

‘Tis the Season for warm, fuzzy emotion: visual storytelling and nostalgia in Christmas adverts

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Abstract

For most viewers, television advertisements are so intrusive, repetitive, and untrustworthy that seldom are they willing to sit through a stream of unwanted TV and/or online advertisements. One of the only times of the year, when this is not the case, is at Christmas. Whether because they make us smile, chuckle or become a little tearful, most festive advertising campaigns succeed in capturing and retaining audiences’ attention. UK leading retailers spend millions of pounds at this time of the year to ensure that adverts are remembered and talked about. I wish to argue that they are more effective and memorable if, among different strategies employed for comedic effect, they have a captivating storyline, are entertaining, meaningful and trigger a strong emotional response. Informed by narrative theory and conceptions of nostalgia, this paper examines the strategies and narrative techniques used in two television advertising campaigns by John Lewis, Waitrose and Sainsbury’s to both produce a feeling of nostalgia and cultivate empathy. It argues that their effectiveness stems from the stories in advertisements that evoke memories and transport people imaginatively to their childhood.

Keywords: nostalgia, narrative, advertising, humour

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Estamos naquela altura do ano de emoções aconchegantes: narrativas visuais e nostalgia em anúncios de Natal

Resumo

Para a maioria dos telespectadores, os anúncios televisivos são tão intrusivos, repetitivos e pouco confiáveis, que raramente estão dispostos a assistir a um fluxo indesejado de anúncios televisivos e/ou online. Uma das únicas alturas do ano em que tal não acontece é no Natal. Seja porque nos fazem sorrir, rir ou lacrimejar, a maioria das campanhas publicitárias festivas consegue captar e reter a atenção do público. As principais marcas do Reino Unido gastam milhões de libras nesta época do ano para garantir que os anúncios sejam lembrados e comentados. No presente artigo considera-se que as campanhas publicitárias mais eficazes e memoráveis são aquelas que, entre diferentes estratégias publicitárias, utilizam o humor, bem como um enredo cativante, para não apenas divertir, mas desencadear emoções fortes também. Informado pela teoria narrativa e concepções de nostalgia, este artigo examina as estratégias e técnicas narrativas exploradas em duas campanhas publicitárias televisivas das marcas John Lewis, Waitrose e Sainsbury's para despertar um sentimento de nostalgia e cultivar a empatia. Argumenta que a sua eficácia decorre das histórias em anúncios que evocam memórias e transportam os espectadores imaginativamente para a sua infância.

Palavras-chave: nostalgia, narrativa, publicidade, humor

Christmas — that magic blanket that wraps itself about us, that something so intangible that it is like a fragrance. It may weave a spell of nostalgia. Christmas may be a day of feasting, or of prayer, but always it will be a day of remembrance — a day in which we think of everything we have ever loved.

Augusta E. Rundel

Introduction

Advertising on TV has traditionally been the most effective way of reaching many people, at one time, but in recent years the advertising industry has had to adapt to, not only contemporary consumer and TV viewing habits but also to how viewers engage with advertising in digital environments. The constant restlessness and distracted sampling of small bits of information, from varied sources underpinning our techno-dazzled world, has reshaped such mundane activities as watching television. Younger generations — from the millennials to Gen Z — have substituted traditional network television for streaming services and user-generated content, because it enables them to watch what they want and when they want (Fitzgerald, 2018; Maheshwari & Koblin, 2018). This has presented advertisers with a challenge. Additionally, since ads can be filtered with the help of ad blocker apps, plugins and filters, advertisers have been compelled to become more creative and adopt inventive strategies to capture audiences' attention.

I wish to focus on advertising in the UK, where spending has been rising steadily, according to marketing research and the Advertising Association (AA) (Statista, 2020; Advertising Association, 2018). In particular, I aim to examine Christmas advertising, which is worth millions of pounds of marketing budget. Data released by the AA and WARC at the end of 2023 revealed that a record £9.5bn was estimated for the Christmas advertising season (Advertising Association, 2023). These statistics invite reflection about the importance of advertising during the festive period, especially considering that, as studies have shown, consumers find most online advertising trivial, irrelevant, annoying, invasive, untrustworthy and ineffective, seeking to actively avoid it (Cho and Cheon, 2004; Kunst, 2024). Christmas is the only time of the year when, as the AA (2023) points out, “70% of young adults (25-34) find Christmas ads to be the ultimate festive mood booster”. This may be due to the recent tradition in the UK for the biggest brands, like John Lewis & Waitrose, Sainsbury's, Tesco, Marks &

Spencer, Lidl, Aldi and Asda of releasing television blockbuster ads, that attract as much attention as a film release.

