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Banal nationalism and everyday nationalism in experiential advertising. A sample of advertisements broadcast on the Catalan public television (2009- 2017)

Abstract

This article explores representations of Catalan identity in contemporary experiential advertising in order to assess whether the symbolic universes and frames of meaning used exemplify the ideas of banal nationalism in Billig's sense (1995) and/or everyday nationalism as described by Edensor (2002), in terms of retaining and reinforcing the mental frames of the nation. Drawing on a sample of 33 advertisements broadcast on TV3, the Catalan public television network, between 2009 and 2017, the ways in which commercial products are linked to a form of representation of Catalan identity through the images, traditions, people, landscapes and/or language they evoke are explored. The article also discusses how collective social and symbolic imaginations are produced and reproduced, in which products are associated with familiar contexts and discourses, normalizing patterns of behavior and consumption linked to certain lifestyles, culture or national models. Likewise, a significant proportion of the sample exemplifies how private agents may play an active role in the production and reproduction of the nation.

Keywords

Nation, advertising, identity, collective imaginations, food, beverage.

1. Introduction

Drawing on an understanding of communications media as key modes of symbolic reproduction in the context of globalization, this article explores advertising narratives as modes of storytelling in which representations of nation and national community are imagined, built and shared in specific ways, thus shaping the public and symbolic discourse about the nation in which their mass audiences engage. The article traces this issue in general, and addresses it in particular relation to representations of Catalan identity on TV3, the Catalan public television network, between 2009 and 2017. Our purpose is to assess whether the symbolic universes and frames of meaning used exemplify the ideas of banal nationalism in Billig's sense (1995) and/or everyday nationalism as described by Edensor (2002).

The project of representing Catalan identity depends on the idea that there are different ways of representing the imagined and documented characteristics of a given cultural

tradition and national *demos* in symbolic terms –in this case, Catalonia. This concept should be read in sociological terms –that is, in relation to its capacity to generate social cohesion and the cultural hegemony of certain ways of representing the nation in terms of identity (Lladonosa, 2019). As Bhabha points out, the nation is a form of cultural elaboration, “an agency of *ambivalent* narration that holds culture at its most productive position” (1990, p. 3). Likewise relevant in this regard is Anthony Smith’s discussion of the changing processes of a nation via modes of territorialization, the elaboration of myths, the shaping of a shared memory, cultural unification, legal standardization, etc.; as well as the modes of appropriation availed of by the nation. Smith refers to what we think of as our ethnic past (Smith, 1986, 1999). Such multiple meanings should inform our reading of the ways in which national identity is represented. Moreover, the idea of *catalanidad* (Catalan identity) is closely bound up with the concept of nationhood, a sense of belonging to a specific community represented in national terms. Nationhood may also stand for the symbolic representation of a range of specific indicators of national identity that are linked to historical, political, social and cultural processes that shape a national community. For the purposes of this study, the most significant such indicators are distinctive traditions, festivals, language and places. Aspects of the everyday nationalism described by Edensor may also comprise subjects of collective representation in this regard: particular works of music, architecture, food and drink, as well as a system of values ascribed to community representation on the basis of essentialized features of the national character as such.

Advertisements for food and drink products are the primary objects of analysis here. The research carried out by Ichijo and Ranta (2016) is especially important in this context, where the authors present food as a good example of the representation of nation, insofar as food is framed as an authentic marker of the nation or its culture. Ichijo and Ranta explore the relationship between nation and the individual dimension of identity, and how this relationship may be examined in food as a product through which identity is experienced and practiced. They draw a distinction between the *unofficial/bottom-up* and *official/top-down* aspects of food and nationalism; the former denotes the agents and spaces outside the scope of direct control by the nation-state which have individual potential as active agents in the experience, production and reproduction of the nation. Thus, our research into audiovisual advertising commercials –that is, representations produced by private brands– is shaped by these considerations. The private sector is seen to play a role in the construction, preservation and revision of national identities by promoting particular images that reflect what the product and nation are and are like (Ichijo & Ranta, 2016, p. 20). Other researchers have also addressed this issue from the point of view of consumption, in light of the argument that people are not merely passive consumers of the nation but also its creative producers, as Palmer (1998), Billig (1995), Edensor (2002, 2006), and Fox and Miller-Idriss (2008) aver.

2. Theoretical framework

1983 was a watershed year in the scholarly renewal of research on the nation and nationalism; the concurrent publication of *Imagined Communities* by Benedict Anderson, *The Invention of Tradition* by Eric Hobsbawm and *Nations and Nationalism* by Ernest Gellner, showed that the real and the imagined, effective institutionalization and symbolism, and the practice and legitimization of power were inseparable for the purposes of analysis in the study of national, historical reality (Mayos, 2015). Anderson (1983) cited imagination as a key dimension in any understanding of the construction of modern national communities, in line with the argument that the idea of nation is fully realized when it is possible to imagine it. The means and agents whereby national identity may be imagined and communicated are many, varied and available across a range of areas in our social life. This context explains how the symbolic dimension of the nation may be framed as an object of historical study.

