

**Peppa Piggy in the Middle of Marketers and Mashup Makers:
A Netnography of Absurd Animation on YouTube**

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Peppa Pig in the Mud

Cartoons for kids are confections of colour, candyfloss and talking animals (Well 2009; Shaw 2010). From sentimental classics like Mickey Mouse and Winnie the Pooh, to contemporary characters like The Gruffalo and Shaun the Sheep, these anthropomorphic creations are designed, yes, to sell merchandise and partake in inevitable cross promotions with fast food companies, but also to educate, captivate and entertain young minds. They are carefully produced so that parents feel secure that their child is not being exposed to inappropriate prototypes of conduct (Dill 2009). And although children's TV programmes often have an undercurrent of humorous violence – where characters run off cliffs and fail to realise that there is nothing under their feet but the long plunge to the ground beneath – they are, for the most part, saccharin and cute, comforting and familiar. The narrative thread tends to focus on simple life lessons that children can easily understand. Despite justified parental reservations that extensive television viewing is bad for children, lest it impinge on their social development and instil in them a "...lifetime of constant, unthinking consumption" (Giroux and Pollock 2011, p. 73), such cartoons are frequently regarded as: "wholesome vehicles of amusement, a highly regarded source of fun and joy for children" (Giroux 2001, p. 83).

Thus, for many years, character-centred cartoons managed to steer relatively clear of controversy. Like puppets on a string, as the stop-motion type sometimes are, their madcap onscreen antics were easy to contain and control. After all, their animated behaviour existed

only in the minds of the cartoonists who invented them. Unlike children's TV presenters and entertainers who have human foibles, it was impossible for the Teletubbies, Barney and the like, to mar their impeccable images by indulging in unsavoury activities. They could always be relied upon not to utter expletives, take drugs or get arrested for indecent exposure. Behind the scene frolics there were none. Each was an idealised paragon of computer-animated predictability, incapable of venturing outside the established parameters of their character's permissible behaviour.

This old business model would prevail for animation firms while their brand mascots featured only in the broadcast mediums of film and TV (Callcott and Lee 1995). Of course, the rise of 'communications anarchy' unleashed by the Internet changed everything (Earl and Waddington 2012). In particular, Web 2.0 technologies, according to the rhetoric at least, render an 'architecture of participation' (O'Reilly 2007, p. 22), that has led to consumer empowerment on a level previously unimaginable (Constantinides 2008; Kucuk 2009). While we are not so sure that everyone fancies themselves as a hermaphrodite prosumer – one that consumes and produces – it does seem that they increasingly consider themselves to be brand co-owners, rather than passive recipients of company-created brand messages (Cova and White 2010). As foreseen by Boutié (1997), and reiterated by recent scholarship, web 2.0 permits the unregulated representation of a brand by any consumer in whatever manner they see fit (Badot and Cova 2008; Greenberg 2010; Campbell *et al.* 2011). Partly as, Fisher and Smith (2011) note, this is due to the widespread availability of artistic and editing tools that enable consumers to alter a brand image in any way they please. Playing with these tools and uploading the results, provides an opportunity for creators, not only to manipulate the intended message, but also to potentially harm the reputation of that brand (Berthon *et al.* 2008).

This new breed of consumers make mashups which, in essence, are combinations of disparate bits of digital video, audio, text, and graphics refashioned into something new (Sonvilla-Weiss 2010; Warren 2010). Booth and Matic (2011, p. 185) describe such people as storytellers who, regardless of their angle or agenda, become unofficial representatives of each brand with which they engage. Tellingly, Pace (2008) asserts that YouTube is the destination of choice where such tales are increasingly told. In particular, he notes that the editing of popular television characters into innovative episodes is a mushrooming trend. These amateur productions present parodies, ranging from playful imitations through to clear intentions to criticise a brand (Willett 2008). So, in the context of this chapter, if your digital storytelling juices start to flow and you fancy making a video of Barbie in an uncompromising position with Ken, or even yourself, then go right ahead. If you would like, as amateur dabblers already have, to animate a scene where Marge Simpson gives fellatio to Peter Griffin, or where the Wile E. Coyote finally catches and kills the Road Runner, then there is little to stop you (except perhaps an injunction from the copyright holder). YouTube awaits your contribution to the 100 hours of content it receives every minute of every day (Sonvilla-Weiss 2010). Such is the era in which we now live.