Featuring the tagline “Whoever you’re looking for this Christmas” and Prokofiev’s “Romeo and Juliet, No 13, Dance of the Knights”, John Lewis began the seasonal campaign advertising frenzy when it released its first televised Christmas advert, titled *Shadows*, in 2007. Since then, Christmas adverts have become an annual public and social media event. As the AA (quoted in Hammet, 2017) has reported:

Nearly half of Brits (47%) have been moved to tears by a Christmas advert they’ve seen or heard.

A third look forward to Christmas adverts more than any film release.

One in six people have changed their plans to watch the premiere of their favourite Christmas advert.

More than 1 in 10 Brits have become fans of an artist/song after discovering them in a Christmas advert.

These intriguing positive consumer attitudes to Christmas advertising campaigns have motivated scholars to examine what has been called the “John Lewis effect” or the “John Lewis formula” that many retail brands have adopted (Beverland, 2021; Kotler et al., 2019). Several factors have been found to contribute to the success of seasonal advertising, including the anticipation created in the public, year after year, because of the combination of entertaining and relatable/emotional content of the ads; the cinematic story with a surprise and a happy ending developed around central themes of love, family and friendship, that conveys a positive and heart-warming message; and the music selection.

Annmarie Hanlon argues that John Lewis gained even more popularity when they made a crucial adjustment in their advertising formula and started focusing on the storytelling, rather than the product(s). As Hanlon (n.d.) writes, “Suddenly, instead of a product-orientated display, it was a case of: ‘Are you sitting comfortably? Let us tell you a story about how people feel when you give them a gift – about what all this means’” and concludes, “The trend John Lewis started works, because they have transformed the advert, from something we want to ignore or fast-forward, into something we want to watch. As human beings, we love a story.”

I wish to reflect on why this is especially true at Christmas. I suggest that the enchantment of Christmas begins at childhood, when storytelling is crucial to childhood development. The National Storytelling Network defines storytelling as “the interactive art of using words and actions to reveal the elements and images of a story while encouraging the listener’s imagination... Storytelling always involves the presentation of a story — a narrative”. Stories, whether told, read or seen, not only stimulate children’s imagination, because they open windows to new worlds, but also enable children to experience and make sense of different emotions. Christmas stories, particularly, are filled with magical events, adventure and lovable characters, like elves; snowmen that walk and talk; flying reindeers; and toys that come to life. Children learn not only about Santa Claus and Jesus but also about the importance of family and friends, of giving and sharing, kindness and empathy. For most children, Christmas is fun, exciting, joyous, and uncomplicated.

For many adults, Christmas is an opportunity to revisit their childhood. People make time to call, see and/or reconnect with relatives and friends they have not been in touch with throughout the year. Stories of the past often animate gatherings and get-togethers, producing laughter, a sense of well-being and rootedness. Christmas tree decorating, Christmas songs — played at home, heard on the radio and in shopping centres — and holiday classic films, like *Home Alone* (1990), *Home Alone 2: Lost in New York* (1992), *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* (2000), *Love Actually* (2003), *Elf* (2003), *The Polar Express* (2004) and *A Christmas Carol* (2009), tirelessly watched year after year with family and friends produce a sense of childlike wonder, that many adults are eager to rekindle. The emotions and state of mind, most often associated with positive experiences and memories of Christmas, are excitement, cheerfulness, contentment and thoughtfulness. That is why, for some people (especially if they have recently lost someone), remembering emotionally intense experiences of past Christmases may generate a sense of longing, sadness and loneliness, often connected with nostalgia.

I suggest that Christmas advertising in the UK uses character-driven stories to conjure childhood memories and to reproduce a sense of childlike innocence in advertisements that elicit mostly positive emotions, not only contributing to a sense of wellbeing but also having a therapeutic effect on consumers. The *Cambridge Dictionary* defines therapeutic as: “causing someone to feel happier and more relaxed; having a healing effect; tending to make a person healthier”. With this in mind, I wish to consider how the effective combination of narrative,

humour and animation, in two TV advertisements by the UK leading brands John Lewis, Waitrose and Sainsbury's produces this state of happiness and relaxation.

