, this thesis sets out firstly to explore the development of three marketing mascots on the social media site of Facebook: *Aleksandr Orlov* mascot for price comparison website CompareTheMarket.com; *The M&M's Spokescandies* mascots for Mars' M&M's chocolate; and *Mr Peanut* mascot for Planters peanuts. A literary approach was adopted when tackling this mysterious process of creating marketing mascots. Secondly, this thesis sets out to analyse consumer engagement with the brands via their engagement with the selected marketing mascots. Six forms of consumer engagement were identified which were perceived to have an effect on the narrative of marketing mascots.

The discussion section of this thesis creatively links the empirical evidence presented in the findings chapters and the insights from the literature with novels, storytelling and genre reading. The prominence of these have led to the development of a *Literary Wheel* model that has scope for use by industry and offers a direction for future research. In conclusion, this research contributes to knowledge in the field of brand anthropomorphism. It provides a formula for the creation of captivating marketing mascots that fulfil the needs of our increasingly communication hungry culture, encouraging elevated consumer engagement and the development of stronger consumer-brand relationships.

Acknowledgements

Access to Contents

I hereby declare that with effect from the date on which the thesis is deposited in the Library of the University of Liverpool, I permit the Librarian of the University to allow the thesis to be copied in whole or in part without reference to me on the understanding that such authority applies to the provision of single copies made for study purposes or for inclusion within the stock of another library. *This restriction does not apply to the British Library Thesis Service (which is permitted to copy the thesis on demand for loan or sale under the terms of a separate agreement) nor to the copying or publication of the title and abstract of the thesis.* IT IS A CONDITION OF USE OF THIS THESIS THAT ANYONE WHO CONSULTS IT MUST RECOGNISE THAT THE COPYRIGHT RESTS WITH THE AUTHOR AND THAT NO QUOTATION FROM THE THESIS AND NO INFORMATION DERIVED FROM IT MAY BE PUBLISHED UNLESS THE SOURCE IS PROPERLY ACKNOWLEDGED.

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Glossary of Terms

Alliteration	A literary device which refers to neighbouring words that begin with the same sound or letter
Allusion	A literary device comprising a figurative or symbolic reference to something supposed to be known, but not explicitly mentioned
AMOP	A framework by Callcott & Lee (1995) which describes spokes-characters on the four dimensions of Appearance, Medium, Origin and Promotion
Anagram	A literary device which encompasses the change of one word or phrase into another by the transposition of its letters
Animism	The attribution of life to the non-living
Anthropomorphism	The ascription of human characteristics to anything non-human
Assumptions	Propositions that are taken for granted, as if they were true based upon presupposition without preponderance of the facts.
Autobiography	A subgenre of Biography, in which the subject and the author are the same person
Axiom	An assumption that is considered to be self-evident or otherwise fundamental
Belief	A descriptive thought that a person holds about something
Biography	A narrative, intimate or gossipy history of the life of a person, house, city, or commodity. Most biographies provide an account from birth to death, or to the time of writing
Black Comedy (or Dark Comedy)	It is a form of comedy which deals with disturbing subjects such as death, drugs, terrorism, rape and war
Blue Comedy	A form of comedy which is typically sexual in nature. It uses profane language often portraying sexism, racism or homophobic views
Brand	A name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or combination of them which is intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors
Brand culture	Refers to the cultural influences and implications of brands
Brand equity	Describes the value of having a well-known brand
Brand identity	The elements of a brand i.e. name, logo etc. which makes it identifiable and recognisable to consumers
Brand image	Perceptions about a brand as reflected by the brand associations held in consumer memory
Brand longevity	Describes the endurance of the brand
Brand management	A communication function that includes analysis and planning on how that brand is positioned in the market, which target public the brand is targeted at, and maintaining a desired reputation of the brand
Brand narrative	Equates to brand story-telling; it is any account of events connected to a brand, and presented to consumers in a sequence of written or verbal words
Brand positioning	Arranging for a brand to occupy a clear, distinctive, and desirable place relative to competing products in the minds of target consumers
Brand Puzzle	A brand is the resultant entity of numerous constituents (puzzle pieces) put together.
Branding Iceberg	A model presented by Davidson's (1997) which suggests that brands are like icebergs, where brand elements above the line are visible to consumers, while constituents under the line are invisible
Burlesque	A disreputable form of comic entertainment with titillating dances or striptease
Case study	A careful study of some social unit (such as a corporation or division within a corporation) that attempts to determine what factors led to its success or failure
Character Comedy	A form of comedy that derives humour from stereotypically invented personas

Chiasmus	A literary device which comprises the crossing or inversion of the order of words or sounds
Chronotope	A literary device which knits together a particular time and place, and by doing so evokes a more general union of space and time
Comedy	A literary genre meaning a humorous discourse generally intended to amuse
Competitive advantage	An advantage over competitors gained by offering consumers greater value, either through lower prices or by providing more benefits that justify higher prices
Consumer Culture Theory (or CCT)	A framework that refers to a family of theoretical perspectives that address the dynamic relationships between consumer actions, the marketplace, and cultural meanings
Cringe Comedy	A type of comedy which relies on embarrassment. Humour comes from inappropriate actions or words
Culture	Socially patterned human thought and action
Customer/consumer engagement	The interaction of consumers with one another, with the company and the brand
Deadpan Comedy	The telling of jokes without a change in facial expressions or a change in emotions
Desire	To wish or long for; crave; want
Differentiation	Process of distinguishing a brand/product/service from others, to make it more attractive to a particular target market
Doppelgänger	A term derived from the German language and literally translates into 'double walker'. It refers to a counterfeit or a copy of the real/genuine
Emic	Features or items analysed with respect to their role as structural units in a system, as in behavioural science or linguistics
Epistemology	The philosophical theory of knowledge; how we know what we know
Epithet	An adjective or adjectival phrase used to define a characteristic quality or attribute of some person or thing
Ethnography	The branch of anthropology that deals with the scientific description of individual human societies
Etic	Features or items analysed without considering their role as a structural unit in a system, as in behavioural science or linguistics
Facebook (or FB)	A social networking site on the internet, used by individuals to connect with family, friends and colleges. Visit www.facebook.com
Family saga	A literary genre which chronicles the lives and doings of a family or a number of related or interconnected families over a period of time
Farce	A comedy that aims at entertaining through highly exaggerated extravagant and thus improbable situations. Due to a large number of plot twists and random occurring events, farces are often highly incomprehensible plot-wise
Fiction	An imaginative work
Foil	A character who contrasts with another character (usually the protagonist) in order to highlight particular qualities
Genre	Meaning kind, a kind of literature. Genres can be contained within one another and they can also overlap. It is also possible to mix genres and combine them
Grounded Theory (or GT)	A systematic methodology in the social sciences involving the discovery of theory through the analysis of data
Hermeneutic interpretation	An iterative process which involves the interpretation and reinterpretation of data in order to gain a holistic understanding of the whole
Homophone	A word having the same sound as another, but differing from it in meaning and usually in spelling
Hyperbaton	A figurative construction, changing or inverting the natural order of words or clauses
Hyperbole	A figure of speech in which the expression is an evident exaggeration
Improvisational Comedy (or Improvisation)	A form of comedy where the plot, characters and dialogue are made up in the moment
In-depth interviews	A long conversation between two people (the interviewer and the interviewee) where

questions are asked by the interviewer to obtain information from the interviewee

Insult Comedy	A form of comedy which consists mainly of offensive insults directed at the audience and other performers or characters
Intangible asset	An identifiable non-monetary asset without physical substance
Interactivity	Continuous two-way transfer of information
Internet (or the Net)	The vast and burgeoning global web of computer networks with no central management or ownership; the World Wide Web is its user-friendly access standard.
Interpretivism	A tradition in social science with the view that all knowledge is a matter of interpretation.
Irony	In its simplest form is a trope that consists of saying one thing and meaning something else
Juxtaposition	A literary device wherein the author places a person, concept, place, idea or theme parallel to another
Lampooning	An insulting attack upon a person, in verse or prose, usually involving caricature and ridicule
Lifestyle	A person's pattern of living as expressed in his or her activities, interests and opinions
Limitation	The quality of being limited
Literary criticism	The study, evaluation, and interpretation of literature
Lovemarks	Brands that consumers are in love with
Malapropism	A literary device which comprises the inaccurate use of a long word or words in a confused and comical manner
Marketing	A social and managerial process whereby individuals and groups obtain what they need and want through creating and exchanging products and value with others
Marketing Strategy	The marketing logic by which the business unit hopes to achieve its marketing objectives
Market-orientated	A market orientated business reacts to what consumers want and need
Mascot	A person, animal, or object that is believed to bring good luck, especially one kept as the symbol of an organisation
Metaphor	A figure of speech that describes a subject by asserting that it is, on some point of comparison, the same as another otherwise unrelated object
Mixed Methods	Is the use of numerous methods to investigate the same research question
Mockumentary	A parody with the conventions of a documentary
Motive (drive)	A need that is sufficiently pressing to direct the person to seek satisfaction of the need
Musical Comedy	Humour is derived from music with or without lyrics
Mythology	A body or collection of myths belonging to a people and addressing their origin, history, deities, ancestors, and heroes
Narrative	A story with the point of view of the narrator
Narrative Analysis	Derived from literary criticism
Need	A state of felt deprivation
Netnography	Is the branch of Ethnography that analyses the free behaviour of individuals on the internet
Observational Comedy	Jokes about everyday life by inflating the importance of trivial things, also by observing the silliness of something that society accepts as normal
Online interviews	Similar to 'in-depth interviews' only taking place on the internet
Onomatopoeia	A literary device which refers to whose very sound is very close to the sound they are meant to depict
Ontological ambiguity	A state of existence which is neither real or imaginary

Ontology	The metaphysical study of the nature of being and existence
Paradigm	The generally accepted perspective of a particular discipline at a given time
Pathetic fallacy	A type of literary device whereby the author ascribes the human feelings of one or more of his/her characters to non-human objects or nature or phenomena. It is a type of personification, and is known to occur more by accident and less on purpose
Personality	A person's distinguishing psychological characteristics that lead to relatively consistent and lasting responses to his or her own environment; it is the particular combination of emotional, attitudinal, and behavioural response patterns of an individual
Personification	The representation of an abstract quality or idea in the form of a person
Phantom	Something apparently seen, heard, or sensed, but having no physical reality; An image that appears only in the mind; an illusion
Phonetic pun	A form of word play that suggests two or more meanings, by exploiting similar-sounding words, for an intended humorous or rhetorical effect
Photo-essays	Photographs which are accompanied by analytical essays
Portmanteau	In literature, this device refers to the practice of joining together two or more words in order to create an entirely new word
Positivism	A doctrine contending that sense perceptions are the only admissible basis of human knowledge and precise thought; The application of this doctrine in logic, epistemology, and ethics.
Primary data	Information collected for the specific purpose at hand
Product	Anything that can be offered to a market for attention, acquisition, use, or consumption that might satisfy a want or need. It includes physical objects, services, persons, places, organisations and ideas
Product recall	The ability to recollect a product from memory
Product-orientated	A business develops products based on what it is good at making
Prop Comedy	Relies on ridiculous props or everyday objects used in humorous ways
Protagonist	The principal character in a work of fiction
Qualitative research	Research that derives data from observation, interviews, or verbal interactions and focuses on the meanings and interpretations of the participants to gain a deeper understanding
Reliability	The trait of deserving trust and confidence; the quality of being dependable and reliable
Retail therapy	The action of shopping in order to cheer oneself up
Romance	A literary genre focused on romantic love
Satire	In literature, satire refers to the practice of making fun of a human weakness or character flaw
Secondary data	Information that already exists somewhere, having been collected for another purpose
Self-actualisation	To develop or achieve one's full potential
Semantic pun	A form of word play that suggests two or more meanings, by exploiting multiple meanings of words, for an intended humorous or rhetorical effect
Service	Any activity or benefit that one party can offer to another that is essentially intangible and does not result in the ownership of anything
Sidekick	A close companion who is generally regarded as secondary to the one he accompanies
Simile	Regarded as a subset of metaphor. It is a verbal comparison of one thing to another usually using the words *like* or *as*
Simulacra	These are entities that have no original or surviving original in the actual world, but are thought nonetheless to be 'real'
Sitcom (or Situation Comedy)	A form of comedy that features characters sharing the same common environment (such as home or workplace) engaging in humours dialogue

Slapstick	A type of comedy involving exaggerated, boisterous actions (e.g. a pie in the face), farce, violence and activities which may exceed the boundaries of common sense
Skaz	A Russian genre consisting of a fictional sketch written with colloquial verve, often imitating the manner of a cloddish, lowbrow, talkative narrator
Sketch Comedy	A shorter version of a sitcom
Social Media	Internet-based tools for sharing and discussing information among people. It is based on user participation and user-generated content.
Spokes-character	A fictional character who advocates a brand or company
Spoof Comedy	The recreation of a book, film or play for humour and ridicule
Story	A usually fictional prose or verse intended to interest or amuse the hearer or reader. It is primarily a cohesive and logical sequence of events that demonstrate a change in the state of the subject
Surreal Comedy	A form of humour based on bizarre juxtapositions, absurd situations and nonsense logic
Touch points	The interface of a product/service/brand with customers, non-customers, employees and other stakeholders before, during and after a transaction, respectively a purchase
Trademark	A symbol, word, or words legally registered or established by use as representing a company or product
Tragicomedy	A literary genre that combines elements of tragedy and comedy, either by providing a happy ending to a potentially tragic story or by some more complex blending of serious and light moods
Twitter	A social networking site on the internet, used by individuals to communicate short messages of less than 140 characters. Visit www.twitter.com
Validity	The quality of being valid and rigorous
Visual analysis	The deconstruction of visual images in order to reveal hidden/layered meanings
Want	The form taken by a human need as shaped by culture and individual personality
Wit	Amusing verbal cleverness
YouTube	A social networking site on the internet, used by individuals to share videos. Visit www.youtube.com
Zoomorphism	The ascription of animal characteristics to humans

Chapter 1. Introducing Brand Anthropomorphism

This chapter commences by presenting the rationale and justification for this research project. It begins by introducing anthropomorphism as an area for investigation at the heart of the dynamic marketing discourse on branding. It continues by stating the research aims and objectives and elaborates on the research perspectives adopted throughout this thesis. A general overview of the methodology and case study selection is given. This chapter finishes by outlining the structure and content of the entire thesis.

1.1   Rationale and justification of the study

We live in a 'land of desire' (Barber, 2007), a land where brands have taken centre stage, stealing the limelight away from basic commodities. Today, a world without brands is practically unthinkable. Brands are so intrinsically fundamental to our rising consumerist culture, that a world without brands is a world devoid of cultural associations (Balmer, 2006). While brands can provide a powerful lens by which to comprehend culture; culture too can provide a window through which some of the quintessential characteristics of brands may be distinguished. With increasing rivalry amongst companies, it comes as no surprise that they are constantly looking for the next big thing; the thing that will differentiate them from their competitors; the thing that will increase repeat sales, instil consumer loyalty and encourage consumer engagement. Perhaps in anthropomorphism lays the answer.

From the "Ho! Ho! Ho!" exhortations of the Jolly Green Giant to the chirpy giggles of the Pillsbury Doughboy; from the energetic Coco Monkey to the spooky Frankenberry; from the controversial, Joe Camel to the much loved, Elsie Cow. There is no end to the brands that lend themselves to anthropomorphic comparison (Brown S. , 2010). Of course, marketers were not the first to attach anthropomorphic associations to products and brands. Evidence suggests that the phenomenon existed since the Neolithic Age (9500BC); that it is instilled into our humanity and cannot be escaped. Much like the modern day Barbie Doll, Neolithic figurines are anthropomorphic representations of the human body which contain extraordinary potential for social, political and symbolic meaning (Bailey, 2005). They stimulate discussions about mortality, humanity and sexuality; and they raise questions such as 'what is anthropomorphism?' and 'why does it occur?' – Questions that have been long deliberated over by philosophers, and are still being raised today. The work of Guthrie

(1993), Freling *et al* (2005), Epley *et al* (2007), Aggarwal *et al* (2007) and Puzakova *et al* (2009) to name but a few, attempt to address such questions. Unexpectedly however, only one study – Hart, Jones, & Royne (2013) – delves into the origins of anthropomorphism from a marketing perspective.

Eleven millennia later, the phenomenon of anthropomorphism is ever increasing in popularity amongst marketers who design their brands and products with human characteristics and representations in mind. A celebrated example of this is the infamous Coca-Cola bottle, with its smooth lines and curves emulating an alluring female figure. Thus, it comes as no surprise that strategic decision making is strongly influenced by anthropomorphism. Research in this field will undoubtedly have significant implications on the way industry construct and communicate their brands and products. Realising the importance of this subject area, various researchers' attention was instigated towards brand anthropomorphism. This is emphasised by the recent *Journal of Marketing Management* special issue on Anthropomorphic Marketing.

There are numerous ways in which a company may choose to anthropomorphise their brand. To date, no study deals with this topic directly; therefore there is a need to tackle this gap in the literature. Instead, many researchers have focused on one highly distinguishable tactic – the use of mascots. As a means of imbuing brands with human characteristics, the use of mascots has been considered from various angles. For example, the work of Garretson & Niedrich (2004) addresses how creating spokes-character trust can lead to positive brand attitudes; Garretson & Burton (2005) look into the role of spokes-characters as advertisement and package cues in integrated marketing communications; Mize & Kinney (2008) concentrate on the influence of spokes-characters on brand relationship quality factors; and Garretson Folse, Netemeyer, & Burton (2012) focus on how the personality traits of spokes-characters can lead to build brand equity.

Undoubtedly, mascots serve to imbue their brands with the human characteristics of emotion, thought and personality. By bringing them to life, brands transcend being mere objects of consumption (Dotz & Husain, 2003, p. 13). Without anthropomorphism, brands are merely a collection of perceptions held in the mind of the consumer with no objective existence – they cannot act think or feel except through the activities of the administrating manager (Fournier, 1998, p. 345). Mascots – as a form of anthropomorphism – give brands a form through which they can act, think and feel. Consequently, consumers can feel something towards the brand.

It is not an illogical leap to assert that consumers can become attached to mascots and that this attachment could influence consumer-brand relationships (Mize & Kinney, 2008), and brand preferences (Ogilvy & Raphaelson, 1982).

Numerous studies were conducted on mascots revealing that a mascot is what makes a brand stand out amongst its rivals. It is what differentiates one brand from its competition; what creates its unique competitive advantage; and what persuades consumers of their relevance to them (Dotz & Husain, 2003; Callcott & Lee, 1995; Hackley, 2009). Additionally, mascots are credited to elicit increased attention to an advert, brand recognition and identification, nostalgic appeal, character/brand trust, positive brand attitude and perhaps even product purchase (Baldwin, 1982; Callcott & Alvey, 1991; Callcott & Lee, 1995; Callcott & Phillips, 1996; Garretson & Niedrich, 2004). Evidently, an amazing phenomenon exists in marketing mascots (Dotz & Husain, 2003, p. 13) – this is what makes them favourably worthy of further investigation.

There is a shortage of literature with practical implications, which aids practitioners in the construction of highly influential, much loved marketing mascots. Callcott & Phillips (1996) do provide advice on how to create likable spokes-character advertising, however, no new updates have been published since their paper, which take into consideration the changing behaviours of consumers and the advancements in technology.

According to Callcott & Lee (1995), marketing mascots have endorsed brands since the late 1800s. Trademarked in 1877, the original Quaker Oats Man was one of the first known characters (Dotz & Husain, 2003). An enduring mascot; whilst keeping him original, his appearance – along with many others – has been updated over the years in order to add a contemporary edge to it. This allowed new generations to embrace old, established characters as new (Phillips & Gyoerick, 1999). This is an extremely valuable notion to take forward – the notion of keeping mascots relevant with the times and with advancements in technology. Through the years, mascots were successfully adapted for use on radio and television. Nowadays, adapting mascots for the internet is critical.

Only a few studies consider the exploration of spokes-characters on the internet. Phillips & Lee (2005) examine the impact of adding online opportunities for interactivity with spokes-characters on a website; while Liao, Liu, Pi, & Liu (2011) studied the effects of using spokes-characters as interactive agents, developing a theoretical framework to address this. Indeed, both research papers have identified that interactivity is one of the most important

differentiating features and the primary benefit hyped for the internet over traditional media. However, to date, I am unaware of any studies that focus primarily on identifying and understanding the different ways in which consumers interact with spokes-characters online, and particularly via Social Media – thus highlighting a further gap in the literature.

Focusing on consumer interaction and engagement with mascots is essential as attitude toward the mascot is one of the most important predictors of attitude toward the brand (Walker & Dubitsky, 1994). Equally important due to its popularity is the parameter of Social Media (a.k.a. Social Networking Sites (SNSs)). The SNSs of Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube have witnessed a sharp increase in their popularity in the past few years. With 80% share of total time spent on social networking, Facebook is the most prevalent website of them all (Verhulst, 2013). Primarily used for entertainment and connecting with friends and family, Facebook has progressively become an attractive space for consumers to discuss their brand preferences and experiences (Acar & Polonsky, 2008; Needham, 2008; Jansen & Zhang, 2009; Dunne, Lawlor, & Rowley, 2010).

From a brand's perspective, there are several reasons to adopt Facebook. According to trade studies (Bernoff & Li, 2008; Edelman & Salsberg, 2010; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Zeisser, 2010), it is the largest SNS: It has over 800 million users and it is used by approximately 44% of the worldwide online population. It is free to set up meaning that a brand can establish online presence with very little upfront cost. And lastly, about 20% of online consumers consider brand pages "influential" or "very influential" in their purchase decision process, thus indicating that brand pages on Facebook are considered fairly trustworthy by consumers. And so, there are numerous strategies by which a company may choose to adopt Facebook. One strategy involves the adaptation of marketing mascots to embrace Web 2.0. Rather than creating brand pages on Facebook, some companies have resorted to creating spokes-character pages, whereby communication with consumers is achieved through the characters. This form of communication and its impacts also require further research.

Lastly, as the majority of communication occurs in the form of words, sentences and phrases which together are used to convey messages, experiences and stories, a look into narrative is also necessary. Studies suggest that a narrative[1] approach can be used to build brand equity. This is believed to parallel product life cycles, protect brand longevity, aid brand recall and recognition, provide reliable income streams for organisations and most importantly construct

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[1] In this thesis, I use the terms narrative approach and literary approach interchangeably

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meaning for consumers (Smith, 2011). Therefore, narrative is considered to be a powerful tool and requires attention.

1.2 Research aims and objectives

The ultimate aim of this research is to improve our understanding of brand anthropomorphism via focusing on one of the most prominent tactics currently being used by industry – the use of mascots. It endeavours to address the gaps in the literature and knowledge highlighted in the previous section, and utilise a literary approach in order to understand how narrative can be used to develop an effective marketing mascot and the outcomes this has on consumer engagement.

In this research project, questions such as 'In what ways does industry currently use anthropomorphism?' and 'How do organisations go about anthropomorphising their brands?' are being raised. Other questions provoked include: 'How do marketers create anthropomorphised mascots?' 'Is there an optimum way of doing this?' and 'How do mascots affect people's attitudes towards a brand?'

On this note, the main objectives of the study are:

1) To review and synthesize the literature on branding in a general context

2) To develop a model which identifies brand elements

3) To examine the roots of anthropomorphism in the context of social science, consumer psychology and branding

4) To develop a theoretical frame of reference by which brand anthropomorphism can be categorised

5) To investigate and evaluate one of the brand anthropomorphism tactics currently used by industry (The use of mascots)

6) To explore and analyse consumer engagement with the brand via their engagement with anthropomorphised marketing mascots

7) To contribute to the academic debate on brand anthropomorphism

8) To outline the potential and implications of brand anthropomorphism in industry

1.3 Research perspectives, methodology and case study selection

The central argument of this research is contained within an interpretivist paradigm. It consists of a narrative ontology, a constructionist epistemology, and asserts the existence of multiple realities. The main assumptions of this social science paradigm have been accepted and this is reflected in the methodology chosen to address the aims and objectives raised. Many considerations have been taken into account to ensure that the methods chosen for this study are appropriate, coherent with the epistemological and ontological views expressed, and most importantly, that the questions asked are capable of providing valid and reliable data that address the research aims and objectives raised at the outset.

The data collection method utilised in this thesis is a case study research approach. It employs various qualitative data collection methods – namely netnography, interviews and photo-essays – in order to capture numerous realities. To coincide with the methods selected for data collection, three methodologies were used for analysis – narrative analysis, visual analysis and grounded hermeneutic approach. Both analysis and interpretation were carried out in an iterative process with data collection in order to achieve a deeper understanding. Furthermore, the textual understanding of this study is achieved through the utilisation of two lenses: a Consumer Culture Theory lens and a literary lens.

Selecting the three case studies to investigate for this project was initially not easy. Firstly, the list of industry's very finest anthropomorphised mascots is extensive: Aunt Jemima, Quaker Oats Man, Michelin Man, Mr Brandyman, Jolly Green Giant, Elsie Cow, Kool Penguin, Tony the Tiger, Toucan Sam, Bertie Bassett, Charlie Tuna, Pillsbury Doughboy, Frankenberry, Count Chocula, Boo Berry, Tom Tomato, Kool-Shake Kids, Tropic-Ana, Miss Freshway, Snap! Crackle! and Pop!, Mr Clean, Mr Shine, Uncle Ben, Quik Bunny, the Duracell Bunny, Trix Rabbit, Birds Eye Kids, Ronald McDonald, Burger King, Colonel Sanders, Jack in the Box, Wendy, Esso Oil Drop, Captain Raid, Aunt Bessie, Smokey Bear, Fido Dido, Aflac Duck, Betty Crocker, the Marlboro Man, Chester Cheetah, Mr Peanut, Mrs Butterworth, Monkey, M&M's Spokescandies, Jollibee, Joe Camel, Betty Crocker, Miss Chiquita Banana, Geoffrey Giraffe, the Geico Gecko, Churchill, Admiral, Gio Compario, Aleksandr Orlov, Coco Monkey, Mr Muscle… to name a few. Secondly, when deciding which mascots to select, the most important guiding light was that they must have a prominent presence on Social Media, Facebook in particular. Thirdly, they must be from

around the world. Fourthly, their brand narrative must be substantial for analysis. After thorough investigation, the mascots eventually selected were Aleksandr Orlov, the M&M's Spokescandies and Mr Peanut.

1.4 Content and structure of the thesis

Academically, brand anthropomorphism can be theoretically linked with a vast body of literature in marketing, branding and consumer behaviour/psychology. Literature in the disciplines of product design and aesthetics of consumerism will also have an impact on the study of anthropomorphism, seen as they will have references to making products look anthropomorphic and their reasons for doing so. This study will therefore make new connections that have not been established previously – As demonstrated in Figure 1.1.
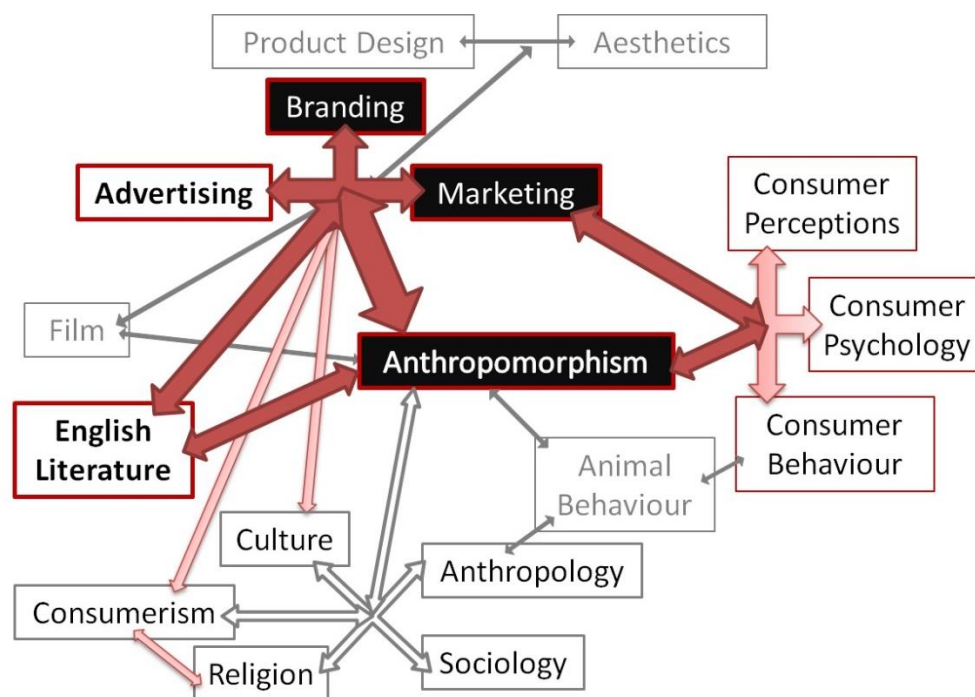
Figure 1.1 overview of the connections made in this thesis

Note: Strongest connections will be made between literatures in the disciplines of branding, marketing and anthropomorphism, closely followed by advertising, English literature and consumer behaviour/psychology/perceptions. Occasional references will be made to product design, aesthetics, film and animal behaviour.

The remainder of this chapter attempts to specifically outline the intellectual terrain that each of the subsequent chapters will examine.

Chapter 2 will explore the multidimensional nature of brands, paying particular attention to investigating what makes brands the way they are. Moreover, numerous definitions for brands will be offered, together with a presentation of the most prominent branding theories. This chapter will aim to address objectives 1 and 2.

Chapter 3 will investigate the phenomenon of anthropomorphism. It will offer various definitions for anthropomorphism from the ranging disciplines of anthropology, animal behaviour, English literature and religion. This will be followed by an investigation into its origins in order to understand the reasons for its occurrence and high appeal. This chapter will aim to address objective 3.

Chapter 4 will look at the phenomenon of anthropomorphism from a branding perspective. It will start by enquiring into the way in which brand meaning is created using anthropomorphism. It will then review the literature on brand anthropomorphism revealing any existing categorisations within marketing. Further to this, the use of marketing mascots will be investigated paying particular attention to their conceptual development and 'humanity'. This chapter will aim to address objective 4.

Chapter 5 will present the methodological framework that this research project employs. It commences by further clarifying the approach adopted and the underlying research assumptions guiding the processes of data collection and analysis. It draws on a wide range of contemporary approaches in developing and applying its theoretical framework. It describes a case study approach that utilises netnography, interviews and photo-essays. Each of the methods used will be explained and detailed justifications for their usage will be given.

Chapter 6 and **7** will discuss the findings of the research. **Chapter 6** will focus on investigating and evaluating the use of marketing mascots as a brand anthropomorphism tactic used by industry. It will do so by presenting the three case studies of Aleksandr Orlov, the M&M's spokescandies and Mr Peanut. This chapter will aim to address objective 5. On the other hand, **Chapter 7** will concentrate on exploring and analysing consumer engagement with the brand via their engagement with the three selected marketing mascots within the parameters of Social Media. This chapter will aim to address objective 6.

Chapter 8 will discuss the implications of the findings in order to further increase our understanding of brand anthropomorphism. Contributions will be made to the academic debate on the subject. Furthermore, this chapter aims to address objective 7.

Chapter 9 will draw conclusions from the research. It will also discuss the limitations and contributions of this study. Recommendations will be made which will allow any interested researchers to follow suit in order to achieve further advancements in this field. This chapter will address objective 8.

Chapter 2. The multidimensional nature of brands

Imagining a world with no brands is virtually unthinkable. We live in a branded world. It is thus unsurprising that the discipline of branding has gained unwavering interest in the past few decades. In this chapter, I aim to address objective 1: To review and synthesize the literature on branding in a general context. Here, brands are thoroughly investigated and an examination into what makes brands the way they are is conducted. Numerous definitions for brands are offered. Moreover, an enquiry is carried out into the different branding theories of 'brand identity', 'brand image', 'brand culture', 'brand equity' and 'brand personality'. In the vast branding literature, two distinguishable mainstream thoughts on brands are present – brands as lifeless manipulable artefacts and brands as living entities. Additionally, brands are perceived to have a multidimensional nature, one which can be understood in terms of metaphors; more specifically, 'brand as differentiating mark', 'brand as person', and 'brand as asset'. The chapter concludes by addressing objective 2: To develop a model which identifies brand elements. I introduce the 'Brand Puzzle' model, and clarify which stance on brands is taken forward with this thesis.

2.1 Introducing brands

The starting point for understanding brand anthropomorphism and the use of marketing mascots is by analysing what brands mean. In the past few decades, we have witnessed both academics and practitioners alike gain unwavering interest in the discipline of branding. The term 'brand' has become a buzzword. With the wide usage of the term amongst company executives, managers, employees, academics and consumers of all ages, it seems everybody knows what brands are. In this chapter, the concept of brands is examined and a detailed look into what makes brands the way they are is investigated.

Through the years, numerous attempts were made to pin down and define exactly what brands are. In 1991, Kotler defined 'brand' as "a name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or combination of them which is intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors" (p. 442). These individual brand components are often called 'brand identities' and their totality 'the brand'. Producers making the same product and offering the same service, utilised brands to distinguish themselves from one another. Consumers were able to identify the producers they prefer based on 'rational reasons' such as best quality, high reliability, most trust worthy or cheapest price (Barber, 2007).

Moreover, as a means of distinguishing producers from one another, trademarking was used on goods to indicate different manufacturers in the same way that a branding iron was utilised to burn a mark on live stock (and formerly slaves) to identify ownership. A trademark is a "symbol, word, or words legally registered or established by use as representing a company or product" (Oxford English Dictionary, 1987). Evidently, the definition of a brand closely correlates with that of a trademark, except, trademarks are the stepping stone to the development of brands, and Kotler's definition provides merely a piece in the illusive brand puzzle. This will be explained further as the argument in this chapter continues.

More often than not, I have been typing this thesis on my Sony Vaio laptop while drinking a Costa Coffee. Immediately, you would have recognised Sony and Costa as brands. But what makes these two examples brands? Using Kotler's (1991) definition, these brands have well-known names that provide a means for identification from their competitors. However, one would argue that a name on its own is insufficient to be called a brand. Instead, a connection between name and product exists. After all, it is highly unlikely that one would purchase a Costa laptop. Therefore, it is evident that name and product form a core composition of the brand.

According to Elliott & Percy (2007, p. 62) a brand name has no meaning in its own right, but must acquire meaning through associations with other pre-existing meanings until it comes to signify some concept or idea. Accordingly, 'Costa' as a name has no meaning in its own right, it has gained meaning through its association with coffee as a stimulating beverage widely consumed across the world, its responsible sourcing of raw materials, the processes endeavoured to yield a high quality product, the pride passion and commitment of its baristas (as they are most commonly called), and the emanating charm and personality of its retail environment. As demonstrated, after acquiring meaning, a brand name becomes a complex symbol that represents a variety of ideas and attributes (Arvidsson, 2006).

It is assumed, more often than not, that the meanings ascribed to brands have been generated by companies for consumption by consumers. Klein (2000) makes the point that corporate mythologies are powerful; by just signing their name onto raw objects, they are able to infuse them with meaning. On the other hand, Dittmar & Pepper (1992) saw it differently. They claimed that "meanings must be socially shared and continuously produced and reproduced during social interactions".

Whether meaning is socially shared or generated by companies for consumption, none-the-less, brands carry meaning. And meaning is processed in the brain. Ehrenberg *et al* (2002) discuss brands in terms of 'mindspace'. Similarly, Obae & Barbu (2004) claim brands exist "in the minds of consumers". This claim is reinforced by Elliott & Percy (2007, p. 4) who contend that "as brands only exist in the minds of customers, then the management of brands is all about [the management of] perceptions". Therefore, it is logical to assume that a brand can mean different things to different people, and that brand meaning is dependent on people's perceptions. If we believe this to be true, this ultimately signifies that brands have a weird status in this world; a status characterised by ontological ambiguity, and very different from Kotler's (1991) previously stated definition.

In his analysis of TV, Günther Anders describes television images as having 'ontological ambiguity'. TV images are neither real nor imaginary. They defy actual existence yet they are not a product of the unreal. For Anders, the peculiarities of the media world give them 'ontological ambiguity'. Because the transmitted events on television are present and absent at the same time, real as well as fictitious, they are considered phantoms (Alderson, 1965). And just like TV images, brands are phantoms. They are distinguished by an ontological ambiguity that renders it impossible for us to measure them. What renders brands visible and knowable in the first place is our way of thinking, with all its in-built mythologies, convictions and rationalities – i.e. our epistemology (Kornberger, 2010), combined with various elements and touch points induced by industry.

Similarly, Ries & Trout (2001) position brands in the minds of the consumers by taking an emic view of markets. They argue that markets mainly exist in the socially situated experience and interaction of consumers rather than existing as an independent artificial managerial construct. Therefore, brand positioning is as much in the mind of the consumer as located in the market.

2.2 The simulation of consumer desire

Since industry turned its focus from being production-orientated to being more market-orientated, brands have gradually undergone dissociation from the specific content of the products and services they label. Instead, they have been re-affiliated with styles, sentiments, and emotions linked to those products and services (Barber, 2007). As expressed by

Kornberger (2010, p. 8), most products were sold in the 1920s based on their function. Adverts were information-heavy, appealing to the need of the potential buyer, and hoping to convince them of the merits of their products. Then, Edward Bernays changed the world.

In 1928, Edward Bernays was assigned the challenging task of getting women to smoke cigarettes. Smoking was a male prerogative after World War 1 and it was taboo for women to smoke in public. The cigarette was a male symbol, representing the phallus. Therefore, the only way to make women smoke was to change the symbolic meaning of the cigarette. And that's what he did. He made cigarettes synonymous with rebellion – cigarettes were then perceived as the 'torch of freedom', and smoking was seen as a powerful, independent and individual act.

To change the world, Bernays induced the occurrence of a shift from a focus on consumer needs to the stimulation of consumer desires. It was no longer about the product and its functionality but about the way the product related to people's subconscious desires. While 'needs' can be satisfied through the functionality of a product or service, 'desire' generates an appetite for goods and services that are no longer directly linked to a need (Needs can be fulfilled, desire cannot). And so, evolving from straightforward trademarks indicating producers, brands emerged as interface between the emotional world of consumption and the rational world of production, linking mundane products with hidden desires. Where supply met demand, brands were a powerful interface that persuaded and seduced.

Consequently, without changing a product's functionality, companies were able to link their products with emotion and change the way people feel about them. In this our 'land of desire' (Barber, 2007), the object itself had become irrelevant; what counts is its symbolic dimensionality, and the way people relate to it emotionally (Kornberger, 2010). By inducing emotion and fulfilling desires, brands were perceived as therapeutic tools that made people feel better, more secure, more confident and independent once acquired. As such, shopping became 'retail therapy', and Maslow's[2] hierarchy of needs provided intellectual justification for this movement towards emotion and desire, with self-actualisation as the highest goal of human endeavour.

To capitalise on this, businesses stopped serving individual needs and began to create, manage and control desire through brands (Kornberger, 2010). Moving further away from

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[2] Refer to Section 4.5

Kotler's (1991) initial definition, brands were the tools used to detach products from their limited functionality and make them an engine of the endless desire for self-actualisation. With this strong focus on emotion and desire, companies turned their attention to culture, producing things that fitted into peoples' way of thinking and being – i.e. their 'lifestyle'. Brands were seen to exist as cultural, ideological and political objects (Schroeder & Salzer-Mörling, 2006). And so, attention was turned to brand culture – a contribution to branding theory.

2.3   Branding theories

According to Schroeder & Salzer-Mörling (2006, p. 1), "brand culture refers to the cultural influences and implications of brands". It provides the necessary cultural, historical and political grounding to understand brands in their context, and to explore the complex underpinnings of the branding process. We live in a branded world, and as much as culture infuses brands with meaning, brands too infuse culture with meaning. Therefore, brand management exerts a profound influence on contemporary society; such influence can be observed in the case studies selected for this thesis.

Based on Arvidsson (2006), the principle of brand management implies the use of the brand as a managerial tool and not just the construction of a distinctive trademark. It is the management of the particular context of action that the brand conveys. As previously expressed, people not only purchase products for their functionality, but also for their symbolic meaning. When a product is meaningful to an individual, it becomes prosthesis, or an extension of the self – i.e. for the individual, the brand becomes a representation of who they are, or who they aspire to be (Lury, 1999). And so brands become a bold statement to others and a valuable expression of the inner true self. Ultimately, an ever-growing inner true self, creates an unlimited demand in the market for ever-new brands.

Unsurprisingly, brands are often discussed in terms of equity. Brand equity constitutes an organisation's most valuable intangible asset (Smith, 2011). As a highly valuable intangible asset, organisations must ensure the endurance of their brands – this is referred to as brand longevity. According to Smith (2011), brand equity resides in culturally constituted meaning in the brand experience, and the key to "endowing product and services with the power of brand equity" is building up social salience and the strength of customer engagement with the

brand (Smith, 2011). Permanent engagement is critical for brand longevity. Therefore, there is a need to investigate consumer engagement with the brand in order to ensure brand longevity.

When the discipline of branding was getting popular amongst practitioners, initially, their preliminary aim was to tell consumers what was for sale, why they needed to buy it, and why they should stick to their particular brand. As brands evolved from Kotler's (1991) previously stated definition to become carriers of meaning, inducers of desire and extensions of the self, the focus of branding was to get people to buy products whether or not they needed them. By associating an emotion with the brand, consumer loyalty could be encouraged (Barber, 2007). Consumer loyalty is about building long-term relationships equivalent to those with family and friends. In other words, to encourage consumer loyalty, brands must become part of the family. Thus, branding takes on a whole new role in the context of a relationship very different from that of making sales:

> *"A transaction is like a one-night stand, and it is never going to be as satisfying or rewarding as falling in love. A transaction makes the cash register ring once. A relationship makes it ring again and again. And selling takes on a new dimension when you put it in the context of a relationship"* (Travis, 2000, p. 54).

In order for a long-term relationship to be synthesised with a brand, and in order for this brand to become part of the consumer's family, it must be anthropomorphised by being instilled with human characteristics and traits (Csaba & Bengtsson, 2006). Consequently, many academics have turned their focus to brand personalities (Aaker, 1997; Freling & Forbes, 2005; Geuens, Weijters, & Wulf, 2009; Fennis & Pruyn, 2007).

According to Bhargava (2008), the key element behind a brand and what it stands for is personality: Every element of a business, from interactions with consumers to the packaging of products, is an element of brand personality. Personality is the unique, authentic, and talkable soul of a brand that people get passionate about. Imbuing a brand with personality is instilling it with human characteristics and traits that aid in building relationships with consumers. As mentioned, this is important in order to assist the building of long-term relationships and encourage consumer loyalty.

"Personality is all consuming; while asleep, we even dream about people real and imagined" (Cone, 2012, p. 7). Because the term personality has numerous definitions in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, when it comes to brands, personality can be exhibited in numerous ways.

The most straightforward method of displaying brand personality is to hinge on real life individuals, company directors, employees, users or famous personalities such as actors, musicians, presenters, sports personnel etc. for celebrity endorsement. Another popular method of displaying brand personality amongst practitioners is the development of spokes-characters/mascots or the utilisation of famous fictional characters. Ronald McDonald, Charlie Tuna and Mr Whipple provide such examples of past mascot successes. Personality can also be displayed as a combination of distinctive characteristics or qualities. Very often, brands are described in terms of adjectives such as fun, quirky, masculine, seductive, cool and so on.

Personality is believed to have a strong influence on the identity of a brand. In the 1990s, brand identity was recognised as an important construct. Macrae (1996) and Kapferer (1997) for example, wrote about brand identity and what a brand stands for: its background, its principle, its purpose and ambitions. Brand identity is unique as no two brands have exactly the same roots, heritage, values, purpose, ambition or visual identity.

In the same way that every element of a business is an element of brand personality, they too contribute to the overall visual identity of the brand. A brand is said to have a visual identity consisting of its design elements and other recognisable manifestations of the brand, such as its logo, mascot, adverts, and those to which specific meaning is attributed. The brand's visual identity is also known as the brand image. Brand image appears as a prominent theory in branding literature. It is defined by Keller (1993, p. 3) as "perceptions about a brand as reflected by the brand associations held in consumer memory". According to Gelder (2005), having a stable brand image is essential in order to ensure a consistent expression and to gauge its effects on consumer perceptions.

Far from being the first, David Ogilvy made the observation that every advertisement should be thought of as a contribution to the complex symbol which is the brand image. However, he was certainly the first to develop this observation into a practical philosophy allowing the concept of brand image to evolve. Ogilvy's first major attempt at creating a brand image, and many ways an anthropomorphic character, came in the form of a man in an eye-patch. In 1951, before colours, patterns, collars and elongated sleeves, white dress shirts were all the same. Rather than branding the shirt, Ogilvy branded the man wearing the shirt. In his unusual eye-patch, 'The man in the Hathaway shirt' was distinctive. For Ogilvy (1985), image means personality. By imbuing Hathaway with a personality, its brand image was

nationally recognised after 116 years of relative obscurity. The example of Hathaway epitomises Levy's (1959) assertion that brand image is a symbolic entity separate from the product itself, and thus must be managed.

2.4   Thoughts on brands

In the vast branding literature, and due to many different views on the subject, there is a lack of consistency in defining the concept of brands. Hanby (1999) distinguishes between two main streams of thought on brands. Firstly, classical branding theory embraces the underlying notion that brands are a lifeless maniputable artefact that can be defined, observed, moulded and managed. This stream of thought reflects a highly mechanistic approach that reflects brands from the perspective of the owners (Csaba & Bengtsson, 2006). Here, brands are understood in terms of their constituent elements – name, package, service, guarantees and quality feature – and are not larger than the sum of their parts. Replacing and adjusting the brand elements does not devour them of their meaning.

According to Hanby (1999), the second stream of thought on brands emerged in the 1980s after positivism relaxed its grip on the marketing discipline. This more recent view conceives brands as living entities. Based on this organic metaphor, brands are perceived as holistic entities that play a major role in consumers' lives; as mentioned, they have personalities, inner essences, and grow and evolve over time. This organic metaphor is more suited for differentiating brands on a non-functional dimension (Csaba & Bengtsson, 2006). Within marketing, differentiation techniques such as Rosser Reeves's Unique Selling Point (USP) and Ries & Trout's (2001) positioning approach, and image management have become indispensable. To add to these, since the late 1980s, differentiation has also been discussed in terms of branding. As per the Hathaway example, brand personality is what differentiates Hathaway shirts from all others.

Metaphors are often used by academics in order to advance branding theory. Davies & Chun (2003) offer advancements to what they believe are the three root metaphors of brands: 'brand as differentiating mark', 'brand as person' and 'brand as asset'. The first metaphor encapsulates a brand's core purpose: to distinguish and identify similar products from different producers, most commonly using name, logo, icon or symbol. To this first metaphor Davies & Chun (2003) introduce the sub-metaphor of 'brand as emblem'. It is generally

accepted that an emblem represents something else, thus adding more to the dull notion of simply labelling or identifying. For example, this idea allows for brand names to be placed clearly on the outside of clothing rather than hiding them away.

Davies & Chun's (2003) second metaphor 'brand as person' suggests human characteristics and traits are ascribed to brands. This notion has already been discussed in this chapter in terms of brand personality, brand relationship and brand loyalty. However, to this second metaphor Davies & Chun's (2003) introduce the sub-metaphors of 'brand as reputation' and 'brand as values'. In the same way that people have reputations, be it good or bad, brands have corporate reputations. It is about ethics. When linked with credibility (Herbig, Milewicz, & Golden, 1994), reputation is the conviction that a company will do what it says it will. And just like a person, to promote a strong reputation, a set of defined values or guideline principles must be adhered to by the brand. This metaphor provides a backbone for the main argument of this thesis, by viewing brands as people with personalities, reputations and values, with whom we form relationships and feel loyalty towards, brands are anthropomorphised.

For the third metaphor 'brand as asset', Davies & Chun (2003) assert that two ideas are suggested by this metaphor. An asset is an item of property; as such, a brand must belong to someone. Additionally, an asset is an item of worth; brands must therefore have a determinable value. The valuation of brands has received increased attention following the decision to allow the inclusion of valuations for intangible assets within the balance sheet under accounting conventions. An organisation's most valuable intangible asset is its brand (Smith, 2011), and as previously mentioned, this has ensured brands are often discussed in terms of equity. Assets often need to be invested in, and to be renovated so as to safeguard their future worth and relevance. It can be argued that advertising maintains the worth and relevance of a brand asset, and that advertising costs are an investment into renovation. Additionally, assets can be bought and sold. Brands too can be licenced as a means of renting out or hiring the usage of the assets by third parties. As brands are intangible, they can be licenced to more than one party simultaneously. For example, Hello Kitty owes much of its merchandise empire and its growth to selecting the right partners when licencing the character (Hosany, Prayag, Martin, & Lee, 2013).

2.5 Defining brands

I started this chapter by stating Kotler's (1991) definition for the term 'brand'. Numerous other academics and practitioners have attempted this very same task of defining brands. Prior to Kotler (1991), Ogilvy (1985) proclaimed "A brand is a complex symbol. It is the intangible sum of a product's attributes, its name, packaging and price, its history, reputation, and the way it's advertised. A brand is also defined by consumer's impression of people who use it, as well as their own experience". Both Ogilvy (1985) and Kotler's (1991) definition reflect a highly mechanistic approach to branding. Arguably, this approach is valuable for companies as it offers clarity. It is almost instruction-like in its definitions as it suggests, bring all these elements together 'et voilà' you have a brand. Niall FitzGerald (2001), CEO at Unilever Plc. on the other hand asserts, "It is people who call brands into existence – who form attachments, detest homogeneity, value consistency and delight in conferring personality characteristics on animals, entities, and inanimate objects". This definition reflects the more organic approach to branding.

Similarly, as Zaltman (2003, p. 227) put it, "brands are units of social consumption" that turn faceless commodities into personal and emotional goods. Based on this, products become social objects that function as cultural markers. Culture is generally accepted as socially patterned human thought and action (Kozinets, 2010). Within culture, a discourse of symbolic consumption occurs. This is increasingly mediated between company and consumer in a continuing dialogue of brand narratives (Smith, 2011). I will refer to this notion of brand narrative quite frequently throughout this thesis. According to Smith (2011), narrative is a natural heuristic because our brains retain stories better than any other form of information.

As demonstrated so far, brands are rich in their conception yet this is not always apparent. A particularly useful model which demonstrates this is Davidson's (1997) 'Branding Iceberg'. Figure 2.1 shows an iceberg featuring elements of the brand both above and below the line. Just like an iceberg, elements above the line are visible to consumers, while constituents under the line are invisible. This analogy is certainly beneficial in emphasising the point that just because an element cannot be seen, does not mean it does not exist. These invisible constituents are just as important as the visible one, if not more. Without them forming a strong base or foundation, the visible elements would 'sink'.
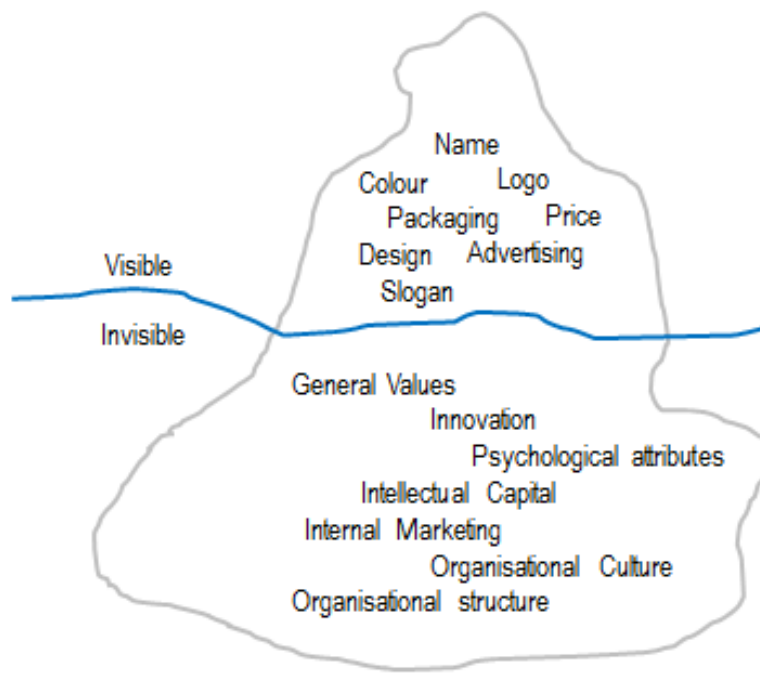
Figure 2.1 The Branding Iceberg

Source: Adapted from Davidson (1997 p. 376)

Just like other disciplines within social science, I have demonstrated that there is no one agreed upon definition for the term 'brand'. Moreover, Finskud (2009) argues that none of the definitions stated thus far fully capture the essence of a brand. Rather, that the attributes described belong to specific resources within the wider brand system. Finskud (2009) believes an accurate picture of brands can be drawn by seeing them as a resource system rather than a single asset. As such, a complete change in mindset is required. Finskud (2009) summarises the key characteristics of a brand as follows: (1) It is a resource system encapsulating the totality of tangible and intangible components that are both internal and external to the company. (2) It is a focal point for all stakeholders embodying the company, its image, its values, and presenting a 'face' to the world. (3) It is the basis for competing for the choice of current and potential stakeholders as well as the representation of the total value proposition of the business. (4) It is a promise to these stakeholders and a responsibility to keep that promise, making the brand owner an accountable entity in the broader society.

In short, "Brands are things, they are tools, they are processes; they explain, they seduce, they corrupt; they are used by corporations and those who fight them" (Kornberger, 2010, p. 5). They are the outcome of a distinct way of conceptualising, practising and institutionalising theory.

As I have demonstrated in this chapter, a synthesis of the branding literature has revealed numerous brand theories within the discipline, all of which do not fully capture the essence of brands, yet help us gain a better understanding of their illusive nature. In this thesis, I rest heavily on the notion that brands are living entities, more specifically, Davies & Chun's (2003) metaphor 'brand as person'. Rather than sticking to this notion as simply a metaphor, I look to investigate the different ways in which brands are imbued with human characteristics and traits and how these manifest themselves in the physical realm, i.e. the visible constituents of the brand, such as the name, logo etc. Based on the literature reviewed, I introduce the 'Brand Puzzle' (See Figure 2.2) as a means of advancing knowledge of brands and offering a different way of looking at the brand construct.

Figure 2.2 The Brand Puzzle

Source: Author

Figure 2.2 shows numerous puzzle pieces put together to form the brand. Indeed, this model takes on a mechanistic approach to branding which may, without taking a second thought, appear contradictory to the ideas of this thesis. However, as I look to take on a practical stance to understanding the concept of brand anthropomorphism, this model operates as a backbone to which the 'brand as person' metaphor is applied. Arguably, any of the puzzle

pieces may be attributed with human characteristics and traits which will render the brand anthropomorphised. This notion is tested out in Section 4.3. Firstly, a detailed investigation of anthropomorphism in the context of social science, consumer psychology and branding is conducted.

2.6   Summary

The past few decades have been a turning point for the branding discipline. As company executives realise the potential of having strong brands, there has been unwavering interest in their development and maintenance. Consequently, defining brands was necessary. Throughout the years, numerous attempts were made to pin down and define exactly what brands are as well as to determine their role towards consumers. Although there is no one popular definition for brands, it seems, the majority of definitions follow a mechanistic approach that reflects brands from the perspective of the owners. That is, brands are understood in terms of their constituent elements – name, logo, advertisements etc. More recently, brands have been perceived as holistic entities that play a major role in the lives of consumers. This view conceives brands as living entities with personalities and inner essences that grow and evolve over time. By imbuing brands with human traits and characteristics, in other words by anthropomorphising them, long-term relationships may be synthesised and consumer loyalty encouraged.

In this chapter, numerous branding theories were introduced: 'brand identity', 'brand image', 'brand culture', 'brand equity' and 'brand personality'. All of these theories rest on the notion that brands are carriers of symbolic meaning. With meaning involved, ontological ambiguity is inevitable. Brands mean different things to different people, and as such, this renders them impossible to measure. With a greater focus on meaning, it was no longer about the product and its functionality. Instead, it is all about the brands' re-affiliation with styles, sentiments and emotions, as well as the simulation of consumer desires.

Brands are perceived to have a multidimensional nature, one which can be understood in terms of metaphors. Three root metaphors of brands have been discussed: 'brand as differentiating mark', 'brand as person' and 'brand as asset'. In this thesis, I rest heavily on the notion that brands are living entities, and the metaphor 'brand as person'.

Chapter 3. Anthropomorphism

Anthropomorphism is the ascription of human characteristics to anything non-human. It is a powerful tool used by marketers in the never ending battle of gaining consumer mind share. In this chapter, I aim to address objective 3: To examine the roots of anthropomorphism in the context of social science, consumer psychology and branding. To start off, this chapter offers numerous definitions for anthropomorphism. This is followed by an investigation into the origins of anthropomorphism which uncovers its long history prior to the Neolithic age. With its deep roots firmly in place, understanding the reasons for its occurrence and high appeal is essentially considered. In this chapter, numerous classifications for anthropomorphism are presented before discussing its limitations.

3.1   Definitions of Anthropomorphism

The second step to understanding the phenomenon of brand anthropomorphism requires an analysis of anthropomorphism itself. To start, anthropomorphism is the name you give your pet, the smile you see on the front of your car (or the frown you see on your parent's car). It is the googly eyes you find on a greeting card and the limbs you interact with on a salt shaker. It is the doodled face you draw on a tree trunk and the familiar face you see on your cereal box. In other words, anthropomorphism is the designation of human characteristics to anything non-human (Guthrie, 1993) and it is a powerful tool used by marketers in the never ending battle of gaining consumer mind share. However, not all disciplines share this same enthusiasm towards anthropomorphism and undoubtedly not all share the same definition. Religionists use the term to describe the way human appearances and feelings are attributed to god(s). In English literature, it is more commonly known as personification: "the attribution of a personal nature or human characteristics to something non-human, or the representation of an abstract quality in human form" (Oxford Dictionaries, 2011). Personification is also the term used by art historians and literary critics when discussing anthropomorphism. Yet, the majority of definitions for this phenomenon appear in the context of anthropology and ethology (animal behaviour). Exploring how the various theorists in these disciplines have attempted to conceptualise anthropomorphism, helps us marketers to gain a deeper appreciation for the term and allows us to use it in potentially new ways few have pursued before.

Anthropomorphism is the residue of human assumptions applied to animals (Cenami Spada, 1994). It is the ascription of human mental experiences to animals (Asquith, 1984). The

mental experiences: feelings, motivations and thoughts which humans gain gradually through continuous introspection and animals possess so effortlessly in adverts such as IAMS cat food – "I am more than just a cat, I am an IAMS cat". Alternatively, Serpell's (2005) interpretation of the traditional meaning of anthropomorphism is not the attribution of likeness, but its overestimation. This definition suggests that likeness does exist in the world around us especially within the animal kingdom and would explain the reason why animals are a popular choice of mascot for marketers, branders and sport teams alike. Lehman (1997) also defines anthropomorphism as an overestimation of the similarity of humans and nonhumans but he restricts the sense of the term to "erroneous or unwarranted attributions of human mental characteristics to animals" (Lehman, 1997, p. 105). This "factual mistake and… intellectual failing" (Sober, 2005, p. 85) poses a threat to anthropologists and ethologists who consider anthropomorphism as a form of hopeful thinking, a use of what we know to rationalise what we do not, and a deviation of thought; it is an evil sin which is frowned upon, a crime that must be avoided at all cost. For them, anthropomorphism carries so many negative connotations to the extent that the term "mock anthropomorphism" was created (Kennedy, 1992, p. 9). It takes on an 'intentional stance' of pretending for argument's sake that animals think and feel as we do; a stance that comes naturally to marketers who purposely use anthropomorphism to humanise their brands in order to grow and prosper. In other words, the most important aspects to humans are attributed to parts of the world that lack them (Guthrie, 1997). This includes an unending collection of human characteristics from body shape, look and feel (e.g. children's dolls), to sound, voice, and capabilities (e.g. voiceovers in adverts) to even personality.

In recent years, marketing and branding literature has focussed greatly on the concept of imbuing brands with personalities; one component out of the many which constitute anthropomorphised brands (Puzakova, Kwak, & Rocereto, 2009) and perhaps a form of animism. Social psychologists have clearly differentiated between the two terms (Epley, Waytz, & Cacioppo, 2007). Piaget (1933) defines animism as the attribution of life to the non-living; a definition broad enough to include religionists' and anthropologists' understanding of the term (i.e. the attribution of souls or spirits to things that do not have them). Based on this definition, animism is also a component of anthropomorphism. Thus, it is insufficient for a brand to be referred to as an anthropomorphised brand if it only possesses a personality. Anthropomorphised brands must be perceived by consumers as actual human

beings[3] - with various emotions, thoughts, soul and conscious behaviours that can act as prominent members of society. Fournier (1998) asserts that a brand should attain numerous qualities of a human being in order to serve as a possible relationship companion and become an equitable component in a consumer-brand bond. This definition conversely implies the idea that humans are the only living creatures with mental, social and emotional capabilities.

Choosing which components to use in order to formulate your anthropomorphised brand is done via a process called 'Anthropomorphic Selection' (Serpell, 2005). Although introduced by Serpell for a different purpose, this process functions very well here. It is defined as "selection in favour of physical and behavioural traits that facilitate the attribution of human mental states to animals" (Serpell, 2005, p. 128). In this sense, product designers and marketers both use anthropomorphic selection when designing and advertising their products. Product designers select the most favourable physical traits, from curves to shape, in order to supply subtle stimuli which encourage and facilitate the process of anthropomorphism for consumers. Marketers then encourage and facilitate the process further by selecting the most favourable behavioural traits and emphasising them in advertisements. The term 'Anthropomorphic Selection' also has connotations closely related to Charles Darwin's theory on 'Natural Selection' and evolution. When it comes to brands, unsuccessful and irrelevant ones eventually die out leaving behind the best to thrive, conquer and breed through the development of sub-brands for example.

For consumers, encouraging and facilitating the process of anthropomorphism is possible because according to Guthrie (1993), anthropomorphism is a more directed expectation, an 'involuntary perceptual strategy' by which humans guess or unconsciously expect that ambiguous or significant stimuli have a human like or human cause or form. Aggarwal & Mcgill (2007) examine this articulation in their paper *Is that car smiling at me? Schema Congruity as a basis for evaluating anthropomorphized products*. Their research revealed that the ability of consumers to anthropomorphise a product is dependent on the extent to which that product is endowed with human characteristics. This view is opposed by Hart, Jones, & Royne (2013), who contend that marketers need not put a smile on a product to anthropomorphise it and enhance consumer evaluations. Instead, consumers are believed to anthropomorphise naturally based on the complexity of the product.

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[3] Similar to Guthrie's (1993) literal anthropomorphism

Nonetheless, anthropomorphism can be forced. According to Heilbrunn (1998) objects can be designed using the shape of the human body explicitly or implicitly. Anthropomorphic objects tend to be explicit – not only do they suggest a vague link between the human body and the design of the product but they also provide an emotional connection through the use of signification. Advertising plays an important role in stressing the relationship between object and body. It has the power to force the consumer into perceiving a relationship between object and body even if one is indistinguishable. This is best exemplified in "The Scoop", a 2011 advert for Goodfella's pizza whereby at first glance, the pizza and the human face have nothing in common.

> *I looked in the delicious Goodfella's pizza and I saw the face Maria Sofia*
> *Maria Sofia? Was she smiling?*
> *Her smile is beautiful ripe tomatoes*
> *And her voice?*
> *Warm as stone baked dough*
> *What did she say?*
> *Eat me!*

3.2   Origins of Anthropomorphism

The concept of anthropomorphism has long been deliberated by philosophers. Puzakova, Kwak, & Rocereto (2009) believe it has been discoursed for more than two thousand years. The discovery of Neolithic figurines suggests that the phenomenon of anthropomorphism existed since the Neolithic Age which commenced in approximately 9500BC. But actually, a look at the heavenly scriptures: the Torah, Bible and Qur'an, suggests anthropomorphism existed since the creation of man. The initial moulding of Adam from clay has resonated through humanity as an urge to create anthropomorphic mouldings of ourselves.

> *"And the lord God formed man (Adam) from the dust of the ground and*
> *breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul"*
> Genesis 2:7

> *"Now those who are made of the dust are like him who was first made of the dust"*
> 1st Corinthians 15:48

According to Bailey (2005), anthropomorphic representations of the human body contain noteworthy potential for social, political and symbolic meaning. This emphasises the human

capacity for 'reflexive consciousness' (Humphrey, 1983) and their "ability to use self-knowledge, knowledge of what it is like to be a person, to understand and anticipate the behaviour of others" (Serpell, 2005, p. 123).

The term anthropomorphism in the Oxford English Dictionary (1987, p. 91), comprises of two Greek words translated to mean 'man' and 'form'. It was originally used to describe the way human appearances and feelings were attributed to any being, animate or inanimate, especially gods (Cenami Spada, 1997). The ancient Greek philosopher Xenophanes, heavily criticised 'physical' and 'psychological' anthropomorphism; conceiving deities as possessing bodily form and ascribing human feelings and virtues to them degrades the figure of the Divine in general. They are supposed to be perfect beings; it is therefore erroneous to ascribe human qualities which are full of defects to them. Described by Lesher (2002) as a philosophically-minded poet who lived during the late 6th and early 5th centuries BCE in several parts of the ancient Greek world, Xenophanes is significantly remembered for his originality in criticizing anthropomorphism in religion, for partially advancing toward monotheism, and for innovatively reflecting on the conditions of knowledge.

Mithen (1996) claims anthropomorphism is one of the defining characteristics of anatomically modern humans (Homo sapiens sapiens) and has probably evolved no more than 40,000 years ago. In fact, Mithen (1996) claims anthropomorphic thinking is the reason behind why pet keeping and animal domestication occurs today, that without it neither one would have been possible – a claim which has been challenged by pet-related consumption literature and research (Franklin, 1999; Bettany & Daly, 2008; Bettany & Kerrane, 2011). For Bettany & Daly (2008, p. 416), human/pet relationships allow people the opportunity to "appreciate nature and experience wildlife"; animal companions help consumers "mediate between nature and culture"; additionally, they help consumers manage the dichotomous relationship between nature and culture, allowing for the inhabitation of both simultaneously.

Mitchell (2005, p. 102) suggests, at the foundation of the phenomenon of anthropomorphism there are claims about the resemblance of non-human objects or organisms to humans. There is also supremacy of human concepts and capacities to categorise behaviours across ontological categories. For example, by describing a dog as feeling shame when it walks away with its tail between its legs, strong anthropomorphism is asserted – a description of a feature of human beings, shame in this instance, is applied to a feature of a non-human. Such claims are often attacked by the critics of anthropomorphism for their presumptive character.

They would argue that neutral data is not being gathered and tested, but rather assumptions that non-humans have the same mental or emotional states like humans are being enforced. However, Mitchell (2005, p. 102) suggests that presumptiveness is at fault here and not anthropomorphism. Given that humans are biologically linked to other species, Mitchell (2005) also suggests that the attribution of notions whose accepted home is in describing human features and behaviours may appropriately relate to nonhumans, but there is no support for the use of such statements.

3.3   Reasons for its occurrence

Debates amongst scholars continue to take place with regards to reasons behind why anthropomorphism occurs. Numerous explanations and interpretations have been proposed by Guthrie (1993), Caporael & Heyes (1997), Gallup *et al* (1997), Mitchell *et al* (1997), Epley *et al* (2007) and Puzakova *et al* (2009) for example. Understanding the causes for its occurrence is highly relevant to marketers. By manipulating the causes, they can choose to anthropomorphise their products/brands more or less depending on their strategy.

Guthrie (1993, p. 129) claims that "We are people. We know a lot about ourselves. And we often make sense of other things by viewing them as people too". His anthropometric theory reveals three main reasons for why individuals are likely to anthropomorphise: *Familiarity* to render that which is nonhuman to appear more human; *Comfort* to acquire relief and consolation; *Risk reduction* to diminish doubt in a complicated, indefinite world. And thus, these are the emotions that need to be induced or manipulated by brands who wish to be more anthropomorphic. Organisations selling everyday objects detached from humanness may wish to capitalise on their familiarity by inducing a human connection to their product/brand. In their 2011 advert, Scottish Power gave life to a number of household items including a boiler, radiator, toaster and kettle. This forces consumers to perceive their nonhuman belongings in an anthropomorphic way and thus build a more meaningful connection with the brands/products. Cara, the all singing and dancing mascot for price comparison website Confused.com, is easily anthropomorphised because she provides a sense of comfort for individuals looking to compare insurances prices on their website. This comfort comes from knowing that the best price is obtained with less effort required to compare hundreds of suppliers individually. Audi emphasise their sense of risk reduction in their R8 advert, the

slowest car ever built, by implying that the vehicle is constructed with special care and attention to detail. From its skeleton, the car is slowly assembled in the advert until the finishing touches are put in place. With the ignition of the engine, the car comes to life and opens its eyes (headlights). According to Kim & McGill (2011), anthropomorphism forms the purpose of illusion control when it comes to consumer risk assessment. When anthropomorphised, high risk activities or products such as using the slot machine are perceived to carry less risk; it allows people to apply their beliefs and expectations of social concepts such as power to the activity or product.