Language is one of the key means by which knowledge is formulated, transmitted and, in the final analysis, legitimized; likewise, therefore, it is a fundamental vehicle for the transmission of representations of identity (Castelló, 2008). Drawing on the kind of interpretative analysis practiced by sociologists of knowledge, the significance of the original formulation of knowledge fades away because the tradition ‘invents’ new origins and frames of reference in accordance with the national design and the reproduction of the imagined community, a thesis that Eric Hobsbawm also pursues in *The Invention of Tradition* (1983). Hobsbawm argues that, as a phenomenon, the invention of tradition involves developing the cultural elements, institutions and practices that legitimize and recreate certain ways of life. To his mind, an invented tradition need not be regarded as any less “true” a tradition; rather, its invention requires a process whereby a series of symbolic or ritual practices designed to produce certain behavioral values or norms are developed by dint of repetition. Such development requires that the emerging present be interwoven with the past, a historical past fit for that purpose (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 200, p. 8).

Michael Billig’s definition of banal nationalism (1995) encompasses the ideological dimension of nation building, enabling further discussion of nationalism as a discourse. Billig’s contribution has greatly enriched our understanding of the significance of the nation in everyday life; the nation is a tangible reality in language and social practices, profoundly shaped by the social application of a shared national imagination in day-to-day activities, in our habitus, to use Bourdieu’s term (1994). Well-established nation-states tend to practice this form of nationalism to ‘naturalize’ habitual reminders of nationhood through a wide variety of psychological acts in order to affect the representation of the nation (Billig, 2006, p. 41).

As noted by Tim Edensor (2002) and others in their research into identity and everyday life, the potential to project the nation may be capitalized on in many different fields and spaces: music, architecture, food, drink and sport. Edensor also cites many aspects of everyday life that may function as markers of identity, which come together to ground a keen cognitive, habit-based and affective sense of national identity. The same process may also be enacted in spaces and places: symbols and iconic emblems in the collective national urban, rural and landscape imaginations that shape the familiar, everyday world. Finally, it may also be accomplished through ritual, ceremony and everyday habits, which become traditional, one’s own, second nature.

The aim of this analytical perspective on nation and identity is to recognize the material reality of the nation, the social significance of naturalized forms of national ‘consciousness’, and their implications in terms of specific practices. In this regard, we could focus on how this narrative is produced: not only what tools are used to develop, normalize and communicate its production, but also how it may be continually reinterpreted, adapted and modified in a given society. This article sets out how such production may be carried out through symbolic forms and their narrative resources, in general, and private commercial advertising, in particular.

Among the strategies availed of by the private sector as a producer of banal nationalism in recent times is its investment in the symbolic potential of the brand and its products. Over the last fifteen years, marketing has gravitated towards the storytelling approach, in which the logo or brand image plays a less important role than the story told about the brand (Salmon & Roig, 2008). Companies have felt a need to explain themselves by telling stories that add value and meaning capable of sparking interest and involvement among their target publics, like the creation of a sense of belonging and national identity that takes place in the case of national branding (Aronczyk, 2013). In addition to such storytelling, which is amplified through branded content (whereby a brand does not simply promote its products but tailor-makes content for its target market), companies have become content-creators on a much larger scale, offering a vision of the product that goes beyond description to explain the values associated with it and the place or land from which it stems. Gobé (2001) sees this shift as a

new paradigm in brand communication: emotional branding –the creation of an emotional bond between brand and person, the generation of meanings linked to personal lived experiences (Govers & Go, 2009).

In this regard, a brand may be read as a hypersymbol, encapsulating all the meanings associated with the company and its products. Over time, commercials for major brands have tended to focus more and more on particular brand attributes highlighted in their advertising so as to engage greater social identification with the products and services they offer. This symbolic overload is rooted in a wide range of social changes, including the radical transformation of the symbolic sphere in the second half of the twentieth century, as well as the increasing significance and questioning of identities in the same period. Advertising is often structured as a set of micro–narratives that set up possible worlds through which modes of social identification are implied (Eco, 1993 [1979]).

Three key aspects emerge in an analysis of brand identity: positioning (the representative place the brand aims to occupy in the collective imagination), brand personality (in general, from an emotional viewpoint), and its essence (the defining characteristic of the brand as such). The cultural heritage reflected in the brand, the codes of expression used, and the beliefs and values it suggests are likewise important (Dinnie, 2008, p. 42–43). Thus, the array of cultural and semiotic representations the brand aims to target and project from an experiential perspective play a very important role in its construction, especially if it is linked to a nation or cultural space or land. Govers and Go (2009) describe three kinds of individual experience in relation to place: physical experience, living in a given place; experience derived from secondary sources; and the experience prompted by the overlapping strategies of promotion, marketing and branding. The hypersymbolization described above, along with the appeal to personalized experiences it may generate, and the centering of geographical place in commercial advertising may generate bonds between the brand and the particular place or land evoked (Pike, 2009). Seisdedos and Mateos (2010) discuss “ambassador brands,” which reference their places of origin, albeit in subtle, non–explicit ways. “Aristocratic brands” assert their connection to their places of origin in explicit and intense terms. Previous research on how national identities may be reflected in commercial advertising have tended to address the matter from the point of view of reception (Hogan, 2005; Bulmer, Buchanan Oliver, 2010) or based on case studies relating to specific products (Morris, 2005).

As stated above, food and drink may be read as instances of banal nationalism, representative markers of a culture or nation (Ichijo & Ranta, 2016). Other scholars have argued that food may be analyzed as an indicator of social class or lifestyle (Bourdieu, 2012 [1979]); Ashley *et al.*, 2004) and as an example of the “consumption of the nation” (Fox & Miller-Idriss, 2008). A wide range of international studies have explored the relationship between food and cultural identity (Bell & Valentine, 1997; Cwiertka, 2002; Montanari, 2006; Almerico, 2014), but this link has not yet been so thoroughly addressed in the Spanish context. On representations of Spain as a nation, Peris Blanes’s account (2015) of the national discourses on view in the entertainment program TVE *Masterchef* should be cited in this regard. Enric Castelló’s studies (2007, 2015) are especially relevant as regards the representation of Catalan identity in audiovisual contents. There has been limited research thus far on the semiotic analysis of advertising narrative discourses and its bearing on banal nationalism, although a number of papers have addressed Catalonia as a specific case, such as Bardera and Espluga (2013) and Gargallo (2014).