Humour and storytelling in Christmas advertising

When effectively used, humour is a tried and tested strategy that ensures advertising campaigns are impactful and remain memorable for audiences. As Charles Dickens (2004, p.79) famously wrote, "It is a fair, even-handed, noble adjustment of things, that while there is infection in disease and sorrow, there is nothing in the world so irresistibly contagious as laughter and good humour". Laughing, – whether on one's own or in the company of someone else – recent research has found, has psychological and physiological benefits. It has now been widely acknowledged that humour helps people in stressful situations. Laughter, a natural response to humour, boosts immunity; it decreases heart rate and blood pressure and produces an analgesic effect for pain. It not only induces a change in mental state and, consequently, generates a feeling of wellbeing, but also relieves physical tension and improves memory and cognitive functioning (Wilkins & Eisenbraun, 2009; Moreall, 2009). Socially, laughter is recognized to strengthen relationships, build connections and help diffuse conflict. As Martin and Ford (2018, p.8) write, "the ability to enjoy humour and express it through laughter seems to be an essential part of what it means to be human".

Whilst the use of humour in advertising is frequent and may appear to be an easy enough formula, many campaigns have been known to painfully miss the mark, because what amuses some people might quite simply annoy or even offend others. I am arguing that humour in advertising is most effective when it is used in conjunction with storytelling techniques that evoke a plethora of emotions in viewers. A funny story may be entertaining, but a story that evokes strong emotions while making audiences chuckle or laugh out loud, is not only enjoyable but may also generate a feeling of light-heartedness and general wellbeing. Advertisements that harness the potential of humour and storytelling thus produce, in consumers' minds, the association between a specific brand and the feeling of wellbeing are, therefore, more likely to be shared and circulated across social networks.

This is especially the case in the UK at Christmas time, when, as Robert Shrimpsley (2023) writes, "a Christmas ad, ideally is a shared experience, watched with loved ones". The anticipation of the Christmas campaigns and subsequent discussion of the best advert has

become a national tradition. Shrimpsley (2023) further observes, “The feelgood Christmas TV ad has been with us a fair while. Ideally, a bit of a tear-jerker, the aim is less to sell you products than to make you associate the advertiser with powerful Crimbo emotions like love, family and giving. The best examples of the genre live long in our memories.” Indeed, the number of articles and opinions that are published every year on print and digital media, either listing the best or favourite Christmas ads released that year or venturing a comparative analysis of ads, by a particular brand or competing brands over the years, reflect how engaging advertisements with emotional stories are sealed in consumers’ memories, as they are remembered, shared and commented on long after they were released.

In his reflection on the enchantment of telling and listening to stories, Richard Kearney (2002, p.3) succinctly explains the essence of storytelling, as follows: “Telling stories is as basic to human beings as eating. More so, in fact, for while food makes us live, stories are what make our lives worth living. They are what makes our condition *human*”. I would add that it is through storytelling that we build bridges between the past, the present and future that help us make sense of our lived experience. In shaping the events and people in our lives into distinct narrative elements like setting, characterization, protagonist, problem/dilemma, journey/narrative arc and resolution, we continually interpret and reinterpret the role we play, not only in our own stories but also in the stories of others. As John Berger (2000, p. 172) writes, “One can lie on the ground and look up at the almost infinite number of stars in the night sky, but in order to tell stories about those stars they need to be seen as constellations, the invisible lines, which can connect them, need to be assumed”. This is why the stories we tell ourselves, others or of others, are pivotal in providing a sense of who we are and where we stand in the web of social relations. But it is in the stories we read or watch that we allow ourselves to dream, to become totally immersed in the fictional world created by the author. We either secretly imagine we are the protagonist in the story or find ourselves empathising with the characters in a book or on screen.

Nostalgia in Christmas advertising

Stories that transport us imaginatively, offering us “the sensuous and material worlds of our particular childhoods, promising us personal meaning and emotional engagement”, as Gary Cross (2015, p.17) has written, are likely to generate nostalgia, the longing for a fondly remembered past. Despite the distinct definitions and theoretical approaches over time to the concept of nostalgia, there is a common belief that it is “a powerful sentiment that has been

part of human experience since long before it was assigned a name” (Batcho, 2013, p.165). In the 18th century, it was understood to be a medical condition resulting from a longing for the past or for something temporarily or permanently lost. It was also described as “homesickness”, a sadness that manifested in “recurring thoughts and memories of home” (Batcho, 2013, p.166). Recent theories have extended the meaning of nostalgia to encompass a combination of sadness and pleasant reminiscing and considered that it may even be viewed as “an adaptive response to stress or change, a fundamental component of human experience or a positive universal emotion” (Batcho, 2013, p.170). In this regard, nostalgia is a form of reconnecting to the past that summons fond memories, warm feelings, contentment, and joy.