However, Guthrie (1993) later argues that our self-knowledge is actually not very deep, for example, we know very little about what goes on in our bodies on a molecular level, thus contradicting previous claims made. He also argues against the ideas that anthropomorphism originates from comfort and familiarity; perceiving ourselves, and projecting the knowledge we have of ourselves onto the universe, often leads to the development of anthropomorphic demons/ fiends which in reality provide little comfort for individuals – arguably another strategy that can be used by marketers. And this is exactly what was used by Dirt Devil in their 2011 advert, the exorcist. An advert which starts like a film, it shows a priest entering an old house with squeaking doors and stairs, dimly lit, and a man praying for the life of his daughter. The priest is directed up the stairs by an old woman where screams are loudly heard. A gentle kiss on the cross and a slow opening of the door reveals a girl plastered to the ceiling as if possessed by the devil. And so the sucking power of the Dirt Devil vacuum cleaner is revealed with the tag line "You know when it's the devil." The vacuum cleaner here has been anthropomorphised in a demonic manner which stirs the feeling of comfort and familiarity in consumers.

Freling & Forbes (2005) use Guthrie's (1993) principle reasons to highlight why people personify their non-living objects by giving them human qualities. Aggarwal & Mcgill (2007) also provide very similar explanations to the question 'why do people anthropomorphise?' which stem from the work of Guthrie (1993): Firstly, people make superior sense of the world around them using what they are generally accustomed to, the knowledge of themselves. Secondly, wishful thinking by people makes them more likely to use products to help fill a relationship/companionship void. It therefore provides them with solace. And thirdly, by making the world more human-like, cognitive and perceptual views provide more benefits than drawbacks.

Puzakova *et al* (2009) on the other hand, suggest five reasons for the occurrence of anthropomorphism; these are an amalgamation of the work of Guthrie (1993), Aggarwal & Mcgill (2007), and Epley *et al* (2007) to name a few. Puzakova *et al* (2009) believe that the first reason stems from "self-concept/brand image congruity". It is predicted that an Individual is more likely to anthropomorphise if their 'human category knowledge' or the knowledge of oneself is stirred especially at the instant of judgement. Therefore, brands can influence consumer decision making by manipulating the degree of supposed human similarity or dissimilarity concerning individual's own self-concept. Guthrie (1993) argues that individuals are extremely perceptive to the availability of small human cues and are incredibly skilled in detecting their presence. So marketers only need to introduce small anthropomorphic cues and consumers can do the rest. This is illustrated by Aggarwal & Mcgill (2007) work which tests the probability of persons to identify with the appearance of a smile on the front of a car, or a human shaped bottle using messages which either contain or does not contain human cues. The other four reasons suggested by Puzakova *et al* (2009) that explain why people anthropomorphise are based on sociality motivators: individuals need to belong, and chronic loneliness; and effectance motivators such as the need for closure and the desire for control –Emotions that marketers need to provoke, and products need to offer.

Caporael & Heyes (1997) also offer three theories of anthropomorphism: (1) as a cognitive default, (2) as a system for coordinating interaction which overlaps across species, and (3) as a means of making prevalent certain values toward people and other animals. However, Mitchell *et al* (1997) believe that the first two theories proposed by Caporael & Heyes (1997) seem inadequate since the parameters of the proposed default mechanism is unknown, and because anthropomorphic interpretations are often notoriously bad predictors of non-human and human behaviour, therefore they are unlikely to be useful for coordination between species. On the contrary, Mitchell *et al* (1997) believe anthropomorphism is used because it transforms our relation to other organisms by talking about them as we do about "other" people. And this is specifically true for children, who are believed to formulate anthropomorphic thoughts during their early childhood as a means of expressing their ideas, and maybe retain them into adulthood. The use of these anthropomorphic thoughts is believed to promote learning and memory (Byrne, Grace, & Hanley, 2009).

Gallup, Marino, & Eddy's (1997) views also oppose those of Guthrie (1993), and Caporael & Heyes (1997). For Gallup *et al* (1997), humans do usefully model the mental states of other organisms based on knowledge of their own mental states. To them, mental state attribution is

a special case of anthropomorphism based on familiarity with one's mind; people constantly transform their behaviour to take into account psychological deficiencies in other people and in animals.

3.4 Classifying Anthropomorphism

It can be argued that the types of anthropomorphism are just as important for marketers as the reasons behind why anthropomorphism occurs. The identification of three forms of anthropomorphism – accidental, partial, and literal (Guthrie, 1993)– has numerous implications on the strategies that could be utilised by companies with regards to product design, branding and advertising. Accidental anthropomorphism is unintentional in nature, for example, seeing faces in rocks or clouds as an outcome of coincidence. Partial anthropomorphism on the other hand is highly associated with products and brands, where consumers detect partial human characteristics such as a smiling face through the arrangement of buttons on a device, or a frowning face on a car, without going so far as to see the object fully human – i.e. literal anthropomorphism. Guthrie (1993) suggests that literal anthropomorphism usually occurs as an outcome of mistaken perceptions of animals or objects in faint lighting; however this is not the case when it comes to The Gecko, mascot for GIECO an insurance company. With his own Facebook and Twitter accounts, consumers leave comments on his wall as if he were a real human being. Recently, he has been posting pictures of himself on his journey across the globe, a feature that his followers are showing great enthusiasm towards.

DiSalvo, Gemperle, & Forlizzi (2005) have also identified four kinds of human anthropomorphic form. These are *structural*, *gestural*, *character* and *aware*. Structural anthropomorphic form includes shapes, mechanisms, arrangements that mimic the appearance or functioning of the human body, this is best exemplified by the Barbie doll. Gestural anthropomorphic form focuses on the gestures that humans do in order to communicate a message. The best example for this and the one that DiSalvo *et al* (2005) use, is the shaking of a Mac window when a wrong password is inserted; a shaking that signifies the shaking of a head from side to side communicating 'No'. Character on the other hand is socially constructed, its context reflects the practices people engage in. And aware is the object's ability to learn, adapt, reason and interact.

3.5   Highly appealing

Our perception of the world around us is influenced by a deep-seated inclination to see the world like ourselves (Guthrie, 1997). It is the nature of man, as opposed to the nature of the universe which shapes our understanding of the world (Bacon, 1960). Rising out of spontaneity and with no training or rationality, ethnographers and folklorists report the presence of anthropomorphism in every culture (Guthrie, 1997). Kennedy (1992, p. 5) believes "we could not abandon it even if we wished to". From early childhood, it has been instilled into us by nature, nurture and culture amongst other things – "Disneyfication" (Bettany & Belk, 2011) and the film industry provide numerous examples which emphasise the implanting of anthropomorphic thinking by culture, seeing as films reflect the place and period in which they were created and convey the culture and dominant ideology at the time (Benshoff & Griffin, 2006). Examples include: *The Little Mermaid* (released in 1989), *The Lion King* (released in 1994), *A Bug's Life* (released in 1998), *Finding Nemo* (released in 2003), and *Chicken Little* (released in 2005) to name a few. Kennedy (1992, p. 5) also suggests that anthropomorphic thinking about animal behaviour is naturally 'pre-programmed' into our genetic make-up by natural selection to aid in predicting and controlling the behaviour of animals. This anthropomorphic 'fellow-feeling' towards animals is frequently unintended and largely unconscious and therefore much harder to avoid (Kennedy, 1992).   Moreover, Inagaki & Sugiyama (1988) believe thinking anthropomorphically is typical of children, who also show developmental swings in its utility (Inagaki, 1989). However, a visit to the toy shop raises the question: is anthropomorphic thinking really a typical trait of childhood or is it enforced into children by product designers and marketers? Almost all products targeted at children have an element of anthropomorphism in their design. This is almost always done by adding a pair of eyes and a smile to anything from balloons to toy cars. Adding limbs is another common way products are anthropomorphised. So often the creators of these characters give them additional vitality by utilising animism. So if you are extremely lucky like Bananas in Pyjamas you get a pair of eyes, a smile and a soul as well.

In his paper, Veer (2013) investigated the use of anthropomorphism to promote product kinship in young consumers by drawing on theories from evolutionary biology, evolutionary psychology and social psychology. Veer (2013) argues that anthropomorphism acts as a

catalyst for kin recognition and encourages attachment and liking. He believes that by creating an anthropomorphised mascot to promote a product, young unsocialised consumers form a tolerance and in time liking and emotional relationships with a brand. Thus, the more human-like the object, the more likely that kin recognition is to occur and less likely that one might see it as an object for purely functional use.

For organisations which deal with animals, anthropomorphism has a strong influence on strategic decision making. For example, up until 2004, the Pittsburgh Zoo did not publicly name its animals, dreading the society would unintentionally confuse wild animals with pets or humans (Fahy, 2004). However, anthropomorphism is not limited to our views of other animals but is wide-ranging and deep-rooted in our thoughts and actions (Guthrie, 1993) and is therefore unavoidable (Guthrie, 1997). According to Moynihan (1997), all the actions and reactions that people observe can only be interpreted in terms of their own experiences and conceptions. For that reason Gallup *et al* (1997) contend that anthropomorphism is a derivative of self-awareness. By using one's own experience as a model, one has the ability to extrapolate the experience of other humans (Gallup, 1982) amongst other things such as San Miguel. From seeing the sunset from 79 different countries to being rescued off the shore, "Una Vida Bien Vivida", the 2011 advert on the experience of the San Miguel beer bottle demonstrates how marketers can use, and are currently using the human experience to communicate to consumers.

According to Guthrie (1993), anthropomorphism alters perception and reactions to perception throughout life. It is the reason why people see a natural disaster as punishment for mortal transgressions, why they have the compulsion to see faces in the clouds or hear a human presence in unidentified sounds. It is also why people speak to their pets, plants, cars and other personal belongings, aside from naming them. Increasingly, car manufacturers are even giving their vehicles labels which are perceived to be girl's names. For example, Renault, a French car manufacturer, has been successful in calling its new release *Zoe* despite undergoing a court hearing in November 2010 (BBC News Europe, 2010). Alfa Romeo, an Italian car manufacturer, also gave their new car a girl's name: Giulietta (pronounced Juliet-a) (Love, 2010). Kennedy (1992, p. 10) also highlights the ability of humans to anthropomorphise actions. When an action is described as "purposeful, intentional or goal-directed" it is being ascribed human mental experiences which occur introspectively. In this sense "there is nothing, in truth, that can't be anthropomorphised" (Brown, 2010, p. 215). The

study of brand anthropomorphism emphasises this for the reason that brands cannot exist independently of individuals, society, consumer thoughts, perceptions and culture.

Unlike previous empirical efforts to understand consumers' tendency to anthropomorphise (e.g. Aggarwal & McGill, 2007; Chandler & Schwarz, 2010), Hart, Jones, & Royne (2013) attempted to measure the natural occurrence of anthropomorphism by not priming participants to engage in human-like reasoning. In their quantitative enquiry that utilised a hierarchical linear regression analysis, Hart *et al* (2013) investigated the relationship between consumers' tendency to anthropomorphise and personal value. They confirmed their first hypothesis that anthropomorphic reasoning itself enhances personal value perceptions – implying that marketers need not put a smile on a product to enhance consumer evaluation.

Hart *et al* (2013) examined consumers' varying levels of anthropomorphism based on product complexity. Through selecting the following four items for inquiry, laptop, mobile phone, USB drive, and toothbrush, they revealed the more complex the product the more inclined consumers are to anthropomorphise it. According to them, complex products such as laptops, mobile phones, cars (Aggarwal & Mcgill, 2007), slot machines (Kim & McGill, 2011) can be easily presented as human-like; whereas simple products are relatively more difficult. In this sense, consumer anthropomorphism may potentially be managed in terms of the product rather than the individual. In relation to predictors of personal value, Hart *et al* (2013) revealed that anthropomorphism was superior to price, usage and method of acquisition. Ultimately, their un-primed methodology indicated that anthropomorphism can be seen as a potential tool to enhance consumer value of all products, simple or complex.

3.6   Limitations of Anthropomorphism

When it comes to this phenomenon, we are initially faced with two limitations. The first being, our inability to see the world as it truly is without the inclination to view it with human eyes (Guthrie, 1997). The second problem is our inability to describe it impersonally. The fact that a neutral language does not exist makes it unavoidable and virtually impossible to break away from anthropomorphism (Mitchell, 2005). For the majority of disciplines, this is perceived as a persistent problem that requires risk management (Cenami Spada, 1997). For marketers however; the world of anthropomorphism is a world full of possibilities.

The unavailability of a neutral language has led to the use of a more metaphorical one. This raises numerous problems related to interpretation or hermeneutics. The term hermeneutics, stemmed from Hermes messenger of the gods in Greek mythology, advocates the interpretive process required during communication. The concept of hermeneutics, originally derived from the field of biblical interpretation (McBurney & White, 2009), implies a scholarly duty to expose the original, hidden and embedded meanings of texts as they were intended for their original readers. The term was later expanded to include all forms of human communication. Kennedy (1992, p. 26) believes "everyday language carries meanings beyond what the users may wish to imply in behavioural research". This demonstrates the problems potentially created through language and its interpretation. Since branding, marketing and advertising are forms of human communication, hermeneutics have a large impact on brand research where the use of anthropomorphism and metaphors is immense. Cusick (2009) emphasises that metaphors are seen to allow a much deeper, even subconscious, emotional connection between a company and its customers; this is because on the whole, consciously experienced thoughts are image based. According to Cusick (2009), the use of metaphors as visual representations has become really important in understanding firstly, how companies are being perceived by consumers and secondly, how to present company brands to consumers. In this sense, anthropomorphism in the discipline of branding is perceived to be advantageous. Marketers also make use of the fact that our ordinary everyday speech is anthropomorphic (Kennedy, 1992, p. 26) by purposely describing products and brands in the first person in order to make them seem more human and bring them closer to the consumer. For example, on a Herbal Essences conditioner bottle you will find the following phrases, 'I am a fearless tamer for Frizzy hair', 'I'm a nourishing formula with mandarin oil and pearl extract...'

3.7 Summary

The concept of anthropomorphism has mystified academics of various disciplines for many years. Although anthropomorphism is perceived as disadvantageous to anthropologists, ethologists, and theologists, on the other hand, it is a marketer's best friend. Anthropomorphism lends marketers a helping hand in the formulation of consumer-brand relationships, allowing brands to grow and prosper. In this chapter, a vast array of examples in which anthropomorphism is used within marketing and advertising was provided.

There are numerous definitions for the term anthropomorphism, all of which comprise the attribution of humans' most important aspects to parts of the world that lack them. This includes an unending collection of human characteristics from body shape, look and feel, to sound, voice, and capabilities, to even personality. A look into heavenly scriptures suggests that anthropomorphism existed since the creation of man. The initial moulding of Adam from clay has resonated through humanity as an urge to create anthropomorphic mouldings of ourselves. Arguably, anthropomorphic thinking is one of the reasons behind why pet keeping and animal domestication occurs today. Other reasons have also been presented by literature in pet-related consumer research (Bettany & Daly, 2008; Bettany & Kerrane, 2011).

Numerous explanations and interpretations have been given in this chapter regarding the reasons behind why anthropomorphism occurs. Understanding the grounds for anthropomorphism is highly beneficial for marketers, who are then capable of increasing or decreasing its likelihood for occurrence based on their strategy. Additionally, two means of classifying anthropomorphism have been highlighted. The first means of classification identifies three forms of anthropomorphism: accidental, partial and literal. The second means of classification identifies four kinds of human anthropomorphic form: structural, gestures, character and aware.

Humans' tendency to anthropomorphise is deep-seated within them. It is the nature of man, as opposed to the nature of the universe which shapes our understanding of the world. This poses two limitations. Firstly, human beings are unable to see the world as it truly is without the inclination to view it with human eyes. Secondly, a neutral language does not exist, thus making it virtually impossible to break away from anthropomorphism. For marketers, the world of anthropomorphism is a world full of possibilities.

Chapter 4. When branding meets anthropomorphism

Attaching anthropomorphic meaning to products and brands comes naturally to marketers and it is ever increasingly. The use of anthropomorphism in branding is believed to facilitate the creation of a stronger, more emotional connection between brand and customers. In this chapter, I aim to address objective 4: To develop a theoretical frame of reference by which brand anthropomorphism can be categorised. I start this unit by investigating the way in which brand meaning is created using anthropomorphism. This is followed by considering the way brand anthropomorphism has been categorised within marketing literature. Subsequently, an analysis of tactics currently used by industry is carried out inspiring the development of a theoretical frame of reference by which brand anthropomorphism is categorised. This framework is based on the 'Brand Puzzle' presented in Chapter 2.

In this chapter, a reiteration of the route selected for this thesis is made, indicating my intention to further investigate the use of marketing mascots. As such, a review of literature on the conceptual development of mascots is undertaken. To further the arguments of this dissertation, a look into our humanity was essential. The concept of 'becoming human' is introduced.

4.1   The creation of meaning

As discussed in Chapter 2, the discipline of branding, has gained increased popularity. In the past 25 years, particular attention has been given to brand equity and accountability, brand culture and loyalty, brand personality, and more recently, brand anthropomorphism emphasised by the recent *Journal of Marketing Management* special issue on Anthropomorphic Marketing. The common perspective on branding has been clearly founded in the fields of information economics, psychology and consumer behaviour (Anderson, 1983). The existence of brands as per Ries & Trout (2001) is commonly expressed as a cognitive construal. In other words, the brand exists in the psyche of the consumer as an array of brand-relevant knowledge (Keller, 2003). This is what makes brands complicated and difficult to investigate without the use of 'projective' and 'enabling' qualitative research techniques such as brand personification, and metaphor/analogy (Chandler & Owen, 2002). Thus, anthropomorphising brands is essential to our understanding of them.

Humans and hence consumers are receptive, emotional, principally irrational life forms. Cusick (2009) suggests 95% of human brain activity transpires in the irrational or subconscious. It has been one of human's evolutionary survival traits, amid other components, to seek out and recognise human characteristics within surroundings such as the sky, and within animals and inanimate objects. Therefore, attaching anthropomorphic

meaning to products and brands comes naturally to marketers and it is ever increasingly. The use of anthropomorphism in branding is believed to facilitate the creation of a stronger, more emotional connection between brand and customers (Cusick, 2009). This is evident in the following examples: Tony the Tiger, Churchill the Bulldog, the Michelin Man, Hello Kitty, Joe Camel and the Duracell Bunny to name but a few (Brown, 2010).

Indeed, the creation of a stronger emotional connection between brand and consumer is facilitated by anthropomorphism. In their book *The 101 Most Influential People Who Never Lived,* Lazar, Karlan, & Salter (2006), suggest characters created by the marketing industry are equal, if not superior, to the very best that fiction, myth, legends, television and films have to offer. Laying claim to the admired title of number one, the Marlboro Man was picked by *Advertising Age* as the most powerful brand image of the twentieth century and one of the top advertising campaigns of that era. Through the use of anthropomorphism, Marlboro was able to portray exactly what adolescents wanted to be, masculine, tough, independent and free of their parents. The Marlboro Man came into existence to plant the idea that the right brand of tobacco would give its consumer independence and strength.

When it comes to brand anthropomorphism, Fournier (1998) suggests that some customers move beyond simply ascribing human like personality traits to brands to forming meaningful human-like relationships with them. She proposes that brands can form worthwhile partners in a relationship, performing a number of roles within the relationship. It is probable that the concept of human-brand relationships can be related to the ideas of Serpell (2005) and Bettany & Kerrane (2011) about human-pet relationships. Serpell (2005) believes human-pet relationships are unique because they are based predominantly on the transfer or exchange of social provisions between people and animals as opposed to economic or utilitarian ones. On the other hand, in their paper which investigates the practices and processes of urban hen-keeping, Bettany & Kerrane (2011) reveal a more complex human-pet relationship in which animals contribute to multiple aspects of consumption/anti-consumption and consumer resistance/domination. For the individuals engrossed in these relationships, anthropomorphism provides the prospect to use animals as unconventional sources of social, emotional and physical support, as well as a form of resistance. Debatably, similar benefits to these can also be achieved through human-brand relationships.

In a consumer culture, the consumption of individuals is no longer purely functional satisfaction, but meaning-based. Cultural meanings are transferred to brands through the use

of advertising. Elliott & Wattanasuwan (1998) propose that brands become habitually used as symbolic resources for the creation and maintenance of identity. To truly appreciate the role of advertising in brand marketing, as highlighted by Levy (1959), it is imperative to focus on the symbolic meanings integrated into the brand through the use of promotional marketing communications. Anthropomorphic representations, be it animal mascot or celebrity endorsers, are commonly used in these promotional messages thus providing one of the major sources of symbolic meanings. Hackley (2010) believes marketing communication establishes brands and does not simply portray them. The meaning of brands cannot be accurately understood in parting from the consumer perceptions of brand names, logos, advertising, media editorials, or from their portrayal in entertainment shows, peer comments and the supplementary communications associated with them.

In advertisements, a suggestive juxtaposition of words and images are used to imply that consuming a given brand will symbolically grant particular qualities and values. Exclusive of compelling viewers to believe the statements made, it is hoped that they will interpret the desired implications (Hackley, 2010). By making claims in advertising that if understood literally would seem ridiculous, marketers utilise the usually perceived problem of 'polysemy of meaning' in a positive way. Polysemy of meaning creates the freedom for viewers of advertising to exercise some permit in reinterpreting ads creatively. A 2012 Toyota Hilux advert (Australia) combines the power of anthropomorphism with the power of ridiculous to produce a highly effective commercial. The advert features a man driving a Hilux through a river, over a snowy mountain, through a valley with a cyclone which caused a flood and a landslide, past a volcano and a cliff edge, before coming across a fire blowing, armour wearing bore on a motorcycle, with an ice cream demanding, fully dressed monkey as a side-kick. The advert is entertaining while at the same time, viewers are able to understand the subliminal messages it tries to put across – *tougher than you can imagine* – emphasised by the title of the advert.

According to Elliott & Percy (2007), the creation of meanings does not solely encompass a mediation process concerning advertisements, the brand, and the consumer during the period of exposure to the advertisement only; instead, the advertising-consumer relationship is dialectical. In other words, Lannon & Cooper (1983) believe advertising helps in forming, adapting, and altering cultural meanings for the consumer, as well as representing cultural meanings taken from the world view of the consumer and invested into the advertised product. Meaning interpreted by consumers is by and large modified and varied according to

their own cultural reference points and imitating their own perception of identity (Hackley, 2010).

4.2   Categorising Brand Anthropomorphism

In the field of branding, marketing and advertising, anthropomorphism is increasing rather than decreasing in intensity (Balcombe, 2010). As opposed to other disciplines where anthropomorphism is frowned upon, Marketers are increasingly endorsing anthropomorphised elements to their brand in order to develop a closer relationship with their consumers. A good example for this is Aleksandr Orlov from the Compare the Market advertising Campaign initiated in 2009 (See Section 6.1). It was revealed in the Computer animation festival of 2009 that Passion Pictures, the production company, was asked to create a very realistic meerkat that spoke and behaved like a real person rather than a cartoon character (Crosscup & McLean, 2009).

It has been perceived by Brown (2010) that designing brands and products with anthropomorphised representations is becoming increasingly popular amongst markers. However, brands do not need these graphical representations in order to be considered anthropomorphic. Every brand, like a person, has its character, possesses the unique traits which configure its ways of conducting relationships, the expression and demonstration of its own inner world. Subsequently, each character has a personality which can take on various representations: happy, melancholic, extrovert and closed, extrovert and simple, friendly or standoffish. What is important for Fioroni and Titterman (2009) as expressed by Brown (2010), is that the success of a brand is linked to its character, just as is the development of interpersonal relations between individuals (Brown, 2010).

Brands are also commonly associated with human personality traits. They are more often than not acquired directly through the real people consumers associate with the brand, such as their typical users, celebrity endorsers or a chief executive. For Levy (1959), brand personality includes demographic categories such as gender, age, and class. For Aaker (1997), personality traits can also become associated with a brand subliminally through a varied array of features such as: brand name, symbol, advertising stylistics, and price as well as distribution channel. In a large number of cases, human personality traits are also obtained through brands' anthropomorphic characters. Plummer (1985) expresses a belief that

attractive (strong and favourable) personalities assist brands in standing out from their rivals and helps to generate elevated consumer appeal.

Brown (2010) has deduced after consulting his database that the popularity of a brand character is directly related to its distance from humanness both physiologically and psychologically. Thus Brown (2010) reveals that the most popular brand characters are somewhat real and portrayed human beings - the Michelin Man, the Burger King, Aunt Jemima, Uncle Ben, Ronald McDonald, Pillsbury doughboy and so on. The second most popular brand character disclosed by Brown (2010) is animals. They go along the following order: domestic, large wild, small wild, mystical, aquatic, and insect. Examples of these include: Hello Kitty, Aflac Duck, Tony the Tiger, the Duracell Bunny, monster.com, Charlie the Tuna, and Ortho Bug. Subsequently, Brown (2010) indicates that personified fruits, vegetables and plants also have their supporters – e.g. Mr Peanut and Tom Tomato. In all fairness, any object can also be anthropomorphised by just giving it eyes, a mouth, and limbs perhaps. For example AC Oil Drop, Mr Torque, Extra Smileage (B. F. Goodrich), Ollie (Oliver Tractors), Trusty the Trostel Seal and so on (Dotz & Husain, 2003).

Brown (2010) has also noticed numerous variations in the anthropomorphic mindset of brand managers and thus established that in some instances, animal ambassadors are embraced whole-heartedly as is the case for Jolly Green Giant; in other instances, the connection between brand and mascot is not entirely clear. Brown (2010) has thus broadly identified four mascot strategies: match, mix, mystify and multiply. The Brown (2010) match model is in keeping with Ries & Trout's (2001) classic marketing concepts of positioning and single minded mindshare; in other words, the brand name, logo, and product are essentially the same. For example: Mr Clean, Penguin books, Toilet Duck, and Jaguar cars. For Brown (2010), the mix model is the animal equivalent to celebrity endorses in the sense that the mascot endorses the brand rather than embodies it. The only differences between them are: animal mascots work for free and are less likely to complain or go off the rails than their human counterpart (Pringle, 2004). Examples include Geoffrey the Toys R Us giraffe and Chester the Cheetos cheetah. The multiply model according to Brown (2010) exemplifies the marketing mentality of more-more-more is better (Brown, 2003). It is therefore better to have a swarm of brand-critters than one or two. This is best illustrated by M&M. There are currently six spokescandies each with a different colour and personality. Finally, the mystify model as per Brown (2010) is more than a missed opportunity (e.g. Lynx deodorant, Gatorade energy drink). It is a baffling connection between name and logo which leaves

customers guessing (Brown, 2001). An example of this is Hot Tuna clothing which has a predatory barracuda as a logo. Debatably missed opportunity (Brown, 2001) should be expressed as a fifth mascot strategy because many brands including Cobra beer, Dove deodorant, Crocs shoes, and Shell petrol use a mascot but they do not anthropomorphise it.

Within marketing literature, there has been confusion and much debate regarding the utilisation of the term anthropomorphism. For instance, Brown (2010) provides numerous examples that are illustrations of zoomorphism (defined by VandenBos (2007, p. 1011) as "the attribution of animal traits to human beings, deities, or inanimate objects") rather than anthropomorphism − Rock bands: Eagles, Fleet foxes and Gorillaz; Hairstyles: pony tail, cowlick and mullet; Figures of speech: herding cats, jumping the shark, pig in the python; Business terms: cash cows, fat cats, dead dogs; Parables: black swans, purple cows; Brands: Lacoste crocodile, MGM lion. For brands specifically, these are animals being portrayed as animals. Arguably, unless these animal mascots get up and dance, speak, or even start wearing clothes, there is nothing human about them. This illustrates the importance of having a clear distinction between a mascot and an anthropomorphised mascot; otherwise it can be argued that brand personality is what makes a brand anthropomorphic. Its sufficiency can be questioned. Doniger (2005) argues on the other hand that although zoomorphism is etymologically the opposite of anthropomorphism, the relationship is more complex than implied in the dualism between nature and culture − the very animalistic qualities we adopt when engaging in zoomorphism are themselves constrained by our humanity, therefore, in effect we can never escape anthropomorphism.

4.3   Tactics currently used by industry

Referring back to Section 2.5, after conducting a detailed review of the different definitions for brands, I introduced the 'Brand Puzzle' (See Figure 2.2) as a means of advancing knowledge of brands and offering a different way of looking at the brand construct. Although this model takes on a mechanistic approach to a very organic overall perspective, I argue that it operates as a backbone to which the 'brand as person' metaphor is applied. For this section, I immerse myself in the field and test out this notion by examining the tactics currently used by industry.

The tactics currently used by industry have been summarised in Table 4.1 based on their typology classification. A company may choose to anthropomorphise their brand by imbuing any of its constituents, i.e. the puzzle pieces, with human characteristics and traits. A company is not constraint to the use of any particular element at any one time; instead, they may choose to anthropomorphise numerous components at the same time. For example, the Uncle Ben's brand has a highly anthropomorphic name, as well as the face of a middle aged African American man as its logo. In this sense, Uncle Ben's have chosen to anthropomorphise their brand using the puzzle pieces of name and logo.

As demonstrated in this section, the 'Brand Puzzle' model provides a useful backbone to tackling the anthropomorphism tactics currently used by industry. In the time frame available for this Ph.D., it would be overly ambitious to investigate all tactics proposed by this model in the excruciating detail they warrant; therefore a decision was made to select only one tactic – the utilisation of marketing mascots – for investigation and evaluation using a case study methodology. Justifications for these decisions are given in Chapter 5. As the focus of this thesis turns towards marketing mascots, a literature review on their conceptual development is undertaken.

Table 4.1 Anthropomorphic representations based on typologyclassifications

Typology Classification	Company/ Brand Example	Anthropomorphic representations
Name	Uncle Ben's Aunt Bessie's Mr Sheen Mr Clean	The names of these brands are anthropomorphic
Logo	Starbucks Versace	
Mascot	M&Ms Comparethemarket Planter's Kellogg's Frosties Michelin Green Giant McDonalds	Red, Yellow, Blue, Crispy, Miss Green, Miss Brown Aleksandr Orlov Mr Peanut Tony the Tiger Bibindum Jolly Green Giant Ronald McDonald
Advert	Dolmio GoCompare.com Plenty Gaviscon	The Dolmio Family Gio Compario Juan Sheet Fire Fighters
Slogan	Reebok	"I am what I am"
Product/ Service	Alessi	Products have facial features and limbs
	Vigar (Dolls)	Kitchen equipment (brushes) in the shape of Dolls
	Mattel	Barbie Dolls

	Lego	
	Crayola	The slit underneath the brand name, which allows for the colours contained within the packet to be seen, is an intimation of a smile

Owner/ Director	Apple	Steve Jobs
	Virgin	Richard Branson
Endorser	Sainsbury's	Jamie Oliver
User	Johnson's	Baby
	Harley Davidson	Bikers
Employee(s)	Halifax	
Vision/ Mission/ Values	Ben & Jerry's	Ben & Jerry's believe business has a responsibility to give back to the community. We make the best possible ice cream in the nicest way… Heroes for Ice Cream. Hungry for Justice.
	TOMS	With every pair you purchase, TOMS will give a pair of new shoes to a child in need. One for One.
Narration	Herbal Essences	"Use me: Massage me in."
	Purina Gourmet Gold	"I promise a truly delectable eating experience or I will offer a full refund"
Relationship	Facebook	Social relationships with family and friends through their website
	Build a Bear	Friendship between children and the product
Emotion	Warburton's Bakery	"We Care Because Our Name's On It"
Personality	Lynx	Seduction, masculinity, individuality, unconventionality
	Marlboro	Masculinity, freedom, adventure
	Levi's	Rebellion, sensuality, being cool

Note: Typology classifications are not mutually exclusive – a company may employ numerous anthropomorphic techniques at the same time

Source: Author

4.4   The conceptual development of mascots

For decades, mascots have been used by companies in the form of registered trademarks to distinguish one product from another in the increasingly competitive market place. Trademarks were defined by Rogers in a 1950 advertising handbook as "any device that enables a purchaser to choose the goods he prefers from among competing articles, and to discriminate against those he dislikes or knows nothing of" (p. 77). Many of the trademarks created by companies were in the form of characters. This was done in order to establish a personal connection with consumers. According to Marchand (1985, p. xxi), "people craved opportunities, through vicarious experience, to bring products within the compass of their own human scale". These characters appeared in a variety of forms, including animals, mythological figures, objects and humans, and in order to facilitate their identification with consumers, they were more often than not anthropomorphised. Margaret Callcott, Wei-Na Lee and Barbara Phillips have done substantial work investigating spokes-characters. However, in their work they refer to animal and object personification. As defined in the previous chapter, anthropomorphism is a more accurate word for imbuing animals and objects human with characteristics, and thus will be used here.

Experts recommend spokes-characters as one of the most effective forms of advertising (Stewart & Furse, 1986; Phillips & Gyoerick, 1999). In one of the first papers to investigate animated spokes-characters, Callcott & Lee (1994) present a content analysis of animated characters in television advertising. The purpose of their study was to document the use of animated spokes-characters across a variety of program audiences and consumer products, placing emphasis on character descriptions and behaviour. Their findings revealed that the majority of animated characters appeared for low-involvement products falling under the categories of cereal/fruit/vegetable, candy/snack, food/beverage and games/toys. Interestingly, two of the three case studies selected for investigation in this thesis fall within these categories – the cases of M&M's and Mr Peanut. Callcott & Lee's (1994) findings also revealed that the majority of animated spokes-characters they observed were human or anthropomorphised animals and products. More recently, attention has turned to characters in adverts for high-involvement adult products – the case of Aleksandr Orlov provides such an example.

Spokes-characters owe their existence to advancements in technology and human's natural inclination to anthropomorphise. Their evolution over time has brought much confusion to the way they are defined. Presented via increasingly diverse methods of animation – such as puppetry, stop-motion, photography, rotoscope, Claymation, and more recently computer animation – spokes-characters are product endorsers and just like their human counterparts (i.e. spokes-persons), their function is to speak for a product or provide some kind of visual demonstration (Stout, 1990; Callcott & Lee, 1995). According to Callcott & Lee (1995), a spokes-character does not necessarily have to be a legal trademark or appear on the packaging but must be used consistently in conjunction with a product over time. When used by companies, spokes-characters often fulfil the role of mascots which are primarily perceived to be symbols and bearers of good luck (Oxford English Dictionary, 1987). Therefore, the terms mascot and spokes-character will be used interchangeably throughout this thesis.

As the first researchers to develop a typology for classifying spokes-characters, Callcott & Lee (1995) established the AMOP framework which describes characters on the four dimensions of Appearance, Medium, Origin and Promotion. Although they strive to be inclusive in their framework, there are two criteria that they insist must be met for an advertising image to be considered a 'spokes-character'. Firstly, the character must be used consistently in conjunction with the product it advertises. In this sense, figures that appear in advertising as illustrations or graphic devices for a single ad campaign are excluded. Secondly, the spokes-character must have a recognisable 'persona' or 'character'. Webster (1983, p. 304) defines this as "a distinctive trait, quality, or attribute". As such, the spokes-character must have an explicit personality easily identifiable by consumers.

The first parameter of the AMOP framework – Appearance – takes into consideration the mind-boggling array of mascots utilised by industry, ranging from human based to mythical beings, anthropomorphised animals and objects. These are discussed in greater detail in the subsequent sections. The second parameter for spokes-character definition relates to the medium through which these characters are presented to consumers. At the time of writing their paper, Callcott & Lee (1995) identified four basic media through which spokes-characters connect with consumers: print, film, radio and merchandise. Although not

advertising per se, merchandise featuring spokes-characters, according to Callcott & Lee (1995), help strengthen consumer awareness of the character, and presumably the brand[4].

With advancements in technology, the internet became another form of media through which spokes-characters potentially connect with consumers. Embracing integrated marketing communication, practitioners coordinated their advertising efforts on other media with advertising on the internet (Geissler, 2001). Consequently, they moved their spokes-characters on the web in the same way that they were able to successfully adapt them for both radio and television use many years ago (Phillips & Lee, 2005).

This explosive growth of the internet as a novel and viable advertising medium has forced advertising researchers to rethink models of advertising communication and persuasion (Phillips & Lee, 2005). For the past ten years at least, companies have been interacting with their consumers through the internet via websites, email, forums, blogs and instant messaging (Kim B. , 2008). With the growth of Social Media (such as Facebook, Twitter, MySpace), companies have been increasingly trying to utilise these sites in order to build stronger consumer-brand relationships. As a differentiation strategy, rather than moving their company onto Social Media, executives have adapted their spokes-characters to embrace the internet. Thus, spokes-characters are increasingly being used as interactive agents online (Liao, Liu, Pi, & Liu, 2011).

One of the most important differentiating features and the primary benefit hyped for the internet over traditional media is its interactivity (Ha & James, 1998; Cho & Leckenby, 1999; Yoo & Stout, 2001). In their research, Phillips & Lee (2005) investigated the effect of spokes-character animation as a formal feature of Internet advertisement. In their findings, interactivity emerged as a key construct. As such, advertisers who wish to use their traditional spokes-character on their corporate website can benefit from increasing spokes-character animation and opportunities for interactivity. Spokes-characters embracing Social Media have an increased level of interactivity with consumers who treat them as 'friends'. This was an important element to keep in mind when selecting my case studies for this thesis.

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[4] Because of commonness of character licensing, it is important to differentiate between spokes-character licensed to endorse a product, and a character licensed to appear on a product. For example, M&M's are spokes-characters for M&M's chocolate. They are not spokes-characters for t-shirts and household items just because they appear on them.

More recently, Liao *et al* (2011) carried out research to investigate whether a spokes-character can be representative of a company and its products online by interacting with its consumers. Their results revealed that consumers who were allowed to interact with the marketing mascot online had higher levels of trust in the mascot and also an increasingly positive attitude towards the brand. Accordingly, consumers treated interactive marketing mascots more favourably than traditional icon based mascots because a change in relationship occurred – a change from an exchange relationship into a communal one. Because consumers feel as though they have a personal relationship with spokes-characters, these marketing mascots play a significant role in gaining consumer trust (Callcott & Lee, 1995; Garretson & Niedrich, 2004) and successfully building an emotional connection between the consumer and the brand (Callcott & Alvey, 1991; Callcott & Phillips, 1996).

For the third parameter of the AMOP framework, spokes-characters can be defined according to their origin – advertising or non-advertising. Spokes-characters with a non-advertising origin can be classified as celebrities. They have many of the same characteristics as their human counterpart including the ability to attract attention and create positive associations for a product through a popular personality. Non-celebrity spokes-characters are those characters with an advertising origin, as they were originally created strictly for advertising purposes (Callcott & Lee, 1995). All three case studies selected for this thesis are of advertising origin. Non-celebrity spokes-characters are perceived to be more effective than their celebrity counterparts because the identity they provide for a product belongs only to that product (Callcott & Alvey, 1991). Through repeated association over the years, non-celebrity characters become almost 'as one' with the product thus eleminating any problems of character over exposure and subsequent consumer confusion over which product is being endorsed by the popular celebrity character (Callcott & Lee, 1995). This has been revealed by a study carried out using spokes-character origin. Callcott & Alvey (1991) found that spokes-characters with an advertising origin elicited approximately 70% correct product recall, while characters with a non-advertising origin elicited only 30% correct product recall.

The fourth and final parameter of the AMOP framework is concerned with the way in which spokes-characters promote a product – active or passive promotion. Even if they never utter a word, active spokes-characters demonstrate, present or speak for the product in some way or another, as opposed to passive mascots with merely a symbolic nature. All three case studies chosen for this thesis are of active spokes-characters. It's important to bear in mind that the degree of activity a spokes-character exhibits can change over time by moving back and forth

between active promotion of a product and symbolic representation. This was witnessed in the case of Mr Peanut (See Section 6.3). According to Callcott & Lee (1995) this cycle may prevent charcter wear-out, while at the same time preserving consumer relationships with the characters.

In addition to classifying spokes-characters, research has gone into the investigation of what makes mascots likable. Callcott & Phillips (1996) examined the dimensions underlying spokes-character likability. In their paper, they explore consumer perceptions in an attempt to answer the question "What makes spokes-character likable?" Four primary dimensions of spokes-character likability were uncovered. These provide a blueprint for creating likable spokes-character advertising. The first dimension according to Callcott & Phillips' (1996) findings is to choose or create a character that has a distinct, identifiable personality that embodies traits and characteristics consistent with the brand and liked by consumers. Secondly, to match the character's personality with the desired brand personality. Thirdly, Callcott & Phillips' (1996) research suggests that consumers like characters that have a neotenous shape (i.e. rounded and childlike) and are 'cute'. Additionally, regardless of type, humour appears to play a large role in spokes-character likability. Lastly, depending on how a character is portrayed, a consumer's cultural associations with ethnic groups together with consumer's prior knowledge of, and attitudes towards, spokes-characters may also affect likability. According to Mize & Kinney (2008), in order to increase the strength of consumer-brand relationships, if practitioners believe that their spokes-character is highly liked by consumers, then they should work to integrate them fully in all their marketing efforts.

Brand mascots are a form of anthropomorphism that operates at the boundary between the world of firms and the world of consumers. A limited number of researchers have endeavoured to understand the way in which brand mascots work for consumers. Pavitt (2000, p. 175) however notes that "the tendency to emphasise the relationship between identity and consumer behaviour eclipses another crucial relationship – with those employed to produce the goods we consume". Looking at it from this opposite perspective, Cayla (2013) tried to understand the way in which employees, managers and other organisational stakeholders relate to brand mascots. By treating brand mascots as carriers of meaning for organisations, Cayla's (2013) research objective was to move beyond analysis of branding as facilitating external commitment (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003) and studying how the symbolic and affective attachments to branded forms develop within companies. Utilising ethnographic methodology, Cayla (2013) situated himself in an advertising agency in order to study the on-

going discussions and negotiations central to the work of tailoring messages for locals. Such discussions included the role of brand mascot in a new cultural context. Cayla's (2013) findings revealed that brand mascots are more than advertising glitter used to entice consumers into buying products; they can also become powerful organisational totems – a symbolic proxy for a firm's identity, solidifying organisational loyalties and guiding strategy. Cayla's (2013) findings also revealed that brand mascots can become a source for inter-organisational tension between clients and advertising agencies, fuelling friction and negotiation especially when the brand mascot is perceived as a treasured asset and put 'on a pedestal' by organisational members. Strict rules and guidelines on the utilisation of the brand mascot cripples creativity within an advertising agency and raises tension.

Additionally, according to Cayla's (2013) findings, a brand mascot can have profound impact on members of the organisation of a global corporation despite being several thousand miles away and several decades after the mascot's invention. A brand mascot operates as an organisational device facilitating indoctrination and control through ritual and celebration; thus carrying the role of identity maintenance and reproduction.

As previously reviewed, humans cannot help but anthropomorphise. To a large extent, anthropomorphism has an effect on likability. As stated by Peltier (2010, p. 188) "we tend to like people and things that are similar to us and familiar" and what is more familiar than our own humanity. Therefore, the popularity of spokes-characters is due to consumers' ability to identify with them, their personalities, and to see themselves in their stories. If we take this idea to be true then the more 'human' the spokes-character the better. Therefore, a comprehensive look into what makes humans the way they are is essential to the development of a highly likable anthropomorphic marketing mascot.

4.5   The human nature of mascots

A main concern of this thesis is to provide practical advice regarding the development of highly successful, highly likeable anthropomorphic marketing mascots. As expressed in Section 4.2, there is a distinction between marketing mascots and anthropomorphic marketing mascots. Developing an anthropomorphic marketing mascot entails the projection of our humanity onto that spokes-character – arguably the more human the better. This projection of humanity means that a closer look into 'us' is required in order to answer the question 'how

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do we make mascots more human?' In this section, a closer look into the nature of humans is initially performed and then applied to mascots, thus raising a variety of interesting questions.

Addressing and understanding the nature of humans is becoming increasingly important as companies are looking to become market-orientated. With major advancements in medical sciences, biology, psychology and other anthropocentric fields, it is evident that we as Homo sapiens have always been fascinated by our own humanity. A collection of cells, determined by their genetic make-up, brought together to form a perfectly functional physical body. As humans, we live our lives with the central purpose of fulfilling the needs of our physical bodies and our psychological dreams and desires. Rather than focusing on the selling of products, marketers are increasingly defining their markets in terms of the consumer needs they wish to satisfy. Marketers do not create needs; they merely identify and fulfil the human needs that are engraved into each and every one of us. Most famously, Maslow developed a hierarchy of needs which takes into consideration humans' various requirements in life. Understanding human needs is necessary in order to help identify the underlying motivations for performed behaviour.

Maslow starts his hierarchy of needs with humans' most basic physiological needs – these are required to sustain biological life and include food, water, air, shelter, clothing and sex. Many advertising campaigns, such as M&S food and Evian's water babies, are focused around products which fulfil these basic needs. For products that do not fulfil a basic physiological need however, another approach is taken. Take Lynx for example; the use of their deodorant will not directly fulfil a basic physiological need, instead, it is suggested that the product's utilisation will increase attractiveness and ultimately aid in fulfilling basic sexual needs.

Once basic needs are fulfilled, safety needs become the driving force behind people's behaviours. According to Maslow, safety needs are concerned with physical safety, order, stability, routine, familiarity, and control over one's life and environment. Many advertising campaigns, such as those for cars and insurance, utilise humans' central need for safety as their central contention. For instance, in 2010 Toyota released an advertising campaign with the tagline "Everyone deserves to be safe", drawing consumer attention to their Star Safety System which combines five safety technologies as standard equipment on all new Toyota models.

Thirdly on Maslow's hierarchy of needs are social needs. These address people's search for warm and satisfying human relationships anchored by love, affection, belonging and

acceptance. According to Layder (2004, p. 2), Humans "are all emotionally needy but each of us has different patterns of need. We all require a certain amount of love, care, and attention. We need to feel we belong, that we are accepted, that we are valued and that other people need us as we need them". When these basic needs are not met by other humans, individuals tend to look for them else-where. Animals and pets serve as an alternative to humans for fulfilling social needs. The following quote by an interviewee provides an example, "my dog loves me! And I love him! I have always wanted somebody to love me that much" (Log book, 12th Nov 2011). In the same way as pets, brands often serve to fulfil humans' social needs. This idea is advocated by an increased interest in the study of consumer-brand relationships.

Social motives have an importance in society. So much so, that many advertisements of various product categories emphasise this appeal. For instance, love is the central focus of Nestlé's Nescafé coffee. Complete with a love story between two individuals, their 'Gold Blend' is often coupled with taglines such as "fall in love with the new richer aroma", "the coffee you love", and "blended to spark something special". Another example is Warburtons bakery and the caring emotion they provoke – "We care because our name's on it".

According to Maslow, when physiological, safety and social needs are more or less met, egoistic needs become operative. These take either an inward or outward orientation or both. Inwardly directed ego reflects the need for self-acceptance, self-esteem, success, independence and personal satisfaction. Outwardly directed ego includes prestige, reputation, status and recognition by others. Advertising campaigns for high luxury goods often address egoistic needs by promoting the idea that obtaining such goods reflects success and increases prestige.

Lastly, the final tier in Maslow's hierarchy of needs is that for self-actualisation, and the desire to fulfil one's potential in this world. In other words, to be the best an individual can be. Self-actualisation needs are often the reason why people pursue postgraduate education, practice exotic hobbies, or engage in physically challenging adventure trips. Companies tap into people's need for self-actualisation by producing motivational adverts. A great example of this is Nike's 2012 "Find your greatness" campaign. The central idea behind the campaign is that "It is not just the championship athlete or record breaker that aspires to push their limits. It is also the everyday athlete who strives to excel on their own terms, to set and realize personal goals and achieve their own defining moment of greatness" (Nike, Inc,

2012). Nike's powerful message hopes to inspire anyone who wants to achieve their own moment of greatness in sport.

Although it is the most prevalent, Maslow's hierarchy is not the only theory pertaining to human needs. According to Schiffman & Kanuk (2007), some psychologists believe in the existence of a trio of basic needs: power, affiliation and achievement. Power relates to an individual's desire to control his or her environment including other persons and various objects. This need appears to be closely related to egoistic needs, in that many individuals experience increased self-esteem when they exercise power over objects or people. Affiliation is very similar to Maslow's social needs in that behaviour is strongly influenced by the desire for friendship, acceptance and belonging. People with high affiliation needs tend to be socially dependent on others. Achievement needs are closely related to both egoistic and self-actualisation needs. People with a high need for achievement tend to be more self-confident, enjoy taking calculated risks, and actively research their environments and value feedback.

Undoubtedly, humans have needs. But do marketing mascots have needs? Indisputably, mascots are not real. They are virtual beings unrestricted by physicality or time. Hence surely they have no needs. The question is: should marketing mascots have needs? In order to achieve the ultimate goal of making mascots as human as humanly possible, perhaps developers should look into imbuing their spokes-characters with human needs, desires and motivations. Motivation can be perceived as "the driving force within individuals that impels them to action. This driving force is produced by a state of tension, which exists as the result of an unfulfilled need." (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2007, p. 83) As such, what motivates spokes-characters? And will this ultimately motivate consumers to interact with them?

A closer look into the character of Aleksandr Orlov, marketing mascot for price comparison website CompareTheMarket.com, reveals that imbuing a spokes-character with human needs is highly plausible. Referring back to Schiffman & Kanuk (2007) and the trio of basic needs, it is evident that Aleksandr exercises a need for power through his bossy control over his assistant Sergei. Additionally, Aleksandr demonstrates a need for affiliation and a desire for friendship via his attempts at making friends on Facebook. Lastly, Aleksandr displays a need for achievement through his pursuit of many accomplishments – he is a highly successful businesskat, entrepreneur, author, actor etc. etc. More detail is revealed in the case study (See Section 6.1).

In addition to having needs, desires and motivations, humans have identities, personalities and traits. As integral components of personal identity, emotion, power and control are closely tied together and influence individual behaviour. Emotions are summoned as a wide spectrum of highly positive to highly negative sentiments (Layder, 2004). Positive emotions include happiness, trust, love, loyalty and empathetic understanding for example; whereas negative emotions comprise sadness, resentment, self-deception, rage and anger. It is widespread practice that spokes-characters project positive emotions. The exhortations of Tony the Tiger, "They're Grrrrreat!!!!" emanate feelings of happiness and excitement. Although voiceless, the Michelin Man transmits feelings of attentiveness and bravery. Moreover, the gentler "Oh yes!" affirmations of Churchill's dog impart reassurance and confidence. It seems highly unlikely that practitioners would seek to project negative emotions.

Human life is often equated to a 'roller coaster' ride filled with ups and downs. A life stripped of negative emotions is only half lived; for it is through experiencing the bad, that the good is truly appreciated. In order to make mascots as human as humanly possible, perhaps the utilisation of the whole spectrum of emotions is indispensable. By looking at the Peperami sausage man, with his outrageous penchant for cannibalism and brutal sadomasochism, it is evident that the idea of utilising the entire spectrum of human emotions is credible. Similarly, as is disclosed in the case study, Aleksandr Orlov too displays the negative emotion of frustration at people who confuse this website, CompareTheMeerkat.com, with that of the price comparison website, CompareTheMarket.com. Therefore, the utilisation of the wide spectrum of human emotions is an important idea to take forward.

Furthermore, humans are said to have personal and social identities. According to Layder (2004, p. 5), personal and social identities are never static; they adapt and change, gradually and incrementally, with time. Abrupt and 'total' makeovers, such as adopting a new fashion style or a 'cooler' way of talking, tend to be purely cosmetic. These outer changes reflect aspects of the self but do not indicate a change in core self-identity. This is most dramatically witnessed in celebrities.

Spokes-characters are celebrities in their own right. And just like their human celebrity counterpart, who have a social life in front of the camera and a personal life when not in the limelight, so too must spokes-characters have a life outside that of brand endorsement. This

notion has been observed as a natural progression of some spokes-characters when embracing the internet and Social Media. For instance, The Gecko, mascot for GIECO insurance company, has been informing his fans with his daily antics on Facebook. On 14th March 2013, he posted: "Perhaps you've noticed that I've been even busier than normal lately. Not to worry. I've been working on something behind the scenes." This notion has also been observed in all three case studies selected for this thesis.

Closely tied up with feelings, emotions, motivations, everyone has wishes, dreams, desires and needs; most crucially, the need for love, security, belongingness (Layder, 2004). And what better way to achieve all three crucial needs than to get married. Should marketing mascots fall in love, get married, have children? To mark the 80th birthday of Bertie Bassett, national mascot for Bassett's liquorice allsorts, on the 12th February 2009 a celebration worth remembering took place at the Bassett's factory in Sheffield, U.K. – the wedding of Betty and Bertie Bassett (Bertiesnewgirl, 2009). A full wedding ceremony, with pastor, vows, hymns, guests, photographers and a wedding reception with cake cutting, dancing, and balloons took place.   As the new face of Bassett's Red Liquorice Allsorts, Betty was Bertie's ideal partner, and now delectable wife.

In order to achieve the ultimate goal of making mascots as human as humanly possible, developers should look into expressing a varied range of human emotions, including negative ones, through their mascots. They should also imbue them with needs and aspirations. Would executing this make mascots appear more human? Would consumers perceive the mascots more favourably? And would this encourage a stronger bond between consumer and mascot? Would this translate into a stronger consumer-brand relationship?

In addition to having needs, dreams, desires, motivations, personal and social identities, humans also have personalities. The study of personality has been approached by theorists in a variety of ways. Some theorists have emphasised the dual influence of heredity and early childhood experience on personality development (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2007). As such, developers would need to address these influences when developing mascots and communicate them with consumer (The case study of Aleksandr Orlov provides a fantastic example of this). Others theorists have stressed broader social and environmental influences and the fact that personalities develop continuously over time. Renowned marketing mascots such as the Michelin Man, Tony the Tiger, and Mr Peanut have been around for over fifty years. Based on this notion, a continuous development of their personality must be observed.

Applying the concept of personality is not new to the marketing discipline. 'Brand personality' for instance is a widely accepted notion which refers to a set of human-like attributes associated with a particular brand (Aaker, 1997). Although the brand personality can take on the form of actual human beings, animated figures or mascots, in most cases however, it is a construct of the brand's underlying character or a transfer of user imagery (Gelder, 2005) – For example, Levi's equates to rebellion, sensuality and being cool. Research was undertaken by Aaker (1997) to establish brand personality dimensions. While hinging on research in personality psychology which conceptualises human personality, Aaker (1997) developed her theoretical framework. She determined the number and nature of dimensions of brand personality. These are Sincerity, Excitement, Competence, Sophistication, and Ruggedness. It is also argued that brand personality includes demographic characteristics such as gender, age and class.

While human and brand personality traits may share comparable conceptualisation (Epstein, 1977), they differ in terms of their formation. Perceptions of brand personality traits can be formed and influenced by any contact that a consumer has with the brand, directly or indirectly (Plummer, 1985). Personality traits come to be associated with a brand directly by the people associated with the brand i.e. the 'face' of the brand as articulated in the 'Brand Puzzle' (Figure 2.2): Owners/Directors, Employees, Users, Endorsers, and Mascots. Personality traits come to be associated with a brand indirectly through the other components of the Brand Puzzle.

In contrast, perceptions of human personality traits are inferred on the basis of an individual's behaviour, physical characteristics, attitudes and beliefs, and demographic characteristics (Park, 1986). As this section is concerned with the human nature of mascots, the argument continues that it is these human personality traits that need to be considered more closely when developing a marketing mascot. There should be a distinguished focus on expressing the attitudes and beliefs of the mascot (which ought to ultimately reflect the values of the company and brand), as well as an emphasis on their demographic, and physical characteristics and behaviour. By applying human personality traits, needs, aspirations, and dreams to mascot, they would be well on their way to achieving the ultimate goal of becoming human.

4.6 Becoming human

Indeed, spokes-characters have appeared in a vast array of forms. As a basic distinction, they can be classified as human and nonhuman. Through illustration, fictitious human spokes-characters such as Betty Crocker, the Quaker Oats man and Aunt Jemima may be perceived realistically. Although these spokes-characters could have been presented through photography long ago, the strategic decision to keep them as illustrations was chosen. According to Callcott & Lee (1995), one reason for this decision is the desire to present ideals that "real" humans could not adequately represent. In the case of Betty Crocker, her face appeared in 1936 and since then, has been updated five times. Betty Crocker was created to be the perfect picture of domesticity. She is the illustration of 'everywoman', enhanced by consumer imagination and untarnished through several generations. "Betty was created to have exactly the qualities she's supposed to have. She's perfect." (Kapnick, 1992, p. D1).

Numerous human spokes-characters have also been presented in the form of caricatures (e.g. Sunny Jim and Campbell Kids). The deliberate distortion of human characteristics is intended to produce attraction and humour in the same way anthropomorphised animals and objects are made attractive to consumers. Additionally, actors have been used by industry to further a spokes-character's image. Both costume-dependent personas such as Ronald McDonald who rely on actors to dress up as them, and less costume-dependent characters such as Juan Sheet (Plenty) and Gio Compario (GoCompare.com) are utilised by industry.

The use of non-human spokes-characters is also a wide spread practice. Callcott & Lee (1995) have identified three categories for non-human spokes-characters; these are animals, mythical beings and products, all of which are anthropomorphised. The degree of anthropomorphism in non-human spokes-characters varies extensively. Callcott & Lee (1995) suggest these can be best pictured on a continuum. The continuum they propose identifies Tony the Tiger, Smokey Bear and Joe Camel amongst the most anthropomorphised animal characters because they closely resemble humans in their speech and behaviour. Amongst the least anthropomorphised is Morris the Cat, a real cat that has been given a personality allowing consumers to relate to him. To a large extent, non-anthropomorphised animals are also utilised by companies. Callcott & Lee (1995) identify Bon Ami chick and Sinclair dinosaur as non-anthropomorphised animals and argue that these characters have been used by advertisers because they possess the qualities they wish to associate with their products.

Perceiving the degree of anthropomorphism as a continuum is a valuable tool that can be used by academics and advertisers alike in order to understand consumer behaviour and attitudes towards marketing mascots and help achieve certain effects based on strategy. In an attempt to elaborate, extend and advance the continuum proposed by Callcott & Lee (1995), I present Figure 4.1. The degree of anthropomorphism ranges from low to high, whereby the lowest degree of anthropomorphism is the utilisation of limited vocabulary – as an example, the Aflac Duck looks, behaves and acts like a duck, yet the only feature which makes it anthropomorphic is its utterance of the word Aflac – and the highest degree of anthropomorphism is 'becoming human'. In the highest degree of anthropomorphism, marketing mascots take on human form – for example, Uncle Ben and the Marlboro man.

Although Figure 4.1 represents the continuum of anthropomorphic mascots with examples of spokes-characters that fit under each degree, it must be said that the spokes-characters chosen are merely examples which fit the continuum at the time of writing this thesis. A company's decision to make their mascot more or less anthropomorphic will move it up or down the continuum accordingly. Additionally, it must also be said that this continuum is limited by its simplicity. The manner in which it is represented suggests that the degrees of anthropomorphism are clear cut and follow the particular order presented, but in reality this is not always the case. The design of the Michelin man for example is based on a stack of tires, with the addition of limbs and an improved posture, yet he has never voiced a single word. Still, he is considered to be more anthropomorphic than the Churchill Dog with his constant reassuring utterances of "Oh Yes!"
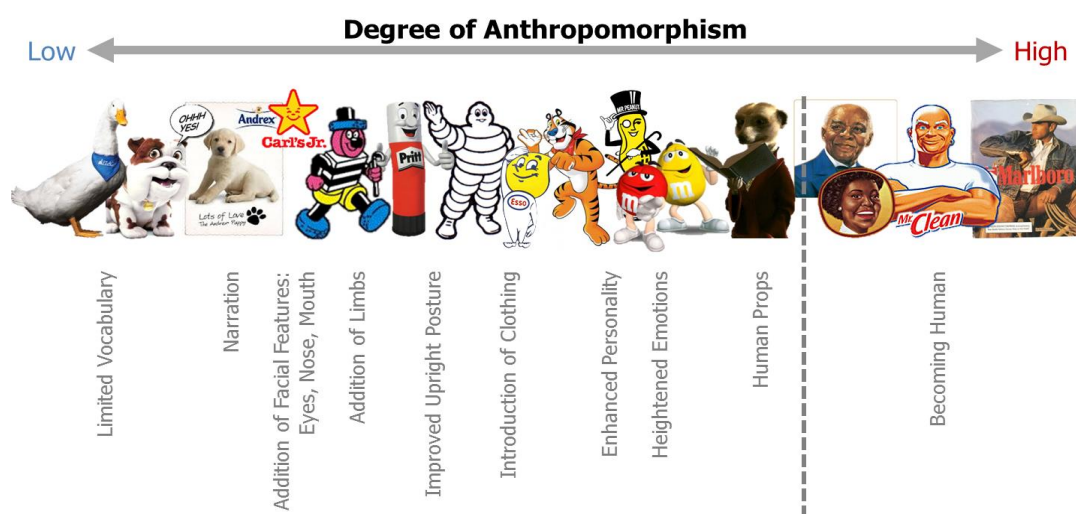
Figure 4.1 The continuum of anthropomorphic mascots

Source: Author

As previously expressed, in order to build a stronger consumer-brand relationship, one which will lead to an increase in brand loyalty, companies must turn to anthropomorphism for it is through imbuing their brands with human characteristics and traits that consumers are able to relate to them and form meaningful relationships. One of the ways in which a company may choose to anthropomorphise their brand is through the use of mascots. Mascots come in all sizes, shapes and forms, but arguably, the most loved mascots veer closer to becoming human. In the previous section, an investigation into what makes humans the way they are was carried out, with an attempt at applying the findings to mascots. However, debatably the most effective way to make a mascot more human is to embrace literature (See Section 5.1).

4.7 Summary

The ascription of human characteristics to brands is ever increasing seeing that it is believed to facilitate and encourage the creation of a stronger more emotional connection with consumers. Anthropomorphic brands are perceived to form worthwhile partners in a relationship by performing a number of roles within that relationship – for instance, providing unconventional sources of social, emotional and physical support.

Utilising the 'Brand Puzzle' model, there are numerous ways in which a company may choose to anthropomorphise their brand. They may choose to anthropomorphise their brand by imbuing any of the brand constituents, i.e. the puzzle pieces, with human characteristics and traits. Over the years, the use of mascots has proven to be a popular means of ascribing brands with human characteristics. These mascots have appeared in a variety of forms including animals, mythological figures, objects and humans, and mainly to promote low-involvement products. Research has revealed that the popularity of a brand character is directly related to its distance from humanness both physiologically and psychologically – the closer the spokes-character to being human, the more popular it is.

In order to make marketing mascots more human, a look into what makes humans the way they are is necessary in order to apply these findings to mascots. It is a plausible notion that a marketing mascot is imbued with both positive and negative human needs, wishes, dreams, desires and motivations as well as human identities, personalities and traits. But in order to truly make imaginary marketing mascots appear as human as humanly possible, developers need to embrace literature.

Chapter 5. Methodology

To satisfy the objective of making anthropomorphised mascots more effective, and to understand homo-sapiens in so far as they are consumers, an empirical investigation is required. This chapter unambiguously renders the methodological framework employed in this thesis in order to satisfy objectives 5 and 6. It commences by introducing the approach taken in this thesis. It then clarifies the underlying research assumptions guiding the processes of data collection and analysis. It describes a case study approach that opts for numerous qualitative methods, including netnography, online interviews, in-depth interviews and photo-essays, as and when applicable. Particular attention is paid to ensure detailed explanations of each method, and justifications for their use are expressed. This chapter also defends the decision to use this mixed methods approach, highlighting its validity, reliability and discussing issues of its limitations.

5.1   Adopting a literary approach

The last chapter closed with the notion that the most effective way to make a mascot more human is to embrace literature. This assertion has evolved out of the clear need for innovative conceptualisations in the field of brand anthropomorphism. As previously stated in Section 1.1, current literature in the area of marketing mascots focus on how creating spokes-character trust can lead to positive brand attitudes (Garretson & Niedrich, 2004); the role of spokes-characters as advertisement and package cues in integrated marketing communications (Garretson & Burton, 2005); the influence of spokes-characters on brand relationship quality factors (Mize & Kinney, 2008); and how the personality traits of spokes-characters can lead to build brand equity (Garretson Folse, Netemeyer, & Burton, 2012) – all of which employ a quantitative methodology.

There are problems associated with the existing approaches towards marketing mascots. Firstly, being bound in quantitative empirical enquiry is ironically devoid of any emotive human qualities. As such, current conceptualisations of brand anthropomorphism are inadequate and in need of tackling. As the discipline of marketing is all about helping brand managers to find new ways of improving their brand strategy, appeal, loyalty and so on, it is insufficient to focus solely on consumer reactions. As such, trying to get a handle on the mysterious process of creating marketing mascots is clearly needed and has not been done previously.

In the previous chapter, human nature was investigated from the perspectives of psychology and consumer behaviour. Indeed, everyone has their unspoken needs, desires, motivations and reasons – all of which must be expressed by marketing mascots; But how? Throughout history, literature has been dedicated to discovering ever more discriminating ways of expressing the complexities of human motivation (Mullan, 2006). In his book, *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human,* the famous literary critic Harold Bloom (1999) directly asserts that Shakespeare not only reinvented the English language but also created human beings as we know them today, with all their foibles, emotions, and atypical eccentricities. Ridiculous it may seem at first, by meticulously anatomising Shakespeare's central characters – Hamlet, Falstaff, and Rosalind – Bloom builds a tantalising and persuasive thesis that Shakespeare did indeed invent the human prototype. By accepting his bold assertion, it becomes easily comprehensible that if the secret of anthropomorphic design is to make an imaginary character appear as human as humanly possible, then perhaps the creators of these anthropomorphic mascots could attainably draw upon literature to make compelling characters that consumers will commend and adore.

As such, this thesis takes on a narrative approach to investigate the literary worlds of three marketing mascots – Aleksandr Orlov, the M&M's spokescandies and Mr Peanut – an approach which has recently gained popularity in human sciences and has been adopted by Stern (1989a; 1994), Brown & Reid (1997), Thompson (1997), and Brown (1998). This chapter delves into the methodological framework and processes employed for data collection and analysis, but firstly, it clarifies the underlying research assumptions. As this thesis continues, it will become clear that a finely wrought complexity rarely encountered in the presentation of mere marketing mascots is evident in all three examples selected. Although it is true to say that the majority of consumers are clearly unaware of the full breadth and depth of these selected mascots, it does not make them any less remarkable, nor their effect any less profound.

5.2   Research assumptions

As academics, we are faced with a challenge. How do we know that the knowledge we produce is true? In what ways is truth affected by the means in which we acquire knowledge and to what extent is it possible for a given subject to be known? Alvesson & Sköldberg (2000, p. 4) believe,

> *"it is not methods but ontology and epistemology which are the determinants of good social science. These aspects are often handled better in qualitative research – which allows for ambiguity as regards interpretive possibilities, and lets the researcher's construction of what is explored become more visible"*

However, this view is contrasted by Patton (1990, p. 90) who deliberates,

> *"... in practice methods can be separated from epistemology out of which they have emerged... One can make an interpretation without studying hermeneutics... The methods of qualitative inquiry now stand on their own as reasonable ways to find out what is happening..."*

These two opposing views raise problematic concerns for researchers; concerns which require a solution in order to minimise contradictions and clarify an academic's point of view. This solution comes in the form of Thomas Kuhn's 'paradigm'. As per Guba and Lincoln (1998, p. 200), a paradigm is "a set of basic beliefs" that must be accepted merely on faith because there is no way to ascertain their ultimate truthfulness. A paradigm characterises the composition of the 'world' for its holder, their place in it, as well as the scope of possible relationships to that world and its parts.