Naturally, this situation is disquieting for animation firms whose brand mascots have potentially become as erratic and volatile as their human counterparts. They have little desire to see their beloved creations mocked, vilified and dragged through the proverbial mud by consumer critics. At the same time, they are equally fearful of YouTube tributes crafted by creators of 'fan fiction' whose intentions, although benign, are likely to be off message. For as Shalit (2000) points out, brand managers and presumably animation firms, have guidelines that specify the personality traits a spokes-character must display, the hand gestures it should make, the clothing it must wear, and the activities it can undertake. Any alteration to these, they warn,

can change perceptions of the brand mascot. Matters are not helped, when headlines harp on about the dangers of losing control of one's brand; and exasperate about the need for marketers to regain their brand management rights (e.g. Kumar *et al.* 2009; Rice 2010; Verhoef *et al.* 2013). And yet despite these dire warning, two questions that have never been fully answered, empirically at least, are (1) how damaging to the original brand are the production of these often scandalous, salacious and frequently silly remakes, remixes and mashups? (2) what is it that motivates consumers to tell these stories in the first place? Determining the latter is important in light of Berthon *et al.*'s (2008) point that to achieve greater sense of control online, marketers must first understand what drives people to produce online content. Additionally, this chapter seeks to make a meaningful contribution to the burgeoning consumer generated media (CGM) literature by providing evidence of the impact of controversial YouTube mashups, an extension of CGM which despite their popularity, as yet, have featured little in scholarly marketing research. In fact, this study is one of the first to investigate the impact of CGM on a celebrity brand mascot, also sometimes described in the literature as a spokes-character.

To explore these issues we will consider one such popular children's cartoon character, Peppa Pig. While plainly fond of a bit of mud herself, she has been well and truly dragged through it by content-creating animators of absurdity on YouTube. They have made – and are still making – mucky mashups of her in all kinds of parodic scenarios. You can witness her dance Gangnam Style, do the Harlem Shake or try her hand as a nightclub disc jockey. More darkly, you can listen to explicit voiceovers of various episodes, observe her kill herself and others, and if you are into scatological humour, well there are Peppa Pig videos available for you too. The bizarre scenarios available to view are seemingly endless. By way of netnographic analysis we will spend some time with those who have dared to meddle with Peppa Pig's squiggly tales. As well

as teasing out the motives of mashup creators, we interview Peppa Pig licensing officials and conduct online video elicitation interviews with Peppa Pig consumers. We begin by presenting a brief history of Peppa Pig, and follow with a deeper elucidation of our methodological approach.

One Little Pig

Peppa Pig is a British animated television series created by Astley Baker Davies in the form of five minute shorts. The star of the show is Peppa, a sweet but cheeky anthropomorphic female pig who lives with her little brother George, Mummy Pig and Daddy Pig. The gentle narrative revolves around family life and everyday experiences. The core target audience is mixed gender pre-school children, aged between two to six years old (Entertainment One Ltd 2012). The digitally rendered animated series is distributed by Entertainment One in 180 countries (Entertainment One Ltd 2012). At the time of writing over 200 episodes have aired. Peppa Pig won a BAFTA for best pre-school animation in 2005 (Astley Baker Davies 2012), and was credited with the title of number one pre-school property in 2010 and 2011 (Toy News 2012). Significantly, Peppa Pig has been licensed to endorse a number of products such as cake mixes, ice lollies and, more recently, porridge. Notably, there are currently 73 licensees on board (Cioletti 2013). Due to the television series' distinguished success, Peppa Pig can be considered a household name and a brand in its own right.