In recent years, nostalgia has become a powerful marketing tool, explored particularly in the holiday season TV advertising campaigns. Narrative and visual elements that include familiar objects, places and food trigger an involuntary sensory-induced reliving of an emotional moment in the past, an experience that has been labelled the Proust Effect (named after Marcel Proust). Cretien van Campen (2014, p.2) explains why this emotional transportation to the past — often one’s childhood — constitutes an important part of one’s autobiographical memory, The smallest sensory impressions seem to slip through the cracks of my memory to bring back events that seemed long forgotten, and which now appear, large and real, in my consciousness. Not only do images appear, but sooner or later also sounds, smells, tastes, and the movements I made, the feeling of being touched by other people ... Not only do I remember being there, but I also *feel* being there These unexpected moments, when one is enveloped by memories of the past, provide an insight into the formative experiences of childhood. They reveal, as they did the narrator of Proust’s (1913-1927) *À la Recherche du Temps Perdu (In Search of Lost Time)*, the importance of allowing oneself to find innocent delight and wonder in seemingly simple things, especially when the obligations, demands and responsibilities of adulthood threaten to breed doubt and cynicism. These moments have a healing and nurturing effect, as they provide one with both a sense of rediscovering/winning back the lost time of one’s childhood and gaining a new appreciation for the present moment.

Leading UK brands have tapped into the impact of the immersive experience of nostalgia. The most memorable Christmas advertisements explore the interplay of the senses in the construction of memory by using visual and audio elements that engage the senses, evoke memories and trigger emotions. Some advertisements cause the viewer to tear up; others attempt to strike a balance between seriousness and light-heartedness, whilst others simply aim

to amuse and produce laughter. The chosen approach is informed by market research and years of fine-tuning. Market research has revealed that the most impactful adverts have the following ingredients: they tell a good story in which the brand plays a key part; they trigger an emotional experience without it being too serious or sad; they provide a Christmas experience that draws people in and taps into fond memories (Friedman 2016).

In this regard, John Lewis, the UK's largest department store retailer (founded in 1864), and the advertising agency Adam & Eve DDB have found the "creating then resolving sadness" winning formula since they started running their Christmas adverts in 2009, not only increasing John Lewis's market share but also becoming now part of British popular culture (Kotler et al., 2019; McCarthy, 2021). In fact, the John Lewis Christmas ads have become one of the most anticipated events of the festive season, attracting wide media coverage. For consumers, teaser trailers and release dates (usually in the first week of November) signal the start of the Christmas shopping season. In 2015, the media helped build the launch of the campaign frenzy, when the *Telegraph* set up a count-down clock on its website (Ang, 2021).

Producing smiles, tears, or both, the emotionally engaging stories generate millions of views on social media within the first 24 hours of their release. The storyline develops around the theme of unusual friendships, the value of family and love, kindness and generosity, and the idea of "thoughtful giving" (Fill & Tumbull, 2019). This formula has been used in award-winning campaigns that have had a surprisingly long shelf-life, like "The Long Wait" (2011), "The Journey" (2012), "The Bear and the Hare" (2013), "Monty the Penguin" (2014), "Man on the Moon" (2015) and "The Boy and the Piano" (2018).

It seems paradoxical that the British, who are historically known for being unsentimental and always showing "a stiff upper lip", have, over the past decade, reacted so favourably to festive campaigns that elicit an intense emotional reaction. This is especially intriguing if we consider social anthropologist Kate Fox's portrayal of English behaviour. In her book *Watching the English*, Fox (2014, p. 716) observes: "there is effectively an unwritten rule prescribing 'bah-humbug' anti-Christmas moaning rituals at this time of the year, and it is unusual to encounter anyone over the age of eighteen who will admit to unequivocal enjoyment of Christmas." Yet, Fox stresses that of all the calendrical holidays, "Christmas and New Year's Eve are by far the most important" (p. 713). When English people think about Christmas Eve, what comes to mind is "family; last-minute shopping; panics and squabbles; tree lights; drinking; too many

nuts and chocolates; possibly church — early evening carols or midnight service”. Christmas Day invariably includes “family; tree; present giving rituals; marathon cooking and eating of huge Christmas lunch; the Queen’s broadcast on television/radio — or pointedly *not* watching/listening to the Queen; fall asleep, perhaps while watching *Toy Story*, *ET* or similar; more food and drink; uncomfortable night” (Fox 2014, p. 714).

