The Affective Power of Brand Films

How do Brand Films Construct Emotional Experiences and Shape Viewers' Perceptions of the Brand?

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Abstract

This thesis investigates how brand films use emotion to influence viewer decision-making, perception, and trust, bridging a gap in traditional advertising analysis. It presents a multidimensional lens that connects story, brand values, culture, identity, and social involvement to emotive experience. Methodologically, it triangulates: (i) close readings of three brand films that specify how audiovisual and narrative elements work separately and together to solicit emotions and compose an overall emotional experience; (ii) semi-structured interviews with brand-film professionals covering definitions of brand film, practices in promoting brands, and practitioners' feelings as viewers; and (iii) a reception study (focus groups) mapping participants' initial reactions, subsequent thoughts and behaviours, and their critical discussion.

Across the corpus, emotional impacts are organized by three interconnected mechanisms—narrative identification, audiovisual immersion, and socially coded value frames —— that mediate alterations in perceived relevance, authenticity, trust, and decision-readiness. The thesis contributes (1) theoretical findings from close readings that link image, sound and narration to discrete affects and composite emotional experience; (2) subjective findings from interviews indicating that value identification, interactivity, authenticity, associative cueing, and fulfilling emotional needs are regarded as the principal levers for eliciting emotion; and (3) empirical findings from reception study that describes how audiences interpret, negotiate, and respond to emotional cues. These elements work together to establish an integrated model of emotion-to-action in brand-film reception, as well as practical advice for creating emotionally engaging brand films without using overt persuasive tactics.

Keywords: Brand film; Emotional marketing; Audience reception; Identity recognition; Experience; Audiovisual analysis.

Table of Contents

Abstract 1

Table of Contents 2

Acknowledgements 9

Declaration 10

CHAPTER 1 11

Introduction 11

1.1 Background: from advertising to brand film 11

1.2 Problem statement and research gap 13

1.3 Research aims and questions 16

1.4 Scope and corpus of the study 17

1.5 Methodological overview 19

1.6 Key concepts and the definition of brand film 20

1.7 Significance and contributions of the study 22

1.8 Thesis Outline 24

CHAPTER 2 26

Literature Review 26

2.1 Introduction and definition of brand film 26

2.2 Tracing the Origins of the Brand Film 28

2.2.1 Promotion in public spaces and social engagement: lantern slide advertising 28

2.2.2 Brand placement: cinema and animation 35

2.2.3 Sponsored shows: Television advertising 41

2.2.4 'Advertising films' after 2000 45

2.2.5 Branded entertainment, film branding and the position of brand film 49

2.3 The brand film 53

2.3.1 The brand film as against the norms and conventions of traditional advertising 54

2.3.2 The brand film as creative storytelling 59

2.3.3 The brand film's 'mediality' 61

2.3.4 The brand film as demonstration of abstract core values and creation of emotional experience 64

CHAPTER 3 70

Methodology 70

3.1 Theoretical and methodological orientation 70

3.1.1 Qualitative interpretivist approach 70

3.1.2 Emotional and marketing theories as analytical lenses 72

3.2 Research Methods 73

3.2.1 Study 1: Close readings of brand films 73

3.2.1.1 Selection of films 73

3.2.1.2 Analytical framework: colour and lighting; camera and framing; editing and sound 75

3.2.1.3 Procedure of close reading and note-taking 77

3.2.1.4 Deriving themes from close readings 78

3.2.2 Study 2: Interviews with brand film professionals 80

3.2.2.1 Sampling and recruitment 80

3.2.2.2 Interview design and conduct 82

3.2.2.3 Thematic analysis of interview data 85

3.2.3 Study 3: Reception study 88

3.2.3.1 Selection of film and participants 88

3.2.3.2 Online screening procedure and data collection 89

3.2.3.3 Analysis of audience responses (including Affect / appraisal coding) 91

3.3 Cross-study integration, reflexivity and ethics 94

3.3.1 Triangulating close readings, interviews and reception study 94

3.4 Researcher position and reflexivity 97

3.5 Ethical considerations and limitations 99

CHAPTER 4 103

Study 1 - Close Readings of Brand Films and the Construction of Emotional Experience 103

4.1 Introduction 103

4.2 Close reading of *The Man on the Moon* 105

4.2.1 Colour and Lighting 110
4.2.1.1 Saturation and Desaturation: why the image feels warm/cold and near/far 110
4.2.1.2 The use of localized light for narrative focus 118
4.2.1.2.1 Localised Warm Practicals as Attentional Anchors 118
4.2.1.2.2 How lighting focuses the audience's attention and shapes emotional climaxes 118
4.2.1.2.3 “Windows of regard”: Lighting as a symbol of spatial separation and emotional connection. 120
4.2.1.2.4 The intensity and direction of light influence the sense of intimacy or distance within a space. 120
4.2.2 Camera and Framing: who we look at, and how close 121
4.2.2.1 Scale and framing: from distance to intimacy 121
4.2.2.2 POV–Reverse–Reaction: Perceptual Alignment and Mutual Recognition. 123
4.2.2.3 Centre vs. Edge Placement: from marginality to welcome 124
4.2.2.4 Threshold framing: windows, doorways, and apertures as emotional bridges 125
4.2.3 Editing and Sound: when emotion rises and settles 127
4.2.3.1 Build–Hold–Release: How Cuts and Music Time the Feelings 127
4.2.3.2. Voice & Meaning: AURORA’s cover as the emotional frame 130
4.3 Close reading of My Dad is A Liar 134
4.3.1 Colour and Lighting: The Chromatic Segmentation from ‘Ideal Father’ to ‘Deception and Sacrifice’ 140
4.3.1.1 A tribute to the father (Daddy is the sweetest… He is my superman) 140
4.3.1.2 Daddy’s lies 145
4.3.1.3 The embrace between father and daughter 148
4.3.2 Camera and framing: How the visual perspective shifts between father and daughter 150
4.3.2.1 “Ideal father” sequence: medium and medium-close shots from the daughter’s level 151
4.3.2.2 ”He lies…”: the father’s body framed, cornered, and subordinated by labour spaces 153