Since its conception in 2004, the show's popularity has spurred the production of character merchandise including playthings and plush collectables, books, DVD's, apps, and clothing (Johnson 2011). Significantly, in 2010 the show made £200 million through merchandising in the UK alone (UK Trade & Investment 2011). What is more, in 2012 the brand expanded to major territories, including the U.S., Australia, Spain, Russia and Benelux, and Peppa Pig is

set for continued international expansion (Cioletti 2013). For instance, in 2014 Entertainment One plans to take the series, and accompanying merchandise, into Asia and Latin America (Cioletti 2013). Peppa Pig has an enviable presence on Facebook, Twitter and the wider blogosphere, boasting many unofficial fan-created pages, in addition to the official company ones (e.g.: PeppaPigWorld.com). The animation company, Astley Baker Davies, also hosts live stage productions where the public can meet Peppa and her posse of family and friends. There is even a theme park in Hampshire, which while hardly on a par with Disney World, is becoming a popular family destination.

Research Methodology

Acquiring an understanding of the underlying motivations of the consumers, creators and guardians of Peppa Pig, is fully equitable with a qualitative approach. Somewhat ironically, our aim, in a fashion, is to anthropomorphise and humanise our insights, so that understanding is not too taxing. To this end, we embark upon a netnography of the variety that Kozinets (2006) champions in consumer and marketing research. Essentially online ethnography, netnography is an open-ended, explanatory and representational research technique used for providing insight into online cultures and communities (Jupp 2006). There are three variants of netnography, based on the ratio of the researcher's participation versus observation in the virtual community, namely: observational netnography; participant-observational netnography; and autonetnography (Kozinets 2006). Of these three categories, this study falls somewhere between a participant-observational netnography and an autonetnography. Reflexive field notes were also used to record the researcher's personal emotions during the online inquiry.

Before initiating entrée into the world of YouTube, one month was spent casually observing interactions in the virtual community. This process of acculturation enabled us to familiarise ourselves with the netiquette and terminology used within this online environment (Beckman and Langer 2005). After this probationary period, a user profile was created. Standard membership allowed unlimited access to the site's features, whilst helping the first author of this chapter to embed herself in the community and become 'one of them' (Bochner and Ellis 1998, p. 8). Following Bruckman (2006), so as not to deceive community members, disclosure was provided on the personal profile. It provided details of the researcher's identity, the university affiliation and the nature of this research project.

Throughout the netnographic inquiry, she naturally progressed from 'lurker' to 'newbie'; a neophyte who desires to learn more about the virtual community, through to 'mingler'; a socialiser who develops strong ties with community members, but who is predominantly concerned with consumer generated media consumption (Kozinets 2010). In doing so, she subscribed to different users' channels, and actively commented on other users' videos. This transition was important since a member who does not participate in a community may be viewed questionably, or considered a free-loader, who takes, but offers nothing in return (Yeow *et al.* 2006).

Searching for 'Peppa Pig' content in YouTube gleaned 351,000 results. The most popular videos are official Peppa Pig webisodes, uploaded by Eonefamily (Entertainment One's official brand channel), while the rest can be classified as consumer-generated content. Significantly, some of these videos have amassed over 600,000 views; an indication of the size of the audience such videos can potentially attract, although it should be said that the majority receive very few viewings. Having selected key mashups, we tagged each video as a 'favourite', which

enabled us to manage and track them (Levy 2008). In total, five of the most controversial mashups were selected. They were titled as follows: YouTube Mashup: I'm Peppa Shit (wind96xx 2011); Watch PEPPA PIG dies episode 1 (themaskehdhunter0101 2011); Peppa Pig Adventures 1 (Olinatorthebest 2010); and Peppa Pig Drum 'n' Bass Remix by Fruityloops and Photoshop (Shawzy147 2012). Comment threads from the abovementioned mashups were collected as data. Comments were captured exactly as they appeared, including grammatical errors and graphical representations, such as emoticons; this facilitated further insight into the attitudes of each content consumer (Markham 2004). They were collected until coded sections became so saturated that they no longer yielded fresh insights.

