

TITLE OF THESIS

Marketing Australian National Identity Through Film: The Place of The Video Store

NAME

Cherie Brits

DEGREES

Bachelor of Arts in Media Studies

Bachelor of Arts in Psychology

STATEMENT OF PRESENTATION

This thesis is presented for the degree of Research Masters in Training (RMT) of Murdoch
University

YEAR OF SUBMISSION

2011

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

Cherie Brits

ABSTRACT

Video stores are one of the main sources of entertainment within Australia today. The films borrowed and sold portray varying cultures, issues and opinions. Assumptions of the educational efficacy of Australian films have always been bumped up against assertions of commercially produced Australian films as mere entertainment. Films are borrowed or bought for diverse reasons but since nationalism is often buttressed by narratives, the video store itself can be used as an instrument to promote and even measure cultural identity. Because film is a major part of popular culture and the video store plays a fundamental role in this domain, I wish to argue that video stores could be used as influential portals for the promotion of Australian films and by consequence of Australian national identity.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

STATEMENT OF PRESENTATION	1
YEAR OF SUBMISSION.....	1
DECLARATION	2
ABSTRACT	3
CONTENTS PAGE	4
INTRODUCTION	6
LITERATURE REVIEW.....	11
HYPOTHESIS.....	17
METHODOLOGY.....	19
CULTURE, HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT OF VIDEO STORES.....	22
AUSTRALIAN CINEMA AND NATIONAL IDENTITY.....	28
THE FILM CRITICS ROLE.....	35
INTRODUCTION TO THE CASE STUDIES	41
CASE STUDY #1	44
CASE STUDY #2	48
POTENTIAL OUTCOMES	51
CONCLUSIONS	54
BIBLIOGRAPHY / REFERENCES	59
WEBSITE REFERENCES	61
FILMOGRAPHY	62
APPENDIX A	63
APPENDIX B	64
APPENDIX C.....	65

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation would not have been possible without the support of many people.

I wish to express my gratitude to my supervisor, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Martin Mhando who was abundantly helpful and offered invaluable assistance, support, guidance, and in put through the entire process of writing this dissertation. His endless support merits the deepest gratitude.

Finally, I wish to express my love and gratitude to my beloved family and friends for their understanding and endless love through the duration of my studies.

Thank you for supporting me while I endeavor to accomplish my dreams.

INTRODUCTION

Despite the prevalence and importance of video stores in contemporary society, media research has surprisingly little to say about them. Maybe this is because we have not yet developed instruments by which we can measure attitudes and cultural potential of this marketplace - the video store.

Home video is indeed a modern ritual. If we define ritual as a set of actions, performed mainly for their symbolic value, with its social and individual repetitive patterns, then in ritual we also find the primacy of the social dimension in understanding culture and its mediating properties. Indeed social structures can also be processes, messages, and meaning systems. In the context of film viewing, meanings reside in the visual, oral and behavioural codes; representation alone is not enough to understand the meaning processes. We therefore look towards the complex inter-relationships that constitute the video store ritual and allow semiotic analysis.

At present, a questionnaire or survey would be the best available option to measure attitudes of the video store goer. If the information obtained is properly measured, this information can give an insight into the varying social values accessible to a video store beside the objective of entertainment. As with any device that is available to a wide and varying audience, the educational, cultural and commercial influences of a video store hold a wealth of untapped potential. It seems almost obvious that the best audience to invite comment from are those who go to the video store regularly – almost ritualistically.

These taken-for-granted understandings undermine the tendency to "naturalize" knowledge. It might be prudent to go beyond the obviously commercial and social use of the media outlet to understanding the semiotic analysis of the social activity in order to give it a discursal perspective.

A central issue of this social activity turns towards the relationship between education and culture. What have been the cultural effects and consequences of viewing social texts such as national narratives? Have state-sponsored films such as the ones produced by Australian filmmakers succeeded in sustaining and advancing a national cinema ethic? Does watching films transform local culture in ways consistent with the visions and interests of state and commonwealth film producing organs? Is there a trend that one can fathom from film policies that would ensure the social and financial security of future films products?