4.3.2.3 Roadside kneeling embrace: changes in shot scale as an emotional structure 155
4.3.3 Editing and Sound 158
4.3.3.1 Voice-over as the structural framework of the film (sound-driven editing) 158
4.3.3.2 Editing rhythm and segmentation: emotional progression through contrast rather than continuity 160
4.3.3.3 Music and audio intensity: a controlled emotional arc 162
4.3.3.4 Using Silence to Guide Viewer Attention 163
4.4 Close Reading of *The Bridge* 165
4.4.1 Colour and lighting 169
4.4.1.1 Outdoor colour fields, visual hints of uncertainty, and the bridge as a threshold 170
4.4.1.2 The low-saturation colour palette as coherence rather than decoration 172
4.4.1.3 Soft daylight and backlighting as an ethics of attention 173
4.4.1.4 Localised accent colour as a perceptual anchor 174
4.4.1.5 Mood as a multi-channel construction of ambience 175
4.4.1.6 Ending scenes and the controlled withdrawal of sensory complexity 175
4.4.2 Camera and framing 176
4.4.2.1 Micro-scale attention as an affective entry point 176
4.4.2.2 Framing through barriers as a visual form of distance 177
4.4.2.3 Low-angle point-of-view and the enlargement of the world 178
4.4.2.4 Insert close-ups that translate unease into clearly visible details 179
4.4.2.5 Wide framing and isolation as an emotional baseline 181
4.4.2.6 Keeping things partly unclear as a way to shape emotion 182
4.4.2.7 The bridge as a framing channel rather than neutral space 183
4.4.2.8 The family context as a stabilising factor in relationships 184
4.4.2.9 Title cards as a shift in address 185
4.4.3 Editing and Sound 186
4.4.3.1 Cutting as attention guidance 186
4.4.3.2 Sound perspective and restraint 189

4.4.3.3 Sound design and emotional orientation 191
4.5 Discussions and Conclusion 194
CHAPTER 5 198
Study 2 – Practitioners' Interviews on Emotional Experience, Brand Values and Brand Perception 198
5.1 Introduction 198
5.2 Interview Content, Data, and Findings 203
5.2.1 Interview data and findings from subject 1 205
5.2.2 Interview data and findings from subject 2 208
5.2.3 Interview data and findings from subject 3 212
5.3 Thematic Findings 217
5.3.1 Theme 1: Value Identity 218
The presentation and concern of brand films for a specific group 219
The content of brand films based on a certain era or communication background 220
Brand films showing a certain attitude or point of view 221
Brand films showing a variety of cultures 221
Brand films showing certain social and cultural values 222
5.3.2 Theme 2: Interactivity 223
Emotional commonalities 224
Product and character interactions 224
Audience and character interactions 224
Generating controversy 225
5.3.3 Theme 3: Realism 225
Similar experience 226
Real events 227
Social and global phenomena 228
Acting skill and mise-en-scene 228
5.3.4 Theme 4: Creating Associations 229
Script 230
Brand culture 231
Consistency 231

Brand history 232
5.3.5 Theme 5: Triggering Emotional Needs 232
Human emotion 233
Caring 234
Everyday life 234
5.4 Discussions and Conclusion 235
CHAPTER 6 239
Study 3 – Audience Focus Group Reception of Emotional Experience and Brand Perception 239
6.1 Introduction 239
6.2 Findings 242
Affinity of Stories 244
Symbolism and Metaphor 246
Values and Social Messaging 249
Emotional Recollection 252
6.3 Discussion 255
6.4 Conclusion 259
CHAPTER 7 262
Conclusion 262
7.1 Restating the aims and defining the brand film 262
7.2 Summary of findings 264
7.2.1 Close reading of brand films 265
7.2.2 Interview study 267
7.2.3 Reception study 269
7.3 Triangular comparison between the three studies 272
7.3.1 Narrative affinity, realism, and emotional needs 273
7.3.2 Values, social messaging, and value identity 273
7.3.3 Symbolism, metaphor, and multimodal cueing 274
7.3.4 Brand association, authenticity claims, and brand inference 275
7.3.5 Interactivity and post viewing talk as an extension of the text 276
7.3.6 A compact mapping across studies 276

7.3.7 Convergences across the three studies 277
7.3.8 Divergences and productive frictions 278
7.3.9 Overview of the triangular analysis 280
7.4 Contributions to the interdisciplinary field of branded cinema 282
7.5 Methodological reflections 284
7.6 Limitations and directions for future research 285
7.7 Implications for practice 287
7.8 Concluding remarks 290
APPENDICES 292
Appendix A: Example Participant Information Sheet 292
Appendix B: Example Consent Form 297
BIBLIOGRAPHY 299
FILMOGRAPHY 308

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for a degree or other qualification at this University or elsewhere. All sources are acknowledged as references.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.1 Background: from advertising to brand film

In contemporary media environments, brands no longer rely only on short, product-centred commercials. Advertising has expanded into longer, more cinematic formats that similar to short films and circulate across television, cinema, streaming platforms and social media. In this transformation, brand films have become a prominent form of emotional marketing. They invite viewers to watch voluntarily, share with others, and discuss the films in ways that extend beyond the moment of purchase.

These changes can also be understood in relation to recent industry conditions. In the UK, digital advertising reached £40.5 billion in 2025, and video investment rose by 20 percent to £9.3 billion (IAB UK, 2026). A similar movement can be seen in the United States, where digital video advertising grew to $64 billion in 2024 and was forecast to reach $72 billion in 2025 (IAB, 2025). Ofcom's Media Nations report also shows that people in the UK spent an average of four hours and thirty minutes each day watching television and video content at home in 2024, while YouTube became the second most-watched service after the BBC (Ofcom, 2025). These figures are not used here to claim that brand films have a single measurable effect. Rather, they indicate the media environment in which brand films have become a relevant object of study.

Brand films operate at the intersection of advertising, cinema and digital culture. They draw on filmmaking techniques of storytelling, character

development and audiovisual design. At the same time, they remain embedded in brand strategy and commercial goals. In this sense, they occupy a specific position in what may be called the field of practice between behaviour and representation. They are practical interventions that seek to influence consumer behaviour from within, while presenting themselves as narrative and aesthetic experiences.

In the current phase of consumer culture, material incentives have increasingly been supplemented or replaced by emotional appeals. Emotional marketing is often described as a way of “creating decision-making power,” because emotions shape how people perceive options, evaluate brands and form trust. Brand films are a particularly concentrated expression of this tendency. They use audiovisual language to create emotional experiences that connect viewers with brands through cognition, feeling, culture and identity. Before any explicit behaviour occurs, viewers are exposed to emotional value that can alter their decisions, perceptions and trust in relation to brands.

When viewers feel that their own identities are recognised in brand films, whether at social, psychological or even political levels, they may experience a sense of “being seen” that is not limited to their physical presence. This kind of identity recognition can trigger empathy, self-persuasion and imaginative projection. Emotional communication in brand films therefore becomes a way of exploring the subjective world and the roots of behavioural awareness. It can act as a mirror that reflects how viewers perceive their own thinking and emotional frameworks.

This thesis takes brand films seriously as audiovisual works that can be considered alongside mini-film advertising and short films in cinema and visual culture, rather than treating them only as extensions of traditional advertising. It approaches the topic from the side of advertising but moves

towards film and visual culture in order to understand brand films as creative artefacts that carry culture, image and values as well as commercial messages.