As this study aims to gauge the offline impact (brand reputation) of an online phenomenon (mashups), it was believed, in keeping with other authors (e.g. Jones and Kucker 2001; Kozinets and Kedzior 2009; Steinmetz 2012), that conducting a pure autonetnography would be insufficient. Accordingly, the first empirical phase was concerned with observing, extracting, analysing and aggregating the responses to the controversial mashups within the virtual community (Bartl *et al.* 2009). The second stage involved conducting semi-structured interviews with Peppa Pig licensing officials Sarah Powell and Hannah Mungo, online interviews with the creators of the mashups, and online video elicitation interviews with Peppa Pig consumers. These online interviews were conducted via YouTube's chat facility. The use of video elicitation, via YouTube, had the benefit of gaining consumer responses to the mashups in their organic setting. Thus, the data were gathered in situ, and consequently, were free from the bias that may arise from a more experimental research setting (Bartl *et al.* 2009).

Brand Damage?

So how damaging to Peppa Pig's original brand are the production of mashups? The literature unequivocally suggests that they are deeply damaging. Hannabuss (2002), for instance, asserts that creative montages like the Peppa Pig mashups will lead to brand image dilution, while Berthon *et al.* (2008) worries that contrary messages on channels like Youtube that are misaligned with core brand values could be catastrophic for a brand's future. Similarly, Thompson *et al.* (2006) claim that creative consumers in virtual communities will initiate the creation of a 'doppelganger brand image' that possesses a competing set of meanings that, over time, could potentially influence consumer beliefs. With such a coalescence of concerns, it is hardly surprising that the guardians of the Peppa Pig brand are themselves extremely weary of mashups. Interviews with key informants from Entertainment One underline the scope of their anxieties:

The content of traditional Peppa Pig episodes has a broad appeal that has relevance and is liked by mums, dads, boys and girls. There is a strong message in the show of the importance of family and support. Another central theme is fun and humour – the brand is very funny and true to everyday life...However, within these YouTube Mashups there is not a broad appeal to a lot of the subject matter and they do not follow a line of friendship and family. These elements could be perceived as trust breaking, as the experiences in the Mashups are not true to life and could potentially expose children to content that is irrelevant or immoral.

Sarah Powell, Entertainment One Licensing Executive

The profanity and use of sexualised content do not relate to the brand or the quality of the programme content. Even the fun and humour involved in the tamer mashups are not related to the broad fun and humour used in the show. This humour type is much older in content and again doesn't relate back to the brand values.

Hannah Mungo, Head of UK Licensing at Entertainment One

Yet our evidence suggests that the brand damage is less significant than they imagine. While it is true that the consumers we interviewed did, of course, recognise the potential damage being wrought on Peppa Pig, on the whole, their brand perceptions did not appear changed. Specifically, consumers distinguished between the 'real' Peppa Pig and the Peppa Pig presented within the YouTube mashups. For instance, after watching 'Watch PEPPA PIG dies episode 1', several consumers note:

I know peppa pig is just a light hearted children's program and that that is just a video by someone with far too much time on their hands has made so it doesn't change my perception of the brand.

Megan

That's not Peppa Pig, THE Peppa Pig would never do that – peppa is a loveable and friendly pig and wouldn't do such things. This isn't the Peppa which me and my children love. It's just a silly parody of it.

Graham

For these viewers, and others like them, the Peppa Pig brand cannot be tarnished by the absurd video renderings of a few amateur creators. Certainly, disdain for the creators of the YouTube mashups is a prominent refrain in both the comments and the consumer interviews. This goes some way to supporting Shifman's (2011) view that the unpolished and amateur-looking nature of spoof videos invites viewers to mock the creators. The YouTube mashup viewers typically condemned the creators for exploiting what is widely regarded as an innocent and upstanding brand. For instance, Echech remarks:

What is wrong with you! You should be ashamed of yourself! I can take a joke as much as the next person but when you mess with children's shows there is nothing funny about that! This is criminal My 2 year old just saw this and it is a travesty. How can you live with yourself! I plan on doing something about this! You are a sick and horrible person!