Fox (2014, p.716) clarifies that “‘Christmas shopping’ is the bit many English people are thinking of when they say they hate Christmas, and usually means shopping for Christmas presents, food, cards, decorations and other trappings”. How then has John Lewis managed to become the undisputed anchor of the festive ad season? Contrary to traditional advertising practice, rather than showcase a range of gifts and merchandise with an overt selling message in the ads, the brand has chosen to engage with customers through storytelling, capturing the public’s imagination and emotion. Consumers feel they are being entertained, not pitched, especially because the ads focus on positive and joyful aspects of the Christmas spirit, like spending time with family and friends and showing love through the giving of thoughtful gifts. The narrative running through all the John Lewis ads prompts “the warm fuzzy feeling associated with sentimental remembrances of youthful joys” (Batcho, 2016, p.171). This “positive affect”, as Hepper and Ritchie (2012) have termed it, is what consumers will ultimately retain.

John Lewis has found other ways of keeping the audience immersed in the story, whilst increasing awareness of the brand and boosting sales. Toys of the characters, hashtags, social media accounts, interactive games, and merchandise (like books, mugs, pyjama sets and slippers) add another layer to the TV ad campaign, creating audience affection for the characters in the ads and the brand itself. In addition, each year John Lewis chooses a charity that benefits from proceeds of the sales, a strategy that has endeared the public, who considers John Lewis to embody the true Christmas spirit.

Edgar, the excitable dragon

A closer look at this brand’s techniques illuminates why campaigns like “The Journey” (2012), “The Bear and the Hare” (2013), “Monty the Penguin” (2014) and “Buster the Boxer” (2016) are on the list of the 10 best John Lewis ads (Heritage, 2022). I am suggesting that the secret behind their success resides in the animated short film format. Combining live action and computer animation, the two to three-minute-long advertisements adopt Pixar’s successful

approach to storytelling. The linear structure — consisting of the introduction of the characters and the setting, the unfolding of the plot, the climax or turning point, and the resolution of the conflict — is crucial for the audience to understand and connect to the story. Additionally, character portrayal is pivotal to a creatively crafted narrative that engages and resonates with the audience.

The characters in the John Lewis adverts are modelled on the animated characters in films produced by Pixar, the studio credited with hit animations like the *Toy Story* trilogy, *Monsters, Inc.* (2001), *The Incredibles* (2004), *Ratatouille* (2007) and *Inside Out* (2015). Besides being visually stimulating, the protagonists in these films are relatable, have engaging personalities and human traits (Movshovitz, 2015). They are typically well-intentioned but flawed; funny; soft-hearted and, yet, strong-willed, motivated, and resourceful. Although they are faced with a hurdle they must overcome or a conflict to solve, they never give up and always find creative solutions for their problems. This endears the audience to the characters and keeps the viewer rooting for the brave protagonist in the story.

These storytelling techniques, which had proved successful in the previously mentioned ads, was repeated in John Lewis and Waitrose's first joint Christmas campaign in 2019. Statista (2021), the statistics portal for consumer survey results and industry studies, rated the advert featuring Ava and Edgar, an excitable baby dragon, the second most successful Christmas advert in the United Kingdom in 2019, having generated 17.3 million views on social media within the first 24 hours of its release. Therefore, I wish to flesh out the short, animated film to consider what made it so popular and why the message resonated with the public.

The story features no dialogue and is mostly told through compelling visuals that engage the audience in an interpretive analysis of the film structure. Exploring the interaction between humans and a non-human, the two-and-a-half-minute cinematic story centres on the theme of acceptance and friendship. In the first few seconds of the film, the camera zooms in on a snow-covered village far away. Ava, a young red-haired girl is walking towards us. Wobbling alongside is Edgar, a cheerful small, yellow-eyed green dragon. When the pair spots two children building a snowman, Edgar eagerly runs to place a carrot nose on the snowman's head. However, to Ava's dismay, the fire-breathing dragon reduces the creation to a puddle.

