Engaging Media

Fan Communities
and Shock Advertisements

Patrik Åker & Anne Kaun (eds.)

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Contents

Introduction

This volume contains adaptions of two noteworthy master theses written within the international master's programme in Media, Communication, and Cultural Analysis at Södertörn University and defended in 2023. Running since 2009, the programme has more than 100 alumni who are employed in the media, academia and education. In 2020, the department chose to distinguish the best theses in a printed volume. This is the fourth volume in the series.

The contributions in this volume cover two very different topics: how social media and content streaming sites are used to shape relationships between K-pop superstars BTS and their fan base in Sweden; how vegans/vegetarians respectively meat eaters react to the use of shock advertisements by the organization for animal advocacy, PETA. Although stretching across two such different topics, the chapters share an interest in zooming in on how media can be understood in relation to engagement and emotions. The two chapters provide a critical re-reading of para-social interactions and representations, and fruitfully re-center our attention to emotions and feelings as a pre-condition of our everyday digital practices and discourses.

The department for media and communications studies invites readers to engage with this crucial and critical work conducted by our master's students.

Stockholm, 19 February 2024
Patrik Åker, Programme Director
Anne Kaun, Professor

Digital Pied Pipers:
A study on para-social relationships, digital media and the BTS fandom

Vian Tahir

Prologue

Within ARMY, the fandom of the Korean pop group BTS, there is a running joke in the lines of "I was just planning to learn names, but I tumbled down a rabbit hole of content and did not resurface until I knew their dogs' names." This aptly describes my own experience a few years ago. Initially curious about who they were, I soon found myself immersed in their content, including 150 episodes of "Run BTS," the travel program "Bon Voyage" and live streams dating back to 2015.

This content, crafted not only to familiarize fans with the members – RM, Jin, Suga, J-Hope, Jimin, V, and Jungkook – but also to showcase their diverse personas, set itself apart from my exposure to Western celebrities. In "Run BTS," they engaged in elaborate scavenger hunts and tried cooking with a renowned Korean chef. "Bon Voyage" documented the group's journeys, including to Sweden. Live streams covered a spectrum from casual chats to arts and crafts sessions, along with more introspective moments where a member discussed the creative process behind each song on a newly released album.

The process of becoming completely engrossed in all this content isn't just an inside joke among fans. BTS acknowledges

this phenomenon in the song "Pied Piper," where leader RM delivers a rap:

> *Stop, now stop watching and study for your test*
>
> *Your parents and boss hate me*
>
> *Video clips, pictures, tweets*
>
> *V app, Bon Voyage*
>
> *I know you can't help what you like*
>
> *But stop, interpret the music video later*
>
> *You have so many pictures of me in your room anyway*
>
> *It's not just one hour, it's a whole year that'll disappear*
>
> *So this song is a reward I'm giving to you*

The wealth of content, noticeably different from Western celebrity norms, caught my interest. Not only did the quantity exceed my expectations, but the concept of "behind-the-scenes" had a distinctive quality. In contrast to staged casualness by Hollywood celebrities, BTS's content unmistakably revealed backstage dynamics. In their variety show, they openly interacted with the production crew, discussed staff monitoring live streams, debated game rules with the Run BTS crew and as I stepped back from the immersive experience and emerged from the rabbit hole, my scholarly curiosity was sparked regarding the social media dynamic between BTS and ARMY.

Introduction

Two central questions within the domain of media and communication studies are:

How does media affect the audience? What does the audience do with the media? These inquiries, focusing respectively on production and reception, have preoccupied scholars since the discipline's inception. On the one hand, scholarly discourse revolves around themes such as mass media, standardization, and the ensuing implications. On the other hand, attention is directed

toward the integration of media within everyday life and its role in constructing individual and collective identities.

The nexus between media technology, textual constructs, cultural forms, and human interaction underscores the attribution of meaning to media artifacts during their utilization. Within this context, the concept of para-social interaction (Horton and Wohl, 1956) assumes pivotal importance, converging with inquiries pertaining to authenticity. These dimensions are particularly pertinent within the scope of media research that focuses on fan cultures, where authenticity emerges as a central theme.

The rapid and dynamic processes of digitalization have engendered transformative shifts within media culture. As posited by Deuze (2012), contemporary engagement with media transcends a mere coexistence, evolving into a state of immersion within the media. This transformation is discernible in the evolution of fan practices, as individuals are now capable of engaging within fandoms through new channels and modes of media interaction.

This article endeavors to interlink these multifaceted themes by exploring the impact of digital media on fan cultures, the influence exerted by the music industry, and the subsequent formation and perception of authenticity. Particular focus is directed towards the realm of Korean pop music (K-pop), with an emphasis on the group BTS and its Swedish fanbase.

The Korean Wave

Over the past two decades, South Korea has experienced considerable success in developing and globally exporting its cultural products, commonly referred to as "Hallyu" or the "Korean Wave" (Flew, 2011; Jin, 2016; Jin & Yoon, 2017). According to Jin (2017), key contributors to the of Hallyu include the proliferation of advanced information and communication technology (ICT) and social media platforms.

Korean popular music, or K-pop, stands out as one of the most successful and impactful subsets of Hallyu (Flew, 2011, pp. 54–55; Hesmondhalgh, 2011, pp. 409–412; Jin, 2015, pp. 29–33). In the late 2000s it had an estimated worth of US$30 million and by 2019

it had experienced substantial growth, reaching US$564.2 million (Flew, 2011; Jin, 2015; Waldeck, 2020). Stylistically, K-pop represents a youth-centric genre that fuses various musical genres, including electronic dance, hip hop, and rock, while incorporating influences from traditional Korean musical heritage and lyrics in the Korean language (Jin, 2016, pp. 111–132). The surge in popularity, particularly since the mid-2010s, is credited to digital platforms providing global access to music and artists and enabling fans to follow and interact with their favorite artists, thereby fostering global engagement.

BTS, acclaimed as one of K-pop's most accomplished groups, consistently shatters streaming records, amasses awards, and serves as diplomatic ambassadors for South Korea through their UN ambassadorship (Carras, 2020; Jin, 2021; Tanús, 2020; Westfall, 2021). The active engagement of their fan base across various social media platforms is identified as a pivotal element contributing significantly to their success (Aisyah & Jin, 2017; Jin, 2021; King-O'Riain, 2021).

Previous research

Embarking on a review of previous research, this summary provides a brief historical overview of four foundational theories: mediatization, para-social relationships, fan culture, and authenticity. This historical overview lays the conceptual groundwork for subsequent exploration within the theoretical domain. By merging medialization and fan culture, the concept of "always-on fandom" is conceived. Similarly, at the intersection of medialization and para-social relationships, the notion of "one-and-a-half para-social relationships" emerges. Moreover, through the interplay of medialization and authenticity theories, concepts such as "corroborated authenticity" and "calibrated amateurism" come to the forefront. These concepts will be expounded upon in greater detail in the theory section.

Through the concept of media logic Altheide and Snow (1979) formulated a theoretical framework aiming to enhance the under-

standing of mass media formats and delineate the influence exerted by the media on institutions and social behavior. The examination centered on the mass media system and its power to influence and potentially bring about societal transformation. Deriving from this, the concept of "mediatization" challenged the perception of media as a distinct entity (1979) and explores how media's features impact institutions and social behavior. Through digitalization media has become increasingly intertwined with society, permeating daily life, public discourse, and institutions (Couldry and Hepp 2017; Deuze 2012; Moores 2012). Sherry Turkle's "Always-On/Always-On-You: The Tethered Self" (2008) emphasizes that digital media's constant presence influences human interactions and self-perception, as individuals become entwined with these technologies. Couldry and Hepp (2017) argue that our lives, both individually and collectively, are molded and reliant on media, extending to governance, institutions, and political discourse. This process has intensified over the past decade, culminating in a "deep mediatization."

The theory on para-social interactions can be situated within the realm of media logics as presented above, serving as a framework to examine how the features and formats of media impact institutions and social behaviors. It finds its origins in Horton and Wohl's seminal work, "Mass Communication and Para-Social Interaction" (1956), an essay that explored how television audiences at the time developed notions of a relationship or feelings of familiarity with public personas, akin to those experienced with long-standing friends or family members. And, what role the production and the mannerisms of television personas played in the conception of this particular type of relationship.

Initially, interest in para-social interaction theories was limited and diminished shortly after their introduction in 1956. In an overview of para-social interaction and relationship research Nicole Liebers and Holger Schramm (2019) noted that with the advent of social media in the mid-2010s scholarly studies on the subject increased, as the public interest prompted scholarly exploration of the role of social media in para-social relationships.

Adjacent to the theories on para-social interaction are explorations of the impact of social media on celebrity culture and, celebrities' use of social media platforms to provide "backstage access" to their followers by sharing personal aspects of their lives, thereby narrowing the between themselves and their fans (Marwick and Boyd 2011; Jerslev & Mortensen 2018). While Jerslev and Mortensen raise uncertainty about intermediaries in Western celebrities' social media activities, the K-pop industry openly acknowledges such intermediaries (Elfving-Hwang 2018; Leung 2017). Interestingly, this transparency enhances the impression of credibility and a sense of intimacy for fans. Fans believe themselves fully informed about the process, enabling them to distinguish between unscripted broadcasts and more structured content with production staff, with the latter still perceived as personal due to the assumption that staff is present for support rather than directing the content (Elfving-Hwang 2018; Leung 2017).

Another facet of popular culture and its influence on audiences is situated within the domain of fan studies dedicated to the systematic examination of the activities, behaviors, and cultural dynamics inherent in fan communities (Bacon-Smith 1992; Jenkins, Lewis1992; Penley 1992). The works of Bacon-Smith, Jenkins, Lewis and Penley, all published in 1992, signified a shift from pathologizing fandom to emphasizing its positive cultural impacts.

Jenkins (1992) positioned fans as active audiences, challenging negative stereotypes and promoting a participatory culture. Lewis echoed this stance, critiquing the stigmatization of fandoms and advocating for their recognition as cultural contributors. Nonetheless, despite recent academic nuance, negative depictions persist in media and fiction (Cristofari & Guitton, 2017). Scholars like Bennet (2014), Cristofari & Guitton (2017) and Roach (2014) note the transformative role of the internet in fan interaction. As highlighted by Seymour (2014) online communities foster global connections among informed fans, enabling unprecedented engagement and discussion.

Transitioning to the exploration of authenticity, discussions on this concept present challenges, as scrutinized by Phillip Van-

ning and J. Patrick Williams in their work "Authenticity in Culture, Self, and Society" (2009). However, Kovács (2019) contends that scholars have predominantly adopted a "top-down" approach which contributes to the complexity as it conceptualizes authenticity in abstract terms. Instead, Kovács advocates for a more accessible "bottom-up" approach, highlighting the academic value of considering laypersons' perspectives which linked authenticity to more concrete ideas such as originality, uniqueness, quality, and honesty.

Chyun Oh (in Kuwahara 2014 p. 66–68) puts authenticity and K-pop in a postcolonial context, identifying that not only is authenticity a social construct, it has a colonial history and is furthered by global capitalism. As whiteness is seen as a natural and neutral representation of all races the perception of authenticity is culturally and racially constructed, where authenticity or realness stems from white supremacy. Thus, unless a culture product fits into a racial stereotype it will be deemed as inauthentic, as is the case with K-pop.

