

## **“The Billion Dollar Pig - A Subjective Extrospective Exploration of the Cross-Cultural Meanings of The Peppa Pig Cartoon Character Franchise”**

### **Abstract**

As a family, the children’s cartoon character franchise Peppa Pig has loomed large in our lives for our daughter’s first three years. The character stars in a popular TV cartoon series that is shown in more than 180 countries, alongside Mummy and Daddy Pig, little brother George and multiple anthropomorphised friends. The cartoon is the centre of a vast \$1.3 billion spin-off franchise operation (Richman, 2015) including countless moulded plastic toys of the characters and their town, print publications, swimming aids, sticker and game books, children’s clothes and bedroom items, DVDs, and a dedicated theme park in the UK.

This poster represents ongoing research that explores the cultural contradictions and tensions that are exposed by the cartoon. It uses subjective extrospection and online data extracts from Peppa Pig social media fora from parents from East Asia, the USA, and the UK.

It is clearly directed at infants and toddler, yet the cartoon characterisation and storylines have sometimes been controversial, inspiring complaints and even anti-Peppa activism in some countries. Peppa can be quite bombastic, her favourite activity is jumping in muddy puddles and she sometimes likes to blow raspberries to signal her discontent. Daddy is kind but rather silly, and her Mummy is invariably right, and always patronising towards Daddy Pig. They live in a two storey house on a hill, they are very British, with Wellington boots and umbrellas for rainy days, they are avid TV watchers and players of video games, they have a small red car and they go on holidays to Italy. George and Peppa go to playgroup with their friends, Danny Dog, Suzy Sheep and many others. The ideological undercurrents of Peppa’s storylines are distinctively Western, indeed British middle class, heteronormative and economically patriarchal - Daddy is the breadwinner (a design engineer, it seems), but Mummy is in charge, and she never tires of patronising Daddy Pig. He seems to accept his role as figure of ridicule with cheery indifference.

Peppa Pig’s global popularity is a curiosity given that, beneath the quirky Britishness of the storylines and characters, aspects of its content are clearly culturally discordant, even subversive to conservative cultural values in some countries. Parents have some strong and striking views on the ideologies to which young viewers are being exposed, and this poster describes initial findings from the study. Some parents feel that the cartoon is imposing values on their household that they do not share and to which they not want their child exposed, yet they feel powerless to resist the corporate Leviathan that is the billion Dollar Pig. How can a parent tell a child that Peppa is banned from the household when cable cartoon channels feature dozens of airings of the show per day, and their children see Peppa Pig merchandise in every newsagent, toy shop and everywhere there are children? Online fora act as a space in which such disquiet can be aired without being subject to ridicule. What kind of parent would feel uncomfortable at such a colourful and childish cartoon that brings so much evident joy to millions of very young children?

This research study does not seek to detail the sociocultural branding strategy (Diamond et al., 2009) of Peppa Pig, but, rather, seeks to explore the ideological tensions that parents in different countries allude to when they express their discomfort with what, on the face of it, is merely a baby’s entertainment. Of course, children’s toys and stories can indeed carry a deep

cultural resonance and this study seeks to pick apart some of the ideological complexities that lurk in the muddy puddles of Peppa's world.

#### References

Diamond, N., Sherry, Jr. J.F., Muñiz, Jr. A. M., McGrath, M.A., Kozinets, R.V., and Borghini, S. (2009), American Girl and the Brand Gestalt: Closing the Loop on Sociocultural Branding Research, *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 73, May, p.118–134.

Richman, S., *TV cartoon Peppa Pig – now worth \$1bn a year – is making a leap to the big screen*, at <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/tv/features/tv-cartoon-peppa-pig-now-worth-1bn-a-year-is-making-the-leap-to-the-big-screen-10042742.html>, accessed 08/01/2017.