> *"Paradigms can be summarised by the responses given by proponents to three fundamental questions which are interconnected in such a way that the answer given to any one question constrains how the others may be answered."* (Guba and Lincoln, 1998 p. 200)

These three questions are the ontological, epistemological and methodological questions (Shankar, Elliott, & Goulding, 2001). In this sense, the processes of data collection and analysis utilised in this thesis are guided by the underlying research assumptions expressed in this section. Research assumptions that take into consideration the cross-disciplinary connections made with psychology, sociology, anthropology, consumer behaviour and cultural studies. Foremost, they draw on the interpretivist research paradigm which represents an eclectic variety of research traditions, perspectives and disciplines; for example, ethnography, netnography, grounded theory, hermeneutics, narrative analysis, semiotics, storytelling analysis etc. (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2006) some of which are explained later on in this chapter.

The dominant paradigmatic position in consumer research, as Shankar and Patterson (2001) argue, has historically been a variant of 'positivism'. Debatably, this variant is interpretivism. Catalysed by the Consumer Behaviour Odyssey (Wallendorf & Belk, 1989) and sometimes referred to as 'interpretive turn' (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2006), interpretivism is the

dominant paradigmatic position in human sciences that include psychology, sociology, anthropology, and so on. Thus, it is a well suited paradigm for the cross-disciplinary elements of this project which investigates consumer behaviour and attitudes towards anthropomorphic mascots as one of its research objectives.

So what makes this research project interpretive? After all, all 'research' involves some form of interpretation. "This includes the interpretation of primary data, of secondary data, of our own personal experience, and of the theories and models that we encounter in research literature" (Hackley, 2003, p. 91). However, as with all paradigms, interpretivism rests upon epistemological and ontological assumptions about the nature of knowledge (its knowability) and the status of reality (its existence); assumptions that empower us to make sense of the social world and are embodied in the research traditions, perspectives and disciplines employed under the umbrella of interpretivism (These are summarised in Table 5.1). I refer to it as the 'umbrella of interpretivism' because there is significant blurring amid the diverse qualitative data-gathering approaches and interpretive data analytical perspectives, to the extent that Hackley (2003) affirms, the terms 'interpretive' and 'qualitative' are often used as synonyms in academia despite the fact they are not. Strictly speaking, for this thesis, 'Qualitative' research refers only to the kind of data being analysed. However, the analytical approaches used to analyse this qualitative data are taken from interpretive research traditions.

Table 5.1 Summary of Interpretivist research assumptions

	Interpretivism
Ontological assumptions (nature of reality)	Socially constructed; multiple; holistic; contextual
Nature of social being	Voluntaristic; proactive
Axiological assumptions (overriding goal)	'Understanding' via interpretation but not necessarily in order to confirm hypotheses
Epistemological assumptions (knowledge generated)	Idiographic; time-bound; context-dependent; value-laden
View of causality	Multiple; simultaneous; shaping
Research relationship metaphor for	Interactive; co-operative; translator

Source: Adapted from Murray & Ozanne (1991)

For interpretivists, the reality of the social world is inter-subjective (Tadajewski, 2008). Since two people going through the exact same encounter will experience different realities, each from their own perspective, the existence of an external concrete social world is thus de-emphasised, and instead, interpretive researchers strive to explore the social world at the level of subjective experience (Arndt, 1985). The shaping of knowledge, ideas and relations is based on consensus, shared cognition and lived experience. When it comes to consumer research, in order to 'understand' these lived experiences, interpretive researchers generally use qualitative methods as a methodological strategy (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988; Thompson, Locander, & Pollio, 1989; Moore & Lutz, 2000).

Arguably, the use of numerous methods allows for the capture of numerous realities; Realities that are shaped by language, meaning and culture. According to Hackley (2003, p. 91),

> *"...knowledge is mediated by human interpretation. In most interpretive research traditions it is further assumed that human understanding is not something we acquire alone. We derive our frame of understanding from our social interactions and cultural life. In other words, we do not invent our ways of understanding the world. We learn them from the culture around us. We adapt these ways of understanding and knowing to serve our sense of individuality but they are, nevertheless, not purely ours alone. Ways of understanding are cultural, they are shared by many, they pre-exist individuals yet they are not fixed or given. They are historical and political."*

In more recent years, Arnould and Thompson developed a framework for conceptualising the experiential, symbolic, ideological and socio-cultural characteristics of consumption and named it 'Consumer Culture Theory' (CCT). This framework "refers to a family of theoretical perspectives that address the dynamic relationships between consumer actions, the marketplace, and cultural meanings" (Arnould & Thompson, 2005, p. 868). Within the marketplace ideology it conveys, culture is depicted as the very fabric of experience, meaning, and action. As demonstrated in previous chapters, the culture of consumers plays an important role in the success or failure of a brand and its marketing campaigns. Consequently, a more detailed look into CCT is necessary.

For CCT researchers, culture is depicted as heterogeneous rather than homogeneous. The view that culture is a way of life, a set of shared meanings and values common between members of a certain society, for instance, the British share this kind of culture and the Chinese share this kind of culture, is an unpopular view in CCT. The common theoretical

orientation towards the study of cultural complexity in CCT is that the distribution of meanings and values has become multifaceted and overlap several groupings of society, especially with increased globalisation and market capitalism. Although this 'distributed view' of meaning in culture is not the invention of CCT, Arnould & Thompson contend that it has greatly contributed to the development of this perspective through empirical studies which examine "how particular manifestations of consumer culture are constituted, sustained, transformed, and shaped by broader historical forces (such as cultural narratives, myths, and ideologies)" (Arnould & Thompson, 2005, p. 869).

Consumer culture theory investigates the way in which consumers dynamically modify and alter symbolic meanings encrypted in material goods, retail settings, brands and advertisements to establish their distinct, personal and social settings and advance their identity and lifestyle ambitions. In line with this, it is assumed that consumer interaction with anthropomorphic mascots and the marketplace provides a capacious and assorted palette of resources from which consumers fabricate their individual and collective identities. As a means of expressing themselves and attempting to portray their realities, consumers use language, engage in narrative and storytelling. After all, 'language shapes the course and meaning of the human condition' (O'Shaughnessy & Holbrook, 1988, p. 197). Hence, when telling a story, reality is constructed; a reality that is dynamic and subject to change each time the story is narrated; a reality that is produced by culture and bound by time/history. Hence, the following axiomatic assumptions are considered:

> *"...the self-telling of life narratives achieve the power to structure personal experience, to organise memory, to segment and purpose-build the very "events" of a life. In the end, we become the autobiographical narratives by which we "tell about" our lives". (Bruner, 1987, p. 15)*

> *"The stories that we tell about our own and others' lives are a pervasive form of text through which we construct interpret and share experience: we dream in narrative, daydream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, believe, doubt, plan, revise, criticise, gossip, learn, hate and love by narrative". (Schiffrin, 1996, p. 167)*

> *"social life is itself storied and that narrative is an ontological condition of social life" (Somers & Gibson, 1994, p. 38)*

It is thus fitting to consider Shankar, Elliott, & Goulding's (2001) narrative perspective. Narrative is defined by Bennett & Royle (1999, p. 55) as a 'series of events in a specific order – with a beginning, a middle and an end'. Our lives too are a series of stories with a

beginning, middle and end; and it is inconceivable to imagine otherwise. According to Shankar, Elliott, & Goulding's (2001, p. 431), since birth 'our parents begin to tell us stories and so we become socially and culturally conditioned into understanding the narrative form… as we grow up we learn about who we are, our history and our culture through stories and by telling stories'. In their paper, Shankar, Elliott, & Goulding (2001) argue that narrative should be elevated from an interpretive or analytical tool to having ontological status. They suggest a narrative paradigm that unescapably shares likenesses with other interpretive paradigms but focuses on the manifestation of language and its structure. It endorses an ontological position whereby 'reality' is constructed by individuals, through language, but 'consensualised' (Guba & Lincoln, 1998), shaped or modified socially and culturally within the world individuals are embedded in (Murray & Ozanne, 1991). Shankar, Elliott, & Goulding (2001) also see the possibility of multiple constructed realities which denotes, any understandings or interpretations will be subjective/relative. As these realities are constructed, there is no way of capturing that reality prior to the research. Also, as researchers are part of the research process, they are inevitably part of their research. As per Guba and Lincoln (1998, p. 207), 'the investigator and the object of investigation are assumed to be interactively linked so that findings are literally created as the investigation proceeds'.

To summarise, the research perspectives and assumptions utilised in this project lie within the interpretive paradigm. They consist of a narrative ontology whereby truth is relativistic and subjective to differences in perception and consideration, and a constructionist epistemology through which knowledge is constructed and co-created. In order to access the multiple realities, the use of multiple methods/ methodological pluralism is the sensible way forward.

5.3 Overall research strategy

In many fields of social science, including marketing studies, consumer behaviour and advertising, interpretive research perspectives have become greatly prominent (Hackley, 2003). This is evident in the large number of highly influential research, based on interpretive methods, appearing in *Journal of Marketing, Journal of Marketing Research, Journal of Consumer Behaviour and Journal of Advertising* to name a few. Scholars looking to conduct interpretive research, often follow the research processes identified by Murray & Ozanne (1991) which can be seen in Table 5.2. Also, they often rely on qualitative data in order to

achieve deeper understandings and to develop conceptual models that successfully interpret their empirical data (Hackley, 2003).

Table 5.2 Research processes for the interpretivist paradigm

Research process	Interpretivism
Initial stage	Identification of general phenomenon of interest; phenomenon's boundaries are left open and not delineated 'Bracketing' of prior conceptions Immersion in natural setting for extended time period Design, questions, and sampling strategies evolve as the phenomena is studied
Data collection stage	Reliance on the human instrument for generating 'thick description' Content or textual analysis to yield an interpretation
Standard data gathering techniques	Participant observation; in-depth interviews
Sample evaluation criteria	Length of immersion and creation of thick description

Source: Adapted from Murray & Ozanne (1991, p. 136)

With a boundless array of qualitative approaches available, the methodology selection process is a particularly confusing one; a mammoth task none the least. Familiarising myself with as many plausible methods before selection was essential in order to ensure I use the most appropriate ones. There are numerous reasons as to why there is no quantitative phase in this research project. Firstly, the research objectives do not require measurement. It is an exploratory research project which looks to investigate the under-researched topic of brand anthropomorphism and the creation of marketing mascots. Thus, it is theory driven and looks to establish several frameworks.

Interpretive studies rarely enquire about findings that can be valid in all cases, at all times (Hackley, 2003, p. 10). Alternatively, they veer towards carefully well-informed insights of a specific issue in a certain social and/or organizational context. When these insights cannot be separated from their social context, when they are present-day and in continuous dynamic change, case study research (CSR) is one of the best suited methodologies for such phenomena (Hackley, 2003). A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context (Yin, 2003, p. 13). It has the ability to describe multiple realities that may also be explanatory, understand influencing factors,

predict and capture the entirety of a situation (Woodside, 2010). Evidently then, the use of anthropomorphised mascots is an occurrence well suited to CRS.

As demonstrated in previous chapters, there is vast supply of highly recognisable anthropomorphised mascots which can be investigated, but only three have been selected for the purposes of this study. After thorough investigation, the mascots eventually selected were as follows:

- ✓ *Aleksandr Orlov* – Comparethemarket.com – United Kingdom
- ✓ Red, Yellow, Miss Green, Blue, Crispy, Ms Brown – M&M's Spokescandies – International
- ✓ *Mr Peanut* – Planter's Peanuts – United States of America

By selecting case studies from around the world, a deeper understanding of mascots, which is not limited by locality, can be attained. When deciding which mascots to select, the most important guiding light was that they must have a prominent presence on social-networking sites, Facebook in particular. This was to ensure the interactions, sentiments, and behaviours of consumers towards the chosen mascots can be investigated, and a deep understanding which includes 'sensemaking' (Weick, 1995) of what consumers perceive and how they interpret their actions can be achieved. A number of complimentary qualitative data collection methods were used to obtain information for each case study. These are discussed in more detail in subsequent sections of this chapter.

5.4 Data collection process

The inability to satisfy all the research objectives after the completion of the literature review meant, data must be collected namely to investigate and evaluate the tactics currently being used by industry, and to explore people's attitudes and behaviours towards anthropomorphic mascots. The data was collected in five stages beginning in May 2010. These are summarised below.

May – Dec 2010 Incubation Period	The incubation period started with a thorough exploration of the literature in the fields of marketing and branding. A few months of absorption and reflection were needed to make sense of the vast literature examined

during that period. With an increased knowledge base, deciding on the theme of my PhD was exceedingly difficult. I am loathed to admit it but I changed the theme at least five times. After delving deeper into literature, I identified numerous gaps in our understanding. And so the direction of my PhD was decided – the use of anthropomorphism in branding. After long deliberations, I settled on 'the appeal of advertising characters, spokescreatures and animal mascots' as my thesis theme. I applied for ethical approval, which was granted shortly after (See Section 5.5.5).

Jan – Aug 2011
Exploratory
Research

With the thesis theme in mind, I started exploring industry's rich array of advertising characters, mascots and spokes people. I was generating ideas, making linkages to theory and readings, reflecting on the insights gleaned and initially theorising.

During this time period, I attended a symposium which introduced me to Grounded Theory, a method I was unaware of previously. Valuably, its forefather Barney Glaser was in attendance. Attending this symposium was highly constructive as it allowed me to introduce and discuss my topic with colleagues. I was awarded best paper for my entry "The Effects of Anthropomorphism on Consumer Perceptions of Brands and their Products". Additionally, I participated in the *Academy of Marketing*'s Doctoral Colloquium (in which I was awarded the runner up prize for best paper) and attended their three day conference, *Marketing Fields Forever*.

Sep – Dec 2011
Case Study
Selection

Following the decision made during the incubation period, with regards to advertising characters, spokes-creatures and animal mascots, and in parallel with the development of a brand anthropomorphism typology during my initial theorising, the next logical step was to investigate three exemplars. In order to ensure consistency, the same methods were employed for the same types of data. Nevertheless, the weightings of these methods were not exactly the same because the sources of data available

for each case study were different by nature (See Table 5.3). To illustrate, Aleksandr Orlov's autobiography provides great literary insights into his character and family history, the kind of insights not available for M&M's or Mr Peanut, or at least, not with the ease of purchasing a single book off the shelf. Insights into their character came from countless hours of detailed investigation and desk research into their past. After all, Mr Peanut is 97 years old, and the M&M's have been around since the 1960s.

Jan – June 2012 Data Collection 1

The first part of the data collection phase started with Netnography (See Section 5.5.2), whereby long periods of time were spent observing the recent online activities of the case study characters and their followers on Facebook. Despite the availability of data for Aleksandr Orlov on Twitter and LinkedIn, these platforms were not used because primarily, they were not available for the M&M's and Mr Peanut. Secondly, Aleksandr's status updates were identical on all three platforms. Thirdly, Facebook provided records from 2009, which meant I had more than enough longitudinal data for all three case studies. Carrying out a netnography on other websites would have made this project unmanageable. After long periods of observation, I began analysing consumer attitudes and behaviours towards the anthropomorphised mascots, and theorising accordingly. A grounded hermeneutic approach was utilised (See Section 5.6.1).

During this time period, I also made numerous trips to the M&M's World store in London, whereby observation and photographic recordings took place and short conversations with customers and staffs was initiated.

Furthermore, preliminary analysis of Aleksandr Orlov's auto-biography, *A Simples Life*, commenced.

Table 5.3 Sources of data available and methodology used for each case study

Case Study	Sources of Data Available	Research Methods
Aleksandr Orlov	Literature: Autobiography, 6 Story Books, 3 interviews with Aleksandr Social Networks: Facebook, Twitter, Linkedin Adverts: 63 Videos Images: 95 official pictures, over 5000 consumer generated pictures Website: 3 websites Industry: Access to Richard Connell and Clement Woodward Secondary Data: Numerous articles	Netnography, observation and participation Online interviews with Facebook followers In-depth interview with industry personnel Narrative analysis Visual analysis
The M&Ms	Social Networks: Facebook (3 accounts: M&M's U.S.A., M&M's U.K., M&M's Australia) Adverts: 638 Videos Images: 412 official pictures, over 10,000 consumer generated pictures, 120 Photographs Website: 2 websites Industry: Access to FTRC representative (Sponsored by M&M's), M&M's World London	Netnography, observation and participation Photographic recording Online interviews with Facebook followers In-depth interviews with M&M's World customers and staff Short interview with FTRC representative Visual analysis
Mr Peanut	Literature: 3 Colouring Books, 4 Story Books, 5 Guide Books Social Networks: Facebook Adverts: 12 Videos Images: 198 official pictures, over 700 consumer generated pictures Secondary Data: Numerous articles	Netnography, observation and participation Online interviews with Facebook followers Visual analysis

Source: Author

July – Oct 2012 Data Collection 2	After the initial stage of data collection, it was clear that interviews of industry personnel, as well as online followers, needed to be carried out in order to obtain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon being investigated. Contacting industry personnel proved to be extremely difficult for all three case studies. Attempts to initiate contact via telephone and e-mail were fruitless producing responses such as the following:

Hi Yusra,

Many thanks for your enquiry and your interest. As I am sure you can appreciate we receive a great number of requests for information and we are unfortunately unable to assist with them all.

We wish you the best of luck with your search.

Kind regards

With no success, I was beginning to lose confidence in the possibility of obtaining industry's perspective on the development of mascots. With my dwindled hope, I attended the three day *Academy of Marketing* conference in Southampton, *Marketing: catching the technology wave*, where I was astonished to discover Nicola Mendelsohn was a Keynote speaker. "Chance has always played a significant role in science" (Muller & Becker, 2012) Nicola is an Executive Chairman and Partner at Karmarama. Having done my homework, I was aware of the fact the creatives behind Aleksandr Orlov had recently moved from VCCP to work for Karmarama. A case of serendipity, Nicola was my gatekeeper. In what is often referred to as snow-balling (Denscombe, 2007), she connected me with Richard Connell and Clement Woodward who helped me achieve my aim of obtaining industry's perspective on the development of marketing mascots. Additionally, as a frequent cinema goer, I was aware of the sponsorship deal between M&M's and From The Red Carpet (FTRC), a 60-second movie show screened in cinemas across the UK which brings the latest from behind-the-scenes. I contacted them with the aspiration of being able to reach M&M's. Although that was unsuccessful, FTRC were very helpful

and were willing to provide me with a short interview; An opportunity I snatched with both hands. Sadly, I was unable to obtain any industry perspective for Mr Peanut.

On the other hand, conducting online interviews with consumers was fairly straightforward. Unerringly, 150 members were randomly selected to take part – 50 individuals for each case study. The only selection criterion I employed was that these members had to be active. I.e. had recently left comments on their mascot's wall. The lucky individuals chosen received the following message in their Facebook inbox:

Hello _____ (Name of individual),
I am currently doing research with the University of Liverpool, and wondering if you would be willing to answer a few questions about _____ (Aleksandr Orlov/ the M&M's/ Mr. Peanut).
Thank you very much for your time.
Best Regards,
Yusra

Out of the 150 members contacted, sixteen replied and were happy to take part in the research. The male to female ratio across the interviews was generally comparable with a nearly equal distribution across the three case studies. Due to the nature of the interviews, conversations have lasted approximately three months. Please refer to Section 5.4.3 for more detail on the interview process.

In October, I was thrilled to hear Aleksandr was releasing six new adventure stories in the form of a box-set. I knew what I wanted for my birthday, and was delighted when my family made my wish come true. And so, preliminary analysis of *Meerkat Tales* commenced.

The data collection process described above was influenced by a number of factors. Firstly, producing a 'thick description' (Arnould & Wallendorf, 1994) of the anthropomorphised characters alone was not enough. Thick descriptions are restricted to varying levels of depth

and detail and often focus on surface details only, thus to achieve deep understanding, the use of multiple research methods across multiple time periods was required. This is frequently referred to as triangulation (Denzin, 1978). As demonstrated in Table 5.3, each case study had different types of data available for it – Aleksandr with his autobiography and a set of children's books, and the M&M's with their dedicated stores around the world, had meant the utilisation of slightly different methods was necessary. Therefore, numerous qualitative data collection methods were used to obtain the information required for each case study. In favour of personal convenience, it was best to collect this information, for all three case studies, at the same time. This was to ensure I was always up to date with the latest mascot antics and people's attitudes towards them. Secondly, the difficulties I was faced with while trying to gain contact to individuals from industry has meant in-depth interviews were carried out at a much later stage than initially envisioned, and the information obtained was limited to two case studies only. My inability to obtain industry perspective on the creation of Mr Peanut has thus led me to rely heavily on secondary data. Thirdly, I am greatly fortunate to have access to longitudinal data from 2009 for all three case studies. It has allowed me, in the short time of data collection, to accurately and reliably investigate the phenomenon of anthropomorphised mascot in excruciating detail.

5.5   Data collection methods

In order to satisfy objectives 5 and 6, a case study research approach (CSR) was utilised in this thesis. It employed various qualitative data collection methods – namely, netnography, interviews and photo-essays – to obtain information for each case study and to allow for attaining the richest possible understanding which captures numerous realities (Refer to Section 5.1). Detailed explanations of these methods and justifications for their use are expressed in this section. First however, a concise look at CSR.

5.5.1   Case Study Research

Besides experiments, surveys, histories and archival analysis, case studies are one way of doing research in the fields of social science. In his book, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods,* Robert Yin looks in great detail at this methodological technique; from problem

definition, design, and data collection to analysis of data, composition and reporting. He starts by clarifying the relevant situations in which CSR is used. Case studies, histories and experiments lend themselves well towards answering 'how' and 'why' questions which are more explanatory. "This is because such questions deal with operational links needing to be traced over time, rather than mere frequencies or incidences" (Yin, 2003, p. 6). This element of time is an important one in the development of anthropomorphic mascots and the investigation of consumer's attitudes towards them, therefore, case studies, histories and experiments are plausible methodological options however, the deciding factor is, the extent to which behavioural events may be manipulated and the degree of focus on contemporary as opposed to historical events.

Case studies are preferred in researching contemporary events, when behaviours cannot be controlled – Ideal for full-of-life mascots who are posting updates as I type, and whose influence on consumers is far greater than I can ever control. According to Yin (2003, p. 8), using CSR has a unique strength in its ability to deal with a full variety of evidence – such as documents, artefacts, interviews, observations – beyond what might be available in a conventional historical study; and this is the case here. As demonstrated previously in Table 5.3, there is a large variety of data sources available and that need to be considered. This is why the setting of case boundaries is imperative. Yin (1989) and Stake (1994) suggest the importance of setting case boundaries, and identifying what is to be considered as part of the case. One way suggested by Yin is in the form of time boundaries – i.e. defining the beginning and the end of the case study. The conception of the anthropomorphised mascots defines the beginning of my cases. I have chosen the end of the cases to be 31st Oct 2012 for the reasons that: as this is a current phenomenon, data available for collection will keep being produced for many years to come with no visible end in sight. And thus, in order to make the project manageable in the time period allotted, the latest feasible, manageable date for data collection was chosen.

CSR comprises of both single and multiple case studies where multiple case designs are likely to be stronger than single case designs (Yin, 2003, p. 19). I have chosen a multiple case design approach which considers cases from around the world – Aleksandr Orlov from the United Kingdom, Mr Peanut from the United States of America and the M&M's Spokescandies with their international presence (See Section 5.2). Ultimately, a deeper

understanding of mascots, which is not limited by locality, can be attained through this chosen approach.

According to Stake (1994, p. 237), there are three types of case studies: one which explores a particular case in order to gain a better understanding of it (i.e. Intrinsic); one which examines a particular case to provide information or insight on issues or the refinement of theory (i.e. Instrumental); one where a number of cases are studies jointly in order to inquire into a phenomenon, population, or general condition (i.e. Collective). Based on this classification, this thesis employs a collective CSR approach for its methodology whereby three case studies are used to inquire into the phenomenon of anthropomorphic mascots.

As already demonstrated, case studies, as a research strategy, come with numerous variations. One of these variations is its motives. Yin (2003, p. 15) states "case studies can be conducted and written with many different motives, including the simple presentation of individual cases or the desire to arrive at broad generalisations based on case study evidence". In order to meet objectives 5 and 6, this thesis looks to use case studies as a basis for the formulation of generalisations and theories about the topic of anthropomorphised mascots and consumers' attitudes towards them.

5.5.2   Netnography

Netnography[5] is a specialised type of ethnography modernised to match the distinctive contingencies of today's computer-mediated social worlds. Fitting, given that "our social worlds are going digital" (Kozinets, 2010, p. 1). Netnography is the most commonly adopted term in marketing and consumer research, and refers to the approach of ethnography applied to the study of online cultures and communities. This section makes frequent reference to Robert Kozinets' book *Netnography: Doing Ethnographic Research Online,* which provides full procedural guidelines to this method and detailed step-by-step assistance.

According to Kozinets (2010), because the most important facets of social and cultural life take place online and through other technologically-mediated communications, social scientists are increasingly concluding that adequate understanding of social and cultural life

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[5] Often referred to as 'network ethnography' 'digital ethnography' 'online ethnography' 'virtual ethnography' 'webnography' (Kozinets, 2010, p. 6)

cannot be achieved without incorporating the internet into their studies. This is because a useful distinction between online social life and the social real life no longer exists – the two worlds have merged into one where people live their lives by communicating through technology.

The world has changed since 1996. Internet users no longer submissively consume published content as they did in the past. Internet users are now actively communicating with each other, expressing themselves through blogs, walls and writing reviews; deepening their social alliances and affiliations through games, chat and social networking sites. Kozinets (2010, p. 2) believes at least 100 million and possibly as many as one billion people around the world regularly participate in online communities as part of their continuing social experience. We are surrounded by these people – I, myself, am one of them.

Netnographies have therefore become a generally accepted mode of research in marketing and consumer research. They have been applied to a substantial array of themes, from general inquiries into identity, social relationships, constructs of the 'digital self' (Schau & Gilly, 2003), creativity and learning, to more specific queries regarding online advertising (Kozinets, 2010). In this thesis, netnography has been used as a methodology to investigate and evaluate the phenomenon of brand anthropomorphism from industry perspective and to explore consumer's attitudes and behaviours towards anthropomorphised mascots. More specifically, following Kozinets' five step netnographic research process (See Figure 5.1), netnography has been used to observe the means by which industry bring-to-life their brands' anthropomorphised mascots, mainly through their use of social networking sites such as Facebook, and the effects this has on consumers who interact with them.
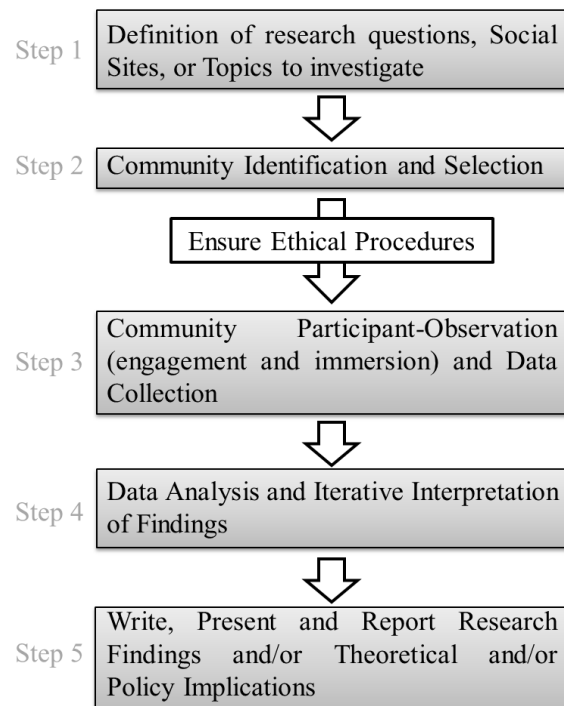
Figure 5.1 Simplified flow of a netnographic research project

The netnographic research project consists of five steps shown in the figure. This simplified flow suggests that the process is a linear one – once one step is complete, the researcher moves onto the next one – however, this is not always the case. Data collection (Step 3) and data analysis (Step 4) are often carried out iteratively. For ethical procedures and considerations please refer to Section 5.4.5.

Source: adapted from Kozinets (2010, p. 61)

Step 1 – A clear definition

The methods selected for this thesis were highly dependent upon the nature and scope of my research objectives, some of which have already been addressed prior to the commencement of this element of the investigation. In order to address objectives 5 and 6 in this empirical part of the study, a clear definition of the research questions is necessary as suggested by Kozinets (2010).

> Objective 5: In what ways does industry currently use anthropomorphism? What are the tactics they employ? How do organisations go about anthropomorphising their brands? As revealed in Section 4.3, one way of anthropomorphising a brand is through the use of mascots. This raises the following questions: How do marketers create anthropomorphised mascots? Is there an optimum way of doing this? How do

these anthropomorphised mascots carry meaning? Does this apply to all anthropomorphised mascots?

Objective 6: How does anthropomorphism affect people's attitudes towards a brand? How do mascots affect people's attitudes towards a brand? How do consumers behave towards anthropomorphised mascots? Why do consumers behave in this way? How can their behaviour be analysed? Are there any systems of meaning? Are there symbol systems, rituals and norms? Is there a particular use of language? Are these linguistic systems common for all case studies? Are they taught? Do these anthropomorphised mascots attract a distinctive group of individuals?

Based on Shaffir, Stebbins, & Turowetz (1981), any research project must be able to gain access to both a setting from which data may be gathered, and to individuals who can provide information. This emphasises the importance of selecting an appropriate netnographic fieldwork site. For this thesis, selecting the appropriate netnographic fieldwork sites was made easy by following Kozinets' (2010, p. 89) guidelines:

(1) Relevance; they must relate to my research focus and question(s)
(2) Active; they have recent and regular communications
(3) Interactive; they have a flow of communication between participants
(4) Substantial; they have a critical mass of communicators and an energetic feel
(5) Heterogeneous; they have a number of different participants
(6) Data-rich; offering more detailed or descriptively rich data.

I selected Aleksandr Orlov's[6], the M&M's[7] and Mr Peanut's[8] homepages on Facebook as my netnographic fieldwork sites. Twitter could have provided another plausible option however, not all mascots had an active account at the time of data collection. Facebook was relevant, active, substantial, heterogeneous, data-rich and provided consistency amongst all three case studies. Facebook was also interactive, but I paid particular attention to how members interacted with the mascot, and limited attention to how they interacted with each other.

There is a strong correlation between people's culture, attitudes and behaviour. As highlighted by Kozinets (2010, p. 12), "culture exists and always has in a continuous state of flux whose transformations have been driven by our inventions, which we simultaneously

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[6] https://www.facebook.com/?ref=logo#!/Comparethemeerkat
[7] https://www.facebook.com/?ref=logo#!/mms?fref=ts
[8] https://www.facebook.com/?ref=logo#!/mrpeanut?fref=ts

shape and drive". When referring to a system of meaning, or a symbol system of language such as emoticons ☺ ☹ and acronyms like LOL or OMG, in other words culture which exists in contexts that are either exclusively or mainly manifested and negotiated online, the term I will be using is 'cyberculture' (Kozinets, 2010, p. 12). Cyberculture will be a topic of investigation which will highly benefit Objective 6.

Step 2 – The virtual/online community[9]

A community is not static in structure or purpose; it is dependent on the individuals that make up these communities and the miscellaneous meanings they impose on them. This is valid whether interaction between group members occurs face-to-face, via electronic communication, or both (Komito, 1998, p. 105). To gain a sense of community, individuals are turning more and more to Computer Networks to participate in sources of culture. They are forming new, surprising and unique fusions of culture, which combines the complex practices and behaviours of human society with the distinct traditions, constraints and trajectories of computer culture. As highlighted by Laurel (1990, p. 93), all online communities exist as 'villages of activity within the larger cultures of computing'. Thus, the activities of online communities are of great significance to netnographers. Interestingly, as Rheingold (1993, p. 3) notes, people in online communities

> *"exchange pleasantries and argue, engage in intellectual discourse, conduct commerce, exchange knowledge, share emotional support, make plans, brainstorm, gossip, feud, fall in love, find friends and lose some, play games, flirt, create a little high art and a lot of idle talk."*

With continuous growth of worldwide internet access, and continuous expansion of time spent online, extraordinary growth in the magnitude, interests, and impact of online communities and their attendant cultures is inevitable (Kozinets, 2010). Internet pioneer Howard Rheingold (1993, p. 5) developed the useful term 'virtual community' and defined it as "social aggregations that emerge from the net when enough people carry on… public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace". In this thesis, the terms virtual community and online community will be used interchangeably.

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[9] In 1984, Starr Roxanne Hiltz coined the term 'online community' while studying communities in the domain of work as opposed to leisure.

As this step required me to select and identify the online community I will be using for this project, Kozinets' (2010, p. 35) classification of the four types of virtual communities was used as a basis for categorising the netnographic fieldwork sites I selected in the previous step:

- Cruising communities:

With weaker social relationships and low focus on any particular kind of consumption activity, cruising communities satisfy the 'relational' and 'recreational' needs that draw people to online communities (Kozinets, 1999). Particular virtual worlds, chat-rooms, and certain gamespaces would fit well into this classification.

- Bonding communities:

With very strong social ties present and created between members, but whose members are not particularly focused on a shared or unifying consumption behaviour, bonding communities would primarily fulfil their members' relational needs, resulting in deep and long-lasting relationships. Social networking sites, many virtual worlds and particular places in virtual worlds, as well as a number of social forums would fit into this category.

- Geeking communities:

Through the provision of deeply detailed information, news, stories, and techniques about a particular set of activities, geeking communities offer their members and readers deeply detailed information, but do not deeply engage most of them in meaningful social relationships.

- Building communities:

These offer strong sense of community as well as offer detailed information and intelligence about a central, unifying interest and activity.

On first glance, Facebook, as a social networking site, provided me with a bonding community who have strong social ties amongst members who they call 'friends'. However, a distinction has to be made with regards to members of the anthropomorphised mascots' homepages. These are mere 'likers' who share the same interest – the brand characters. Thus, the community I actually investigated was a cruising community who utilise my selected netnographic fieldwork sites to satisfy their relational and recreational needs.

Prior to the commencement of step 3, ethical procedures and considerations were required and ethical approval was obtained from the University of Liverpool Ethical Committee. Please refer to Section 5.4.5 for more detail.

Step 3 – Participant-Observation and Data collection

Prior to the collection of data, long periods of time were spent observing the recent online activities of the case study characters and their followers on Facebook. During that time of observation, subjects were unaware that an observer-researcher is amongst them (Albas & Albas, 1998, p. 123). I chose not to let myself be known to the subjects and I chose not to participate in the action. Based on the typology of online community membership and participation developed by Correll (1995) during her ethnography of an electronic bar called 'The Lesbian Café', I was a lurker and I did not make apparent my developmental progression from lurker to newbie to regular. Arguably, there is an ethical dilemma involved with being a lurker. Firstly the word 'lurking' implies a series of negative connotations. Existing unnoticed or unsuspected usually provokes a feeling of darkness, mysteriousness and threat – almost analogous with 'spying'. However, this is a highly inaccurate portrayal of my role in this research project. More appropriately, I am better described as a non-active participant/member or observer. I chose not to announce my presence or participate because "the very act of participating in a community changes the nature of later data analysis" (Kozinets, 2010, p. 96). I also chose, for ethical reasons, not to have an oppositional status by becoming a basher and harassing members of the community.

During his initial phase of observation, I was faced with an unavoidable struggle to understand the interactions taking place within the selected online community. I needed to understand the cultural context in which these interactions are embedded rather than to strip cultural members out of their practices in a general, unspecified, universalised manner. The Facebook homepages provided me with pre-existing computer-mediated communications and 'archival data' (Kozinets, 2010, p. 98).

When working with archival data online, spam is a common nuisance researchers are faced with. Kozinets (2010, p. 103) suggests three ways of dealing with this:

Spam can be …

- ignored, treated like background noise, do not bother to mention in fieldnotes

- treated as a fact of life, ignored in most cases but attended to if relevant
- examined, read coded and commented upon in fieldnotes

I chose to deal with spam as a fact of life. In most cases they were ignored, in other cases, where community members treated spammers as bashers, spam was attended to and analysed.

As per a study carried out by Brown, Kozinets, & Sherry (2003), which studied Voltswagen consumers, I initially read through a large number of messages on my computer screen, making general notes about what I saw and where I found that data. My personal observations were recorded as 'fieldnote data' (Kozinets, 2010, p. 98). I then focused on threads made in a specific time period. I read through the relevant messages and postings much more closely and saved most of them as data files. All data was placed into one large Microsoft Word file. As I was going to code the qualitative data manually, using a pen-and-paper technique, Kozinets (2010, p. 98) suggests the limitation of data to perhaps 1000 pages of text.

 Later, I printed some of these files and hand-coded them. I used the word processing program's search capabilities to look for repeat instances of my observations. This aided in coding as well as confirmation and disconfirmation. In total, I had the equivalent of 750 double-spaced pages of text. This large amount of text was required for the detailed hermeneutic reading. Note, this text was already quite 'distilled', as I have already read through, noted, thought about, and intellectually processed a large amount of data that was not saved. The figures noted are for the amount of data saved and coded.

In netnography, Kozinets (2010, p. 95) argues that the term data collection "implies that 'data' are scattered and [our] job is simply to 'collect' them, however to do this would be analysis of online 'content' rather than netnographic participant-observational fieldwork 'in' an online community". In this sense, data collection does not happen in isolation from data analysis. However, data collection in netnography entails communicating with members of a culture or community – the individuals on the other end of the screen. The main form of communication adopted in this thesis is online interviews (Please refer to Section 5.4.3 for a detailed account of interview procedures). As demonstrated in Figure 5.2, I chose to carry out 'pure' netnography, an entirely online strategy with no important in-person element, because I was satisfied with the insights I attained through online interviewing, I felt face-to-face

interaction was unnecessary. These co-created, online personal interactions provided me with 'elicited data' (Kozinets, 2010, p. 98).
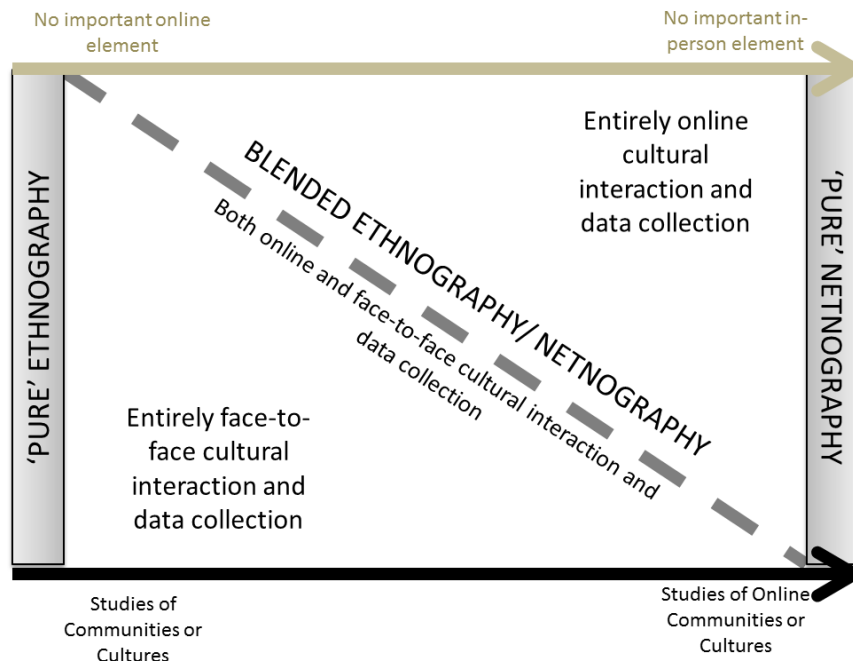
Figure 5.2 Coordinating online and face-to-face interaction and data collection

Source: adapted from Kozinets (2010, p. 67)

According to Pink (2001, p. 18), ethnography "should account not only for the observable, recordable realities that may be translated into written notes and texts, but also for objects, visual images, the immaterial, and the sensory nature of human experience and knowledge". I have applied this to my netnographic data collection process and included a compilation of consumer-generated and company-generated photographic recordings to my data. Photography, as both Lury (1998) and McQuire (1998) see it, is not only a product of particular social and cultural environments, but moreover as an influence that has preceded shifts in ways of understanding and 'seeing' (Pink, 2001).

This participant-observation and data collection process produced three different types of data: archival, elicited and fieldnote data (Kozinets, 2010). These categories more or less

follow Wolcott's (1992) categories of watching, asking, examining and Miles & Huberman's (1994) categories of observations, interviews, and documents.

Step 4 – Data analysis

As research was being conducted on Facebook, a social networking site, a look into social network analysis seemed applicable. Social network analysis is an analytical technique that concentrates on the structures and patterns of connections between and among social actors in a network (Berkowitz, 1982; Wellman, 1988; Kozinets, 2010). It is often a valuable counterpart to netnography which can be amalgamated into a netnographic study in itself. According to Kozinets (2010, p. 54), social network analysis is appropriate for studies regarding online cultures and communities in which the researcher wants to learn about "the structure of a community's communications, discuss patterns of social relations or 'ties', describe different types of social relations and exchanges between members of an online community". Social network analysis is unfitting for research that pursues to: "gain a detailed, nuance understanding of the lived experience of online community or culture members; understand the social practices and related systems of meaning of online communities or cultures; convey and compare the unique ways that language is used to manifest culture through online social formations".

As I wanted to learn about consumer attitudes and behaviours towards anthropomorphised mascots – bearing in mind that communicating with mascots constitutes a type of behaviour – I was more interested to learn about the types of communication taking place between consumers and mascots as opposed to the structure of the cruising community's communications. As was becoming increasingly evident through observation, people do not tend to communicate with each other apart from limited cases where bashers are involved. Consequently, social network analysis was deemed inappropriate for this thesis.

Content analysis methods were also found to be inappropriate. Their high tendency to quantify items and themes within large quantities of archival data signifies a shallow and superficial cultural understanding (Kozinets, 2010). As this research aims to explore and analyse consumers' attitudes and behaviours towards anthropomorphised mascots – attitudes and behaviours which are highly influenced by culture – a different method of analysis was required.

In the previous step, data was collected without any clear-cut theoretical direction. I was unsure of the appropriate questions to ask. Wallowing in lots of data, out of what began as seemingly incomprehensible occurrences, theoretical sense emerged "by dint of classification, the observation of patterns and relationships, as well as an awareness of the literature" (Albas & Albas, 1998, p. 140). A grounded hermeneutic approach to data analysis was used to investigate consumers' attitudes and behaviours towards the anthropomorphised mascots. This method of analysis was best suited to the intentions of objective 6.   Section 5.5.1 provides more detail on this approach.

In order to satisfy objective 5, I also required methods for analysis which take into consideration the tactics by which industry manifest anthropomorphised mascots. The main tactics being, the use of visual cues, imagery, narrative and language as means of mascot development. Thus, narrative analysis and visual analysis were chosen. Section 5.5.2 and 5.5.3 provide more detail on these approaches.

Step 5 – Report research findings

Research finding are reported in Chapters 6 and 7. Section 5.7 provides a detailed account of the approach adopted to present the findings, together with justifications for this approach.

5.5.3   Interviews

Interviews were chosen for this research project due to their long history in the social sciences as the main tool for qualitative research (Wolcott, 2001). According to Willis (2000), interviews are an effective qualitative research tool because they can attain a superior depth of understanding; 'get beneath' justified or inconsequential responses; deliver a richer source of material for researchers; and because they have an open-ended, dynamic and malleable nature. Thus, interviews exist in numerous forms, some of which have adapted to different research situations and various media channels. In this study, I utilised two forms of interviews: in-depth and online interviews.

In-depth interviews were carried out with industry personnel in a semi-structured manner. Brewerton & Millward (2001) accentuate that semi-structured interviews contain both the advantages and disadvantages of the two techniques they integrate (i.e. structured and unstructured interviews). They are simpler than unstructured interviews to interpret, and

nevertheless provide in-depth and comprehensive replies. Prior to the interview, a set of questions were devised however, these were not set in stone. I was still probing, asking clarifying questions and staying amicable to interesting segues and elaborations.

Online interviews were carried out with consumers in order to document their attitudes, thoughts and feelings towards each of the anthropomorphic mascots they have interacted with (However, not one consumer was interviewed for all three mascots). Online interviewing has lots in common with interviewing at large. It encompasses formally approaching a participant, proposing an interview, and steering a conversation in the structure of an interview, whereby the researcher's role is to predominantly ask questions (Gubrium & Holstein, 2001). Grant McCracken's (1988) 'long' or 'depth' interview approach is usually the preferred technique amid qualitative researchers; however this approach requires substantial time, which is difficult for people to spare especially in an online setting.

As with in-person interviews, there are numerous options and choices for the conduct of online interviews; they can be group or individual based, formal or informal, structured or unstructured. There is also a selection of multiple arrangements where the interview may be conducted. These include, "A research web-page, blog, social networking site, chat rooms or virtual worlds" (Kozinets, 2010, p. 110). This study utilised Facebook chat not only to conduct the interviews, but also to reach potential participants. Individuals were privately messaged so as to reduce any impact on the cruising community and on their behaviour.

Some valuable insights about conducting online interviews were presented by Annette Markham (1998, pp. 62-75). She elaborates, 'online I see only the text – not the nonverbal, the paralanguage, the general mannerisms or demeanour of the participant'[10] and 'because writing takes much longer than talking, being a good interviewer means being patient' (Markham, 1998, p. 70). And patient I was indeed. I was rewarded by being freed from routine note-taking and transcription and able to fully concentrate on the body of the interview – an advantage to conducting interviews through the computer, where communication is shaped by the medium used (Kozinets, 2010).

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[10] This emphasises the limitation of anonymity – the inability to validate or verify a person's identity. But because this study was not investigating a specific group of people (e.g. age, gender, race or tribe), and did not require the divulgence of any private or sensitive information, anonymity was not seen as a problem.

Overall, conducting online interviews with consumers was fairly straightforward. Interviews were individual based, semi-structured and informal. The quality of the participant's response was determined by "the calibre of the questions and the nature of the interaction" (Kozinets, 2010, p. 111). Thus, probing and asking clarifying questions were also carried in hope to receive thought-provoking elaborations and genuine disclosure. Building rapport was therefore of uttermost importance. In his work, James Spradley (1979) writes in detail about the rapport process. He defines rapport as

> *"a harmonious relationship between ethnographer and informant. It means that a basic sense of trust has developed that allows for the free flow of information". (Spradley, 1979, p. 78)*

Accordingly, positive feelings about the interview, perhaps a sense of enjoyment, are experienced by both the researcher and the respondent – the end result of a persistent process which begins with apprehension. Ethnographic Interviews always commence with a sensation of insecurity, a feeling of apprehension (Spradley, 1979), arguably even more so with online interviews owing to anonymity. Every time I contacted a potential respondent, I felt apprehensive and sensed they had similar feelings. "Sometimes apprehension is slight; at other times interviewees express deep anxiety and suspicion" (Spradley, 1979, p. 79). Suspicious respondents spared themselves the headache by simply not replying back to the interview invitation. Other configurations of deep anxiety and suspicion took on the form of a lack in cooperation. I had an incident where a respondent would not cooperate because they believed the interview to be an advertising gimmick despite my efforts to convince them otherwise. I also recall a case, whereby the respondent was a shop owner and did not want to be associated with the brand in question. Such examples emphasise the difficulty of building rapport in online interviews.

For all respondents who agreed to take part in the study, every effort was made to ensure they felt at ease, and that their partaking is appreciated. The same can be said for in-depth interview respondents. Building rapport with them was much easier after initial introductions from the gate keeper.

5.5.4 Photo-Essays

People now live in a 'visual information culture' (Schroeder, 2002). Advancements in technology, computer-aided design, digital cameras and the introduction of cameras to mobile phones have led to an explosion of visual images; images with a profound effect on individual lives, society and understanding of the world. Not only are people exposed, on a daily basis, to hundreds of images from advertising, billboards, magazines, the internet etc., but they are engaged in their production and distribution. Historically, it has never been this easy for everybody to share news, information and images with the world. Thus, understanding how visual images function within a cultural system of meaning is essential (Schroeder, 2002) for marketers, social scientists, and for this thesis. Especially since the creation of an anthropomorphic mascot revolves around the creation of a visual image.

Images and symbols appeal to our visually oriented mind. According to Vincent (2002), the phrase that 'a picture is worth a thousand words' is more true than most people realise. An emotional response can be triggered by one simple image much quicker than a sentence in a book. Images and symbols provide instantaneous visual representation of a meaningful construct. Simply put, they elicit a logical belief that is linked to emotions (Vincent, 2002).

As such, the use of photo-essays in this CSR reflects the prominence of image as a quintessential characteristic of the twenty-first century economy. After all, "brands are developed based on images, products are advertised via images... [And] marketing is fundamentally about image management" (Schroeder, 2002, p. 4). Images function as stimulus, text, or depictions that drive cognition, interpretation, and preference. Thus, it is essential at this stage to clarify the distinction between different types of images; photographs and videos, that nevertheless bear some relationship to 'reality' (Pink, 2001), and computer generated images which are entirely make-believe. Despite these differences, the relationship between visual images and experienced reality is the same. It is constructed (Crawford, 1992) through individual subjectivity and interpretation, and perceived as real by cultural convention (Wright, 1999). Thus, in keeping with Schroeder's (2002) belief that "image interpretation is never complete, or closed" and that "interpretations are meant to be contested and debated", the visual insights I offer the reader, are merely my interpretations, influenced by my personal subjectivity and culture.

In total for this project, three hundred and nine photographs[11] were taken while immersed in the field, seven hundred and five images were officially produced by the chosen organisations, and over fifteen thousand seven hundred images were consumer generated. Nonetheless, due to space limitations, 'recurring image compositions' (Pink, 2001, p. 62), and perhaps irrelevancy, only 70 images appear in the thesis. Rather than being isolated as discrete commentaries, the photo-essays are incorporated in the body of my empirical narrative, together with the findings from the other methodologies used; because despite the importance of images, visual consumption is by no means a comprehensive approach to understanding (Schroeder, 2002).

5.5.5   Ethical procedures and considerations

Prior to the commencement of data collection, and during the first year of study, ethical approval was sought from, and granted by, the University of Liverpool's ethical committee. The process required the submission of an ethics application form which included a full summary of the purpose, design and methodology of the planned research, including participant details and anticipated risks.

According to Bryman (2008), ethical considerations can be largely evaluated on four principles: whether harm is caused to participants, whether informed consent is obtained, whether privacy is invaded, and whether deception is embraced. With regards to this study, for participant and researcher alike, a negligible possibility of adverse effects or risks were anticipated as no sensitive or potentially embarrassing information was obtained via observing the netnographic fieldwork sites, or via asking questions during the interviews. Although prepared, a participant consent form (which required a signature) was not used for online interviews. Instead, potential respondents were sent an interview invitation message via Facebook as previously presented. Participation after the receipt of an interview invitation was regarded as consent. The research did not include any elements of deception or invasion of privacy.

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[11] These include photographs of anthropomorphic items around the supermarket, toy shop and M&M's store.

5.6 The process of analysis and interpretation

Both analysis and interpretation were carried out in an iterative process with data collection in order to achieve a deeper understanding of industry tactics and consumer attitudes and behaviour. With the intellectual dynamism of analysis and interpretation, a theoretical model that commands new understanding can be fostered. For Kozinets (2010, p. 118), "analysis means the detailed examination of a whole by breaking it into its constituent parts and comparing them in different ways". Thus, numerous analytical operations were utilised in this thesis to manage the data collected, including Grounded Theory, Hermeneutics, Narrative and Visual analysis. Detailed explanations of these methods and justifications for their use are expressed in this section.

As per Spiggle (1994) who makes a distinction between analysis and interpretation, the interpretation process involved making sense of data through more abstract conceptualisations. According to Albas & Albas (1998), wider conception permits more effective problem solving and avoidance of error. They give the example of a child burning himself by touching a flame, then burning himself again by touching a stove with no flame, and thus developing the wider concept of heat. Ultimately, interpretation is less an arrangement of procedures and more a 'gestalt shift' that 'represents a synthetic, holistic, and illuminating grasp of meaning, as in deciphering a code' (Spiggle, 1994, p. 497).

In this thesis, a Consumer Culture Theory interpretive lens was adopted to understand consumer attitudes and behaviours, and culturally constructed meanings (Belk & Sherry, 2007). A literary lens was also adopted to understand industry tactics and anthropomorphic mascots. These lenses are not mutually exclusive and occasionally overlap especially since language and culture are tightly interlinked.

5.6.1 Grounded Hermeneutic Approach

According to Kozinets (2010), there are two types of data analysis in netnography, hermeneutic interpretation and analytical coding-based methods which involve induction; a type of logical reasoning in which singular observations are put together with the aim of making more general statements about a phenomenon. Grounded theory is a form of analytic

coding as well as a thematic analysis technique which identifies recurring themes within text (Dittmar, 2008).

Based on Miles & Huberman (1994, p. 9), analytical coding-based methods generally follow a common set of analytic processes. Kozinets (2010) arranges, names, and adapts these common analytic processes to match the needs of netnographers. The following is the sequence of analytic moves used in this thesis to analyse qualitative data:

(1) *Coding: affixing codes, categories, classifications, names or labels to data. These usually emerge inductively through close reading rather than imposed.*

(2) *Noting: reflecting on the data and making remarks*

(3) *Abstracting and comparing: materials are sorted and sifted to identify similar phrases, shared sequences, relationships and distinct differences. This abstracting process builds the categorised codes into higher-order, conceptual constructs.*

(4) *Checking and refinement: next wave of data is used to refine understanding of patterns, processes, commonalities, and differences.*

(5) *Generalising: a small set of generalisations are elaborated that cover and/or explain the consistencies in the dataset.*

(6) *Theorising: confronting the generalisations gathered from the data with a formalised body of knowledge that uses construct or theories. Constructing new theory in close coordination both with the analysis of data as well as the existing relevant body of knowledge. (Kozinets, 2010, p. 119)*

The use of this analytic process allows for the emergences of codes that are grounded in the data. Unlike A Priori Codes which are informed by literature and are imposed on the data (Kozinets, 2010), here, my individual prejudices, assumptions and previous knowledge of the subject were put aside in order to discover new themes which are true to the information collected. For integrating the categories and constructs defined and refined during analysis, Strauss & Corbin (1990)'s concept of 'selective' and 'axial' coding, presented in their grounded theory framework, was considered. Selective coding progressively moves constructs to greater and more sophisticated levels of abstraction, laddering them upwards and then stipulating the relationships that link them mutually – i.e. emic to etic. Axial coding, on the other hand, assimilates coded data into theory by documenting contexts, strategies, conditions, and outcomes that are inclined to cluster together.

For the second type of data analysis in netnography, hermeneutic interpretation, although originating in theological studies, is increasingly being used in marketing and consumer research (Arnold & Fischer, 1994; O'Shaughnessy & Holbrook, 1988; Thompson, Pollio, & Locander, 1994; Thompson, 1997). Thompson *et al* (1994), define the process of hermeneutics and the hermeneutic circle in particualr as:

> *an iterative [process] in which a 'part' of the qualitative data (or text) is interpreted and reiinterpretted in relation to the developing sense of the 'whole'. These iterations are necessary because a holistic understanding must be developed over time. Furthermore, initial understandings of the text are informed and often modified as later readings provide a more developed sense of the text's meaning as a whole. (Thompson, Pollio, & Locander, 1994, p. 433)*

Arnold & Fischer (1994, p. 64) suggest, when constructing a hermeneutic interpretation, it should be 'coherent and free of contradiction', clear in its relation to 'relevant literature', 'supported with relevant examples', 'comprehensible' to the anticipated reader, 'enlightening' and '"fruitful" in revealing new dimensions of the problem at hand' as well as generating 'insights' that explicitly revise current understanding. These are important considerations which not only have I kept in mind for the analysis and interpretation process, but also throughout writing this thesis. I have strived to include allusions, metaphors, similes, and analogies in my writing prose, as encouraged by Arnold & Fischer (1994), in order to ensure it is 'persuasive, engaging, interesting, stimulating, and appealing'.

Good hermeneutic interpretations, according to Thompson *et al* (1994), must also delve into the social and historical contexts of the data for its rationalisations, and provide a specific, subtle, nuanced cultural interpretation. Hopefully, this was something I achieved successfully through my adoption of a CCT interpretive lens.

As noted by Miles & Huberman (1994), particular disciplines and scholarly traditions usually focus on one form of analysis more than the other. However as demonstrated, these two different analytic processes overlap in many interesting ways, especially their tendency to breakdown qualitative data and reassemble them as interpretation. Accordingly, they can both be used at the same time. And as per Kozinets (2010, pp. 120-121) who states "in practice, the skilled netnographer will use both of these methods", I have chosen to do just that – to

use a grounded hermeneutic approach to understanding consumer attitudes and behaviours towards anthropomorphic mascots.

5.6.2 Narrative Analysis

Narrative analysis is derived from literary criticism, and its objective is "identification of structural elements and their diverse modes of combination, with recurrent narrative devices, and with the analysis of the kinds of discourse by which a narrative gets told" (Abrams, 1993, p. 123). Stern, Thompson, & Arnould (1998) believe narratology provides an analytical tool for the investigation of structure, content, and context with regards to the theory, language, and techniques of narrative (Greimas, 1971; Scholes, 1981; Prince, 1982; Martin, 1986). Due to a 'narrative turn', narrative analysis, used synonymously with literary analysis, has recently gained popularity in human sciences (Shankar, Elliott, & Goulding, 2001). For example, the narrative perspective and its potential contribution to consumer research have been explored by Stern (1989a; 1994), Brown & Reid (1997), Thompson (1997), and Brown (1998), who have lengthily reviewed and critically evaluated the use of various literary techniques, applied techniques from literary theory to enlighten our understanding of advertising texts, spawned greater understanding of consumption experiences, and provided relevant strategically managerial insights. Still, Shankar, Elliott, & Goulding (2001) argue, consumer researchers have lots to acquire from comprehending the inter-relationships between, consumption, identity and narrative.

In their work, Cooper, Schembri, & Miller (2010) use narrative analysis to shed new light on the James Bond movie series. Similarly, narrative analysis was used in this thesis to explicitly examine the means by which industry develop anthropomorphised mascots and ultimately produce brand narratives. Industry produced narratives – derived from Facebook status updates, adverts and articles (also autobiography and story books in the case of Aleksandr Orlov) – were closely analysed in order to delve beneath superficial meanings, to examine more implicit social meanings, to decode culture, and to show conscious or deliberate links to larger story depictions in society. A first take on this project (Patterson, Khogeer, & Hodgson, 2013) was carried out and published in the recent *Journal of Marketing Management* Special Issue on Anthropomorphic Marketing.

In this mode of analysis, narratives were treated in terms of the familiar literary elements identified as plot, themes, character, interaction, structural pattern, and the verbal expression of language (Levy, 1981; Stern, 1989b; Stern, Thompson, & Arnould, 1998). Also, in addition to having these key elements, the plots were identified to have basic structure. Ever since Aristotle said in *Poetics* that narratives have a beginning, middle and end, scholars agree that sequence is necessary (Riessman, 1993). Therefore, basic plots were characterised further in the way that they were narratively arranged or configured (Polkinghorne, 1991); in other words, the way sequence is established towards a conclusion or a value end point. Following in the Aristotelian tradition, Frye (1957) distinguished four basic plots: comedy, romance, tragedy and satire; some of which have interestingly been identified in the case studies investigated in this thesis. Gergen & Gergen (1988, pp. 20-22) also highlight the fundamental features 'to the construction of intelligible narratives in contemporary western culture'. These can be seen in Table 5.4.

Table 5.4 The key features of narratives

Feature	Brief Description
The establishment of a value end point	Every story must have a valuable 'point' to make. This may be perceived positively or negatively by the people involved in the narrative process
Selection of events relevant to the goal state	Only events that aid in portraying the 'point' of the story are selected.
The ordering of events	The selected events, which support the point of the story, are usually placed in a 'linear, temporal sequence'. Labov & Waletzky (1967) refer to this as a 'chronological sequence' where events move linearly through time.
Establishing sequences	Causal sequencing: the order of events in the story is determined causally, that is, event b only happened because of event a and so on. Consequential sequencing: one event causes another but according to Young (1987) links between them may not always be chronological. Thematic sequencing: episodic narrative is linked by themes rather than time (Michaels, 1981).
Demarcation signs	Stories tend to have well recognised beginnings, (middles) and ends

Source: adapted from Gergen & Gergen (1988)

In his work, Mishler (1995) identified three main approaches to narrative analysis used by researchers. First, he classified researchers who focused on reference and temporal order (paying particular attention to the ways in which stories were constructed, and the sequence in which events are told in the story). Next, he identified a set of researchers who focused on textual coherence and structure (paying particular attention to how stories gain their structure and coherence through the use of diverse grammatical devices). And finally he recognised a body of research that concentrated on narrative functions within a psychological, social and cultural context.

Shankar, Elliott, & Goulding (2001) highlight a number of related issues that emerge from Mishler's (1995) typology that may be of importance to consumer researchers. Whose story is it anyway? Does it have a relationship with reality? How is the story represented? What role does the narrative play for consumer cognition, memory and self-conception? These questions are of extreme importance to the investigation of anthropomorphised mascots, after all, they are creative creations, who came into life in the land of imagination and make-believe, and who are virtually living amongst us in the real world as the puppets of organisations, and subsequently if successful become the pets of consumers. Thus, investigating temporal order, textual coherence, and narratives functions are equally important to develop a comprehensive picture of the tactics being used by industry.

5.6.3   Visual Analysis

Images and photographs are an integral part of this thesis especially since it is a form of communication, a universal language which facilitates cross-cultural communication (Stimson, 2005). According to Schroeder (2002), consumers understand the world fundamentally through photography; thus it is unsurprising, the way in which the creation of photographs and images has exponentially risen since advancements in technology. This poses the questions, 'why do people take pictures?' and why are they so keen on sharing them?[12]

People's visual consumption can be understood through travel and tourism (Schroeder, 2002). Conveniently, travel provides a useful metaphor for analysis. Through pictures,

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[12] The success of applications such as Instagram is based on people's willingness, and keenness to share photographs and images.

consumers now have the ability to psychologically transport themselves around the world. A world in which "the ability to visualise a culture or society almost becomes synonymous with understanding it" (Fabian, 1983, p. 106). Consumers are not limited in their abilities, they can visualise themselves in computer generated images with the same ease they have towards photographs (reconstructions of 'reality'). Therefore, the visual is growing in significance as a general category of experience (Stimson, 2005).

Visual analysis, as an iconographical method, was established by art historians such as Edgar Wind, Erwin Panofsky and Meyer Schapiro (Van Leeuwen & Jewitt, 2003) who advocated the idea of layered meaning. They believed images consist of firstly, a layer of representational or denotative meaning (clear depictions of who and what is presented), and secondly, a layer of superimposed, connotative or symbolic meaning. These symbolic meanings were argued for using textual and contextual criteria. Images and photographs used in this thesis were perceived to have those layered meanings, however, as in conjunction with Bourdieu (1990 [1965]), they were also perceived to inevitably express the shared norms of society – to provide a dynamic unfolding of specific social practices in which non-verbal communication plays a role.

In his attempts to theorise photographic practices, Bourdieu argues 'that the most trivial photograph expresses, apart from the explicit intentions of the photographer, the system of the schemes of perception, thought and appreciation common to a whole group' (1990 [1965], p. 6). He argues that 'photography cannot be delivered over to the randomness of the individual imagination' but alternatively 'via the mediation of the ethos, the internalization of objective and common regularities, the group places this practice under its collective rule'. Thus, understanding culture and the social and cultural conditions of production (hence the use of a CCT lens), was essential when analysing visual consumables (Pink, 2001).

5.7   Validity, reliability and limitations

Interpretivism and qualitative data collection methods are constantly under scrutiny by academics who favour the more positivist approach to research. Questions of validity, reliability and rigor are endlessly being raised. In this section, I attempt to address these doubts and defend my choice of methodology.

Case study research, although a distinctive form of empirical enquiry, it is nevertheless met with disdain by many research investigators. There are numerous traditional prejudices against this data collection strategy. Perhaps their utmost concern has been over its lack of rigor. According to Yin (2003), the case study researcher is perceived to be sloppy, not following any systematic procedures, and allowing equivocal evidence or biased views to influence the direction of the findings and conclusions. In response to this accusation, people often confuse case study teaching with case study research. Yin (2003) believes, in teaching, case study material is often deliberately altered in order to demonstrate a particular point; however, this is strictly forbidden in research, and I have been very careful to report all evidence fairly.

A second common concern with regards to case study research is that they deliver bantam evidence for scientific generalisation (Yin, 2003). Thus, I have chosen to undertake a multiple-case study approach, which has aided me to develop theoretical propositions. Thirdly, case studies are often met with the complaint that they take too long and produce massive, unreadable documents (Yin, 2003). This was certainly not the case for this thesis; otherwise, it would have rendered this task unmanageable in the time period allocated.

To improve the quality of the data and research findings, Patton (1990) suggests the use of multiple sources of evidence and different data collection techniques. Albas & Albas (1998) liken the use of multi-source data to the way photographs may be taken from numerous angles and under diverse light conditions. In this way, they believe, the inherent weaknesses of one approach (e.g. subjectivity) may be corrected by the strengths of another. Therefore, in this thesis, I have chosen to utilise the methodologies of netnography (participant observation), with interviews and photo-essays to collect my data in order to produce "great rigor" (Adler & Adler , 1994, p. 382).

When analysing consumer interactions and narrative, it was also worth keeping in mind Cohen & Rapports' (1995) belief that our understandings of what participants say or do is solely 'an expression of our own consciousness'. This may be perceived as a limitation; however, the use of multi-methods reduces any likelihood of misinterpretations or misunderstandings.

On-site flexibility and the less stepwise research design that characterise traditional qualitative methods (e.g. interviews) have unfortunately been taken to mean that these

methods are not systematic and thus are not 'rigorous' in the literal sense of the word; a concept (rigor) highly accentuated in significance to theory development by Herbert Blumer (1931; 1954). Yanow & Schwartz-Shea (2006, p. xvi) feel "this is hardly the case, as attention to the care with which settings, interview subjects, and/or research question-relevant document are identified, considered, and selected; observations and interviews carried out; and analyses conducted will attest". They believe qualitative work involves a philosophical rigor of logic and argumentation, as opposed to procedural rigor.

Another limitation to this study is arguably the varying degree of spokes-character richness. Both the M&M's spokescandies and Mr Peanut are over fifty years old and thus have a ripe history to back them up. Aleksandr Orlov on the other hand was only created in 2009 – a toddler in comparison. So how did I ensure that each of the case studies were as detailed and as rich? By identifying the sources of data I had available for each case study (See Table 5.3), I was able to find a balance between all three case studies without compromising their quality. For each case study, where one data source is lacking another source takes prominence; For example, M&M's lack of textual material is balanced by the accessibility to M&M's World store. Similarly, I was unable to interview industry personnel for all three case studies. To accommodate for this limitation, I had to rely more on secondary data that provided me with the answers I was seeking and make interpretive speculations when necessary. As all three campaigns are on-going and providing a constant feed of narrative, selecting when to stop collecting data was not easy, but necessary in order to complete the task at hand. A limitation arises here because interesting twists and turns to the brand narrative have occurred since October 2012, which are not included in this thesis.

5.8   Approach to Presentation of Findings

An attempt has been made in the in the empirical and discussion chapters of this thesis to blend scientific investigation with creative discovery, and interpretation, then nonetheless present the findings in a stimulated manner which not only reflects my enthusiasm, but will do justice to the inspirationally light-hearted topic chosen. Attempts were made to introduce life and drama into the data as suggested by Ely *et al.* (1997). Also, a similar writing style to Mitchell & Charmaz's (1998) five basic strategies were employed: (a) enticing the reader into the story (b) re-establishing experiential moods within the writing (c) adding components of

surprise (d) re-enacting the experience through written images and (e) crafting closure on the story simultaneously acknowledging it as part of an on-going process. While many aspects of the case studies seam descriptive, portraying elements of the campaign in as much detail as possible was essential to set the scene.

Of course, as demonstrated in this chapter, conventional, robust, tried and tested qualitative research methods were used for data collection and analysis. Careful thoughts also went into devising the best possible way to present netnographic and interview data. I opted for a naturalistic approach to language, which captures every utterance in as much detail as possible (including grammatical and spelling errors); and to visual images (no adjustments made to colour, brightness, contrast, sharpness, hue and saturation).

A decision was also made to split my empirical findings into two chapters. Chapter 6 focuses on addressing objective 5 by tackling the narrative devices currently being used by industry to develop each anthropomorphic mascot character. Chapter 7 on the other hand, targets objective 6 by presenting an exploration of the shared consumer attitudes and behaviours towards anthropomorphised mascots.