3. Methodology

Given that the key characteristic of Billig’s definition of banal nationalism is its invisibility –that is, its implicit nature– the primary purpose of our study is to explore the main aspects enabling the representation of Catalan identity in experiential advertising in recent years in such terms. The aim is to explore whether such narrative devices function as modes of banal

nationalism in retaining and reinforcing the mental frames of the nation. In particular, we highlight the impact of the Catalan context on the ways in which identities are (re)presented by some players in the commercial advertising sector. To these ends, the original sample for this research project comprised a total of 73 advertisements broadcast between 2009 and 2017 on TV3, the Catalan public television network, and via digital media platforms (primarily YouTube), which used representative markers of Catalan identity to promote a wide variety of products. 42% of the commercials were for food products (cheese, *fuet* –a type of cured pork– ham, *turrón*, olive oil, etc.), 34% for beverages (water, beer, wine and milk), and the rest for tourism campaigns, banks and textile products.

The original sample encompassed two different basic modes of advertising that contained elements of identity representation in the terms established by the theory of banal nationalism: advertising that capitalizes on the Catalan tradition (a total of 40 commercials) and advertisements that take a more experiential approach (33 commercials in total). The latter category is the focus of the analysis offered in this article, although it should be noted that the two categories need not be seen as mutually exclusive.

Table 1: List of advertisements analyzed.

ADVERTISEMENT	COMPANY	SECTOR	YEAR
“Amb treball, aquesta terra dona els millors fruits” (“With work, this land yields the best fruit”)	Oli Borges	Food: Olive oil and nuts	2009
“Estrella Damm Leo Messi - Barcelona F.C.”	Estrella Damm	Beverage: Beer Sport	2009
“Estrella Damm. Mediteràniament” (“Estrella Damm. Mediterraneanly”): 8 adverts	Estrella Damm	Beverage: Beer	2009-2016
“Estrella Damm: F.C. Barcelona. La feina ben feta” (“Estrella Damm: Barcelona F.C. Work well done”)	Estrella Damm FC Barcelona	Beverage: Beer Sport	2010
“Catalonia Tourism: I’m a Fan of Catalonia”	Turismo de Cataluña	Tourism	2010
“La historia de la boda real de l’Albert i la Miriam.” (“The true story of the wedding of Albert and Miriam”)	Aigua Veri	Beverage: Water	2011
“Moritz.cat”	Mortiz	Beverage: Beer	2011
“Estrella Damm FC Barcelona. Què tenim?” (“Estrella Damm Barcelona F.C. What have we got?”)	Estrella Damm FC Barcelona	Beverage: Beer Sport	2011
“Estrella Damm. Barcelona F.C. Inimitable”	Estrella Damm FC Barcelona	Beverage: Beer Sport	2012
“Free Damm. El migdia.” (“Free Damm. Midday.”)	Free Damm	Beverage: Beer	2012
“Kilian Jornet. Veri”	Aigua Veri	Beverage: Water	2012
“Aigua de Ribes. Natural”	Aigua de Ribes	Beverage: Water	2012
“Els germans Roca i la Costa Brava” (“The Roca brothers and the Costa Brava”)	Patronat de Turisme Costa Brava	Tourism	2014
“Llet ATO. Fest a Catalunya” (“ATO Milk. Made in Catalonia”)	Llet ATO	Food and Beverage: Milk and other dairy products	2014
“Viladrau, l’aigua que ens mou” (“Viladrau, the water that moves us”)	Aigua Viladrau	Beverage: Water	2014
“Música, vaques i gelats” (“Music, cows and icecream”)	La Fageda	Food and Beverage: Milk and other dairy products	2014
“Nova Sant Aniol ROC Esperit Volcànic.” (Nueva Sant Aniol ROC Volcanic Spirit.”)	Aigua Sant Aniol	Beverage: Water	2015
“Catalunya és casa teva” (“Catalonia is your home”)	Turisme de Vilaseca	Tourism	2015
“La tradició mana” (“Tradition dictates”)	La Selva	Food: Meat products	2015
“Llet Nostra #APROP” (“Llet Nostra #NEAR”)	Llet Nostra	Food and Beverage:	2016

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		Milk and other dairy products	
“Ara Lleida: The Pyrenees and the Lands of Lerida.”	Diputació de Lleida	Tourism	2016
“Priorat experience”	Priorat etnoturismo	Tourism	2016
“Tasta’ns.” Catalunya Experience” (“Try us. Catalunya Experience”)	Agència Catalana de Turisme de la Generalitat de Catalunya	Tourism	2016
“Viladrau, vinga va” (“Viladrau, let’s go”)	Agua Viladrau	Beverage: Water	2016
“Torró, Torró” (“Turrón, turrón”)	Torrans Vicens	Food: <i>Turrón</i>	2017
“Moritz. Què pot fer el cinema per tu?” (“Moritz. What can cinema do for you?”)	Moritz	Beverage: Beer	2017

Source: Own elaboration.