Clearly, Echech's disdain is towards the creator of the YouTube mashup, and not the Peppa Pig brand. Mike expresses a similar sentiment: "I'm disappointed and a bit sickened that someone would spend time creating and enjoying the creation of such material about such an appealing children's character". Many other YouTube users were quick to condemn the creator with comments like: "You're a big fat meanie. I love Peppa Pig!", "Why would you even make this up? Pathetic creature.", "you monster!!", "this is stupid... peppa pig is a show for kids" and "Sick minds...who makes such disgusting videos?" All such sentiments demonstrate the overall consensus that those who viewed the YouTube mashups did not consider the brand negatively; rather, the brand was considered a victim that had fallen prey to 'pathetic' and 'sad' creators. Drawing on the celebrity spokesperson literature, it can be argued that Peppa Pig is involved in what Louie and Obermiller (2002) term 'a low blame situation', where Peppa Pig is a victim within the YouTube mashups, whilst the creator is the perpetrator. Consequently,

it follows that Peppa Pig receives sympathy from consumers, and the brand reputation remains unharmed.

Moreover, the video scenarios these creators depicted are so outlandish, so far removed from the well-established fictional realm of Peppa that exposure to them does not significantly alter their feelings for the brand. For instance, having watched ‘Peppa Pig Adventures 1’, we note that Peppa Pig is carrying a gun, and has a drawn-on moustache and menacing-looking eyebrows. In respect of this, one of our interviewees observes: “Peppa Pig’s facial features are much less friendly here. She is drawn with sharp lines which make her look more aggressive and evil” (Jasia). Why then, if the graphically altered Peppa Pig causes the viewer to have a negative impression of the character, does this not negatively transfer to the brand? One possible reason is that brands are not wholly visual (Schroeder 2005). To explain, symbolic depictions of a brand are only fractional reflections. Rather, brands are constructs of personality, inherent character, history and organisational traits (Balmer and Soenen 1999; Balmer 2008; He and Avinandan 2009). Such a multi-layered understanding of a brand is evidenced through Amy’s response:

Me and my Jake [the interviewee’s son] have met the real Peppa before in Nottingham. Peppa was friendly and gave my son a cuddle. Peppa doesn’t speak much though, because she’s only young herself.

The interviewee is referring to the Peppa Pig mascot deployed in and around the country to promote the brand. Symbolic representations of the Peppa Pig brand mascot within the YouTube mashups were not considered in isolation, rather such proxies were measured against prevailing deep-rooted experience with the brand, what Christensen and Askegaard (2001, p. 311) terms its ‘organisational reality’.

It is clear that respondents are familiar with Peppa Pig’s back-story and the wider brand experience, and thus perceive Peppa Pig as more than an identifying icon of the brand. This

finding goes some way to supporting Rowley's (2004) contention that the graphic design and logo do not create a brand, they simply assist in accelerating brand recognition. This concept is mirrored in Deidre's articulation:

The thing is though, Peppa Pig is so much more than an animation! I can remember I went to visit peppa pig land in Paulton's themepark last year. We met Peppa and brought lots of Peppa goodies. Certainly nothing that happened in that YouTube poop would happen there!

Here the respondent reflects on her first-hand experience with the brand, and contrasts it with the representation within the YouTube mashup. This finding is congruent with Brunk and Blümelhuber's (2011) contention that consumers have multiple pieces of data, including personal experience, on which they base their evaluative impression of a brand. Taken together, these findings also support Abratt and Kleyn's (2012) argument that, when considered in totality over time, a stakeholder's experience of a brand can form the organisation's reputation. Or as Davies *et al.* (2003, p. 39) said more succinctly: "reputation is cumulative".

To summarise, although consumers perceive the Peppa Pig character to be fundamentally different within the YouTube mashups, they evaluate the actions of the character against their past experience with the brand. A consumer's lived experience of the brand dominates the experience mediated through the YouTube mashups. As Licensing Executive, Sarah Powell, insists: "Peppa Pig is committed to being trustworthy, it is a wholesome brand, trusted and endorsed by parents." Thus when contrasting the consumer's minimal exposure to YouTube mashups, against their longitudinal and on-going encounter with the brand, it is clear that the longitudinal encounter wins every time. As Christensen and Askegaard (2001) argue, the entrenchment of the original Peppa Pig identity in the consumer's mind overpowers and rejects any new mashup-contrived consumer-generated identity. The established belief of what a brand 'really is' is a powerful construct that, despite hysterical warnings to the contrary, cannot be easily weakened.