5.9 Summary

This study draws on approaches from the interpretivist paradigm to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of anthropomorphic mascot creation and consumer attitudes and behaviours towards them. Consistent with this perspective, the following three case studies were selected for further exploration: *Aleksandr Orlov*, the *M&Ms* and *Mr Peanut.* Selecting case studies from around the world enabled a detailed investigation which was not limited by locality.

The study was carried out over a period of approximately three years, and employed a variety of inductive research techniques within a case study methodology. These included netnographic observation, online interviews, in-depth interviews and photo-essays. The process of analysis and interpretation involved the interplay of three dominant techniques: Consumer attitudes and behaviours were analysed using a grounded hermeneutic approach; tactics currently used by industry to construct anthropomorphic mascots were analysed using a narrative/literary approach; and all visual images utilised a visual analysis approach.

Chapter 6. Findings 1 – Case Studies of Anthropomorphic Mascots

This chapter presents a trilogy of anthropomorphic mascot case studies that conform to the typology developed in Chapter 4. Using a narrative analysis and literary approach, each case study was examined to identify their most prominent brand narratives and literary explorations of their rich and textured imaginary worlds was conducted. As a result of my interpretation of the brand narratives, three fictional genres were identified for each case study:

> **Aleksandr Orlov's literary world is anything but 'simples'. It displays a finely-wrought complexity rarely encountered in the presentation of a mere marketing mascot and encompasses the three literary genres of Russian, Comedy and Adventurous family saga.**

> **Red, Yellow, Blue, Ms Green, Crispy and Ms Brown's world is highly irresistible, complex and of course, schizophrenic – The result of internationalism, and the debuting of different, parallel marketing campaigns. Despite this, three literary genres do emerge lucidly: Romance, Tragicomedy and Burlesque.**

> **Mr Peanut, though initially mute, in 'Naturally Remarkable', the recent marketing campaign for Planters, not only was Mr Peanut given a voice and a personality, but his life was enriched with friends, physical activity and a stunt-double who is virtually always crushed into peanut butter. Literary genres that best capture Mr Peanut's world are Comedy, Action and Sport.**

The findings indicate that the use of literary genres, which are far from mutual exclusivity, is crucial to assemble a viable persona for brand mascots. By drawing on completely diverse genres, compelling mascots which are more complex, interesting, different, and unique and have denser personalities can be developed.

6.1   Case Study 1: CompareTheMarket.com[13]

6.1.1   Orlov's Origin

CompareTheMarket.com is a UK-based online price comparison website. Launched in 2006 as an aggregator of 'cheap' car and van insurance, it has since, over the years, grown and developed to introduce the range of products it offers today – that is, cheap vehicle, home, pet, life, and travel insurance quotes, it also allows for the comparison of energy suppliers and finance products such as credit cards, loans and mortgages.

Up until December 2008, CompareTheMarket.com was yet another price comparison website, late to market and with no clear point of difference. It was a small player – flagged fourth in a category of four – and had an unwieldy brand name that no one could remember.

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[13] Is a business unit owned by BGL Group

Trading in the notoriously uninteresting sector of insurance, it was a challenge to get consumers excited about a compulsory inconvenience required by law.

CompareTheMarket.com set advertising agencies the following brief: to improve their market positioning relative to their competition, and to develop a tactic for decreasing the inflated cost per click on the word market (which is over £5). At the time, VCCP was the account holding advertising agency, and they were competing against several other agencies to retain the account. This made their new campaign pitch a do-or-die move for the team.

In an industry where market share is determined by spending power, CompareTheMarket.com was outspent by its rivals Confused.com, GoCompare.com and MoneySupermarket.com who all offered the same thing – the ability to put your details in once and search prices from approximately 400 insurance providers in 30 seconds. A generic benefit, so time saving and life changing, that all four brands were trying to express this same message. Thus, it comes as no surprise that all adverts were perceived to be the same by consumers, and that all their rational differentiating claims had progressively blended into one (Everett, 2009).

And so the confusion began. People were unintentionally muddling up CompareTheMarket.com with the names of its rival brands. For instance, they would describe GoCompare's adverts and website and ascribe them to CompareTheMarket.com, and vice versa (Everett, 2009). Research carried out by VCCP revealed that "Within the scrabble of brand names the word compare was easily remembered so the word market needed to be made more memorable." (Reynolds, 2009). Inspired by this confusion, VCCP had their first strategic breakthrough, and market became meerkat.

(Un)fortunately for CompareTheMarket.com, spending more than the competition on communicating the generic benefit was not an option. It became increasingly obvious that an irrational differentiating competitive advantage was required; after all, according to the Freudian philosophy, individuals are driven by unconscious, intensely irrational forces (Kornberger, 2010). So instead of using language to communicate with consumers, who at this point were sick of hearing the same messages and were not really listening, a novel image based approach was used to drive emotional and irrational behaviour (Cusick, 2009); An image which steered clear of computer screens, cars with stars and price saving claims, and revolved around the market/meerkat pun spotted by Senior creative Matt Lloyd.

VCCP's planning process commenced with a consideration for the way in which people use Google. Thus it is correct to say that the creative strategy behind CompareTheMeerkat.com was entirely Google-led (Torode, 2009). During their explorations, they discovered that cost per click on meerkats was in the region of 5p – a massive improvement on £5 for market. This provided a much needed confirmation that they were on their way to meet the latter part of the brief. The creative team (which, at the time, consisted of a copywriter Richard Connell, and art director Clement Woodword) was instructed to do something with the market/meerkat pun. In the interview I carried out with Richard, he said:

> *"We had several different concepts initially, not all of which involved anthropomorphising meerkats [e.g. Concepts similar to the Aflac Duck]. But it became clear that some kind of fictional conflict between two completely different but similar sounding businesses was funny. And this conflict should be fronted by the meerkat in charge of CompareTheMeerkat.com"*

According to Richard Reynolds (2009), who at the time was a senior planner at VCCP, two different meerkat routes were explored during the creative development process, and both ideas revolved around the idea of confusion between CompareTheMarket.com and CompareTheMeerkat.com. Both campaigns were set in a land where meerkats were business people; however, in the rejected campaign, the unfortunate confusion between both websites was exaggerated by having offices side by side.

> *"Employees at CompareTheMarket.com were seen to accidentally walk into the lobby of CompareTheMeerkat.com and become startled at seeing the place bustling with besuited meerkats before realising their mistake. The confusion and competitiveness between the two offices, based in an ordinary English office park, was to become the basis of the campaign."* (Reynolds, 2009)

Qualitative research carried out by George Everett, the VCCP planner delegated to the account, uncovered that this route would have only partially addressed the objective of making the brand name famous. In hindsight, it is now clear to see why the eventual route shone brighter in research groups than this one. The meerkats needed a stronger and more believable purpose than just being characters in a humorous advert, a motive that would give the campaign an imaginative foundation for content in social media.

For the meerkats to become genuinely famous, they needed to live beyond the traditional territory of TV advertising. They needed to adopt the 'celebrity' strategy of feeding public interest by sharing private information regarding their 'real' lives. They needed a big public

stage and also a backstory; a world outside the adverts and personalities that would flourish on the prospective elevation to stardom. In other words, the meerkats needed to have a strong anthropomorphic skeleton, with a complex narrative flesh[14]. And so Aleksandr Orlov was born.

Yet, to convince CompareTheMarket.com to buy into the notion of a meerkat mascot was not easy – It proved to be a tough sell, and a 'big ask' indeed. Just picture the pitch:

> *"We would like you to fund an advertising campaign that actively promotes another comparison website, not your own. Oh, and by the way, we'd like you to pay us to build that other website. And did we mention that you compare meerkats on this new site?*

> *"But people need to be able to compare thousands of meerkats for this idea to really work. The main character of the advertising campaign is a meerkat called Aleksandr, who hates your car insurance website and tells everyone how angry your site makes him.*

> *"In our opinion, the best way to bring this meerkat character to life is on social media platforms, such as Twitter and Facebook, so we will need you to move money out of your TV spend to put into social media."* (Torode, 2009)

VCCP's joint creative directors, Darren Bailes and Steve Vranakis, actually had to demonstrate how the advert would appear on TV by climbing onto chairs and pretending they were meerkats (Murden, 2010). Although CompareTheMarket.com may well have thought the agency was outrageous, it listened and granted VCCP the account – A truly courageous and inspired move.

The arrival of Aleksandr provided CompareTheMarket.com with their much needed competitive advantage. With one clear-cut swoop, the campaign was able to deliver on both aspects of the brief, and managed to do so in an incredible nine-week period, as opposed to the original target of twelve months (Hall, 2009). By switching focus from generic search terms such as 'compare' and 'market', to much less desired, and thereby inexpensive terms like 'meerkat', 'Orlov', and 'Aleksandr', a study by global information company Nielsen found that the ad-cost-per-visitor for CompareTheMarket.com has dropped nearly fourfold, from £5.47 in 2008 to £1.45 in 2010. Remarkably, it also made CompareTheMarket.com more appealing to consumers with 73% of people saying they liked them (Beston, 2011).

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[14] Detailed narrative analysis revealed three prominent literary genres: Russian, Comedy and Adventurous family saga – see subsequent sections.

Despite being the lowest spender of the big four – where advertising is the fundamental method of getting people to their website in this very competitive industry – in January 2009, with the launch of its multi award-winning[15] meerkat marketing campaign, the fortunes of CompareTheMarket.com received a significant boost. Within a month, it had become the clear market leader with an estimated 35-40% share of the market (BGL Group, 2012).

It can be said that the campaign shares similar success to when Old Spice began their "Man Your Man Could Smell Like" campaign where their profits rose over 200% from their average the previous Fiscal year. CompareTheMarket.com is now the number one car insurance comparison website. It is, in a national sense, the Google of its industry (Patterson, Khogeer, & Hodgson, 2013). All thanks to an anthropomorphic advertising campaign which has sincerely captured the imagination of the public, and made people think much more favourably of the brand it represents. It is one of the most talked about advertisement campaigns ever to feature on UK media.

6.1.2   Nothing compares to meerkat marketing

When it comes to meerkat marketing, nothing compares. To date, no other marketing campaign delves into the same level of detail, and sophistication that this campaign achieves. The way in which VCCP, the advertising agency in charge of the campaign, has managed to integrate over ten communication mediums to enhance consumer awareness of the Compare the Market brand is truly noteworthy. They have combined traditional TV, radio and billboard advertising, with the ever increasing use of social media networks such as Facebook, Twitter, Linkedin and YouTube. And that merely scratches the surface. A comprehensive look into all facets of this fascinating campaign has been carried out and a timeline, from campaign birth until Oct 2012, has been devised (See Appendix 1). A narrative analysis of the campaign has also been executed.

At the heart of the Compare the Meerkat campaign is Aleksandr Orlov, a Russian, multi-talented, aristocratic, cravat wearing, entrepreneur, billionaire meerkat, and owner of the website CompareTheMeerkat.com; A website, which despite all odds, actually exists and

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[15] Winner of 'Best Use of Social Media' at the New Media Age Effectiveness Awards in 2009; Winner of 'Gold' at the 2010 British Television Advertising Awards; Winner of PETA's GOODY Award for Best Ad in 2009; Winner of APG Creative Awards 2009; Winner of the Marketing Initiative of the Year Award at the prestigious British Insurance Awards in 2009.

allows its visitors to compare over 1400 meerkat character combinations (gender, size, hobbies, interests etc.). Although visitors are prompted to leave and visit CompareTheMarket.com, the content and structure of the meerkat website allows play and exploration. According to a review made in the *Financial Times*, CompareTheMeerkat.com proved so popular that for numerous months, traffic to it exceeded that of CompareTheMarket.com itself (Bradshaw, 2010). And ultimately, traffic to CompareTheMarket.com rose by 186% (Fenn, 2010).

Yet, VCCP's decision to take on a meerkat mascot was by no means a leap forward – after all, historically, numerous insurance brands had been built on icons such as Admiral, Hastings and Churchill. However, what sets this campaign apart from other traditional mascot marketing campaigns is their consideration of the numerous platforms of communication available to them, and their use for specific purposes within their advertising campaign strategy; a strategy I will delve into in this section and the subsequent ones.

Based on Brown's (2010) classification of marketing mascot strategies, VCCP have employed a mystify model. By adopting Aleksandr Orlov, an incongruous connection was built between him and the product which fascinates consumers and marketers alike. Aleksandr Orlov was first introduced via a TV advert in January 2009. This propelled him to instant stardom and gave the campaign mass reach and awareness of his character. "On February 20th 2009, 14 of TV's biggest stars came together to help those less fortunate than themselves" (Red Nose Day Advert 2009). In support of Comic Relief, Aleksandr made a guest appearance on the Red Nose Day advert along with the Cadbury's Gorilla, Honey Monster, the Churchill dog, and the Peperami sausage man to name a few. But Aleksandr is much more real than them. He is set apart from those traditional marketing mascots by character depth. George Everett sums this up:

> *"The strength of the idea comes from his depth of character. He is neither obviously bad nor obviously good and his frustration at the confusion is a real one. The strength of Aleksandr is that his engaging (if a little bad tempered) personality creates a level of emotional engagement that means that people are prepared to forgive what is a very simple play on words".* (Reynolds, 2009)

The depth of Aleksandr's character was not accredited to conventional TV and radio advertising because it is extremely difficult to build a character in 30 seconds of exposure. However, the mass reach and awareness generated through TV and radio advertising are considered the catalyst for campaign success, without which the other components of the

campaign would not have worked efficiently. To build Aleksandr's character, notable creative investment went into his life away from his public stage of TV advertising, and into the spheres of social media.

Soon after Aleksandr's TV debut in 2009, he joined Facebook, a social media network which allows individuals to connect with their friends, to share updates, pictures and videos, and to join common-interest groups. VCCP decided to stay away from making Facebook about the campaign, and made the page about Aleksandr Orlov, the meerkat himself, who regularly communicates with fans and makes observations about current events. Aleksandr also has a personal Twitter account, which up until Sept 2012 posted the same updates as Facebook. But, what makes Twitter special is Aleksandr's ability to 'follow' back his fans, showing them a commitment that often social media campaigns lack. According to Amelia Torode (2009), VCCP's head of Strategy and Innovation at the time,

> *"social media was the perfect platform for Aleksandr to develop conversational relationships with his fans. We wanted people to be able to ask him questions, share content and to talk directly to him… It was important to us that this was an active community of fans – new content gets uploaded regularly, and discussions are added to and developed."*

In all these mediums, Aleksandr is eager to interact with his fans, amusing them with oddly twisted answers to even simple questions. With his witty Facebook and Twitter status updates bringing him to life, Aleksandr is proving to be even-more popular than real-world celebrities. Aleksandr had over 800,000 Facebook fans and over 58,000 Twitter followers in October 2012. Just to put this into perspective, Aleksandr's fan base is currently[16] eight times larger than The Beetles and Prime Minister David Cameron. At some point, Aleksandr also had more fans than Lily Allen and Girls Aloud singer Cheryl Cole as was reported by *The Telegraph* (Leach, 2009).

Away from his public stage of TV advertising, Aleksandr also shares videos on YouTube.com; these include behind the scenes antics, bloopers, interviews, advert replays, documentary films, and mini feature films. With over seven thousand subscribers and nearly eight million video views, it is evident that consumers cannot get enough.

Aleksandr has an ever growing list of talents that continuously gives his character more depth. His release of a trilogy of mini feature films about the 'Orlov Family History', their

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[16] At the time of writing this dissertation

escape from the Kalahari Desert, their battles against mongoose, and the beginnings of their business empire, makes him not only a meerkat, but a writer, actor, director and producer. Staring Aleksandr in what Film Crickets describe as "The best sixty second independent meerkat adventure film of the year" (Official Trailer 2009), *The Journey of Courageousness* provides a lens into Aleksandr's past and a backbone to his story. The film was aired on ITV on the 3rd January 2010 and was rendered by Aleksandr as "a claw-biting edge-of-seat thrill-ride".

Upon launch, the central idea of the campaign was to enlighten the public about the difference between CompareTheMeerkat.com and CompareTheMarket.com. Frustrated with their confusion, Aleksandr went about clarifying the discrepancy. As the campaign progressed, it was becoming increasingly apparent that this confusion between Meerkat and Market is causing adverse effects on Meerkovo (Aleksandr's home town) and its villagers. A documentary was created by Aleksandr to illustrate the repercussions of getting the names wrong. Visiting the wrong website is causing a server clog, and is depriving the villagers of their ability to use the website, and ultimately affecting their way of life. According to Aleksandr "Compare the Meerkat is more important than internet itself... without it we may as well just be Muskrats." (Podcast interview 2010) Due to this server clog, Meerpups at school can no longer learn about diversity, families are no longer able to bond over evenings of compare games, and hardworking meerkats can no longer relax at the end of the day. Now, there is a dark cloud hanging over Meerkovo. In the podcast interview with ITV's News correspondent Mark Webster, Aleksandr introduces <u>Meerkovo.com</u>. A website especially designed to allow individuals to explore the village of Meerkovo and to learn more about the villagers and their plight. The website is full of games and quizzes to entertain its visitors as well as to educate them of the difference between meerkat and market. Visitors to the website can also read the weekly newspaper of the meerkats, *The Meerkovian* (See Appendix 2).

With 'no success', the campaign took on a drastic turn. In order to raise awareness of the villagers' plight, in January 2011, a competition was launched to name Meerkovo's twin town in the UK. Consumers were encouraged to vote for their towns and to give reasons. After a month of voting, Market Harborough was named winner of Twin Town Poll. To celebrate, the town's name was changed to Meerkat Harborough for the day and a sign was placed in the market hall for everyone to see. Please refer to Figure 6.1.

Figure 6.1 Market Harborough winner of Twin Town Poll

Market Harborough was gifted with a £5000 donation from those behind the Compare the Meerkat commercial for winning the twinning town campaign. The money was spent to give community projects around the town a boost.

Source: http://www.marketharboroughpeople.co.uk/pictures/Meerkat-Harborough/pictures-10738573-detail/pictures.html

Another radical step in the campaign was taken when Aleksandr Orlov announced that he was hiring. He was seeking to recruit a UK-based human to be the official ambassador for Meerkovo. Someone able to explain that the villagers are very unhappy, and that they cannot compare meerkats on CompareTheMeerkat.com; Someone to become a Meerkovo hero, to represent the village at some of UK's biggest cultural and sporting events. Individuals were prompted to apply online through Meerkovo.com[17] for a real opportunity to earn £40,000 for a 6 month contract. With this announcement, Aleksandr made the bold move of joining Linkedin.

> *"Sergei find clever interweb site called Linkedin with many peoples looking for job, so I join to help find ambassador for Meerkovo. Look and see"* (Facebook update, 14th April 2011)

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[17] Due to Sergei's inability to run both Meerkovo.com and CompareTheMeerkat.com, Aleksandr decided to close down the website. Please read his letter in Appendix 3.

Since his debut in 2009, Aleksandr remained in the spotlight, not only as the key character of the CompareTheMeerkat.com campaign but also as a living, breathing individual, who is very much capable of existing alongside news reporters and TV presenters here in the UK and in Meerkovo. Not only were exclusive interviews with Aleksandr featured in *Furbes* and *Timings* (See Figure 6.2), *The Sun*, *The Telegraph*, *The Sunday Times* and the *Sunday Times Culture Magazine*, but also numerous live appearances were made by Aleksandr on ITV's Daybreak with Adrian Child and Christine Bleakley.

Figure 6.2 Meerkovian Media and PR

Source: http://meerkat.comparethemarket.com/meet-the-meerkats/aleksandr/

A range of merchandise also accompanies the ads. In a time where it seems every celebrity is capitalising on sharing their life story, it was only natural for this rising star to publish an autobiography (See Figure 6.3). Ambitious it may be, it managed to secure more pre-orders than any other title released at the same time – e.g. Books by Russell Brand, Cheryl Cole, and Tony Blair. In fact, the week after launch, it shot to number two on the Amazon.co.uk autobiography chart (Davies P. , 2011; Patterson, Khogeer, & Hodgson, 2013). Publishing

was estimated to have garnered at least £10m in boosted revenue for CompareTheMarket.com.
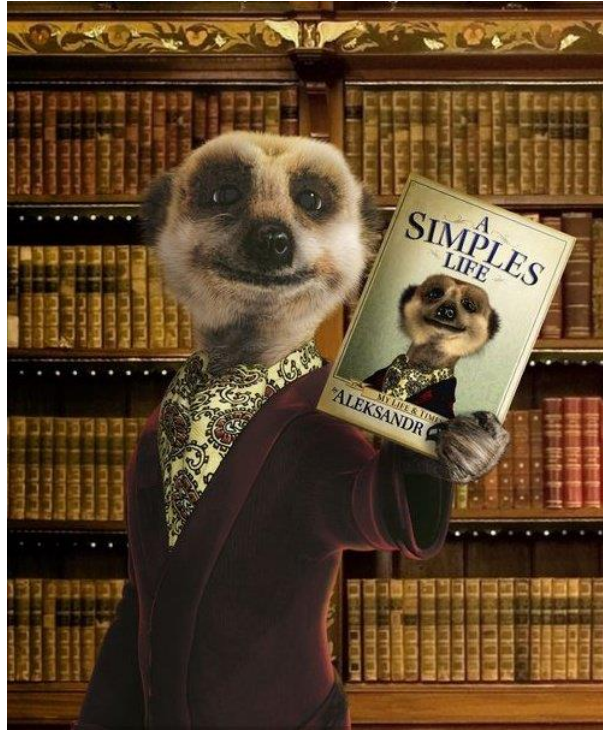
Figure 6.3 Aleksandr Orlov holding his autobiography

Source: https://www.facebook.com/Comparethemeerkat

Written by Ghost-writer Val Hudson, a witty wordsmith with nearly thirty memoirs under her belt, Aleksandr's pseudo-autobiography documents, in comic style, the history of the Orlov family, and his own consequential climb to eminence that has seen him become "like the young Sugar Alan only nicer to look at" (Orlov, 2010, p. 78). According to the interview with Richard Connell,

> *"To get a handle on the character we wrote a short biography of him – his background, personality, ambitions etc. Much of this made it into the 'autobiographical' book we (Me and Clem and the 'ghostwriter' we collaborated with on it) went on to publish two years into the campaign"*

Not since *Me Cheeta*[18]*: The Autobiography,* as identified by Patterson, Khogeer, & Hodgson (2013), has such a convincingly rendered text been assembled in the name of an

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[18] Cheeta is the chimpanzee that acted in the Tarzan films.

anthropomorphic character (Lever, 2009). With regards to CompareTheMeerkat.com, the campaign took this one step further in October 2012 buy releasing a six book box set entitled *Meerkat Tales*, writen by Aleksandr.

> *"Ever since A Simples Life I have a writings itch. Sergei try scratch my haunch but this not satisfy. I think perhaps I bring my own writing pen out of retirements. I present, my new books: The Meerkat Tales"* (Facebook Update 27th Sept 2012)

Figure 6.4 *Meerkat Tales* book set

Source: https://www.facebook.com/Comparethemeerkat

 The release of the box set illustrated in Figure 6.4 was enforced by a special live book reading session with Aleksandr himself in Harrods, London. This reading was done via a live, smart satellite connection which also allowed for Aleksandr to include a live question and answer session. Aleksandr is by no means shy of new technologies, with the help of his side kick and I.T. manager, Sergei, he is able to excel in public reach.

Through his podcast with first guest David Hasselhoff, Aleksandr and his website gained worldwide fame reaching number two in the iTunes podcast charts. Aleksandr also released an iPhone Application called *iSimples* which was downloaded by tens of thousands of fans. The application plays popular catch phrases, is equipped with a mongoose detector, and has a library of adverts, mini films and bloopers[19]. Fans are able to watch the "bloops" of his commercials on CompareTheMeerkat.com. These include: one where he, himself, makes the common mistake between market and meerkat, where he breaks into Russian then reminds himself that the advert needs to be in English, where he gets distracted by a bouncy chair,

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[19] These adverts, mini films and bloopers can also be viewed via YouTube.

sneezes in-front of the camera after closing a dusty book, where he has a wardrobe malfunction, and where he sings the CompareTheMeerkat.com theme tune after inhaling a helium balloon.

Since July 2011, and for its ongoing *Simples Rewards* scheme, Aleksandr has been giving away a cuddly meerkat toy representing one of the stars of the campaign to each of its customers. Consumers are able to investigate the progress of their delivery via CompareTheMeerkat.com. Delivered by Aleksandr's very own Postkat, an interactive map provides consumers with an entertaining way to check the location of their meerkat reward.

Figure 6.5 Simples Reward cuddly toys

Source: https://www.facebook.com/Comparethemeerkat

According to Aleksandr, CompareTheMeerkat.com has not always been a successful website. It all started out, so the story goes, in Old Moscow with his father Papa Anton and CompareTheMeerkat.cart. Many years of struggle forced Papa Anton to take on a second job comparing Muskrats. From these humble beginnings, business took off and he was able to open CompareTheMeerkat.shop. In October 2010, Aleksandr decided to follow in his father's footsteps and open a branch of CompareTheMeerkat.shop in London's Regent Street. For two days only people were able to catch a glimpse into the world of comparing meerkats. The first 250 people to visit the shop received an autographed copy of Aleksandr's autobiography.

As has been demonstrated, to date, no other marketing campaign delves into the same level of detail, and sophistication that the Compare the Meerkat campaign achieves – It is only fitting

that Aleksandr's deep character is matched by an equally elaborate world. The success of the campaign has been so profound that it has influenced culture and society as a whole. Aleksandr's catchphrase 'Simples' has in less than a year not only has become a light-hearted conversational affectation, but has also gained entry to the *Oxford English Dictionary*; a catchphrase which according to *The Telegraph* has earned him 'cult' status (Otto, 2009). This was highly evident in the large number of fans encouraging him to stand for Prime Minister in the UK.

As highlighted in Chapter 4, marketing campaigns featuring anthropomorphic characters are not new. However, bringing together a great story, an engaging character who shares our most human traits and the ability for people to engage with him one-on-one through social media is something entirely different. The popularity of the campaign has been greatly responsible for an increase in parents christening their newborns Aleksandr and for an upsurge in people wanting to keep meerkats as pets or visit them in zoos (Bradshaw, 2010; Gold, 2010).

With the profound influence that this successful campaign has had on culture and society, it was only a matter of time before many in the realm of industry wanted to jump on board. For instance, Scotland's St Andrews Aquarium, who welcomed a family of meerkats into their zoo in March 2011, released 100 cuddly meerkats in some of Scotland's most iconic locations ready for members of the public to find, giving them an exclusive opportunity to win a free trip to the Aquarium and the chance to feed the meerkats in person (Volpa, 2011). Another illustration comes in the form of envious brand managers around the country telling their advertising agencies to "get off their butts and find me a meerkat" (Marketing, 2009). And that is exactly what Renault did in their advertising campaign 'wildly civilised'[20]. A gang of meerkats graced our screens dressed in tuxedos and checking out their reflections on the new Renault Koleos car (Campaign, 2011). Influence of the campaign can also be seen in the form of meerkat dolls and soft toys, adopt a meerkat gift boxes, numerous DVDs and books (e.g. Knitted Meerkats by Sue Stratford), garden sculptures, birthday cards, mugs and coasters, calendars etc. (See Figure 6.6). Despite all these valuable merchandising opportunities that Aleksandr generates, his main purpose remains to promote the Compare the Market brand. Diversifying into anything else will ultimately result in the dilution of the message, campaign and brand.

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[20] Advert by: Publicis Conseil, Paris. Director: Nick Losq.

Figure 6.6 The profound influence of CompareTheMeerkat.com campaign on industry

Source: Numerous – collage compiled by author

Market research carried out by VCCP, according to Amelia Torode (2009), revealed that prior to the launch of the Compare the Meerkat campaign, only 15% of social media conversations about car insurance were about CompareTheMarket.com. Now, the firm accounts for 55% of UK conversations about car insurance. This prodigious improvement has had an effect on CompareTheMarket's competitors. Alongside their best efforts to fight back with their own eccentric campaigns, one featuring the comedian Omid Djalili (MoneySupermarket.com) and another featuring an Italian opera singer (GoCompare.com), they are now actively targeting the word 'meerkat'.

> *"One wonders how much money they are spending to target meerkat enthusiasts, rather than people looking for car insurance".* (Torode, 2009)

Following a similar strategy and adopting an anthropomorphised character, BGL Group, owners of CompareTheMarket.com, decided to rebrand Courtanet, their French price comparison website as 'LesFurets.com'. In September 2012, 'LesFurets.com', which translates as 'The Ferrets', was formally launched (BGL Group, 2012). BGL Group hope to

achieve the same level of success they attained with Aleksandr Orlov – Hervé the ferret certainly has some large meerkat shoes to fill (See Figure 6.7).
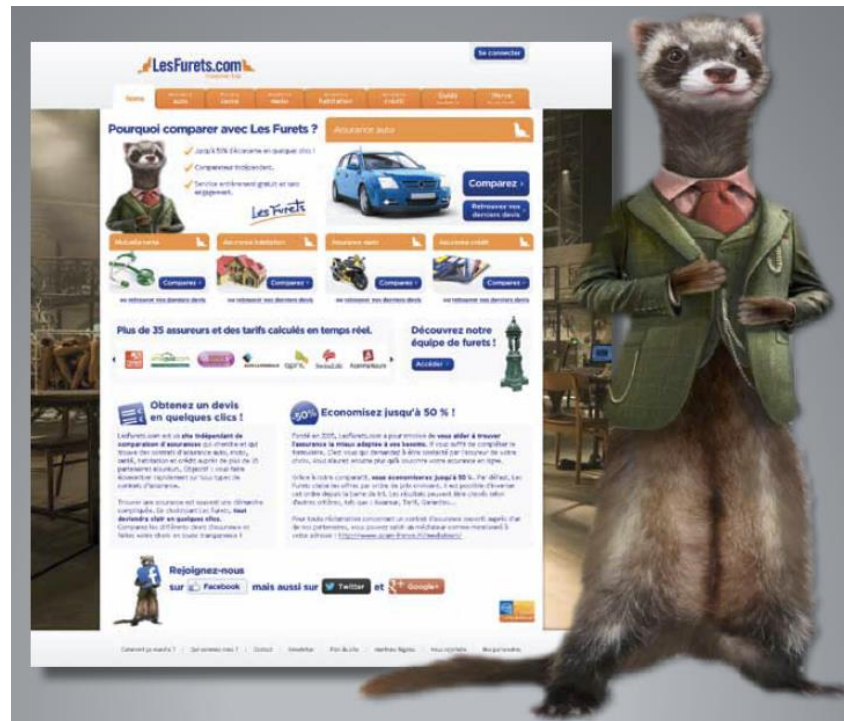
Figure 6.7 LesFurets.com

Source: BGL Group Annual Report, 2012

This comprehensive look into all the facets of this fascinating meerkat campaign has clearly indicated that Aleksandr Orlov's imaginary world is anything but 'simples'. Although it may be true to say that the majority of consumers are unaware of the full depth and breadth of the campaign, that does not make it any less remarkable, nor its effect on industry, culture and society any less significant. In the subsequent sections, Aleksandr's world is examined to identify its most prominent brand narratives (Russian, Comedy and Adventurous family saga) and literary explorations of its rich and textured imaginary world is conducted. It should be noted that the three fictional genres discussed are far from mutually exclusive – aspects discussed in one genre might fit equally well under another.

6.1.3 Russian literature

The CompareTheMeerkat.com campaign can be primarily analysed in light of Russian literature. Exquisitely dressed in smoking jacket and cravat, Aleksandr Orlov has been styled as a multi-talented aristocrat meerkat who lives and works in Meerkovo, a small village outside Moscow, Russia. Given that Aleksandr was allegedly born and raised in Moscow, it is hardly surprising that his creators have decided to draw heavily upon Russian history and literature to give substance to his character and to his imaginary world. These cleverly conceited connections are *covertly* illustrated in Aleksandr Orlov's pseudo-autobiography entitled *A Simples Life: My Life and Times.* I place emphasis on the word covertly because of a short warning on the inside cover of his book which states, "This is a work of fiction. Names and characters are the product of the author's imagination and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental". In this section, I shall demonstrate what makes this character narrative fit perfectly into the genre of Russian literature.

Naturally, meerkats live in all parts of the Kalahari Desert and in much of the Namib Desert. So when Aleksandr's ancestors started their lengthy journey in an attempt to find food after the grub famine which landed them in Russia, they were not accustomed to the cold freezing weather and were forced to use scraps of sail as cravat in order to keep their necks warm. Aleksandr claims, later cravats were made of expensive Pavlov Posid Russian silk. A clear connection may be drawn here to Pavlovo-Posad shawl factory 60 kilometres from Moscow, which manufactures the finest quality of satin silk with modern bright durable fade-proof dyes. Furthermore, Aleksandr's great grandfather Vitaly spent many weeks in St Vladimir Soldier Hospital in Moscow after the mongoose war, where he met his future wife, a beautiful nurse called Valentina. Interestingly, St Vladimir Hospital does exist in Moscow, however in real life, it is a paediatric hospital. Likewise, Aleksandr's Papa Anton worked with a magiciankat in the middle of Red Square, The Great Furdini. I speculate the creators here are making reference to Harry Houdini the great magician, famous for his underwater handcuff escape; he toured Russia in the early 20th century demonstrating his magic, illusions and escapes.

As per the examples mentioned, Aleksandr Orlov's pseudo-autobiography is riddled with clever connections to Russia. It even explicitly states on the dust jacket, "If Dostoyevsky was

small and furry, this is the book he would have written." But why did the creators chose Russia in the first place? According to Richard Connell, "He is Russian because Russia seemed like a likely place for an obscure online meerkat comparison business to thrive." And a thriving business it is indeed. Like his vintage Rolls-Royce, Aleksandr is a refined act. He is often pictured unwinding in his mansion which is "a bit like English palace of Bucking Hams, only bigger" (Orlov, 2010, p. 108), a mansion which encapsulates traditional Russian architecture with its colourful domes and gold embellishments (See Figure 6.8). Built especially for Aleksandr's great grandfather Vitaly, the Orlov mansion was a reward for his unmatched fearlessness during the mongoose battle from the powerful ruler of Russia at the time, Czar Alexei. I speculate, Tsar Alexis Mikhailovich Romanov, first of the dynasty to rule Russia until 1917 and renowned for his expansions of the Russian boundaries (Fuhrmann, 1981). Moreover, Aleksandr is often depicted relaxing in his soothing whirly-bath, posing on the grand staircase, in his office, and against the backdrop of sixty thousand books in his library.

Aleksandr is an avid reader of Russian belles lettres. Surrounded by books from a very young age, it comes as no surprise that Aleksandr claims to have read *War and Peace* (or, as he calls it, War and Peaces) by the age of seven, to have written an epic novel entitled *The Enormous Adventures of Aleksandr the Adventurer* by the age of nine, and to have put on an enhanced production of Anton Chekhov's play, *Uncle Vanya*, by the age of fifteen (Orlov, 2010, pp. 77-79). As highlighted by Patterson, Khogeer, & Hodgson (2013), literature is in his blood. As the story goes, his father was a student of English and Russian literature, and his Great Uncle Vassily was an industrious author who wrote an extraordinary forty-one volume *History of the Mongoose Wars*. Therefore, the creators' decision to draw heavily upon this deep literary heritage is only fitting to enrich the character narrative.

Figure 6.8 The Orlov family mansion in Meerkovo

Source: CompareTheMarket.com Advert – Wanted: Ambassador for Meerkovo (2011)

Firstly, let us take a closer look at the name Aleksandr Orlov. Patterson, Khogeer, & Hodgson (2013) speculate, Aleksandr's namesake is Alexandr Pushkin, the most revered Russian poet of all time and the founder of modern Russian literature. A name with a semantic intent perfect for a Meerkat that holds himself in high regards. It may have been pure coincidence, but Aleksandr's real-life historical namesake led a life of action-packed as any made-up story. Aleksandr Orlov was Stalin's master spy, who was regarded as the father of Russian intelligence operations in Europe. In a comment made by Aleksandr Orlov to *The Sun*, he said: "I have never hear of this Aleksandr 'Mikhailovich' Orlov. Orlovs are brave warriors that fight claw to claw – espionage is more like sneaky mongoose profession" (Phillips & Buckland, 2010).

Interestingly, a recognised characteristic of Pushkin's literary sensibility was his witty parody of his contemporaries and predecessors (Kahn, 2008). Aleksandr's parody of a Russian national's grasp of the English language operates in the same manner. He truly believes that he is masterful in his command of English, and it is clearly articulated in expressions like the following:

> *"Well done to 'The King's Speak' for clean up of Oscars. Mr Firth is remind me of myself, only without my master-grasp of English language"* (Facebook update 1st March 2011)

Apart from the public's fondness for cute furry animals, Aleksandr's Russian voiceover, provided by Simon Greenall who played Geordie Michael in I'm Alan Partridge, is arguably one of the key reasons behind the campaign's success. It is this distinct Russian voiceover that comes through any written correspondence from Aleksandr, and it is this which makes Aleksandr's character narrative truly Russian. According to Makaryk (1993), Russian formalist critics steadily changed their focus from the peripheral conditions of the literary practice to the internal configuration of literary work. They scorned the traditional dichotomy of 'content' and 'form', debating that it improperly implies the presence of two detachable layers in a literary composition. In imaginative literature, where arguably Aleksandr Orlov and his world are a manifestation of the creators' imagination, Viktor Zhirmunskii argues, content only materialises through a medium of form and therefore cannot be usefully deliberated or indeed pictured separate from its artistic embodiment. Aleksandr Orlov is this artistic embodiment; he is the medium of form through which content materialises.

As opposed to the concepts of 'content' and 'form', Russian formalist critics proposed the notions of 'material' and 'device'. These two notions were believed to be better suited to the two phases of the creative process: pre-aesthetic and aesthetic (Makaryk, 1993). Material is understood as the raw substance of literature – from everyday life facts, to literary conventions and ideas – that writers can use for their work. Aleksandr's creators have evidently relied on Russian celebrities such as business tycoon, Roman Abramovich, for inspiration[21], as well as Russian history, current affairs, and literature material to enthuse their creative process. They even turned to The following Facebook update provides a perfect example,

> *"I cannot believe that they ask someone other than me for switch on Moscow Christmas lights. Who is this Mr Putin[22] anyways?"* (Facebook update 4th Dec 2009)

Another example of this can be seen in Figure 6.9. Aleksandr is often pictured playing a block rotate game on the 'computermabob' and the 'laptopamabob' with Sergei; a game commonly known as Tetris. Originally designed and developed by a Russian named Alexey

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[21] This was confirmed by Clement Woodward during the interview: "Aleksandr was a conflation of Terry Thomas, Hugh Hefner, Alan Sugar, Roman Abramovich and Hugh Laurie's Prince Regent character in Blackadder III."

[22] Mr Vladimir Putin is the fourth President of Russia.

Pajitnov while working for the Dorodnicyn Computing Centre of the Academy of Science of the USSR in Moscow, it is a very well-suited game for a Russian-born meerkat.

> *"Today I borrow Sergei laptopamabob for play block rotate game. Hope he not mind I delete all high score"* (Facebook update 25th March 2012)

Device on the other hand, is defined as the aesthetic principle that transforms material into a work of art. In order to experience something artistically, according to Shklovskii, material must be transformed via an assortment of compositional devices such as sequence, phonetics, syntax and plot. It is this creative organisation and transformation of material that gives a work of art its form (Makaryk, 1993). As demonstrated in the previous section, this Meerkat campaign is undoubtedly a work of art that encompasses various devices, one of which is Eikhenbaum's skaz, a Russian literary technique.

Figure 6.9 Aleksandr and Sergei playing Tetris

Source: CompareTheMarket.com Advert – Official Compare the Meerkat Sergei Bloopers (2009)

Eikhenbaum explored the role of the narrative voice as the consolidating principle of fiction. In his essays, *Illiuziia skaza* ['The illusion of Skaz', 1924] and *Leskov i sovremennaia proza* ['Leskov and Modern Prose', 1925], he asserted that in some literary works, focus is not consigned to the plot or the interlocking of motifs, instead, to the voice of the narrator

compelling his way into the forefront by any plausible mean. This kind of narration was defined by Eikhenbaum as *skaz*, and described as an exclusive type of dialogue orientated in its idiolect, composition, and cadence towards the oral speech of the narrator. This is highly evident in Aleksandr Orlov – his narration as the Russian voiceover of Simon Greenall resonates with consumers regardless of plot and interlocking motifs. According to Makaryk (1993), in his work, Eikhenbaum distinguishes two types of skaz: 'narrating' skaz which relies on verbal jokes and semantic puns; and 'reproducing' skaz which introduces elements of impersonation, gesticulations and the invention of special comic articulations and phonetic puns – both of which are commonly used by Aleksandr and will be discussed in the subsequent section (Comedy Literature).

A handful of humourless critics may argue that using such literary techniques fringes gravely into non-politically-correct territory since it ridicules foreigners (Murden, 2010). However, the charge carries negligible weight. After all, the mascot is a meerkat and not an individual. In just the same way that Budweiser's famous anthropomorphic 'Frog Campaign' was able to evade any charges despite of indulging in sexist advertising, so too is the reputation of theCompareTheMeerkat.com campaign, impeccable (Stanfel, 2007; Patterson, Khogeer, & Hodgson, 2013).

6.1.4   Comedy literature

"We love comedy in advertising. And we would love to see more of it in UK advertising."

Connell & Woodward (Campaign, 2012)

A second literary genre by which the CompareTheMeerkat.com campaign can be analysed is Comedy literature. When Creative Directors, Richard Connell and Clement Woodward, stylised Aleksandr Orlov as a rich Russian businesskat who wears cravat and smoking jacket, they certainly had comedy in mind. Firstly, with no idea what rich people wore (Campaign, 2012) they just wanted a short hand for wealthy. According to Richard Connell:

"'wealthy' gives you infinite comedic possibilities… When someone has infinite wealth, they can do anything. They can have a stretch helicopter or a Faberge egg omelette. It also gives you a house with countless different rooms in which countless absurd things can happen. I believe this is the same attitude The Simpsons writers have to Mr Burns." (Interview)

Secondly, to them, comedy isn't just "whatever's funny". Someone needs to be frustrated, and there has to be some tension (Campaign, 2012). The Compare the Meerkat campaign is based on conflicting businesses which brings out indignation in Aleksandr – his best attribute. The first advert in the campaign did not include any 'real' jokes; it just brought to light a ridiculous situation which cannot be solved by Aleksandr. Comedy as a literary genre was highly evident afterwards. When Aleksandr is made to speak on TV adverts, podcasts and interviews, or write on Facebook, Twitter and his recent collection of books, a range of recurring comedic literary devices are employed. These include the use of universal linguistic playfulness, memorable catchphrases, allusion, hyperbaton, hyperbole, juxtaposition, lampooning, malapropism, irony, metaphors and puns (For term definitions please refer to Glossary).

Aleksandr's infamously light-hearted catchphrase 'simples', always reverberates with impersonations of broken English. This is achieved through the distortion of his sentences, specifically, the inappropriate adding and dropping of plurals, the incorrect use of verb tenses, the omission of the definitive article in almost all instances and the improper addition of 'ing' and 'ness' at the end of ill-fitting words. All of which, help to skilfully achieve the English accent of a native Russian speaker. Aleksandr's story books and autobiography are riddled with examples of this unique literary style. Consider the following excerpt as an example:

> *"It was totally puzzlements, but soon Seri thought he had plotted course to Bermudas. After many week, they began to think something was probables wrong. It was getting very cold and still no land."* (Orlov, 2010, pp. 22-23)

As mentioned in the previous section, Aleksandr has no awareness of his poor English grammar. This combined with his largely presumptuous manner, serves to create some of the integral comedy in this campaign. Humour is also drawn from the continuous use of wordplay in the form of deliberate malapropisms, allusions and anagrams. Everything is made to revolve around meerkats – Aleksandr talks about reading the 'Meerkonomist', discovering art by 'Meercasso', wearing fashion by 'Stella Meerkatny', and inviting celebrity actors 'Robert Red-Fur' and 'Mel Grubson' for instance. He also alludes to popular British television programs, films, and cultural events. A fine illustration of this is 'Night of the Living Mongoose', beetle cake bake-off, and Russia Fashion week. Although puns are used by Aleksandr as well, they are not as popular as other literary devices. Connell & Woodward express why:

> *"We don't hate puns. Puns can be great because they give you permission to do something fantastical in a very short space of time, which, in advertising, is very useful. Puns can also be terrible."*
>
> Connell & Woodward (Campaign, 2012)

Puns can be terrible when they are over used and 'cheesy'. Nevertheless, semantic puns and phonetic puns which form skaz are used by Aleksandr to exert comedy into everyday situations, places and things – these puns help to reflect a foreigner's understanding of the English language, and most certainly highlight their limited vocabulary. Comedy is thus achieved through misunderstanding and misuse of words, terminology and even idioms. Consider the following extract, "People always say 'Judge a book by its cover'. It looks like this book is going to be very handsome and successful!" (Facebook update 20th September 2010). Comedy is also enriched through the use of juxtaposition. An example of this can been seen in Aleksandr Orlov's storybook, *Aleksandr & the Mysterious Knightkat,* whereby Knightkat uses extremely technologically advanced equipment such as 3D night vision goggles and a flying cape, yet Sergei, his trusted-sidekick, uses merely a Walkman.

Sergei has a very important role in the Compare the Meerkat campaign. Not only does he serve as the Head of I.T. for CompareTheMeerkat.com, frantically maintaining the website, the server and building a mobile phone application (iSimples for iPhone), but also as a faithful servant to Aleksandr – cooking, cleaning, chauffeuring, washing and ironing his cravats, and tending to his every need, one of which was typing up Aleksandr's autobiography.

> *"Special mention must go to Sergei, my head of IT. Without him this book would not have been written (because he record all my dictating on his cassette tape and spend all his holidays typing). Thank you, Sergei."* (Orlov, 2010, p. 9)

Although this may seem like a sweet and thoughtful message from Aleksandr, Sergei is often on the receiving end of lampooning and ridicule. He is frequently likened to mongooses[23], which are noticeably depicted by Aleksandr as sweaty, stinky, conniving thieves. Sergei can also be considered a literary foil. His character is often contrasted with Aleksandr's in order to highlight the drastic differences between them and to accentuate Aleksandr's aristocracy, arrogance, extravagance and lavish life style which fills the pool of comedic possibilities. Table 6.1 has been devised to illustrate all the comedic literary techniques used during this campaign to inject humour into it, and to provide numerous examples for each.

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[23] According to Aleksandr, mongooses are subjects worthy of "rude jokes".

Table 6.1 Examples of comedic literary devices used by Aleksandr Orlov

Literary Device	Example
Allusion	Allusion made to James Bond: "I think I more spykat than villain. Wear tuxedo and drink millipede meertini, stir, not shaken." (FB[24] update 8th October 2012) Allusion made to *Britain's Got Talent*: "Tonight we settle to watch Russia has the talent." (FB update 29th September 2012) Allusion made to Elvis Presley: "My balalaika gently weep because today is last day on the Facebook. You have been great audience. Maybe I will get encore sometime soon? Vassily has leave the building!!" (FB update 6th September 2012) Allusion made to Superman: "Beware Knightkat, protector of meerkats and guardian of Meertropolis." (FB update 16th April 2010)
Anagram	"It is first night of the famous ballet 'Romeero and Juliet'." (Orlov, 2012c, p. 3) "In picture I think Henri Meertisse has capture most handsomest side of Mysterious Knightkat" (FB update 15th October 2012) "I prefers classic tunes of Beetlehoven but many people say they enjoy noisy sound of rocks music like in Vassily book" (FB update 10th October 2012) "Today I show Sergei his book I have written. It is all about his adventures in to the space. He say it is classic, like the Dostoyevsky, Shakesmeer and Sir Alan of Sugar" (FB update 28th September 2012) "I just found out I miss out on Reading festival of noise. I hear the Fur Fighters make heavy rock!" (FB update 3rd September 2012)
Chiasmus	"Have you seen promotion video for book?! Now it sure to beat Sugary Alan's book to top spot!" (FB update 6th October 2010)
Chronotope	"I buy holiday book for Sergei to make joke about his fur… it's called Fifty Shades of Grey!" (FB update 7th August 2012)
Epithet	Aleksandr the Adventurer (Orlov, 2010, p. 77)
Foil	"Today is Global Celebration for the Necktie. I am wear my finest cravat with pride. Sergei is wear stripe tie with small hole and stain" (FB update 18th October 2012)
Homophone	"Today I try crunches but could not hear any noise. Perhaps I am not doing right." (FB update 26th July 2012)
Hyperbaton	I am excite for UK X factors today with theme of lovings and heart with breaks. Paws cross someone is choosing Celine Dion classics 'My Heart Will Go On." (FB update 13th October 2012) "A big congratulations to 102 winners of meerkat toys, and a round of a-claws to all who played my game." (FB update 25th September 2012) "Extra! Extra! Read all around it! Stay up-to-date with all village happenings in latest edition of Meerkovian" (FB update 28th January 2011)
Hyperbole	"I am begin to run out of clean cravat, I was think about have a go at clean myself but I decide to buy 100 new one instead" (FB update 16th April 2012) "I have return to mansion, it is quiet without Sergei around. I am use to noise of him tappings 25/7" (FB update 22nd March 2012)
Irony	"Why is Sunday call Sunday? It always seem to be wet and rainings. I not see Sun anywhere." (FB update 20th May 2012) "I decide to organise surprise party for Sergei. Villagers of Meerkovo at mansion now making mess, I mean putting up decoration." (FB update 16th May 2012)
Juxtaposition	"Last night I was beam through smart satellite to meet some of my fan in small shop in London, The Harrods" (FB update 26th October 2012) "Today we are visit Hadrian's wall. It almost as big as one that surround my garden." (FB

[24] FB = Facebook

	update 12th September 2011)
	"When I have finally compare my last meerkat, maybe I will have career in Holly Woods. Not as glamorous as compare meerkats…" (Orlov 2010, p.103)
	"My home is a bit like English palace of BuckingHams, only bigger."(Orlov 2010, p.108)
Lampooning	"Look at Sergei the silly mongoose performing at circus." (FB update 11th June 2012)
	"Who turn up temperature in England, Sergei looks like sweaty mongoose." (FB update 30th September 2011)
Malapropism	"I hear Nicola Adams is champion 51kg fly. An insect that big could feed Meerkovo for a week" (FB update 10th August 2012)
	"Sergei is very excite about arrival of Santa Claws tonight. I not know why he look forward to get lump of coal." (FB update 24th Dec 2011)
Metaphor	"I think Sergei will be hard to get out of hospital door, his head start to grow with number of card he has receive." (FB update 10th May 2012)
	"Sergei is fascinate with the bagpipe. Who would have think that octopus would make such great instrument" (FB update 6th September 2011)
Onomatopoeia	"All the cars are painted brightly and look sparkle in the sunshine. Neeeeeeeaow! They go." (Orlov, 2012b, p. 6)
	"With a loud whooooooosh that knock small grey figure off his feet, the Knightkat Ejector Lift shot Knightkat up on roof of mansion" (Orlov, 2012a, p. 15)
Phonetic Pun	"Congratulations to city of Burning Hams for win of football cup! Your team must have meerkat-levels of skill, bravery and handsome." (FB update 28th February 2011)
	"Congratulations to UK for appoint of new President. I hope Mr Cameron and sidekick Mr Egg will be very happy together in new relationship." (FB update 12th May 2010)
Portmanteau	"New interwebs site meerkovo.com is now launch!" (FB update 18th January 2011)
	"Maiya is really struggle at school with the meerpups. Because comparethemeerkat.com is clog the pups are spend all day on the Facetube. Naughty." (FB update 14th January 2011)
Semantic Pun	"I have get Sergei a present for when he get back. I get him mouse for laptopamabob I hope he not try and eat it." (FB update 13th May 2012)
	"Sergei tell me about Reading festival happening this weekend. Maybe I fly in on my private helicopter, I am look for new book to read." (FB update 25th August 2011)
	"I am suffer from very large stomach pain. It take real 'battering' from too many pancakes eatings! (FB update 9th March 2011)
Simile	"Today we go ice skate; I used to be junior meerskate champ! Sergei still find his claws. He is like the bambi on ice!" (FB update 14th December 2011)
	"Keep on thinkings it is Monday, but is actually Tuesday, these bank Holiday make my brain like pickle" (FB update 30th August 2011)
	"Sergei tell me it Star Wars day, he say I look like Wookie, is this compliment?" (FB update 4th May 2011)

Source: Author

However, this use of wordplay has not been the only source of comedy. In September 2011, following the launch of "Simple Rewards", Aleksandr and Sergei went on a tour around the United Kingdom where they visited places such as Edinburgh Castle, Hadrian's wall, Newcastle, Bristol, London and Brighton pier. To document their travels, Aleksandr posted photographs on Facebook, all of which have comedic qualities and are coupled by equally compelling comments. Examples of such pictures are illustrated in Figure 6.10 and 6.11.

"Here is me and Sergei carry one of our favourite landmark! It was not as heavy as it look..." (Facebook Update 23rd Sept 2011)

Figure 6.10 Aleksandr and Sergei visit London

Source: https://www.facebook.com/Comparethemeerkat

What makes these images amusing are the cultural connotations they carry together with their high quality which makes them almost believable. Pure genius, Figure 6.10 is inspired by what Pink (2001) refers to as a "recurring image composition". Carrying a 2,100 tonne structure effortlessly and saying it is 'not as heavy as it looks' falls in the same calibre as other common touristic poses such as holding up the leaning tower of Pisa or placing a finger on the top of the pyramids of Giza, except, these have been practically done to death, and Aleksandr and Sergei's pose is original. Where they may have been humorous initially, these poses are arguably now a must in every person's photo journal. I believe carrying the London Eye will surely follow suit.

"We have just visit the Brighton Pier, I am expert in the Hasslehoff impression!" (Facebook Update 27th Sept 2011)

Figure 6.11 Aleksandr and Sergei visit Brighton Pier

Source: https://www.facebook.com/Comparethemeerkat

Although they are different species, Aleksandr and Sergei still conform to human cultural norms. Carnival cut-outs, which almost always illustrate humorous scenes involving people or animals, with holes in place of faces allowing for individuals to put their own face in the hole to complete the scene, are a prime example of the influence of cultural norms. There is something about a scene with a missing piece which drives people to want to complete it intuitively, without the need for instructions. Aleksandr and Sergei too had those same urges. Figure 6.11, shows a picture of them with a comedic carnival cut-out in Brighton Pier. The scene alludes to a popular television series called Baywatch, in which David Michael Hasselhoff was best known for his lead role as L.A. County Lifeguard Mitch Bachannon. In this sense, Aleksandr's statement "I am expert in the Hasslehoff impression!" is highly entertaining because firstly, Aleksandr is representing the role of a hopeless male swimmer and not the lifeguard, moreover Sergei is signifying the role of a female lifeguard. Secondly, Sergei is carrying Aleksandr, thus emphasising his role as loyal servant and accentuating Aleksandr's lavish, pampered lifestyle.

6.1.5 Adventurous Family Saga literature

A third literary genre by which the CompareTheMeerkat.com campaign can be analysed is Adventurous Family Saga literature. Skilful storyteller, Aleksandr Orlov, narrates the many adventures that he and earlier generations of his family have experienced through the years in his impressive autobiography *A Simples Life: My Life and Times* (Orlov, 2010). Specifically, this autobiography fits perfectly in the adventure and family saga genres. With its distinctive content of prose narrative with episodic units, the narration depicts events of a period in history which focuses its concerns on the activities of the Orlov family. It centres on the events that brought honour, success and fortune to the Orlovs.

According to Coats (1983), in a family saga, typical episodic units represent the travel of the family, and relationships within the family – commonly depicted as strife and separation of family members from the unit, birth, marriage, death, and some indication about the primary family structure. Aleksandr's autobiography is brimming with such episodic units. The book opens in the 18th century with the story of Kefentse, Aleksandr's ancestor, and his struggles in the Kalahari Deserts of Africa. Together with Seri his loyal companion, they endeavoured to flee famine, sandstorms and 'mongossery' by bravely setting sail. Their initial voyage predestined for Bermuda did not go to plan. A misreading of the 'nonsense map of the world' landed them in Russia after narrowly escaping war with a crew of mongoose pirates. This initial episodic unit of travel was closely followed by the passing of Kefentse and Seri, leaving behind the second generation of Orlovs.

Another significant episodic unit took place in the mid-1800s with Aleksandr's great-grandfather Vitaly demonstrating that his meerkat ancestors were able to escape the hardships of the Kalahari, but were unable to escape the mongoose. Aleksandr describes an epic battle between the fearless Vitaly and a horde of savage Mongolian mongooses. According to D'Ammassa (2009, p. 9), "stories set against the backdrop of war are, by their very nature, stories of adventure". This is a primarily the reason behind why the Compare the Meerkat campaign narrative fits perfectly in the adventure and family saga genres. Having won the 'Mongoose Wars', Vitaly was a hero. While seeking treatment for his battle wounds, Vitaly fell for a beautiful nurse called Valentina. Their intimacy, love and marriage represent yet another episodic unit.

As this detailed autobiography continues, Aleksandr's narration reveals further noteworthy episodic units: the birth of his twin grandparents Ivan and Grigory; the disappearance of Ivan; the marriage of Grigory and Anastasia; the birth of his father Anton; the conflict between Anton and his parents; the marriage of Anton and Valeria; the birth of Aleksandr; and finally, the death of Aleksandr's father Anton – all of which undoubtedly depicts the Orlov family structure. As an added bonus, Aleksandr includes a clear illustration of 'The Orlov Family Tree' in his autobiography. Aleksandr is the seventh generation Orlov, making him the heir to the Orlov Family fortune and business. According to Coats (1983), a family saga characteristically encompasses some account of the conception and birth of male heirs. Aleksandr describes his birth as follows:

> *"The night I am being born there was thunderings and lightnings in the sky. Was this because of warm front coming in from Ukraine? Or was it because the universe was sense something importants was occurring in the history of meerkats? Whatever the case, I was for definites a specials pup."* (Orlov, 2010, p. 77)

The level of detail in which Aleksandr's family affairs are described in his autobiography is truly admirable. Almost each page of this delightful book is filled with pictures, including sepia coloured photographs of his meerkat ancestors, old artefacts and prised possessions, maps, floor plans, crayon drawings and childhood pictures. Was it not for the neatly hidden warning on the copyright page stating "This is a work of fiction. Names and characters are the product of the author's imagination…" one could effortlessly be swept into Aleksandr's realistically rendered family and world. But this after all is a work of fiction. D'Ammassa (2009, p. vii) affirms, "almost all fiction involves some sort of adventure, exposure to new experiences or knowledge, changes in the shapes of the characters' lives". And this story is truly made from the mould adventure. Because adventure spans genres and take on many manifestations such as fantasy, detective stories, romance and so on (D'Ammassa, 2009), it has been established that in this case, adventure has taken on the form of family saga.

This adventurous family saga contains many of the literary formulaic constituents that Cawelti (1976) recognises as being mutual to adventure stories. Firstly, successful adventure stories involve the creation of an integral fantasy world, and Aleksandr unquestionably has an elaborate world of his own. Secondly, the main character in an adventure story must be conceived in heroic terms. Aleksandr comes from a long line of heroes who escaped the hardships of the Kalahari Desert and who fought numerous battles with their enemies. Aleksandr too follows in their footsteps. He is on a critical mission to liberate the world of

semantically-challenged consumers, who do not know the difference between their meerkats and their markets. These consumers are affecting the villagers of Meerkovo by reducing their quality of life. Thirdly, heroes in adventure stories must have an enemy, and surely, the arch enemy of our meerkat is the mongoose.

Flood *et al.* (2007, p. 2) also characterise adventure narrative by "a central male protagonist who typically leaves his home to face the unknown caused by forces beyond his control, undergoing hardship and danger with stoic goodwill in his quest to attain independence". As mentioned previously, Aleksandr's autobiography opens with the story of his ancestor Kefentse who was forced to flee the Kalahari Desert in Africa in order to escape the scorching heat, dry landscape, grub famine and typical 'mongoosery'. These were forces beyond his control which led him to set sail for Bermuda, undergoing hardships and danger along the way. Yet, in the Compare the Meerkat campaign narrative, Aleksandr is the central male protagonist. Consequently, he can also be analysed using Flood *et al.*'s (2007) characterisation of adventure narrative. Aleksandr, who lives in the Orlov mansion outside Moscow, has to typically leave the luxuries of his home and travel to the United Kingdom in order to raise awareness of the villagers of Meerkovo and their plight. His travels are essentially influenced by forces beyond his control. They are caused by the need to address semantically-challenged consumers who are clogging up the CompareTheMeerkat.com server looking for car insurance.

In his pioneering analysis of the 'Great Tradition' of adventure literature, Green (1979, p. 82) argues that the protagonist's quest is almost always set against a backdrop of Western imperial conquest. This includes contact with a racial 'other' usually portrayed as inferior and savage. In the Compare the Meerkat campaign narrative, this racial 'other' is none other than meerkats' very own arch enemy, the mongoose. They are always depicted as subordinate, sweaty, stinky, vicious, conniving thieves. Furthermore, according to Green (1979), the fundamental emotional focus of this genre is towards triumph. And meerkats are always triumphant against the mongoose.

Aleksandr's life narrative is just as adventurous as his predecessors – He explicitly refers to himself as 'Aleksandr the Adventurer'. Not only does he enjoy the escapades of this 21st century, but he has relived the adventures of his ancestors. As a lead actor and star, Aleksandr has recreated their life journeys in three epic sixty second films, represented by the equally epic film posters illustrated in Figure 6.12. These chronicles of adventure have been placed

into the following distinct themes, 'The Journey of Courageousness', 'The Battle of Fearlessness', and 'The Streets of Ambitiousness'. The plot of this trilogy is episodic; each adventure flows logically from the previous one. For adults and children alike, Aleksandr is a manifestation of adventure. His elaborate life story feeds the imagination, ultimately turning this adventure into something rich and exciting.

Figure 6.12 Aleksandr Orlov's epic film posters

Source: https://www.facebook.com/Comparethemeerkat

Moreover, Aleksandr's epic adventure continues to this day on Facebook and Twitter, where he posts further pictures and amusing scenes from his latest antics. His most recent release, *The Meerkat Tales,* is an adventure packed box set containing six story books, one for each of Meerkovo's villagers (See Figure 6.13). Although intended for children, adults are likely to find these tales equally thrilling. To illustrate, *Aleksandr & the Mysterious Knightkat* (Orlov, 2012a) is described by Aleksandr as a "story of Suspense! Action! Huge Braveness! And very importantly a hero of Enormous Handsomeness!". Knightkat is an enigmatic superhero far from the real superheroes of our community – i.e. officers and fire-fighters. He is based on common social and cultural constructs; he hides his identity in the same way as Spiderman, and just like Batman, he wears a mask and cape, which indecently can be washed at 30 degrees in order to reduce impact on the environment. The tale of this book alludes to the adventures of Super Mario. Knightkat's prime objective is to rescue the beautiful Princess

Maiya from the Presidential Palace, where she has been kidnapped by the evil Doctor Robogoose. Knightkat's rescue mission takes place with great speed. After defeating Robogoose, Knightkat scoops Maiya into his arms and whisks her into the night in the same way that Superman/Clark Kent whisks away Louis Lane. In this tale, and in *Maiya in the Beautiful Ballet* (Orlov, 2012c), Aleksandr expresses his admiration for Maiya. Is there a future for these two? Only time will tell.

Figure 6.13 Illustrations of adventure from *The Meerkat Tales* story book set

Aleksandr and the Mysterious Knightkat; Sergei's Space Adventure; Bogdan & the Big Race; Yakov Saves Christmas; Maiya in the Beautiful Ballet; Vassily the King of Rock

Source: https://www.facebook.com/Comparethemeerkat

6.1.6   Discussion: Anything but Simples

As demonstrated in section 6.1.2 'Nothing compares to meerkat marketing', Aleksandr Orlov's imaginary world is anything but 'simples'. The way in which VCCP have incorporated depth and breadth into the Compare the Meerkat campaign, through the use of multiple media channels, is remarkable and relates profoundly to two important theories put forward by Henry Jenkins, the theories of 'Convergence Culture' and 'Transmedia Storytelling', also the theory of 'Transmedia Planning' by Faris Yakob.

Jenkins (2006) explains convergence as the flow of content across multiple media platforms. It represents a cultural shift as consumers are encouraged to pursue new information and make connections amid dispersed media content. Convergence culture utilises the migratory behaviour of consumers who will go almost anywhere in search of desirable entertainment experiences. According to Jenkins (2006), it is important to note that convergence does not occur through media appliances, but occurs within the brains of individual consumers, through their social interactions with others. A key catalyst for this, is humanbeing's inability to retain all information, thus giving incentive for conversation. This conversation creates buzz, and in this competitve environment, it is becoming increasingly valuable for organisations to have the active participation of their consumers.

It was clear from the very beginning that the meerkat campaign needed to purse a very different, far from traditional marketing strategy. According to Amelia Torode (2009), head of strategy and innovation at VCCP at the time, the meerkat campaign needed to be "more akin to the way in which a film or TV show might think about communicating". In other words, in a layered narrative approach, rather than a linear one. This coincides with the principle idea of transmedia storytelling. From its very inception, transmedia storytelling spans more than one medium (Miller, 2008). Stories are crafted in a layered narrative which is made to unfold across multiple media platforms – each piece capable of standing on its own, nonetheless interacting with the other pieces to deepen the whole – thus giving consumers the choice of depth they want to experience (Weaver, 2013). In this sense, non-traditional marketing platforms are not produced as a subordinate to the primary source, instead, as part of the synergistic entirety (Evans, 2011).   Jenkins (2006) argues that few consumers will be able to dedicate the time required to obtain the whole picture, which is why transmedia storytelling drives and triggers word-of-mouth.

It is true to say that the majority of consumers are unaware of the full depth and breadth of the Compare the Meerkat campaign. And that is precisely the intention. Amalgamating numerous texts to construct a narrative so large will ensure no one knows everything, but everyone knows something, thus giving consumers incentive for conversation, participation and ultimately generating excitement and buzz around the campaign. This is evident in Aleksandr's ever increasing Facebook and Twitter following. At last count, Aleksandr had over 800,000 Facebook fans and over 58,000 Twitter followers. When he posts a comment on his wall, it averagely reaps around 1500 likes and around 100 responses (Please refer to Chapter 7 for a closer look into consumer responses and their analysis).

Compare the Meerkat is a fantastic example of transmedia planning. As opposed to media neutral planning, which develops a single message that is iterated across brand touchpoints, transmedia planning involves non-linear brand narratives. Different touchpoints are used to communicate different, self-contained elements of the brand narrative that build to create a larger brand world (Yakob, 2006). The key principle here is to build a world, not just a story; but a world for the story to live in. It may seem obvious that this is the most basic element of storytelling – the creation of an elaborate world for characters to reside in and for consumers to escape to– however, for brands especially outside entertainment, this is not always straightforward (Huang, 2009). In spite of this, as demonstrated in the previous sections, for a price comparison website Compare the Markat excels in building an elaborate world for their brand. In this case study, the rich and textured imaginary world of Aleksandr Orlov has been explored in literary terms, identifying the three prominent literary genres of Russian, Comedy and Adventurous family saga. This just proves that with a little creativity and hard work, everything is possible.

At the heart of the campaign, the idea is totally consistent. Dispersed fragments of the brand narrative are used across multiple platforms to tell the story. This has the potential to cultivate spectacular brand experiences, stronger existing consumer relations and true advocacy (Carlton, 2012). Transmedia planning caters to the consumption habits of both the passive massive mainstream TV audience, and the interactive, two-way communication hungry group (Yakob, 2008). In a media environment, where grabbing consumer attention is increasingly difficult, understanding that campaign success can be enhanced through an intrinsically participatory relationship with consumers can go a long way. Making everyone part of the advertising campaign will enrich it, but this requires a great deal of listening. In the case of Compare the Meerkat, Torode (2009) admits, "We listen to all suggestions made about the

future direction of the campaign and digital and social media content and functionality, such as mobile phone ringtones and new meerkats." Indisputably, this is one of the reasons why the campaign continues to increase in popularity, and why Compare the Market attracts the highest concentration of young adults (16-34 years old) amongst its competition (Beston, 2011).