The study of Hallyu gained international traction in the 2010s (Yoon & Kang, 2017) and various Hallyu scholars emphasize the K-pop industry's proficiency in fostering digital engagement and strong fan bonds as part of this success (Jin & Yoon 2016; Jung 2017; Leung in Yoon, Jin 2017; Won 2017). Discussing social media and K-pop fans, Lisa Yuk-Ming Leung notes, "The productivity of fans has bedazzled international scholarship," underscoring the pivotal role of social media in Hallyu's success (Carras 2020; Jin & Yoon 2016; Jung 2017; Leung in Yoon, Jin 2017; Tanús 2020; Won 2017).

Rebecca Chiyoko King-O'Riain explores the relationship between K-pop artists and their fans in the USA and Europe in her 2021 publication, "They were having so much fun, so genuinely…: K-pop fan online affect and corroborated authenticity" and, in this work she he conveys the notion that fans are misled or lack awareness of the manufactured aspect of media content. However, it is worth noting that there remains a divergence of perspectives on the awareness of intermediaries in shaping an idol's online pre-

sence, challenging the unanimous understanding of authenticity construction within the K-pop sphere.

In contrast, Elfving-Hwang's (2018) work delves into the topic of beauty in the K-pop industry, revealing fans' nuanced awareness of the staged aspects of artists' appearances. Both male and female artists openly discuss the efforts they invest in maintaining their looks, including rigorous training, strict diets, skincare routines, makeup, and, in some cases, cosmetic surgery. However, fans do not perceive these efforts as fake or inauthentic; rather, they see them as integral to an idol's professional responsibilities. Interestingly, fans do not feel compelled to imitate idols attention to beauty regimens, as this is viewed as part of the idol's performance rather than an invitation for emulation.

While Jerslev and Mortensen raise uncertainty about intermediaries in Western celebrities' social media activities, the K-pop industry openly acknowledges such intermediaries (Elfving-Hwang 2018; Leung 2017). This transparency enhances credibility and a sense of intimacy for fans. Fans believe themselves fully informed about the process, enabling them to distinguish between unscripted broadcasts and more structured streams with production staff, with the latter still perceived as personal due to the assumption that staff is present for support rather than directing the content (Elfving-Hwang 2018; Leung 2017).

Despite Hallyu's global popularity, there is a scarcity of studies in the Swedish context, particularly on its audiences. While Tobias Hübinette's 2012 article, "The Reception and Consumption of Hallyu in Sweden: Preliminary Findings and Reflections," makes a contribution, he acknowledges the study's preliminary nature, and much has evolved in the landscape since then. Traditional fan studies exhibit a Western-centric focus, neglecting non-Western cultural productions and their fandoms (Chin, Hitchcock Morimoto 2017; Busse and Gray, 2011). Scholars highlight the potential insights from studying fans of transnational media in shaping global audiences (Busse and Gray 2011, p. 439) and, Chin and Hitchcock Morimoto critique the peripheral treatment of non-Western or non-English-speaking fandoms,

overlooked by scholars (2017, pp. 175–187). Tae-Jin Yoon (2017) contextualizes this within the Hallyu phenomenon which encompasses K-pop, arguing that global media studies lack a sufficiently developed postcolonial perspective, perpetuating a Western-oriented viewpoint (p. 110).

In addition to the imperative of broadening scholarly perspectives beyond a Western-centric framework, another motivation for redirecting attention is discerned in the evident distinctions and potential evolution of para-social relationships in K-pop. While Western celebrities offer glimpses of their lives on social media, K-pop idols engage in more extensive and detailed content creation, such as live broadcasts and streams. This aligns more closely with the strategies of micro-celebrities operating within niche online communities and amassing followers through social media platforms (Elliot & boyd, 2018; Hamad in Elliot et al., 2018).

Aim and research questions

This research seeks to unravel the complex tapestry of para-social relationships between K-pop superstars BTS and their fan base in Sweden. The limited scope of comprehensive studies on BTS in Sweden, a prominent international music phenomenon, highlights the necessity for an inquiry that encompasses both Western and non-Western perspectives.

The study intersects with various academic avenues, including fan studies and the interplay between media and everyday life. While most fan studies emphasize identity formation and community building, this research complements the discourse by exploring media logic within para-social relationships. Informed by the belief that production and reception are inherently interconnected, this study challenges the dichotomy between the two and emphasizes the audience's perceptiveness towards media logics. Recognizing audiences as active interpreters rather than passive consumers, the thesis argues that delving into media logic and text reception within the realm of K-pop is crucial. By elucidating how fans navigate the intricate web of media logic to

form para-social relationships, this research aspires to bridge this existing gap in scholarship.

In pursuit of this objective this study investigates the K-pop phenomenon within the Swedish context, with a particular focus on fans of BTS. The exploration encompasses an examination of the distinctive features characterizing K-pop culture and its manifestation within the Swedish K-pop community, especially among BTS fans. Additionally, the study delves into the presentation and experience of para-social interactions in content and production, specifically analyzing their impact on Swedish fans of BTS. The investigation also extends to understanding the intricate relationship between these dynamics and aspects of authenticity.

Theory

This section revisits key theoretical frameworks involving mediatization, para-social relationships, fan culture, and authenticity. However, the focus will shift to introduce pivotal concepts, namely "always-on fandom," "one-and-a-half para-social relationships," "corroborated authenticity," and "calibrated amateurism".

Always-on fandom

In contemporary media research, scholars underscore the integral role of media in society, influencing not only daily life but also public discourse, institutional frameworks, and infrastructure (Couldry & Hepp, 2017, Deuze 2012)

Sherry Turkle's exploration in "Always-On/Always-On-You: The Tethered Self" (2008) posits that we are now tethered to our communication devices, existing in an in-between space where our physical presence and digital persona coalesce through these devices. Subsequently, digital remains perpetually active and accompanies us wherever we go.

Building on these ideas, Hills (2018) introduces the concept of "always-on fandom," exploring how fans sustain continuous engagement with their interests online. This includes participating in discussions and sharing reactions to media content in

real-time. Hills underscores that fandom traverses the boundaries between the public and the private sphere, intertwining individual fan identity with its construction within the fan community. The availability of fan discussions online forms an immediate co-audience for fans' reactions, which can be instantaneously shared, compared, or discussed with others such as live-commenting during TV shows and observing real-time reactions. This shift fundamentally enables fans to co-interpret and co-decode media content. Within the realm of K-pop, this constant engagement is facilitated by dedicated platforms featuring live broadcasts accompanied by real-time comment sections, providing an authentic always-on experience for fans (King-O'Riain, 2021).

One-and-a-half para-social interaction

As previously alluded to, Horton and Wohl's (1956) seminal work on "para-social interaction," highlighted the potential of media in establishing a sense of familiarity and simulated face-to-face interaction between a media persona and its audience. This dynamic, guided by the persona, remains contingent on the active engagement of the audience, contributing through verbal and non-verbal cues, and mirroring actual social relationships in the viewer's daily life.

Expanding on this notion, Rachel Kowert and Emory Daniel Jr. (2021) introduce the concept "one-and-a-half" para-social relationships, grounded in the transformations brought about by social media platforms, in the context of micro-celebrities i.e, individuals who have gained substantial online recognition within specific online niches. They posit that several factors contribute to the emergence of this one-and-a-half sided para-social relationship. In contrast to the media landscape described by Horton and Wohl (1956), contemporary platforms enable direct communication with the persona, thereby reshaping the dynamics of audience-performer interaction. Notably, the live streaming format facilitates real-time commentary from viewers, indicating a potential for reciprocity between the viewer and performer. However, while potential for reciprocity exists, the sheer volume

of followers and comments makes it improbable for all inter-actions to be acknowledged. This unfulfilled potential for reci-procation is what distinguishes this relationship as merely one-and-a-half sided, rather than a two-sided interaction. (Kowert & Daniel Jr. 2021).

It's crucial to note the marked viewership disparity between micro-celebrities and global groups like BTS, influencing the likeli-hood of comment acknowledgment. While audiences interacting with BTS may not expect the same reciprocity as with micro-cele-brities, BTS occasionally responds to select comments, maintaining a limited potential for reciprocation despite their vast fanbase.

Corroborated authenticity & calibrated amateurism

Grazian (2019 emphasizes that authenticity it is not an inherent or neutral concept and, Vannini and Williams (2009) propose authenticity as a negotiated process—shaped through collective consensus, communication, and interaction—subject to con-tinuous challenge and defiance. Scholars like Grazian (2019), Shuker (2013), and Vannini & Williams (2009) link authenticity to favorable attributes such as originality, sincerity, and realness, traits highly sought after in the music industry.

Within the realm of K-pop, Rebecca Chiyoko King-O'Riain (2021) introduces the concept of "corroborated authenticity." This involves fans merging observations from various sources, in-cluding in-person encounters, media consumption, and digital platform engagements. Crucially, this corroborated authenticity is further validated through interactions among fans, reinforcing the perceived authenticity of the idol. This process not only deepens the emotional connection between fans and idols but also fosters a sense of camaraderie within the fan community.

Within this context, King O'Rianin refers to Abidins' (2017) concept of "calibrated amateurism," observed in influencers or micro-celebrities. As with the concept of one-and-a-half sided para-social relationships parallels can be drawn between the practices of micro-celebrities and K-pop idols, as the latter have adopted comparable strategies in content creation. Calibrated

amateurism deliberately engineers a contrived authenticity, presenting personas as novices despite their actual expertise. This approach aims to foster a sense of relatability between the persona and their audience, cultivating a connection and sense of identification through the implementation of three pivotal tactics.

Firstly, the use of various technologies, from smartphones to studio equipment, allows for a shift between amateurish and professional aesthetics (Abidin 2017). Similarly, K-pop idols employ diverse technologies, ranging from multiple cameras in a studio setup to mobile devices, for content broadcasting (King-O'Riain 2021). Secondly, the strategy reshapes expectations and comparisons across different content streams, demarcating meticulously produced content from more impromptu content. Thirdly, it correlates apparent spontaneity and behind-the-scenes glimpses into influencers' lives with a scripted performance genre (Abidin 2017). These transitions between formats can be likened to the variances in content formats observed among K-pop idols, such as the contrast between impromptu live broadcasts and studio-produced content (King-O'Riain 2021).

The "amateur" aspect of calibrated amateurism contributes to relatability when influencers intermittently challenge or reinforce expectations by deliberately making minor errors or engaging in self-parody. Although Abidin (2017) applies these findings to family influencers, King-O'Rain (2021) suggests they can be extended to apply to K-pop idols as well.

Methodology

Given the thematic focus on attributes of the K-pop fandom, their experiences in para-social interactions, and their interpretations of authenticity, coupled with the research's subject being K-pop fans, a qualitative approach is logically aligned. This alignment is substantiated by Jensen's (2002) assertion that qualitative research aims to comprehend and interpret meaning within a naturalistic context.

Scholarly recommendations for this type of research commonly advocate for interviews as a method, emphasizing its capacity to enable interviewees to articulate their experiences more comprehensively (Ayres 2008, Jensen 2002, Brinkmann Kvale 2015). As Kvale and Brinkmann explain (2009), an interview constitutes a "structured conversation with a purpose," seeking accounts of interviewees' lived experiences to facilitate the interpretation of phenomena. For this study, the choice of semi-structured interviews is informed by their ability to provide heightened systematicity and comprehensiveness compared to informal conversational interviews, all while maintaining a natural dialogue atmosphere (Bryman 2012; Kvale & Brinkmann 2014). Conducted through Zoom, the interviews, each lasting approximately one hour, involved presenting participants with brief excerpts from two video segments for their insights and observations concerning the content.