1.2 Problem statement and research gap

Existing research has examined a range of promotional forms that link brands with moving images. Studies of product placement and hybrid messages have explored how branded products integrated into films and television programmes can increase brand awareness and influence evaluation. Work on digital content marketing, viral videos and interactive advertising has analysed how new media platforms such as YouTube and social networks enable new forms of engagement and targeting. Research on advertising film and branded content has begun to discuss longer, narrative-based advertisements and their effects on brand engagement and purchase intention.

Much of this literature concentrates on specific aspects of the promotional environment. Some studies focus on platforms and distribution channels, for example online video sites and social media streaming services. Others focus on content formats such as digital content marketing or campaigns, or on communicative forms such as interactivity and psychological targeting. Many studies are interested in causal relations between content or format and outcomes. They examine how digital content affects audiences' purchase intentions, how interactive features influence engagement, or how particular strategies increase the efficiency of brand communication.

There is relatively little work that isolates brand film as a distinct object of analysis. Research that discusses well-known examples, such as the John Lewis Christmas films or mini-film advertising, has opened important lines of

inquiry. However, these studies often remain at the level of individual cases or particular campaigns. They do not always address the broader category of brand film, nor do they provide a clear and widely accepted definition of what a brand film is. The field still lacks systematic analysis of brand films as a specific type of branded moving image, with its own aesthetic, narrative and emotional strategies.

There is also a gap in how emotional experience is treated. Emotional marketing is widely acknowledged as important in advertising and branding, but in many studies, emotion appears mainly as an independent or dependent variable in quantitative models. Emotional appeals are measured against outcomes such as preference, recall or purchase intention, but the inner structure of emotional experience, its relation to narrative and audiovisual form, and its role in shaping brand perception are less often examined in depth. Research rarely takes the emotional experience of brand films as a central topic for investigation.

The problem is therefore not only that brand films have been under-defined in scholarship. It is also that the industries that use brand films need a more precise account of what emotional communication does inside the film text and in audience interpretation. Campaign data can show circulation, reach or engagement, but such data do not fully explain how a viewer connects a story, a social value, a sound, an image or a character to the brand itself. For this thesis, the research opportunity lies in examining this intermediate process. Brand films do not only raise the question of whether the viewer remembers or likes a brand. They also raise the question of how the viewer interprets the brand through feelings of care, trust, identification, social responsibility or doubt.

This concern is important in the present industry context because advertising effectiveness is increasingly discussed in relation to receptivity and trust.

Kantar's Media Reactions 2025 reports that campaigns are seven times more impactful among receptive audiences, drawing on responses from more than 21,000 consumers in 30 markets and more than 1,000 marketers (Kantar, 2025). Edelman's 2025 brand trust report, based on 15,000 respondents across 15 countries, reports that 73 percent of respondents say their trust in a brand would increase when the brand authentically reflects today's culture (Edelman, 2025). These reports do not define brand film as an academic category. However, they help to explain why emotional experience, cultural positioning and trust are significant issues for contemporary brand communication.

This thesis responds to these gaps by narrowing the focus to brand films and by treating emotional experience as the main communicative approach. It concentrates on brand films as a specific form of content, emotional experience as the key mode of communication, and audience decision, perception and trust as important outcomes. Rather than viewing emotional content only as an independent variable, the study considers how viewers attribute decisions and perceptions to their emotional experiences of brand films. It situates these processes in the context of digital media and interactive communication, where brand films circulate widely and viewers participate by sharing, commenting and debating.

Compared with other scholars who treat brand film primarily as a marketing tool, this thesis argues that brand films function as media that carry a brand's culture, image and values and that can be understood as creative works. It emphasises the content and meaning of brand films, and treats emotional experience as a form of "remote dialogue" between brand and audience. By positioning brand films as creative artefacts as well as marketing contents, the thesis aims to offer a different perspective that can encourage further theoretical work on their content, strategies and effects.

1.3 Research aims and questions

In this sense, the research question is not only a question about textual construction. It is also a question about the relation between construction and contribution. By asking how brand films construct emotional experiences and shape brand perception, the thesis addresses the lack of detailed qualitative explanation between film form, emotional response and brand interpretation.

The thesis addresses the overarching research question:

How do brand films construct emotional experiences and shape viewers' perceptions of the brand?

More specifically, it investigates:

How do story, brand values, culture, social engagement and audiovisual language collectively construct emotional experience in brand films, and how do these elements shape viewers' perceptions of brand relevance, authenticity, trust and decision-making?

The main aim is to develop a nuanced understanding of how brand films connect narrative, values, culture and audiovisual design to viewers' emotional and cognitive responses, and how these responses inform perceptions of relevance, authenticity, trust and decision-making.

To address this aim, the thesis pursues three related sub-questions:

1. How do story structures and audiovisual elements in brand films organise emotional arcs for viewers?

2. How do professionals in brand film, advertising and marketing conceptualise the emotional and value-based strategies of brand films?

3. How do audiences experience and interpret brand films emotionally, and how do these experiences contribute to their perceptions of the brand?

These questions guide the design of the empirical studies and structure the discussion across the thesis.

1.4 Scope and corpus of the study

This research focuses on brand films of approximately five minutes or less that are designed to be watched voluntarily and shared across broadcast and digital platforms. The textual corpus consists of three brand films that exemplify different configurations of narrative, emotion and social concern:

- "*The Man on the Moon*" (dir. Kim Gehrig, 2015), a two-minute film centred on care for an elderly person living alone.

- "*My Dad is a Liar"* (dir. unknown, 2015), a 3:18 minute film that presents a story of familial love and a father's sacrifices for his child.

- "*The Bridge*" (dir. Jakob Ström, 2018), a 1:33 minute film about autistic children and the challenges faced by their families, produced within a campaign that raises awareness of this group and advocates for support.

The three examples also locate the project within an international context. They are drawn from a UK retail brand, a Thai insurance brand and a US foundation-related campaign. This range does not make the study

representative of all markets. It is used to examine how emotionally driven brand films operate across different sectors, social issues and cultural settings, rather than within a single national advertising tradition.

These films were selected because they are representative of emotionally driven brand films that employ narrative complexity and strong affective appeals, and because they engage with recognisable social and ethical issues. They have also attracted attention in professional and public discourse, which makes them suitable for examining both production-side and reception-side interpretations.