Having been selected, the commercials were transcribed and analyzed from a qualitative perspective, using a classification system based on the characteristics of the advertisements included in the study sample (title, product, year of broadcast), and a typology of the symbolic references deployed in them: geographical points of reference within the advertising narratives (Barcelona, the Pyrenees, Montseny, the Plain of Lleida, etc.); symbolic markers of Catalan identity (*castellers*, *correfocs*, public figures and/or values presented as in some sense emblematically Catalan); as well as the possible worlds that might arise from such symbolic frameworks. Such characteristics enabled the construction of the collective symbolic imaginations reflected in each commercial, as well as general comparison across advertisements. A number of iconic and representative aspects of the national collective imagination were identified: the value of urban, rural and open landscape spaces; and traits linked to lifestyle and consumption habits, as well as community representation practices, which are of ethno-symbolic value. The term ethno-symbolic here denotes the power of a product and the social values associated with a given brand to project local identities within –broader– global frameworks; that is, representations of identity as such. Ethno-symbolization refers to the capacity of local and regional reference points to articulate particular meanings in contemporary terms by recreating markers of community identification previously defined by and now interpreted as characteristic of popular traditions.

Given this context, our case study shows how commercial products may function as modes of identity representation through the images, traditions, people, land and language they use and evoke; it illustrates how shared social and symbolic imaginations may be produced and reproduced by presenting the product within a context and discourse that are familiar, emotionally-relatable and meaningful, and appeal to –or alter– our universe of meaning by normalizing modes of behavior and consumption associated with certain lifestyles, culture and/or national standards. As Fox and Miller-Idriss (2008) aver, consumption creates, reinforces and signals social belonging and, as a result, establishes the boundaries of what may –and may not– be regarded as typical and authentic.

The commercials selected are advertisements that are designed to target primarily the Catalan market. (It should be noted that Estrella Damm advertises throughout Spain, and its commercials are widely available across a range of platforms, including YouTube.) In the context of the Spanish market, none of the brand advertisements discussed here feature in the top 20 main advertisers listed by Infoadex, a major advertising consultancy firm in Spain. At the same time, however, the brands belong to sectors that account for the highest levels of advertising investment: the top ten sectors together comprise 78.6% of the total advertising spend in Spain as a whole. The food sector is in sixth place, beverages in ninth place, and tourism in tenth. Advertising investment in regional TV channels for 2018 amounted to €102.2 million, which was 4.8% of the total advertising spend for the country (Infoadex, 2018).

According to the report produced by CCMA (Corporación Catalana de Medios Audiovisuales: the Catalan Audiovisual Media Corporation), television is still the medium that attracts the highest levels of investment from advertising agencies. Advertising companies based in Catalonia spent €656.4 million on television advertising in 2017. €59.8 million was spent on Catalan television outlets that same year. Regional television networks attracted 5.3% of the total advertising spend for Spain. In 2017, CCMA channels took in €47.6 million. As regards advertising formats, 230,000 commercial spots were broadcast, 56.1% of them on TV3 (CCMA, 2018). Unfortunately, it was not possible to access information about the advertising budgets of the brands discussed here: due to corporate confidentiality and competitor sensitivity concerns, neither the Catalan public television network nor the brands themselves shared such data.

Thus, the commercials analyzed here were selected insofar as they are representative of the variety and importance of such products in the Catalan market: water, wine and beer in the beverage sector; and cured meat products, oil, *turrón*, and some pre-cooked food products in the traditional gastronomy sector. These commercials belong both to the ambassador and aristocratic brand categories described above. The advertisements are for well-positioned commercial brands with established reputations in the Catalan market; they are significant in terms of impact and consumption. Most of the sample was broadcast in Catalan, but to facilitate the discussion here the transcriptions are given in Spanish.

4. Banal nationalism in Catalan experiential advertising

Western societies have seen a marked rise in focus on ethnic identities in recent times, which is reflected in the emergence and acceptance of a range of ritual activities (in the anthropological sense of the term) that encompass particular views of life and aim to shape specific modes of identification and a readjustment of the relationship between one's personal identity and the world, issues that have been dealt with in some detail in the context of globalization and modernity by Castells (1997, 2004) Bauman (2000) and Brenner (1999). Examples of this phenomenon include practices relating to mind-body renewal and healing, as well as endeavors to revise traditional and popular cultural events (Bhabha, 1990). Moreover, this shift is ineluctably linked to globalization in general, and its impact on the individual's sense of themselves in the world and the feeling of *anomie*, in particular (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). The more intense presence of ethnic identity in social life has a significant influence on what we figure as ethno-symbolic meanings; that is, emblematic –and often traditional– representations of the nation. The reappraisal of ethnic identity involves re-reading its meaning and value in relation to a series of other meanings and values such as ecologism, nature and the natural way of life, health, sport and leisure, and linking these realities to (micro-) spaces or territories. The ways in which this takes place may be usefully interpreted from the perspective of banal nationalism, both in relation to rural living and in the context of city life and 'cool' modernity. This reshaped popular and traditional culture is expressed in a wide variety of ways, although they share a number of common features. The first characteristic common to them is the individual's direct role and contact with the experiences and feelings related to the culture (Lacroix, 2003). The second feature is its "global" scope: cultural experience at a local level involves engagement with values that are global –conservation, health, etc.– and entails a fundamental dialectic between two poles of consciousness: the local and the global (Capdevila, 2012). Agriculture, food and traditional cooking, traditional arts and crafts and forms of social interaction, mountain sports and long-established festivals are key expressions of popular and traditional culture. Such expressions tend to be linked to culturally defined, often small places or spaces. Given that ethno-symbolism is framed in territorial terms, which relates to the personalization and performance of the 'I' in everyday life, it follows that place be framed as a theme among the visible symbols of culture (Capdevila, 2015).