In the next scene, Ava is diligently helping her father at the Bakery; the villagers are going about the seasonal activities in the medieval fairy-tale land. When she looks out the window, Ava sees Edgar sprinting to the ice-skating rink. He ends up melting the ice as he blissfully skids around breathing fire, leaving the disgruntled children wading in water. There was little that Ava could do to prevent the disaster. However, when the villagers gather for the unveiling of the Christmas tree, Edgar has his mouth tied shut with a scarf to avert further misfortune, but he cannot help fire coming out of his ears. He inadvertently sets fire to the holly and burns down the Christmas tree.

Confronted with the villagers' exasperated looks, the heartbroken Edgar locks himself at home. Ava feels his misery and patiently waits outside, but to no avail. After much thought, she figures out a way of showing him how much she cares. She knocks on Edgar's door and gives him a beautifully wrapped gift. In the final scene, the villagers have come together to share a tasty meal, but when Ava announces their arrival, everybody hastily hides under the table, fearing the worst. But when Edgar unexpectedly uses his fiery breath to light his special gift, a delicious Christmas pudding, he is met with great acclaim.

Throughout the narrative arc, as the camera zooms in on Edgar's face, we cannot help but empathise with his candour, his excitement and sadness. The visual narrative is further supported by the backing track, the reworked 1980s pop-ballad by REO Speedwagon "Can't Fight the Feeling" sung by Bastille's Dan Smith, which connects to different generations. Ultimately, the ad delivers the message that Christmas is a time for friendship, acceptance and thoughtful gifts, reminding consumers of John Lewis and Waitrose's slogan: "Show them how much you care". The brand and slogan appear at the very end of the advertisement, giving audiences the impression that rather than attempting to persuade consumers to buy a specific product, the brand is more interested in sharing a set of values.

The short film's success resides in its ability to captivate and entertain, while effectively taking the audience into a fictional world that captures the innocence, hopefulness and simple bliss of childhood. We warm to Ava and Edgar's selfless and protective friendship, and the joy they find in each other's company, regardless of their differences. So, when her best friend loses hope that he will ever be accepted, Ava can no longer enjoy the Christmas festivities until she finds a way of proving his worth to the villagers. This prompts reflection about the importance of childhood friendship. The message is simple: friends are the source of wellbeing. They

provide not only companionship, comfort and support, but, crucially, a window into the thoughts, feelings, and desires of another.

Visually, the film relies on warm, inviting colours and imagery that transmit the happiness of the festive season. Idyllic scenes of children playing in the snow, bread baking in a wood oven, and cheerful people gathered around a long candle-lit table, filled with delicious food, stimulate the senses, evoking a sense of comfort and nostalgia. Edgar, the protagonist, harks back to dragon legends and folklore. But, in contrast to the monstrous beast in *Beowulf* or the fearsome and fiery dragon in J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit*, Edgar does not look evil or threatening at all. He has wings, scales, teeth and claws, but is far from a treacherous, dangerous creature. His only flaw is that he is disaster-prone and cannot control his instincts. Rather than slay the creature, the hero in this story befriends and protects him, echoing the storyline of many picture books and dragon stories for children.

Mog's Christmas Calamity

Industry experts claim that Sainsbury's has been the only brand to consistently compete with John Lewis. One of its most popular and memorable ads features an animated cuddly character in *Mog's Christmas Calamity*, a humorous and entertaining story that has generated 40 million views on social media. CGI (Computer Generated Imagery) brings Mog, the fictional character in a popular series of children's books written by Judith Kerr, to life in the story of a mischievous cat that sets off a chain of unfortunate incidents on Christmas eve. The narrative weaves the theme of Christmas with broader themes of love, kindness and solidarity.

Mog's Christmas Calamity was published as a book and raised over 1 million pounds for Save the Children's literacy appeal. It reached No.1 in the overall book charts and was the bestselling picture book of 2015 in the UK, confirming the public's affection for the likeable character of sixteen titles, starting with *Mog the Forgetful Cat*, published in 1970, and ending in 2002 with *Goodbye Mog*. Thirteen years later, Judith Kerr was persuaded to resurrect Mog and write a story for Sainsbury's Christmas advert that brought childhood memories and unleashed a flood of emotions for readers of different generations, as many children who read Mog's adventures, or were read to, are now adults who are reading the same stories to their children.