The methodology extends beyond textual analysis. The interview study involves nineteen non-anonymous professionals who work across related areas of brand-film practice, including brand film production, advertising, marketing, creative planning, digital communication, editing, screenwriting and short-video creation. They contribute perspectives on definitions of brand film, creative and strategic practices, and their own experiences as viewers. The reception study is based on a focus group with six anonymous participants, who watched the same three brand films and discussed their emotional responses, reflections and attitudes towards the brands. While the focus group is small in scale, its qualitative design allows participants to express complex emotions and perceptions, to react to one another's views, and to collectively construct meanings in discussion, which is essential for understanding how emotional experiences of brand films emerge and evolve in a social context.

The study does not attempt to cover all forms of advertising or all varieties of branded content. It does not include short, purely informational commercials or humour-based spots that do not construct extended emotional narratives. Its findings are therefore situated within the specific domain of emotionally

oriented brand films that combine narrative storytelling with value-driven, socially engaged content.

1.5 Methodological overview

The thesis adopts a three-step research design that triangulates close reading, interview study and reception study. This design treats brand films as texts, practices and experiences, and seeks to integrate these perspectives into a coherent analysis.

The first step is a close reading of the three selected brand films. This step generates theoretical and textual data about how story, image, sound and editing are arranged to solicit emotions and to create an overall emotional experience. It focuses on three dimensions: colour and lighting, camera and framing, and editing and sound. The close reading specifies how these elements work separately and together to construct emotional arcs and to position the brand within those arcs.

The second step is a semi-structured interview study with nineteen professionals in brand film, advertising and marketing. This step produces subjective data about how practitioners define brand film, how they describe its role in promoting brands, and how they understand emotional impact from their own positions as creators and viewers. It explores the challenges, characteristics and strategies associated with creating high-impact brand films, and investigates how professionals reflect on value identity, realism, interactivity and ethical issues.

The third step is a reception study based on a focus group with six participants. This step yields empirical data on how viewers engage with,

interpret and negotiate the emotional cues of brand films. The focus group discussion maps initial reactions, later thoughts and imagined behaviours, as well as critical comments on the films' social messages and brand involvement.

By combining these three steps, the thesis uses triangular analysis to connect textual form, production practices and audience experiences. The approach makes it possible to see where the perspectives of films, practitioners and viewers converge and where they diverge. This in turn supports a more precise account of how brand films create emotional experiences and shape perceptions of brands. In this design, each approach of analysis plays a distinct but complementary role. The close reading produces theoretical findings by interpreting the films' narrative structures, visual symbols and audiovisual strategies as constructions of meaning. The interview study provides subjective findings that capture professionals' own experiences, motivations and reflections on brand films, including how they understand emotional strategies in relation to branding and ethics. The focus group generates empirical findings that reveal how viewers in a social setting actually respond to, negotiate and sometimes contest the films' emotional cues and value positions. Taken together, these theoretical, subjective and empirical findings form a triangular analysis. Theoretical interpretations of the films can be tested against audience responses; professional accounts can explain or complicate patterns observed in reception; while focus group data can confirm or challenge the emotional effects that the close reading suggests should occur. This integration allows the thesis to move beyond description and to situate its conclusions within a broader framework of branding, narrative and visual communication.

1.6 Key concepts and the definition of brand film

The thesis builds on a set of key concepts that are introduced briefly here and developed more fully in the literature review. The central concept is that of the brand film itself. On the basis of historical and theoretical work, the thesis proposes a working definition with four dimensions. Brand films:

i) are presented publicly in ways that depart from the norms and conventions of traditional advertising;

ii) use storytelling as the main approach to represent the core value of the brand and avoid showing the product in its straightforward, instrumental meaning;

iii) have a form of “mediality” that gives them a social and cultural stance, and invite viewers to respond by agreeing or disagreeing with that stance;

iv) aim to create an emotional experience that connects audiences with the brand.

This definition emphasises the tension between brand films and conventional advertising. Brand films reject, or at least soften, some of the formal and ideological constraints of standard commercials. They downplay explicit promotional content and allow emotions, values and cultural references to take centre stage. This rejection is itself significant. It breaks viewers’ habitual expectations of what an advertisement should look like and opens space for new patterns of emotional engagement that may feel more like encounters with narrative film than with advertising.

The thesis uses “emotional experience” to refer to the process by which viewers perceive, feel, interpret and reflect on brand films. Emotional experience is understood as more than a momentary feeling of affection or enjoyment. It includes recognition of identity, empathy with characters, moral and social evaluation, and the activation of memories and associations. It is

through these processes that viewers may change or reinforce their perceptions of brand relevance, authenticity and trust.

“Viewers’ perception of the brand” here refers to how people position a brand in relation to their own values, needs and lives. The focus is on attitudes, trust and identity-based connections rather than on immediate purchase behaviour. The thesis argues that brand films intervene in this perceptual space by shaping how viewers see brands as social and cultural entity, and by linking brands to emotional experiences that feel meaningful in the context of viewers’ own stories.

1.7 Significance and contributions of the study

This project is significant because it connects an academic research gap with a practical problem in brand communication. The thesis asks how brand films construct emotional experiences and shape brand perception because brands and agencies increasingly work in a media environment where video is a major form of communication, yet the emotional and interpretive process through which brand meaning is produced is not always clear. The contribution of the thesis is therefore not to claim that brand films always produce trust or action, but to explain how emotional experience can be constructed, interpreted and related to brand perception.

The primary academic contribution is to clarify brand film as a distinct form of branded moving image. Some research has examined notable cases, such as John Lewis campaigns and mini-film advertising, but this has not yet led to a comprehensive understanding of brand films as a category. This thesis contributes to that discussion by defining brand film through public presentation, storytelling, mediality and emotional experience, and by

examining how these features work across selected film texts, practitioner accounts and audience responses.

The methodological contribution lies in the triangular design of the study. The close readings show how emotional experience is constructed through audiovisual form; the professional interviews show how practitioners conceptualise emotional and value-based strategies; and the reception study shows how viewers interpret and negotiate these strategies. This combination allows the project to compare the film text, the production perspective and the audience perspective without treating any one of them as sufficient on its own.

The project is interdisciplinary. It draws on media and communication studies, advertising, film studies and psychology. It proposes a structured way to connect these fields in the study of brand films. The close readings bring film and audiovisual analysis into conversation with advertising research. The interviews engage with questions of branding, strategy and ethics. The reception study contributes to audience and experience research. Together, these components provide an ordered and coherent interdisciplinary approach to brand films.

The direct beneficiaries of the project are scholars of brand film, advertising, film, media and communication, together with practitioners who work with brand storytelling, including brand strategists, creative directors, filmmakers, producers, editors, advertising agencies, marketing planners and communication professionals. For these groups, the thesis does not offer a formula for commercial success. It offers a way to examine why certain emotional strategies may support brand relevance, authenticity and trust, while others may appear forced, opportunistic or detached from the brand.