This research aims to illustrate the importance of ritual in human psychological life. In the video store's case, the transforming effect of a ritual to complete identity processes could be important. The video store and client work together to create a ritual that is specific to national-social experiences. Video-store owners are aware of the importance of ritualised moments in the film business, mindful of the importance of the ritual that the store performs outside the cinema, in the home and including the processing of critical events in the national calendar. At this point it is important to note that the DVD is the distribution medium and the video store is the site in all assumptions and discussions throughout this Dissertation.

The video shop has indeed continued to be a centre for suburban cultural activity for the last 20 years and its importance has not diminished. Many video stores have helped catapult

the retail marketability of film and more recently video games. In fact, the AVRRRA (Australian Video Rental Retailers Association) has launched a weekly ratings list that reveals the Top 20 movie rentals in demand for a particular week.¹ The ratings are derived by counting every movie title hired in a sample of more than 100 stores across three chains of video stores. Most importantly the ratings include urban and rural locations therefore encapsulating a wide consumer demographic. This is a true example of instruments and available data that could be used to advance and promote Australian film and thus Australian film identity.

At closer inspection it seems there is quantitative research available within a Video Store that can be explored and that supports the concept that video stores can be used to promote a particular culture and a particular identity. For example, at present the video store chain *Video Ezy* has introduced new genres of films titled *Eastern Eye* and *World Cinema*. In the *Eastern Eye* section all films relate to the Asian and at times Middle Eastern film industries whilst *World Cinema* displays films from all foreign countries with fundamentally French and European themes. These types of films are promoted and are made available in this particular video store chain as overnight and 3-day new releases as well as weekly hires. In essence such promotional genres could be used across a wide palate including the local film industry of Australia and would no doubt aid, promote and increase its availability and market potential. Furthermore there are the figures and quantities in terms of hire and purchases that can be investigated. With these captured statistics one could filter data and create reports for a particular film or film genre and analyse these

¹ This was introduced in June 2008 and has been initiated with www.DVDindustry.com.au's weekly newsletter and *Encore* magazine's website (<http://www.avrra.com.au/pdf/050608.pdf>, accessed 2nd December 2009).

figures to great length. For this reason the Video Store system holds within itself a wealth of information if properly measured and analysed.

At this stage it is important to note that there is also a need for qualitative data analysis within this research topic. Not only should there be facts and figures arguing the links between Australian national identity and the video store but emphasis needs to be made on the possible qualitative expression available. That is aiming to gather in depth understanding of the human behaviour at play within a video store, investigating the why and how of the film viewers' decision making processes. In essence researching why and how the viewer relates to a specific film in terms of Australian national identity. That is why it is proposed that one area that will be touched in this thesis one that could be researched at a PhD level is semiotics of the video store.

The rhetorical orientation of this nationalist narrative is obvious. It is possible that the viewers are not simply consuming nationalist dogma in the films they watch;, they actually might accept to hire or buy the videos in order to optimize the perceived value in the narratives describing the nation.

However, this does not imply that video shopping experience is only discursive and does not have any "real" grounds for nationalistic drives. The shopping experience suggests that the actual narratives of the Australian nationalist lived-experience could also be recognised as a political tool, and the video consumers employ narratives to make sense of their experiences rather than looking solely for the meaning of these experiences. By focusing its attention on the production of meaning as a dialogical construction between action and discourse, the video shopping experience constitutes a promising method to uncover parts

of consumers' experiences that often remain overlooked by marketers using exclusively empirical methods.

This Dissertation will address a number of topics in each chapter to reveal that the video store could add to national Australian identity. Within the 'Literature Review' section I will address what literature is available discussing the importance of video stores as markets, then progressing into the tradition and stereotyping of video stores within the 'Culture, History and Development of Video Stores' Section. Once this is reflected upon, I will introduce the correlations between 'Australian Cinema and National Identity' in the similarly titled section focussing thereafter on 'The Role of Film Critics' in negatively or positively reinforcing the previous mentioned correlations. The remaining sections strengthen the theme of this Dissertation by explaining the proposed hypothesis and methodology, two case studies as well as their outcomes to promote the view that the video store could add to national Australian identity as well as the potential value in further researching this topic at a Doctorate level.