The success of the meerkat marketing campaign can also be linked to the concept of contagion. Just as ideas that influence or inspire people circulate rapidly, contagious advertising campaigns can fortify brand engagement. In this era of social media, waves of contagion spread through the population with incomprehensible speed. The reason for this can be down to memetic forces. 'Meme', a term coined by Richard Dawkins, is defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as "an element of culture that may be considered to be passed on by non-genetic means, esp. imitation". This suggests that ideas are, like genes, selfish replicators which are transmitted, copied and spread through commmunities (Tyler, 2011). Contagiousness can be conveyed using four visual metaphors: (1) Buzz, these ideas are said to have their 'water cooler moment' (2) Belonging, these ideas create a shared sense of ownership (3) Numinosity, these ideas have an inspirational quality about them and exploit people's desire to be part of something special (4) Energy, these ideas are believed to have a 'life of their own' (Penn, 2010). The visual metaphor for contagion best suited for Compare the Meerkat is buzz. "The meerkat is something people want to talk about in the pub or at home with the kids" (Torode, 2009).

Aleksandr Orlov, the meerkat, is also someone people want to talk to. People leave comments, questions and suggestions directed to him on social media platforms. To respond to people's questions regarding other meerkats that Aleksandr has worked with, using a multiply strategy (Brown, 2010) VCCP developed the character of Sergei, the IT manager. His introduction was critical in generating buzz and enthusiasm. Torode (2009) explains,

> *"for the second creative execution, we got Aleksandr to tweet about him and post about him on Facebook three weeks before the new TV execution broke. This generated a frenzy of excitement online – so much so that, when we seeded the new ad online before it aired on TV, the traffic to the website almost crashed the servers"*

The development of Sergei has been elaborate. He is not just a character on face value; he is as 'real' as Aleksandr. Communicating in the same way as Aleksandr, Sergei has his very own Facebook and Twitter pages where he has his very own followers and fan base. It is only fitting that Aleksandr and Sergei are 'friends' on these social media platforms. This adds

another dimension to their imaginary meerkat world, where the story narrative can take on two complimentary perspectives. An example of this can be seen in Figure 6.14.

Figure 6.14 Complimentary Facebook statuses

Source: https://www.facebook.com/Comparethemeerkat

It seems one of the key issues in creating an adored anthropomorphic mascot is the commitment to persistently breathe new life into it (Patterson, Khogeer, & Hodgson, 2013). This is achieved through the management of supposedly real character profiles on social media platforms Twitter and Facebook. Looking back to Chapter 4, where I investigate brand and human personality traits, and the elements that make humans the way they are, it is evident that Aleksandr and Sergei are prime examples of 'becoming human'. Sergei, so the story goes, was extremely ill in March 2012 and had to go into hospital due to his inability to cope with the increased work load caused by people comparing credit cards. Bedridden for two months, Sergei made a recovery and the critical decision to quit his job as CompareTheMeerkat.com IT manager (He submitted a resignation letter to Aleksandr which can be seen in Appendix 4). In June 2012, Sergei was well on his way to finding a new career path, looking through newspapers and circulating jobs of interest, he finally made the decision to join the circus, where was taught how to juggle and trained as a meerkat cannon fur-ball. A week later, Aleksandr was begging Sergei to return home to CompareTheMeerkat.com. It is apparent that Sergei's actions were triggered by humans' deep desire for appreciation and improved working conditions; desires hardly expressed or seen from a mere advertising mascot.

Interestingly, creating a real, human-like anthropomorphic mascot was the plan from the very beginning. Passion pictures were asked to create a very realistic meerkat that spoke and behaved like a real person rather than a cartoon character. Likewise, in order to stimulate consumer enchantment, the setting was specified as very real and atmospheric (Crosscup & McLean, 2009). Creative Director Daren Walsh explains the design process,

> *"We knew it would have to be a CGI[25] meerkat, so we spent a few days watching the BBC wildlife documentary series 'Meerkat Manor' to get the shape movement down, then built our own 3D model. We adapted his features a little to fit the character and groomed him a little, too. We started the key animation as if he was just a normal meerkat sitting up, looking around, sniffing around. We then embellished the action with more human gestures and finally put the lip sync in. We really didn't want to go too far with the phonetic mouth shapes because it would look too manipulated. Most of the dialogue is just a flapping mouth; it works really well".* (Walsh, 2009)

Contrary to the main idea of this thesis, Aleksandr's character was not based on any books or literatures. According to Richard Connell, his character was "a conflation of Terry Thomas, Hugh Hefner, Alan Sugar, Roman Abramovich and Hugh Laurie's Prince Regent character in Blackadder III." Aleksandr was also not the first CGI talking animal mascot. The GEICO Gecko has been popular on American television ten years prior to the creation of Aleksandr. The Gecko was created in 1999 and plays around the idea of the mispronunciation between GEICO and Gecko. An idea so similar, that CompareTheMarket.com could be accused of stealing it.

6.1.7   Summary: Mad about Meerkats

In an industry where consumers do not care about the product, where company success is highly dependent on spending power, and where unique selling points were practically non-existent, CompareTheMarket.com stood their ground with a differentiation strategy that brought them straight to the top – An advertising campaign that embraced the confusion and turned it into something memorable. The birth of the meerkat campaign was the start of something profound; a contagious effect on society which made everyone meerkat mad. Children were asking their parents when their car insurance renewal was due. People were

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[25] CGI = Computer Generated Imagery

buying meerkat sculptures to put in their gardens. Anything and everything from birthday cards, mugs, coasters, calendars and toys for example were meerkat related all thanks to one lovable, enchanting anthropomorphic mascot named Aleksandr Orlov. He is a contagious idea which produced a 'social' response (Penn, 2010) encouraging people to share and exceeding mere advertising engagement.

In this case study, I have demonstrated that Aleksandr Orlov's imaginary world is anything but 'simples'. It displays a finely-wrought complexity rarely encountered in the presentation of a mere marketing mascot. So much so, it has been analysed in literary terms and found to encompass the three literary genres of Russian, Comedy and Adventurous family saga. Russian literature was selected not only because Aleksandr has been stylised as a Russian aristocrat, billionaire, entrepreneur, multi-talented meerkat who lives just outside Moscow, but also because the brand narrative draws greatly to the Russian literary device of skaz. Comedy literature was chosen because of the extensive comedic literary techniques used to add humour and entertainment to the narrative; techniques that include metaphors, malapropism, juxtaposition, allusion and lampooning. Finally, Adventurous family saga was picked because Aleksandr's life narrative is brimming with typical episodic units that represent family travels and relationships. Aleksandr provides a fantastic example of how marketers can use literary genres to assemble a viable persona for a brand mascot.

The Compare the Meerkat campaign is a prime example of transmedia planning. Aleksandr's life story has been crafted as a multi-layered narrative which is made to unfold across multiple media platforms: Traditional TV and radio adverts, Website, Facebook, Twitter, Linkedin, an autobiography and numerous storybooks. Aleksandr also illustrates how, in this new social media driven marketing landscape, great content is still king, but the threshold for 'great' has gotten harder to reach (Hollis, 2012). As the campaign grew and matured, so did the meerkat family. Following a multiply strategy (Brown, 2010), Sergei and the remainder villagers of Meerkovo were introduced to further elaborate Aleksandr's imaginary world; a world which entices, excites, intrigues and thrills its spectators, and allows for people who are mad about meerkats and want to investigate how deep the meerkat hole goes to do so.

6.2 Case Study 2: Mars' M&M's

6.2.1 Making a mark

Since its invention in 1941, M&M's have been one of the most famous chocolate treats around the world (Mars, 2013). Named after the surnames of its creators Forrest Mars Sr. and R. Bruce Murrie, M&M's are snack-sized, button-shaped, pieces of chocolate in an instantly identifiable, colourful shell. The chocolate's recognisability comes from the unmistakable letter "m" imprinted in lowercase on one side of the tempered chocolate shell; a unique trademark which was introduced for the very first time in 1950. M&M's were intentionally created to be less sweet than other chocolates, so that eaters would eat handfuls of them rather than just four or five (Brenner, 2000).

M&M's are made by Mars Incorporated[26], and are available in numerous flavours that range from plain milk chocolate, to peanut, peanut butter, almond, pretzel and coconut (Mars, 2013). Originating in the United States of America, in 1980, M&M's were introduced internationally to Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Hong Kong, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Malaysia, The Netherlands, Spain, Switzerland and the UK (M&M's, 2013). M&M's are now sold in nearly 100 countries around the globe.

In 2009, BusinessWeek collaborated with Euromonitor to construct a list of the top-selling chocolate and gum brands in 25 countries. M&M's were acknowledged as the number one[27] best-selling chocolate in the U.S. as well as worldwide (Deprez, 2009). Additionally, according to a report by Senior Food Analyst Alex Beckett for Mintel, in the UK chocolate and confectionary market, M&M's sales in 2012 reached £61m. This is projected to increase to £75m in 2013 – equating to a rise of 23% in brand sales (Beckett, 2013). With an estimated $3.49 billion in global sales according to Euromonitor projections (Advertising Age, 2012), it is undeniable that M&M's is making a mark on the world.

M&M's operation in international markets is faced with numerous challenges. For several years, both managers and researchers in marketing and advertising have debated over

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[26] Mars Incorporated is one of the world's leading chocolate manufacturers. Its headquarters are in Mount Olive, New Jersey, U.S.A. and it employs more than fifteen-thousand associates across nineteen countries. It manufactures thirty-four brands in total, including five billion-dollar internationally iconic brands: M&M's®, SNICKERS®, DOVE®/GALAXY®, MARS®/ MILKY WAY®, and TWIX®. Other prominent brands include: 3 MUSKETEERS®, BALISTO®, BOUNTY®, MALTESERS® and REVELS® (Mars, 2013).
[27] Euromonitor International projections reveal Snickers will pass M&M's, its sister brand, as the top international confectionary brand by the end of 2012 (Advertising Age, 2012).

strategies of customisation versus standardisation for international markets (Roth, 1995). For example, Levitt (1983) championed global marketing programs that benefit corporations tremendously via economies of scale in production, distribution and marketing – allowing managers to achieve message consistency and the ability to attract common cross-national market segments. On the other hand, Fisher (1984) and Kotler (1986) argue that larger returns can be achieved via customisation, through modifying products and marketing strategies to the distinctive characteristics of individual markets. Yes, additional expenses will be incurred through customisation to local and national markets in order to meet significant differences in consumers, cultural and socioeconomic conditions, and market structures; however, Wind (1986) believes this is worth it. He strongly argues, a strategy of universal standardisation is naïve, over-simplistic and disregards the integral complications of procedures in international markets.

Truly, the majority of firms' strategies are somewhere amid the extremities of complete customisation and complete standardisation (Quelch & Hoff, 1986), and the M&M's brand is no different. Evidently, this globally iconic brand has complied with traditional marketing conventions. When it comes to market segmentation, identifying their target audience, and their brand's positioning, careful adaptations to their product ranges and promotional activities, were made to match the laws of the countries in which they are trading, and to carefully suit the needs of their selected consumers. In this sense, the M&M's brand (Mars Inc.) operates as a multinational corporation. According to Levitt (1983), global and multinational corporations are not the same; global corporations operate with unwavering consistency, as if the entire world were a single entity selling the same things in the same way everywhere, whereas multinational corporations operate in a number of countries, and adjust their products and practices in each.

For M&M's, although the core chocolate product is the same worldwide – with minor differences in packaging such as size and language used – more specialised flavours (e.g. coconut) are limited edition and are only sold in a particular country (e.g. only in the U.S.A.) to meet the needs of those consumers. M&M's biggest differences however, lie in their promotional activities. With each country/region running their own advertising campaigns, the overall message can be accurately described as schizophrenic[28]. In subsequent sections, a more detailed and analytical look at M&M's overall promotional activities will be taken –

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[28] Despite the confusion in specific character antics, three prominent literary genres are revealed through detailed narrative analysis. These are: Romance, Tragicomedy and Burlesque.

More specifically, touching on promotional activities in Canada, the U.K. and Australia before focusing in particular on promotional activities in the U.S.

At the heart of M&M's advertising campaigns are a group of anthropomorphic characters. In 1954, the M&M's brand was brought to life through the introduction of the infamous M&M's 'spokescandies'. The first spokescandies graced America's television screens with the tagline "melts in your mouth, not in your hands". Since then, numerous iterations of the characters were created prior to the introduction of Red and Yellow in 1971 (Please refer to Figure 6.15). The spokescandies are a literal embodiment of M&M's. They possess the chocolates' button-shaped body, Caucasian arms and legs, wide eyes and a mouth. Referring back to Chapter 4, M&M's have adopted a 'Mascot' strategy towards brand anthropomorphism. These anthropomorphic representations of the brand also have heightened emotions and recognisable human personalities with which consumers can relate, bringing them closer towards the ultimate goal of becoming human.
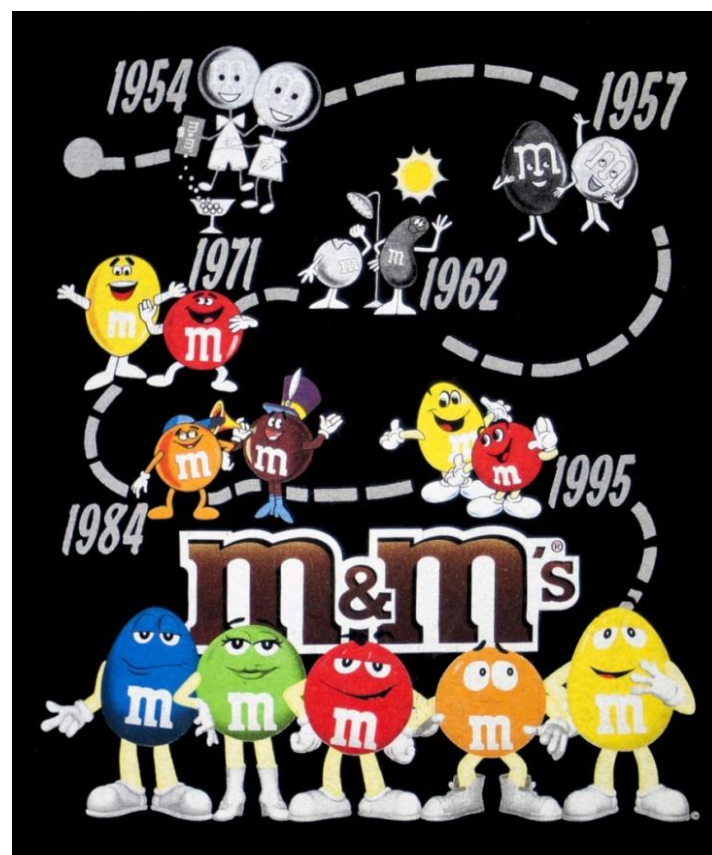
Figure 6.15 iterations of the M&M's characters through time

Over the years, M&M's have epitomised "marketing's more-more-more mentality" by adopting a "multiply" strategy mindset to brand mascots (Brown, 2010, p. 218). According to Aaker (1991), strong brands maintain a consistent brand image for twenty or thirty years, if not longer. For over fifty years, M&M's have utilised anthropomorphic mascots to help sell their products. Despite going through numerous iterations, M&M's have maintained the same five spokescandies since 1995 – they have appeared on packaging, became increasingly known through print and TV advertising as well as purchasable memorabilia, thus reinforcing the brand and increasing consumer awareness. With the introduction of Ms Brown, Chief Milk-chocolate Officer in January 2012, M&M's currently have six official spokescandies, with six very different personalities, backing up the brand. Meet M&M's anthropomorphic mascots…

6.2.2 M&M's Marketing Mascots
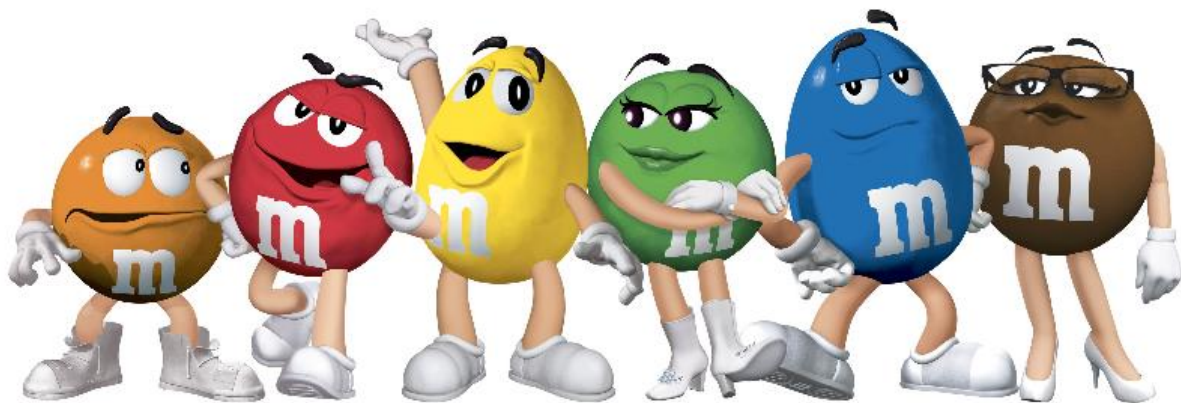
Figure 6.16 M&M's official spokescandies

Introducing Orange/Crispy, Red, Yellow, Ms Green, Blue and Ms Brown (illustrated in Figure 6.16 above). It did not take much creativity to come with their names, but their personalities make all the difference.

As indicated in the previous section, Red and Yellow are the original spokescandies. Since 1995, Red has been stylised as a wise-cracking character. He is acerbic, eccentric, sarcastic, theatrical, and with leader qualities. He is also a sucker for love and often a victim of his own scheming. Voiced by the legendary Billy West, Red can be likened to Fred Flintstone, Bart

Simpson and Daffy Duck. Red's character profile reveals his age as "30-something" (Mars Inc., 2013), which is highly debatable. I am yet to see his birth certificate in order to confirm. His weight is perfect for his shell. Red thinks he has genius I.Q. and physical prowess which is why he believes he can run for president. In reality, he thinks he knows more than he actually does. Additionally, Red has been telling people what to do their entire life, turning simple chores into complicated tasks. Funnily, some people follow his wise advice – most notably Yellow. As his name suggests, Red is red in colour, round in shape and represent milk chocolate M&M's.

Yellow has been depicted as a kind hearted character, who is full of smiles, honest, simple, child-like, naïve, clumsy, innocent and serendipitous, yet charming at the same time. Yellow considers Red his best friend because he "seems to know a lot" which compensates for Yellow's gullibility and the fact he sees the good in everything. Voiced by J. K. Simmons, Yellow's character can be likened to Elmer Fudd, Tom Hank's character Josh in *Big* (1988), and Robin William's character Jack Powell in *Jack* (1996) for example. Yellow's character profile reveals his age as "unknown" (Mars Inc., 2013). This comes as no surprise since he is in touch with his inner child. This is evident in his snappy comebacks, for example "ooh look, a butterfly! Yay!" and "Wait, wait... I got one… nah, I forgot it…" As his name suggests, Yellow is the colour of his shell. He is plump, but about average for a peanut covered in milk chocolate. Yellow represents Peanut M&M's.

In 1995, Blue was introduced as a new spokescandy after ten million people voted to add blue to the colour mix. Conforming to the cultural connotations of the colour, he has been rendered as a confident, cool character who is up on current events, never runs when he can strut, wears a leather jacket with everything, and believes it is never too dark to wear sun glasses. Blue coolly ambles through the world, commentating and observing. He is likened to Aladdin's Genie, Bugs Bunny, *Iron Man*'s Tony Stark, *Toy Story*'s Buzz Lightyear and *Home Improvement*'s Tim Allen. Blue is voiced by Robb Pruitt who is also known for voicing Frankenberry. Blue enjoys keeping fit, he is 'turned-on' by moon-lit nights, jazz and ladies. If you are lucky, he might make an appearance and usually the party does not start until he gets there (Mars Inc., 2013). Blue is the colour of his shell. He is an almond covered in milk chocolate and represents Almond M&M's.

In 1999, Orange, who is also named Crispy, was introduced as a new spokescandy. He has been portrayed as a neurotic character, paranoid that people want to eat him – and probably

rightly so. His character is likened to Shaggy from the cartoon series *Scooby Doo*. Orange's paranoia means that he avoids dark alleys, crowded elevators, all-you-can-eat buffets and anywhere with birds. Orange is voiced by comedian Eric Kirchberger. His character profile reveals that "stress makes him look older than he is" (Mars Inc., 2013). Always looking over his shoulder, and both ways repeatedly, Orange does not eat and does not even sleep. As a hidden talent, he can always identify the hungry person in the room. As suggested by his name, Orange is the colour of his outer shell. He often represents Crispy and Pretzel M&M's.

Up until 2012, Ms Green was the only female M&M's mascot. She made her television debut on SNL with host Dennis Miller in 1997. She is stylised as a fabulous fashionista with expensive taste. Wide-eyed with a full set of lashes, she is flirty, alluring, quick-witted and confident enough to display her sexuality. Playing on the idea that green M&M's are an aphrodisiac[29], her character can be likened to Kim Cattrall's character, Samantha Jones, in *Sex and the City*. She is often shown strutting her stuff in high heeled boots and showing off a little milk chocolate flesh by taking off her shell. Voiced by Cree Summers, Ms Green often comes across as slightly self-indulgent – "just look at me… fabulous!" – An illustration of this is her belief that her beauty is of a magnitude that "can't be described in words" (Mars Inc., 2013). She is also a Diva who is intimidating and hard to get. You often hear her say "I melt for no one". Ms Green wears her green shell with pride. She has been used to represent Dark chocolate M&M's, Coconut M&M's and the luxurious M&M's Premiums.

After many years of working behind the scenes, in January 2012, chief chocolate officer Ms Brown finally comes into the spot-light. Voiced by Vanessa Williams, she has been embodied as an intelligent business woman, who is mature and full of advice. Her seriousness and good charm is emphasised by her corporate glasses, yet, it has been counter balanced by her witty personality, making her a valuable addition to the M&M's character medley. Although she is made of pure milk chocolate, Ms Brown believes she does not have a sweet side. Stern in her nature, she keeps the rest of the M&M's characters under control, acting like a mother figure and a role model for the group. In the words of Ms Brown (2012), "How can you choose one… they are like children, you love them all". She represents the original milk chocolate M&M's. So the story goes, Ms Brown was the very first M&M's to be created. She went to Ivy League School to absorb as much business knowledge as she could.

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[29] Common urban folklore, which first gained prominence in the 1970s, suggests green M&M's have the power to increase sexual desire – perhaps because culturally the colour green symbolises healing and fertility. Mars do not claim their green M&M's to have any extraordinary powers nor can they prove it scientifically or medically.

Once graduated, she went to Mars Chocolate to become Chief Chocolate Officer. It was her idea to introduce red, yellow, blue, orange and green to the M&M's mix. After travelling the world and being in boardrooms across the globe, researching, studying coco, and being in development labs to perfect chocolate recipes, she became M&M's spokesperson after seventy years.

Unquestionably, the M&M's spokescandies are ambassadors for the brand. According to Scott Hudler, who at the time was Mars's brand communications manager, part of the characters' appeal is their personalities; "Everyone can almost identify with one of the personalities" (Angrisani, 2002). Hudler further explains in an issue of *Brand Marketing,* "We don't want them spouting the same lines over and over again" (Angrisani, 2002). Thus, in the same way that humans evolve, grow and develop themselves and their personalities, the spokescandies are undergoing continuous development.

Since their initial introduction in 1954, their biggest change came in 1995 when they evolved from being one-dimensional to being three-dimensional. This change made them appear more realistic. Adding on the element of personality to the M&M's characters was the next logical evolutionary step and took place after 1995. As such, the M&M's spokescandies fit into Hosany *et al.*'s (2013) typology as "brand characters with identity". Despite their longevity and their countless appearances however, the depth of their personalities is not accredited to conventional TV and radio advertising as it is exceptionally difficult to build a character in short bursts of 30 seconds. Thus a deeper look into M&M's marketing campaigns and promotional activities has been carried out (See Section 6.2.3) in order to fully understand the way in which BBDO New York, M&M's advertising agency, have managed to construct, develop and evolve the personalities of the spokescandies into the characters they are today – injecting them with a deep anthropomorphic presence that is embellished with a narrative full of romance, tragicomedy and burlesque[30]. These identified literary genres are further elaborated on in the subsequent sections.

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[30] These three prominent literary genres were revealed as a result of a detailed narrative analysis carried out into all aspects of the M&M's imaginary world.

6.2.3 M&M's Marketing Milieu

M&M's market chocolate like no other. To date, no other chocolate brand utilises anthropomorphic characters like M&M's, despite their popularity with numerous confectionary brands (e.g. Bertie Bassett - Bassett's liquorice allsorts) and breakfast cereals (e.g. Tony the Tiger – Kellogg's Frosties). BBDO New York, which has been the advertising agency for M&M's since 1995, have managed to incorporate a high level of sophistication into the M&M's spokescandies by giving them distinct personality traits. In this way, BBDO were able to effectively combine traditional TV, radio and billboard advertising with digital marketing platforms – websites and the social media networks of Facebook and Twitter – in order to communicate M&M's brand to consumers, enhancing brand awareness on and off the shelf.

As indicated in the previous section, M&M's is an internationally well-known brand which has been around since the early 1900s. Thus, a comprehensive look into all facets of their advertising campaigns (worldwide) is practically impossible in the timeframe available for this project. Therefore, in addition to the time boundaries highlighted in the methodology chapter, this case study will focus in particular on M&M's promotional activities in the U.S.[31], with reference to key activities in Canada, the U.K. and Australia[32]. A timeline, from character inception until October 2012, has been devised and can be seen in Appendix 5. A literary analysis of the character/brand narratives has also been executed in the succeeding sections.

As this section will illustrate, the M&M's brand is a pioneer in the world of marketing. It has a unique approach to promotions, tie-ins and interconnected advertising strategies (Samano, 2007) that combine traditional TV marketing with digital forms of marketing. Since its inception, in what can be described as his first promotional tie-in, founder Forrest Mars Sr. managed to sell M&M's exclusively to the U.S. military during World War II – their hard shells prevented the chocolates from melting and that provided a great practical advantage. In 1982, M&M's went into space for the very first time. The chocolates were provided for astronauts in the first NASA space shuttle trip and have been a part of all missions ever since.

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[31] I chose to focus mainly on U.S.A. because it is M&M's brand origin, where key activities and innovations firstly take place.

[32] I chose to refer to Canada, U.K. and Australia, as opposed to other countries, simply because of the language barrier.

To illustrate this, an amusing image has been developed of two human space suits standing along-side their M&M's counterpart[33] (See Figure 6.17).

Figure 6.17 M&M's go to space

Source: "Aboard the Shuttle since 1981." M&M's print ad from 2004.

Such tie-ins continue. M&M's introduction into international markets was epitomised by their status in the 1984 whereby they were named the 'Official Snack Food' of the Olympic Games in Los Angeles. During this period, colour became a critical on-going theme in all their advertising and promotional activities, and a tactic for generating increased consumer appeal. By means of example, M&M's offer a pack of entirely pink chocolates in support of Breast Cancer Research and the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation[34]. Thinking ahead, in 1998, M&M's declared themselves 'the official candy of the new millennium'. They wittingly tied their product with an immense worldwide event and without having to spend a single cent on rights. They did so by profusely capitalising on the Roman numeral *MM*, meaning 2,000.

To mark Orange/Crispy's first birthday, M&M's threw a birthday party of epic proportions. As part of the festivities, and to say thank you to all their fans, M&M's created the world's

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[33] Based on size and shape, the M&M's space suit will most likely accommodate Red

[34] A donation from the sale of the product goes toward the Foundation's goals of breast cancer research, screening, treatments and education.

largest Piñata – with a sum total measurement of 153ft 4 in (46.72m), the structure broke the previously set Guinness World Record[35] (Guinness World Records, 2011). To make the official announcements, M&M's brought to the stage three-time Grammy-winner Cee Lo Green and Z100 DJ Danielle Monara in an open event which is free of charge to the public. Attendees were indulged to gift bags, raffle prizes, cupcakes and various birthday party games.

M&M's have also developed a strong tie with sports. Since 1990, they have sponsored motorsport NASCAR[36]. After nine years of hanging out at the race tracks, these small chocolate treats made their debut with an M&M's branded car. Tying themselves with the fortunes of the sport's hottest young drivers, M&M's managed to attract what at first glance may be considered an unlikely consumer base of snack hounds. Due to receiving a fanatical response from supporters, M&M's went on to sign a principle sponsorship deal with NASCAR's premium racing series, the NEXTEL cup series. Again, Mars stepped up their financial commitment to the sport in 2006 by making M&M's the circuit's "official chocolate" (Precourt, 2010). The M&M's spokescandies are often featured around the track in traditional racing gear (See Figure 6.18) where they are positioned as real people. For example, Red has actively conducted an interview on *Entertainment Tonight* featuring M&M's NASCAR driver Kyle Busch (Busch, 2011).

Figure 6.18 M&M's Spokescandies sponsor NASCAR

Similarly, M&M's became the official chocolate of the NETS basketball in 2009. They launched a confectionary and merchandise store, called the "M Zone", on the main concourse

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[35] Previous record held in 2008 by Carnival Cruise Lines in Philadelphia (sum total measurement 44.52m, or 146ft 0.75in) (Guinness World Records, 2011)
[36] National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing, Inc. Founded in 1984 and has a jurisdiction of U.S.A., Canada, Mexico and Europe.

level of the IZOD Centre[37], offering Nets-branded M&M's licensed merchandise during the games (NBA, 2009); merchandise which encompasses the infamous spokescandies. Also in 2009, M&M's teamed up with Six Flags amusement park to make their amusements park more amusing. Red and Yellow were utilised to educate the public with the Do's and Don'ts of Six Flags. Additionally, images of colourful M&M's candies graced their staircases, transportation vehicles and bridges. M&M's day at Six Flags also provides brand advocates with the opportunity to save on admission tickets and receive VIP treatment.

Further emphasising the M&M's central theme of colour, it has been used as a key tactic for generating consumer interest. Consumers are given the opportunity to vote for colour introductions and colour changes thus ensuring consumers feel like they have a strong personal stake in the product (Samano, 2007). In M&M's first Global Colour Vote of 1995, ten million people voted to add Blue to the colour mix and as a replacement for the tan coloured M&Ms. Pink and Purple later got a second chance against Aqua (Turquoise) to be voted consumers' favourite and to be introduced to the M&M's colour mix. Purple was voted consumers' top choice in 2002, but all three colours are now available from MY M&M's and M&M's world stores. M&M's are all about 'colourful chocolate fun'. And undoubtedly, maintaining this consistent brand image for a long period of time denotes the strength of a brand; however, to survive the changing market conditions, competition and consumer tastes, organisations need to adapt and make adjustments (Reichert & LaCaze, 2006; Park, Jaworski, & MacInnis, 1986). So in 2004, when M&M's decided to remove the colour from their chocolates by turning them black, white and grey, people were in shock (Littlewood, 2004). To ensure consumers were aware of the loss of colour, M&M's partnered with Dick Clark and ABC's New Year's Rockin' Eve to drape the country with this move. Dick Clark enlisted the assistance of the M&M's spokescandies in their first-ever integration of this extent in order to count in the New Year. The colour loss happened simultaneously. Consumer involvement was generated by the actual 'search' for colour in return for an extensive prize package. This reminded people why they loved M&M's.

To further ensure consumers have a strong personal stake in the product, M&M's introduced a personalisation innovation. In what started out as the first viral digital marketing initiative to increase awareness online, MY M&M's Candy Lab was a fun engaging experience that allowed consumers to personalise their chocolates and mimicked the purchase path for MY

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[37] A multipurpose arena in the Meadowlands Sports Complex, in East Rutherford, New Jersey, USA

M&M's. Through the website (mymms.com), customers were, and still are, able "to create powerful, personalised, fun stories around special, memorable moments, like birthdays and weddings" by selecting their favourite colours, uploading photographs of loved ones and combining that with a few custom messages (imc2, 2009). The Candy Lab was enthusiastically embraced. In eight weeks, it entertained over 94 thousand unique visitors, exceeding their goal by 0.07% (imc2, 2009).

In another effort to increase M&M's presence online, another digital marketing campaign was launched in 2007 and named 'Find your inner M'. The heart of this campaign revolved around the idea that there is a candy-coated ball of chocolate in every single one of us. Consumers could go onto the M&M's website mms.com, and using an innovative Character Creator, customise an impressively accurate M&M's version of themselves. The creator allows for the selection of a huge range of bodily attributes and facial features in what can be described as a next level incarnation of Mr Potato-Head. Users have complete control in selecting colours, positioning body parts, selecting arms and legs, and in changing and adding accessories. To mark the launch of the website, M&M's revealed Lady Liberty, a fifty-foot statue in NYC Harbour. For this marketing campaign, BBDO New York worked together with Barbarian Group to create the 'Planet M' website. Dismissing what they perceived to be an overused tactic of user-uploaded photographs, their main aim was to create a new palette for user-generated content that provided consumers with a creative playground through which they could express themselves, while still being true to the M&M's brand. Barbarian Group chief operating officer, Rick Webb, openly expresses this;

> *"We wanted to stay true to the illustrative nature of the M&M characters that BBDO has developed. Making your character in the same style as the pre-existing characters reinforces the brand, and reinforces the feeling that these M&M's are a real...race? People? Tribe? Well, like Smurfs are real. You get the idea."* (Ho, 2007)

In an attempt to find my inner 'M', Duchess Brainiac was born and represents my alter M&M's ego (Figure 6.19). To promote becoming an M&M's, celebrities were lined up to take part in the advertising, these included Burt Reynolds, Melissa and Joan Rivers and rock band Kiss. In this sense, the transformation of well-known real life individuals with which consumers can relate to into M&M's characters further portrays the idea that the M&M's are real and that the M&M's spokescandies are potentially real too.

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Figure 6.19 Duchess Brainiac

Source: Produced by author through mms.com

In another equally compelling digital marketing campaign in Canada, M&M's drove their brand's online awareness by targeting internet-savvy males and females. A promotional TV advert was released in 2010 which showed Red being bizarrely sucked into Google Street View after Yellow spilling a glass of water on the computer's keyboard. Interestingly, Red's disappearance shadows the colour's withdrawal in the 1970s due to consumer health concerns about the red colour dye[38]. For this campaign, and for a chance to win a red Smart car, Canadians had thirty days to find three hidden red M&M's in Toronto in Google Street View. With clues available virtually via the website, Twitter, Facebook, Foursquare and in YouTube annotations, and in the real world via QR code wild postings and package UPC codes, players had the opportunity to go as deep as they wanted into the game by using as many channels as they so please.

> *"In just 30 days, this Canadian-specific promotion received: 8.4 million PR impressions, over 7 million QR Code poster views and over 225,000 Twitter impressions. The total impressions came out to over 15.6 million."* (BBDO/Proximity Canada, 2011).

This campaign achieved its purpose of increasing awareness and interaction with the M&M's brand. It also generated valuable buzz and confirmed the brand's key message of 'irresistible fun'.

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[38] Red triumphantly returned in 1987 due to popular demand.

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Additionally, the M&M's brand teamed up with one of the biggest award shows of the year, The Oscars. At the awards ceremony, award nominees were given gift boxes with colourful chocolates with tailored messages of encouragement and congratulations. Michele Kessler, vice president of marketing at Masterfoods USA articulates, "We're excited to be able to congratulate the nominees in this personalised way for achieving the ultimate honour in the movie industry" (Buyce & Pierson, 2006).

The Oscars are commonly associated with the recognition of excellent cinematic achievements, celebrities, fashion, glamour and the infamous Red Carpet – so who's better to give 'Red Carpet Tips' than Red himself? M&M's used this opportunity to deliver the successfully humorous "Red's Red Carpet Tips" in which Red hosts a series of lighthearted pointers to make an appearance on the Red Carpet. These include advice on time of arrival, posing for the cameras, the use of Collagen/Botox, fake tan, having an entourage and also on what to wear. M&M's link with the Oscars strengthens the brand's association with the film industry. According to Michele Kessler, "M&M's is the quintessential movie candy and has a sweet history of being part of the movie experience." (Buyce & Pierson, 2006). And this is ultimately why many of their promotional activities are closely interlinked with films and new DVD releases. For example, to mark the release of Star Wars, M&M's launched the "mPire" campaign; for the release of Shrek 2, Ogre sized M&M's were created and for the release of Transformers, limited edition flavours were developed. They also launched a DVD promotion called 'Bag a Million Movies' in autumn 2011 in the UK (Beckett, 2013). Consequently, M&M's have also tried to increase their association with cinema. In July 2012, M&M's announced 'Sweet Sundays' in the UK; an on-pack promotion which allowed entrants to win free cinema tickets. It coincided with the launch of *Skyfall*, the newest James Bond blockbuster, and marked M&M's latest cinema tie-in (Beckett, 2013).

Due to their continuous efforts to increase association with cinema, it comes as no surprise that M&M's are the sponsors of Digital Cinema Media's (DCM) 'From The Red Carpet' (FTRC) show here in the United Kingdom. In 2011, Red and Yellow graced the U.K.'s big screen by co-hosting FTRC, a 60-second entertainment show that offers inciting interviews with stars and starlets from the latest cinematic film releases. These charming spokescandies are seen joking around the cinema environment in an entertaining way which showcases the fun side of the brand and reinforces the value of sharing during films and especially in cinema. An illustration of Red and Yellow's banter on the big screen can be seen in Figure 6.20 – banter which is perceived to add further depth to the characters' personalities.

Figure 6.20 Red and Yellow co-host FTRC

Source: From The Red Carpet episode 21[39]

M&M's have continued their association with FTRC by becoming an inaugural sponsor of the show, thus growing their relationship with DCM. According to Abbey Voce, Group Head at DCM, "Cinema is the ideal fit to reach M&M's core audience and the new look of the show will definitely increase its appeal" (Patoux, 2012). M&M's Senior Brand Manager also confirms, "Bite-size M&M's is the perfect snack to eat whilst watching a film. Cinema not only has a great fit with this eating occasion, but also offers an impactful way to drive additional reach and engagement with our brand" (Patoux, 2012). The use of Red and Yellow, M&M's most popular anthropomorphic spokescandies, brings the M&M's connection with film and cinema to life. Even FTRC's new presenter Craig Stevens believes,

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[39] This dialogue was utilised again for episodes 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 32, 34, 35, 36, 37 and 38.

he "will have to get used to being upstaged on a massive screen by two of the most famous confectionary characters on the planet, M&M'S Red and Yellow." (Patoux, 2012)

Cinema is only a fraction of the spokescandies' life outside M&M's. Since 1996, the spokes-characters have remained in the spotlight through numerous television appearances. They have illustrated that they are living breathing individuals who can exist alongside TV presenters and News reporters and alluding to their lives outside M&M's. For instance, an exclusive interview was conducted with SNL host Dennis Miller to mark Ms Green's arrival (See Figure 6.21). Additionally, Ms Green also conducted an interview with celebrity Heidi Klum on *Entertainment Tonight*. In 2006, Red and Yellow also started their hosting careers on *Entertainment Tonight* before going on to host FTRC. More recently, Ms Brown has made numerous appearances on celebrity apprentice, where she has been giving valuable tips on how to succeed in the business world.

Ms Green's Arrival, 1996

Dennis: Time to bring out our next guest, she is a sexy spokescandy… Green *Clapping*. So sweetie, you have been busy
Green: Well my new movie is opening. And no Dennis I don't remove my shell.
Dennis: Of course not
Green: And you know about my book…
Dennis: Bitter-sweet memoir "I Melt for No One"
Green: It's changing lives
Red: Hey babe, call me when you want to do commercials
Green: *Giggles* I don't do commercials
Dennis: That will kill your career

Figure 6.21 Ms Green interview with host Dennis Miller

Together with the core product of colourful candy coated chocolates, a set of merchandise that range from T-Shirts, key rings and household items accompany the M&M's brand (See Figure 6.22). In 1997, the first M&M's world shop was opened in Las Vegas. Since then, M&M's World have opened in Orlando Florida, New York and London. Five airport locations similarly have a dedicated M&M's store; these include Dubai UAE, Changi Singapore and Bankok Thailand. In 2012, and to mark the reveal of Ms Brown, the museum of chocolate art (also known as Mocha) was opened in New York and celebrates Ms Brown's

life in chocolate. It holds a three hundred pound chocolate statue of the spokes-character. For those unable to visit the museum in person, a video tour was produced on Facebook and allows for leisurely viewing.

Figure 6.22 A selection of M&M's branded merchandise, M&M's World London

Source: Author

According to Scott Hudler, Mars's brand communication manager at the time, M&M's "continue to bring new uses of character to consumer" (Angrisani, 2002). Merchandising illustrates one of the many uses of the characters. By means of another example, the characters are used as the face of the brand's corporate social responsibility efforts. As part of their 2013 campaign, 'Better with M', M&M's introduced 'M'Prove America' (See Figure 6.23). By funding home construction across the United States, this new cause-related marketing partnership with *Habitat for Humanity International* was devised to make 'America Better with M' (Nodzak & Henry, 2013). The M&M's brand is projected to donate $500 thousand to help fund the construction of homes across the country, with a unique volunteer initiative. M&M's fans were encouraged to donate their time and talents. According to Roy Benin, Chief Consumer Officer of Mars, "We know our fans are passionate about our brand but also about helping their neighbours" and therefore this campaign is

designed to "leverage those passions to truly help make America better" (Nodzak & Henry, 2013).

To make occasions 'Better with M', M&M's are showcasing how their tantalizing chocolate makes moments more enjoyable and delicious. As an extension to the campaign, M&M's introduced 'Race Day is Better with M'. M&M's fans were given the chance to make their NASCAR race day experience more entertaining. The brand recognises and rewards devoted fans who incorporate M&M's into their race day rituals both at home and at the track (Nodzak & Briggs, 2013). Race fans are also actively encouraged to exhibit their race day rituals on Twitter via the hashtag #BetterWithMMS, thus endeavouring to increase M&M's brand presence online.

Figure 6.23 'M'Prove America as part of the 'Better with M' campaign

Source: Image compiled by author from https://www.facebook.com/mms

The company tie-ins and promotions described in this section have ensured that the spokescandies are exposed, and are active in their society and surroundings. However, to truly increase M&M's brand presence online, and to actually build their personalities, BBDO

New York resorted to digital marketing and the use of social media. In 2008, M&M's USA joined Facebook in what was a common M&M's account – i.e. not a specialised account for each character. Yet, each character took a turn in the limelight where they were making comments and updating their status. Eventually, M&M's also joined Twitter. However, this time, each character had their individual Twitter account[40]. In both these mediums, the M&M's spokescandies are eager to communicate with their fans. Taking turns in writing amusing comments and status updates that virtually brings them to life and further sheds light on their personalities. Of all the characters, Ms Green an Ms Brown, post and interact with consumers the most. At the time of writing this dissertation, being the most popular, Ms Green had 55,400 Twitter followers.

Ms Green's popularity comes from her life outside TV advertising. Being the only female spokescandy, prior to the introduction of Ms Brown of course, she is adored by male and female consumers alike for her looks, her personality, her colour, and what that stands for. In 2010, she pinched more than 23% of the 3.4 million votes cast by fans, making her officially America's most favoured M&M's character (Mars, 2010). Ms Green, so the story goes, has written a bitter sweet memoir called 'I Melt for No One' and an autobiography titled 'Our Bodies, Our Shells'. Ms Green has also appeared on the back cover of the renowned *Sports Illustrated*. Her personal life took an active turn when the M&M's characters decided to break up and pursue their interests in 2011. In a similar fashion to real life celebrities and music bands, for four months, the M&M's spokescandies were pursuing their solo careers. According to a press release by Mars;

> *"Red tried his hand at becoming the spokescherry for the Oregon Cherry Company. Blue joined the Blue Man Group, Ms Green made appearances at all the hottest parties and Orange, paranoid as always, was hiding out somewhere. Luckily Yellow – the only spokescandy left behind – never gave up hope, working tirelessly to help 'Reunite M'"* (Mars, 2011).

A similar promotional idea was executed in Australia in 2009 and was named 'M&M's Colour Break-up'. This break-up was executed both figuratively through the spokes-characters and literally through the product. The key objective of this campaign was to remind consumers about what made M&M's special through distressing the very heart of the brand. Consumers were taking M&M's for granted. They had forgotten that a 'colourful' chocolate experience was what made M&M's unique. In order to illustrate the break-up, the

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[40] Ms Green, Ms Brown and Red have active Twitter accounts. As for Yellow, Blue and Orange, they have their own designated accounts but they are not active – No tweets have been posted.

product's packaging was altered, a TV advert playing on the familiar "throwing the other person's possessions out of the window break-up scene" was created, and the news was broadcasted through gossip magazines (Meldrum, 2010). But what is a break-up without a story of reconciliation? To announce the reunion of the M&M's characters, Yellow was filmed doing his finest boy band moves in a parody of Take That's 'I want you back'.

By the end of 2012, the M&M's characters could not be more alive in Australia. Building on the success of M&M's 'Action Pack' – these are specially marked packs which allow for smartphone users to bring the M&M's characters to life in 3D using a dedicated application – Mars chocolate brought their famous M&M's characters one step closer to their fans using a major augmented reality experience in Melbourne's Federation Square (Ricki, 2013). M&M's 'Come Alive' campaign allowed for passers-by to meet their chocolate brand ambassadors and interact with them in substantial stage in the heart of the city.

Thus far, this section provided a short overview of M&M's promotional activities, interconnected advertising strategies and tie-ins. It is important to note that it is far from comprehensive, but non-the-less displays what makes M&M's a pioneer in the world of marketing. In hindsight, it is easy to see why in 2011, M&M's were voted number one candy of all time according to *USA Today,* and 'brand of the year' in the sweet treat category. The M&M's spokescharacters were also named America's most loved anthropomorphic mascots.

The M&M's spokescandies are considered internationally famous celebrities. They have gained stardom and celebrity status since their introduction via TV advertising in 1954. TV advertising meant that they had mass reach and consumers were aware of their existence. Brand awareness was reinforced since 1972, when the spokescandies images first appeared on product packaging, and further emphasised by the use for print advertising. Evidently, the M&M's spokescandies have existed for a long time prior to the development of their personalities. This new dimension to their character was introduced in 1995 after which "by 1996, the characters were more popular than Mickey Mouse and Bart Simpson" (Clow & Baack, 2007, p. 231). As indicated in this section, the M&M's spokescandies are highly integrated in all their promotional activities and help deliver the confectionary company's key aim of increasing brand presence on and off the shelf.

To play on their celebrity status, M&M's street, a website which resembles a street in Hollywood was created[41]. The street encompasses a Sexy Sweet shop (more like a striptease bar that offers the product's nutritional information), a cinema (more like a theatre lobby), a photo studio (where Blue is taking photographs of Ms Green) and other venues where real people meet the famous M&M's characters and briefly interact with them. It also allowed for visitors to create humorous film posters and self-portraits.

As expressed by Reichert & LaCaze (2006), advertising facilitates the construction of corporate brand images and, over time, strengthen those images in the minds of consumers. Perceptions are shaped through the repetitive and consistent advertising of the product. M&M's advertisements and promotions were always designed to appeal to a wide variety of consumers. Traditionally, every age group was considered in the brand's multifaceted campaigns and the spokescandies ensured that attraction would encompass a broad range of consumers. As identified by Samano (2007), the M&M's spokescandies were designed to be cute for children yet wisecracking and witty in attitude to generate teen appeal.

However, the end of 2007 marked the beginning of a marketing commitment. Mars became the first chocolate company to voluntarily cease advertising and marketing directly to children under the age 12 worldwide. Focusing on responsible marketing, a Marketing Advisory Group, that meets quarterly, was established to provide guidance on marketing endeavours and to review all activities against their Marketing Code (Mars, 2013). Ultimately, this gives the company more scope in its communication and the messages it broadcasts; messages which arguably allude to adult content.

Red, Yellow, Blue, Ms Green, Crispy and Ms Brown's world is highly irresistible, complex and of course, schizophrenic. An examination of the M&M's spokescandies' world revealed three prominent brand narratives (Romance, Tragicomedy and Burlesque) despite internationalism and the debuting of different, parallel marketing campaigns. A literary exploration of these lucidly emergent fictional genres has been conducted and discussed in the subsequent sections – these genres are far from mutually exclusive and aspects from one genre could fit equally well under another.

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[41] Despite providing engaging virtual scenes, disappointingly, the website lacked interactive depth and thus visitors only spent an average of 3 minutes on it (Proximity BBDO Paris, 2009).

6.2.4   Romance literature

> *"Every great love affair has its common elements. It's intense yet sweet exciting, yet comforting, passionate, and yearning. Sometimes it's bittersweet; sometimes exotic and mysterious. Other times, it's so filled with desire, it borders on obsession. And so it is with chocolate: Our favourite sweet has all the makings of a passionate affair.*
>
> *Why do we love chocolate? Maybe it's the smooth, velvety way it slides across the tongue and arouses the senses. Maybe it's because cocoa is married to sugar and fat, our other true loves. Or maybe, like love, it does something to the brain: Eating cocoa actually boosts the brain's production of serotonin, the "feel-good" neurotransmitter, and chocolate contains phenyl-ethylamine, the same brain chemical that occurs in higher concentrations when you're in love."* (Turner, 2008)

Consumers' love affair with chocolate continues to grow year on year[42], thus it is not surprising that the creators of M&M's decided to draw broadly upon love and romance to give substance to their brand narrative and the spokescandies imaginary worlds. If anything, the romance genre is as satisfying as chocolate and a lot less fattening (Kaler, 1999). The first literary genre by which the M&M's brand narrative can be analysed is romance literature. Romance is a powerful emotional buying motive which marketers incorporate into the product style, design, packaging and advertisement in order to sell their merchandise (Jain, 2010). Relying on my interpretation, in this section I will demonstrate what makes the M&M's brand narrative fit seamlessly into the genre of romance literature.

Increasingly, culture denotes red as the colour of love. Walk into a gift or card shop around Valentine's Day and you will be overwhelmed with the seemingly endless array of red cards, hearts, teddy bears, roses and the like. It is thus suiting that M&M's have chosen Red to represent romance. People, irrespective of age, have romantic experiential desires. Romance cannot be claimed solely by the young, for it is a need that all people have throughout their lives; and especially when defined as per Wolfe & Snyder (2003) as being about an adventurous spirit and enthusiasm for life. M&M's encapsulate the adventurous essence and excitement for life in Red. He has been stylised as enthusiastic, upbeat, and with a light-hearted attitude which often makes him come across as immature – something which, as portrayed by BBDO, tends to get on the nerves of Ms Brown.

Red and Ms Brown have what can be described as a love/hate relationship. Red expresses a deep fondness for Ms Brown. This is evident in the way his creators make him behave around

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[42] The chocolate confectionary sector grew by 18% between 2007 and 2011 (Hughes, 2012).

her which displays warm signs of affection and liking. By means of an example, Red gave Ms Brown a Christmas present which consists of a picture of the both of them together; he also makes an effort to sit next to her during football games, and almost always behaves in a silly jokey manner in order to make her laugh. However, Ms Brown is not entertained and often receives him with annoyance. She also views his attempts at displaying affection as a 'prank' with the ultimate intention of winding her up. Through employing the sympathetic values – which are encoded in familiar themes, patterns and images – and identifiable conventions, the romance literary scene is crafted (Kaler, 1999). For instance, playing onto the conventions of Valentine's Day, Red, so the story goes, sent Ms Brown a bouquet of flowers, that incorporated the symbolic red rose, signed "A Secret Admirer" – See Figure 6.24. Although she was delighted, she did suspect they were from Red and received them with apprehension.
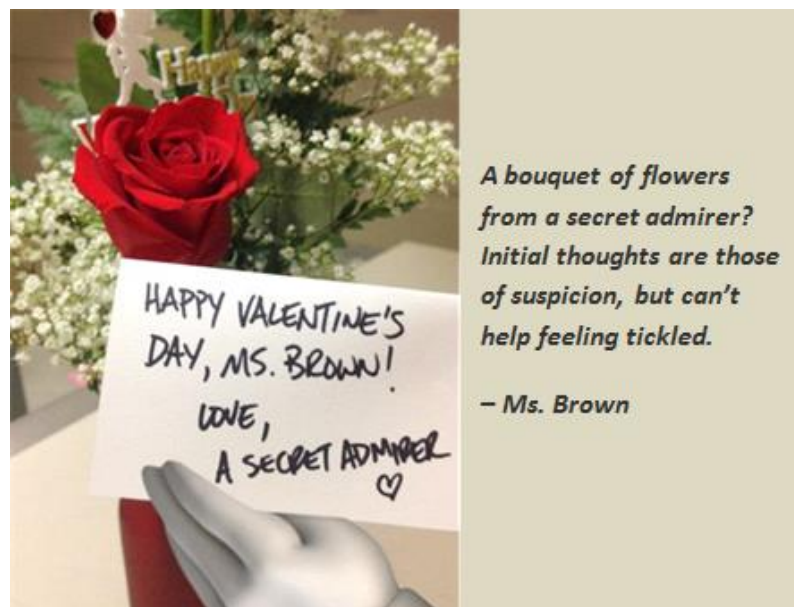
Figure 6.24 Ms Brown receives a bouquet of flowers

Source: https://www.facebook.com/mms

Ever since the first time a pair of lovers gazed with love-blinded eyes at each other and saw the world as they wanted it to be, romance was made part of the human experience (Ramsdell, 2012). Prior to the great reveal of Ms Brown, Ms Green was the recipient of many admirations. Being the only female M&M's spokescandy, it was often depicted that Red,

Yellow and Blue find her extremely attractive and 'hot'. On set for the M&M's Premiums adverts, Ms Green – who is being filmed by Red, Yellow and Blue – is portrayed by her creators as a sultry screen siren with a mesmerising presence and a sexy voice which renders her fellow M&M's spokescandies enthralled, let alone speechless. Her allure and 'heat' made them melt on the spot (See Figure 6.25). Ms Green cheekily comments:

"That's not supposed to happen" – Ms Green
(M&M's Premiums advert – Almond 2008)

Figure 6.25Red, Yellow and Blue on the set of M&M's Premiums

Source: M&M's Advert – M&M's Premiums Almond, USA (2008)

And she is right. As per the original tagline, M&M's 'melt in your mouth and not in your hands', the characters melting emphasises the extremity of Ms Green's captivating presence. She is attractive, and she knows it. Moreover, she is depicted as self-indulgent, loves the spotlight, loves attention and loves her fans, thus, she is not entirely interested in being in a committed relationship. Needless to say, she has been on numerous dates with Red. It is evident that Red is infatuated by Ms Green through the way he is made to stare at her with love-drugged eyes. Similarly, Yellow has feelings towards Ms Green as well. So the story goes, he and Red often fight over her affections not only with amorous gestures but also

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physically – e.g. arm wrestling. Yellow expresses his feelings freely, for example, he wrote her a heart shaped card which stated:

> *"M&M's are red*
> *M&M's are blue*
> *You're really pretty*
> *I think I like you*
> *♥ Yell☺w"* (Facebook Update 14th Feb 2012)

But owing to his child-like comportment, Ms Green often perceives him as cute and adorable and is not interested in him romantically. Red on the other hand, has difficulty expressing his feelings. According to Jason Lucas, the senior creative director for BBDO New York, "Red has trouble showing his emotional side" He added, "The only way he can say it is with the candies." (Vega, 2011). In a clever campaign which promotes MY M&M's, Red takes a more subtle approach to declaring his love on Valentine's Day (See Figure 6.26).

Based on Ramsdell (2012, p. 5) definition, romance is "a love story in which the central focus is on the development and satisfactory resolution of the love relationship" between the leading characters, and written in such a way as to "provide the reader with some degree of emotional participation". Through MY M&M's consumers are given a high degree of participation in the product. After all, as per Lauren Nodzak, a spokeswoman for Mars Chocolate North America, "What better way to celebrate love than to customise it?" Emotional participation stems from their empathy towards Red and ultimately through their selection of customised messages. According to Nodzak, the most popular messages are "Be mine," "You make me melt" and, of course, "I Love You" (Vega, 2011). Evidently, romance is heightened especially during the month of February as M&M's play on Valentine's Day with the characters, however, the emotional participation of consumers is not constraint to a specific time of the year, but may be engaged throughout via special occasions like birthdays, bridal showers and weddings.
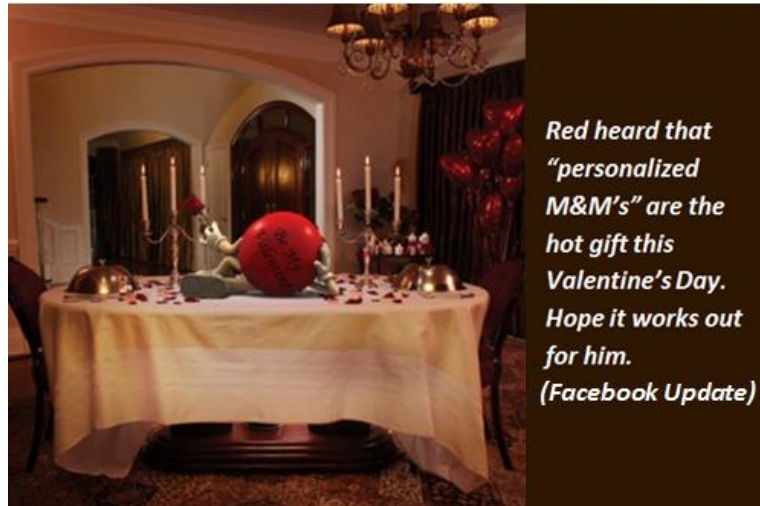
Figure 6.26 Red declares his love on Valentine's Day

Source: https://www.facebook.com/mms

By today's standard, in order for a love story to qualify as a romance, preliminarily, certain criteria must be met. According to Ramsdell (2012, p. 4), firstly, the plot must focus on the developing love relationship. As highlighted, numerous love relationships, and what can be described as 'love-triangles', are evident in the M&M's brand narrative – Red and Yellow are portrayed by their creators to have strong feelings for Ms Green, and she is enjoying the attention. Red is also fond of Ms Brown but she is not interested. Ms Brown is dating humans, and ultimately with no luck, Red has also resorted to dating humans. Secondly, the readers must be engaged emotionally and allowed to participate in the process. Consumers can relate with the relationship difficulties that the M&M's character are experiencing, after all, it remains extremely difficult for many people to make the romantic connections they so desperately crave (Patterson & Hodgson, 2006). For those lucky enough to be engrossed in a romantic relationship, MY M&M's provides the perfect platform for them to engage with the product. Lastly, the romance is resolved and the story includes a satisfactory happily-ever-after ending. The M&M's brand narrative and the lives of the spokescandies are far from ending or resolving. It will be very interesting to see if any of the M&M's characters do end up together.

But what is love if it is not without obstacles? The M&M's brand narrative more specifically falls under the sub-genre of romantic comedy. Romantic comedies capture that sense of fun and M&M's chocolates are all about 'Colourful Chocolate Fun'. They also simultaneously

throw up emotional roadblocks between the lovers. A major roadblock to the advancement of any romantic relationship is the fact that the M&M's spokes-characters are made of pure milk chocolate, which is clearly irresistible to humans. By means of illustration, Figure 6.27 summarises the dialogue from a fairly recent M&M's advert called *One Track Mind*, where Ms Brown goes on a date with Cuban-American actor and former model William Levy. All he seems to care about is how delicious her chocolaty interior is. Likewise, Red is a sucker for love. In a recent advert by BBDO New York, Red is showcased falling all over himself to display his commitment and affection to American actress and singer, Naya Rivera. He is shown belting out the popular song, "I'd Do Anything for Love", while carrying her shopping bags, twisting on the beach, putting nail varnish on her toes and trying on a wig. However, the relationship comes into question when Rivera is unable to resist adding him to her favourite treats (PRNewswire, 2013). These examples lend themselves fittingly to the second literary genre of tragicomedy (See Section 6.2.5) where the M&M's irresistibility will be discussed in more detail.

Date:	Wow you look delicious today
Ms Brown:	Delicious?! Honestly sometimes I think you only like me because I am an M&Ms
Date:	That's not true, baby what matters to me most is what is on the inside
Ms Brown:	I am pure milk chocolate on the inside
Date:	And I LOVE that about you
Ms Brown:	Uhh, and here I thought you loved me for my brain
Date:	Is that made of chocolate too?
Ms Brown:	... Gosh you're handsome!"

Figure 6.27 Ms Brown goes on a date

Source: M&M's Advert – One Track Mind, USA (2012)

6.2.5   Tragicomedy literature

A second literary genre by which the M&M's brand narrative can be analysed is tragicomedy literture. Foster (2004) articulates that the nature of tragicomedy is difficult to define considering that the term has been utilised variously since its invention. As the name suggests, both tragedy and comedy interplay to produce this literary genre. Here, the standard characters and subject matter and the typical plot forms of tragedy and comedy are intermingled (Abrams & Harpham, 2009). Tragicomedy can comprise of numerous dissimilar modes including pastoral, melodramatic, satiric and romantic. In the same way that romance is intrinsically mixed with tragicomedy in Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* (Pollard, 2008)*, tragicomedy and romance are, in fact, intimate bedfellows in the M&M's brand narrative. The previous section highlighted the way in which the M&M's brand narrative fits into the literary genre of romance; however, M&M's irresistibility often leads them into an uncertain fate.

Tragicomedy captures from tragedy and comedy the parts that can prevail with high plausibility, resulting in a balance from which the comic and tragic elements cannot be disconnected (Foster, 2004). This is clearly evident in the lives of the M&M's spokescandies. The idea of a walking, talking, breathing piece of chocolate is in itself amusing, but the creators have also turned to several comedic literary devices for emphasis and to increase the longevity of humour; after all, hearing the same joke numerous times and knowing the punch line detracts from its funniness. Most notable, play-on-words/puns, and allusions are utilised by the M&M's spokescandies and have a strong precedence in their written communication via Facebook and Twitter. However, this only accounts for a small percentage of the comedy. Taking Albert Mehrabian's theory of human communication[43] into account, non-verbal signifiers have a quintessential impact on the effectiveness of message conveyance. The way in which the creators of M&M's utilise the characters' body language, facial expressions, voice tonality and pitch plays a major role in delivering the brand's timeless comedy; a comedy which also stems from the tragedy of the situation. Embodied and best articulated in Orange as a character, the tragedy of the situation is that the M&M's are an irresistible chocolate treat which ultimately leads to them being eaten. To be eaten represents a serious action that threatens the existence of the protagonists (Abrams & Harpham, 2009). Yet by an

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[43] Three V's of communication: Verbal, Vocal and Visual (Sen, 2006)

abrupt reversal of fortune and circumstance, and of course their ability to escape, always renders a happy ending.

In line with modern tragicomedy, as Foster (2004) explicates, the protagonist represents the mutual nature of humanity, overwhelmed by doubts and fears that are not ultimately resolved. Within the M&M's brand narrative, Orange is this protagonist. BBDO show him in a continuous state of paranoia and fear that people are after him, that they want to eat him, and probably rightly so. Foster (2004) further illuminates that the protagonist isolates himself even from those closest to him. And this is often the case with Orange. His overwhelming fears often lead him to go into hiding. He is made to wear various disguises and distances himself from the public eye. This is evident in his adverts (Figure 6.28) and his entries on Facebook (Figure 6.29). Furthermore, the protagonist is uncertain of the meaning of his existence or of why he suffers. Without a sense of meaning, something such as character cannot be tragic though his situation often is (Foster, 2004). Orange is often made to wonder about what makes him irresistible and why people are always after him. He may have found the answer, but he remains uncertain (See Figure 6.30).

Figure 6.28 Orange and Pretzel wear disguises

Source: M&M's Advert – Disguises (2012)

I'm going into hiding for the next month. This disguise should work   – Orange

(Facebook Update 23rd July 2012)

Is this pretzel why you're always trying to eat me? – Orange

(Facebook Update 16th July 2012)

Figure 6.29 Orange in concealment   **Figure 6.30 Orange holding an X-ray**

Source: https://www.facebook.com/mms

The M&M's brand narrative is brimming with examples of threat towards the spokescandies and their survival. For example, M&M's latest advert gets somewhat dangerous when Ms Brown introduces Red to a chocolate fancying beauty. Things swiftly get unpleasant as the red headed woman drives off with him and *Devour* (2013) him. In another advert, *Airplane* (2011) the M&M's spokescandies are actually the inflight complementary snack. They attempt to escape their tragic fate by hiding out in the plane's lavatories (See Appendix 6). Similarly, in the advert *Cupboard* (2010), the spokescandies who are standing inside the cupboard are asked to "get in the bowl", but they refuse to do so and they throw food items at the individual. Likewise, in the 2003 advert *Vending Machine,* Red goes through the traumatic experience of being selected as a midnight snack. Not losing his will to live, he clings onto the bars of the machine with all his might, leaving the customer hungry for his snack and frustrated. The customer bangs, kicks and shakes the machine in order to get Red out but with no luck. Figure 6.31 shows an image of Red clinging for his life thus inducing a tragicomic response in the viewers. In this tragicomedy, the tragic and the comic both exist but are formally and emotionally dependent on one another, each modifying and determining the nature of the other so as to produce the required mixed, tragicomic response in the audience (Foster, 2004).

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Figure 6.31 Red stuck in a vending machine

Source: M&M's Advert - Vending machine, USA (2003)

M&M's uncertain fate is often tested in relationships. It seems, charmingly attractive women cannot be trusted around these tempting chocolate treats. Yellow is made to learn this the hard way in the advert *Love Hurts* (1990s). Falling into the lap of a beautiful woman after spying on her, she takes a huge bite out of him, and he is left wounded but in love (See Figure 6.32).
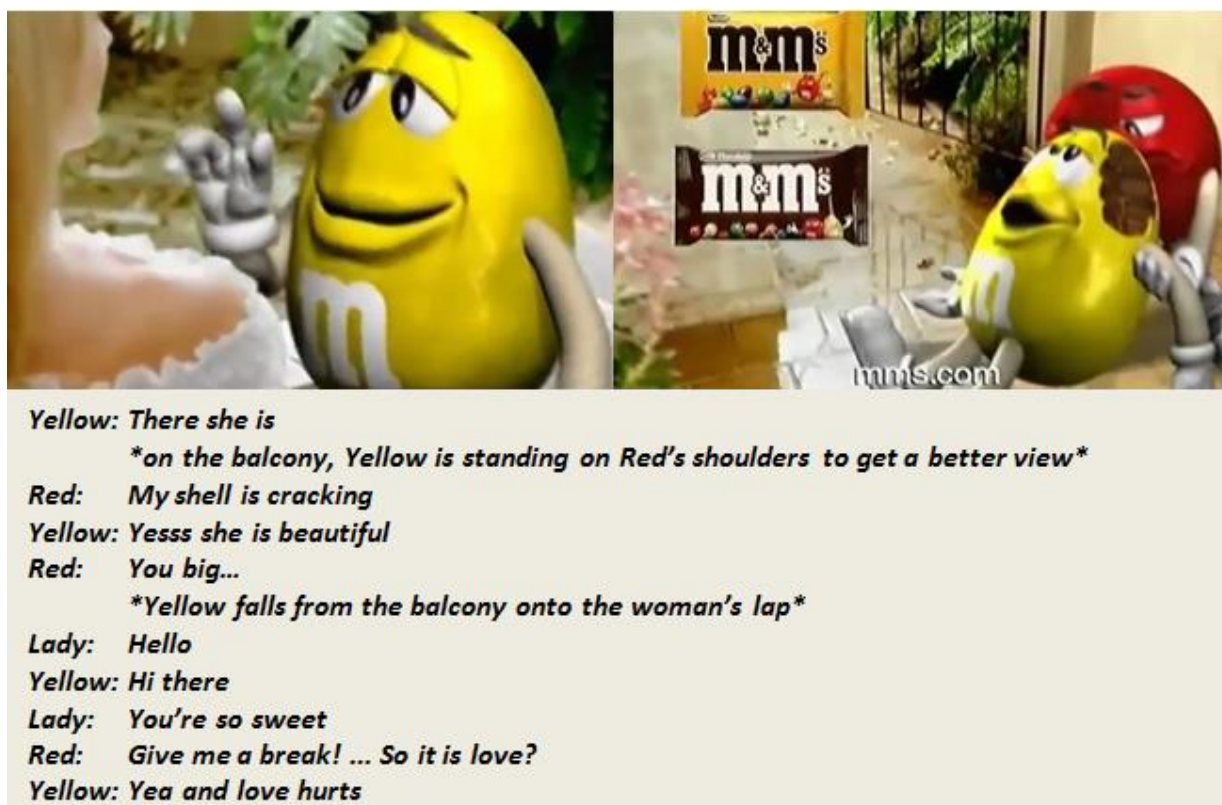
Figure 6.32 Love wounds Yellow

Source: M&M's Advert – Love Hurts, UK (Late 1990s)

Even a sucker for love, like Red, has limits to the things he would do for his beloved, especially when it instigates a threat on his existence. As mentioned in the previous section, in M&M's recent advert *Love Ballad,* Red is shown singing (in Meatloaf style) the popular song, "I'd Do Anything for Love (But I Won't Do That)". Rivera, unable to resist his tempting pure milk chocolate interior, licks him while watching a movie, puts him in a bowl of vanilla ice cream, covers him in whipped cream, asks him to enter a piñata, puts him in a bowl of popcorn and on top of a birthday cake, she even goes as far as attempting to put him in the oven. Images from the advert can be seen in Figure 6.33. Indeed, funny to watch, but all points to a probable tragic end. Tired of the overall situation, so the story goes, Red makes a statement:

> *"I'm fed up with being irresistible. I wonder if there was ever a time when M&M's weren't looking over their shoulder for hungry humans all day? Yeah, a time when M&M'S weren't irresistible" – Red, M&M's Australia* (Facebook Update 27th March 2013)

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Figure 6.33 Red with Naya Rivera

Source: M&M's Advert – Love Ballad, USA (2013)

According to Pavis (1998, p. 418), the tragicomedy genre is a varied genre centred on three essential criteria. Firstly, to eliminate the boundaries between comedy and tragedy, "the characters belong to both the popular and the aristocratic classes". Through TV advertising, the M&M's spokescandies have gained celebrity status and are thus seen to mingle with the famous and the elite both on and off the Red Carpet. Secondly, "the action, though serious and even dramatic, does not lead up to a catastrophe, and the hero does not perish". To get eaten is a catastrophe. Luckily, the M&M's spokescandies are very talented at escaping hungry eyes, and are consequently still breathing today. Lastly, Pavis (1998, p. 418) articulates, "the style has ups and downs, combining the elevated and emphatic language of tragedy with the everyday or vulgar language of comedy". The language used in the M&M's brand narrative leans more towards the everyday comedy. Tragedy, on the other hand, is implied through the situations the M&M's spokescharacters are faced with. The M&M's brand narrative does also encompass an element of the 'vulgar'. Proud of their delicious milk chocolate interior, the M&M's spokescandies are naughty. They like to take their shells off.