Viewers may also benefit indirectly because the study identifies risks involved in the use of social issues and vulnerable figures as emotional material. This is important in relation to films that address ageing, poverty, disability, family labour or other socially sensitive themes.

The international significance of the thesis is limited but still relevant. It does not claim to produce a global theory of brand film. Rather, by bringing together films from the UK, Thailand and the United States, and by placing them alongside professional accounts from different areas of brand-film production and communication, it shows how the same broad question of emotional experience can be examined across more than one market and sector.

1.8 Thesis Outline

The thesis proceeds as follows:

Chapter 2, Literature Review, traces the historical emergence of brand films from earlier practices such as lantern slide advertising, brand placement in cinema and animation, sponsored television shows and advertising films after 2000. It then develops the conceptual framework for the thesis, defining brand film and discussing key concepts including emotional experience, audience reception and brand perception.

Chapter 3, Methodology, sets out the research design in detail. It explains the three-step triangular analysis, describes the procedures for close reading, interviews and focus groups, and reflects on issues of sampling, ethics and analysis.

Chapter 4, Close Readings, presents detailed analyses of the three selected brand films. It examines how narrative, colour and lighting, camera and framing, editing and sound interact to construct emotional arcs and to position brands within those arcs.

Chapter 5, Interview Study, reports findings from the nineteen professional interviews. It explores how practitioners define brand film, describe the challenges and strategies of production, and understand emotional and ethical dimensions of their work.

Chapter 6, Reception Study, presents the focus group findings. It analyses how participants experience the three brand films, how they interpret emotional cues, and how they connect these experiences to their perceptions of the brands.

Chapter 7, Conclusion, synthesises the theoretical, subjective and empirical findings. It answers the research questions, outlines the conceptual and methodological contributions of the thesis, discusses limitations, and suggests directions for future research on brand films and emotional marketing.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction and definition of brand film

In this chapter, I critically discuss the literature and theoretical background related to my definition and concept of the ‘brand film’.

There are no formal definitions of brand film in existing scholarship, where the term rarely appears. As mentioned in my Introduction, I define ‘brand film’ as a mini-film released online which communicates the core values of a brand, company or organisation through emotion. It is a form of advertising that combines brand content – i.e. any content that contains a brand message of its core values and aims to build brand awareness – and audiovisual material to create an emotional experience, while still maintaining the brand as the central content of the film and the basis for its creation.

Because the term ‘brand film’ is close to the literature on branded entertainment, it is necessary to position my definition in relation to that field more precisely. Hudson and Hudson (2006, p. 492) define branded entertainment through the integration of advertising into entertainment content, especially when a brand is embedded into a storyline rather than only displayed within it. Their argument is useful here because it places brand film near the point where advertising and entertainment become strongly integrated. However, I do not use brand film as another name for the whole field of branded entertainment. In this thesis, a brand film is a more specific audio-visual form in which the story, characters, style and final brand relevance are created for the brand from the beginning. The brand is therefore

not only placed within entertainment. It becomes the reason why the filmic text exists.

When it comes to the description of ‘mini-film’, the term separates brand films from lengthier categories like feature films, is appropriate in this situation. A brand film's length may be described as a relatively short film that aims to convey the values of a brand. It typically lasts between a few seconds and several minutes. Depending on the objective, target market, and distribution channel of a brand film, its length may change. To be clear, a brand film's duration does not always indicate whether it is a mini-film or not. A brand film may be any length and yet be regarded as a mini-film provided its core aim is to communicate a narrative that effectively and creatively conveys the brand values. So, the content of the film and how well it adheres to the principles of the brand are more important than its duration. A brand film's length isn't governed by any strict guidelines. Though some brand films are as little as 15 or 30 seconds, others can go up to 30 minutes. The goal is to present a gripping tale that enthrals the audience and captures the essence of the brand.

Specifically, I argue that a brand film contains the following four characteristics (which will be discussed further in section 2.3). Namely, the brand film:

(i) is presented publicly against the norms and conventions of traditional advertising (more in 2.3.1);

(ii) uses storytelling as its main approach to represent the core value of the brand, and avoids showing the product in its original meaning (more in 2.3.2);

(iii) has a nature of 'mediality' that gives it a social and cultural stance, and enables interactions from the viewer by provoking discussions from them through agreement or disagreement with its stance (more in 2.3.3); and

(iv) aims to create an emotional experience to connect the audience with the brand (more in 2.3.4).

The chapter will proceed as follows. In 2.2, I will discuss the historical backgrounds to the brand film that lead to my definition of the term as stated above. Across eras from the 1870s to post-2000, I will categorise and analyse the media forms and communication statuses of different precedents in relation to my notion of the brand film. I will then position this notion in relation to branded entertainment and film branding, because these fields are the closest bodies of previous work for understanding the overlap between brands, entertainment, film form and audience experience. In 2.3, I will expand on the four features which I have used to form the definition of brand film, with examples to support their practical implications.

2.2 Tracing the Origins of the Brand Film

2.2.1 Promotion in public spaces and social engagement: lantern slide advertising

Lantern slides are the first form of advertising shown on a public screen. They originated in the 17th century, but became popular between the 18th and mid-20th centuries. Lantern slide advertising refers to the presentation of advertising content in the form of images projected by a magic lantern (the prototype of today's light projectors) (Fig. 1). In this early technique of image projection, a concave mirror first directed a light source to an image slide. A

lens on the outside of the magic lantern was then used to project the slide onto the screen (Fig. 2). Between 1870 and 1880, projection art was at its height, and magic lanterns were a major part of Victorian culture. However, lanterns were also used for teaching to illustrate scientific concepts, to convey world events, and to produce "fantastic" programs. Lectures on temperance and religion were also offered. Lanternists used magic lanterns to project static images that appear "moving". They do this in a variety of ways. For example, by alternating between images at various stages of movement. By being the technology in presenting moving pictures in the late 18th century, it was a breakthrough in transforming static promotional material into action.