Creators' Motivations

YouTube users who had viewed Peppa Pig mashups were often rather taken aback by the content they had just viewed. In trying to establish the motives that drove the content creators, common reactions included the expression of anger and confusion. For instance, having watched 'peppa pig dies haha' Quenine enquires: "This is shameful!! Children's favourite programme being exploited like this...only kids watch it so why do such shameful things?" And within the consumer interviews, Jacob wondered: "I am unsure why the creator would even wish to create a video like this? I simply don't understand who the target audience is". The same sentiment was also evident in Catherine's field note: "this is so bizarre; I honestly can't understand why someone would exert time and effort to create this!" (Author's fieldnotes, 20th May, 2013). To this end, interviews with the creators were insightful. They revealed that there was no definitive motive behind the creation of the controversial Peppa Pig YouTube mashups. Rather, motivations were varied, supporting the diverse motivations for the production of consumer generated content as articulated in the burgeoning literature on the subject (Hannabuss 2002; George and Scerri 2007; Bughin 2007). Chiefly, however, the motivations can be categorised under the following three headings: *being creative*; *social capital*; and *aversion*.

Being Creative

Several of the YouTube Mashup creators made explicit that their motivation was the simple act of being creative; or as wind96xx termed it, "just for fun". Wind96xx is the creator of 'YouTube Mashup: I'm Peppa Shit'. The creator describes his motivation: "I love making these videos for my own pleasure, it is strangely entertaining...You see, I'm an artist. Lol." This finding is consistent with Berthon *et al.* (2008), who also asserts that the act of creation is a

motivating factor in the generation of consumer generated advertisements. And in a world where being creative is becoming “the last bastion of the human spirit in an age in which electronic devices are taking over most noncreative functions” (Crompton 2010, p. 2), it is hardly surprising that people take solace in such activities. The work may be amateurish, a little rough around the edges, but the creators are clearly proud of their work, otherwise they would not embolden it with their name, moniker though it may be.

Further communication with themaskedhunter0101 revealed that a key strategy for attaining the popularity he craved: “Personally I don’t like the Peppa Pig series because it is wayyyyyyy under my age group, so I thought I would make a funnier series about it for older people to enjoy.” Aside from empirically reconfirming that brands are on-going social constructions co-created by consumers (Muniz and O’Guinn 2001), the creator could be said to be redeveloping a brand relationship through producing the YouTube Mashup. This is consistent with the findings of other authors’ discussions of the motivations for consumer-generated content production (Schau and Gilly 2003; Wipperfurth 2005; Pace 2008). For instance, Pace (2008) suggests that creators of online video content often use products or brands in novel and entertaining ways, permitting creators to redevelop their brand relationships. This also adds credence to Wipperfurth’s (2005) argument that consumers create content to communicate their own interpretation of brands.

That one of the most important motivating factors for content creators is a desire to be recognised for the production of interesting and stimulating content is in keeping with Shao’s (2009) comprehensive review of the appeal of creating online media who asserts that, undoubtedly, it is the principal factor. By sharing their videos over which they have complete editorial control, the creators become agents in their own right. They become active consumers,

telling stories about Peppa Pig that convolute and entwine with their own stories. In doing so, they can ignite not only their imaginations, but potentially those of others too. This corroborates Hannabuss' (2002) view, with specific reference to the creation of parodies, that users produce content with the purpose of evoking laughter in the viewer. In a similar vein, Shifman (2011, p. 195) found that 'playfulness', whereby a video is created to be humorous, was a prevalent theme in the production of YouTube memes.