Through snowball sampling, wherein initial participants served as informants to identify and refer additional participants for inclusion in the study (Morgan in Given, 2008; Baltar & Brunet, 2012), and recruitment at fan events, seven dedicated fans of the musical group BTS were chosen as participants. To ensure confidentiality, pseudonyms have been assigned to each participant.

Selection criteria prioritized regular engagement with BTS-related content, including activities such as music consumption, participation in live streams, and engagement with entertainment shows produced by the group's record label. The participants, all women aged between 18 and 32, reflect the typical demographic of the ARMY fandom, which is predominantly female.

The interviews centered around three key themes: firstly, the exploration of fan practices; secondly, an examination of personal sentiments to unravel the perceived relationship between fans and the group members; and thirdly, the interviewees reviewed and commented on stimulus material to reflect on the elements that imbued a group with a sense of authenticity.

Ethical Considerations

Several ethical considerations were integral to the study's execution. These include power dynamics, practicalities of conducting online video interviews, and the need to balance the roles of being both an academic and a fan, often referred to as an "aca-fan." This section delineates the strategies adeptly employed to navigate these challenges.

Acknowledging power dynamics in researcher-subject relationships is crucial, as they can significantly influence interactions and outcomes, particularly with regard to factors such as gender, class, and race (Kumar, 2016). In the context of this study, recognizing the dimensions of gender, age, and the perceptions of young female fans was vital. The K-pop fan base, predominantly consisting of young women and girls, often faces marginalization, characterized as frivolous and overly enthusiastic, with their interests dismissed as lacking intellectual value (Kreuse, 1992; McCann, 2019; Yoon, 2017). Against this backdrop, it is crucial to establish transparency regarding the intentions of the research and reflections on the subject matter. Clearly articulating the research question and emphasizing the absence of judgment or condescension toward these young women was essential to create a respectful and equitable space for their insights.

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and requirements for masks and social distancing prompted a shift in research practices, necessitating the adoption of remote video interviews due to social distancing measures.

The advantages of remote video interviews included enhanced accessibility, time efficiency, cost-effectiveness, adaptability, and the integration of technical functionalities like screen sharing. However, it presents challenges such as internet connectivity issues, audio quality, the need for tool proficiency, and complexities in nonverbal communication (Archibald et al., 2019; Oliffe et al., 2021). The primary advantage in this case were practical benefits such as increased accessibility and flexibility which enabled engagement with individuals from different locations. The extended duration of the pandemic mitigated concerns about

nonverbal cues and rapport, as participants were accustomed to remote communication.

Privacy and confidentiality emerged as central concerns, particularly regarding video recording. To address these, a decision was made to retain only audio recordings, communicated to participants beforehand to enhance their comfort levels, assuring them that video data would not be preserved.

As fan studies evolved, a discourse emerged concerning the dual role of individuals as both academics and fans, giving rise to the term "aca-fan." This concept prompts an exploration of the inherent complexities and potential implications associated with these roles within both academia and fan culture (Busse 2018; Bennet 2014; Cristofari & Guitton 2017; Roach 2014).

It may introduce tensions between the anticipated academic detachment and the emotional engagement intrinsic to fan participation, along with disparities in language and communication conventions (Cristofari & Guitton 2017). The advantages of being an aca-fan include pre-existing familiarity with fan culture, language, and community access. However, ethical considerations, such as maintaining a clear boundary between participant and observer, need careful attention (Busse 2018; Bennet 2014; Jenkins 2006; Cristofari & Guitton 2017; Roach 2014).

In this study, the mutual understanding as an aca-fan and the interviewees facilitated a smooth interview process, eliminating the necessity for extensive explanations. The establishment of trustworthiness was enhanced by the interviewees' comfort in conversing with someone who comprehends the fandom, standing in contrast to their perception of mainstream media coverage, which they often find dismissive, derogatory, or inaccurate.

Analysis

This section is dedicated to presenting and exploring the research findings is divided into three segments.

"The rabbit hole," presents the interviewees journey of becoming fans of BTS. Subsequently it delineates the fundamental

attributes characterizing the realm of K-pop and the significance of BTS within this landscape. The ensuing analysis delves into an exploration of the characteristics of the Swedish BTS fandom and their fan practices serving as the bedrock for the analysis of the "always-on" experience within the fandom.

Transitioning to the subsequent part "Bias", the investigation navigates the trajectory of para-social relationships underscored through the exploration of the concept of bias. This segment endeavors to provide an insight into the intricate processes through which para-social relationships are established and.

The third segment, "Running with BTS and being V Live" employs the lenses of one-and-a-half para-social interaction, calibrated amateurism, and corroborated authenticity as the analytical apparatus. This involves examining two video clips and exploring the fans' reactions.

The rabbit hole

Tracing back to the prologue of this article, several informants shared a consistent narrative regarding their discovery of BTS often involving the discovery of a song or video followed by an immersive exploration of the group's content. Significantly, Saga, who joined the fandom around 2017, used the term "rabbit hole" to characterize her experience, as well as citing the song "Pied Piper" as her initial exposure.

> Well, I love music very much. It's one of my biggest passions in life so I just listened to Spotify and when my playlist was finished, random songs just came up, […] and then Pied Piper came on with BTS and I was like, oh, what a song. And then, I thought it was great music. And yes, then I came down the rabbit hole, sort of after that.

Consistent with this trend, Pia, initiating her engagement in 2016 as she describes hearing a song online, and gradually almost surreptitiously, finding herself transformed into an ardent fan.

> And then you start listening and like let's go through all the songs and there were a lot of good songs. And then you're like but what kind of people are they, then you have to learn who is who. And then you start watching even more videos like all Bangtan Bomb and like BTS Run and you don't know what happened and all of a sudden, you're a superfan.

A customary practice in the K-pop world involves assigning a unique name to a group's fanbase, as seen with BTS and their fervent supporters known as "ARMY". This practice signifies the shared identity cultivated between fans and the ensemble (Aisyah, Jin, 2017; Jin, 2021; King-O'Riain, 2021). This fanbase plays a crucial role in driving BTS's success, intricately connected to the digital landscape where fans adeptly utilize social media platforms for accessing and sharing K-pop content (Carras, 2020; Jin & Yoon, 2016; Jung, 2017; Leung, 2017; Tanús, 2020).

Fan management and social media strategies in K-pop originated from initiatives by entertainment agencies and public relations firms. These created social media platforms for K-pop artists, fostering interactions between artists and fans through images, videos, and daily life updates, as well as fan-to-fan communication sections (Leung, 2017). As record labels' direct involvement in fan management has diminished, fans have adopted social media strategies, leading to independent campaigns for group success (King-O'Riain, 2021). In addition to official platforms, various user-generated content flourishes on social media, including translations, video compilations, analyses of music videos and lyrics, and explorations of the distinct personas and personality traits exhibited by ensemble members (Aisyah, Jin, 2017; Jin, 2021; King-O'Riain, 2021).

The significance of social media in the K-pop fandom and its integration into the daily lives of participants is underscored in the responses provided by interviewees, and indicates their experience as an always-on practice, as elucidated by Hills (2018).

BTS primarily communicates in Korean during live broadcasts, and subtitles are not available until a replay. Due to the interviewees' limited proficiency in Korean, they employ various

strategies to follow along, exemplifying the always-on practice (Hills 2018). For instance, Nina uses a dual-screen approach, watching the streams on her phone while following Twitter accounts (rebranded as X in 2023) that provide real-time translations.

> I usually watch when they're broadcast live. And when it comes to subtitles, if I'm at home and can watch the lives then I have the lives on my phone and then I watch live translations that are done by different accounts on Twitter, so kind of scroll my feed and get like bits. You don't get the whole picture, but that's how I usually do. And if it something more specific, most clips are still posted with translations afterwards on Twitter and social media so then I usually take part of it that way.

One specific practice of the "always-on" fandom, as described by Hills (2018), is live-tweeting during events. This closely resonates with Nina's engagement pattern, where she concurrently watches live streams from BTS, comments, and reads others' real-time comments on Twitter.

> I kind of live react to it at the same time on Twitter so I watch, then something happens and then I write a tweet about what is happening or like my reactions to what is said for example. It's part of this like, like what I talked about before, sharing something that's happening with all the other fans where everyone is kind of on Twitter and reacting at the same time and kind of flipping out over what's happening at the same time.

The responses emphasize that being a BTS fan is a communal undertaking, particularly within the realm of social media, including the group's proprietary platforms, making it an always-on practice (Jin & Yoon 2016; Jung 2017; Leung in Yoon, Jin 2017; Tanús 2020; Won 2017).

Bias

A terminology frequently employed by fans when discussing members of k-pop groups is "bias" derived from the word "biased", signifying their preferred or emotionally resonant mem-

ber within the group, highlighting fans' connections not only to the collective entity but also to a specific member or persona.

BTS consists of seven members; RM (Kim Nam-Joon), Jin (Kim Seok-Jin), Suga (Min Yoon-Gi), J-Hope (Jung Ho-Seok), Jimin (Park Ji-Min), V (Kim Tae-Hyung), and Jungkook (Jeon Jeong-Guk).

Nina discloses that her bias is RM, expressing her preference for him and referring to him colloquially as his given name Namjoon, indicating a perceived sense of familiarity.

> My bias is RM or Namjoon and that's mainly because he is the primary songwriter in BTS. I felt very strongly that I could relate to the way he thinks and sees the world, and the life experiences he describes in his music felt like something I could relate to. And the fact that he loves animals. It's one of those things that is like, anyone who loves animals, it's something that melts my heart. But then, I would say that, the main reason why he is my bias is because he is the primary songwriter.

Beginning with recognition of his "official" role in the group, Nina's narrative then delves into personal dimensions, transitioning to an identification with the individual's worldview and an appreciation for specific attributes, such as a fondness for animals.

The recurring theme of establishing a relatable connection through shared traits is also seen in Pia's favoritism towards Jimin, which is grounded in a sense of self-identification with him.

> He always wants to take care of everyone, even though he's childish and that's kind of how a lot of people would describe me. Then he can be a real brat too, and that's not me. [laughs] But he laughs readily and, like you rarely see him sad, but when you do, it's just like you feel for him. I haven't had the same struggle as him and then you just want to take care of him even more. But he's very like this, vulnerable. And kind of likes the camera. And he's very like physical, which I also am. So I think I recognize myself very much in him and then drawn a little bit that way.

The interviewees' knowledge about the idols often originates from diverse content spanning various occasions and genres, aligning

with the practices of corroborated authenticity outlined by King-O'Riain (2021), exemplified in Nina's response.

> If you follow other fans on social media, it's quite easy to find clips from lots of different places […] different clips or programs whether Hybe themselves has produced them or that they have participated in other Korean shows that have been part of. But also, things that he himself has posted on Twitter or all different social media for example.

Running with BTS and being V Live

V LIVE, integrated into Weverse in 2023, has played a pivotal role in the K-pop ecosystem. Established in South Korea in 2015, it evolved into a prominent video streaming platform, providing idols with a channel to share original content and engage in live broadcasts. This facilitated intimate, real-time interactions with their audience through features like chats and likes. With around 30 million monthly active participants V Live became a cornerstone of cross-cultural engagement within the K-pop community (King-O'Riain, 2021; V Live, 2022).