Drawing on the theory of banal nationalism and the experiential advertising framework, our analysis has yielded many instances in which identity is recreated by means of the kinds of ethno-symbols cited above, enabling the development of a basic threefold typology of such cultural productions: those that appeal to aspects of traditional ways of life or culture, those that connote heritage factors now read as emblematic of identity in the broadest sense, or those that shape definitions of “what it means to be Catalan.” The idea of ethno-symbolic advertising fits neatly within the framework of banal nationalism. Such advertising is clearly different to the explicitly nationalistic forms of advertising that have emerged in Catalonia since 2009, following the rise of the pro-independence movement and a corresponding surge in patriotic and pro-independence modes of public communication. In the private commercial sector, the latter is limited to merchandising items produced by small businesses. It is not addressed in this article because it does not feature on television and its overall range of its public impact is narrow. At the same time, however, and although we do not explore the matter here, it should be acknowledged that on occasion a number of larger brands (in terms of market positioning) have also exploited more explicitly nationalistic modes of advertising: the *Moritz.Cat* (2011) advert and the *Voll-Damm Sant Jordi. Doble o Res* (2013) commercial broadcast by Estrella Damm around St.Jordi’s Day (a major festival in Catalonia) are relevant examples in this regard. Such initiatives may be read as part of the brands’ respective market positioning strategies, but they are not included in the study sample addressed here.

The most prevalent form of ethno-symbolic advertising in recent years has been experiential advertising relating to particular places and their identities. Such advertising might also be referred to as “ethno-experiential advertising.” The term “experiential” is used because it encompasses a range of activities that involve the senses (smell, taste, touch, sight and hearing), and “ethno-symbolic” because such experiential activities are related to typical expressions of certain ways or styles of life and encounters with the natural world, history, architecture, gastronomy, agriculture, etc. that are implicitly valued as emblematic or representative of the cultural heritage of the spaces in which they take place, as Edensor holds (2002, 2006). Some experiential advertising encompasses Catalonia as a whole, but other such commercials target specific provincial, regional and/or local places, as well as particular towns and cities. The “Costa Brava Pirineo de Girona” tourism campaign provides a number of examples in this regard, including the “Priorat experience” and “Ara Lleida” initiatives by Lerida Council that feature slogans such as *Para los amantes del deporte blanco* (“For those who love winter sports”), *Disfruta del aire* (“Enjoy the open air”) and *Rutas de aventura* (“Adventure trails”) superimposed on images of people enjoying sports activities. Because of the city’s importance and the impact of advertising on its cultural creation, meaning and development, experiential commercials about Barcelona would require a study of their own. In general, however, advertising of this kind is capable of centering the experience of different expressions of place or space: mountains and plains, rivers, forests, beaches and bays, as well as restaurants, monuments, agricultural and food products, etc., which reflect the values of a place and its identity.

The industries most likely to avail of this kind of advertising are the tourism and beverage sectors, especially drinks that are associated with leisure activities and young people: refreshments, beers and wines. Relevant examples from the corpus of commercials described above include the series of commercials for the “Catalunya experience” program produced by the Catalan Tourism Agency for the Generalitat de Catalunya (the governing body of Catalonia), as well as adverts for other tourism promotion bodies in Catalonia, such as the *Los hermanos Roca y la Costa Brava* (“The Roca brothers and Costa Brava”) ad for the Girona-Costa Brava Tourism Board. Other examples include the commercials for Aigua Veri, Aigua Viladrau, Aigua de Ribes and Aigua de Sant Aniol (mineral water brands), Estrella Damm and Barcelona FC with Leo Messi, *La cerveza que se bebe dónde se vive mejor* (“The beer you drink in the best place to live”).

Another aspect of the experiential described above is its “glocal” nature; in this context, references to specific (micro-) spaces or places –particular, small territories associated with tradition, spaces seen as emblematically traditional: glocal places. These places often already have a very well-established identity; they are well-known beyond the bounds of their local or regional status. This is important because economic capitalization on traditional activities and experiences is a key aspect of consumption of the identity of the territory in which a given traditional activity or event takes place. Landscape and other features of geographical space often figure prominently in the definition of the identity of such territories. The commercials analysed here evince a variety of ways in which places are rendered distinctive or emblematic. The name of the brand may play this role, as is the case with the meat product company, *La Selva* (“forest” or “wilderness”); or a combination of brand name and the images projected in the advertisements, as in the advertisement for the sweet company Torrons Vicens de Agramunt, which highlights the fact that the company has a two-hundred year history of tradition and innovation in its place of origin; or the slogan, like that offered by Aigua de Ribes, a mineral water company, which runs *Natural es no esconder lo que sientes, ni cómo eres. Natural es el vínculo con el lugar de dónde vienes, el que tienes desde que naces, el carácter, el talento... Es una manera de hacer* (“It is not natural to hide what you feel, or who you are. Natural is the your bond with the place you come from, what you are born with, character, talent... Natural is a way of doing things”), or another slogan like *Veri, el agua del Pirineo* (“Veri, the water of the Pyrenees”). Iconic landscape features presented as the backdrop to advertisements may also serve a similar purpose, such as in the commercial *Música, vacas y helados!* (“Music, cows and ice cream”), Llet Nostra #aprop, for the Fageda yogurt company, and the *Nova Sant Aniol ROC Esperit Volcànic* (“Nueva Sant Aniol ROC Volcanic Spirit”) advert for Aigua Sant Aniol, which includes images of the landscape of the Garrotxa region, and the Llet ATO commercial *Fetacatalunya*, which features the Ramblas in Barcelona as its main setting. Advertising voiceover discourse may also play a significant part in identifying the specific nature of a place or territory; an outstanding example of the many to be found in our study sample is the commercial *Pruébanos* (“Try us”), featuring famous chefs, the Roca brothers:

[Josep Roca] What does Catalonia taste of?