Fig 1: 19th century magic lantern with printed slide incorrectly inserted

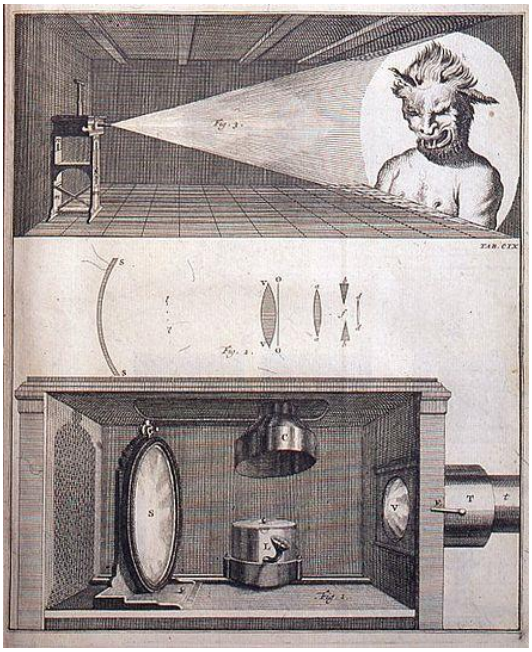


Fig 2: A page of Willem 's Gravesande's 1720 book Physices Elementa Mathematica with Jan van Musschenbroek's magic lantern projecting a monster



Fig 3: A scene displaying a magic lantern show

In its time, lantern slide advertising was a form of entertainment for the public akin to a show (Fig. 3), satisfying the need for entertainment for group/social activities (Roo, 2022). In this sense, it constitutes a historical precedent which shares two characteristics with the public nature of the brand film. The first shared characteristic is promotion in public spaces. David Robinson and other scholars refer to lantern slide advertising as manifest from 1871, particularly stating its commonness on the streets of New York (see Vonderau et al. 2016, p. 314). In 1876, *The Globe* reported a traffic jam on the Strand in London because of 'a gratuitous exhibition of dissolving views', where a range of clockwork street lanterns were used to show a variety of lantern slides advising people on their daily lives (Roo, 2022). Advice included information on the cheapest hatter or choosing a restaurant. Political parties also used lantern slides to promote their political initiatives, for example by giving ideas of contemporary social issues such as child poverty, gambling, etc. In the boom of lantern slide advertising, advertisers used to lend or give lantern slide ads to lanternists for free because it was one of the most effective ways of promoting their message to a large audience.

Similarly, the brand film promotes in a public space. The difference is that the brand film is usually presented online, thus promoting in web-based public spaces. With the advent of digital technologies, I argue that the concept of public space no longer refers to only physical or geographical spaces, but also spaces of public discourse, and specifically spaces on the Internet where the dissemination and re-creation of information take place. Social interaction no longer requires the support of (physical) public spaces (Badel and López Baeza, 2021, p. 127). Not limited to coexistence, face-to-face interaction and/or direct synchronous communication in physical public spaces (Badel and López Baeza, 2021, p. 131), people can also use their online media accounts as virtual public spaces in which to interact, communicate and form communities. As I will argue in relation to brand films, promotion in public space also involves interactivity with the audience as they enter those spaces to engage in conversations about the brand and with one another in a networked environment. It is through these conversations that the narrative content of the brand film exists in a dynamic and ever-changing discussion between the audience.

The second shared characteristic between lantern slide advertising and brand films is the stimulation of social engagement for advertising. The lantern slide advertisement was at the time the most effective form of advertising in terms of sparking public opinion and promoting discourse. It was played as a tool for persuading the public in areas of temperance, suffrage, and political propaganda (Vogl-Bienek and Crangle 2016; Eifler 2017). It also involved promotions relevant to people's everyday lives, such as advice on hats and restaurant choices.

Similarly, the brand film also achieves social engagement. Its presentation in online spaces means that liking, sharing and commenting are all ways in which people can engage digitally with the brand film. The brand film further promotes social discourse by addressing social issues with serious impact, such as global warming, ageing populations, or care for people with

disabilities. For example, the film *Rising* (David Nutter, 2019) advertises the website lovehasnolabels.com, while dealing with social issues of prejudice, discrimination and racism. The Ad Council, a non-profit organisation in the United States that creates public service advertising campaigns, launched the website LoveHasNoLabels.com. Being a forum for acceptance, diversity, and inclusion, the website does not provide any goods or services for sale. Videos, blogs, and other materials are available on the website with the goal of eradicating implicit prejudice, celebrating diversity, and encouraging people to be nice and respectful to one another. The website initiative aims to advance inclusion and acceptance in all facets of society, including racial, religious, and gender identities as well as sexual preferences, age, and abilities. It tells the story of neighbours of different races who do not interact with each other in their daily lives. However, they eventually unite to save people and survive in a disaster caused by a rainstorm. The tagline at the end of the film states: 'why does it take a disaster to bring us together?' The story mirrors the persistent problems of racial prejudice and discrimination in society, and uses the tagline to ask the audience to think deeply about the significance of the issue, calling people to come together on their website lovehasnolabels.com. Another example is *Father's Day* (Gillette, 2018), which advertises Gillette razors. At the beginning of the brand film, it presents a statistic with respect to father-son relationships: '94% of teenagers ask the internet for advice before their dads'. This sentence is followed by interviews with fathers who agree that their children spend too much time on the Internet and on electronic devices, rarely reaching out to their fathers. It then shows a father-son interaction experiment called 'go ask dad', where children experience finding answers to questions both via the Internet and by asking their father. The results show that fathers are better at teaching their children how to solve problems than the Internet. The film ends with the slogan: 'this Father's day, go ask dad'. The whole brand film uses interviews and experiments to create documentary-like realism and to call attention to the issue of father-son alienation, and especially for the new generation of young people to have more interaction and communication with their fathers.

There are also differences between lantern slide advertising and brand films. For instance, most lantern slide advertising is local in scope. Its aim is to create a positive and immediate impact, such as in the advertising of a restaurant (Fig. 4), an upcoming film (Fig. 5) or an elector (Fig. 6). It focuses on temporary effects, with expectations for people to make choices after watching the ad. Conversely, I argue that it is not the aim for the brand film to turn the viewer into an instant consumer. , Rather, the intention is to build a long-lasting emotional connection between the viewer and the brand (to be discussed in 3.2).



Fig 4: A lantern slide ad for the restaurant - The Sweet Palace H. FAIAD

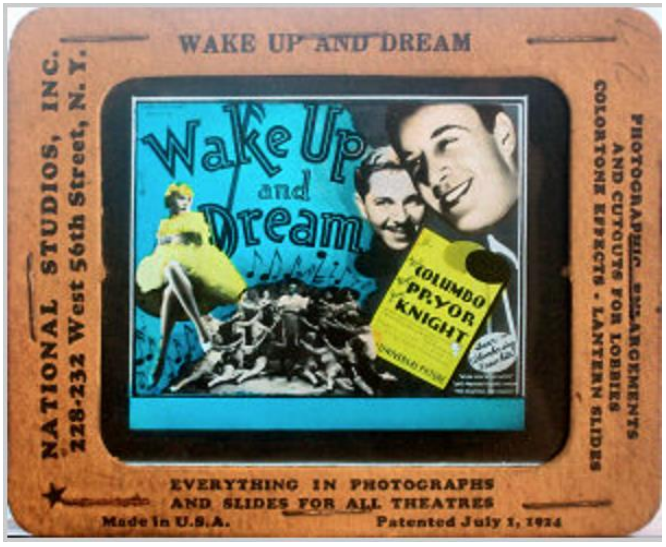


Fig 5: A lantern slide ad for the film – Wake Up and Dream (1946, Lloyd Bacon)