BTS conducts informal live broadcasts and semi structured studio sessions, while entertainment shows produced by their record labels exhibit higher organization scale (Leung, 2017; King-O'Riain, 2021). To explore para-social relationships, specific video excerpts from a less organized V Live session and another structured, pre-planned and edited program were chosen as a topic of discussion with the interviewees. This sought to examine para-social interactions and instances where cast members deviated from scripted boundaries, interacting beyond the immediate camera scope. The aim was to assess the impact of these deviations on authenticity perceptions, considering the differing perspectives presented by King-O'Riain (2021) and Elfving-Hwang (2018).

V Live "JwiJjwanBbooKkweoh2" March 6th, 2022

The first video excerpt observed by the interviewees portrayed a live stream where J-HOPE, Jin, Taehyung, and Jungkook engaged in informal conversation regarding an upcoming performance.

They were attired in casual clothing, seated on a modest couch in a straightforward room, responding to fan inquiries and comments. This live aligns with the concept of "calibrated amateurism" by diverging from the polished appearance in traditional media settings (Abidini, 2019; Elfving-Hwang, 2018; King-O'Riain, 2021; Leung, 2017). The mode of address involves direct engagement with the audience, using expressions like "you" and, occasionally referring to the collective community with the inclusive pronoun "we", exemplifying the formation of para-social interactions.

What Rahima finds compelling with the informal setting is that the members seem more relatable.

> [It] is not like the way in the western world that has like this you can call it facade of like picture-perfect individual or mystery individual who does not live a normal life like me that I can't relate to. Here it's more like I can relate to them sitting and eating noodles, they sit and eat ice cream, they sit and eat cake and sit and make jokes and kind of hit each other and throw things at each other and play around. Like a normal..., it feels like 'I'm friends with them, like I sit and facetime a person I know and sit and laugh with them and jokes I understand and I don't understand. We have inside jokes that only the fandom kind of knows. They sit and look at comments that we write and are like 'what is wrong with you?' or like 'ha ha look marry me' or whatever it is so they laugh. Well, you can say that you kind of get an insight into their personalities off stage in addition to their music and artistry, but it's still a part of them, you kind of get to get closer to them.

Rahima's response encompasses several salient observations, one of which pertains to her comparative analysis with Western artists. She discerns a dichotomy in the manner of the latter, attributing to them a tendency for upholding an artificial façade. Conversely, her perspective on BTS is characterized by a heightened sense of proximity and an impression of increased authenticity in their interactions.

She likens the experience to video calls with friends and a sense of amicable familiarity with the on-screen persona, indicating a

para-social relationship (Horton and Wohl, 1956). As the idols' read and respond to viewer comments in real-time this moves the relationship into a one-and-a-half-sided para-social dynamic. While Rahima's perspective suggests a mutual discourse, it's crucial to underscore, following Kowert and Daniel Jr. (2021), that while the potential for reciprocal exchange exists, its realization remains contingent.

The incident reviewed in the interview took place towards the end of the broadcast, where members engaged in a game to determine the member responsible for concluding the session. Taehyung, as the losing member, was tasked with this role. This impromptu determination, rather than adhering to a preordained and meticulously structured farewell, serves as an additional illustration of calibrated amateurism (Abidini, 2019).

Contemplating playing music, the member sought approval from the staff behind the camera, deviating from the show's goal to present an informal side of the group through "calibrated amateurism" (Abidini, 2021). This incident serves as evidence of monitoring or control, as staff asserted that such actions were not permitted.

In the realm of K-pop idols, there is rigorous information control, extending to prohibitions on specific brand references unless formal collaborations are established (Jin 2016; Jin & Yoon 2017; Leung 2017; King-O'Riain 2021). Nina acknowledges the structured nature of these sessions with accompanying constraints on speech and actions. However, she asserts that these limitations do not diminish the inherent value of the encounter, viewing them as integral to the professional role.

> I personally think of it more like they're in a professional situation I guess than if they just turn on the V Live when they are on their way home, from like in the car on the way home from work. Because they are in their profession, and so are the staff. […] that's how I think about it kind of, that they are there to do more of a job, if you know what I mean.

Pia offers a comprehensive perspective, citing instances that demonstrate fan awareness of BTS's scrutiny. However, Pia does not perceive such oversight negatively.

> No, but they've been so open about it. Even when they do V Live, they say that. 'Yeah, I can't go on too long because then the one who monitors can't go to bed until I finish this.' So, you've always known that there is always someone who keeps track.
>
> […]
>
> But it doesn't matter to me, that you know that they are not there alone, it's obvious, that's just how it is. And if they're there alone there's someone who monitors somewhere else. As I said, they are still such celebrities, so they still even if they try to be themselves as much as possible, they are still a face to the outside world. Which they have always been very, very open with. Like 'we can't do and say anything even if we say what we feel and think most of the time'.

These insights illuminate a dimension overlooked by Rebecca King-O'Riain (2021) namely, the awareness among fans of surveillance and its implications for authenticity and para-social relationships. The responses reveal that fans are cognizant of both monitoring and imposed constraints, aligning with Elfving-Hwang's (2018) observations on fans' awareness of the staged elements in idols' work. This convergence underscores the nuanced dynamics within para-social relationships.

Run BTS episode 155 October 12th, 2021

The program "Run BTS," produced by HYBE, the record label overseeing BTS, adheres to a methodical structure comprising pre-planning, recording, and post-production editing. In this episode, the group participated in a barbecue event, completing challenges to obtain designated items.

In the selected segment, Jungkook moves beyond the camera's view, interrupting his meal to deliver slippers to the director. This action, prompted by his expressed worry that the director might be cold without shoes as they are outdoors, diverges from the

established show structure, as members typically adhere to pre-determined activities. Despite this departure, interviewees found the incident endearing rather than disruptive. Yasmin interprets it as illustrative of the close bond between BTS and the staff, emblematic of her perception of Jungkook's personality.

> I think this is rather good than bad. Because I don't think just because there is a framework for how a program should work, I don't think they don't benefit from going outside that framework and show a little of their own personality. Because that moment that we saw then on the clip, it was really 100% Jungkook and that was how he is as a person, which I as a fan appreciated very much to see.

Rahima concurred with the notion that the BTS members appeared to share a close bond with the production staff. From her perspective, the engagement with the crew situated behind the camera constitutes a facet of the show's dynamics.

> But it's not behind the scenes, it's part of the show. It spices it up, you get like this feeling like 'I'm also there'. It's like a community and not like 'we need to film this' very square. I think it's professional that you can have your whole crew involved and appreciate the people behind the camera, it's reality.

The responses highlight the concept of corroborated authenticity, as articulated by King O'Riain (2021). The interviewees evaluate the authenticity of the depicted actions by comparing them to other instances within various shows. Nonetheless, instead of attempting to diminish the significance of the staff's involvement in content production as King O'Riain (2021) asserts, fans integrate this aspect into their perception of authenticity, thus enriching the overall authenticity narrative.

Conclusions

Social media and content streaming sites, have revolutionized the relationship between idols and their fanbases. The unique hybrid-

ity of the "one-and-a-half" para social relationships, which are enabled by real time interactions, highlights the transformative power of digital platforms, where mediated interactions foster a sense of familiarity and camaraderie that transcends traditional limitations. The "always-on" fan practices observed in this study reflect a shift in audience engagement, as social media platforms serve as constant conduits for interaction, discussion, and content sharing. Furthermore, the concept of "calibrated amateurism" underscores the strategic construction of authenticity by media content producers. This calculated portrayal of spontaneity and unscripted actions during live streaming sessions demonstrates how media content is crafted to resonate with audiences seeking genuine connections.

Fans' active engagement on social media platforms serves as a mechanism for validating authenticity, confirming the genuine nature of idols' expressions. The phenomenon of "corroborated authenticity" elucidates how diverse content sources contribute to shaping a comprehensive and multi-dimensional understanding of an idol's true self.

In conclusion, the exploration of mediatization through the lens of fan engagement, para-social interactions, and authenticity within the K-pop phenomenon unveils the transformative power of digital media in reshaping the contours of interpersonal connections and the construction of authenticity.

This chapter suggests promising directions for future research in the realm of K-pop and Hallyu. One promising avenue for future research involves mapping Hallyu influence in Sweden, addressing the current scarcity of research in this specific context. This exploration could yield valuable insights into the diffusion and acceptance of the Korean wave in Sweden, elucidating the cross-cultural resonance of K-pop. Additionally, there is potential for further research by expanding on the concept of "one-and-a-half" para-social relationships and "calibrated amateurism" introduced in this thesis. A more thorough investigation into these strategies, extending beyond live broadcasts and Korean plat-

forms, is essential to gain a comprehensive understanding of how artists manage authenticity and performance in diverse contexts.

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Stimulus material

Subsequent to the merger of V Live and Weverse, the official platforms no longer host the video clips, necessitating my reliance on unofficial sources, specifically fan accounts, for access to said content.

Run BTS episode 155 October 12th, 2021
> https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Td3SxQwbcoc&ab_channel=JinKook%26OT7

V Live "JwiJjwanBbooKkweoh2" March 6th, 2022
> https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mLYfi_hlbnw&ab_channel=KPOPLIVE

Advertisements representing animals: A reception study of PETA's shock advertisements

Ana Carolina Carvalho

Introduction

Animals have throughout the centuries been used and abused for humanity's benefit. They are depicted as symbols, pets, food, clothes, entertainment and are under constant human control. The way animals are depicted, particularly by the media is concerning, because it influences the way people experience animals. Therefore, the mass media's power on knowledge dissemination is crucial to understand how oppression and speciesism towards animals has been spread and constantly enabled. Indeed, the modern human-animal relationship comes down to questions of representation (Braidotti, 2013, p. 69).

The way oppression and speciesism are conducted upon animals is a result of an anthropocentric views – the Man as measure of all things. Non-profit organisations for animal advocacy, such as People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), try to develop tactics in their media representations to challenge such anthropocentric attitudes. PETA has been known around the world for their use of shock tactics and activist campaigns. They wish to end animal marginalisation, raise awareness for animal suffering, for the impacts that using animals has on the environment and on our health. They fight against animal cruelty,

violence, speciesism, animal experiments, using animals for entertainment and urge people to go vegan (PETA, 2019). They are also great supporters of shock tactics and "provocative and controversial campaigns" because it has proven to make a difference when exposing animal suffering to the public (PETA, n.d.). Shock advertising is a type of communication that means to surprise the user with disturbing elements, blood, body parts, violence, disease, sexual content, and so on (Urwin & Venter, 2014). It also violates social norms, personal ideas, and values (Satas, 2014). By challenging what is generally accepted as normal, I argue that shock tactics may be a possible tool to decentering the Man. Challenging the idea of Man at the center, means moving towards post-humanism and post-anthropocentrism and promote a multispecies coexistence.

Aim and research questions

The purpose of this thesis is to critically analyse PETA's shock advertisements and see how vegans/vegetarians and meat eaters react to them. Elements of speciesism and animal oppression will be looked for in the advertisements to understand if PETA is reinforcing those attitudes or if they are mostly challenging the human supremacism, anthropocentrism, moving towards post-humanism and post-anthropocentrism.