[Jordi Roca] It must taste of the landscape –the Ebro, the Empordà, the Pyrenees– which yields so much and is so inspiring...

[Joan Roca] But it also tastes of sautés and starters, sea and mountains, sweet and sour.

[Josep Roca] As [Josep] Pla used to say, cooking is landscape in a saucepan; we’ve always been tempted by the idea of eating the land, this place of ours, which has shaped the character and essence of our people.

[...]

[Josep Roca] What does Catalonia taste of? Try us!¹

The symbolic worlds implicated in this advertising are rooted primarily in natural world and urban environments, which are very diverse and recognizable in iconic terms. The symbolism is also linked to emblematic architecture and monuments, gastronomy and –in a special way– ways of life and lifestyles, leisure activities, sports and traditional festivals. The possible worlds suggested by the narratives projected by this kind of advertising include the following: First, Catalonia as a rich and diverse land in terms of its heritage values and charm, offering therefore a plethora of appealing opportunities to be enjoyed in sports, leisure options and gastronomy. See, for instance, the commercials *Catalunya experience*, *Cataluña es tu casa* (“Catalonia is your home”), *Soy fan de Cataluña* (“I am a fan of Catalonia”) and *Pruébanos* (“Try

¹ Catalunya Experience. Taste us, 2016. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bq17m\]-ujYs&t=31s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bq17m]-ujYs&t=31s) [Accessed December 2018].

us”), which present the coastline and buildings designed by Gaudi as emblematic landmarks, or in the same way, the Costa Brava, Girona and the Empordà as spaces rich in potential for leisure, sports and gastronomic experiences. The metaphorical notion of “eating the land” that features in this kind of advertising speaks volumes. The second possible world centers on ideas of nature, authenticity and birth-right in the promotion of water products, especially mineral water (see the “Natural” commercial for Veri cited above). And the third world comprises possible ways of living: life high in the mountains and the Pyrenees, which fosters authentic, community life, and the open-air, Mediterranean life in Barcelona (see the Estrella Damm and Barcelona FC commercials featuring people sitting in outdoor cafés, running along the beach, or cycling along city streets).

With regard to the use of mountains in symbolic terms, the commercial *La verdadera historia de la boda de Albert y Miriam* (“The true story of the wedding of Albert and Miriam”) for Aigua Veri tells the love-story of a couple who fall for one another through their shared experiences in the Catalan Pyrenees. Other advertisements for the same brand about the famous Catalan mountain climber Kilian Jornet, likewise set in the Catalan Pyrenees, illustrate how ways of life associated with high mountains may be defined and made in some sense emblematic. Both campaigns shape the brand identity and reinforce it by using images and other elements relating to place. The commercial featuring Kilian Jornet is an impressive example of storytelling, in which his mother recounts the decision to live in a shelter high on the mountain slopes:

It was the place we wanted to see our children grow up in. In the beginning, we did wonder, “Are we isolating him from the world?” “Would he be able to adapt afterwards?” As a mother, I knew these rocks and rivers would make him grow up stronger. We may not have brought him to the cinema or to amusement parks, but we made sure to bring him to see other kinds of spectacle. In the end, I’ve only ever wanted what every mother wants: to give my son the very best. [Ends with slogan]. The higher, the purer. Veri, the water of the Pyrenees.²

The #APROP commercial for Llet Nostra is also relevant in its use of recognizable (though unnamed) landscapes of the La Garrotxa region to assert a way of life based on pride in the local: “my home,” “my world,” “my street,” “my people,” “our way of seeing the world,” “our way of being the way we are,” “my friends,” “my loves,” “our always lively culture.”

“Ethno-experiential” advertising has been widely used to promote certain places by evoking certain, primarily youthful, outlooks on life. An effective example in this regard is the *Mediterràniament* (“Mediterranean-ly”) sequence of adverts for the beer brand, Estrella Damm, which makes use of the Mediterranean brand; the series includes commercials that focus on specific places such as Formentera (2009), the Festival of Sant Joan (2010), the El Bulli restaurant (2011), the Sierra de Tramuntana (2012) and the Costa Brava (2013). Other projects of this kind include the Cerveza Moritz commercial and the Free Damm advert, *El Mediodía* (“Midday”), which links Barcelona (and its brand) to lifestyles and attitudes typical of young people and a pleasure-driven sense of energy. The latter recounts the following:

Midday, maybe the best time every day. Time between responsibilities, free time, your time. You don’t have to explain anything. Stop, go out, read, run, stroll, stay, cycle, surf, swim, surprise yourself, an aperitif, a meal or a simple sandwich. And if you want, a siesta. It’s the little holiday or the short weekend in every day. Don’t let it slip through your fingers. Two hours, a quarter of an hour, five minutes. Every midday you miss is a midday that never comes back. To keep going, stop. Free Damm.³

² Aigua Veri, 2012. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YuDL-DL4i4k>. [Accessed December 2018].