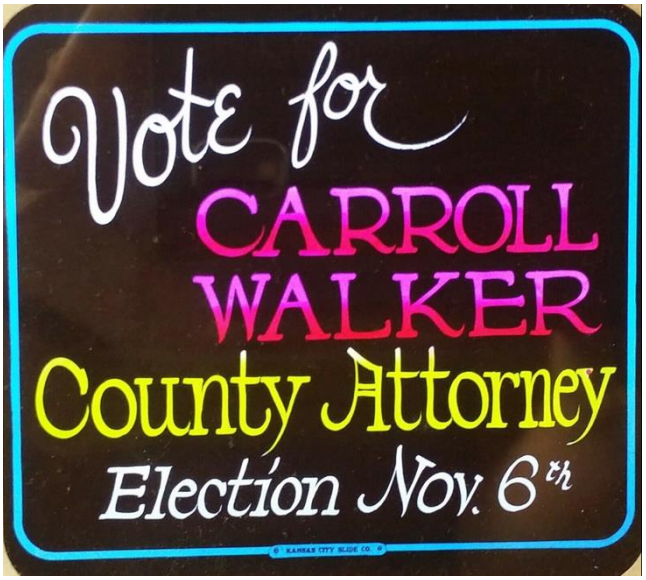


Fig 6: A lantern slide ad for the elector of County Attorney – Carroll Walker

2.2.2 Brand placement: cinema and animation

In this thesis, I argue that the brand film delivers unique cultural and social functions (see also section 2.3.3), especially as considered in the context of an art form. In that sense, the brand film is not a vehicle for straightforward communication of information about the brand or product. This feature of the brand film may be contrasted against its predecessors of advertisement on screen media in the twentieth century which I argue are more straightforward structural projections or mechanisms of advertising.

One contrasting precedent to these notions of the brand film can be seen in the form of large-screen advertising known as ‘brand placement in films’. The term ‘brand placement in films’ only came into academic or commercial use in the 1980s. Prior to this, the industry used other words to describe this marketing technique, such as ‘exploitation’ (Steele, 1925); ‘moving picture advertising’ (Ethics of Motion Picture Advertisers, 1930); ‘co-operative advertising’ (Harrower, 1932); ‘plugs’ (Firms Get Free Ads, 1939); ‘tie-in advertising’ (Tie-In Advertising, 1951); ‘trade outs’ (Lees & Berkowitz, 1978); and ‘tie-ups’ ((Newell et al., 2006, pp. 576-577).

In essence, the practice of ‘brand placement’ uses film as a medium in which to embed promotional content about a product or brand for advertising purposes. Balasubramanian (1994) refers to ‘brand placement’ as a then-new advertising approach for disseminating a ‘hybrid message’ ‘to convey brand messages and images to…consumers’ (Parker and Berger, 2010, p. 428). Such a hybrid message indicates ‘all paid attempts to influence audiences for commercial benefits using communications that project a non-commercial character’. As such, viewers may not be aware of the commercial message and thus process it differently than if they had known otherwise (Balasubramanian, 1994, p. 30). Another feature of ‘brand placement’ is its lack of control by the viewer. Referring to brand placement in films as ‘in-film

placement', Gaoshinde (2020, p. 2) points out that the branded content is not controlled by the viewer as the viewer cannot opt out of watching parts of the promotion by 'skipping the ad'. Brand placement in film can thus be regarded as an integral media form with film, where the film allows the brand to minimize its presence in it and to occur 'naturally' in the film in a functional or conceptual state, i.e. contextualized through the film narrative so that the abstract concept of the brand becomes a tangible experience. Gaoshinde also points out that brand placement in films is a win-win promotion: the brand gets promoted in the film, and the film also promotes itself through the licensing of the film's footage onto the brand's promotional materials and strategic activities.

Notably, in such placement, the promotion of the brand is not presented of its own right, but merely attached to the film. In other words, this form of advertising is only for brands to collaborate with films, rather than being a vehicle of expression specifically and explicitly for the brand. It is a practice that is cooperative, subsidiary and insertive in nature. In short, the core meaning of brand placement in films is that a brand enters into a partnership with a film to insert into the content of the film a product or logo that represents the brand, using the film as a vehicle to promote the brand.

A more recent reference is 'product placement', defined by Liew and Lim (2014, p. 138) as 'placing a brand in media content to affect consumer behaviour'. Specifically, this practice involves companies paying films or television programmes for their product's or brand's logo to be shown in the programmes' content. The practice is similar to brand placement in films. However, the term 'product placement' does not refer to any media in particular, and so may not be limited to promotion only through films.

According to current scholarship, brand placement in films first appeared in two films in the 1890s. With the invention of the moving image in 1895, the

Lever Brothers (a British manufacturing company which made, among other things, Sunlight Soap) and François-Henri Lavanchy-Clarke (a cinematographer and Swiss representative of Lever Brothers) pioneered a collaboration to advertise Lever Brothers products in cinema. In May 1896, the film, *Les Laveuses*, was first exhibited in the Parc de Plaisance, a place also known as Palais des Fées, in Geneva. In June of the same year, the film was shown in New York at Keith's Union Square Theatre with the English title *Washing Day in Switzerland*. Directed by Lavanchy-Clarke, filmed by Alexandre Promio, and lasting just one minute long, *Les Laveuses* was the first film that showed a brand name in it, demonstrating the combination of advertising and cinema. The film is silent, and depicts two women and two children washing clothes together in a garden. The Lever Brothers' brand of laundry detergent, Sunlight Soap, is carefully placed in French ('Sunlight Savon') and German ('Sunlight Seife') on two cases alongside the washing tubs (Fig. 7). Through a scene depicting where even children can do the laundry with adults, the advertisement showed that washing clothes was easy with Sunlight Soap.



Fig 7: A screenshot of *Les Laveuses* (1896, Lavanchy-Clarke)

While there are no detailed statistics on the sales of Sunlight Soap at the time, the branding may be considered a success in how *Les Laveuses* achieved significant cinema audience attendance at the time (Strickland, 2021, pp. 4-5). The first release of *Les Laveuses* in Switzerland attracted 70,000 people. In further promotion at the time, *Les Laveuses* was shown in some schools, and students were given free entry to watch the film in the cinema theatre by presenting the trade mark cut-out on the Sunlight product box. Students who wanted a free film ticket would thus ask their parents to buy the Sunlight product. If more than one child in a family wanted to see the film, more detergent boxes would be purchased (Strickland, 2021, p. 5). Therefore, such campaigns exhibited the film and promoted sales of the product at the same time. On this argument, Strickland (2021, p. 1) claimed that this practice from Lever Brothers can be seen as an example of innovative use of cinematography during the mid-1890s, enabling the recognition of the value of film as a promotional carrier.