Social Capital

A major theme in our data that clearly incentivises mashup creators is the desire to be recognised for their work, or as much of the literature dubs it, have their 'social capital' enhanced (Bowman and Willis 2003; Ellison *et al.* 2007). Of course, in order to do this, they know that they must produce something of value, something that people will enjoy, either by way of education or entertainment. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that for themaskedhunter0101, the impetus for creating the controversial YouTube Poop 'Watch PEPPA PIG dies episode 1' is articulated thus: "My reason for making this video and others like it is for entertainment purposes. Though I never truly had a goal, I just hoped to make people laugh who could essentially enjoy such videos..." Interestingly, throughout the netnographic inquiry, we developed reasonably close ties with themaskedhunter0101. Unprovoked, he contacted us on several occasions, sending us links to new mashups that he had created, and inquiring if there were, "any specific Peppa Pig mashups that you would like me to create?" These communications stand to reinforce the notion that he was getting a genuine sense of self-gratification out of pleasing others.

Everyone, of course, likes to be popular, and much has been written about how content-creating consumers with every YouTube upload, tweet posted, and Facebook status update manage to

say as much about themselves as they do about the subject they are commenting on (Patterson 2012). This striving for popularity and the thrill it can provide once achieved is evident in the collected data:

The reason i created this was because it was a laugh to do, i found it very fun indeed i didnt expect anyone to like it but i work with children and i showed it to them and they loved it!! i cant believe the reaction from it.

(Shawzy147)

I made it and it got unbelievably popular, so I made a sequel, “YouTube Mashup: School Gay”. It didn’t get so popular but everything above 10000 views is good enough for me.

(Wind96xx)

I just love making vids like this. Personally, I don’t even know much about Peppa Pig. All I know is that it's a cartoon for young children about a little female pig and its family. I never thought it could become THIS popular.

(Olinatorthebest)

Consumer research also draws attention to the fact that YouTube is predominantly a place of self-promotion and, as such, brands feature peripherally (e.g. Schau and Gilly 2003; Cheong and Morrison 2008). Moreover, the findings of the present study complement those of Smith *et al.* (2012) who infer that, on YouTube, peripherally-located brands are often evaluated with neutral sentiments.

Aversion

A third motivating theme that stimulated the creation of controversial mashups is aversion. Initially, we were alerted to this theme, not through the interviews held with creators, but through textual analysis of the YouTube mashup ‘Peppa Pig Dies haha’. Within the mashup’s caption, its creator, MissHarrietB, declares: “I really hate Peppa Pig! She must be staked to a wall”. Surprisingly though, rather than stake Peppa to a wall, this mischievous mashup maker decided instead to create a much more visually arresting and dramatic animation. Her mashup features Peppa Pig calmly, yet determinedly, setting herself on fire, and horrifically perishing in the resulting flames. While it would be tempting to speculate that this was intended as a

subversive and subtle, albeit bizarre, commentary on the extreme self-immolation practises of pork-denying Buddhist monks, an interview with MissHarrietB clarifies the actual root cause of her aversion:

I have no relations with the Peppa Pig brand, i just find her annoying and wanted to get revenge on her. The Peppa Pig brand is just confuddling as peppa pig is a pig, yet she can hold a fork even though she has no opposable thumbs, and she has a pet fish, which begs further questions.

It seems MissHarrietB has a simple aversion to anthropomorphism, to animals displaying human traits, rather than to Peppa Pig per se. Cartoon animation of pigs dressing up as people and engaging in acts of speech, just seems objectionable to her. Anthropomorphic aversion, although rife in the world of cartoon animation, is a common complaint mentioned in both wider discussions of anthropomorphism (Kennedy 1992), and in consumer research (Bettany and Belk 2011; Patterson *et al.* 2012).

Elsewhere in our dataset, Olinatorthebest, creator of ‘Peppa Pig Adventures 1’, claims that his mashup was also an expression of aversion. Nonetheless, as with MissHarrietB, it was not aimed squarely at Peppa Pig, but rather at the generic domestic animal, the pig:

I created this mashup because of my hatred for pigs!!! My father used to keep them when we were children. They are such pointless animals. I don’t even know what peppa pig is really. All I know is that for a brief moment in my mashup pigs actually become interesting! That’s what I wanted to achieve.