Narrated by Emma Thomson, the three-minute advert begins on a peaceful snowy night. Three houses, surrounded by snow, can be seen in the scene. The dark sky is lit by the town's lights

in the distance. The Thomas family are quietly sleeping in their beds. The children, Nicki and Debby, are dreaming about the presents they will get on Christmas Eve. Mr Thomas is dreaming he is the batsman in a cricket game; Mrs Thomas is dreaming she is Elizabeth Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice*. In the kitchen, Mog, the family cat, is having a nightmare, where she is flying and being chased by evil-looking birds. The ominous sky foreshadows misfortune.

When Mog wakes up from her restless sleep, she sees smoke coming from the oven. Referencing Kevin's antics in the Christmas classic *Home Alone*, Mog accidentally causes a chain of disasters that lead to a fire in the family home. Nevertheless, Mog turns out to be the hero in the story when she inadvertently manages to alert the fire brigade and saves the family. The turkey in the oven, however, could not be saved, nor could the kitchen. When the heartbroken family survey what little was left of their kitchen, a knock on the door announces a wave of solidarity. In the end, what might have turned Christmas into a very sad occasion brings the neighbours together as they pool their resources and put on a meal for all to enjoy. In the end, a neighbour is seen lugging a huge Christmas; the house is filled with neighbours, delicious festive food, and decorations. Mr and Mrs Thomas radiate happiness as they serve Christmas lunch to their guests. Mog is rewarded with an egg, her favourite treat.

The music, composed by Rachel Portman, sets the emotional tone of the story, but the film's most effective trait is Mog's realistic expressions, which convey an array of human emotions, capturing our attention and evoking sympathy. Fear, surprise, confusion, sadness, and contentment are mostly achieved by subtle eye and mouth movements. Meike Uhrig (2019, p. 5) describes the potential of computer-animated characters to, "elicit certain emotions by emphasising faces in general and parts of the face particularly. Here, the eyes of a character appear to be a major elicitor, as they are central in displaying most of the eight basic emotions". Importantly, as Uhrig concludes, "The special importance of the characters' faces as transporters of emotions over the exaggerated body language in traditionally animated films is mirrored in the camera work and editing with the film's use of close-up shots — so-called scenes of empathy". Indeed, when the camera zooms in on Mog's face, the eyes take up the narrative space, intensifying the character's emotions and eliciting empathy.

The simple slogan "Christmas is for sharing", which appears only at the end, reinforces the timeless and relevant message of the importance of community and togetherness, particularly in the present climate of war, uncertainty, and the ongoing financial crisis. This may explain

why the 2015 ad is still one of the most watched Christmas adverts, second only to John Lewis's "The Bear and the Hare" (according to the article "Most Successful Christmas Ads Unveiled", 2021). The cheerful and uplifting advert not only entertains but also inspires viewers, since the selfless act of helping a neighbour in need is something that people can easily relate to.

Conclusion

The cinematic advertisements discussed above take the audience on an emotional journey through a colourful and wonder filled world seen through the untainted mind of a child, enabling a moment of respite from the complexities of life. They are composed of narrative elements that conjure holiday memories and produce a sense of nostalgia. Humour is woven into the narrative to provide a cathartic release.

Both stories provoke an emotional response in audiences. They explore, through a combination of fantasy and reality radiating from children's imagination, what for many is/ should be the meaning of Christmas: spending time with family and friends, laughing together, showing love and affection, giving and receiving carefully chosen gifts, sharing meals and enjoying food. Even if the ads do not have us roar with laughter, the smile or chuckle they produce promote a sense of wellbeing, an emotional state many people relate to Christmas. The fictional fantasy world created in both stories help trigger "fond, rose-colored, and personally meaningful recollections of childhood or social relationships", central features of nostalgia that foster "self-continuity, the sense that one's past is interwoven with one's present" (Sedikides et. al., 2016, p. 524-525). This connection between past and present is, in many ways, established through the stories we tell of the meaningful occasions or events in our lives and that we keep going back to again and again, helping us to stay grounded and maintain a sense of who we are. John Lewis and Sainsbury's uncanny ability to tap into this human need and consistently craft the kinds of stories many people relate to illuminates the secret behind their marketing strategy.

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