1. How does PETA represent animals through shock advertising?

2. In what ways do PETA's advertisements challenge anthropocentrism and do they also contain elements of speciesism and animal oppression?

3. How do vegans/vegetarians and meat eaters react and interpret PETA's shock advertisements?

Previous research and theoretical frame

Human-animal relation

The theories on human-animal relation are developed through notions of anthropocentrism, oppression, and speciesism towards animals, by society. *Anthropocentrism* places Man at the centre, as a measure of all things. The model of this Man is "male, white, heterosexual, young" and is separated from "other 'lesser' humans as well as from other animals and nature" (Mellström & Pease, 2023, p. 7; Braidotti, 2013, p. 68). This constant othering is a strong tool for maintaining Man's power and works on assigning difference in hierarchical structures (Braidotti, 2013, p. 69). Human-animal relationship is unequal and framed through the dominant structures of masculinity that are granted access to consume, use, and abuse others, including animals (2013, p. 68).

Anthropocentrism originates from the same ideology of "dominance", the interests of men over oppressed groups (Taylor, 2015, p. 52). *Oppression* when applied to animals is the constant marginalisation of them (Almiron et al., 2015), by thinking of them as inferior, excluding them (Braidotti, 2013) or constantly categorising them – domestic, farm, zoo, wild or laboratory animals. Categorisation contributes to the deindividualization of the animal and to reinforce current power structures. For example, in films, pets are usually depicted as lovable beings and wild animals are a threat. This reinforces the fact that some animals may be more deserving of our attention and empathy than others (Taylor, 2015) and pushes animals into a hierarchy, privileging some above others (Merskin, 2015, p. 13).

Another term connected with anthropocentrism is *speciesism* (Kopnina, 2019), the discrimination and moral exclusion against animals, not considering them sentient beings, worthy of respect (Horta 2009;). Even animal advocacy organisations conduct speciesist language in their media messages (Dunayer, 2015). There are also parallels between speciesism and other types of isms: sexism, racism (Singer, 2009, p. 572; Dhont et al., 2014). It

can in fact apply to any other markers of difference, ethnicity, disability, age and so on (Merskin 2015, p. 11). There are several examples where the mass media compares nonhuman animals to people of color. For instance, the program *"Man v. Cheetah"* on National Geographic, shows two of the fastest black men running with cheetahs to see who reaches first the finish line, for the white man's entertainment "and to determine the hierarchy of physical ability for these representatives of systematically oppressed groups" (Plec, 2015, p. 138). Other ways of being speciesist and oppressive towards animal is through language. Expressions such as "wise as an owl" or "sly as a fox", the use of animals to insult or refer to other human beings are a few examples. (Merskin, 2015, pp. 20–21). Examples like this turns animals into "metaphorical referents for norms and values", foxes are deceitful, lambs are humble, and become like myths, immortalised (Braidotti, 2013, p. 69).

Animal representation

Animal representation in the media, advertising, news, documentaries, films, images, videos, technologies, literature, throughout the decades has shaped the way in which one perceives animals. The representation of animals' suffering in the media, particularly farm animals or "captive" animals, is almost invisible (Almiron & Cole, 2015). The rare times when animal suffering is displayed in the media, it is not to show for their own benefit, but to either relate to something considered positive or negative to humans. For example, when news report animals dying in some kind of catastrophe, the central topic is often how their death is an inconvenience to humans, not the animal suffering (Taylor, 2015, p. 4). There are also times when animals are represented in a healthy, positive way – giving the industry a positive image – and hiding the animal's suffering. Other representations may include using animals that are endangered species, leading the audiences to believe they are not really in danger (Merskin, 2015, pp. 11–14). These examples, teach audiences, that animals are ours to use, for economic gain, are not like us and they "understand, in fact enjoy, their 'natural' obligations to us" (Almiron, 2015; Merskin, 2015,

pp. 18–19). These are ways of silencing animals, thus symptoms of oppression (Almiron & Cole, 2015).

Another example of conducting oppression towards animals through media representations is by anthropomorphizing them – attributing them human characteristics. In visual culture, animals are usually depicted in disguise, with masks or in costumes, which may lead to their mockery for the public's entertainment and removing animals from their natural state, into an anthropocentric standpoint (Malamud, 2015, p. 156). When animals are used to deliver a message, no matter how serious, it is received in a lighter way. Therefore, animals are sometimes used to convey humour, because it distracts the audience from the real problems (Leitsberger et al., 2016, pp. 1014–1015).

Representation and reception theories

Stuart Hall et al. (2013) also discuss anthropomorphism, particularly when discussing animal representations in nature shows and documentaries. Hall states that for scientists, anthropomorphism is a misrepresentation of animals. For example, when documenting animal life in nature shows or wildlife photography, one sees an invisible side of animals. However, they are depicted in ways for human entertainment, for spectacle, the producers only show the exciting parts (Hall et al., 2013, pp. 90-91). On the other hand, by attributing human characteristics to something or someone nonhuman, it is easier to understand it. For Hall it is difficult to escape anthropomorphism, since we represent and talk about animals according to our own understandings (Lindahl Elliot, 2001, as cited in Hall et al., 2013, p. 91).

Representation theory can thus be used to discuss animals, since representations of them may contribute for animals to be misunderstood, misrepresented (Hall et al., 2013). Representation is how one uses language to communicate or represent some meaningful. It means something or someone was there and is being re-presented in the media (Merskin, 2015). "Re-presentation" can be problematic for the animals if they are made as

"objects of ridicule, humiliation and bullying that seem, at first glance, harmless" (Merskin, 2015, p. 22).

When individuals interpret media messages, the meaning extracted is not simply transferred from the media to the public. According to Hall's model of communication process encoding/decoding (1973), for a message to be successfully received, it should be understood as it was intended by the encoder. However, that does not always happen, which can be better explained with Hall's *reception theory*. It shows the different ways audiences interpret and react to media representations and depends on the reader's current social situation, context, background, culture and so on. Hall identifies three readings or positions audiences can conduct when interpreting a message. Firstly, the *preferred reading* is the "dominant-hegemonic position", when the viewer understands and decodes the dominant the meanings inserted in a message (Hall, 1973, p. 101). According to Charles S. Peirce model of understanding, since the process of signifying depends on the reader/viewer, the preferred reading often becomes the reading of the majority of the audience (Schrøder et al, 2003, p. 132). Secondly, there's a *negotiated reading,* which "contains a mixture of adaptive and oppositional elements"' (Hall, 1973, p. 102). The audience accepts and understands parts of the message, while rejects others and makes their own rules. Finally, the *oppositional reading*, when the viewer understands "literal and connotative inflection given by a discourse" but decodes the message in a contrary way (Hall, 1973, p. 103). Hall's reception theory in this project will be mainly used as a tool to help analyze the reactions and interpretations of the interviewees.

Shock and compassion fatigue

Lilie Chouliaraki (2010) also discusses how audiences decode media messages, particularly charity advertising, from a humanitarian perspective, mostly on non-western developing countries. There are two types of appeal investigated by Chouliaraki, positive effect appeals and shock appeals. Using positive images has its advantages, it focuses on the sufferer's dignity (2010, p. 8). On the

other hand, it can also result in "inaction", when audiences think that, if the sufferers look happy, everything is taken care of (2010, p. 10). Shock appeals are usually seen as a solution to the clutter advertising that audiences are bombarded with every day, to get people's attention (Pflaumbaum, 2013). It is considered effective if memory is retained and may or may not influence behaviour (Aung & Inn, 2019). As a type of emotional appeal – to reach people's emotions – shock can evoke fear, sadness, anger, joy and so on. Provoking emotions in the audiences has proved more effective to do that, than to show facts (Mukattash et al., 2021, p. 3). Taylor argues that using shocking and graphic content when representing animals – from an animal advocacy perspective – might lead people into action, change their behaviour, attitudes and not ignore the message. Since speciesism is so embedded in society, something impactful needs to change it, such as the use of "shock value" (Taylor, 2015).

However, shock appeals may have as a negative consequence a *compassion fatigue*, also known as "shock resistance". Compassion fatigue means that people turn away, because they are tired of seeing certain messages (Chouliaraki, 2010). Two effects of compassion fatigue related to shock are the *bystander effect* – an indifference to the message – and the *boomerang effect* – feelings of guilt that the organisations provoke on audiences, which makes them angry and backlash at them (Chouliaraki, 2010). According to Juan Martinez (2002), if non-profit organisations depend on guilt appeals, the message may be mostly rejected, and people become indifferent or irritated by it. Jochem A. Jansen (2015) investigates if it is effective for non-profit organisations to use shock tactics to increase donations and raising awareness. The results indicate that while shock is an attention grabber, people are desensitized to it, either due to the amount of information people are exposed to in the media every day, or because the content wasn't shocking enough.

Wendy Atkins-Sayre (2010) investigates PETA's shock tactics and explains why and how PETA uses shock to blur the line between human and animal. This tactic extends into three

elements: shared emotions, placing humans in the animal world and breaking down barriers. She also refers to an interview published in *The New Yorker* (2003) wih PETA's cofounder, Ingrid Newkirk. When questioned about the use of shock in their communication appeals, Newkirk stated shock tactics are crucial for them: "we are complete press sluts (…) it is our obligation. We would be worthless if we were just polite and didn't make any waves" (Atkins-Sayre, 2010, p. 310). Atkins-Sayre's findings acknowledge PETA's successes in changing the ways humans think about animals, but the division between them is still a barrier when it comes to animal rights. The tactics of sharing identity conducted through shocking images can be effective since visual elements reach a quicker emotional response.

Post-humanism and post-anthropocentrism

Charity advertising for animal advocacy tries to decentre the Man as measure of all things and bring focus to animals. This ideal Man is based on the Eurocentric model of what is being human. It sets a standard of what is "normal" or the dominant norm, which makes it an instrument of oppression, "exclusion and discrimination" (Braidotti, 2013, p. 26). The traditional notion of humanism has become then very restricted in what it means to be human, which is how we arrived at a post-humanistic turn. What it means to be an individual is not a part of human nature, it is a historical and cultural construct, which can be problematic (Braidotti, 2013, p. 24).

Theories that argue against anthropocentrism are *post-humanism* and *post-anthropocentrism*. The former challenges anthropocentrism, by exploring the possibility of decentering the white, male, European model of the Man (Braidotti, 2013). Post-humanism theories have roots in "deep ecology", "environmental ethics" and animal-rights literature" (Kopnina, 2019, p. 2). It wants to promote social change, responsibility, and coexistence between different species (Donna Haraway, 2008, as cited in Kopnina, 2019, p. 2). Post-humanism also challenges the hierarchy structure between human and animal and the universalism of masculinity (Braidotti, 2013, p. 22; Kopnina, 2019, p. 2). Post-

anthropocentrism includes studies within technology, digital culture studies, environmental and animal rights studies (2013, pp. 57–58). It states that the politics of life are not exclusive property of humans, it is open. It challenges this boundary by including animals and other non-human life.