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6.2.6   Burlesque literature

A third literary genre by which the M&M's brand narrative can be analysed is burlesque literature. With her wide eyes and full set of lashes, and her flirty, alluring, quick-witted, confident, sexual personality, Ms Green is the epitome of burlesque literature in the M&M's brand narrative. In literary terms, burlesque is derived from the Italian *burla* meaning a joke, ridicule or mockery. According to Martín (1991, p. 2), "Burlesque can mock a literary style or movement or a specific work. It can also mock a person, a society, an institution, or even a nation." However, Burlesque is not specifically limited to literature.

> *"Many dictionaries and encyclopaedia entries for burlesque refer to the literary tradition and historical theatrical definitions which on their own are slightly archaic. When the word burlesque is used as a verb, certainly it's understood to mean that exaggeration and parody are being used; however for nearly one hundred years, burlesque as a noun has referred to shows that contain variety, comedy, and girlie numbers as well. Striptease has been part of burlesque since the 1920s, and it is a huge component of neo-burlesque."* (Weldon, 2010, p. 10)

Additionally, burlesque came to be characterised as a cultural epidemic of indecency, impudence, and suggestive sexual display (Allen, 1991). Certainly, in the M&M's brand narrative, burlesque leans closer to the noun definition of the term.

With her sultry seducing eyes, Ms Green has been made to, on countless occasions, engage in displaying her sexuality. Sexual appeal in advertising is often composed of a variety of executional elements that include visual/graphic, verbal/music, or a combination of both (Garcia & Yang, 2006). M&M's Premiums adverts provide a significant example of this. In tantalising white stilettos, Ms Green is depicted showing off her toned legs from behind a dark green curtain, and then laying across the marble floor with her arm stretched alluringly above her head. She is made to twist and turns in front of a dark chocolate fountain where she invitingly places an M&M's in her mouth. She lies on her back with arms wide-open in a manner which alludes to a scene in the film *American Beauty* (1999), whereby Mena Suvari is an object of lust and floats on a bed of red rose petals. Ms Green is shown winking to the camera. All topped with exotic music and a seductive voice that begs for attention. Even her film crew which comprises of Red, Yellow and Blue, are left wide-eyed, open mouthed and speechless.

As per Weldon (2010), striptease and girly numbers are also prominent in the M&M's brand narrative. And even more so since Mars' decision to voluntarily cease advertising and

marketing directly to children under the age of 12 worldwide. On M&M's virtual street, Sexy Sweet Shop provides a valuable playhouse for an essential burlesque experience. The M&M's spokescharacters come to the stage in order to display their most seductive moves. Playing on the chords of culture, Red, dresses in a police hat, points at the audience and walks with a confident stride on stage, takes his shell off, whips it around before throwing it to the ground. Baring all, he sits on a motorcycle and does what he believes to be an attractive display of motorcycle stunts. Similarly in Figure 6.34, Ms Green, who is welcomed on stage by Red and Yellow, struts slowly towards the front of the stage where she engages in pole dancing before temptingly taking her shell off. Baring all, she stands amongst the moon and stars and blows a kiss to the audience. The use of sex and nudity, by means of both male and female images, is one important form of provocation in advertising (Pope, Voges, & Brown, 2004). In the same way that Lynx deodorant, Chanel perfume and Calvin Klein underwear utilise provocative advertising, so too are M&M's deliberately attempting to gain attention though shock; perhaps as Pope, Voges, & Brown (2004) suggest, a response to increased advertising clutter.
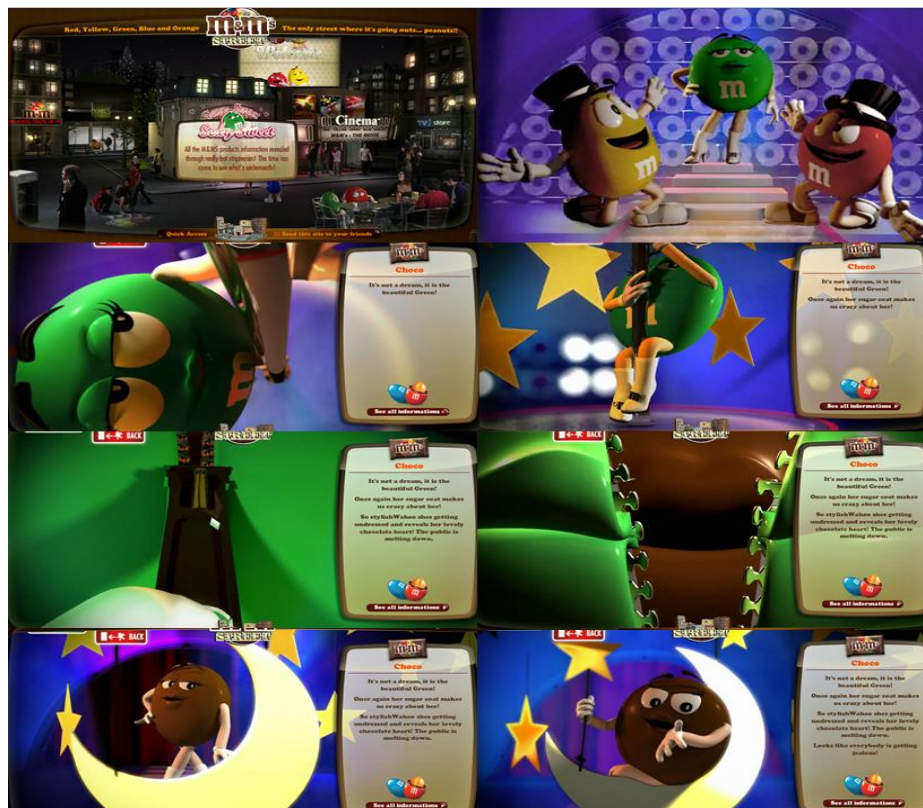
Figure 6.34 Ms Green bares all

Source: M&M's street – https://www.m-ms.se/

It appears we are now living in an era where culture and especially media forms, lyricists, entertainment executives, and Hollywood are continuously pushing the boundaries towards more sexualised content. Marketers and advertisers continue to follow suit (Chambers, 2006). They are all helping exploit a single reality: Sex Sells (Everson & Everson, 2005). As a type of emotional appeal, sex appeal has clearly been utilised in the promotion of M&M's. As demonstrated so far, the M&M's brand is evidently trying to exploit this 'single reality' through amplified chocolate nudity. In a recent advert (See Figure 6.35) for example, Red walks into a party, proudly takes his shell off, and to Ms Brown's embarrassment, starts dancing to LMFAO's "sexy and I know it!".
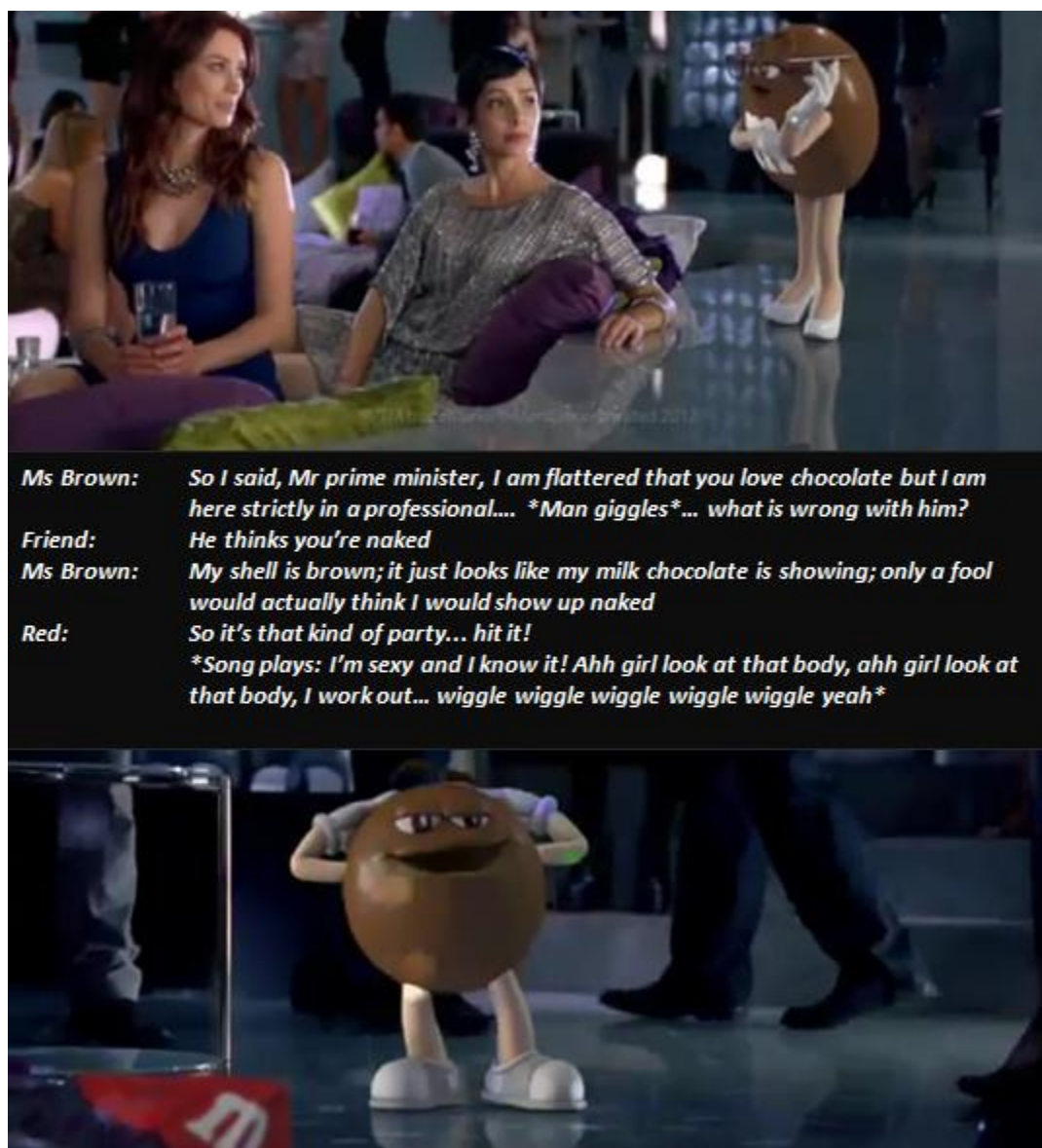
Figure 6.35 Red takes his shell off

Source: M&M's Advert – Just My Shell, USA (2012)

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Additionally, the M&M's spokescharacters are increasingly exhibited baring all their chocolate flesh to the camera (as per Figure 6.36). Some conservative critics may argue that such nudity and the use of sex appeal risks brand objectives by offending consumers and provoking potential backlash effects (Reichert, LaTour, & Ford, 2011). Part of the issue is the amount of graphic nudity to feature without raising a negative response. Chapter 7 takes a closer look at the varied response of consumers towards the M&M's spokescandies; after all, this is the nudity of chocolate mascots and not of individuals.
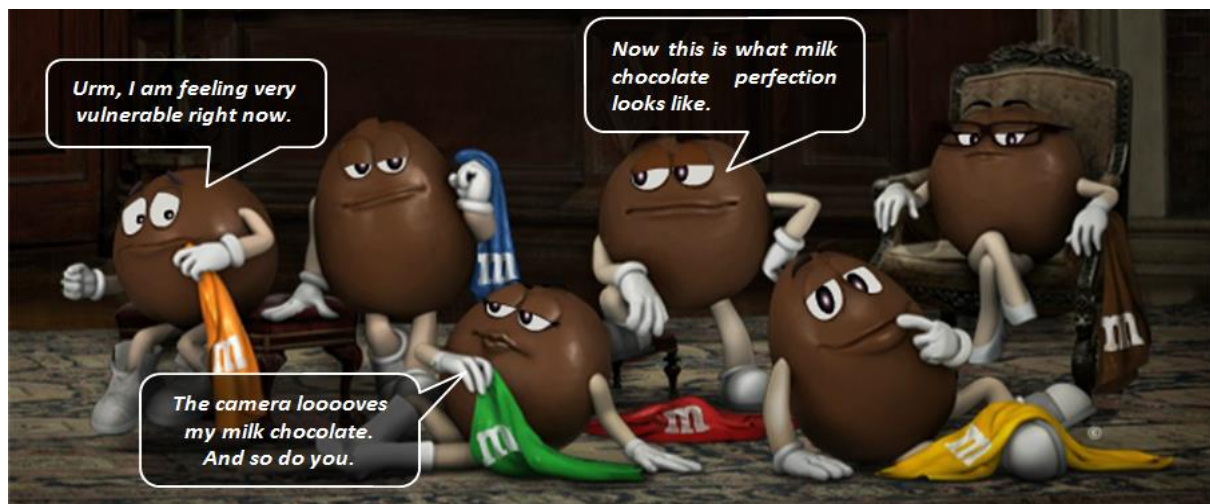
Figure 6.36 The M&M's spokescandies bare all for the camera

Source: Image: https://www.facebook.com/mms – Speech bubbles: Author

Using nudity and sex as an appeal in messages is, according to Koekemoer (2004, p. 150), excellent for gaining attention. However, research indicates that it achieves little else, especially when the product is unrelated. For perfume, underwear and deodorant for instance, sex appeal works well. However, for unrelated products, and in cases where it is overdone or irrelevantly used, where sex is the star of the adverts and not the brand, this type of appeal typically has a short life and a minimal maintainable creative power.

The myth that chocolate is an aphrodisiac works constructively as a link in M&M's favour, giving it highly maintainable creative power. For instance, Ms Green's female identity is almost exclusively defined in terms of her female sexuality. As portrayed by her creators, she takes pride in looking hot and attractive. For numerous years (2009-2012), she has

featured on the back cover of the infamous *Sports Illustrated* magazine, Swimsuit issue. Figure 6.37 exhibits various shots of her looking "En Fuego"[44] on the beach (Facebook Update 11th Feb 2010).

Figure 6.37 Ms Green Sports Illustrated Swimsuit Issue appearances (2009-2011)

Source: Compiled by Author from https://www.facebook.com/mms

BBDO let us into the thoughts of Ms Green about the photo shoot:

> *"If you think I have that 'hungry look', you should see the boys behind the camera. You've never seen a group of fellas get so wound up about a chocolate covered in*

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[44] Literal translation: On Fire

sand. But seeing how this shot turned out, I can tell you - that's most people's natural reaction"

"The thing you need to know about this shot is: that water was 55 degrees before I took off my shell. Make Ms Green jump in the cold water, they said! They thought it'd be funny. But I take looking hot VERY seriously, darlings. And literally"

"Well the first thing you'll notice is that I'm on a bed of orchids. Which looks nice. What you won't see is that there's a bed of ice under there. It keeps the flowers from wilting. And makes poor Ms Green freeze her boots off. The hard part about looking good is making it look easy, darlings."

"So THIS shot happened when my phone started ringing. Leave it to a fashion photographer to take advantage of the situation while I reached for it. I can't say I'm unhappy with the results, though. I'm sure you aren't either, dear."

"I thought it was safe to change behind that rock. But they had photographers everywhere on that island! Well, I look great (no big surprise), and if people see my chocolate, so be it. I've got nothing to be ashamed of!"

"Would you believe they made me keep my boots on? Something about stingrays and liability insurance. But you know what, nothing's gonna keep Ms Green down, darlings. Being sunk up to my shell in sand with 12 pints of seawater in my shoes? All in a day's work, sugar. All in a day's work"

A complex web of cultural interests surrounds visual narrations of the female body (Miles, 1985). In this spectacle of female sexuality, there is an inherent potential for objectification. Sexual objectification of women in popular entertainment is coherent with the Burlesque-indulgent perspective on the world (Allen, 1991). Objectification of women occurs in many ways, each suggesting and reinforcing the perspective that women are objects to be viewed lustfully, romanticised about and possessed (Schroeder & Borgerson, 1998). Shell on or off, Ms Green is made to take looking hot and attractive seriously. With little effort, she displays her body for the enchantment of spectators who often give her the 'hungry look'. Conforming to one of the most prevalent forms in Western art history, the convention of the nude, Ms Green has been used by advertisers to sell the M&M's brand and to improve consumer awareness. Schroeder & Borgerson (1998) believe the nude is important for its connections with art and for its reflexion of sexual relations. It is allegedly a celebration of the beauty of the human form. With a striptease and burlesque dancer mentality, I can only speculate that those who control Ms Green have her believe that her body and form are appealing and that she has nothing to be ashamed of.

6.2.7 Discussion: Diagnosed with schizophrenia

As revealed in section 6.2.3 'M&M's Marketing Milieu', marketing efforts of the M&M's is unmatched by any other confectionary brand. The way in which brand awareness is enhanced on and off the shelf, through the use of tie-ins, promotions and interconnected advertising strategies, has ensured M&M's remain one of the most popular chocolate brands around the world. And because it is a well-known brand around the world indeed, numerous challenges arise over strategy.

Analysing the M&M's brand narrative deeply reveals its schizophrenic nature. Any consumer engaging extensively with the spokes-characters will discover that internationalism and the debuting of different parallel marketing campaigns have tainted the overall plot narrative. At one point, the M&M's lost tribe where stranded on an island in Australia while in search for their ancestors, they were also, at that same moment in time, broken up in the United States and looking to pursue their solo careers; yet in the United Kingdom, Red and Yellow were co-hosting 60-second entertainment show FTRC. With each country running their own campaign inharmoniously, in this sense, although the M&M's spokescandies have well-defined personalities, it seems they do not have a single identity.

M&M's are confronted with the challenge of expressing concepts, not only across borders coherently, but also that resound with consumers of diverse cultures (Torelli, Özsomer, Carvalho, Keh, & Maehle, 2012). In essence, they need to adopt what Cooper (2010) refers to as a 'borderless approach'. With the profusion of digital platforms, it is no longer plausible for brands to pursue different strategies in different countries. A more unified marketing approach is necessary. Formerly, a brand could have one target audience in one country and a diverse positioning in another. However, with increased technological advancements, anyone can access a companies' website, Facebook page, Twitter stream, YouTube channel, and cross over proposed borders. This raises an important question: How does a company develop a single content story that works across all of their markets?

According to Richard Huntington, director of strategy at Saatchi & Saatchi, the marketing focus for global brands has moved away from division to cohesion. Instead of looking for what separates consumers up, brands should be considering what unites them.

> *"Marketing traditionally has been focused on differences and segmentations between markets and consumers. If brands start caring about the things that real people care about then those differences seem to disappear."* (Cooper, 2010)

Ignoring superficial regional and national differences, Levitt (1983) believes companies must learn to operate as if the world were one large market. However, it is not a homogenous world market Holt *et al* (2004) argue, but a global culture that is created and preserved mainly by communication.

Since M&M's communicate with their consumers through the use of anthropomorphised mascots, a greater emphasis is placed on them and the messages they convey. In light on what was mentioned earlier, it comes as no surprise that, for different regions, M&M's chose to focus on certain spokescandies. Ms Brown's introduction was only in the U.S., as she does not feature in any Australian advertisements or within the UK. To be more specific, the UK market, still in the 1970s, only utilises Red and Yellow in advertisement despite the existence of the remainder characters in London's M&M's world. Applying a 'borderless approach' for the M&M's brand narrative would mean all six spokescandies are exploited globally. However, special care must be taken to ensure plot narrative is consistent, and only promotions differ per country; as opposed to running disjoined campaigns, for specific periods of time, with narrative that does not follow on from previous campaigns.

In this case study, the elaborate merchandising, tie-ins, and promotions of the M&M's provide a resonant and textured lens into their fictional world; a world which has been explored in literary terms to reveal the three prominent literary genres of Romance, Tragicomedy and Burlesque. Notwithstanding this, for numerous reasons I do not believe the M&M's brand narrative utilised its full potential. For instance, during the spokescandies' break up in the U.S.A., so the story goes, Ms Green wrote an autobiography titled "Our Bodies, Our Shells" which can be seen in Figure 6.38. Much to their fans' disappointment, this book is only imaginary – based on the success of Aleksandr Orlov's autobiography, this can be perceived as a missed opportunity to create a merchandised item which could be sold in their flagship stores and potentially be on the 'best seller' list in bookstores.
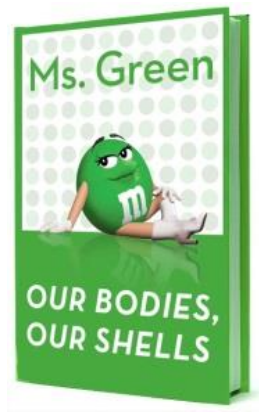
Figure 6.38 Ms Green writes an autobiography

Source: https://www.facebook.com/mms

Additionally, the sponsorship of 60-second entertainment show FTRC provides yet another example where M&M's brand narrative has fallen short. It is apparent that a lot of time an effort has gone into creating new episodes. In their first year of sponsorship, and before extending their sponsorship, FTRC released a total of 18 episodes (episodes 21-38) all of which were co-hosted by Red and Yellow. None of the other characters were utilised.

> *"The M&M's brand is still at a relatively early stage in its development in the UK. Therefore we have focussed on Red & Yellow to ensure that our advertising doesn't get confusing by introducing lots of different personalities at once."*(Interview)

FTRC provided a valuable platform for M&M's not only to introduce Red and Yellow to the UK market, but also to build on their characters and personalities, to allow consumers to know them a little bit better and to elaborate on the brand narrative. Yet, for 13 episodes out of 18, Red and Yellow say the exact same thing. When asked about this in an interview, Mars and DCM's unconvincing reply was:

> *"Due to the large number of shows we have in a year it's not feasible to have lots of different animations to go with each different premiere. We have worked to have enough different animations to provide variety based on how regularly people tend to go to the cinema."* (Interview)

Such examples of shortcomings continue throughout the M&M's brand narrative. Yet, there are glimpses of hope; unlike Ms Green's autobiography, which elaborates on the story but does not actually exist, her featuring on the back cover of the infamous *Sports Illustrated* magazine's Swimsuit issue actually holds weight. And Figure 6.39 provides evidence for this.

Figure 6.39 Ms Green graces the back cover of *Sports Illustrated* Swimsuit Issue

Source: https://www.facebook.com/mms

Looking back to Chapter 4, where I investigate brand and human personality traits, and the elements that make humans the way they are, it is evident that the M&M's spokescandies are a premier example of mascots heading towards 'becoming human'. In addition to their recognisably human desires to move on with life, to pursue a solo career, to engage in romantic relationships, to learn more about their past and ancestors, everyone screws up every once in a while when filming commercials – anthropomorphised marketing mascots are no exception. M&M's share with their fans the "bloops" for the advert *Hungry Eyes* (2012) where Pretzel is filmed getting his lines wrong, revising the script, getting tongue-tied and where Orange falls off the seat.

The M&M's spokescandies have been endowed with a state of consciousness and feelings unlike the majority of mere advertising mascots. In a letter addressed to the Lost Tribe (see Appendix 7), Orange displays a high level of understanding; he also expresses feelings of fear, anxiety, intimidation and the need for help. Evidently, through the use of anthropomorphism, the M&M's spokes-characters have been imbued with human-like values, goals and emotions, making them worthy of this investigation.

6.2.8   Summary: Can't resist M

With its unmistakable letter 'm', M&M's have made a prominent mark as one of the most famous chocolate treats around the world. They trade in over one hundred countries with

their core products. A pioneer in the world of marketing, the M&M's brand has a unique approach to promotions, tie-ins and interconnected advertising strategies. Through combining traditional TV, radio and billboard advertising with digital marketing platforms such as websites, Facebook and Twitter, M&M's communicate their brand to consumers, enhancing its awareness both on and off the shelf. Marketing chocolate like no other, they utilise six anthropomorphic spokescandies with very distinct personality traits. These literal embodiments of the brand have heightened emotions and are close to achieving the ultimate goal of becoming human.

In this case study, I have demonstrated that the M&M's brand has a highly complex marketing milieu which is further emphasised by its longevity. At the heart of all their marketing communications lie the M&M's spokescandies. Basing all promotional activities on these characters helps to build the brand narrative. So much so, it has been analysed in literary terms and found to embrace the three literary genres of Romance, Tragicomedy and Burlesque. Romance literature was selected not only because people have a love affair with chocolate and are obsessed with it, but also because M&M's encapsulate, especially in Red, the adventurous essence and excitement for life when in love. Tragicomedy literature was chosen because it captures from tragedy and comedy the parts which best fit the M&M's brand narrative; their irresistibility often leads them into an uncertain fate. Finally, Burlesque literature was picked because M&M's brand narrative is bursting with sex appeal, nudity and striptease. All these selected literary genres are best encapsulated in a phrase, in the one thing that remains certain, people 'Can't resist M'.

In addition to uncovering the three prominent literary genres, deep analysis revealed the schizophrenic nature of the M&M's brand narrative. The overall plot narrative has been tainted as a result of internationalism and the debuting of different parallel marketing campaigns. With each country running their own campaign inharmoniously, it appears, the M&M's spokescandies do not have a single identity despite having well-defined personalities. Further analysis highlights shortcomings throughout the M&M's brand narrative. Nonetheless, M&M's remain a class act in the confectionary industry, providing a marvellous example of how marketers can, through the use of anthropomorphised marketing mascots, utilise complimentary literary genres to elaborate on brand narrative.

6.3   Case Study 3: Planters' Peanuts

6.3.1   Nuts about Mr Peanut

Based in America, Planters is a snack food company best known for its processed nuts. It was founded by Italian immigrant Amedeo Obici in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, 1896. Like all humble beginnings, Obici started out with almost no money and little proficiency for English. After holding a series of jobs, he was able to invest in a peanut roaster and start his own business selling freshly roasted and salted peanuts from a horse-drawn cart. Planters Nut and Chocolate Company was established in 1906, when Obici partnered with Mario Peruzzi and expanded the business. In 1960, The Planters Nut and Chocolate Company was bought by Standard Brands, which in 1979 merged with the Nabisco Holdings Corporation[45]. Planters is now a division of Kraft Foods. With overall sales of $42.2 billion in 2008, it is the unrivalled industry sales leader[46] (The Gale Group, 2011).

Central to the success of Planters is Obici's passion for advertising and promotion. In an effort to eradicate unscrupulous retailers, who filled empty Planters tins with less expensive peanuts to customers, thus jeopardising the company's reputation for high quality, he decided to communicate directly with the public to increase awareness. Planters was the first peanut manufacturer to advertise nationwide. Truly believing in the importance of promoting peanuts, Obici opposed other peanut sellers and processors who felt national advertising was a waste of money. Obici was a savvy marketer. He genuinely believed that name recognition and repeat business would be critical for his company's success. To encourage repeat business in the early days, he placed one of the letters of his name in every bag of peanuts sold. A free bag of nuts was given to anyone who collected all five letters, thereby additionally generating name recognition.

Obici was not satisfied. To further develop brand recognition, he wanted something more effective. In what can be described as an early example of co-creation, in 1916 Planters conducted a contest to develop a trademark, offering a prize worth five dollars for the best-design. Anthony Gentile, a fourteen-year-old boy who submitted a drawing of "a little peanut person" was named the winner of this contest. With this image as a foundation, Planters hired a Chicago art firm. Andrew Wallach, a professional artist, was commissioned by the firm to

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[45] In 1989, Nabisco and the tobacco giant RJ Reynolds merged to form RJR Nabisco. This was acquired in 2000 by Kraft Foods.
[46] Dole Food Company was second, with overall 2008 sales of $7.6 billion (The Gale Group, 2011).

draw several different caricatures. Obici selected the archetypal peanut person with a top hat, monocle, cane and the look of a dashing gentleman. At least that was the story that was dispersed by Planters. According to Smith (2002), peanut figures had been published for years. Fourteen years prior to the alleged invention of Mr Peanut, "a little peanut person", complete with top-hat, monocle, cane and gloves had illustrated an article titled "Social Rise of the Peanut" in Good Housekeeping magazine (December 1902, 468), an image which may well have been spotted by Obici.

Regardless of his origin, Mr Peanut was a solid advertising success aimed at the major market segment for peanuts, America's youth. On March 12th 1917, Mr Peanut achieved trademark status. His national debut was in a full-page advert in the *Saturday Evening Post* in 1918 (Milstein, 2000). Since then, Mr Peanut appeared in countless newspapers and advertising posters; But that is not all. The company published various colouring books and guides (See Table 6.2) that ensured the company's print advertising moved from common place marketing to innovative schemes that drew in consumers. And this paid off; Sales grew from $1 million in 1917 to $7 million in five years (Smith, 2002).

Throughout the years, Mr Peanut played numerous roles in Planters' marketing strategy. Primarily, he was the mouthpiece for all written published text. He explained the origin of the shelled peanut and highlighted the nut's nutritive value. Mr Peanut proclaimed that peanuts were a perfect food for picnics, baseball games, and for use as an ingredient in main dishes served at lunch or dinner. He encouraged the increased consumption of peanuts because they were a good alternative to meat. Peanuts were also abundant, readily secured and inexpensive.

Appearing both in the forefront and in the background of packaging design, and featuring in print advertisements, Mr Peanut became known everywhere in America (Milstein, 2000). In the 1930s, Planters opened a shop along Atlantic City's Boardwalk where visitors were greeted outside the store by a man dressed up in a Mr Peanut outfit (Smith, 2002) – Mr Peanut continues to parade 'live' around America at various events throughout the year. In New York, Mr Peanut appeared in his first alluring billboard in Times Square; a billboard which was later refurbished into an "electric spectacular". In 1935, Planters revealed the "Peanut Car" which was later named "Nutmobile" – a vehicle which possessed the exact shape, delineation and colour of a colossal peanut, and had a Mr Peanut dummy mounted on the back. By the 1950s, Mr Peanut was appearing regularly in television commercials. He

achieved further recognition in 2004 by earning a spot on Madison Avenue's "Advertising Walk of Fame" (Kraft Foods, 2013).

Table 6.2 Planters' publications

Title	Year	Author/Publisher	Length (Pages)
A ride with Mr Peanut (Issue 2 of Planters colouring book)	1929	Planters Nut and Chocolate Company	n/a
Around the World with Mr Peanut (Issue 3 of Planters colouring book)	c1930	Planters Nut and Chocolate Company	32
Fun days with Mr Peanut (Colouring book)	1950	Standard Brands Limited	30
Mr Peanut presents the "Key to Good Health": Planters Hi-Hat Peanut Oil: for tempting salads none better	1951	Planters Edible Oil Company	8
The personal story of Mr Peanut: Celebrating the 50th Anniversary of the Planters Nut & Chocolate Co.	1956	Planters Nut and Chocolate Company	16
The Complete World of Mr Peanut	1967	Nabisco Brands Inc.	32
Mr Peanut's Guide to Physical Fitness and Health	1967	Nabisco Brands Inc., Standard Brands	24
Mr Peanut's Guide to Tennis	1969	Neil Amdur, Standard Brands	24
Mr Peanut's Guide to Nutrition	1970	Evelyn B. Spindler, Standard Brands.	32
Mr Peanut's Guide to Entertaining	c1970	Standard Brands	30
Eating in with Mr Peanut: Unusual menu ideas from Planters	1971	Planters, Royal Baking Powder	64
Mr Peanut's Bedtime Stories	1984	Eve King, Arthur H. Stockwell Limited	30

Source: Author

In every phase of its ownership, it was agreed by Planters' company leaders that Mr Peanut is a valuable mascot. Since his inception, numerous iterations of this anthropomorphic mascot have been produced (See Figure 6.40). Always wearing a top-hat, monocle and cane, company leaders have retained the core of what made Mr Peanut who he is, a classic. What has evidently changed is the colour of his peanut body and the amount of detail on it. Except that is not all; Mr Peanut's role as a spokescharacter has changed. Despite his observable centrality to Planters, by the 1980s, he had become marginalised, appearing unobtrusively as a small trademark in some adverts. He had been "relegated to a mere footnote apology even though he was conceived before Mickey Mouse was born" (Packaging Magazine, 2002). This had its implications. As widely recognized as his image was, known all over the world, many

people did not know that Mr Peanut represented a specific brand. And rightly so; for reasons that will become evident as this section continues, Mr Peanut had become the symbol for the entire peanut industry by the mid-1930s (Smith, 2002) and not just for Planters.
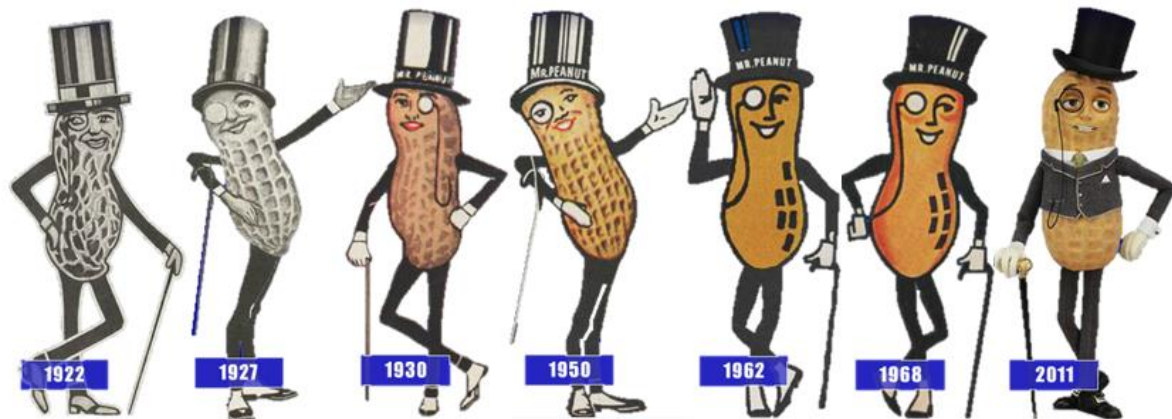
Figure 6.40 Mr Peanut through the years

Source: Compiled by Author, images from http://planters.com/history.aspx

Since the 1990s, the brand was perceived to have 'lost its way' (Design Week, 2002). Therefore, a decision was made to reinvigorate the Planters brand and to make Mr Peanut prominent and pervasive again. His image was made more contemporary, featuring minimalist detail, and his peanut shell was turned bright yellow. London based design agency Ergo was briefed to bring personality back into the brand and to 'kick-start' Mr Peanut's character as a visual icon. Distinctive 3D packaging in the shape of Mr Peanut, with a screw top 'top hat' closure (also known as 'nutcases') was produced (See Figure 6.41). Mr Peanut was the packaging; he was no longer side-lined to a mere inconspicuous trademark.

Figure 6.41 Mr Peanut 'nutcases'

Source: Design Week, 2002

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Keeping Mr Peanut close to his roots was always essential to retain his equity. Peter Reiner, who at the time was Senior Director of Marketing at Nabisco's Planters division, was often asked by people "Why don't you hip him up?" For Reiner, the way to contemporise Mr Peanut is "to put him into hip situations without taking away from his equity" (Thompson, 2000). In order to appeal to their selected market segment of 18-to-34 year olds, Reiner sought to tell stories of how Planters peanuts would fit into the contemporary lives of their target audience. Mr Peanut was thus depicted on the beach, at the Super Bowl, part of the NCAA's[47] March Madness, and at NASCAR[48] with driver Dale Jarrett[49]. As a result, Mr Peanut succeeded in attracting new younger consumers to Planters. He also triumphed in increasing purchase frequency and household penetration. Consequently, Planters grew from $500 million in sales in 1995 to more than $800 million in 1999 (Thompson, 2000).

In 2003, Planters uncovered a real opportunity when, for the very first time since 1916, they showed Mr Peanut as a baby legume. In this thirty second Christmas-themed advert named *Holiday*, Mr Peanut, Santa Claus and Rudolf were depicted sitting on a couch in front of a projection screen viewing and giggling over old film footage from back in the day (Champagne, 2003). As a baby legume, Mr Peanut was making adorable noises while opening his Christmas presents – receiving no other than a monocle, cane and a black top-hat which happens to fall over his eyes when he puts it over his delicately small head. In this film footage, baby Mr Peanut displays the common characteristic one would associate with a toddler – his movements are erratic and clumsy, even tumbling off balance at one instant. For the first time, a glimpse of Mr Peanut's rich elaborate backstory is revealed.

Mr Peanut was further reinvigorated in 2010. As part of the launch of a new marketing campaign, 'Naturally Remarkable', Mr Peanut was given a complete makeover to turn him back to what he truly is, a peanut. Efforts by Kraft Foods to revitalise him and the Planters brand are evident in their big decision to embrace being small. Mr Peanut was shrunk down from human size to peanut size (2.87 Inches, 1.48 Ounces), and his body was given the colour and texture of a peanut. His new, more contemporary look was supported with the addition of new attire in the form of a stylish grey flannel suit. While still sporting the top-hat, monocle and cane which we are accustomed to seeing, Mr Peanut was news worthy;

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[47] National Collegiate Athletic Association (formed 1910): A non-profit association that organises the athletic programs of many colleges and universities in USA and Canada. Its headquarters are in Indianapolis, Indiana.
[48] In 1999, Planters secured a three-year contract as official snack of NASCAR.
[49] As part of Planters' 'Relax. Go Nuts' campaign, customers were given the opportunity to win either a drive with Dale Jarrett at his racing school or the chance to play a round of golf with him at Pinehurst, America's premier resort.

despite being the mouthpiece for previously printed communication, for the very first time in 94 years, he was given a voice; the voice of actor Robert Downey Jr. According to Kris Wixom, a Creative Director at BEING, the advertising agency in charge of the campaign, "Mr Downey was chosen to speak for Mr Peanut because of his 'everyman suaveness'. He has a voice that could wear the top-hat, monocle and cane and still feel contemporary and cool" (Elliott, 2010); a voice that can bridge the gap between being easy-going and classic/old-school.

In line with their intention of being contemporary, *My Remarkable Holiday Party* advert premiered on Mr Peanut's Facebook page prior to TV and cinema release. Media frenzy began almost immediately. Mr Peanut's voice got people talking. In just over a week, there were over 400 broadcast, online and print placements, the advert received over 700,000 views, and Mr Peanut's Facebook page saw a 1300% rise in friends. Jason Levine, Senior Director of Marketing for Planters exclaimed, "People love Mr Peanut, he has always had a rich personality, and giving him a voice now allows people to connect with him in an authentic and entertaining way" (Maglaris & Lustig, 2010).

The 'Naturally Remarkable' campaign builds on the initial glimpses of Mr Peanut's rich elaborate backstory – with the advert being a portal into his ostentatious imaginary world; a world that I will delve into in more detail in the subsequent sections of this case study. Mark Gustafson, Supervising Animation Director at LAIKA/ house, the animation studio that brought out *My Remarkable Holiday Party* advert, sums this up:

> *"For the first time, we are making him speak and move in a stylized world among friends. No longer is he a 2D character with a top hat, monocle, spats and a cane. Now he is a tangible character with a rich backstory evident in his appearance and mannerisms."* (SHOOT, 2010)

Since the campaign was launched, year on year sales increased by 17%. Undoubtedly, reinventing this 97 year old marketing mascot gave Planters a much needed boost. Indeed, Mr Peanut has always had wit and charm even though he has not spoken, however, as BEING's Creative Director Kris Wixom points out, "To have the character entertain, and deliver messages, is a real opportunity" (Elliott, 2010). A timeline, from character inception until October 2012, has been devised and can be seen in Appendix 8.

Planters' founder Obici always captured opportunity. By the mid-1930s Mr Peanut symbolised the entire peanut industry because Obici did not limit the use of his

anthropomorphic mascot to advertising and packaging. Instead, Mr Peanut memorabilia were used for promotional purposes. Since Mr Peanut was adopted as a corporate symbol, he has appeared on virtually every Planters package, container, premium and advertisement. His likeness graces mugs, pencils, pens, tote bags, glass jars, charm bracelets, clocks, metal tins, wrist watches, ashtrays, plastic whistles, display figures, money banks. This strategy elevated Mr Peanut from trademark to icon. Consumers were 'nuts' about Mr Peanut, so much so, an enthusiastic fan club *Peanut Pals*[50] spawned as Planters Peanuts memorabilia became highly collectible – a fan club which is still growing and thriving to this day and currently[51] consisting of over 900 members. Since June 2009, a new breed of Mr Peanut fans has appeared in the form of Facebook followers. With over 540,000 fans in October 2012, one can rightly say, consumers are still 'nuts' about Mr Peanut (Chapter 7 investigates to what extent this is true).

6.3.2 Nut for the faint hearted

Through the years, Mr Peanut has been a highly influential marketing mascot, unintentionally representing the whole peanut industry and not just Planters. Side-lined for some time, Mr Peanut needed rejuvenation. Since 2010, since BEING, Smuggler and LAIKA/ house launched their new marketing campaign 'Naturally Remarkable', Mr Peanut's transformation has been noteworthy. Not only did BEING manage to breathe new life into the mascot by contemporising his appearance – which is now a more realistic computer generated representation of a peanut man dressed in top-hat, monocle, cane and flannel suit – but also through giving him a voice which allows for people to connect with him in an authentic and entertaining way. This has been a very crucial step closer towards 'becoming human' (See Section 4.6).

But BEING did not stop there. They added a high level of detail and sophistication into the virtual world of Mr Peanut which was not previously present. They introduced consumers to the nut-sized world of Planters which is full of what is important in life – "family and friends; real, authentic experiences; delicious, wholesome foods; and having fun" (Maglaris & Lustig, 2010).

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[50] *Peanut Pals* (not affiliated with Planters/Kraft) is a group of Mr Peanut enthusiasts who collect items and memorabilia. They also publish a regular newsletter and run several conventions a year whereby members meet, gather, share stories, and auction items.
[51] At the time of writing this thesis

Mr Peanut has been stylised as the classiest, kindest, most generous, funniest, most sophisticated talking peanut in the world, with exceptional all round talent in acting and sports. He considers himself a pretty good racquetball player. He also loves training for triathlons (or, as he calls it, tree-athalons) and winning them. Mr Peanut has starred in numerous movies including *Nut This Time 1*, *Nut This Time 2*, and as the story goes, he is currently filming *Nut This Time 3*. He has also starred in a number of workout videos and an upcoming TV mini-series which he is not at liberty to discuss. Mr Peanut is also interested in contemplating, problem solving and in pranking squirrels.

Mr Peanut has been made to move with confidence, sophistication and an unmatched coolness that inevitably earns him respect, so much so, he is often popular with the opposite gender. He enjoys having leisurely lunches with women (more like glamorous female butterflies) in the park where he reads nature essays to them. On his Facebook profile page, Mr Peanut claims to be a Virgo, and Virgos can be surprisingly flirtatious (Rosenvald & Schmidt, 2009). In line with the traits of his star sign, Mr Peanut works his charm in quiet ways and is an expert at subtle seduction. According to Rosenvald & Schmidt (2009), once a Virgo's love is ignited it will simmer steadily for years to come. This has been evident in Mr Peanut's romantic efforts to keep the "heart pumping". He considers himself a heart throb, a heart breaker, and most importantly, heart healthy. Thus it is only fitting that Planters nut varieties have been certified heart healthy by the American Heart Association.

Astrology teaches that Virgo is the sign of excellence; that it represents intelligence, high standards, and extraordinary commitment (Woolfolk, 2011). Embodied in Mr Peanut, these key elements are what Planters are known for and take pride in. Mr Peanut's character is also all about harnessing opportunity. His life and work ethic is summarised in his favourite quote: "You miss 100% of the shots you don't take. Unless you're me. I make those shots as well." (Facebook Profile, 2013). As a matter of fact, this has been the working ethic of Planters. They have a long history of pioneering industry firsts. Their inventiveness has been delivered through a diverse portfolio of what they claim to be nutritious and delicious plant-based snacks such as peanuts, cashews, almonds, pistachios and other nuts. They have distinctive lines of nut mixes that focus on specific nutritional needs that fuel active lifestyles.

To parallel their ever-growing product ranges, Planters have introduced new characters into Mr Peanut's multi-dimensional world. For instance, Benson; much like the Jolly Green Giant has Little Green Sprout, Benson fulfils the role of Mr Peanut's assistant and sidekick.

According to Stepp (2011), there are several reasons to have a sidekick. On the surface, a sidekick is usually there to aid the main character, and possesses opposing characteristics. For instance, if the main character is strong and chatty, then the sidekick is usually small and quiet. This is true for Benson; he is a peanut dressed in white shirt, black suit and bow tie, shorter than Mr Peanut – with one nut in his shell rather than two, just to ensure that consumers understand the pecking order between them (Elliott, 2010). In all his appearances thus far, Benson does not speak, he just accompanies and assists Mr Peanut, thus appearing to be less charismatic. Stepp (2011) also elucidates, a sidekick tends to bring a little light-heartedness into a situation by having no idea how to do something, or by coming up with surprising new ways to get things done. If the sidekick is a novice, then the main character will constantly need to support him. Mr Peanut proclaims that he often helps out his assistant Benson become a better nut. But it seems, Benson does the majority of the hard work and Mr Peanut takes credit for it.

In just the same way that life consists of a series of interactions, the addition of new characters in the Planters' narrative allows for interactions to take place with Mr Peanut within his virtual world. The development of interactions and the elevation of character connections often engage consumers' imagination; an imagination which can run rampant if these connections are not spelled out clearly. Where consumers are forced to fill in the blanks within a brand narrative, unplanned humour is often born. For example, an extensive text by Rudnick (2010) has been rendered in the name of this anthropomorphic character. Rudnick (2010) purporting to be Mr Peanut said:

> *"I am Mr Peanut, and I can be silent no longer. While I have only the greatest respect for Mr Levine, who is the senior director for marketing at Planters, I cannot live a lie. I'm a gay nut, and Benson and I are in love."*

Without proper introductions, certainly, a silent nut following a talking peanut does raise some eyebrows. However, Mr Peanut does mention Benson in his Facebook status updates: "I gave Benson the day off in honor of Administrative Assistant's Day. But being Benson, he's still here. Right by my side. Staring at me. Guess I'll have to give him a chore to do…" (Facebook Update 27th Apr 2011). According to Levine, "Benson is quite enamoured of Mr Peanut," but as the saying goes, they are just friends. Kris Wixom, a Creative Director at BEING, the advertising agency in charge of the campaign also confirms, Benson and Mr Peanut do not live in the same house (Elliott, 2010). Mr Peanut does confirm however, that Benson is his biggest fan:

"Dustin, thank you for your kind words however I don't think Benson will take too kindly if I replace him as my biggest fan. I however, I personally think it's quite wonderful." – Mr Peanut (Facebook Update 28th Jan 2011)

In their effort to give Mr Peanut a new look and an elaborate virtual world, Planters introduced yet another spokescharacter to mark the release of their new line of fiery roasted flavoured almond nibbles. As part of their marketing campaign 'Naturally Remarkable', Kraft foods introduce a new advert[52] whereby an angry beetle barges into the town of Planters causing havoc. Although Mr Peanut is often conveyed as a ladies man, when danger strikes, a red-caped and ready torero named Alejandro bursts out of his shell and into the scene to defeat the out of control beetle. Like a true Spanish matador, Alejandro the almond behaves like a "cross between Antonio Banderas in the movie *The Mask of Zorro* and Johnny Depp in the movie *Don Juan DeMarco*" (Elliott, 2011). When Alejandro, the saucy, brave, confident bullfighter enters the scene, he certainly casts a luring spell on the butterfly ladies between Mr Peanut's arms. Mr Peanut cannot help but show avid signs of jealousy – an appropriate emotion for a character heading towards 'becoming human'.

Planters' peanuts and other nut snacks are aimed at the adult consumer. Due to the growing interest in peanut butter as a food for adults as opposed to children, in 2012, Kraft was interested in re-entering the peanut butter market especially since adult consumers constitute two-thirds of the $1.8 billion of peanut butter sold in the U.S. (Welch, 2012). In what may be considered the most over-due brand extension in history, Kraft reintroduced peanut butter in both in creamy and crunchy varieties in the U.S. (Elliott, 2011). Prior to Kraft Food's acquisition of Planters, the last time that Planters sold peanut butter was from early 1950s until around 1980, as executives at Kraft believe. To reinforce their targeting of the adult market, Chef Marcus Samuelsson was hired to host an event which introduces consumers to adult orientated recipes such as peanut butter steak sauce – PB&J is nowhere to be seen.

To mark Planters' reintroduction to the peanut butter market, a new spokescharacter joined the 'Naturally Remarkable' campaign: Doug, Peanut Butter Doug – he was formerly known as Mr Peanut Stunt Double, but those in control of Mr Peanut made him feel that Doug's former name was infringing on his trademark. Donning goatee, aviator glasses, and immense confidence, Doug is made to perform death-defying stunts which are perceived to be far too dangerous for his diva-ish celebrity look-alike Mr Peanut. During the stunts, Doug gets repeatedly crushed – an image 'nut' for the faint hearted. All that remains of him each time is

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[52] The advert is appropriately named "Alejandro"

a jar of peanut butter. "I'm O.K.", voiced by Kevin Dillon, Doug flashes a thumbs-up through the top of the peanut butter jar to reassure his viewers that he is doing fine (Nudd, 2011) - See Figure 6.42.

Figure 6.42 Peanut Butter Doug is doing fine

Source: Planters' Advert – Peanut Butter Doug (June 2011)

In just the same way that the revived Mr Peanut was initially introduced via Facebook, Doug also made his debut on the social media network rather than television. According to Triona Schmelter, a Senior Marketing Director at Kraft:

> *"The focus is on social media right now because there's so much opportunity in the social media space"*

Social media provides an opportunity to create buzz and instigate excitement and word of mouth as well as 'sharing' amongst friends. Social media also allows for two way interaction between a brand and its consumers. In March 2012, Mr Peanut officially announced the launch of "Peanut Butter Doug's Peanut Butter Bracket Challenge" on Facebook. Consumers were encouraged to submit photographs, videos, recipes or written entries that prove how much they love peanut butter. The most favourable sixteen submissions, as voted by fans, received a case of Planters peanut butter. However, the grand prize winner received two lifetime supplies (Planters, 2012).

To honour one of America's most iconic foods, the 24th of January marks National Peanut Butter day in the U.S. To celebrate, Mr Peanut and his stunt double, Peanut Butter Doug, encouraged consumers to grab a spoon and enjoy Planters Natural No Need to Stir Creamy Peanut Butter Spread (Planters, 2012). Jon Hall, Brand Manager at Kraft Foods said:

> *"With over 100 years of nut expertise, Planters brings more knowledge to the table than any other peanut butter connoisseur. We want peanut butter fans to mark this day by enjoying their favourite Planters peanut butter creation."*

Increasing Planters' product range and expanding into new markets has allowed the addition of more characters and the utilisation of a 'multiply' mascot strategy (Brown, 2010). By filling Mr Peanut's world with characters, another dimension to the Planters' brand narrative is achieved; a narrative where people experience his life, humour and friends like never before (Maglaris & Lustig, 2010). The innovative series of stop-motion animation adverts that constitute the 'Naturally Remarkable' campaign allows for consumers to peek into the multi-dimensional world of Planters – a world that has been explored using a literary analysis to reveal the three prominent genres of Comedy, Action and Sport. An examination of these emergent fictional genres has been conducted and is discussed in the subsequent sections. These genres are far from mutually exclusive as aspects from each overlap. They are also a product of my interpretation of the Planters' brand narrative.

6.3.3   Comedy literature

A first literary genre by which the Planters' brand narrative can be analysed is comedy literature. Most critics and historians agree that comedy has its roots based in the Greek word kômai – meaning village – indicating that comedy is the product of a rural environment rather than an urban one. Appropriately, peanuts are grown in rural farms and Mr Peanut conveniently lives in the rural town of Planters. There is something rather ironic about a walking, talking peanut wearing a monocle, top-hat and flannel suit and carrying a cane. Dressed in high class attire, this humble peanut was a low-life food for the poor. In this reversal of fortune, a form of comedy exists. When understanding the term comedy in a broad manner as highlighted by Stott (2005), a series of persistent themes are encountered over and over again across a variety of settings. The theme of inversion in its various forms is where the "world-turned-upside-down" scenario is evident. Common examples of this include a slave governing his master or a man biting a dog. For individuals who are aware of a peanut's

history, Mr Peanut's social status would be perceived as comical. However, uninformed individuals will most likely fail to make this connection and thus neglect to see this element of comedy.

If it isn't just 'whatever's funny'[53], then what is comedy? Answering this question is tricky as no one simple formula exists. According to Stott (2005), 'Comedy' as a term is multilateral. It is a literary form with diverse linguistic and performance practices. It can refer equally to a genre, a tone, and a series of effects that manifest themselves in different environments. In this sense, the label 'comedy' can be applied across a range of styles to describe isolated events or passages within other types of work or as a literary tradition with identifiable structural qualities. For this reason, applying a single uniform definition or methodological approach is highly inadequate. Comedy is as much a tonal quality as a structural one; and the Planters' brand narrative does utilise comical tonality through their spokes-character Mr Peanut and his use of various comedic literary devices. These include allusion, irony, hyperbole, puns and sarcasm.

> *"Time to kick off the football season. That's not meant to be a terrible pun, but if it works, I'll take it!"* – Mr Peanut (Facebook Update 5th Sep 2012)

The use of laughter-eliciting devices does not always justify the label comedy – as for instance, they are employed in satiric and grotesque dramas as well (Rozik, 2011). With this in mind, there is a general agreement, according to Rozik (2011), that what characterises comedy is its comic mood. Comic mood is often produced by character or situation. In the Planters' brand narrative, Mr Peanut is the main resource of comic mood. He adds light-heartedness and humour to the everyday, making references to social behaviour and culture. For instance, consider the following where Mr Peanut alludes to the famous saying "When life gives you lemons, make lemonade":

> *"When life gives you peanuts, do not make peanut-ade. It is not very refreshing. Just eat the peanuts, trust me."* – Mr Peanut (Facebook Update 30th Apr 2012)

Different types of comedy have emerged in new contexts and media that often mingle with other modes and tones of narrative, thus making the forms of comedy numberless. Comedy appears in many guises. According to Debbèche & Perron (2009), it can be spoken and written language, moving or fixed images, or gestures, as well as a combination of any or all of these. Comedy is articulated through all of these forms in Planters' brand narrative.

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[53] As expressed by Richard Connell in Section 6.1.4

Animated adverts provide a platform for comedy through spoken language, moving images and gestures. To demonstrate, an example of this has been taken from the advert *Remarkable Holiday Party;* an advert which Mr Peanut considers as a "think piece about the struggles of friendship during times of stress, that, and delicious snacks" (KraftCareers, 2012). As Mr Peanut gives advice about throwing a great party and being a gracious host "no matter who shows up", Richard walks in carrying six bottles of root beer – fitting for a party in Mr Peanut's home located in the roots of a peanut plant.

> *"Richard, didn't think you were gonna make it."*
> *"Hey, sorry about last week, I don't know what got into me."*
> *"Yeah, well, forgive and forget. Kind of…"*
>
> (Advert – Remarkable Holiday Party, 2011)

Mr Peanut turns around to reveal a plaster covering his broken shell. An amusing moment occurs when Mr Peanut places his cane rapidly into Richard's mouth. It is clear, Richard is a nut cracker. Additionally, because moles are known to have very poor eyesight, another humorous moment in the advert is when a mole, dressed in a winter jumper, offers Planters' nuts to a wall mounted taxidermy squirrel head wearing a Christmas hat and asks: "Do you like nuts?"

In the Planters' brand narrative, Facebook provides a platform for comedy in the form of written language through status updates and fixed images such as computer-generated photographs. Figure 6.43 shows Mr Peanut in a top-hat, athletic gear and golden trainers pulling a truck full of Planters' NUT.rition nut mixes, while Benson times him. With a lean figure like his, can he really pull a truck? Mr Peanut's comment exaggerates the humour as he does not try to hide the fact that the image is fabricated.

Figure 6.43 Mr Peanut pulling a truck

Source: https://www.facebook.com/mrpeanut

Comedy has been renowned in giving people pleasure; pleasure that is derived from laughter; and laughter is often derived from jokes. Douglas (1975) argues that jokes do not simply emerge from nowhere, but are derived from a sense of reality that pre-exists them and which they seek to distort. They emerge from within the social framework, they express the nature of their environment, and are in a relative relationship with the dominant structures of understanding and traditional culture. Very often, Mr Peanut attempts to tell a good joke. The following is an example:

> *"Here's a good joke for you all: a blind mole, a talking peanut, and a turtle with a toupee walk into a Root Beer Bar. Wait never mind, that's not a joke, that's what we did Saturday. Anyone have a better one?"* – Mr Peanut (Facebook Update 27th June 2011)

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Evidently, the humour is not in the punch line. As Mr Peanut mocks common 'two people walk into a bar' jokes, he enjoys a kind of immunity through the belief that his wit represents insight into another reality (Douglas, 1975). Frequently jokes and humour are perceived as a form of social criticism (Helitzer & Shatz, 2005). As a means of enforcing humour into Planters' brand narrative, Mr Peanut ridicules the behaviour of society. In the following excerpt, Mr Peanut mocks the way in which common shorthand writing has taken over the use of proper sentences:

> *"BTW I'm OOTO till EOD w/ B2B mtngs & no ↓time. BRB ASAP FYI. Hmm, even I have no idea what I just said. Any thoughts?"* – Mr Peanut (Facebook Update 8th Nov 2011).

Mr Peanut also pokes fun at the way in which society utilises Facebook to convey to the world what is important in life:

> *"Just thought I'd go on Facebook and see if there's anything important going on. Let's see, baby pic, baby pic, cat pic, baby pic, cat pic, baby cat pic… nope, same as usual."* – Mr Peanut (Facebook Update 20th Feb 2012)

In order to assert social superiority and individuality above the ordinary dullness of society (Stott, 2005), Mr Peanut exploits wit, a quick inventiveness in language, and takes pleasurable liberties with meanings through the utilisation of double negatives and challenging common cultural norms and expectations.

> *"It is scorching hot outside. In totally unrelated news, if anybody reads about an ice cream truck that was stolen by a talking peanut it was not definitely not me."* – Mr Peanut (Facebook Update 30th Jul 2012)

> *"Thinking of switching to contact lenses. But are they always sold in packs of two? #monocle problems"* – Mr Peanut (Facebook Update 5th October 2012)

> *"Someone told me it takes 540 peanuts to make a 12-ounce jar of peanut butter. But I think it depends on how hard these 540 peanuts are working, the lighting conditions in their work area, and how motivated they are to make said peanut butter"* – Mr Peanut (Facebook Update 19th May 2011)

Helitzer & Shatz (2005) believe creativity and imagination are essential to the generation of comedy. Lots of imagination was utilised to enrich Mr Peanut's backstory – including how he keeps a nice peanut figure – and to create his virtual world for it is not just filled with peanut, almond and pistachio characters, but also with animals and insects – including mice, moles,

turtles, beetles, cockroaches and butterflies – that reflect the real natural environment of a growing peanut under soil. As peanuts grow in large numbers, Mr Peanut's family is overwhelmingly large.

> *"I get a lot of questions about how I keep my nice peanut shape. Well, I think I get it from my parents. They were both pretty peanut-shaped also."* – Mr Peanut (Facebook Update 10th May 2012)

> *"My cousins are visiting this weekend. All eleventy billion of them."* – Mr Peanut (Facebook Update 6th Aug 2012)

As demonstrated, Mr Peanut utilises various forms of the verbal comic – From puns, which are the most primitive form of the verbal comedic according to renowned Canadian humourist and theorist of humour Stephen Leacock (1943), to the highest levels of sublime humour that reflect the incongruity of life itself.

I have demonstrated the way in which Planters have utilised the genre of comedy to add depth to their brand narrative. As the face of Planters, Mr Peanut is always in the spotlight. An influential spokes-character like him thus needs to possess assertive leadership qualities to guide consumers through the crowded marketplace and encourage them to purchase from Planters. A sense of humour indicates leadership as it is a sign of confidence (Helitzer & Shatz, 2005) and Mr Peanut has that in abundance.

Any other genre could have been utilised in place of comedy, however, the exploitation of comedy has numerous advantages and benefits. Humour is more than entertainment or telling jokes for it is a powerful social lubricant that eases and enriches interporsonal relationships and communication. Helitzer & Shatz (2005) identified three significant benefits to humour – they refer to these as the three Rs of Respect, Remembrance and Rewards. These three benefits of humour are true for the use of Mr Peanut as a marketing mascot. Within the world of marketing, Mr Peanut is highly respected due to his longevity. His sense of humour has also earned him respect amongst consumers and made him more memorable (See Chapter 7). When advertising messages are entertaining, they have a higher probability of being remembered than a plain boring message. Thus, as a highly respected and remembered marketing mascot, Mr Peanut has surely earned Planters great financial rewards.

6.3.4 Action literature

A second literary genre by which Planters' brand narrative can be analysed is action literature. Nuts are manly. According to market research carried out by Scott Marcus, Senior Brand Manager for Planters, "what men love about nuts is they see them as both healthy and manly" (Planters, 2012). In an effort to address men's changing role in society, whereby they are "grocery shopping more [than they used to], and they want a healthy snack that they can feel confident putting in their cart" (Planters, 2012). Planters teamed up with *Men's Health* magazine to create an ideal, nutritious snack. Planters' nutritionists and product developers worked with this trusted and respected authority on nutrition and manliness to produce Planters Men's Health NUT.rition mix containing 6 grams of protein and 6 types of vitamins and minerals in the form of almonds, peanuts, pistachios, peanut oil and sea salt.

The nut mix did not just grow out of men's changing role in society but also out of men's changing attitudes towards food. "What's really relevant to Planters" according to Scott Marcus "is their interest in eating healthier". Many years of collaboration and communication with *Men's Health* about the eating behaviours of males and what they are looking for has revealed a real need for health snacks (Ives, 2012). Ronan Gardiner, publisher of *Men's Health* believes "together they've succeeded in creating a tasty mix that has the nutrients and protein that active guys want" (Planters, 2012).

And what better way to attract the male market than through their most preferred genre of action. In literature, action has two basic meanings. It is the main story-line of a play, novel, short story, narrative poem etc. It is also the main series of events that together constitute the plot (Cuddon, 2013)– these might be real or imaginary, physical or psychological (Sharma, 1998). In this sense, action is, by default, incorporated in every piece of literature, including every brand narrative. However, considering Planters' brand narrative more deeply reveals action that closely emulates it in the cinematic sense.

Since action translates across language barriers, it is the most popular of genres among male moviegoers. The action picture has been the dominant film genre of American and many foreign film markets such as Hong Kong. Action addresses the audiences' appetite for physical, visceral entertainment. They showcase physical action in the form of fist fights, gun fights, sword fights, fights against nature, and so on (Lichtenfeld, 2007).

Hill (2012) identified six qualities which embody the essence of action; Firstly, the presence of a hero. In the Planters' brand narrative and more specifically in the advert *The Team*, Mr Peanut and his team of Alejandro Almond and a new pistachio character are the heroes. First and foremost, their likeability gives foundation to build the rest of the story on. Described as "the best of the best, of the boldest, of the bravest, of the hard corest, (and of the tenderest)", they are able to 'kick some major ass'. They are also described as the "manliest mix ever assembled" (nut-wise of course, as they are no match for legendary action figures such as Jean-Claude Van Damme, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Jason Statham, Bruce Li, Sylvester Stallone etc.).

The second quality which embodies the essence of action is the villain. Squirrels pose a real threat to Mr Peanut and the team as their efforts are always directed towards trying to consume them. Thirdly is the mission. The team's mission is pure and simple, promote Planters' Men's Health NUT.rition snacks at all cost.

The fourth and fifth qualities which embody the essence of action as identified by Hill (2012) are the amount and quality of action. The Planters' brand narrative is brimming with action sequences that bring lots of energy and intensity to it. And what is an action sequence without explosions, fast cars, chases and beautiful women? None existent. BEING creatives conform to consumer expectations of action movies by including scenes of hard core training (including skipping rope, boxing, hanging sit-ups and karate), intense pursuits and explosions. Animation studio LAIKA/ house produced a high-quality render that almost looks realistic.

According to Hill (2012), action is best when applied early, spread evenly throughout, baked for a while, and ends in a huge explosion for the finale. The advert *The Team* starts with the three spokes-characters dressed immaculately in suits, confidently walking towards the camera and away from a building which immediately explodes from behind them. The audience then feast their eyes on Mr Peanut and Alejandro Almond as they drive rapidly in the Nutmobile and through a barn window causing damage to its structure (See Figure 6.44).

Figure 6.44 The Nutmobile bursts out of the barn

Source: https://www.facebook.com/mrpeanut

A ski chase scene is also included whereby Mr Peanut and the team are chased by avalanche and an angry looking squirrel. This emulates a scene from the James Bond film *The Spy Who Loved Me,* in the same way that Bond skis backwards to shoot Sergi Borzov with a ski pole, the pistachio man turns backwards to shoot the squirrel with an arrow launcher gun. The action is allowed to bake while the team train in a manner suggestive of manly scenes from films like *Rocky* (1976) and *The Karate Kid* (1984), and while Mr Peanut tends to his butterfly lady. The advert ends in space travel. A red button is pressed and a planet explodes from behind the team (See Figure 6.45).

As identified by Hill (2012), the sixth quality which embodies the essence of action is the stunts. Doing the dangerous stuff, stuntmen are the people who put their bodies and lives on the line to bring forth entertainment. The fact that Mr Peanut has a stunt double (Peanut Butter Doug) lends itself perfectly to the action genre. Like the case with most celebrities, Mr Peanut relies on Doug to carry out his stunts in the fear of injury; stunts that get him flattened by a statue, crushed by a lightening ring and charged by an insect-bull (beetle).
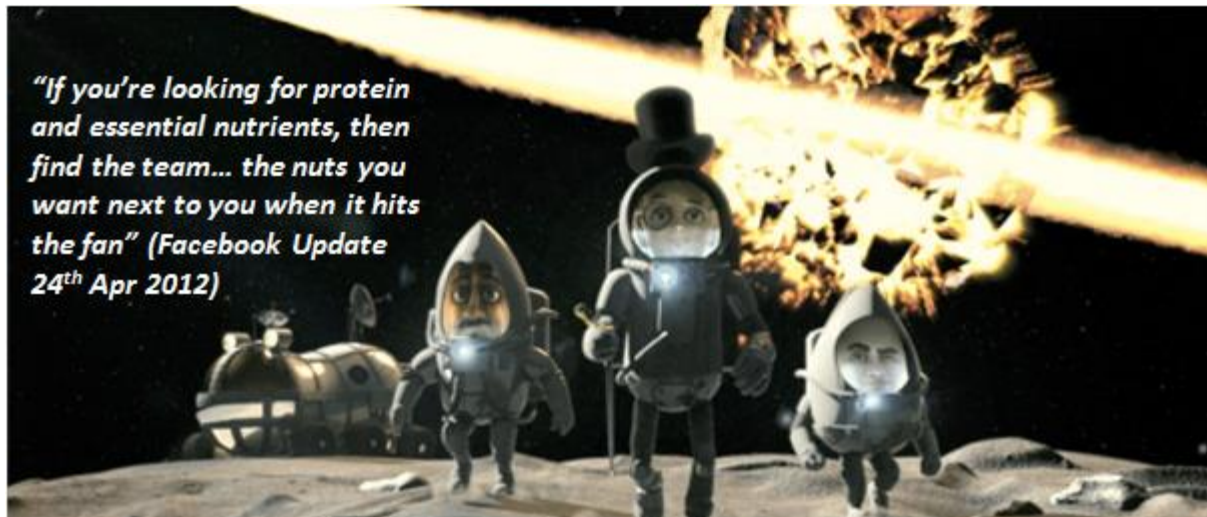
Figure 6.45 Mr Peanut's explosive finale from the advert *The Team*

Source: https://www.facebook.com/mrpeanut

When the beetle comes charging into the rural village of Planters causing havoc, Alejandro bursts out of his shell and into the scene like a true Spanish matador to take control. In this action driven advert, Alejandro waves his red cape to attract the raged beetle (See Figure 6.46). The beetle charges at Alejandro before being tricked into crashing through a wall marking its end. Alejandro takes precedence as a hero and saves the day. Mr Peanut admits "there is a lot of fire in that boy" (Advert – Alejandro, 2011).

