



UNDERSTANDING FILM AS AN EXPERIENTIAL CONSUMER GOOD

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INTRODUCTION

The film media has existed for more than a century and over time, people have named it or labelled it in many ways- sometimes as a pure art, sometimes as a commercial good, sometimes as a cultural good or event and the list goes on. Most of the time, we assume that film is an art to entertain or educate people. But it is an art form that also created a glamorous and profitable industry worldwide.

Explaining what kind of a product film is, Niklas Rinne has mentioned that the film-watching experience is always unique, and people have a goal when they are watching a film. That particular goal can be either related to the film or not related to the film at all. Further, Rinne emphasizes that many of them do not consider film as an art. (Rinne, 2013) bringing the conversation forward many researchers have talked about the two-fold nature of the film. “cultural goods have a twofold nature: they are simultaneously artistic creations and economic products.” (Delmestri et al., 2005; Kerrigan, 2017; Kerrigan et al., 2007) another argument which has emerged over the time is, that film product can be considered as an experiential product, because of the pleasure and hedonic nature of the film consumption which explains the effect of feelings, emotions, and sensations customers experience while consuming the product. (Cooper-Martin, 1989, 1991, 1992; Fornerino et al., 2008; Hart et al., 2016; Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982) Scholars who define film as an experiential product further explain that when you compare the experiential products with other utilitarian consumer goods, the difference is here people expend time rather than money as a transaction. This idea points out that consuming this kind of product demands allocating time and people choose experiential products purely to experience them and have some fun. Therefore, it's very clear that this concept is highly compatible with the nature of the film product and it's reasonable to consider this approach as an alternative way to relaunch the Sri Lankan film industry. The argument which is brought forward by this study is, by understanding film as an experiential product Sri Lankan film industry can bring the audience back to the cinema.

PROBLEM DISCUSSION

Even though the world's lucrative film industries have identified and paid attention to the other aspects of the film, there is a considerable lack of such thought regarding the Sri Lankan film industry. We have had considerable discussion about cinema from artistic perspectives. But significantly fewer people have spoken about cinema, considering it as a business or as any other consumer good. It's a noticeable fact that the number of theatre attendance is going down day by day, leading to a drop in film sales. Since the theatrical run is still considered as the primary revenue-generating mode for a film, there must be a proper audience for the betterment of the film industry. This is where the importance of understanding the nature and true potential of the film product emerges. The main objective of this research was to explore how Sri Lankan filmmakers have understood the nature of the film product and how they treat the film product and suggest how it can be useful to create a unique film watching experience by understanding film as an experiential good.

METHODOLOGY

Since interpretivism research philosophy serves the researcher's objective, which is to explore, gain insight, and understand the context of the identified problem, it was adopted for the study. In-depth interviews with a purposely selected sample were held to collect primary

data aligned with the qualitative and inductive research approach. Since the high-relevancy primary data sources were limited and the researcher wanted to enhance the effectiveness of the study, purposive sample technique was used to select interviewees. Secondary data was collected by referring books, research articles, newspapers, and web sites related to the research field. Inductive thematic analysis was used to analyse collected primary data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research revealed that the contemporary Sri Lankan film industry is predominantly a director-oriented film industry where the artistic aspect of the film is valued over the industrial aspect. The majority understand film as a masterpiece of art. They said they use this medium to express their views/inner expressions and they don't consider the audience's requirements as a factor before making the film. As it was clearly mentioned in the literature related to this argument, researchers/scholars and professionals have admitted that it's not easy to ask what they want and make films. It's not practical and it's not compatible with the nature of this product. Rather than asking each person what they need, what filmmakers should do is, find the appropriate audience, target them, and place the film within that particular market segment. When you do that, you must have some knowledge about the true potential of the film product that you created.

"Consumer satisfaction cannot be achieved through asking consumers what they want to watch films about and making them but can be achieved by making films which are of high technical and/or artistic value and positioning these films appropriately in order to appeal to the target market." (Kerrigan, 2017)

In contrast, what happened in Sri Lanka is that the majority of filmmakers act like superiors who are above the heads of the audience, and they do not care about the interests of the audience. They create what they want and make it available in the market expecting that people will come and watch whatever they create. Further, some directors emphasized that they are not ready to compromise the director's vision and expression because of the needs and wants of the audience. But producers know that they must think about the audience when making a film and some producers are trying hard to negotiate with directors to make changes to the director's version of the film. And also, some producers are trying hard to change this director-centric approach by involving in the filmmaking process rather than staying away from it. The majority of film directors consider themselves as a brand and they don't like to shift the attention to another person or another thing. This self-centered attitude has made the situation even worse where the majority of Sri Lankans have started rejecting local films and shifted their favor to consuming foreign films.

Even though there is enough literature to prove that film is an experiential product where we need to take subjective experience more seriously, Sri Lankan filmmakers give priority to their artistic expressions irrespectively to the needs, wants, and desires of consumers. Further, the majority understand that the film-going experience needs to be differentiated and specialized from the home-viewing experience. They think that people have forgotten how the film-going experience feels like since the Sri Lankan people have been imprisoned in their homes due to the various type of social, economic, and political crises that occurred in the country. But none of the authorities (both academic and professionals) has taken enough action to challenge the present scenario and overcome the problem.

CONCLUSIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS

This research study focused on considering film as an experiential product and tried to explore how contemporary Sri Lankan film industry treats the film product. At the end of a pure qualitative in-depth study, the researcher could come to the conclusion that Sri Lankan film authoritarians are reluctant to break the traditional barriers, innovate new techniques and re-launch film to the new millennium. Even though they are struggling to attract audiences to the theatres, they pay less attention to creating truly memorable experiences by adopting

dazzling film-watching techniques. Film-going is an event itself. “When you watch a movie at the theatre, you're sharing it with everyone around you. There's nothing quite like a room full of people laughing, crying or gasping at the same moments as they journey through a story together.” (Parry, n.d.) This study strongly suggests that by valuing film as an experiential consumer product and adopting ideal experiential marketing mix filmmakers can create unique experiences for film goers.

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