Methodologies

a. Semiotic Approach

In order to help answering research questions 1 and 2 the semiotic approach was chosen. Semiotics is concerned with the study of signs. A sign can be material, symbolic, textual, visual, aural, verbal, nonverbal and so on (Hall et al.,2013). The semiotic tools chosen to analyse PETA's advertisements are meant to dive into the symbolism of the codes inserted in the message, or the *connotative* level. *Social, representational, interpretative codes* were used to identity certain signs used, which represent respectively, verbal or body language, choices of aesthetic or ideologies (such as speciesism) (Chandler, 2017, p. 186). Sign relations such as, *indexes, icons* and *symbols*, developed by Charles S. Peirce were also identified, to help understanding the deeper symbolisms and codes inserted (Chandler, 2017, pp. 56–58). Furthermore, *syntagmatic* and *paradigmatic* dimensions of Ferdinand de Saussure were also helpful when comparing visual scenes with each other and or to imagine what type of elements could have been used instead (Chandler, 2017).

b. Focus Group Discussions

To answer research question 3 the method of focus group discussions was selected. The interviews were conducted with two groups of 4 people, between 21 and 32 years old, one group included people that eat meat and the other vegans and vegetarians. Two different groups were selected to obtain various reactions from different types of people, with perhaps different beliefs and values when it comes to animal rights. Furthermore, the

separation into two groups could perhaps allow for a deeper discussion and for the interviewees to feel more comfortable sharing their opinions and sensed a shared identity.

Materials

Four shock advertisements were selected to be analysed semiotically and presented to the interviewees. They were chosen due to the elements of shock displayed, graphic images, comparing animal and human suffering and possibly strategies that decentered the Man. These choices could lead to discussions on human-animal relation and address the theories of oppression and speciesism. Furthermore, while some advertisements are older, one could still find today discussions about them in social media platforms.

Assumptions and ethics

Vegans and vegetarians are assumed to be the ones that support animal rights and reject any kind of speciesism and discrimination against them. However, that does not mean all vegans are anti-speciesism, some might consider human lives more important (Animal Ethics, n.d.). The same goes for people that eat meat. They are not necessarily speciesist and might have empathy towards the animals. Therefore, this researcher did not conduct the interviews with any previous assumptions. It is also important to note that shock, oppression, and speciesism may be subjective, depending on one's identity and cultural background.

Analysis and key findings

Silent Scream (2012)
The first advertisement, by PETA UK, is a 30-second video and it can be analyzed through the social codes inserted: verbal and body language. The first scene represents a domestic violence case, represented by a couple arguing, a man raising his fist and a child screaming when observing the situation – see figures 1 and 1.1. The second scene shows an elder woman being robbed by two

men. The indexes that lead to this assumption are the way they search their purse and hold her against her will. She demonstrates fear and cries for help – see Figures 2 and 2.1. In the third scene two young boys kick another young boy on the floor. He is bleeding from his nose and screams "help" in the end - see Figures 3 and 3.1. The three scenes may shock the viewer for it violates social decency and shows people being harmed (Urwin & Venter, 2014), particularly vulnerable people, women, children, and elderly. So far, without understanding the context of the message and without knowing who the sender is, this could be a campaign to raise awareness of violence or abuse.

However, in the fourth scene an animal appears – a fish – and a new point of view is presented. It takes place in a kitchen and according to society's conventions no obvious signs of violence are shown. The human chef is cooking and there is a fish in the counter, who opens its mouth, but no sound comes out – see figures 4 and 4.1. In the final scene, the slogan of the campaign appears "Some screams can't be heard" and along with the sender's logotype – see figures 4.2 and 4.3. This final picture contextualizes the viewer, links all the scenes together and the message makes sense, from an animal advocacy standpoint. One possible intended meaning is to compare human suffering with animal suffering, one of their main strategies as stated by Wendy Atkins-Sayre (2010). This might be, arguably, a positive way for PETA to link human-animal relation and make animals worthy of consideration, making audiences understand animal suffering.
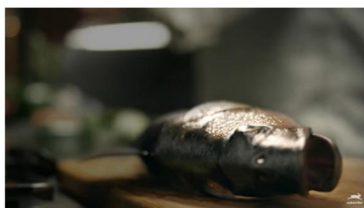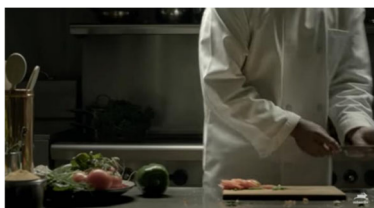

Figures 1 and 1.1. *Silent Scream* (2012), first scene. Source: YouTube, PETA UK.

Figures 2 and 2.1. *Silent Scream* (2012), second scene. Source: YouTube, PETA UK.

Figures 3 and 3.1. *Silent Scream* (2012), third scene. Source: Youtube, PETA UK.

Figures 4 and 4.1. *Silent Scream* (2012), fourth scene. Source: YouTube.

Figures 4.2. and 4.3. *Silent Scream* (2012), presenting the slogan and logotype. Source: Youtube, PETA UK.

The first scenes have the same pattern: aggressor's act, victim screaming, repeat. In the fourth scene, the viewer is taken by surprise, the type of aggressor and victim changed, or perhaps are no longer there. Cooking is usually not considered an aggressive act, but PETA uses it as a metaphor to compare with the previous scenes. The chef is now the aggressor, and the fish is the victim that cannot scream. PETA shows the viewers different types of aggressors there are in the world, showing the animal's point of view.

There is also a pattern in the characters chosen. Comparing all scenes, syntagmatically, the aggressors chosen are all white males. This suggests PETA is criticising the dominant model of the ideal Man, white, male, thus moving towards post-humanism and post-anthropocentrism. The same applies to the choice of victims, females, elderly, and children, which are usually considered vulnerable ones. Parallels between gender, race and animal oppression are thus seen here (Singer, 2009). PETA links the human oppressed victims with the animal victim making them stronger together.

This advertisement can be considered sexist, offensive and ridiculous to compare cooking with domestic violence, without even considering the animal side. Furthermore, PETA may also be stereotyping animals, by displaying them as victims and weaker links. According to Hall et al., stereotyping is "part of the maintenance of social and symbolic order". (2013, pp. 258–259). However, in this situation, I believe the stereotypes were used to show the current normality and criticize it.

Furthermore, there was also an attempt to anthropomorphize the fish, making it scream like humans, which was not possible. This tactic may reinforce the traditional division between human and animal, however, the slogan – "Some screams can't be heard" – suggests that this is "failed anthropomorphism" (a term from this researcher) was consciously made, to create empathy within the audience.

Killer cows (2019)

Killer Cows, by PETA Germany, displays a hunt. A cow has hunted down a jaguar and is now eating it – see figure 5. However, the choice of these characters is confusing. A cow is a grass eating animal, a prey and a jaguar is the opposite, a carnivore and predator, here the roles have reversed, into a shocking scenery.

Figure 5. *Killer Cows* (2019). ©fischerAppelt / PETA Germany e.V.

In the top left corner, PETA explains the context. "Eating meat kills more animals than you think. Everyday more rainforest – the habitat of the jaguar - gets cut down to grow feed for the meat industry. Stop eating meat - and save more animals than you think". The scenery was PETA's way of creating a metaphor around this situation.

When it comes to interpretative codes, the choice of the cow is complex regarding other culture's ideologies. This advertisement was published in Germany, but if it would have been published in India, for example, where people worship cows, perhaps the viewers would have been outraged. This representation, reversing the animal's natural instincts, provokes natural laws, to which

people can respond negatively and turn away from the message for being unethical or too controversial. Even in a Western context, where people usually eat cows, this representation can be considered too immoral and shocking.

Additionally, the use of the jaguar is according to World Wildlife Fund (WWF) a near threatened species (WWF, n.d.). Several researchers have pointed out the risks of representing endangered or vulnerable individuals in the media. Information may be distorted, if the animal is represented in a charismatic way, because it might appear the animal is not at risk at all and "limit the conservation success". If the animal is represented as the villain of a narrative, the audiences might also indirectly rejoice with their death (Grasso et al. 2020, pp. 14–15). However, in this situation, the jaguar is the victim.

The Payback (2018)

The Payback, by PETA Latino, is the advertisement with the most shock elements. The indexical signs symbolize the inside of a butchery, "decorated" with elements of blood and body parts. The place chosen connects to the context of Halloween – when it was released – and horror movies, identified by the aesthetics, symbols, and icons such as the knife, body parts, meat grinder - see figure 6.

PETA's tactic of role reversal is used once more, this time, by placing animals in the human world, which can be seen as a solution to decenter the Man. The figure – a cow-human hybrid – is getting revenge, as indicated by the title, "The Payback", and became the aggressor, instead of the victim. The human is now the food.

The creature can, on the one hand, be considered too fearful, connecting with Halloween films where the aggressors wear animal masks or monsters or are digitally created. On the other hand, since the creature has already taken revenge, PETA is empowering it, especially since the hybrid resembles a minotaur or godly creatures populations used to worship. Regarding the theoretical problem of oppression, PETA introduces a new tactic as a way of decentering the human, the reversal of anthropomor-
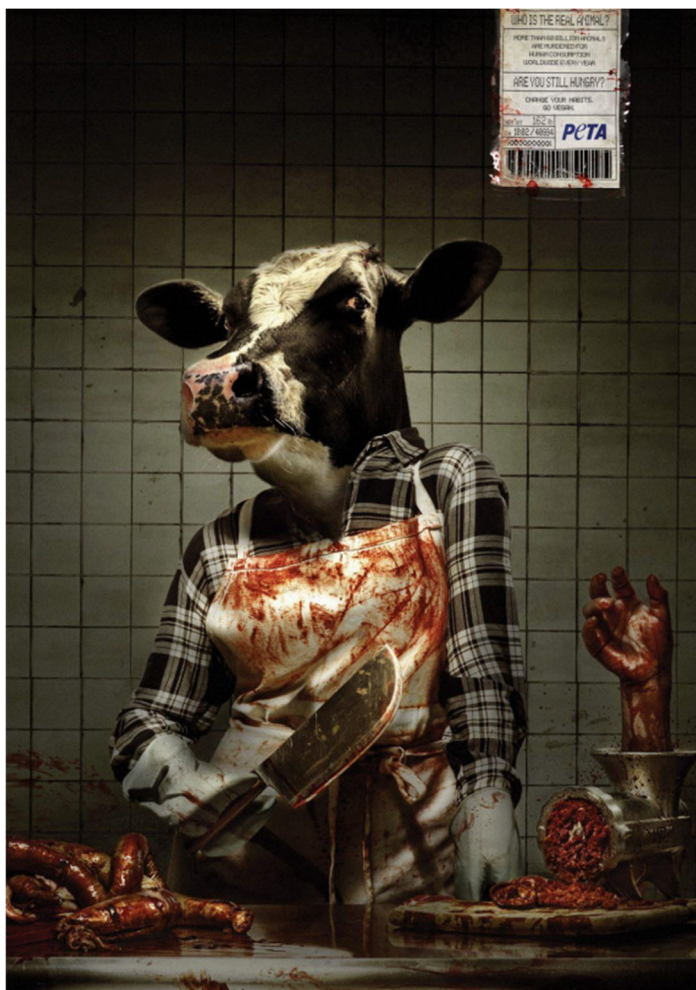
Figure 6. *The Payback* (2018). Cowoman. Source: PETA Latino, Author: Archer Troy.

phism: zoomorphism. This concept is attributing animal characteristics or mental states to humans (Nanay, 2021, p. 171).

The choice of a woman for the human body may also be paralleled with Singer (2009) arguments of speciesism and sexism: women and animals being equally oppressed. PETA might be

criticizing women that eat meat, by using their human body. Or, PETA might be empowering both animals and women, that took revenge on their oppressors.