Figure 6.46 Alejandro Vs. The angry beetle

Source: Planters' Advert - Alejandro (2011)

It may appear, through the examples discussed in this section, that action as a literary genre has only been utilised by Planters recently – i.e. since their recent targeting of the male consumer. However, action has been a prominent literary genre in the Planters' brand narrative ever since their first publication. Evident in the form of action-adventure, their first ever children's colouring book, *A ride with Mr Peanut* (1929), takes school children on an action packed adventure to explain how peanuts are cleaned and selected for processing. Similarly, *Around the World with Mr Peanut* (c1930) and *Fun Day with Mr Peanut* (1950) introduce children to action filled days full of exploration, travelling and adventure.

6.3.5 Sport literature

Achieving a healthy lifestyle is done through balanced nutrition and regular physical exercise. Nuts are renowned for being a good source of protein, antioxidants and vitamin E; thus making it a heart healthy food. Peter Cotter, Senior Brand Manager for Planters states, "For years, Planters' fans have enjoyed our peanuts for their delicious taste. While many of our Planters Dry Roasted Peanuts have always been heart healthy, we are now recognised by a respected and well-known authority committed to heart health." (Planters, 2013). Certified with the American Heart Association's (AHA) Heart-Check Mark, Planters continue to communicate the health benefits of peanuts to their consumers. Early this year, they teamed up with celebrity fitness and nutrition expert, Harley Pasternak. He says:

> *"When I'm training my clients, I always make sure they are making healthy choices in all aspects of their lives, particularly in their diets. Partnering with Planters was a natural decision since I encourage my clients to eat heart healthy foods." (Planters, 2013)*

To complete this healthy lifestyle message, Planters have relied heavily upon sports literature as a third genre to add depth to their brand narrative – This comes as no surprise since peanuts are a calorie rich snack that requires activeness to burn them off. In comparison with the major classic literary genres of drama, romance, satire, tragedy and comedy, the sports genre is a fairly new one, gaining its popularity in the 1980s. It is characterised by a narrative in which the protagonist plays athletics or other games of competition. The most common sports covered in this genre are boxing, baseball, basketball, tennis, cycling, horseback riding, hockey, football and American football. Similarly, it has been increasingly noticeable that 'sport' is gaining recognition as a genre within the film industry (Crosson, 2013). One of its

most significant recognitions, according to Crosson (2013), came in June 2008 in the form of a CBS television special whereby the American Film Institute presented their Top 10 films in 10 different genres. Amongst the genres chosen was 'sport', thus further acknowledging its significance.

Mr Peanut has been stylised as an avid sports player. From as early as the late 1960s, Mr Peanut was used to communicate the health benefits of sports, as well as to give guidance (predominantly to children) on how to participate in them. Two guides titled *Mr Peanut's Guide to Physical Fitness* (1967) and *Mr Peanut's Guide to Tennis* (1969) were released – See Figure 6.47. In *Mr Peanut's Guide to Tennis*, we are introduced to a Cashew character named Tony. Mr Peanut and Tony are made to play tennis against each other. Consider the following excerpt:

> *"His famous fast hard serve comes into the service court. Tony Cashew returns the serve. They rally with several backhands and forehands. Mr Peanut decides to rush to the net. Tony hits a lob, but Mr Peanut takes several steps back and hits an overhead smash which Tony cannot return. Mr Peanut wins the point and the game." (Amdur, 1969)*
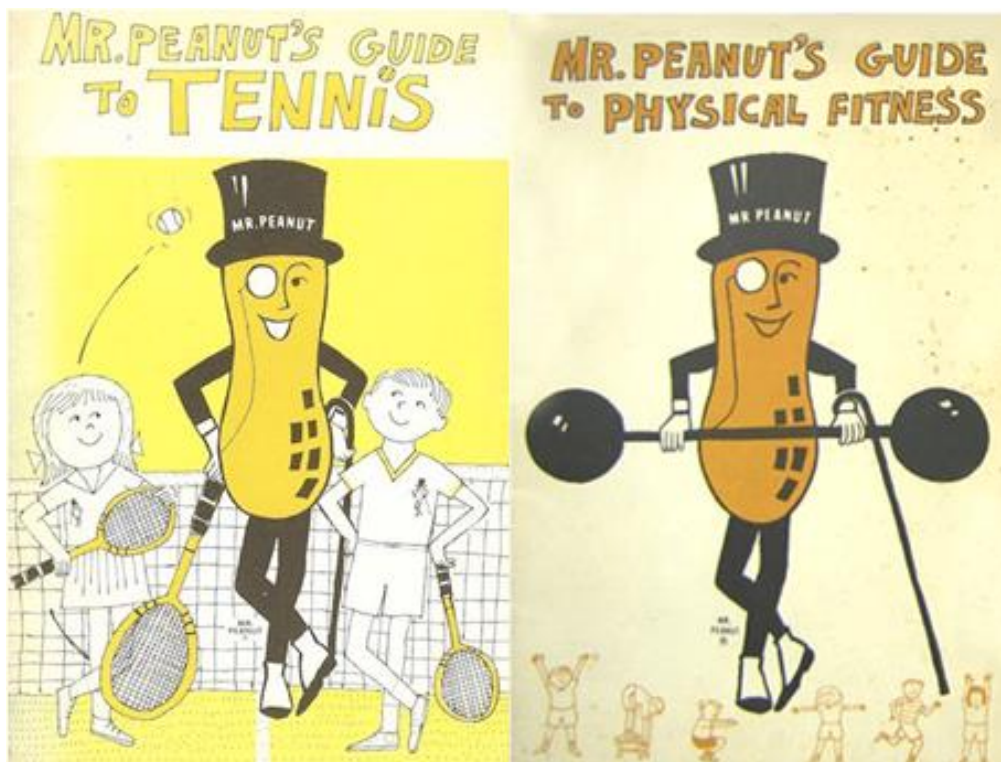
Figure 6.47 Mr Peanut's sport guides

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Mr Peanut winning the tennis match comes as no surprise. Ever since then, he has excelled in every sport he plays ensuring he continues on his winning streak. Mr Peanut believes:

"If you can't win, lose with style. Just kidding. Win at all cost. And with style. Or it doesn't count, that's what I say and I am always right"

Thus, to Mr Peanut winning is essential. He does not just have a trophy shelf or cabinet, he has an entire trophy room. Amongst his awards is a "Winfinity" trophy – this is a trophy of Mr Peanut, holding a trophy of Mr Peanut, who is holding a trophy of Mr Peanut holding a trophy, and so on. What is the secret to his success? Mr Peanut reveals all in the Planters' advert *Tree-athlon*. On your marks (See Figure 6.48):

*"At Planters, living a healthy lifestyle is important. Take our annual Tree-athlon, which I have never lost. What's my secret? Hmm, well, amazing shoes. *Benson peddling frantically on the double bicycle* And this… A tasty NUT.rition blend that helps to keep the legs pumping…"* – Mr Peanut (Advert – Tree-athlon, 2011)

Figure 6.48 Let the race begin

Source: Planters' Advert – Tree-athlon (2011)

Having the right mentality and training is also an essential ingredient to achieving success. Mr Peanut has been fashioned to take his training very seriously (See Figure 6.49). Physical Fitness and Sports Month is every day for him thus helping him to maintain his great shape. Mr Peanut trains every part and muscle in his body, including his wrists.

"To prep for this year's Tree-athlon I've been doing serious sets of trophy lifts. Tomorrow, on to victory waves. Never underestimate the importance of an agile wrist". (Facebook Update 7th Jan 2011)

Figure 6.49 Mr Peanut does some hard core training

Source: https://www.facebook.com/mrpeanut

In line with the most common sports covered in this genre, Mr Peanut plays basketball – a popular game which requires opponents. According to Crosson (2013), a competitive dynamic is frequently present in sports narrative and thus a manifestation of dual protagonists is formed. Mr Peanut is often seen competing against other residents from the village of Planters. Figure 6.50 shows Mr Peanut coming head to head with Richard the nutcracker and scoring against him. Mr Peanut's attitude towards winning and achieving success is summarised on his basketball jersey – Number one.

Figure 6.50 Mr Peanut plays basketball

Source: https://www.facebook.com/mrpeanut

Sport narrative has often been criticised for frequently suffering from clichés, 'nauseating sentimentality' and repeated material; such repeated material comes in the form of the big game, race of fight finish. A further recurring pattern in sports narrative is the attempt of the 'underdog' team or individual to achieve success through sport (Crosson, 2013). Such criticisms do not hold weight in Planters' brand narrative. As an on-going campaign and a 'living' spokescharacter, there is no big finish, only on-going sport participation. Once a winner always a winner, Mr Peanut leaves little room for marginalised individuals (such as Garry the mouse) to achieve success through sport. Figure 6.51 presents Mr Peanut wearing numerous gold medals around his neck and stylishly leading the tree-athlon race ahead of Benson, Garry and Turtle. Planters and Mr Peanut strive to remain relevant to consumers by relating the post in Figure 6.51 to the Olympic Games of 2012 taking place in London.

Figure 6.51 Mr Peanut participates in Planters' annual three-athlon

Source: https://www.facebook.com/mrpeanut

As demonstrated thus far, Mr Peanut has been stylised as an enthusiastic sports player. In April 2012, he decided to add American football to his list of played sports by entering the draft (See Figure 6.52). A draft is a procedure used to assign individual players to sports teams. In a draft, teams alternate turns in selecting from a pool of eligible players. Due to his height, Mr Peanut is rendered to believe he will not be a popular choice amongst the teams but he is taking that chance. This illustrates his high degree of motivation and will power.

Figure 6.52 Mr Peanut plays American football

Source: https://www.facebook.com/mrpeanut

As the official sponsor of NCAA and former sponsor of NASCAR, when Mr Peanut is not competing in sport, he is certainly depicted watching it. As a frequent winner and an expert, he is even made to participate in post-game interviews to share his thought and opinions (See Figure 6.53). This element of the narrative is essential to the depth of the brand story. As the majority of people do not participate in sport, Planters' have to remain relevant to their consumers by emphasising that half the fun of watching a game is eating peanuts.

Figure 6.53 Mr Peanut gets ready to be interviewed

Source: https://www.facebook.com/mrpeanut

6.3.6   Discussion: Naturally remarkable

Peanuts were perceived as trash food by antebellum America. Grown by slaves and fed to hogs, peanuts were as the extreme opposite of haute cuisine. According to Smith (2002), they were "the very symbol of rowdyism", as they were consumed by rowdy fans consisting of slaves and the poor who can only afford the cheapest seats in the theatre – located in the uppermost section, farthest away from stage. This section was thus known as the peanut gallery (Krampner, 2013).

Immaculately dressed in top hat, monocle and cane, Mr Peanut had a large significant effect on raising the status of peanuts in society. He was (and arguably still is) a highly influential spokescharacter as his anthropomorphic qualities ensured there was a meaningful connection between him and consumers. This social-climbing peanut helps reflect a major change in American culture in general – the inception and birth of the American Dream.

In a phenomena which closely parallels the rise of the burger bar chain in the U.S. and the independent fish and chips shops in Britain (Spary, 2005), peanut vending franchises were emerging and becoming national companies. The peanut was part of a short-lived alimentary culture that reflected gender relations and new working patterns as well as an increase in the availability of pre-prepared foods. The rise of the peanut informs us further about the

convergence of culture, politics, industry and commerce. It also clearly reflects the wider Western embrace of fast food – defined as obtaining maximum nutrition at maximum speed and with minimum effort.

The American Dream is a dream partially attractive to the marginalised and under privileged and one often powerfully affirmed by sport. Utilised by Mr Peanut, the literary genre of sport has significant appeal for large numbers of immigrants to the U.S., as well as members of the African American community because it proposes a utopian sensibility. Sport provides a means to 'live the dream' of opportunity, ability and achievement through sporting heroes, even if attempts to achieve success in life were fruitless for its followers (Crosson, 2013).

Consumers can 'live the dream' through their highly successful marketing mascot Mr Peanut. Winner of countless medals, awards and trophies, Mr Peanut's success is worthy of a first page news coverage in *The Daily Legume* (See Figure 6.54).

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Figure 6.54 *The Daily Legume* newspaper

Source: Planters' Advert – Tree-athlon (2011)

In other news, so this elaborate story continues, Mr Peanut has been busy filming a new workout DVD; adding a new angle to his elaborate backstory and Planters' brand narrative.

The final front page story reveals Mr Peanut's "Shell of Steel Heart of Gold". It is an awe-generating tale that illuminates Mr Peanut's humanity. Consider the following excerpt:

> *"Planters' favourite set of frienemies took a step closer to repairing their 'cracked' relationship"*

Developing, building, breaking, and repairing relationships is something that humans do. In an attempt to repair his relationship with Richard the nutcracker, Mr Peanut is increasingly heading towards 'becoming human' (See Chapter 4). Where do we draw the line between fiction and reality? Even Mr Peanut himself does not know (See Figure 6.55) but he surely considers himself real. To further emphasise Mr Peanut's humanity, he is considering writing a biography titled *The Man Behind the Monocle* (Facebook Update 19th Jan 2010) although he has not done so yet. What he has done however, is feature in the 2011 February edition of the infamous *Men's Health* magazine (Refer to Appendix 9).

> *"I know you're all curious about how I keep in top physical condition. And although I hesitate to give away all of my secrets, you can find some inspiration from me in my exclusive interview in the latest Men's Health."* (Facebook Update 19th Feb 2011)

Figure 6.55 Who are they calling fictional?

Source: https://www.facebook.com/mrpeanut

Mr Peanut became more human when he was given a voice. "Having him able to speak is bringing him to life as a personality," said Jason Levine, Senior Director for Marketing at Planters, "people can engage with him more." Prior to this, people were not connecting with Mr Peanut beyond the nostalgia. However, nostalgia is not what it used to be, particularly when it comes to younger consumers. Mr Peanut needed to be perceived as old-school rather than dull, out-of-date and old-fashioned. Conforming to what Mintel International Group, a research company, is calling the "new retro", Mr Peanut needed to appear from an earlier era yet still worthy of respect (Elliott, 2010).

Regardless of his new look, Mr Peanut is still worthy of respect as Planters plan for his *Naturally Remarkable* world to come to life. Efforts have been made by Global Green Initiative and The Corps Network to bring Mr Peanuts' extravagant virtual world into the real world by firstly revamping rundown city parks making them greener, and secondly by transforming neglected land into natural spaces, in select communities across America. Renowned landscape architect Ken Smith was approached to design the spaces with a whimsical touch befitting of the Planters brand and its iconic character Mr Peanut (Maglaris & Lustig, 2010). Jason Levine articulates, "We decided it was important to allow consumers to experience the idea of making the world a little more naturally remarkable than we found it".

6.3.7 Summary: Nuts about it

The success of Planters, the snack food company best known for its processed nuts, was down to its founder's passion for advertising and promotion. As the first peanut manufacturer to advertise nationwide, it generated repeat business through name recognition. In what can be described as an early example of co-creation, the infamous Mr Peanut was born. For 97 years, he stood tall and proud as the official spokescharacter for the brand. Used as the face of Planters, he appeared both in the forefront and in the background of packaging design, featured in print advertisements, various colouring books and guides, traditional TV advertising, billboards advertising and countless memorabilia.

Since his inception, Mr Peanut has undergone numerous revamp iterations. Always retaining his top-hat, monocle and cane, his most recent rejuvenation effort has seen the addition of a flannel suit. Mr Peanut's new look has turned him back to what he truly is, a peanut – peanut

size, peanut colour and peanut texture. For the first time in 2010, Mr Peanut was also given a voice. A high level of detail and sophistication was added into his virtual world which also parallels Planters' ever-growing product ranges. Mr Peanut's multi-dimensional world was analysed to reveal the three prominent literary genres of Comedy, Action and Sport. Comedy literature was selected because Mr Peanut utilises a range of comedic literary devices that appear in spoken and written language, as well as moving and fixed images. Action literature was chosen because Planters' brand narrative is filled with explosions, fast cars, danger, chases and beautiful women. And finally, Sport literature was picked because Mr Peanut is an avid sports player who communicates the importance of achieving a healthy lifestyle through balanced nutrition and regular physical exercise.

Additional analysis has revealed that Mr Peanut has had a large significant effect on raising the status of peanuts in society. He also helps reflect a major change in American culture and the birth of the American Dream. Sports provide a means to 'live the dream' of opportunity, ability and achievement through sporting heroes. As a significant literary genre in the Planters' brand narrative, consumers can 'live the dream' through Mr Peanut winner or countless medals, awards and trophies. The 'Naturally Remarkable' campaign, which grew and matured adding complexity to Mr Peanut's imaginary realm, has extended out into the real world to ensure it is left more naturally remarkable than it was found.

Chapter 7. Findings 2 – Consumer engagement with marketing mascots

This findings chapter conceptualises the attitudes and behaviours of consumers towards anthropomorphic marketing mascots within the parameters of Social Media. Here, a grounded hermeneutic approach was utilised to analyse data collected via the three methodologies of netnography, online interviews and photo-essays. In this chapter, I aim to address objective 6: To explore and analyse consumer engagement with the brand via their engagement with anthropomorphised marketing mascots. Analysis revealed six distinct ways in which consumers engage with marketing mascots within the parameters of Social Media. These have been labelled as: Imitation, Devotion, Participation, Dissemination, Observation and Guardianship. Consumer engagement is perceived to have an effect on the narrative of marketing mascots.

7.1 The route to conceptualisation

To investigate the attitudes and behaviours of consumers towards anthropomorphised marketing mascots, the three methodologies of netnography, online interviews and photo-essays were utilised for data collection. Sections 5.4.2, 5.4.3 and 5.4.4 provide an extensive explanation of these data collection methods and justifications for their usage. For analysis, a grounded hermeneutic approach was utilised to understand consumer attitudes and behaviours towards anthropomorphised marketing mascots. After following the sequence of analytic moves explained in Section 5.5.1, a more sophisticated level of abstraction was achieved. The close coordination between the analysis of data and the existing relevant body of knowledge has allowed for the conceptualisation of consumer engagement with marketing mascots within the parameters of Social Media.

Firstly, during the initial periods of time, where long durations were spent surveying online activities of the case study characters and their followers on Facebook, the four styles of online community membership and participation identified by Correll (1995) – regulars, newbies, lurkers and bashers – were observed. These four styles were very much apparent in Facebook's online communities for all three case study characters. As indicated in Section 5.4.2, I was a lurker myself and chose not to make apparent my developmental progression.

Considering both netnography data and online interview data, diverse actions and attitudes were beginning to emerge. Early analysis returned eighteen distinct behaviours towards the anthropomorphised marketing mascots. The social and historical contexts of the data were considered during their hermeneutic interpretation (Thompson, Pollio, & Locander, 1994). Following Strauss & Corbin (1990) and Spiggle (1994), these eighteen initially identified

conducts were inductively classified into a more sophisticated level of abstraction that capture the structural and functional similarities within, and differences between, each grouping.

After numerous attempts at abstracting the identified behaviours, six all-encompassing categories were emergent. To contextualise these findings, the six emergent categories of performed consumer behaviour are presented, described and exemplified in this chapter using evidence from online interviews and netnographic material. The subsequent section focuses on presenting the attitudes and behaviours of consumers towards anthropomorphic marketing mascots within the parameters of Social Media. These parameters are an important aspect to keep in mind as individuals who do not utilise Social Media (Facebook in particular) were ignored during conceptualisation. Please refer back to Sections 5.4.3 for justifications and Section 5.3 for interviewee selection criteria.

In this chapter, you will notice plentiful spelling and grammar mistakes in the data. These have been left on purpose in order to keep the integrity of the data – meaning, interviewee responses and netnographic material are in their original state. At risk of stating the obvious, not all consumers behave in the same manner towards their followed marketing mascot. Interactions between consumers and mascots are of differing degrees and depend highly on a consumer's willingness to immerse themselves within the virtual world of their liked marketing mascot. For example, when an interviewee was questioned about whether or not she has purchased meerkat related Christmas presents, she responded, "No didn't, too old for things like that. Only dust traps!!" (Interview, Female, 55-64). In this example, the interviewee perceived her age to be a barrier to her immersion.

Online interviews and netnographic data has confirmed my assumption that the majority of consumers are not aware of the entirety of their followed mascot's marketing campaign. This is true for all three case studies. The following quote provides a good example: "didn't realise they [Compare the Market] had a book out to be honest with you.. it's a good idea… I wouldn't go out my way to get it, but if I had kids I suppose I would be more likely to get them" (Interview, Male, 25-34). The conceptualisations presented in this chapter take into consideration consumers' diverse levels of immersion and their dissimilar awareness of the intricacies within their liked mascot's marketing campaign.

7.2 Conceptualising consumer engagement

7.2.1 Forms of consumer engagement

Six all-encompassing forms of consumer engagement were identified after numerous attempts at abstraction. This section presents, describes and exemplifies these forms of engagement using evidence from online interviews and netnographic data.

1) Imitation: it is consumers' inclination to emulate their liked mascot. In its extreme forms, it is impersonation and identity theft whereby people highjack a spokes-character's identity and post on their behalf on Social Media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. For example, a fan purporting to be Orange and using an image of Orange as a display picture states:

> *"I think I was abducted by some little green geckos and then implanted with a tiny pretzel. Though I could be mistaken. :/"* (Netnography)

More commonly, imitation is performed in three ways: it is the replication of accent/writing style/speech, the copying of slogans/catchphrases and the duplication of pictures (to use as profile pictures for example). Consumers who imitate can become obsessive over the correct use of terminology. For example, referring to M&M's original chocolate as 'Plain' is frowned upon. Plain M&M's have been abolished since the year 2000; they are now referred to as 'Milk chocolate'.

The copying of slogans/catchphrases is a wide spread practice. As previously mentioned in Section 6.1.2, Aleksandr's catchphrase 'Simples' has in less than a year become a light-hearted conversational affectation.

> *"Its now a worldwide phenomenon, "Simples" will be the phrase to stop war, end suffering and unite the world in peace and happiness :)"* (Netnography)

> *"My four year old nephew does the Alexandr 'squeek' when I say, 'Simples' to him! It's great!! He adores you Mr. Meerkat!"* (Netnography)

People like Aleksandr. The texture of the comments he posts on Facebook captures the imagination of his followers.

> *"Alexandr is a good character that compare the market have developed. He speaks in his own quirky way which is quite endearing, a bit like Yoda in starwars I guess."* (Interview, Male, 25-34)

Thus it is hard to miss the willingness of his whimsical fans to play along with the idea and to copy him. For instance, in one Facebook post Aleksandr complains, "I am suffer from very large stomach pain. It take real 'battering' from too many pancakes eatings!" This comment provoked a sizable but characteristic response from his followers. Aside from acquiring 1139 likes, many followers were inspired to make comments of their own. Some mimicked the hallmark Aleksandr-style wordplay: "So sad you is feelings not too goods... takings Alka Selsters will soolves the stomachs problems". Others exclaimed, "you should eat Mongoose Pie the ingreedients are SIMPLES" and "did you have beatles and grubs on them?" Whatever the response, almost everyone willingly suspended their disbelief (Baldwin, 1982) just to be part of this fictional tall tale. Similarly for Mr Peanut, and the M&M's spokescandies, fans too play along with them. In one of his Facebook posts Mr Peanut says: "Today is ask a stupid question day. So go for it–whoever asks the stupidest question will win, and lose." This post generated 567 responses from followers playing along: "What do you mean by stupid question????" and "How stupid, does a question have to be, to be considered a stupid question?" Other more imaginative responses included: "If guns don't kill people, people kill people; does that mean that toasters don't toast toast, toast toast toast?" and "is a zerba black with whits strips or white with black strips?"

2) Devotion: As a performed behaviour, devotion refers to consumers' level of commitment towards a brand/mascot and the ways in which these consumers display their loyalty. As expected, there are varying levels of devotion. Commonly, consumers who are devoted to the brand/mascot show a high level of commitment by going one step further than the casual consumer. Firstly, this can be in the form of elaborate collections – including official and non-official merchandise, packaging, print adverts, displays etc.

Unquestionably, great care, time and effort go into the development of merchandise. As a fairly young marketing mascot (under 5 years old) Aleksandr Orlov officially has a total of 6 cuddly toys, an autobiography and 6 story books to collect. However, as mentioned in Section 6.1.2, meerkat 'fever' has seen the development of meerkat dolls, soft toys, garden sculptures, figurines, mugs, coasters, calendars etc. Consumers who are highly devoted to Aleksandr go even further to collect such meerkat related non-official merchandise.

M&M's on the other hand have thousands of collectable merchandise. With four M&M's World stores and five airport locations, M&M's sell collectable merchandise that spans clothing garments, key rings and countless household items. On Social Media, fans very

openly, proudly and willingly share images of their collections. Figure 7.3 provides such an example. Additionally, statement such as "I love my m&m collection. All of then I have over hundreds of then from t shirt's, calanders. I love my collection" are also very common uttered.

Figure 7.1 Individual private collection of M&M's merchandise

Source: Compiled by Author - original images from https://www.facebook.com/mms

Similarly, Mr Peanut has thousands of collectables. With many fans interested in collecting Mr Peanut merchandise (Figure 7.4 below illustrates numerous private collections of Mr Peanut memorabilia), these devotees have formed a club named Peanut Pals (See Section 6.3.1). Considered brand advocates, these individuals display a high level of brand loyalty. They also portray a high sense of pride and a strong sense of ownership.

Figure 7.2 Numerous private collections of Mr Peanut memorabilia

Source: Compiled by Author - original images from Peanut Pals private collections, and http://www.journalnow.com/news/local/article_a858374e-5bcf-5fa0-a0de-ad659d632ca2.html?mode=image&photo=0

A second form of devotion comes from the literal meaning of the word which is choosing to involve oneself in or to commit oneself to something. Consumers display their commitment to the brand mascot by proposing: "Aleksandr marry me ;) xx". They may also display their commitment to the product. In Figure 7.5, a loved-up fan decides to wed a bag of M&M's Pretzel. He dresses it in a tissue veil and places a ring on one of its corners. In support of the shared image he utters "Just so you know, I'm in love with your pretzel M&Ms and I'm not afraid of commitment…"

Figure 7.3 A consumer displays his love for M&M's Pretzel

Source: https://www.facebook.com/mms

Thirdly, a high level of devotion is evident in the form of tattoos. Regardless of the underlying reasons behind getting them[54], many devotees have engraved their favourite mascot on their bodies (shown in Figure 7.6) and expressed it verbally e.g.:

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[54] The reasons behind getting a brand related tattoo is beyond the scope of this thesis but is an interesting avenue to investigate in the future.

"I hope this isn't creepy for you Mr. Peanut…. But you have a special place in my heart (and my leg.)" (Netnography)

"I love M&M's and have a tattoo… It's just a green M&M oval and no legs hands or anything else" (Interview, Female, 45-54)

Figure 7.4 Tattoos of marketing mascots

Source: Compiled by Author – original images from Facebook, and Google

Lower levels of devotion are also evident in both interview and netnographic data. These include the use of marketing mascots as a theme for weddings and birthdays; as mobile ring tones, "love him [Aleksandr], used to have him as my text message tone on my mobile" (Interview, Female, 45-54); and as baby names. In the same way that the popularity of the Compare the Meerkat campaign has been greatly responsible for an increase in parents christening their newborns Aleksandr (Bradshaw, 2010; Gold, 2010), M&M's fans are increasingly naming their children so as to have mms or mnm as their initials.

3) Participation: The performed behaviour of participation incorporates consumers taking part in games, competitions and conversations. It is based on the brand's effort to provide

opportunities for participation by investing in the running of competitions and games, as well as the development of websites and mobile phone applications.

4) Dissemination: This performed behaviour refers to the wide sharing of personal information which has been made effortless through the use of the Internet generally and Social Media more specifically. As a form of consumer engagement, people are willingly sharing anecdotes, personal stories and experiences, including pictures on the Facebook pages of their favoured spokes-characters. What makes dissemination different to participation is firstly, here fans share information willingly without taking part in conversation, and secondly, through their sharing of information, individuals are placing themselves within the narrative of the brand without influencing the plot or backstory of the characters. As a form of dissemination, the following passages provide examples of story sharing:

"I can eat a whole medium bag in about a half hour! LOVE THESE THINGS! It's a love hate relationship to be honest with you. Love them because of their chocolaty and pretzel goodness, hate then because they put weight on my body. Why does something you love have to be so mean back? NOT FAIR! }:o(" (Netnography)

"What a terrible day. I pushed D4 on the vending machine instead of D7 and now I'm looking at a 3 Musketeers bar instead of Peanut M&Ms. I'm devastated." (Netnography)

"My mom used to always say this same thing when she would give us peanuts "A peanut sat upon a track, his heart was all aflutter... the 8:15 came roaring through, "toot toot peanut butter!" My dad hated it LOL" (Netnography)

"once in college, I was wasted after a football game and we drove past Mr. Peanut. I yelled out the window, 'Mr Peanut' Mr Peanut waved! I then yelled, 'Show us your nuts' Mr Peanut shook his fist at us. Lol" (Netnography)

In another illustration of dissemination, Aleksandr confesses in a Facebook post, " I make Halloween trick and switch Sergei's sugar pot for salt, but he seem to barely notice. In fact he seem to enjoy it more. His tasting buds must be broken". This comment provoked followers to share similar anecdotes of their own. For instance, one respondent wrote, "When I was a child I sprinkled sugar over my fish and chips thinking it was salt! Yuk".

The self-placement of individuals within the narrative of the brand adds texture for other fans and casual publics visiting the page. Imagination plays a big role in this as evident here:

"Aleksandr, I am professor of meerkosis at university of meerskvo. Hav u ever had assessments for mentalist health? You display all bad traits of psychokatic personalities!" (Netnography)

It is important to note that the forms of consumer engagement are not mutually exclusive and therefore cannot be perceived as ridged boxes. An individual may engage with their favoured marketing mascot in any of the forms highlighted, and alternate between these different forms as they so please. As such, dissemination is often intertwined with imitation – fans utilise the same writing style and terminology as their liked spokes-character when sharing personal stories and experiences. For example, in a reply to Aleksandr's petition to end the invasion of dirty muskrats from the 'interwebs', one respondent wrote, "I had to wash my eyeballs out when my skanky ex gf ripped me off, cheated on me and left… SHE'S A MUSKRAT!!".

5) Observation: The performed behaviour of observation links closely to Correll's (1995) definition of 'lurkers'. These are individuals who have 'liked' the page of their favourite marketing mascot, often read status updates and comments, posted very little in a tentative manner or even nothing at all. As one interviewee puts it, "Well I like the page and get updates in my time line occasionally. I don't look at the page very often if ever though tbh… I think one of my friends liked something a while back which appeared in my timeline and I thought it was good so I liked it" (Interview, Male, 25-34)

6) Guardianship: Occasionally, bashers (as referred to by Correll 1995) or killjoys make their way onto the Facebook pages of the marketing mascot, leaving distasteful messages such as ""No offence but all u lot talkin to Alexander are R.E.T.A.R.D.S! He not real, get over it!" and "Lol @ everyone upset by Aleksandr associating with X Factor. PEOPLE, HE IS AN ADVERTISING CAMPAIGN. Jeez!" and expressing their frustration and irritation through the use of uppercase letters. As such, the final form of consumer engagement, *guardianship*, is evoked. Fans feel the need to stand up against their 'enemies' and protect their much loved spokes-character who to them is 'real'.

"Then why are you so worked up then…? Anyway you're wrong! He's real!" (Netnography)

Guardianship behaviour is not confined to fans against bashers/killjoys. It is the natural instinct that makes people watch over their loved ones and protect them. It is a position of responsibility (Oxford English Dictionary, 1987), and fans do feel responsible for their favourite spokes-character, even if there are being 'bullied' by another virtual character. In a

message directed to Aleksandr, a fan pleads "Please don't insult my Sergei by comparing him to a Mongoose! He is far superior even if he has got betty swallocks!!LOL." To emphaises further, the feeling of responsibility is strongly evident in the following post:

"orange M&M you are the man. Don't let anybody tell you different. If they do let me know because I will take care of them for you." (Netnography)

As indicated in this section, there are six distinct ways in which consumers engage with their favourite marketing mascot within the parameters of Social Media. These have been labelled as: imitation, devotion, participation, dissemination, observation and guardianship. As demonstrated, these performed behaviours often extend beyond the realms of virtual reality and actually affect people's everyday lives. None-the-less, they come back full circle to Social Media as consumers express matters of their everyday lives on the Facebook pages of their favourite marketing mascots.

In order to gain a deeper understanding of consumer engagement, it is insufficient to only look at how consumers behave. An investigation into why consumers behave the way they do is necessary. The subsequent section investigates this further.

7.2.2 Antecedents for consumer engagement

Through comprehending consumer engagement with marketing mascots, a better understanding of consumer engagement with the brand can be gained. As previously stated in Chapter 1, interactivity is one of the most important differentiating features of the internet. It is characterised by an immediate two-way communication and the capability of two entities acting on or influencing each other – in this case, the two entities comprise of consumers and mascots (acting on behalf of the brand). Therefore consumer engagement on the internet – and Social Media more specifically – can be understood by focusing on the interactions that take place between consumers and their favourite mascots on Facebook. The previous section presented the ways in which consumers engage with marketing mascots. However, part of exploring and analysing consumer engagement is to understand the underlying reasons behind why they behave the way they do.

As empirically demonstrated, to engage a consumer is to attract them, to draw them in, to win them over, to hold their attention and to occupy a proportion of their lives. In this section, an investigation into how this has been achieved in all three case studies has been carried out revealing numerous underlying motivations for consumer engagement. These are closely interlinked, overlapping and far from mutually exclusive.

Imagination, curiosity and compassion: Developers of marketing mascots release titbits of narrative that ignite consumers' imagination, curiosity and compassion – these are essential to the initiation of consumer engagement. As Aleksandr Orlov was created in London for a U.K. based price comparison website, one consumer took it upon himself to explain to visitors of Aleksandr's Facebook page from other countries about the character and his origin. Referring to the fact it has captured consumers' imagination, he describes it as 'very quirky' and 'quite compelling'. He encourages visitors to investigate this by teasing their curiosity.

"For non-UK visitors, this started out as a TV advert for a website called "Compare the Market" and took on a life of its own. It's very quirky and quite compelling (especially for Sims or DiscWorld fans who will find a few similarities, I think). So if you've got time to waste, take a look!" (Netnography)

The Compare the Market campaign took a life of its own indeed, in what has been one of the most entertaining interviews, a respondent's imagination runs wild with him when he is asked about Aleksandr Orlov. The respondent conveys his feelings towards the character, describes their antics and clarifies some details about their relationship:

"tell the little russian shit that when i get hold of him im gunna beat him to death with his own shoe , he owes me 30 quid !... me and a few friends invited him to a party so he and his friend sergai turned up and drank all the beer (about 4 crates of stella) , they were both really drunk so i gave them 30 quid to go to the asda 24hour supermarket down durkar so they could get some more beer but they never returned .... iv tried ringing his I-phone loads of times and sent him numerous emails but no reply ... if you see him tell him im not angry im just very dissapointed , we have been friends for a long time and then he goes and does this to me... i know , its upsetting really , he taught me the way of life and thanks to him i was ranked #1 in the 2011 world meerkat comparison competition in moscow .... we speak on the phone now and then , but to be honest since hes got sergai on his team we have grown apart... i vowed that after the incident with the beer i would never give him money again , not even for insurance" (Interview, Male, 18-24)

Despite the tone of the passage being light-hearted and to some extent, it can be argued that the interviewee was not taking the conversation seriously and perhaps he was not, but this none-the-less provides evidence for imagination, and insight into the way marketing mascots are easily involved in the mental manipulation of events outside of immediate reality (Cohen, 2011). The mental manipulation of reality is done with more ease when marketers provide consumers with triggers and suggestive cues. Can you presume what followers think of Mr Peanut in his top hat and flannel suit? One follower says: "You should run for president Mr. Peanut. You remind me of Lincoln. Can you grow a beard for us?" Further to this, consumers are eager to be captivated by mascots, marketing communications and advertising – much to their disappointment when they find out or realise that it is untrue. For example:

"I was disappointed when I tired the 'pretzel' m&m… it's not a little pretzel in there, it's more like a pretzel ball, covered with chocolate. Totally misleading. But I do enjoy the ads' subtle suggestion that they shoved the pretzel up the M&M's butt." (Netnography)

Often, imagination, compassion and curiosity are captured together making it clear that their presence is not mutually exclusive. In the following, a supporter engages her imagination by dressing the meerkats in Christmas attire. She then displays compassion by not having the pluck to reject them. Her curiosity is exposed when she asks Aleksandr if they are related in any way:

"I have 4 meerkats visiting my garden wearing Christmas hats saying they are here for Christmas celebrations (already!!!!) Didn't have the heart to turn them away. Are they cousins of yours Aleksandr if so what are they're names & how do I get hold of scorpions for them?" (Netnography)

Capturing the imagination of consumers, captivating them and evoking their fascination, is often referred to as consumer enchantment (O'Reilly, 2012; Patterson, Khogeer, & Hodgson, 2013) when combined with a sense of entertainment. When aroused by brands, sentiments like enchantment and love form the basis for consumer-mascot relationships. Love, based on the facilitator of compassion, strengthens a consumer's bond with the brand and its mascot, making comments like "Awww poor poor Sergei ☹ xx", "I want to cuddle him come round xx", "Aaaww Yellow you are the Best!!" and "I love you Mr. Peanut..." readily given. It also indicates that consumers are imaginatively more involved with the brand mentally and emotionally as per the following passage:

"I love M&Ms because they're my favorite candy and I love chocolate blue is my favorite the characters are really funny:) I love the way they mix to music with the characters

and they dance I just wish they would mix up all the colors!!.. more of all the colors instead of just 1 or 2 whole neighborhood of different colors the world is full of different people different languages different colors you know… well since I'm a father of 8 children I think they should have some little baby M&Ms up at the hospital would be really funny mother giving birth to some little babies. the olympics are coming up M&Ms from all over the world can compete against each other" (Interview, Male, 55-64)

Entertainment: People are enthused to interact with a company/brand and its marketing mascot in different ways. Entertainment comes through strongly as a sense of fun, amusement and the opportunity to make consumers feel-good about themselves, their surroundings, and their life. Entertainment has been achieved by developers in numerous ways. For Mr Peanut, his physical attributes and dress code induce entertainment. For example:

"Mr. Peanut makes me laugh! … Just the fact that he's a talking peanut in a tophat, wearing gloves, etc. … I have a small, bendable Mr. Peanut in my office to keep my spirits light. I love his monical (spelling)! There is nothing I don't like about Mr. Peanut"(Interview, Female, 45-54)

In other instances, entertainment is achieved by developers generating situational comedy. This is evident in all three case studies. The following passage supports this point from the case study of Aleksandr Orlov:

"well, I like the fact that he is quite funny, ant they always have a funny story on the adverts. The way that he get's quite annoyed about compare the market is good as well. He's really passionate about the Meerkat. not really got any dislikes tbh, he is entertaining on the adverts. Unlike that stupid opera singer on gocompare. Because of that I would never buy from them! And I actually tell people not to go to them as well… haha" (Interview, Male, 25-34)

The interviewee goes further to explain what it means to him to be stimulated by entertainment:

"well it just means that it's not annoying and makes me feel like something isn't being pushed onto me like someone giving you the hard sell! If I have to put up with adverts its better to have ones that are entertaining!" (Interview, Male, 25-34)

People do not like to be forced into things; comedy helps to lower their guard and makes them more accepting of messages and farther willing to purchase. To some extent, perhaps it

even makes them more enthusiastic in encouraging a company to develop related products/merchandise by showing their interest and support. For instance:

"I wish they would put all the m&m commercials together on a DVD, I think it would be a lot more entertaining than the things we can buy on DVDs. Anybody else thing the same way?" (Netnography)

A common attitude displayed by consumers is their eagerness to feel good. "I enjoy reading these pages a bit of fun in our lifes whots wrong with that xx". With negative news on the T.V. and radio all the time – stories of war, murder, rape and theft etc. – people latch on to things that add a little light-heartedness to their everyday. Marketing mascots are seen to give people hope through entertainment, fun and amusement. "Aleksandra…gets you in the spirit of things,bit of light hearted fun in a very sad world" (Interview, Female, 55-64).

Once marketing mascots become intertwined in the everyday lives of people, they start to look forwards to receiving their dose of entertainment from them. "Oh my what a week breaking Dawn comes out and a new orlov ad !! can't wait to see what sergie does he cracks me up". It also helps if the spokes-characters are relatable:

"As far as the humor I think the video commercials are just too funny.. Mrs. Brown for instance is historical to listen to, because she reminds me of everyday people..and a close friend with her actions" (Interview, Male, 35-44)

Liberation and relaxation: Additionally, consumers are enthused to interact with marketing mascots as a form of liberation, relaxation, release and relief from the everyday. Companies are thanked and appreciated when they give people something different and unexpected, which breaks the routines of everyday. For examples, in Figure 7.1, a woman displays her gratitude to M&M's for brightening up her day. This leisure-orientated fun form of liberation is culturally viewed as escapism (Goulding & Shankar, 2004). A term commonly used by consumers as well "Its escapism from a very very stressful job!" However, I have chosen to refer to it as liberation because it is not a permanent attempt to escape reality (Arnould E. J., 2007), just a form of relaxation and stress relief.

Figure 7.5 A display of gratitude from a liberated woman

Source: https://www.facebook.com/mms

Evidence suggests that the majority of liberation and escape narrative is pleasure driven and is a means of coping. This is apparent in the following: "I enjoy aleksandrs daily rants,puts a smile on my face whenever im feeling sad.So keep up the good work boys & behave urselfs.simples" and "Too much sadness and bad things happening in this world - Meerkat fever is such harmless fun and brings a smile!"

Reminiscence: The ensuing quote provides another interesting observation; through reminiscence, the follower was able to reiterate part of the characters' narrative in which Aleksandr discusses the implications of visiting the wrong website (Refer to Section 6.1.2):

"WHEN IS SERGEI GOING TO SORT OUT YOUR NEW WEBSITE?!!! I need to compare meerkats… Getting like that rockgod Vasilly – I can't get no relax… Please sort it out as Yakov is probably losing business and Maiya is probably having an issue right now with explaining diversity to Bogdan. Pull rank Mr Orlov and sort it out. Simples." (Netnography)

Thus, performed behaviour is enthused by reminiscence. Defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* (1987) as "the act or process of recalling past experiences, events etc.; a mental impression retained and revived; a recollection narrated/told", reminiscence as a motive includes memory of the past and present. It also comprises brand familiarity, recall of brands and recent/past adverts, plus anything engaging memory which ultimately leads to increased

interactions. Reminiscence also includes an element of nostalgia. Defined as "the wistful desire to return in thought, and the sentimental yearning for the happiness of a former place" (Oxford English Dictionary, 1987), nostalgia is limited only to past and childhood memories and therefore falls within the boundaries of reminiscence.

Reminiscence maybe encouraged by a company through the release of limited edition vintage style products or the release of past images. For example, on their Facebook page M&M's released a picture of their first ever packaging (See Figure 7.2).

Here's another important Milestone from our Timeline: The first M&M'S Original Milk Chocolate Candies debuted in 1941. Talk about true Originals. I'm getting up there in age. – Ms Brown (Facebook Update 10th April 2012)

Figure 7.6 M&M's first packaging

Source: https://www.facebook.com/mms

This image generated 5.5k likes and over 200 responses from consumers expressing their love for the brand "M&M's....Always have been my chocolate of choice!", their love and support for Ms Brown who posted the picture and feels that she is getting old "Age is just a number, Ms. Brown, you are absolutely beautiful !" , how they want the tin "love this look it would be cool to come out with it one more time" "you should bring that back out in stores", how it remind them of their childhood and sharing anecdotes from the past and stories from when they were young. "I had the pleasure of working for my favorite candy maker for 30 years, still M&MS Plain are my Favorite. and I got to make them, Hackettstown Plant. now I'm Retired." "My Dad was a sheet metal worker and spent many hours in the M&M factory... he brought home M&M's BEFORE they got coated!!!" "I loves M and M candies when I was about 9-10yrs old in 1967 or 1968 same times The Monkees show on every Saturdays morning then night Dakarati lion blind 2 eyes crosses and a deaf chimp. I loved it and ate some candies. I never forget that."

The consumer responses uttered above emphasise that nostalgia is a powerful feeling strongly evident in consumers' interactions with the M&M's brand and their marketing mascots. Similarly, a strong sense of nostalgia is present towards Mr Peanut as reinforced by interviewees below:

"I like Mr. Peanut fine. I remember him for when I was a kid. My mom always bought planters Spanish peanuts." (Interview, Female, 55-64)

"I have a collection of Mr. Peanut items. I like him a lot, because he reminds me of my childhood. One of my young aunts then had a stuffed Mr. Peanut that was really cute. You could get items like this (premiums) when you saved packages of peanuts." (Interview, Female, 45-54)

Companies have an opportunity to strengthen and maintain consumer-brand relationships through the use of reminiscence as a motive. In their everyday lives, consumers do not just build relationships with marketing mascots, they also build them with objects, pets and of course primarily with other humans. The following passage exemplifies that connections are not just made with the spokes-characters, but also with loved ones who adored the spokes-character before them and are no longer around. The mascot thus acts as a reminder and carries a much deeper meaning:

"My Grandma had a Mr. Peanut mechanical pencil that I frequently admired. When I was older and she new I could take care of it, she gave it to me and told me that my Grandpa really loved Mr. Peanut. My Grandpa died when I was one, so I have really treasured that pencil all these years. It is the only thing I have that belonged to my Grandpa. I don't remember my Grandma using any peanuts but Planters in all of the baking she did!" (Netnography)

Experiencing family members utilising a brand, and hearing about that brand from those family members, increases their sense of familiarity. Brand familiarity, which is also achieved by new companies through consistent messages, is effective for awareness and brand recall, generating more favourable consumer attitudes. When an interviewee was asked about her purchase intentions and motivations, she replied:

"Name recognition and familiarity. I simply liked that brand since childhood and still do. I have possibly tried some other brands, but they don't stick in my mind like Planters. Nabisco and Planters are quintessential in my view." (Interview, Female, 45-54)

Evidently, reminiscence, brand familiarity and nostalgia are a strong motivation for performed behaviour which ultimately has an impact on consumer engagement. As reminiscing involves the ability to remember things from the near or distant past, it is

essentially used by consumers for the recall of brands and the recall of adverts. The following examples demonstrate consumers' ability to recall the brands and adverts:

"Aeksandr means cheap car insurance I guess. That's his catch phrase an it sticks with you I think… Well, I think of the meerkat and would then remember the compare the market I suppose" (Interview, Male, 25-34)

"Got to love them they are trying to keep up with marketing, but my FAV is the commercial where the women wants a snack and the mman is getting it and the M&M's are throwing food at him,,, I crack up every time I see it……" (Netnography)

"Yes Oh Peanut Friend You make me laugh, you make me smile, and I love the commercials – especially the Halloween one and Christmas – We need more M&M's" (Netnography)

"The characters are cute I like that they made a female character the green m&m and now also there is a brown female m&m and the advertisement commercials are funny. M&ms have always been my favorite candy regardless of this new cute characters but it sure makes it even better becuase it makes me laugh each time I see that commercial about the guy m&m dancing and the girl m&m is like : oh no lol" (Interview, Female, 25-34)

Companionship: Some consumers are invigorated to interact with marketing mascots in order to achieve personal growth (Arnould & Price, 1993), relieve loneliness (Forman & Sirnan, 1991; Stern, Thompson, & Arnould, 1998), gain social support (Thompson, 1996), feel socially connected (Adelman & Ahuvia, 1995; McGrath, Sherry, & Heisley, 1993) and to fill personal deficiencies. People who have a personal deficiency are likely to use characters and mascots as companions to fill a void. Thus as a rationale, companionship targets peoples' need for fulfilment and friendship. Companions are also a source of reassurance and support. As expressed in the passages below, characters act as comfort figures for consumers in the same way that comfort dolls provide security for children:

"My son (aged 6) lost his Meerkat in the Canary Islands a few weeks ago - I put up a big reward and someone found 'Naykat' and brought him home to the Uk - we spent 8 hours driving to the East Midlands airport to get him. Naycat is a familiy member - we all thought sick for the week he was away. He had the Meerkat handpuppet since a tiny baby and even now just the touch can send him off to sleep xxx" (Netnography)

"Mr. Peanut is a true friend. No matter what happens, Mr Peanut has got your back. Bullies steal your lunch money? Don't worry, Mr. Peanut is there. Skinheads giving you a hard time cause of your Yarmulke? No sweat, Mr. Peanut will fight them off with his kung fu skills and his kick-ass cane" (Netnography)

Despite Mars not advertising to children under 12, the M&M's spokescandies are building companionship with comsumers from a very young age. In a netnographic post made by a mother about her daughter, a picture of the child is posted together with the following statement:

> "Hey M&M's This is my daughter *****, she is 8 years old and has Cerebral Palsy, and this is her one true love!!! She loves everything and anything M&M's!!! Her collection has just gotten restarted after she lost all of hers in a recent house fire, just wanted to take a min to let you guys know how much she loves her 'M&M Guys'!!! Thanks and have a great New Year!!" (Netnography)

Evidently, companionship is a strong underlying motive for performed behaviour. Increasing this sense of companionship strengthens the consumer-mascot relationship, even more so if the mascot is similar to the consumers. As stated by Peltier (2010, p. 188) "we tend to like people and things that are similar to us and familiar. We like people who look and dress like us… We also tend to attribute positive qualities to people we like… We tend to like people who have a similar back-ground to our own, and it pays to find something in common with someone you are trying to influence." This is true for marketing mascots and is highly evident in the examples below:

> "[Referring to Sergei] I like the geeky one with the glasses, but that's probably just because I'm a a computer geek as well! Haha… I don't wear glasses but I am deffo a geek! Might get some of those fashion glasses" (Interview, Male, 25-34)

> "I think the M&M's character are cute, green and brown of course are my favorite cause I am a woman" (Interview, Female, 45-54)

> "Green my favorite color and the fact that she is female and in the commercials she is making all the guy m&ms melt becuase she is acting sexy lol" (Interview, Female, 25-34)

> "Ms. Brown and Ms. Green, how about wearing sneakers? That's what my daughters and I wear… not go-go boots…" (Netnography)

Companionship does not refer solely to consumers. In the same way that perhaps mascots are used to fill a void, this need for relationships and happy endings – which is what makes romantic comedies a popular genre – is reflected in consumers wanting to see the spokes-characters have relationships of their own. Remarks encouraging companionship amongst mascots are plentiful: "isn't it about time you found a nice lady meerkat for Sergei"; "Alexander its about time you settled down and produce many meerpups to fill big mansion"; "Could Blue and Ms. Brown ever have a successful romantic relationship?"

Confusion: When faced with a sense of confusion, people are propelled to ask questions and interact with marketing mascots. As a motive confusion fulfils humans' need to search for answers and meaning (Cohen, 2011). For example:

"Who decided to have the M&M candy pieces have Caucasian arms and legs? Arent they chocolate under their candy coat? Shouldnt they then have brown skin?" (Netnography)

"So... would the human equivalent of this be like a woman eating babies while posing in front of a fountain of blood?" (Netnography)

"Peanut butter Doug sounds weird -- why not Peanut Butter Pete at least? Or Penny? Alejandro might be funny!" (Interview, Female, 45-54)

As demonstrated in this section, there are numerous antecedents for consumer engagement. Promotional, communicational and informational messages transmitted via traditional advertising platforms (e.g. TV) and via Social Media (e.g. Facebook) provide titbits of narrative that ignite consumers' imagination, curiosity and initiate a sense of compassion within them. As these anthropomorphic mascots live in the realm of make belief, they cannot exist without imagination – imagination and creativity from their developers that is ultimately passed over to the consumer. Additionally, without curiosity and interest, consumers would not invest any of their valuable time to interact with the mascots. Finally, without the ability to ignite a feeling of compassion and tenderness, consumers have no reason to care or pay attention to the marketing mascot. Additionally, motivations for consumer engagement have been demonstrated and categorised as entertainment, liberation, reminiscence, companionship and confusion.

7.2.3 The effects of consumer engagement

Further to understanding the underlying reasons behind consumer engagement, an enquiry into the effects of consumer engagement is valuable especially since nothing exists in isolation. The forms of engagement discussed in Section 7.2.1 are perceived to have an effect on the narrative of marketing mascots. Consumers engaging in conversation with their liked spokes-characters are co-creating (Vargo & Lusch, 2008) brand narratives. This is seen to have an effect on the plot and backstory of all three spokes-characters. For example,

Aleksandr, in his witty humorous manner, replies to some of the comments left by his fans on his Facebook page (See Figure 7.7).

Figure 7.7 Co-creation of brand narrative with Aleksandr Orlov

Source: https://www.facebook.com/Comparethemeerkat

Similarly, consumers send their fan pictures to M&M's USA. Every Friday, M&M's select the best fan picture and posts it onto their Facebook page, supported by an entertaining comment from one of the M&M's spokescandies. In Figure 7.8, Blue questions the rationale behind being placed at the back behind Yellow. In addition to this initial co-creation of narrative, followers have commented on the picture continuing the dialogue.

Figure 7.8 Co-creation of brand narrative with M&M's

Source: https://www.facebook.com/mms

When a fan decided to carve his hair in the image of Mr Peanut, and post a picture of it on Mr Peanut's Facebook page, Mr Peanut could not help returning the compliment. Figure 7.9 shows an image of Mr Peanut with this peanut shell carved in the image of his adoring fan. These examples further emphasise that the participation of consumers in conversation with their liked spokes-character leads to the co-creation of brand narrative, thus further enriching the stories which have been analysed into literary genres.

Figure 7.9 Co-creation of brand narrative with Mr Peanut

Source: https://www.facebook.com/mrpeanut

As illustrated, two-way communication between mascots and consumers exists on Social Media providing evidence that brand narratives are co-created. Through their participation, consumers can feel that they are in control (Hede & Watne, 2013), which is a basic human motivation (Rucker, Galinsky, & Dubois, 2012), and thus enhancing their emotional attachment with the mascot and brand. It is not always easy to determine however how people will react to the words and actions of marketing mascots. According to Baldwin (1982, p. 96), animated characters can "create a world of fantasy for a product in a way that makes puffery palatable. Cartoons can get away with doing and saying things that real (live) people cannot". In all three case studies, this was not supported. Spokes-characters were substantially criticised for their behaviour and the subliminal messages that they convey. For example, Aleksandr has often been harsh towards his I.T. manager Sergei, offering him only five minute breaks and mostly 'bossing him' around. He has also shown dislike and prejudice towards mongoose and muskrats. As such, the following consumer responses were generated:

"Aleksandr. I am very worried. I feel your comments are promoting ill feelings between different races. I am not happy ☹" (Netnography)

"i dont like Aleksandr i think hes a bully if he was realy i would take him to court for been a bully ." (Interview, Female, 35-44)

As focusing on consumer attitude towards the mascot is one of the most important predictors of attitude toward the brand (Walker & Dubitsky, 1994), it is essential for companies to take

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on board, to a large extent, consumer opinions. CompareTheMarket.com did take on bored the criticisms of their consumers and have worked towards improving Aleksandr's character by showing the public a softer side to him. This has reflected back positively on consumer attitudes:

"hes a better boss I know some people will not have like to the change I think it is better for the children to have something to look up to than 1 that is the a bully I like the adverts just befor coronation street comes on when thy are walking down the street and crossing the road I think that is very funny and I watch for it all the time I would like to know what other people think now he has changed" (Interview, Female, 35-44)

According to Callcott & Phillips (1996), advertisers must explore the symbolism and stereotypes that surround a particular spokes-character to determine whether these associations are desirable for their brands, especially as these associations evolve over time. Looking back to the now extinct Joe Camel, it was argued that his familiar cartoon figure gave children the false impression that smoking a cigarette is fun and harmless (Ravitch & Viteritti, 2003). M&M's are now treading on comparable grounds. Through their advertising, and the material illustrated in M&M's burlesque literature, it seems there is simply no escaping the sexualised messages of western culture (Everson & Everson, 2005). Determining how people will react to such campaigns is not easy, and there is often mixed responses demonstrated. The following responses are supportive:

"OMG OMG OMG I am loving this! Take it off, take it ALL off, baby! Way to go, green! I am jade with envy! Come here, you sexy thing, you! How can you top that?! I'll tell ya…. Wait for it… wait for it…. ::drum roll:: I'm thinking sunset, posed lying on the beach with the tide coming in over you without your 'suit', body propped on your hands, bare of course with your chocolate behind exposed this time, giving us that excellent dark smile of yours. Love, LoVe, LOVE YOU!!" (Netnography)

"Adorable! You are definitely eye 'candy!'" (Netnography)

On the other hand, many consumer responses are against M&M's advertising and the subliminal messages they portray:

"this is so stupid. What are we teaching our kids? That is ok to be a whore or its ok to dress like a skank? Good god people think about the kids" (Netnography)

"Sure, it's cute, but think about it. Do you really want to promote this kind of sexuality with candy, that is exposed to kids? Don't we have enough sex in the media without 'degrading' out M&M's?" (Netnography)

"I was very dismayed to see you latest commercial and the fact that it was eluding to sex… I understand that you want people to buy you product but at what cost??? I personally buy m and m's for the grandchildren but have decided not to anymore because of your commercial…. C'mon do you really have to do to the extent of stripping to get people to buy your product???? That is a sorry state of affairs if you feel that way go back to having m and m's a kid's enjoyment I and others would really appreciate your consideration on this matter" (Netnography)

"M & Ms, you are marketing sexism to kids by keeping female characters in the minority and in high heels" (Netnography)

M&M's have demonstrated no consideration for people's negative opinions towards the brand and to this date, continue to produce advertising with sexual connotations. This will surely have an effect on consumer perceptions and will influence their purchase intentions (Garretson & Niedrich, 2004).

Marketing mascots are perceived to have an impact on the purchase intentions of consumers; consistent with Callcott & Phillips (1996), several respondents have admitted to purchasing products because of the spokes-character used, which they found appealing. In addition, consumers use characters as memory cues when choosing products; more often than not, they buy a product just because they like a certain mascot and recognise it (especially if it is a non-comestible product):

"U is a leg Aleksandr wen I'm older I'm gonna get my car insurance from u how ever shit the price" (Netnography)

This further confirms the work of Callcott & Phillips (1996) that respondents tend to like brands that are associated with the characters that they like. It has also been previously noted by Urde (1994) that likable spokes-characters increase attention and brand liking as well as impacting purchase behaviour and brand loyalty. However, Veer (2013) argues in his paper which investigates the use of anthropomorphism to promote product kinship in young consumers, that it may not be worthwhile to anthropomorphise a product itself, as that may actually detract from a child's consumption of the product, but rather, to anthropomorphise characters that then consume the product or even the process of consumption itself. To a certain extent, this has been supported by the data, for instance:

"I have not eaten M&Ms in a long time. Who wants to eat little cute creatures who look like people and have fears like people do? Years ago, they were just sugar covered pieces of chocolate!!" (Netnography)

As has been demonstrated in this section, consumer engagement is seen to have an effect on the narrative of marketing mascots. The co-creation of brand narratives epitomises interactivity and emphasises the centrality of two-way communication to the success/failure of a marketing mascot. Additionally, spokes-characters are criticised in the same way as their human counterpart for their behaviour and the subliminal messages they convey. Companies need to focus on consumer attitudes towards marketing mascots as they provide a valuable predictor of attitude towards the brand.

7.3 Summary

The attitudes and behaviours of consumers towards anthropomorphic mascots within the parameters of Social Media were conceptualised in this chapter. Firstly, six all-encompassing forms of consumer engagement were identified: (1) *imitation* captures consumers' inclination to copy their liked mascot (2) *devotion* displays consumers' level of commitment towards a brand/mascot (3) *participation* incorporates consumers taking part in games, competitions and conversations (4) *dissemination* encapsulates the wide sharing of personal information, stories and anecdotes (5) *observation* relates to lurkers who often read updates and comments but refrain from posting themselves (6) *guardianship* involves the protection of their much-loved mascot.

Secondly, this chapter delves into the antecedents for consumer engagement in order to gain a better understanding of the underlying reasons behind why consumers behave the way that they do. Numerous interlinked, overlapping and far from mutually exclusive motivations were uncovered: *imagination, curiosity* and *compassion, entertainment, liberation* and *relaxation, reminiscence, companionship* and *confusion*. Finally, this chapter makes an enquiry into the effects of consumer engagement. The empirical evidence indicates that consumer engagement leads to the co-creation of brand narrative.

Chapter 8. Discussion

This chapter discusses any issues raised as a result of the empirical study and from the initial literature review. It starts by considering the implications of using literary genres as a result of adopting a literary approach. Focusing on genre reading, an examination of comedy as a key construct to the development of a highly likable marketing mascot is carried out. The *Wheel of Literary Genres* model is introduced. To aid practitioners in the development of their own spokes-characters, a discussion regarding the importance and significance of novels, narratives and storytelling is then carried out. This leads towards the idea of fantasy becoming reality, where virtual mascots are treated as if they were other 'real' human beings.

As marketing mascots form an integral part of this thesis, their appeal is discoursed in terms of their influential powers and the high level of consumer engagement they receive. As a form of consumer engagement, imitation is linked to the development of doppelgänger brand mascots. Finally, in this chapter I aim to address objective 7: To contribute to the academic debate on brand anthropomorphism.

8.1 The use of literary genres

Throughout this project, numerous matters have been raised and require further discussion; firstly, adopting a literary approach raises questions regarding the significance of using literary genres. As demonstrated in the case studies, the interpretation of the brand narratives comprised of three popular genres for each marketing mascot. But is it necessary to use three genres? Can more or less genres be used to create mascots? Of course the use of three genres is not written in stone; more or less can be used depending on the brand's strategy however, three is the ideal number – in mathematics, drawing a straight line requires the identification of three points on the graph; in physics, calculating an item's weight, height etc. always calls for three measurements to be made for confirmation; in lab science, experiments are always carried out in threes in order to ensure the data is reproducible. Evidently, three is a prominent number in the natural sciences and it is also increasingly prominent in the arts and humanities. In the Christian faith, the essence of God is always explained in terms of the Trinity. In what may be perceived as advertising's cousin, film producers are increasingly utilising three genres in their motion pictures. Films such as *RED* (2010)*, Hot Fuzz* (2007), *Spy Kids* (2001) and animated feature films such as *Up* (2009)*, Madagascar* (2005) and the *Toy Story* trilogy (2010, 1999, 1995) for example are classified as action/adventure/comedy genre films. Similarly, *Diary of Seduction* (2005), *Carnal Passion* (2001) and *Victim of Desire* (1995) are classified as drama/ thriller/ romance genre films. Undoubtedly, three is the ideal number as it is common to many theories (Brown, 1996).

Another issue raised is, why use literary genres in the first place? Does it not limit creativity and form an obstacle for Creatives in the advertising industry? In literature, *genre* is a word for types of writing; therefore it is also a word for habits of reading (Mullan, 2006). Through reading, people gain expectations that are interlinked with the type of genres experienced. Very often novelists aim to cheat expectations and challenge generic conventions; however, this can only be done if/when readers have expectations that can be cheated. As such, prior conscious/unconscious knowledge of generic conventions is relied upon by novelists. For them, genre does not mean the imposition of rules, but the presence of conventions that may be altered or defied. Without our awareness of genre, the alteration or violation would be meaningless (Mullan, 2006). This applies to the use of literary genres when developing marketing mascots. "Rightly understood, [a genre is] far from being a mere curb on expression that it makes the expressiveness of literary works possible" (Fowler, 1987, p. 20). It is a resource for the writer and not just a category for literary critics. According to Fowler (1987, p. 31), genres are far from inhibiting. They provide positive support for the author. "They offer room, as one might say, for him to write in . . . a proportioned mental space".

8.2   Genre reading

As demonstrated in this thesis, brand narratives can be analysed in terms of literary genres. Additionally, literary genres can be used by marketers to assemble a worthwhile persona for a brand mascot. In the case of Aleksandr Orlov, its anthropomorphic essence is best encapsulated by the three literary genres of Russian, comedy, and adventurous family saga literature. In the case of the M&M's spokescandies, their anthropomorphic quintessence is appropriately captured by the three literary genres of romance, tragicomedy and burlesque literature. And in the case of Mr Peanut, its anthropomorphic spirit is pre-eminently depicted by the three literary genres of comedy, action and sport literature. Immediately one can see that comedy is a common denominator between all three case studies. This raises the following questions: must comedy be used as a core literary genre in order to create a compelling marketing mascot? And if so, if all spokes-characters utilised comedy, then what would make them different and unique?

According to research carried out by Callcott & Phillips (1996), it was revealed that humour plays a large role in spokes-character likability. This is probably why marketers have relied

thus far on comedy when developing their marketing mascot. As a genre, comedy is vast. It is divided into a large variety of sub-genres based on the source of humour, the method of delivery and the context. Such sub-genres include: wit/word play, irony, satire, sketch, sitcom, spoof, surreal comedy, slapstick, improvisation, black and blue comedy, character and prop comedy, cringe and deadpan comedy, insult comedy, musical and observational comedy as well as mockumentary (Please refer to Glossary of Terms for definitions). Combined with other genres therefore it is highly possible to use comedy and still be different and unique.

In their study Callcott & Phillips (1996) identified several types of humour used by spokes-characters. Wit (often described as 'clever'), silly behaviour, and the mere use of animation were identified as humorous. Another type of humour based on surprise is incongruity (Bendinger, 1988). And finally, Callcott & Phillips (1996) identified 'humanity' as comical. As such, anthropomorphism is, in itself, considered humorous. Because laughing out loud is not always an appropriate response, marketers perhaps do not need to take comedy any further than anthropomorphism if all that their strategy requires is a "small smile and a warm feeling of recognition" (Bendinger, 1988). Serious awareness campaigns that convey 'stop smoking' or 'slow down' messages for example, may only wish to ignite a warm feeling in their audience through the use of an anthropomorphic mascot. This allows for their messages to penetrate into the psyche of their audience without undermining the importance of the message. Other companies/brands that sell less desirable items (such as insurance) will perhaps need to rely more heavily on comedy as illustrated in the case study of Aleksandr Orlov.