Selecting a well-known animal type for any cartoon character can, of course, be coloured by preconceptions that a particular viewer, holds about a particular animal. Moreover, pigs are a particularly problematic animal for they are often, as Arabella *et al.* (2007, p. 1) notes “derided for their apparent slovenliness, unclean ways, and gluttonous behaviour”. Olinatorthebest is clear, for instance, that his mashup creation is not a personal attack on the Peppa Pig brand, as he admits to having little knowledge of it. This finding adds credence to the argument that animal symbolism and cultural experience play a role in the way in which a brand mascot is perceived (Callcott and Phillips, 1996; Phillips, 1996). Consequently, whilst Mou and Jeng (2008) and Chaney (2011) note that the graphic design of the brand mascot can artfully

distances the animal's meaning from cultural undertones, Olinatorthebest's hijacking of the Peppa Pig mascot stands to support those who argue that an unfavourable experience of an animal may still lead to a negative perception of a brand mascot (Callcott and Philips, 1996; Phillips, 1996; Chiu *et al.* 2009).

More importantly, however, our empirical research makes it clear that the conclusion reached by Kerr *et al.* (2012) and Bosman (2006), that creators produce spoofs simply to declare their like or dislike for a brand, needs a little nuancing. In fact, simple dislike for a brand under attack by mashup makers is rarely the abiding motive. According to our research, mashup makers have only a cursory engagement with the Peppa Pig brand, prior to subjecting it to an idiosyncratic YouTube edit. Often, we found more complex underlying motives – perhaps relating to their personal experience with the specific brand mascot animal, or their attitudes to anthropomorphism – can be the cause of their aversion.

Pigging Out

Peppa Pig will not be butchered by the machinations of mashup makers. Regardless of the mud they sling in her direction, the presence she already occupies in the minds of her loyal followers, children and adults alike, is too powerful to be diluted by their brand-meddling efforts. Indeed, their YouTube interventions, their playful rooting around and 'pigging out' with the brand, for good or ill, might actually be a cause, not for consternation, but for celebration. Since, in a fashion, they signal that the brand has become a distinguished touchstone in the vanguard of popular culture, and therefore is deemed a worthy target for a mashup makeover. And to brutalise Oscar Wilde's maxim: is it not better to be talked about, than not be talked about?

In any case, the search and display algorithms on YouTube will keep the most offensive, least admired mashups beyond the reach of all but the most inquisitive YouTube viewers or truffle hogs, as we like to call them. Unless, the creators produce a truly remarkable mashup with go viral potential, it is likely to remain buried deep in YouTube's vast video vaults, unseen and unliked. Unless a talented underground artist somehow manages to breakthrough with an interesting and acceptable twist on Peppa Pig, attracting an audience for said mashup will be difficult. Besides which, there are easier targets, like the legion of Disney mascots, for mashup makers to marshal against. This is probably why the image of Mickey Mouse nailed to a crucifix has become so commonplace.

Mashup makers may construct new narratives around brand mascots, but even when they do receive an audience, those who witness the piglet protagonist transmogrify into a fowl-mouthed, murderous strumpet, report that the representation is so ridiculously absurd, so far removed from the innocent character they know and love, that they dismiss it as an aberration; as just another piece of Internet flotsam that they will soon forget. Their perception of the brand thus remains unchanged. Moreover, the self-policing reprimands issued by YouTube commenters also acts as a restraint on creators, who, as we have seen, seek above all else, the endorsement of their peers and the wider YouTube community.

This, of course, is the worst possible outcome for mashup makers since, as we have demonstrated, the denigration of our mud-loving Mascot is rarely their overriding motivation. These guys, as they mostly are, just want to showcase their creative talents and share their oeuvre with the world by piggybacking on the Peppa Pig brand name. Really, they just want YouTube browsers to acknowledge their existence and perhaps subscribe to their YouTube channel. This finding accords with Thornton's (2010) contention that fan videos allow users to

produce and distribute 'a packaged self', which is a careful and considered construction of the image they wish to portray. YouTube, as the name suggests, says much more about *you* - that is, the content creator - than the actual content of any video he/she uploads. As such, Peppa Pig fans can rest easy. Her brand is not brittle or broken. She will not be trampled to bits by the piggish absurdity of mashup makers, any time soon. On the contrary, she will continue to oink and giggle in the minds of those who hold her dear, oblivious to mashup makers, and happy as a pig in mud.

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