In the top right corner of the picture, the text – resembling labels of meat packages – contextualizes the viewer: "Who is the real animal? More than 60 billion animals are murdered for human consumption worldwide every year. Are you still hungry? Change your habits. Go vegan". The word "animal" in "who is the real animal?", is being used as a derogatory term. In society's dominant conventions calling someone animal is usually an insult, therefore, PETA uses this common knowledge to offend meat eaters. This may reinforce speciesism, by enabling the use of this insult. Additionally, the question "are you still hungry?" is very sarcastic, which may question the seriousness of the message. The verb "murdered", associated with humans, is anthropomorphized, but in this situation is positive, educating audiences that animals are individuals, not objects.

All Beings Bleed the Same (2019)

The campaign published in 2019 by PETA Germany, presents a new challenge. It is digitally manipulated, like the previous ones, but it is a closer representation of reality, something that could actually happen. There are three main characters in the image. The aggressor, the human, is shirtless, barefoot, and holding a bat. It is assumed that he has killed all the pigs on the floor, clubbing them to death. The use of a bat together with him being shirtless is a symbolic sign of a caveman, usually associated with being old fashioned or close minded or non-civilized – see figure 7. One can argue that PETA is insulting people that eat meat, attributing to them those characteristics. Eating meat is outdated and veganism is the future.

The second character present is the pig. There is one last pig standing who is about to be clubbed to death, judging by the indexes of all the other pigs' corpses surrounding it. The action of "about to", is portrayed by the movement of the bat in the human's hands. It has not landed on the pig yet. It is "frozen" for

the picture. The pig looks passive, it is looking down, calm, presumably unaware of what is going to happen.

The third character is an icon, and the white lines resemble a dog. It is transparent, which I argue, asks the viewer to imagine if it was a dog being clubbed to death instead. The dog is used to create a deeper impact and empathy, since a dog is considered a Man's best friend and as a symbol to represent all domestic animals. The way the dog's face was drawn in PETA's advertisement is somewhat anthropomorphic, an illustration of the human's idea of a sad face, because real life dogs do not look like this. In here, anthropomorphism can bring humans closer, creating more sympathy, guilt, and sadness (Grasso et al., 2020).

Figure 7. All Beings Bleed the Same (2019). Source: ©DDB Prague / PETA Germany e.V.

This advertisement criticizes the line people draw within the animal kingdom. While some animals are considered food, entertainment, for lab work and so on, others are considered pets. PETA is turning the attention to the problems of categorization that can be speciesist and oppressive towards the animal such as, privileging some animals over others (Merskin, 2015). This is particularly understood through the slogan "All beings bleed the same".

Group Interviews

This section contains the key findings of the qualitative group interviews. The subtitles chosen were based on the main topics discussed in the interviews, as well as the aims of this project. Additionally, the meat eater group was represented by letters A–D and the vegan and vegetarian group by numbers 1–4.

Comparison to human suffering

The first advertisement shown to the participants was the video *Silent Scream*. The meat eaters' first reaction was to laugh. They found the message "ironic" and comical, "over dramatic" and "absurd" (Participant B, age 23, meat eater), claiming they became desensitized with the choice of the fish and suggesting that PETA could have used another animal "that wouldn't be as funny", like a cow (Participant D, age 21, meat eater). The attempt to anthropomorphize the fish (opening the mouth, but no sound coming out) was considered funny, which confirms one negative consequence of anthropomorphizing animals. PETA might be reinforcing speciesism and enabling people to mock animals. On the other hand, the vegans and vegetarians became emotional with the display of human suffering, showing sympathy towards vulnerable humans and joined PETA criticising anthropocentric views towards animals. The majority found the use of the fish smart and powerful. The discussion suggested that the participants were centering the animal as a sentient being and showed support for PETA's message.

The same tactic of comparing animal and human suffering was identified here and the participants were asked about it. Extreme opinions emerged between both groups. The vegans and vegetarians thought it was a "smart tactic" (Participant 2, age 29, vegetarian) and stated that there is no difference between us and animals, suggesting that human and animal suffering is comparable. For them it is a good strategy to use human emotions to relate to animals, because the latter's emotions can otherwise be

hard to read. In other words, anthropomorphising animals can be advantageous in certain situations.

Regarding the same question, the meat eater group seemed hesitating in sharing their opinion, were confused by the intended meaning and revealed some defensive behaviour. "The human suffering and the animal suffering is not the same thing (…) I don't want to say that animals are worth more than humans, but there's a difference" (Participant B, age 3, meat eater). Participant A believed that the suffering displayed was worse than the "silent scream of the fish". The majority of the meat eaters did not intend to say animals are less worthy than humans, even though they are different, showing compassion. According to the philosopher Bernard Williams, being anthropocentric does not imply speciesism, one can still show respect towards animals (Diamond, 2018). The same group understood the message, but thought that it was not delivered the best way and suggested new ways of doing it:

> If I want to sympathise with the animal, I mean…I don't think the fish is the best example, because if you compare a fish to say something of a more advanced animal, maybe, I don't know a horse or something (…) you can read the emotions, you can understand it's suffering (…) a fish… it's a fish….I've gone fishing many times and if I'm going to be honest I feel nothing for the fish (Participant D, age 21, meat eater).

Elements of speciesism can be found in the response above, when Participant D refers to fish as a less "advanced" animal, reflecting the distinction within the animal kingdom that society is used to making. Participant D was asked about the choice of horse or cow instead of the fish, to which was answered that, those are animals whose emotions one can read. This statement confirms the idea that we feel closer to animals that have similar characteristics to us (Leitsberger et al., 2016; Grasso et.al, 2020). This pushes animals into a hierarchy (Ohrem & Bartosch, 2017), privileging some over others, reinforcing speciesism (Merskin, 2015) and consequent oppression. This result reveals that categorising

animals not only is problematic and speciesist, but also it is difficult to stay clear from.

Digital manipulations and switched roles

Killer Cows was the second advertisement shown to the participants, which was called by both groups a piece of art, something with a symbolic message to reflect on. In the meat eater group, the majority comprehended the problems of overconsumption of meat and showed understanding towards environmental issues. However, one could also identify defensive attitudes within this group, when shifting the blame from the meat industry to also other industries, regarding climate issues. The vegans and vegetarians criticized the different ways in which humans use and abuse animals, focused on the overconsumption of meat and claimed how important it is for humans to reconnect with nature – which brings us one step closer to understanding animals, moving towards post-humanism and post-anthropocentrism (Mellström & Pease, p. 5).

When asked about what elements stood out in this ad, participants mentioned switched roles, the aggressiveness but also the sadness in the eyes of the cow, like it understood that "this isn't the way I'm supposed to be" (Participant A, age 23, meat eater). PETA is therefore challenging or avoiding stereotypes. Participant A showed then compassion for the cow.

Since it is a digitally manipulated picture, the participants were asked about the advantages and disadvantages of displaying content in this way. The shock tactics had not been mentioned up to this point, but some participants associated the digital manipulation of pictures with it. Both groups had similar answers. Digital manipulation was seen as a way of delivering something in a lighter way, creating discussions and making people think. The vegan and vegetarian group presented a new perspective: by using digitally manipulated pictures, animals could not be harmed. This point of view connects to Carrie P. Freeman and Debra Merskin's arguments regarding respectful ways to represent animals, by using CGI (Computer-generated imagery) (2015, p. 214). Regar-

ding disadvantages, it was pointed out that if the picture is too busy, loud, with too many elements, the message gets lost. This refers to the disadvantages of shock named by Taylor (2015) and Chouliaraki (2010). Nonetheless, most of the participants believed that the advantages of using digitally manipulated pictures were greater than not using it and found the advertisement powerful. In fact, most meat eaters claimed *Killer Cows* could be the one advertisement that could convince them to go vegan, explaining that they prefer facts to aesthetics, which showed a willingness to learn. This result goes against the arguments stating that shocking people through emotions is more effective than facts (Mukattash et al., 2021).

The Payback, also a digitally manipulated picture that portrays switched roles, received similar reactions in both groups. It was considered by the participants the least impactful advertisement. For the first time critiques on PETA's choices emerged from the vegan and vegetarian group. They turned their attention to the title "The Payback", which suggests – according to the participants – that animals are vengeful, which for them was a misrepresentation. While they believe that animal and human suffering is equal (as mentioned in *Silent Scream*), in this situation, they did not support attributing negative human characteristics to animals. Animals are better than that. In this situation it hurt the message and caused a boomerang effect (Chouliaraki, 2010) – people backlash at the company that insults them or their beliefs.

In the meat eater group participant C revealed a concern related to numbness. Now that the participants had been exposed already to two violent ads, this one was not impactful anymore. This situation proves Chouliaraki's theory (2010) on compassion fatigue, regarding one negative effect of shock, the bystander effect, indifference, or in this case what I call, shock fatigue. Nonetheless, a comparison between *The Payback* and *Killer Cows*, both digitally manipulated, emerged in this group. While the former taught them about facts, had an educational value, *The Payback* was considered too exaggerated, which leads people to turn away and ignore the message (Taylor, 2015; Chouliaraki, 2010):

Participant A: (…) I reacted to "who's the real animal?". They are just assuming in this ad that people that eat meat don't like animals, because they use this as negative…"who is the real animal?".

Participant B: But why is being an animal a negative thing? That's also what I've been thinking about…the whole thing is really negative, the whole ad.

Participant D: I mean it's quite an ironic message, because if you think about it "who is the real animal?", they are pretty much insinuating that being an animal is being a dumb creature and then they are trying to save animals at the same time, saying that they have a higher purpose…

Participant A: This ad [*Killer cows*], in my opinion, is something they encourage you to do something (…) but this [*The Payback*] is just so…

Participant B: Disgusting.

Participant A: Exactly! And I can't do…there's no knowledge here, there's just aesthetics and like the horrific image. But this [*Killer cows*] gives you like "Eating meat kills more animals than you think", it's more logical…

From the discussion above one concludes that the meat eaters are calling PETA hypocrites. They want to support animal rights, yet they are also using oppressive language that the dominant Man uses. PETA takes it too far, going against their own values. The text "Who's the animal now?", is seen as derogatory towards animals and hypocritical by PETA. The meat eaters also thought the picture was empowering people that are already vegan, calling it a "good and evil narrative" (Participants A and C, meat eaters). If a person is good, is vegan and superior (Participant D, age 21, meat eater) if not, is evil.

Closeness to reality

The last advertisement shown was *All Beings Bleed the Same*. Even though the participants claimed numbness, the feeling of shock re-emerged when this picture was shown. In the meat eater group, the participants felt compassion for the animals' suffering. Parti-

cularly participant B, meat eater, who was indifferent to the advertisements thus far, was shocked by this one and came into the animals' defense:

> I can visualise in my head that this happens in reality. (…) I think this is horrific to look at, because I can actually see it. (…) I feel like if I was there, I would probably not let that happen. (…) I feel sorry for the pig (Participant B, age 23, meat eater).