Of course, other brands seeking to create a compellingly unique mascot might want to draw on completely different genres of their own. To provide assistance, I introduce the *Wheel of Literary Genres* model illustrated in Figure 8.1. The figure consists of two tiers: the core wheel offers the sub-genres of comedy while the outer wheel proposes an assortment of the most popular genres. For a company to create a compelling marketing mascot, I propose that a form (or numerous forms) of comedy is selected from the core wheel, and that two genres are selected from the outer wheel. Rather than speculating in the abstract, imagine if you will a brand owner selecting from the wheel of literary genres (Figure 8.1) the categories of

musical comedy, epic and supernatural[55] literature. Immediately, one can begin to conjure up a backstory of a musically talented superhero[56] with unmatched abilities and super-strength. Dressed in tightly fitted clothing attire and a cape made of feathers, he only communicates in song and rhyme and relies immensely on humorous lyrics to convey his message. His oral delivery is the epitome of epic performance on a grand scale. Furthermore, he has been christened "The Macho Moose".
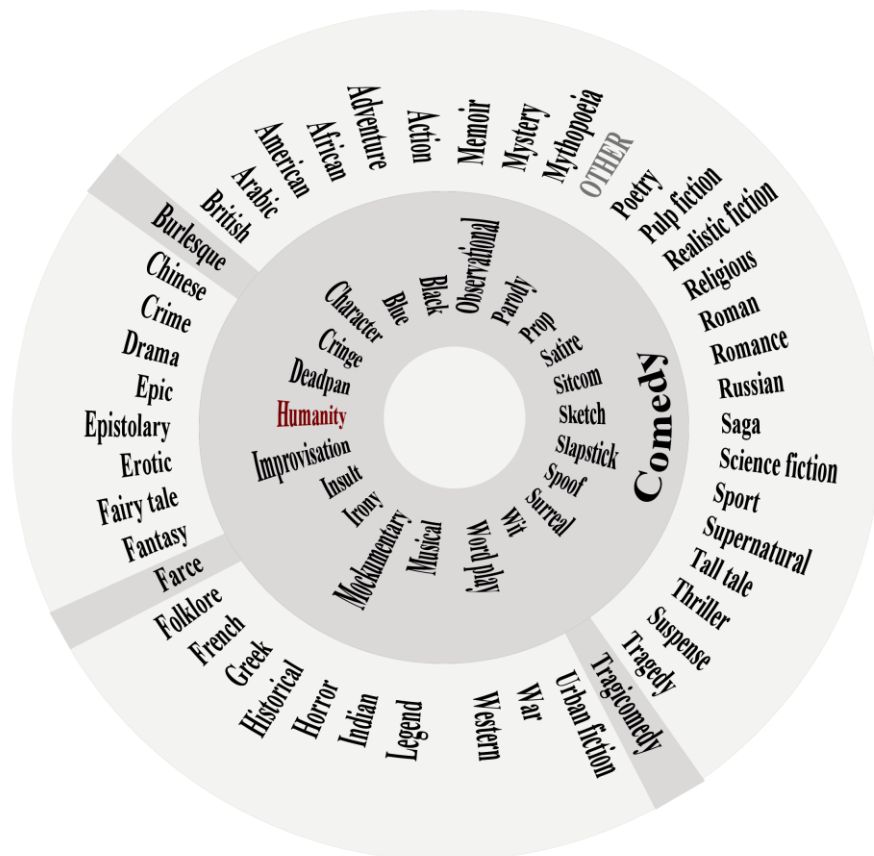
Figure 8.1 Wheel of Literary Genres

The genres of burlesque, farce and tragicomedy have been highlighted because although they are considered genres in their own right, they all exercise humour. Based on Callcott & Phillips (1996) humanity has been included in the core wheel as a form of comedy. The OTHER genre option available in the outer wheel highlights the difficulty of making this model all-inclusive. As such, there is room for genre selection outside the popular choices listed.

Source: Author

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[55] All mascots, in a way, are supernatural. They do not age, if anything, they get younger and become more youthful. Even the mascots that were unfortunate to receive the axe remain immortal in the books of history.

[56] The possession of superhero abilities is all part of the superhuman condition and the anxious public's longing for secular saviours to fight for them against crime and injustice on the streets (Gravett, 2005). This superhero stance has been witnessed in mascots before – The Michelin Man must save the people by giving them the right tire; and the Gieco Gecko must save Americans 15% on their car insurance.

In our first take on this project (Patterson, Khogeer, & Hodgson, 2013), we give the example of Amélie, an alluring and glamorous female alien. Through the selection of the three literary genres of French literature, glamour literature, and science fiction we conjured up her backstory:

"She dresses like a character from the Moulin Rouge in a collection of risqué attire complete with stockings, and she speaks zee English language with a languorous French accent. Though obviously a creature from outer space, she is reminiscent of an exotic feline furry from planet earth. She drives, or rather flies, a retro-futuristic Jetson-style convertible spacecraft . . ."

What these two examples illustrate is how, with very little effort, a thumbnail portrait of a character can be crafted using literary genres. Of course, further research into the selected genres will help enrich the character, making it denser, more interesting and complex. As expressed in the previous section, more or less genres can be amalgamated in the development of marketing mascots however, three as a baseline is ideal. The design of anthropomorphic mascots based on this literary wheel is still free to move with the times and to take on new directions – after all, many genres overlap and have elements in common – however, to show consistency, it should not stray too far from its original design (Patterson, Khogeer, & Hodgson, 2013).

This notion poses an interesting question. Does there need to be a meticulous fit or association between the brand and its anthropomorphic representation? After all, the M&M's spokescandies are made of chocolate, and Mr Peanut is a humanised peanut. However, in the case of Aleksandr Orlov – in what can be described as an initial mystify strategy (Brown S. , 2010) – there is little which instantaneously joins the conceptual world of online insurance quotes with the vibrant and unconventional Russian meerkat. All it needed was the clever plot of Aleksandr being frustrated with consumers getting the wrong website to weld a bond between the two. Fortunately, such narratives are effortlessly crafted that in all likelihood will be well-understood by consumers. Returning to the example of "The Macho Moose", his superhero mission could be to rid the world of mediocre washing-up liquid, toilet paper, pizza, or whatever product you wish to promote.

Based on the examples mentioned and the genre wheel introduced in Figure 8.1, indeed I suggest that the development of a compelling marketing mascot is formulaic in nature. This

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idea has been contrived from John Cawelti's (1976) notion of "formula stories". Cawelti (1976) claims that best-selling novels contain formulaic embodiments – that literary works within the same genre often have notable similarities that render them predictable or unoriginal. In his book, Cawelti (1976) inquired into the nature and connotation of formulaic literature revealing new insights into social and cultural implications. His formulaic approach signifies that audiences have expectations which are tested and upheld – it is the reason why a person may prefer a certain genre and always returns to it; that s/he knows what they are going to get. Presumably, it is this formulaic nature that brings consumers back to interact with the explored marketing mascots on Facebook – they know where to go if they need 'a good laugh'.

To strengthen the brand narrative even further, one can take inspiration from Hede & Watne's (2013) novel approach. Following a qualitative review of over 1000 breweries from online sources and beer companion books, they argue that a sense of place, derived from myths, folklore, and heroes, enables the creation and co-creation of narratives. Although applied in a different context (destination branding), a sense of place, which describes the relationships between people and social settings (Jorgensen & Stedman, 2001), can be used to underpin a spokes-character to a location more strongly. For example, using folklore and myths from Russia would enrich Aleksandr's literary world and add substance to the Russian literary genre.

8.3 Novels, narrative and storytelling

A second issue that has been raised in this thesis and requires further discussion is the prominence of storytelling. Many parts of this thesis, mainly the findings chapters, may seem too descriptive, almost story-like in the information they provide; ultimately this emphasises the importance of storytelling when developing a marketing mascot.

Well-known for their storytelling function are novels. Often praised for being 'gripping', 'compelling' and 'riveting', novels have a unique ability to seize their readers. This is confirmed by their enduring receipt of compliments such as 'I could not put it down' (Mullan, 2006). Since one of the aims of this thesis is to aid marketers in the conception of gripping, compelling and riveting marketing mascots that a communication-hungry-society

cannot get enough of, it is only logical to gain knowledge and inspiration from novels and some of the best novel writers in history.

According to Mullan (2006), some books we read once, some we go back to, but the most valuable literatures are the ones we revisit time and time again. Repetition is the whole point, and it is the whole point in creating a highly appealing marketing mascot – to have consumers come back to it and the brand time and time again. Classic novels by some of the best writers in history, such as Charles Dickens, have people revisiting their work repeatedly with the ability of discovering something new each time. This has been demonstrated in the case study of Aleksandr Orlov. VCCP's utilisation of transmedia planning has ensured that people who are mad about meerkats can return to the brand narrative and discover something new on every occasion.

Well-known for creating some of the world's most memorable fictional characters, Charles Dickens can be regarded as a role model for marketers who want to develop highly memorable marketing mascots of their own. Indeed as proposed by Lazar *et al.* (2006), in the past marketers were able to create equally influential spokes-characters, however, in our increasingly communication-hungry interaction-hungry society, previous mascot models are no longer sufficient. According to Cane (2009), Charles Dickens's motto and method were "make them laugh, make them cry, make them wait". The previous section has addressed laughter through the use of comedy literature as a core genre. Alternatively, as noted by Vincent (2002, p. 32), "the stories that stand the test of time and gain the greatest public sentiment are consistently the stories that provoke negative emotional response"[57]. As such, crying suggests that the stirring of emotion is an essential element of creating memorable mascots – as demonstrated by the case study of M&M's whereby mixed emotions were instigated through the use of sexualised images. Finally, waiting instils a sense of mystery and people love mysteries. Concealing some aspects of the story and revealing them as needed keeps people curious and interested (Cane, 2009).

Another technique used by the great writer W. Somerset Maugham is putting characters in situations that require the making of difficult decisions. Here, the narratives flow naturally drawing people in to know what happens next (Cane, 2009). This technique has been demonstrated in the first case study where Aleksandr needed to make a difficult decision

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[57] For example, *Casablanca*, *War and Peace*, *Psycho*, *Death of a Salesman*, *Hamlet*, *Les Miserables*, and *Terms of Endearment*

regarding Sergei. Sergei was described by Aleksandr as "he is start to lose his marble" and not performing up to par. Consumers were asked for suggestions on what Aleksandr should do and ultimately he made the decision to give Sergei a laptopamabob.

Stories are captivating: they capture the imagination and play on the strings of emotion; they encapsulate and communicate traditions, values and cultural beliefs; additionally, they assist individuals in understanding experiences and their social world (Adaval & Wyer, 1998; Woodside & Chebat, 2001), and they aid in building stronger consumer-brand relationships. Therefore, it is unsurprising that brands that tell stories earn consumer loyalty, whereas those that fail to do so fade into obscurity and become mere commodities (Vincent, 2002). As Gobé (2002, p. xxi) writes, "consumers today not only want to be romanced by the brands they choose to bring into their lives, they absolutely want to establish a multifaceted holistic relationship with that brand, and this means they expect the brand to play a positive, proactive role in their lives". As such, brand strategies should focus on telling stories that inspire and captivate consumers from an emotional-branding standpoint (Roberts, 2004). According to Roberts (2004) they should demonstrate a genuine understanding of consumers' lifestyles, dreams, and goals and compellingly represent how a brand can enrich their lives through storytelling.

Unsurprisingly, academics have increasingly turned their attention to brand storytelling. Further to evidence provided in this thesis, support that the creation of brand meaning is interactive has been presented by brand storytelling literature (Padgett & Allen, 1997; Shankar, Elliott, & Goulding, 2001; Escalas, 2004; Woodside, Sood, & Miller, 2008). The literature stresses the significance of storytelling in the lives of consumers as a mode of communication. Based on the evidence presented in Chapter 7, it is clear that the brand narratives and stories presented in the case studies have truly captivated consumers.

Although thus far narrative and story have been used interchangeably, it is important to draw a distinction between the two terms. A story is primarily a cohesive ordering of events that demonstrate the change in the state of a subject. It often follows a three-act structure consisting of situation, complication and resolution. As highlighted by Vincent (2002), the purpose of this structure is to create rising tension and resolve that tension, leaving the audience with no unanswered questions. A narrative however adds a point of view to the story. As understood by focussing on the root word 'to narrate', a narrative is a story told by a narrator. From the findings in Chapter 6, it is evident that the brand stories have been told

from the perspective of the spokes-characters. And as demonstrated in Chapter 7, this perspective is highly captivating to consumers.

Furthermore, Vincent (2002) advocates the power of storytelling in creating a winning marketing strategy in his book *Legendary Brands*. He believes narrative is a remarkably influential device and an essential component for developing legendary brands. According to him, legendary brands project a sense of celebrity within their consumer base. They take on a human persona and attract followers in the same way that human celebrities do. In essence, they are anthropomorphic. A look into legendary brands further helps in understanding the centrality of storytelling to the development of a highly influential marketing mascot. Legendary brands "stand for concepts, values and objects that consumers use to interpret meaning in their own lives" (Vincent, 2002, p. 7) – concepts and values that can be (or have been) communicated via a brand mascot. As such, I believe one of the keys to developing a legendary brand, is to develop a legendary mascot – an illustrious brand mascot worthy of celebration by many generations to come. The three case studies examined in this thesis, I believe, provide powerful examples of legendary mascots.

8.4   Fantasy becomes reality

The findings presented in Chapter 7, and especially the netnography responses quoted demonstrate that to some extent, despite consumers knowing that the spokes-characters they engage with are not real, they still go on to treat these virtual mascots as if they were other 'real' human beings (Liao, Liu, Pi, & Liu, 2011). This has been increasingly referred to by academics as the 'suspension of disbelief' (Baldwin, 1982).

The inspired fantasy world in which the examined spokes-characters live in can be equated to the fantasy world of TV soaps, series and feature films. The messages and symbols they convey flourish, often seeming more alive than the actual social world humans live in (Thwaites, Davis, & Mules , 1994; Strinati, 1995). When such fantasy world experiences become more real to people than the everyday world (Baudrillard, 1988), this condition is called 'hyperreality'. It is the essence of fantasy becoming reality. Indeed, the social real world shrinks in significance and the lives that people build begin to involve their favoured marketing mascot as illustrated in Chapter 7. What is interesting in all three case studies is that the 'thing' being anthropomorphised is not an actual meerkat, M&M's or a peanut; it is a

digital representation of those things. This makes the mascot a type of anthropomorphised simulacra that is 'more real than real' (Baudrillard, 1994) – in the same way as characters in the popular children's film *Toy Story* (Lanier Jr., Radar, & Fowler III, 2013). Followers emulate their simulacra by copying their style and manner of speech, writing to them or even proposing marriage (as demonstrated by the performed behaviour of devotion).

In the same way that the beginning of a novel is a threshold separating the real world we inhabit from the world the novelist has imagined, drawing their readers in (Lodge, 1992), so too are marketing mascots. As a form of anthropomorphism, they are the key to entering the world imagined by marketers. Handed over, our imaginations form a home in which fiction has the unique capacity to live (Mullan, 2006). As animated spokes-characters, they are more engaging to consumers for "animation can actually take you as far, if not farther, than live action" (McBride, 1991, p. 32). Equipped with brand narratives, marketers can reap the advantageous rewards of storytelling. Stories can make us laugh, cry, and tense up in fear. As such, during a storytelling experience, we project ourselves into the narrative and trick our minds into believing that we are experiencing what the characters experience (Vincent, 2002). For this fantasy world to remain real, marketers are constantly faced with the challenging task of breathing new life into their spokes-characters (Patterson, Khogeer, & Hodgson, 2013). As demonstrated in the case studies, this has been done through the management of seemingly real social media profiles for the characters on Twitter and Facebook, generating staggering levels of consumer engagement and appeal.

8.5 The appeal of marketing mascots

The previously mentioned controversy surrounding Joe Camel and the new concerns surrounding M&M's sexualised messages (see Section 7.2.3), indicate that spokes-characters are highly influential and appealing to people. With this appeal comes a duty. Many people feel that marketers should not use spokes-characters inappropriately; that spokes-characters should not promote certain kinds of products. As such Callcott & Lee (1995) contend that spokes-character success is in part product-dependent. Appropriateness aside, it is important to note that all the tricks in the marketing handbook – including the use of mascots – will not sell poorly fabricated products. For instances where a company/brand develops a highly appealing marketing mascot using literary genres to promote a poor product, I speculate that

the mascot will play on the strings of emotion, enter the consumers' hearts and gain popularity independent of the product. In this case, I would encourage the company/brand to pursue merchandising opportunities.

Further to the points and arguments raised in Chapter 2, a third-generation term for trademarks has been introduced by Roberts (2004); a term which he believes improves on brands in the same way that brands improve on trademarks. His expression is 'lovemarks'. Both findings chapters, and Chapter 7 more specifically, indicate towards consumers falling in love or being in love with the marketing mascots. In many instances, consumers have explicitly expressed their love and admiration for the mascots, which have ultimately resulted in marriage proposals. Evidently, consumers are buying into love, pushing aside the rational needs of the product itself. According to Roberts (2004), the first step to developing lovemarks is to fully embrace emotion – especially since human beings are powered by emotion. As previously indicated in Section 4.1, a successful method of encouraging an emotional connection with consumers is through the use of anthropomorphism. Therefore, it can be deduced that the use of marketing mascots as a form of anthropomorphism leads to the development of lovemarks – brands that consumers are in love with (Roberts, 2004).

The love that consumers feel towards brands due to the use of anthropomorphised marketing mascots (as demonstrated by their popularity and the high level of consumer engagement in Chapter 7) further emphasises their appeal. As has been discovered, one of the forms of consumer engagement towards the spokes-characters is 'imitation'. Expressed in Section 7.2.1 is one extreme form of imitation, impersonation and identity theft. Where people highjack a mascot it can be argued that it leads to the development of a doppelgänger mascot, and ultimately, a doppelgänger brand image. Thompson, Rindfleisch, & Arsel (2006) argue that emotional-branding strategies are conductive to the emergence of a doppelgänger brand image, which they define as a family of disparaging images and meanings about a brand that circulate throughout popular culture. They believe a doppelgänger brand image can undermine the perceived authenticity of an emotional-branding story, and thus the identity value that the brand provides to consumers. However, Thompson *et al* (2006) propose that rather than merely being a threat to be managed, a doppelgänger brand image can actually benefit a brand by providing early warning signs that an emotional-branding story is beginning to lose its cultural resonance. The case study findings reveal quite the contrary. There is no netnographic or interview evidence that display early warning signs for loss of cultural resonance. If anything, consumers are aware of imitators and mascot highjackers and

pay little attention to them. Claims that Mr Peanut is gay (Rudnick, 2010) for example, have been shared by three thousand two hundred users on Facebook, but little evidence suggests that this has had an impact on Mr Peanut himself or the Planter's brand. Similarly, a parody video showing Aleksandr being shot to death was uploaded on YouTube in 2009 by TemplePhantom. The video has accumulated over twelve thousand four hundred views, but to date, there is no evidence to suggest that Aleksandr is indeed dead or even close to dying. If anything, his popularity is increasing exponentially with new knowledge that he has become an international star.

According to Thompson *et al* (2006), a doppelgänger brand image culturally competes with the emotionally resonant meanings that a brand's management attempts to instil through its marketing activities. From a conventional brand management standpoint, the central question about these brand parodies and social criticisms is whether they actually hurt a brand and whether a firm should take action to combat them (Earle, 2002). Findings from all three case studies suggest that doppelgänger images do not harm the actual brand. They are merely another form of PR which consumers find entertaining. Furthermore, Thompson *et al* (2006) argue that a doppelgänger brand image functions as a diagnostic tool that can reveal latent brand image problems that could eventually blossom into a full-fledge brand image crisis. Although this may have been the case for Starbucks in Thompson *et al*'s (2006) study, no evidence supports this notion was found in this study. As such, I propose to extend Thompson *et al*'s (2006) notion of doppelgänger brand images. This form of brand narrative co-creation – where a doppelgänger brand image is created through spokes-character highjacking – does not function as a diagnostic tool but as another form of PR spreading through popular culture with lightning speed, giving the company a healthy boost in brand awareness.

Where spokes-characters are absent, where brands that do not employ emotional or cultural brand strategies are being attacked, Freund & Jacobi (2013) argue the use of anthropomorphism is imperative. They propose that brand monsters represent the most potent elements within the cloud of meanings that makes up the doppelgänger brand image. If we consider the management-controlled face of a brand as being its Apollonian or bright and breezy side, the doppelgänger is a kind of ghost which emerges from the unseen Dionysian or dark side of an organisation to haut it (Freund & Jacobi, 2013). It is therefore important to further understand the phenomenon of brand anthropomorphism.

8.6 Advancements in brand anthropomorphism

The research carried out in this thesis contributes to our understanding of the phenomenon of brand anthropomorphism. In this section, my findings are discussed in terms of recent research carried out in the field of anthropomorphic marketing, thus participating in current ideas and debates about the topic.

For starters, is brand anthropomorphism the best term to use for the phenomenon being studied in this thesis? Hede & Watne (2013) refer to the phenomenon as brand humanisation. To them, brand humanisation strategies involve anthropomorphisation, personification and the utilisation of user imagery – all of which are implemented and controlled by the marketer. Looking back to the definitions in Section 3.1, anthropomorphism and personification refer to the same thing however certain disciplines preferred one term over the other. Imagery on the other hand refers to the use of vivid or figurative language, language which does not necessarily involve the ascription of human characteristics, thoughts or emotions – e.g. the word spread like leaves in a storm. Therefore, a distinction between the three strategies mentioned is not entirely necessary. Additionally, if imagery was to ascribe human characteristics, then it would just fall under anthropomorphism.

In their in-depth, grounded theory-driven interpretation of the *Toy Story* franchise, Lanier Jr., Radar, & Fowler III (2013) investigate the sophisticated use of anthropomorphism in the films. They reveal that human-toy relationships are far from one-sided, value-based, identity-laden, symbolic manifestations. Rather, they encompass a mutually constituting, evolving, defining and ever-changing process in which humans become their objects as much as their objects become them. Looking beyond the relative value of these objects is important in order to assess their overall worth.

Lanier *et al*'s (2013) critical analysis reveals that the *Toy Story* trilogy takes anthropomorphism to a whole new level. Through the complex, interwoven structures between consumers, objects and their interactions, anthropomorphism operates simultaneously on multiple levels and from various perspectives, ultimately calling the very nature of anthropomorphism into question. At the most basic level, anthropomorphism is employed by Pixar[58] in the traditional manner bringing children's toys to life and situating them in an intricate world of their own. Similarly, the creators of all three case studies

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[58] Creators and Producers of the *Toy Story* trilogy

employ anthropomorphism to bring their spokes-characters to life, and through the use of three literary genres situate them in an elaborate world of their own. On another level, Pixar situates the secret lives of toys within the world of humans, bringing these two very different worlds together through interaction while also keeping them distinctly separate. The lives of the three spokes-characters are also cleverly interlinked with human life on Social Media thus indicating that this level also exists within all three case studies. In a complex twist, Lanier *et al* (2013) reveal yet another type of anthropomorphism where the human children in the films bring the toys to life through their imagination and pretend play. This imposed 'fantasy' life remains different from the 'real' lives of the toys. This type of anthropomorphism has also been identified in all three case studies within the behaviour of 'dissemination'. It is common practice for consumers to place themselves within the narrative of the brand, describing events from their imagination and creating a 'fantasy' life outside the 'real' lives of the mascots. Lastly, in a final ontological push of the boundary of anthropomorphism, Lanier *et al* (2013) identify the toys calling their own anthropomorphic nature into question "You think you're special? You're a piece of plastic. You were made to be thrown away". Similarly, as revealed in Figure 6.55, Mr Peanut was forced to examine his anthropomorphic existence after being called a fictional character. As demonstrated, Lanier *et al* (2013) identified levels of anthropomorphism can be applied more widely to marketing mascots, suggesting that anthropomorphism is not as straightforward as it initially seems. This calls for the development of a conceptual model which takes into account all the intricacies of the phenomenon.

As previously highlighted, how to build and sustain brand characters is an area under explored. In order to address this insufficiency in research Hosany, Prayag, Martin, & Lee (2013) present a theory and strategies of anthropomorphic brand characters. Utilising a case study approach, they explore the brand management strategies of Sanrio's iconic character Hello Kitty, a cat epitomising cuteness and innocence. Hosany *et al* (2013) start off by suggesting three broad typologies, brand characters in animation (e.g. Peter Rabbit, Mickey Mouse, Winnie the Pooh), brand characters in identity (e.g. Tony the Tiger, Michelin Man, Ronald McDonald) and brand characters in pure design (e.g. Miffy, Kilakkuma, My Melody). Based on this definition, all three case studies mascots would fall under brand characters in identity.

Hello Kitty is a brand character in pure design. To investigate this anthropomorphic character further, Hosany *et al* (2013) explored Sanrio's strategies by applying an ethnographic case

research paradigm (Woodside, 2010) which combined desk research, multiple interviews and direct observations. They observed eight tactics that helped to build and sustain the Hello Kitty brand: "keep it simple, character licensing, third-party collaboration, capitalising on nostalgia, product line extensions, brand extensions, sustaining consumer interests and harnessing technology" (p.48).

Contrary to the ideas of this thesis, Hello Kitty does not have a strong storyline. It was introduced on products directly without the benefit of prior celebrity endorsement. Director of Sanrio Wave Hong Kong, responsible for licence development and third-party brand collaborations argues, "The lack of a strong story line allowed great flexibility for consumers to link the [brand] character to their own personal situation" (Hosany, Prayag, Martin, & Lee, 2013, p. 56). Indeed, Hello Kitty started out in 1974 without having a strong backstory. However, to sustain the character and consumer interest, Sanrio revitalised the brand by adopting a multiply strategy (Brown, 2010) and introducing various characters over the years to support Hello Kitty. Consumers are introduced to her family consisting of Mimmy, Mary, George, Anthony and Margaret (Sanriotown, 2012). They are also introduced to Dear Daniel, Kitty's childhood friend and purported boyfriend. They are further introduced to her friends and pets. Therefore, conforming to the ideas of this thesis, there is a need for an elaborate imaginative world in order to maintain the attraction of communication-hungry – and evidently story-hungry – consumers.

Additionally, Hosany *et al* (2013) suggest Hello Kitty's likability is achieved through her possession of key features that induce the feelings of comfort and safety, as well as the sense of cuteness and innocence among consumers. Ultimately, its small innocent, young, dependent, round, and animal-like character attracts people of diverse ages leading to the growth of a merchandise empire with more than 50,000 products in more than 60 countries (Walker, 2008). Although, amongst all three case studies these key features are somewhat apparent – after all, the M&M's spokescandies are round and Aleksandr Orlov is animal-like – arguably, the key to her likability is the use of anthropomorphism.

In their paper Payne, Hyman, Niculescu, & Huhmann (2013) examine how design elements affect logo meaning. Specifically, they assess design antecedents and consumer responses to ascriptions of anthropomorphic features for logos. Utilising a "best practices" framework that suggests the three universal influential elements of elaborateness, naturalness and harmony to drive consumer effect (Henderson & Cote, 1998; van der Lans, et al., 2009), Payne *et al*

(2013) evaluate all 120 major US collegiate football team logos from the Bowl Championship series of 2011, and query a sample of Australian adults about these logos in order to control and minimise perceived familiarity, knowledge and emotion towards the universities and their programs. Interestingly, none of the logos presented are actually anthropomorphic as the majority are composed of lettering and images of animals e.g. buffalo, falcon, tiger etc. The typology introduced in Section 4.3 points towards a more explicit form of logo anthropomorphism – i.e. logos that utilise human images such as Uncle Ben's or Aunt Jemima. Payne *et al* (2013) articulate that the relationship between logo design elements and logo personality is what makes them anthropomorphic. They state that consumers may anthropomorphise a logo by ascribing personality characteristics to it. But is that enough? Arguably, personality is a different form of anthropomorphism all together. There needs to be a distinction between an anthropomorphic logo and a logo which ignites a sense of personality in the consumer. If a distinction is not made, it means anything and everything is anthropomorphic, after all, humans cannot escape their humanity (Guthrie, 1993).

Another angle on brand anthropomorphism has been raised by Hellén & Sääksjärvi (2013). In their paper, they investigate the phenomenon of childlike anthropomorphism. Although the term 'childlike' may suggest products that are targeted to children, this is not the connotation that Hellén & Sääksjärvi (2013) adhere to. Instead, they focus on adults identifying and characterising products to have childlike features. In their paper, they develop a 23-item measurement scale to capture childlike anthropomorphic characteristics comprising four dimensions – sweetness, simplicity, sympathy, and smallness. It seems, childlike anthropomorphic products are a multidimensional concept, possibly comprising physical dimensions but also dimensions related to affect and relations.

Applying this notion to all three case studies, firstly, the dimension of smallness (Hellén & Sääksjärvi, 2013) is common between them all. The mascots utilised in all three case studies interestingly do not sell products aimed at children – insurance is definitely an adult-centric product; Mars have voluntarily stopped advertising directly to children under 12 thus indicating that their products are aimed at teenagers and adults; and Planter's products are unquestionably aimed at adults e.g. Men's Health NUT.rition. Despite this, these mascots are still attractive to children especially because they fit into what children culturally watch from cartoons to animated feature films. Possibly, children are also attracted to these mascots because they see the childlike elements they possess and are able to relate to them easily. As

such, the notion of childlike anthropomorphism has scope for further research and development.

As demonstrated thus far, the concept of brand anthropomorphism is not straightforward. There are various perspectives, angles and elements entailed. Through their exploration of the depiction of cows in adverts and their adoption of an ecofeminist lens, Stevens, Kearney, & Maclaran (2013) reveal the 'dark side' of anthropomorphism in contemporary advertising. They derive three main emergent themes: disconnection from nature, monstrous feminine and mastering 'the Other'. These themes have been witnessed in this study. Firstly, anthropomorphism and the goal of 'becoming human' have led towards a disconnection from nature. Although Aleksandr Orlov physically looks like a meerkat, walks like a meerkat and possesses meerkat posture, his dressing in clothes has slightly disconnected him from nature. Additionally, he has been removed from his natural habitat in the Kalahari Desert and placed in the cold weathers of Russia. Although the story is highly intriguing, anthropomorphism and storytelling has instilled a disconnection from nature. Similarly, a walking talking peanut in itself is far removed from nature. Secondly, the theme of the monstrous feminine has also been observed in all three case studies. As an initial thought, females are generally underrepresented. Only one female character (Maya) has been developed in the Aleksandr Orlov narrative, as opposed to five male characters. Similarly, for many years only one female character (Ms Green) graced the M&M's brand narrative until another female (Ms Brown) was introduced in 2012. Still, there are two female characters as opposed to four male ones. Finally, the Planter's brand narrative has no established female characters. This underrepresentation of the female gender has certainly casted them out and perhaps labels them as 'the Other'. Furthermore, and especially in the M&M's brand narrative, the female has been arguably degraded and objectified through the use of sexualised messages, pointing towards the notion of the monstrous feminine. As illustrated, indeed anthropomorphism can be seen to have a 'dark side', one with the potential to be explored further.

8.7 Summary

Numerous matters have been raised throughout this project and required further discussion. The adoption of a literary approach has led to the analysis of the three selected case studies in terms of literary genres. Probably thought of by many as something crippling and choking to

the creative process, literary genres are arguably a source for inspiration and support. They give marketers guidelines to develop a consistent marketing mascot and a means through which to challenge generic conventions.

The use of three literary genres is found to be ideal for the development of marketing mascots. One essential genre, common to all three case studies, is comedy. As a genre, comedy is vast and divided into a large variety of sub-genres based on the source of humour, the method of delivery and the context. As such, combined with other genres from the proposed *Wheel of Literary Genres* model, it is highly possible to use comedy and still develop a different and unique marketing mascot.

Through elaborate brand narrative and storytelling, it is argued that a meticulous fit or correlation between the brand and its anthropomorphic representation is not necessary. A bond between the two can be creatively created out of narratives. Storytelling and narratives are seen to be essential in the development of highly successful, highly influential, highly likable marketing mascots. Therefore, turning to novels and some of the best novel writers in history to gain knowledge and inspiration on how to produce 'gripping' and 'compelling' stories is logical. The development of an intricate spokes-character leads towards the idea of fantasy becoming reality, where virtual mascots are treated as if they were other 'real' human beings when consumers suspend their disbelief.

Sophisticated marketing mascots are found to be highly appealing. Their appeal often manifests itself in the form of consumer imitation. Extreme forms of imitation lead to the development of doppelgänger mascots. Contrary to the views of Thompson *et al* (2006) on doppelgänger brand images, these images are not perceived to culturally compete with the emotionally resonant meanings that a brand's management attempts to instil through its marketing activities. Findings from all three case studies suggest that doppelgänger images do not harm the actual brand. That this form of brand narrative co-creation – where a doppelgänger brand image is created through spokes-character imitation – does not function as a diagnostic tool but as another form of PR, giving the company a healthy boost in brand awareness.

Finally in this chapter advancements are made to our understanding of the phenomenon of brand anthropomorphism through participating in current ideas and debates within the field of anthropomorphic marketing. Derived from analysing the *Toy Story* trilogy and not intended

to serve as a model, Lanier *et al*'s (2013) four levels of anthropomorphism were actually also identified in all three case studies, thus signifying the possibility of turning them into a framework/model. The notion that an elaborate background story is required to maintain consumer attention was evident in the case study of Hello Kitty carried out by Hosany *et al* (2013). Although Hello Kitty did not have a strong storyline when it was first introduced, it has since been revitalised to include various characters, family members and friends. From Payne *et al* (2013) examination of logos I argue that there needs to be a distinction between an anthropomorphic logo and a logo which ignites a sense of personality in the consumer because logo and personality are two different forms of anthropomorphism based on the typology introduced in Section 4.3. From Hellén & Sääksjärvi's (2013) investigation on childlike anthropomorphism I conclude, that despite promoting adult products, children remain attracted to anthropomorphic mascots because they see the childlike elements in them and are able to relate to them easily. Lastly, Stevens *et al*'s (2013) observation of the 'dark side' of anthropomorphism in contemporary advertising was also observed in all three case studies, thus confirming that the three main emergent themes they derive are transferable. The 'dark side' of anthropomorphism has potential to be explored further.

Chapter 9. Conclusion

This final chapter draws some conclusions about the development of marketing mascots as a form of brand anthropomorphism. It recapitulates the findings and main contributions of this thesis, offering implications for industry before delving into the limitations encountered and areas for possible future research. In this chapter I aim to address the last and final research objective.

9.1 Contributions

The current study contributes to our understanding of the phenomenon of brand anthropomorphism. It deals with the numerous ways in which a company may choose to anthropomorphise their brand. Furthermore, it addresses the shortage in literature with practical implications. Through its adoption of a literary approach, this study offers advice on how to construct a highly influential, much loved marketing mascot that consumers will love and celebrate for many years to come. Focusing on the exploration of spokes-characters on the internet, this thesis primarily addresses the deficiency in literature which centres predominantly on identifying and understanding the different ways in which consumers interact with spokes-characters on Social Media sites (Facebook more specifically). Additionally it investigates this form of communication between consumers and mascots, and considers its impact. Similar to Callcott & Phillips's (1996) paper, this thesis helps advertisers create, understand, and control the characters that are associated with their products. This can lead to more effective use of spokes-characters in advertising and brand-building strategy.

To start, this section recapitulates the findings of each chapter before highlighting the overall contributions of this study. In Chapter 2 the nature of brands was investigated and was found to be multidimensional. There is no one popular definition for brands; instead, there are two very distinct streams of thought: brands as a lifeless maniputable artefact, and brands as holistic entities that play a major role in consumers' lives. In this investigation of brand anthropomorphism, the later stream of thought was carried forward. In this chapter, the *Brand Puzzle* model is introduced.

Chapter 3 identified anthropomorphism as marketers' best friend because it lends a helping hand in the formulation of consumer-brand relationships, allowing brands to grow and prosper. Although numerous definitions exist for the term, they all comprise the attribution of

humans' most important aspects to parts of the world that lack them. The main reason behind why people anthropomorphise is that they cannot escape their humanity.

Chapter 4 investigated the use of anthropomorphism in branding. It found that the ascription of human characteristics to brands facilitates and encourages the creation of stronger, more emotionally connected consumers. Anthropomorphised brands are perceived to be worthwhile partners in consumer-brand relationships, providing unconventional sources of social, emotional, psychological and physical support. Numerous ways were found in which companies may choose to anthropomorphise their brands. These are based on the *Brand Puzzle* model introduced in Chapter 2. Furthermore, the use of mascots has proven to be one of the most popular means of anthropomorphism used in industry, and that their likability is directly related to their distance from humanness both physiologically and psychologically. A distinction is made between marketing mascots and anthropomorphic marketing mascots. As revealed in the chapter, likable mascots are those closer to humanity. As such, marketers should strive to make their mascot veer closer to 'becoming human'.

In order to make marketing mascots seem more human, a look into what makes humans the way they are was necessary. Human nature was further investigated in Chapter 4 from the perspectives of psychology and consumer behaviour. However, it was finally revealed that the most effective way to make mascots more human is to embrace literature. At the heart of this thesis is Harold Bloom's (1999) direct declaration that Shakespeare not only reinvented the English language but also created human beings as we know them today, with all their foibles, emotions, and atypical eccentricities. As such, turning to literature for inspiration is ideal; after all, some of the best and most celebrated characters (such as The Great Gatsby, Ebenezer Scrooge and Macbeth) have come from literature, and this is an ultimate aim for marketers – to create a marketing mascot that consumers will love and celebrate for many years to come.

Adopting this novel literary approach compliments the constructionist epistemological and narrative ontological standpoint embraced in this thesis. Here, truth is understood to be relativistic and subjective to differences in perception and consideration, whilst knowledge is assumed to be constructed and co-created. I argue that using this novel literary approach is necessary because current conceptualisations of brand anthropomorphism – which are bound in quantitative empirical enquiry – are inadequate because they are ironically devoid of emotive human qualities. Literature on the other hand has been dedicated throughout history

to discovering ever more discriminating ways of expressing the complexities of human motivation (Mullan, 2006).

The research perspectives and assumptions utilised in this thesis lie within the paradigm of interpretivism. After explaining the interpretive methodology conducted since May 2010, which uses a case study methodology and a variety of research techniques, including netnography, online interviews, in-depth interviews and photo-essays in Chapter 5, an exploration of the three marketing mascots Aleksandr Orlov, the M&M's spokescandies and Mr Peanut was carried out and presented in Chapter 6. Through the literary analysis of all selected case studies it was found that three literary genres best encapsulate the brand narrative of each marketing mascot. Humour and comedy were common to all case studies thus emphasising their importance as a core genre in the development of highly likable marketing mascots.

Chapter 7 investigated the attitudes and behaviours of consumers towards the three marketing mascots within the setting of Social Media. Conceptualisation has rendered six all-encompassing forms of consumer engagement. These have been identified as imitation (leads to the development of doppelgänger mascots), devotion, participation, dissemination, observation, and guardianship. This chapter also revealed numerous motivations for engagement. These are imagination, curiosity and compassion, entertainment, liberation and relaxation, reminiscence, companionship and confusion. Finally, consumer engagement was found to co-create brand narratives.

Chapter 8 addresses some of the issues that have been raised throughout this project. First, the use of genres is found to be a source for inspiration and support giving guidelines for consistency. The *Wheel of Literary Genres* model is introduced. Additionally, storytelling is found to be an essential ingredient to the development of highly compelling marketing mascots. This chapter also participates in current academic debates about anthropomorphic marketing. Although the use of anthropomorphism has, thus far, been predominantly expressed as the thing that will differentiate one company from another, increase repeat sales, instil consumer loyalty and encourage consumer engagement, it must be said that anthropomorphism also has a 'dark side' – a side which has, to a large extent, made acceptable the mocking of foreigner's English accents (as per the case of Aleksandr Orlov), besides degrading and objectifying women through the use of sexualised messages (as per the

case of the M&M's spokescandies) – making it very difficult to know where to draw the hypothetical line.

Overall, this thesis makes six main contributions. First, through the synthesis of branding literature, I introduce the *Brand Puzzle* as a means of advancing knowledge of brands and offering a different way of looking at the brand construct. This model clearly identifies sixteen crucial elements which fall under four distinct categories: face, core, social and message. This model also functions as a backbone to understanding the current tactics used by industry to anthropomorphise their brands.

Second, through the detailed examination of the roots of anthropomorphism and the way in which the ascription of human characteristics has taken precedence within the discipline of marketing, I offer a theoretical typology for categorising brand anthropomorphism. With it I contend that brand personality falls under brand anthropomorphism and not the other way around. Additionally, I assert that the typology classifications are not mutually exclusive, and that a company may choose to employ numerous anthropomorphic techniques at the same time. Amongst the most popular forms of anthropomorphism is the use of mascots.

Third, through focusing on the use of marketing mascots, I propose a continuum for assessing their degree of anthropomorphism which ranges from low (utilisation of limited vocabulary e.g. the Aflac Duck) to high ('becoming human' e.g. the Marlboro man). Although this continuum may be limited by its simplicity, it is a valuable tool that can be used by academics and advertisers alike in order to understand consumer behaviour and attitudes towards marketing mascots and help achieve certain effects based on strategy. The concept of 'becoming human' is also introduced.

Fourth, in an area dominated by quantitative research methods and techniques, the utilisation of a literary approach to analyse marketing mascots is in itself an innovative idea which has not been done before. The detailed analysis of the rich and textured imaginary worlds of Aleksandr Orlov, the M&M's spokescandies and Mr Peanut has rendered three case studies which can be used as valuable teaching material. Furthermore, as a result of my interpretation of the brand narratives, three fictional genres were identified for each case study. This has led to the development of the *Wheel of Literary Genres* in which comedy was identified as a key construct to the development of highly likable marketing mascots.

Fifth, this thesis offers a conceptualisation of consumer attitudes and behaviours towards anthropomorphic marketing mascots within the parameters of Social Media. Furthering literature in consumer behaviour, I identify six distinct forms of consumer engagement. These comprise of the following: (1) *imitation* captures consumers' inclination to copy their liked mascot (2) *devotion* displays consumers' level of commitment towards a brand/mascot (3) *participation* incorporates consumers taking part in games, competitions and conversations (4) *dissemination* encapsulates the wide sharing of personal information, stories and anecdotes (5) *observation* relates to lurkers who often read updates and comments but refrain from posting themselves (6) *guardianship* involves the protection of their much-loved mascot. Furthermore, the empirical evidence indicated that consumer engagement leads to the co-creation of brand narrative.

Finally, this thesis contributes to the academic debate on brand anthropomorphism, offering new insights and understandings to help advance knowledge in this field. These include: the different levels of anthropomorphism, the notion that an elaborate background story is required to maintain consumer attention, the need for clearer distinction in terminology used, childlike anthropomorphism, and the observed 'dark side' of anthropomorphism.

9.2   Implications for industry

This thesis has numerous implications for industry; implications that are associated with the use of anthropomorphism, the development of marketing mascots and their maintenance and sustainability. I offer these implications in the form of bullet points to improve accessibility.

- With the identification of fifteen forms of brand anthropomorphism, companies should strive to employ at least one form in order to make their brands more human.

- The more human the brand the better. This builds stronger consumer-brand relationships, which ultimately leads to increased consumer loyalty.

- The use of mascots is a favourable method of brand anthropomorphism. In these communication driven times, the mascots need to be more sophisticated and developed than ever before in history.

- Simply, it is not enough for an anthropomorphic spokes-character to be a colourful, happy and cheerful one uttering tiresome slogans at the consumer. Depth and the utilisation of negative emotions (e.g. confusion, frustration etc.) are indispensable.

- A meticulous fit or correlation between the brand and its anthropomorphic representation is not necessary. The bond between the two can be built through narrative.

- Animals are a popular choice for spokes-characters because they are often associated with human traits and qualities, and associated with cultural experiences (Callcott & Phillips, 1996).

- The use of storytelling, narrative and the employment of three literary genres aids in the development of elaborate mascots.

- A core genre to use is comedy. With a vast array of comedy sub-genres, combined with two other genres, there are countless options to develop different and unique spokes-characters.

- If a product is unsatisfactory, anthropomorphism is not going to help sell it. Everything boils down to the product. However, I speculate that people who like a mascot will buy into the mascot independently of the brand. Therefore a merchandising opportunity emerges.

- A brand needs to produce communicational, promotional and informational messages that conjure up the imagination, curiosity and compassion of consumers.

- As the internet has broken down all geographical barriers, a higher demand for consistent messages is imminent.

- Word of mouth and interest can be increased through the use of transmedia planning.

9.3 Limitations

Although I tried to minimise any preconceptions or biases that may have existed prior to my commencement of this research project, this does remain an interpretive thesis based on my subjective understanding and perception of the world. In addition to the limitations raised in Section 5.7, I have been faced with two major limitations. Firstly, time. More time would have allowed for longer immersion in the field. In hindsight, after stopping the data collection process in October 2012, numerous interesting plots and event have occurred in the 'lives' of the spokes-characters which would have provided valuable evidence and support for the arguments raised in this thesis. However, these would not have affected the conclusions drawn here, only brought the stories more to life. Secondly, word count. Although the task of writing a maximum of 100 thousand words was initially a daunting task, as I draw near the end of this thesis, I am struggling to remain within the limit - there are constantly more things to say, more connections to make, more sources to reference.

9.4 Areas for future research

There are numerous aspects and opportunities for further research that this study highlights, many of which have been expressed in the form of open-ended questions to encourage thinking and deliberation.

Based on the types of brand anthropomorphism identified in Section 4.3, finding out which is the most effective or influential form of anthropomorphism would be highly valuable. As evident by brands such as Mr Muscle and Aunt Bessie's, more than one form of anthropomorphism can be used at the same time. As such, which combinations of anthropomorphism, if any, work best together? And how many forms of anthropomorphism should be used at any one time? These questions probably lend themselves more to be answered quantitatively. Additionally, the use of anthropomorphic thoughts is believed to promote learning but does it promote memory?

Potentially, each form of anthropomorphism identified in Section 4.3 can be examined in more detail. In this thesis, I have focused on investigating the use of mascots as a form of brand anthropomorphism. Callcott & Lee (1995) contend that spokes-character success is in part product-dependent. 'Appropriateness' aside, there may be differences in the types of products successfully promoted by spokes-characters versus approaches using other forms of anthropomorphism. What are these differences? Are they significant? How can a decision be made regarding which approach to use?

Furthermore, based on Figure 4.1, the continuum of anthropomorphic mascots, this thesis focuses on spokes-characters aspiring to become human. There is also potential to investigate the full spectrum. Moreover, I have focused on online interactions between consumers and spokes-characters. This can be extended to include offline interactions as well. Indeed it was found that consumers behave in six distinct ways towards marketing mascots. As an area for future research, each of the six identified behaviours could potentially be investigated in more detail. Relatedly, it must be said that although the use of social media as a platform for online interactions between consumers and spokes-characters humanises the spokes-character, the effects this has on humans (i.e. whether it is ironically a form of de-humanisation for instance) requires further exploration.

In addition, it should be considered that a consumer's fascination and captivation with a spokes-character could result in a relationship independent of the brand. Is it entirely possible

that a consumer could be highly attached to a character, yet care nothing for the brand it represents? Is it possible for a consumer to be very involved with a brand, yet not care about the spokes-character representing it? Although the purpose of creating marketing mascots is to embody a brand's personality (Mize & Kinney, 2008), is it possible that a consumer thinks about the two as independent from one another? These questions enforce the need for the development of a conceptual theory for understanding the interactions between brands and humans, furthermore, the development of a conceptual theory for understanding the complex multi-dimensionality of the brand-human relationship. After all, practitioners are not the only ones aspiring to make their brands more human, but humans are also inclining towards becoming more branded – a tendency which can be clearly observed in the cases of Coco Chanel and David Beckham.

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Appendices

Appendix1. Campaign timeline for Comparethemeerkat.com

2009	Jan	First TV advertisement - introducing Aleksandr Orlov
		Aleksandr joins Facebook
		Aleksandr declines marriage proposals
	Feb	"Jingles" TV advert explains the difference between Meerkat and Market
		Aleksandr looks to expand meerkat database
	Mar	Televised Broadcasting Brainstorm for UK Red Nose Day
		Aleksandr Film Bloopers
	Apr	New and improved Comparethemeerkat.com features
		Sergei's TV Debut
		Introducing Rapkat and Bellydancekat
	Jul	Puppet Advertisement
		Interview with The Sun
		Sergei Film Blooping
	Aug	Petition to put 'Simples' in the Oxford English Dictionary
	Oct	"Jacuzzi Relaxings" TV advert
		Official Comparethemeerket.com website launch
	Nov	Meerchat No.1 with David Hasselhoff
	Dec	Film Teasings
		Debut Film Poster
		Victory - 'Simples' to be included in future editions of the dictionary
2010	Jan	"The Journey of Courageousness" - First part of the 'Orlov Family History Trilogy'
		Interview with The Telegraph (Q&A breakfast)
		Interview printed in Sunday Times Culture Magazine
	Feb	Art Class Advertisement
	Mar	Meerchat No.2 with Piers Morgan
		Launch of iSimples for iPhone app
		Fearlessness Poster
	Apr	"The Battle of Fearlessness" - Second part of the 'Orlov Family History Trilogy'
		Introducing Firekat, Soliderkat and Knightkat
	May	Feature in The Sun - Mona-meerkat!
	Jul	"The Streets of Ambitiousness" - Third and final part of 'Orlov Family History Trilogy'
		Ambitiousness Poster
	Aug	comparethemuskrat.com was launched
		Launch of movie related website (Behind the Scenes, Meet the Cast, Explore old Moscow, Reviews)
		Introducing Tradekat
	Sep	Petition for banning of filthy comparethemuskrat.com
	Oct	"The Simples Life" Advert
		Autobiography release - A Simples Life: My Life & Times
		Interview with Adrian Child and Christine Bleakley (ITV Daybreak)
		Comparethemeerkat.shop opens for two days (80 Regent Street, London)
	Dec	Interview with ITV's News correspondent Mark Webster
		Interview with The Sunday Times
2011	Jan	Meerkovo documentary part 1

		Meerkovo.com was launched
		Meerkovo quiz and Meertar Star (Rock with Vassily!) game was created
		Launch of The Meerkovian
		Competition: Meerkovo twin town (UK)
	Feb	Meerkovo documentary: Retirement Home
		Meerkovo documentary: New School Funds
		Market (Meerkat) Harborough named winner of Twin Town Poll.
	Apr	Job opportunity: Human Meerkovo Ambassador
		Aleksandr Orlov joins LinkedIn
	May	Meerpup Choir advertisement
		Josh Mitchell voted Meerkovo Ambassador
	Jul	Cuddle Kat Launch (Simples Rewards)
		Toy Posters
		Aleksandr and Sergei come to the United Kingdom
		Meeting Steve Smith advert
		Sarah Roberts Home Visiting - Dog advert
		Taking Over Home Pages - Live interview press conferencing
	Aug	More fun facts about Sergei, Bogdan, Vassily, Maiya and Yakov
	Sep	Aleksandr and Sergei visit Edinburgh Castle (Scotland), Hadrian's wall, Newcastle, Bristol, London (Royal Guard and London Eye), and Brighton pier
	Oct	Meeting stewardess Susie Dixon - Aeroplane advert
		Aleksandr and Sergei visit Cambridge (Library and punting), Llanfairpwllgwyngyll (Wales), and Belfast
	Nov	Meeting Barry Greendale - Supermarket advert
		Aleksandr and Sergei visit Giants Cause way, Liverpool Cavern Club, and Ireland
		Sergei joins Facebook
	Dec	Aleksandr and Sergei return to London to buy their Christmas shopping (Oxford Street and Regent Street)
		Christmas celebrations are underway
2012	Jan	Interactive Meerkat
		"Tough Decision" advert - Sergei's future
		Sergei receives new laptopamabob to deal with people trying to compare credit cards
	Mar	"Sick Sergei" advert
	Apr	Sergei in hospital advertisements
		Make Sergei a Card' app release
	Jun	Sergei resigns from comparethemeerkat.com
		Meerkovo Circus Poster
		Sergei joins the circus advert
		Sergei juggle tricks advert
	Jul	Sergei's birthday celebrations
	Aug	Aleksandr and Sergei visit old friend (Steve Smith) advert
		Bogdan and Vassily look after Aleksandr's Facebook account
	Sep	Launch of 'Which meerkat are you?' game
		Meeting James Draper - Window cleaner advert
	Oct	Box set release - Six adventure story books - The Meerkat Tales
		Meerkat Tales advert

Appendix2. The Meerkovian issue No. 232

Appendix3. Letter from Aleksandr Orlov

From the desk of
Aleksandr Orlov

Dear Meerkovo visitors,

Over the past few months it has come to my
attentions that Sergei has been struggle to run
both meerkovo.com and comparethemeerkat.com.
(I not sure why, he even get new laptopmabob
for job)

So, to stop him lose last tuft of fur I have
decide to close meerkovo.com so Sergei can
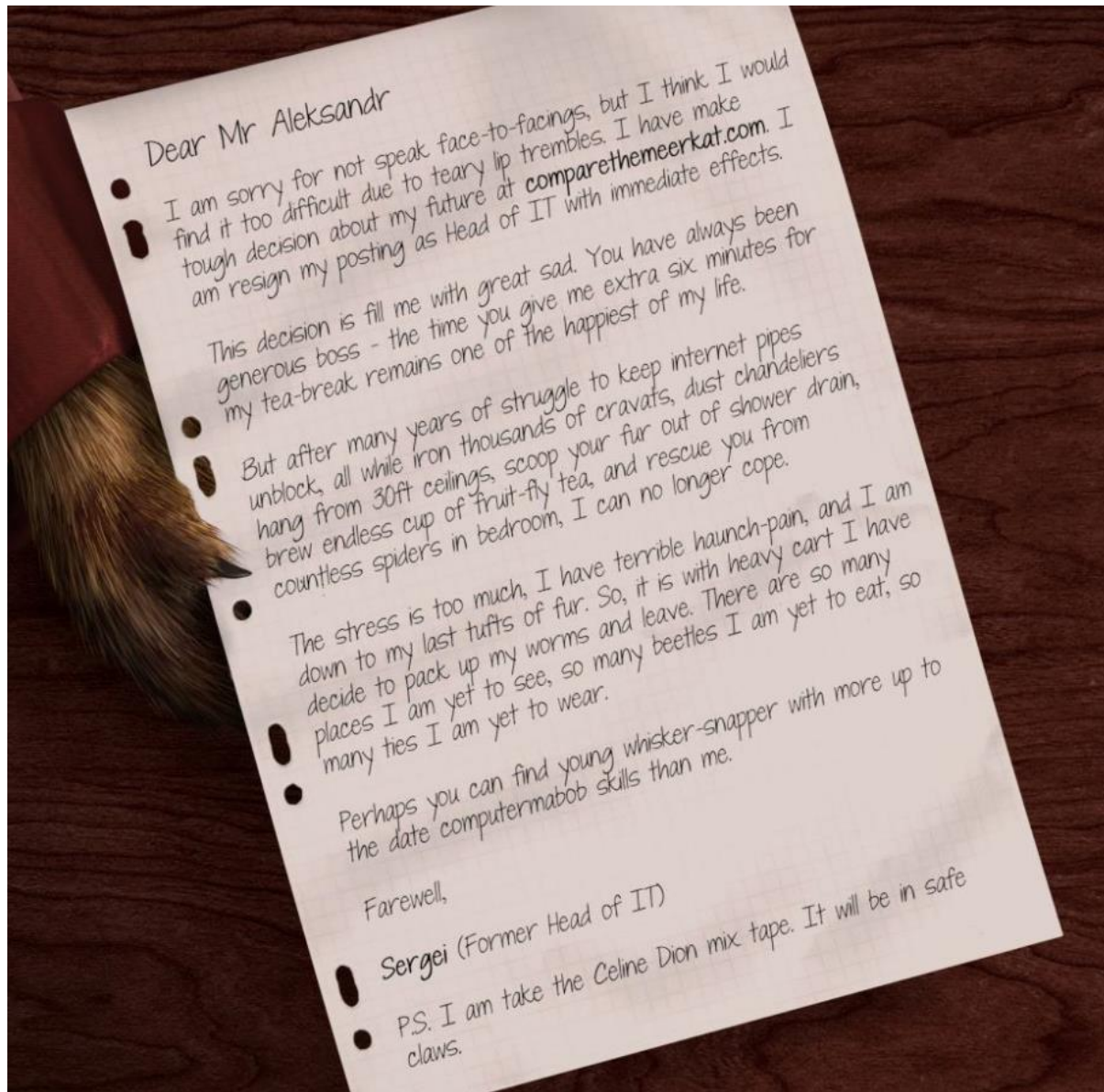focus attentions on keep comparethemeerkat.com
unclogged.

But please do not worry, you can still claim
meerkat toys or pay visit to Meerkovo villagers
on thrillsy new sections of
comparethemeerkat.com.

Aleksandr Orlov

COLLECT ALL
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Appendix4. Letter from Sergei

Dear Mr Aleksandr

I am sorry for not speak face-to-facings, but I think I would find it too difficult due to teary lip trembles. I have make tough decision about my future at **comparethemeerkat.com**. I am resign my posting as Head of IT with immediate effects.

This decision is fill me with great sad. You have always been generous boss - the time you give me extra six minutes for my tea-break remains one of the happiest of my life.

But after many years of struggle to keep internet pipes unblock, all while iron thousands of cravats, dust chandeliers hang from 30ft ceilings, scoop your fur out of shower drain, brew endless cup of fruit-fly tea, and rescue you from countless spiders in bedroom, I can no longer cope.

The stress is too much, I have terrible haunch-pain, and I am down to my last tufts of fur. So, it is with heavy cart I have decide to pack up my worms and leave. There are so many places I am yet to see, so many beetles I am yet to eat, so many ties I am yet to wear.

Perhaps you can find young whisker-snapper with more up to the date computermabob skills than me.

Farewell,

Sergei (Former Head of IT)

P.S. I am take the Celine Dion mix tape. It will be in safe claws.

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Appendix5. Campaign timeline for M&M's

	U.S.A.	**U.K. and Australia**
1954	The tagline "Melts in Your Mouth, Not in Your Hands" is born and the world famous M&M's characters make their television debut in black and white.	
1960	Yellow and Red introduced as the first M&M's Brand spokescandies	
1980		M&M's Chocolate Candies are introduced to Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Hong Kong, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Malaysia, The Netherlands, Spain, Switzerland and the UK
1982	M&M's went into space for the first time in the first NASA shuttle and have been part of all space shuttle missions since	
1984	M&M's were named the official snack food of the Olympic Games in Los Angeles	
1988	M&M'S Almond Candies Introduced	
1990	M&M's proudly sponsor NASCAR (and have continued sponsorship ever since)	
1991	M&M'S Peanut Butter Candies Introduced	
1995	M&M's introduce Blue as a new spokescandy after 10 million people vote to add Blue to the colour mix	
1996	M&M's Minis are introduced	M&M's Minis make their way to Australia
1997	Miss Green makes her television debut on SNL with host Dennis Miller Miss Green writes a memoir - "I melt for no one" Advert: "Muscles" - Red and Yellow work out to impress Miss Green The first M&M's World store opened in Las Vegas	
1998	M&M's named the official candy of the new millenium	
1999	First M&M's Collector's Club meet - Fan club members regularly hold events and regional picnics to meet eachother and sell or swap M&M's memorabilia. The fan club also holds a bi-annual convention that includes tours of an M&M's World store M&M's introduce Crispy/Orange as a new spokescandy	
2000		Crispy M&M's is launched in Australia
2001	Miss Green's face graced the shell of all green M&M's candy	

2002		Purple M&M's are introduced for a limited promotion	
2003			White chocolate M&M's are released in Australia
2004		M&M's Get Personal by offering customers the opportunity to personalise their M&M's (custom print on vibrant colours) Red and Yellow appear in promotional videos/clips for NBC	M&M's go back in time to when colour TV was not invented. M&M's turn black and white in Australia.
2005		The second M&M's World store opens in Orlando, Florida	
2006		M&M's World store opens in New York Red and Yellow start their hosting careers on Entertainment Tonight Miss Green interviews Heidi Klum on Entertainment Tonight M&M's Dark Chocolate become a permanent addition	
2007		The first M&M's World store in Las Vegas hits the 8 million visitor mark M&M's Dark Chocolate Peanut is introduced M&M's reveal Lady Liberty, a fifty-foot statue in NYC Harbour, for the launch of mms.com. A campaign which encourages Americans to find their inner M	
	Oct	Advert: "Headless Horseman"	
2008	Sep	M&M's U.S.A. joins Facebook Advert: "Vending Machine" - Red is stuck	
2009		M&M's Coconut become a permanent addition	
	Feb	Advert: "Checkout" - Red and Yellow are on the menu for Super Bowl XLIII	M&M's colour break-up in Australia
	Apr	Advert: "Easter" - Red and Yellow dress as the Easter Bunny	
	May	Mars Real Chocolate Relief Act	
	Jun	M&M's join forces with Transformers2 to promote new Straberried Peanut Butter candies M&M's team up with Six Flags amusement park	
	Oct	M&M's become official candy of NETS Basketball	
2010	Jan	Red joins Twitter (mmsred)	
	Feb	Miss Green makes it on the back cover of Sports Illustrated Red goes to the Super Bowl XLIV Week	
	Mar	Miss Green joins Twitter (mmsgreen)	
	May	Miss Green voted America's favourite M&M's character	
	Jun	M&M's Pretzel introduced M&M's Pretzel launch concert	

		Video: Inside Joke - Pretzel Guy	
	Jul	Voting for favourite M&M's Character begins	
	Aug	M&M's celebrate 1 Million fan milestone with Mosaic from Hashtagart.com	
	Sep	Green goes to the Red Carpet	
	Oct	Yellow dress up for Holloween	
2011	Feb	M&M's is the No.1 candy of all time according to USA Today's Pop Candy: Unwrapping pop culture's hip and hidden treasures Miss Green makes it onto the Sports Illustrated Swimsuit Issue M&M's Pretzel named 2011 'Product on the Year' in the candy and snacks category (USA) Crispy/Orange and the Pretzel Guy go to Super Bowl XLV	
	Mar	M&M's USA Facebook page receives 2 million 'likes' Customers vote M&M's 'Brand of the Year' in the Sweet Treat category - www.candyandsnacktoday.com M&M's named one of America's most loved spokes-characters - www.forbes.com	
	Apr	Advert: "Selfish Gift" - Red gives a portrait of himself as a gift instead of Personalised M&M's	On a visit to the UK, President Obama handed out special packs of M&M's with a special presidential seal M&M's sponsors 'From The Red Carpet' entertainment programme shown in cinemas prior to the main feature
	May	M&M's Spokescandies to pursue Solo Careers Miss Green writes a book - "Our Bodies, Our Shells"	M&M's World store opens in London
	July	Advert: "Wish" - Red and Yellow are the third wish of a castaway M&M's congratulate NASCAR driver Kyle Busch on 100 wins	
	Aug	M&M's Pretzel first birthday party the makers of M&M'S achieve a Guinness World Record for creating the world's largest piñata for Crispy/Orange's first birthday	
	Sep	M&M's reunited	M&M's Australia joins Facebook
	Oct	Advert: "Ding Dong"/ "Trick or Treat" - Red and Yellow try to crash a Halloween party Red and Yellow dress up for Halloween	
	Nov		M&M's UK joins Facebook All the M&M's join Facebook (Blue M&M, Miss Green M&M, Red M&M, Yellow M&M and Crispy M&M) as an extension of M&M's Australia

			Australia's Red and Crispy join the Movember cause.
	Dec	Advert: "Faint" - Red and Yellow meet Santa	Personalised M&M's launched in UK at www.mymms.co.uk
2012	Jan	Stuart Elliott (The New York Times) writes "M&M's to Unveil New Speaking Role at Super Bowl"	Australia's Red is entered as a wildcard for CLEO Magazine's Bachelor of the Year competition
	Feb	Ms Brown makes her debut in L.A. Ms Brown makes her debut at the Super Bowl XLVI Super Bowl Advert: "Just my Shell" - Meet Ms Brown M&M's live chat with Ms. Brown 8th-12th, Museum of Chocolate Art in New York opens to the public Ms Brown Celebrity Apprentice Debut	
	Mar		Australia's Yellow features in an online advert for Ancestry.com.au Australia's M&M's characters start their very own blog Launch of M&M's Lost Tribe campaign in Australia
	Apr	Advert: "Disguises" - Crispy/Orange and the Pretzel Guy wear disguises Advert: "Mock" - Red makes fun of Ms Brown	Lost Tribe M&M's promotion packs are released into Australia's supermarkets
	May	Advert: "Airplane" - M&M's hide in an airplane's bathroom to avoid being eaten	M&M's UK Facebook page receives 100,000 'likes'
	June		Launch of limited edition Union Jack M&M's with X-factor winners Little Mix Advert: "Union Jack" - Yellow tries to be British M&M's Australia Facebook page receives 200,000 'likes'
	Sep	Advert: "One Track Mind" - Ms Brown goes on a date	Sweet Sunday Competition launched in UK M&M's Action App (for iPhone and Android) is released in Australia
	Oct	M&M's USA Facebook page receives 4 million 'likes'	M&M's Australia Facebook page receives 250,000 'likes'

Appendix6. M&M's advert – Airplane, USA (2011)

Appendix7. Letter from Crispy/ Orange

Dear Lost Tribe,

That incident with the
pepper really shook me up.
I don't think I'll be able to
go to restaurants or even listen to my favourite
band (the Red Hot Chili Peppers) for some time.

I get that you're hungry and uncivilised, but
when you tied me up and licked me, it made
me feel scared, sick to the stomach, violently
ill, terrified, petrified, intimidated... I could
keep going but my half hour psychologist
appointment is almost over.

PLEASE DON'T WRITE BACK.
OR MAKE ANY CONTACT AT ALL.

Crispy.

Appendix8. Campaign timeline for Planter's peanuts

1916		Mr Peanut is born in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania
1918		Mr Peanut's first ad appearance
1927		Launch of the Nickel Lunch Campaign
1928		Planters' first vacuum-packed tin can - Mr Peanut is on the tin
1930s		Advertising slogan: "The Nickel Lunch!"
1935		Mr Peanut's first "Peanut Car"
1939-1945		World War II: Mr Peanut helped promote war saving stamps
1946		Mr Peanut had his 30th birthday party
1949		Mr Peanut works his way to the holiday party scene
1950		Mr Peanut makes it onto an "electric spectacular" billboard in Times Square, New York
		The first TV commercials featuring Mr. Peanut aired nationwide
		Advertising slogan: "Planters is the word for (good) Peanuts"
1961-1965		Mr Peanut was a star attraction at the New York World's Fair
1973		Planters increased their product variety - and Mr Peanut played the saxophone
1976		Mr Peanut turned 60
1978		The Peanut Pals organisation, a non-profit group dedicated to collecting Mr Peanut and Planters memorabilia, was founded
1983		Mr Peanut poses for an ad which encourage literacy
1991		Hot air balloon of Mr Peanut
1992		NASCAR sponsorship
		Advertising slogan: "Peanut butter with a crunch" on P.B. Crisps
1997		Mr Peanut appeared in the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade
		Advertising slogan: "Relax. Go Nuts" on Deluxe Mixed Nuts
1999		Planters became the official snack nut of NASCAR (3 year contract)
		The 'Nutmobile' made its debut
2001		A Planters' Peanut can was treasured by Tom Hanks' character in "The Terminal" film
2003		Advertising slogan: "Put Out the Good Stuff"
2004		Mr Peanut makes it to Madison Avenue's "Advertising Walk of Fame"
		Planters NUT.rition bar and mix varieties launched
2007		Advertising slogan: "Instinctively Good"
2008		Planters runs TV in Super Bowl XLII
2009	Jun	Mr Peanut joins Facebook
2010	Jan	Considers writing a biography titled "The Man Behind the Monocle"
	Mar	Planters is the official Nut of the NCAA
	Apr	Mr Peanut gets his hands on the NCAA champion's trophy
		Planters sponsor the "Kraft Fight Hunger Bowl" game
	Nov	National Cashew Day
	Dec	Advertising slogan: "Naturally Remarkable"
		Mr Peanut undergoes a transformation. Robert Downey Jr is the new voice of Mr Peanut
		Advert: My Remarkable Holiday Party

2011		
	Jan	Advert: Planters' Tree-athlon
		Mr Peanut escorts Miss Alabama in the Miss America Parade
	Feb	Mr Peanut attends Global Green Event
		Mr Peanut unveils new Sustainable Nutmobile
		Mr Peanut does exclusive interview for Men's Health magazine
	Mar	Planters' Bracket Challenge
		Mr Peanut goes on the Planters' Naturally Remarkable Tour
	Apr	Meet Alejandro
	Jun	Meet Mr Peanut's stunt double
		Advert: Peanut Butter Doug
	Aug	Planters sponsor Jim Dillard (Fishing)
	Sept	Mr Peanut's 95th Birthday
	Oct	Mr Peanut participates in Times Square event
	Dec	Planters Winter Spiced Nuts are back
		Planters switch to 100% recyclable plastic jars
2012		
	Mar	Mr Peanut reveals 'The Secret of (his) Success'
		Peanut Butter Doug Peanut Butter Challenge
	Apr	Planters NUT·rition Men's Health® Recommended Mix launched
		Advert: The Team
	June	Mr Peanut tries a new pair of glasses
		The 37 Manliest Things to do Before you Die' Foldout poster in Men's Health® magazine
	July	Arm Wrestle Boxing game
	Aug	Planters NUT-rition Cinnamon Raisin Granola Peanut Butter launched
		Mr Peanut thinks its time for a name change
	Oct	50th anniversary of PLANTERS Dry Roast Peanuts

Appendix9. Nut's Health featured in *Men's Health* Magazine (Feb 2011)