³ Free Damm, 2012. ‘El migdia’, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mBuoAEsozvM>. [Accessed December 2018].

Another beer brand, Moritz, also provides an interesting example in this context: *Moritz. ¿Qué puede hacer el cine por ti?* (“Moritz. What can cinema do for you?”), where the following narration is voiced over different frames and techniques used in film-making:

I can make you go back to that moment you thought forgotten, make you grow up in an instant. I can see inside you and show you new points of view. I can make you believe in fate and make the world orbit around you. I can make you feel free and show you paths you thought impossible, lead you to places that no one else has ever gone. I can fill you with emotion, frighten you, make you laugh or cry, until the lights come on and you are no longer there, because without you, there is no cinema.⁴

Finally, as noted above, experiential advertising also encompasses an approach that aims to present “what it means to be Catalan.” Such advertising depicts stereotypical characteristics historically associated with the representation and collective imagination of Catalan identity: for instance, the value of hard work and effort (above all, work well done). The Borges Oil commercial featuring Bojan Krkic and his birthplace, the town of Linyola, is an illustrative example in this regard. The slogan for the advert is *Con trabajo, esta tierra da los mejores frutos* (“With work, this land yields the best fruit”), and the footballer says: “This is my town. This is where I learned to play football. It wasn’t easy, it wasn’t easy at all: tackling very different opponents, the ball never went in, the defenders were like animals, and if a match was tough going, it was really tough going. The truth is I’ve been lucky, my land has only given me good things.” The footballer’s story is voiced over images of different places and people that portray rural life. The mineral water advert, *Viladrau, el agua que nos mueve* (“Viladrau, the water that moves us”), is crystal clear: “What are we Catalans made of? A lot of things, outdoing ourselves every day. A little, working very hard. A lot, loving where we are from. And a good dash of energy, the vitality of Viladrau water.” As is the slogan for the *Viladrau, vinga va* (“Viladrau, let’s go”) campaign, whose slogan is: “Outdoing oneself, effort, determination and vitality. That’s what we Catalans are made of. And the water of Viladrau, which springs from Montseny, is the water that moves us.” This kind of advertising is not limited to representations of rural, traditional life as typical of national identity; banal nationalism also encompasses urban living and ‘cool’ modernity. The advertising of Estrella Damm offers relevant examples in this context. The *Inimitables* (“Inimitable”) campaign for the Estrella Damm beer brand and Barcelona FC sparks a conversation around the strength and force of Barcelona’s success with its players Messi, Xavi, Iniesta, Puyol and Valdés. The advertisement *El treball ben fet* (“Work well done”) references a web of meanings implicitly associated with the emblematic and traditional values of Catalan identity: work well done⁵, loving your job, hard work, passion, dedication, daring, creativity, etc. The following transcription of part of the commercial is a good illustration of how it frames the emblematic qualities of “what it means to be Catalan”:

A football team was the center of the world, and people wondered what the secret could be. The most beautiful game, the pace, the control, always on the offence, always shooting for the goal, is it teamwork? It can’t be humility, no stars, no god [referring to Barcelona FC] [...] Work well done, who doesn’t remember that? Something so ours in the glory days. [...] Salvador Dalí, Pau Casals, Antoni Gaudí, universal names from here. [...] La Rusalleda [a Michelin-starred Catalan chef] with her spoon, Monzó [a Catalan writer] with his pen. You with your hammer, me with my computer. [...] Doctors, journalists, mechanics, painters, construction workers, plumbers, musicians and writers. [...] A football team was the center of the world, and people wondered what the secret could be [...] Passion,

⁴ Moritz, 2017. “Què pot fer el cinema per tu?”, https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=mortiz+2017+cinema [Accessed December 2018].

⁵ The notion of work well done starred in 1990 a renowned slogan of the Generalitat de Catalunya *La feina ben feta no té fronteres* (The work well done has no borders), which had the reverse *La feina mal feta no té futur* (Bad work has no future).

dedication, daring, curiosity, loving what we do is what makes people believe in us. [...] It's wanting to work hard. Wake up, teammate! It's better than luck. [...] We don't have to reinvent ourselves, we have to keep being who we are, do what we've always done, not fall asleep. [...] If we do things as we know how, is anything really impossible? Is there anything we can't achieve? [...] What others do will make no difference: hard work has no borders and no rivals.⁶

A final, representative extract comes from another advert for the beer brand, Estrella Damm, which depicts “what we have as Catalans”:

Leo Messi, the best player in the world; Andrés Iniesta, the second best; and Xavi, the third best. All three trained in *La Masia* [the Barcelona FC youth academy], all three made here. Like Pedro, Bojan, Busquets, Valdés, Piqué and Puyol, all made here. And Pep Guardiola, who many think is the best coach in the world –and born in Sant Pedro, trained in *La Masia*. You see? We may have one of the best football teams in history and most of its players were made here. [...] What is it we have? [...] We have the Pyrenees, covered in snow all winter, and we have 580 kilometers of coastline from Alcanar to Portbou, and 336 days of sunshine a year. We have the Empordà, la Fageda, La Cerdaña, the Delta del Ebro, the Estañó de Sant Maurici and Aiguestortes. We have Sagrada Família and the Parque Güell, both built here by a great man from here. We have all the beautiful things Miró made. We have the eggs of Dalí and Portlligat. And we have a stack of stories by Mercè Rodoreda and Monzó; the poems of Joan Brossa; and of course, we always have the lyrics of Joan Manuel Serrat. We have things that only we have: the *Tiò*, the *Caganer*, the *sardanas*, the *Patum* and the *castellers*, and now they are not only ours, they belong to all humankind. We have sausage from Vic, *recuit* from Fonteta and Ullastret, Camprodon biscuits, *calçots* (a type of onion) and *romesco* (a tomato-based sauce), *capipota* and *trinxat* (traditional dishes), and the best anchovies in the world. And we have the best chefs in the world, preparing extraordinary meals, with all the good things we have here. Our things, the good things we have.⁷