For participant B, not only was the advertisement a closer representation of what happens in real life when slaughtering pigs and so on, as it resembled one past memory. This statement suggests a new result for resembling reality: one feels closer empathy when the representation is more personal. While on Killer Cows, the facts were more important, here shocking through reaching emotions proved more effective. The other participants also felt compassion towards the animals and criticized abuse towards them, but had also issues understanding the meaning behind the message:

> **Participant D:** (…) clubbing a living animal to death (…) it's just wrong (…) Their message is simply just "animals bleed the same as us", so stop eating the animals, that's the way I perceive it. But the way I would like it to be perceived is that…instead of slaughtering like this and treating animals like they're completely worth nothing, let's just change our slaughtering practices and that's it.

> **Participant B:** (…) I don't even get why they put the dog in it, because the picture is already really tragic, the dog doesn't make any sense. (…) I think they try [send the] message that the dog is more worthy than the pig or something for humans.

By claiming that PETA is trying to show that "a dog is more worth than a pig to humans", it shows first the dominant normality, the anthropocentric views, what happening in society and then they criticize that vision, by educating audiences and equalizing animals. Participant A believed that an image like this does more harm than good and claimed that it feels like once again a war between good and evil and it is counterproductive to get a message

across. As previously stated in the compassion theory section, if non-profit organisations depend on guilt appeals and insult the viewer, the message may be mostly rejected, and people can get angry (Martinez, 2002). Participant D added that they felt disgust towards the Man's slaughtering practices, suggesting other critiques PETA could have used instead.

The vegan and vegetarian group had another perspective. All animals are equal and deserve the same rights. The group showed anger against the anthropocentric views of animal categorization and understood the intent of the dog illustration: "I see a pig or a cow the same as I see a dog (…) I am mad [that] you don't react the same way when a pig is beaten up" (Participant 3, age 21, vegetarian). For Participant 1, it raised the question of racism "because people are like divided when it comes to like "oh this culture is bad because they eat this type of animal" (Participant 1, age 32, vegan). For the vegans and vegetarians *All Beings Bleed the Same* was voted the most powerful advertisement representing animal suffering.

On shock tactics and oppression

In the final stage of the interviews the focus turned towards the non-profit organization itself and the theories regarding oppression, the use of shock tactics and compassion fatigue (Taylor, 2015; Chouliaraki, 2010). The interviewees were asked about the knowledge they had on PETA. The vegans and vegetarians were more familiar with their work, claimed their exaggerations necessary and applauded their tactics.

Since the exaggerations are mostly used through shock tactics, the participants were asked about the advantages and disadvantages of its use. The vegans and vegetarians believed that using shock is necessary because there is nowadays "less that affects you" (Participant 1, age 32, vegan). The meat eaters stated that it is a way of grabbing attention and getting closer to someone. The disadvantages were that it was done in a "polarising" way, instead of giving them something to reflect on. If PETA keeps insulting meat eaters was giving them the "opposite reaction" (Participant

D, age 21). Additionally, if messages are too loud and the meaning gets lost (Participant A, age 23).

As non-vegetarian people, the meat eater participants were asked which ad would most likely convince them to go vegan. Participants A and C chose *Killer Cows* and participant B, selected *All Beings Bleed the Same*. Participant D answered "none", however, later on, they stated that every advertisement was "impactful", even if some negatively.

Finally, the participants were asked if PETA was empowering or victimizing animals. The majority agreed victimizing – except in *The Payback* – since it was the standard of power structures in society. The vegan and vegetarian group claimed that victimizing is a "good strategy" (Participant 4, age 24, vegan) and "truthful, because animals are victims" (Participant 1, 32, vegan).

Results overview

The Venn diagram inspired by Schrøder et al. (2003), shows an overview of the general and individual reactions of each group and each participant. The participants' readings were associated to three categories: supportive, skeptical, and critical, based on Stuart Hall's preferred, negotiated, and oppositional readings. Since several participants had more than one reading, the Venn diagram helped illustrate those nuances, placing them between circles. The differences between both groups are highlighted by the green and red colors – see figures 8 and 9. The vegans and vegetarians showed greater support for PETA's messages and centered the animals. They all had mostly similar views, even when criticism was expressed, the support was greater.

The meat eaters criticized PETA often, but also understood their messages and felt compassion towards certain animals. For them, all four advertisements were different in some way. For example, Participant B rejected three advertisements, claiming indifference or no opinion, but expressed a strong reaction to *All Beings Bleed the Same*, they were therefore placed between a supportive and critical reading. Interviewee D criticized PETA the most but was also able to extract meanings and did state that all

advertisements were in some way impactful, therefore the participant was still slightly pushed out of the oppositional reading and placed between circles.
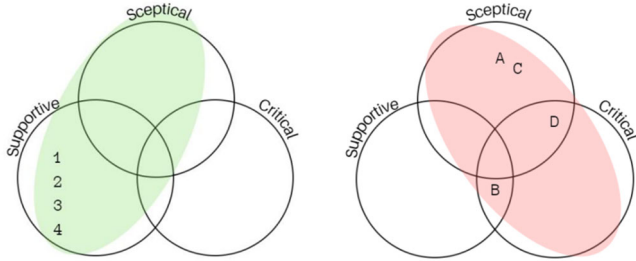
Figures 8 and 9. General narrative of the vegan and vegetarian group to the left and of the meat eater group to the right.

Discussion and Conclusion

This project sought out to answer how PETA represents animals through shock advertising. The use of shock tactics was developed through two distinct ways: 1) a closeness to reality, more realistic shock, situations that could happen and 2) digital manipulations, fictitious situations, which usually ask the audience to imagine and to think. Shock elements are incorporated not only through violating social norms, displaying people and animal harm, role reversal, physical violence, but also through use of body parts, blood, grim environments, sounds, horror, and gore genres.

Several other tactics were identified during the semiotic analysis. One pattern in common is that PETA starts by centering the Man, showing the dominant normality, stereotypical situations to contextualize the viewer. Afterwards these situations are linked to animal suffering, which educates humans that animals are not so different from us. This tactic revealed an empowerment of women, other vulnerable humans, and animals, together as one. These statements reflect for example the *Silent Scream*. Humans' ways of abusing, using, categorizing animals are criticized and there are situations where PETA educates the viewer with facts.

The role reversal is used in two advertisements, which is shocking, but also powerful to do (*Killer Cows* and *The Payback*). Zoomorphism is attributed to humans and anthropomorphism to animals which can be controversial, but also helpful to fight stereotypes.

This project also sought out to answer in what ways PETA's advertisements challenge anthropocentrism, and if they also contain elements of speciesism and animal oppression. While some of the tactics used were very powerful and may challenge anthropocentrism, others are taken too far and become problematic. Starting with anthropocentric views, they do center the Man, however, it relates to the pattern identified previously, to first explain the human perspective and then later associate it with the animal suffering. This creates understanding and empathy, educates viewers that animals are subjects not objects, they should not be placed into categories, they and us are equal – post-anthropocentrism. Decentering the dominant Man was also done by bringing to the light other oppressed humans and animals, which PETA does, by associating animal suffering with other human victims and empowering them (*Silent Scream*). Other ways PETA challenges anthropocentrism is by fighting stereotypes, done mainly through the strategies of reversed roles (*The Payback* and *Killer Cows*).

On the other hand, PETA also uses stereotypes that can be considered problematic and reinforce speciesism. In *Silent Scream*, women, elderly, children, and animals are considered victims and vulnerable ones, thus reinforcing the dominant power structures of society. Furthermore, there are some words and elements chosen by PETA that could also be considered speciesist, such as "who's the animal now?" (*The Payback*). However, in this situation, I argue that PETA is being speciesist, but towards meat eaters. They are acting how – they assume – meat eaters act towards animals, in speciesist ways. These assumptions can be counterproductive, as explained by the interviewees, and they also keep enabling the use of animals as insult. There are also times when PETA has oppressive attitudes. For example, when using cows as the aggressors (*The Payback*), may transmit the idea of

cows needing to be controlled and continue to be eaten. Since the advertisements are media representations, they might also influence perceptions of the cow as an aggressive animal.

Finally, this project also questioned how vegans/vegetarians and meat eaters react to PETA's shock advertisements. Some similarities were found between the results of the semiotic analysis and the interviews. However, the participants dug deeper into certain topics. For example, the question of racism, brought up by participant 1 (vegan) was used to discuss the problematics of categorizing animals, showing parallels between racism and speciesism (Singer, 2009).

The groups also identified speciesist words, "who's the animal now?" or "The Payback", suggesting either that PETA was hypocrite for using those words or that it was a misrepresentation, because animals do not get revenge. The vegans and vegetarians thought while animals are equal to humans, they are also different – and better – because they do not get revenge. Post-humanistic and post-anthropocentric views mean to centralize all, vulnerable humans, animals, and other species. It wants to promote a co-existence between species and challenge hierarchies (Kopnina, 2019). However, the vegans and vegetarians were, in a way, elevating the animal above other species. Nevertheless, they were also supportive of vulnerable humans in the advertisements.

The meat eaters felt offended and often displayed defensive behavior. These attitudes were found when they felt insulted by PETA's assumptions, or when shifting blame to other industries, moving the attention away from the problems of eating meat. They felt PETA's use of a good/evil narrative – to insult meat eaters and empower vegans – can be counterproductive. They valued human suffering above the animals, however at the same time showing some compassion towards certain animals. Some participants stated that animals are different, suggesting that some are more worthy of human empathy than others, revealing some problematics of animal categorization.

Regarding shock tactics, there were two types of shock identified within the meat eater group: positive and negative. The

positive was identified in the images that gave something to reflect upon (such as *Killer Cows*). The negative shock was present in the advertisements with too many elements or when PETA's message was controversial. According to the participants of both groups, some shock elements were considered offensive to animals, to humans and sometimes too loud, that people would turn away. Furthermore, using digitally manipulated images and anthropomorphism through shock can be harmful for the company and the cause, for people might not take the message seriously. The vegans and vegetarians thought the shock was necessary and that PETA has a purpose to fill in this world.

Both groups agreed that these advertisements would not make people turn vegan tomorrow, but that they open doors for discussion. Instead of shock, it was PETA's strategies of closeness to reality and educating about facts that were, in their opinion, the most successful and could lead discussions towards veganism.

This project concluded that PETA tries to decenter the Man as superior to the animal and show that humans and animals are not so different. However, one concluded that to decenter the Man is in fact difficult, anthropocentrism and speciesism are deeply embedded in our society that it is hard to create a message staying away from it. The meat eater group shifted the blame to PETA's misrepresentation and miscommunication and had speciesist views, which may be influenced by society's hierarchical structures. They also revealed a certain compassion and willingness to learn. The vegans and vegetarians also mostly positioned themselves as animal supporters, criticizing society's anthropocentric ways. One can conclude that PETA's strategies in these advertisements in challenging the power structures in society, are greater than the elements of speciesism and oppression present.

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This volume contains adaptions of two excellent master theses that were written and defended within the international master's programme media, communication, and cultural analysis at Södertörn University in 2023. Running since 2009, the programme has more than 100 alumni who are employed in the media, academic and education. In 2020, the programme coordinator together with the programme council and the department council, chose to distinguish the best theses in a printed volume. This is the fourth volume in the series.

The contributions in this volume cover two very different topics: how social media and content streaming sites are used to shape relationships between K-pop superstars BTS and their fan base in Sweden and how vegans/vegetarians respectively meat eaters react to the use of shock advertisements by the organization for animal advocacy, PETA. Although stretching across two such different topics, the chapters share an interest in zooming in on how media can be understood in relation to engagement and emotions.

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