5. Conclusions

Based on the analysis of extracts from commercials included in the sample for this article, our purpose has been to show how advertising as such may comprise a practice of nation and identity representation in the terms set out by studies in banal nationalism and everyday nationalism. To that end, a range of examples in which specific representations of Catalan identity are deployed in experiential advertising actions has been explored. These commercials evince the recreation of one form of banal nationalism through the use of ethno-symbolic contents that are implicit in both oral and visual discourses. Our view is that this sample of adverts illustrates how private actors may play an active role in the production and reproduction of the nation, in line with Ichijo and Ranta's *unofficial/bottom up* model. The general typology of productions outlined here, and the distinctions between them, enable a more in-depth examination in semiotic terms of both discourses and structures. A brand's main goal as a private actor is commercial, to maximize profits; at the same time, however, they are active agents of banal nationalism and the promotion of local and national industries. The analysis presented here yields a threefold typology of productions, which in turn contributes to a greater understanding of the nation and representative elements of Catalan identity in the current context: aspects that refer to traditional life and/or culture, connote heritage factors now read as emblematic of identity in the broadest sense, and/or shape definitions of “what it means to be Catalan.” Furthermore, these are instances of the symbolic production underlying “glocality” –that is, the interrelationship between global processes and

⁶ Estrella Damm, 2010. ‘Estrella Damm: F.C. Barcelona 2010. La feina ben feta’, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oaczosE4NkU>. [Accessed December 2018].

⁷ Estrella Damm, 2011. ‘Estrella Damm FC Barcelona 2011: Que tenim’, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h--RbjdQ6G8>. [Accessed December 2018].

local concerns: the representation of local tradition and experience through a sense of a particular place, elevated to a global plane by appealing to its emblematic, distinctive, authentic and natural status. A number of these examples are discussed in the previous section.

At the level of communications practices, a gradual need among brands to present themselves by means of storytelling formats and narratives that add value and meaning to the product is evident. Such stories aim to link experience to its emotional import, thus generating bonds between the experiential domain and the creation of meanings. The hypersymbolization of brands ought to be read in this context, as well as how it affects marketing strategies designed to amplify the evocative potential of advertising actions. The argument here is that such hypersymbolization draws on four resources: narration, the fictionalization of reality, the use of symbolic references and the use of ideological discourses. A related idea is that the branding of a product is increasingly likely to incorporate aspects of the branding of the nation. This shift is reflected in the growing use of elements of identity representation in product branding: key markers of the representation of Catalan identity, hypersymbolization combined with storytelling, the personalization of experiences recreated in the commercials, and a progressively more intense evocation of place.

The sample of experiential commercials addressed here shows that landscapes viewed as emblematically Catalan or representative of Catalan identity are frequently included in a variety of advertising actions. Given that this is the most commonly used approach in branding the nation and, to a lesser extent, the construction of a brand around land or territory, it may be posited that there is a general tendency to create a Catalonia brand in a national sense. At the same time, however, other similar features, now standard in late modernity, must also be taken into account in discussing the key characteristics of this kind of advertising: a pleasure-driven vitality (based on emotion and gratification) and the leading role played by the 'I' in the images and voicing of these advertisements. Finally, it should be noted that commercials that center on commending what Catalan identity is and appreciating its most emblematic features prove successful in terms of popular response and distribution. For instance, the Estrella Damm advert *Que tenim* (2011) has been viewed almost 650,000 times on YouTube. This commercial was one of the first spots of an experiential and emblematic kind produced by the brand, rolled out primarily via the *Mediterráneamente* ("Mediterraneanly") saga. This advertising format has yielded exponential results for the Damm brand, which registered 10 million views on YouTube in 2018.⁸ Such success may be attributed to the powerful symbolic status of features linked to Catalan identity, the nature of the imagined world in which those characteristics are presented, and the modern and playful style that generates original and distinctive experiences of the national Catalan brand and of Catalan product brands. Despite this up-to-date approach and the backdrop of certain sensitive, pleasure- and 'I'-centered values and practices, however, the striking ethno-symbolic aspects that recur across the sample of commercials discussed here prompt the conclusion that this type of advertising generates a civic sense of identity that may be modern in visual terms, but that is also very closely aligned with established or classical nationalist models of Catalan identity as regards the traditional and community values they articulate in discursive terms. In short, they could be read as part of a lineage of representational models dating from *Noucentisme* down to the present day. The fact that the growth and popularization of this kind of commercial advertising in Catalonia in recent years has taken place in a context of heightened nationalist and identity-centered language cannot be overlooked. As a result, companies may be targeting publics they see as more sensitive to the emotional implications

⁸ "Estrella Damm bate nuevo récord con Mediterráneamente", *Reason why*.
<https://www.reasonwhy.es/actualidad/campanas/estrella-damm-record-visualizaciones-mediterraneamente-2018-07-09> www.youtube.com/watch?v=h--RbjdQ6G8. [Accessed November 2019].

of the language of banal Catalan nationalism. This issue is a potentially fruitful line of research inquiry for the future.

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