Another pioneering example of advertising through the moving image is the animation film *Bird's Custard Powder*, made by British photographer and early filmmaker Arthur Melbourne-Cooper in 1897. *Bird's Custard Powder* was based on an advertising poster (Fig. 8), and is considered the first animated film advertisement in the UK. The original advertising poster depicted an old man who breaks a plate of eggs on his way down the stairs. However, he is shown to have no cause for worry because a chef in the kitchen raises a box of Bird's Custard Powder in his hand which does not require eggs, as demonstrated by the poster's slogan: 'custard without eggs!!'.

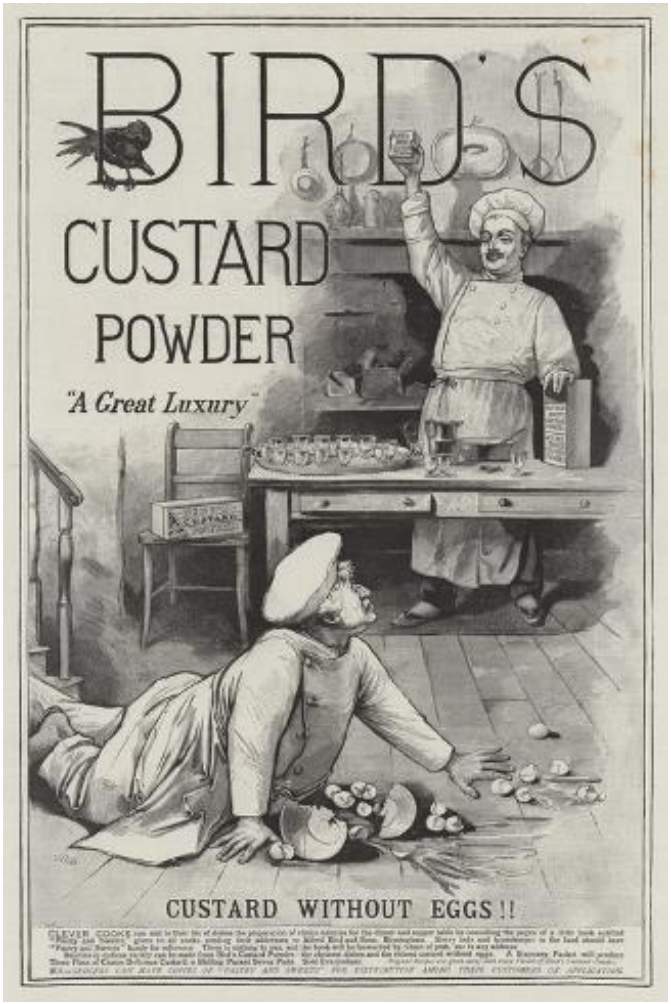


Fig 8: The poster of Bird's Custard Powder

The film then animated the poster's story. New to the film market at the time, venues and opportunities for releasing this advertising animation film were hard to find. Melbourne-Cooper showed *Bird's Custard Powder* in fair-grounds and private houses, earning £1 as the producer for selling every copy (de Vries and Mul, 2009, p. 62). The film contributed to the growing film industry with its attempt to turn a non-animated promotional poster into an animated advertisement, and showed the efficacy of the moving image as used for advertising (de Vries and Mul, 2009, p. 257). The film not only led to the development of animation, but also made Melbourne-Cooper a pioneer of animated advertising (Strickland, 2021, p. 4).

As mentioned, scholars classify *Bird's Custard Powder* and *Les Laveuses* as the first historical attempts or pioneers of advertising and 'product placement' through the then-new medium of the moving image in Europe (Strickland 2021, p. 4). However, in view of my framework of brand films, I also argue a different perspective. The plot of *Les Laveuses* has only one event: the washing of clothes. As such, its story of the family doing laundry in the one-minute film was most likely composed specifically for Sunlight Soap, rather than the director wishing to make a story about washing clothes in the first place. Hence, the film appears to be where the brand is first identified and then its story created for it, rather than a specific placement made conveniently in a film that is otherwise not about or connected to the brand. Similarly, it is important that the genesis of the creation of *Bird's Custard Powder* is also the content of advertising out of an advertising poster. The film was an attempt to make an animated advertising film out of an already existing advertising poster, rather than adding advertising elements to an animated film as an adjunct promotion.

Hence, in my view, both films' audiovisual content includes brand placement but, significantly, is not limited to it. Brand placement in films is the application of the appropriate brand product in a film and integrating the brand into the film's existing plot. It is about bringing branded content into a *pre-existing* film. Instead, I argue that both *Les Laveuses* and *Bird's Custard Powder* are predecessors of the brand film, rather than straightforward brand placement. A key aspect of the brand film is its original intention from its start to create a story for the brand. Hence, its characters, background and narrative content are *designed* for the brand. What the two historical films share in common is their attempt to combine two media forms – advertising and film – where the films' plots and content were specifically created for the brand. Based on this reading, I thus argue that it is more accurate to consider *Les Laveuses* and *Bird's Custard Powder* as practices of cinema advertising in intention and design that are precursors to the 'brand film' today.

2.2.3 Sponsored shows: Television advertising

From the 1940s, television became the dominant form of screen media that heavily presents advertising, or what some advertising practitioners consider as ‘creative advertising’ (Bell, 2015). Creativity became regarded as a key contributor to raising the effectiveness and long-term brand value in advertising (Priest 2014, Dyson and Weaver 2006).

On July 1, 1941 at 2:30 p.m., the world’s first television commercial was broadcast on New York’s local channel WNBT (later changed to WNBC) before a baseball game between the Philadelphia Phillies and Brooklyn Dodgers. This commercial was for Bulova watches. The 10-second commercial focuses on a watch, with a voiceover telling the audience what time it is as the second hand ticks (Fig. 9). The ad was seen at the time by only around 4,500 people (O’Barr, 2010, np). However, considering that the Broadcasting Association recorded an estimate of only 7,000 television sets in operation in America by May 1941 (Jay, 2008, np), that audience viewership represents a sizeable proportion.



Fig 9: A screenshot of the first TV commercial in the world

Since that first television commercial broadcast in 1941, brands have become more involved in and heavily marketed on television in various ways. One of these ways is sponsored shows, where the brand 'collaborates with a TV show through product placement, licensing, or a fully-integrated partnership' (Mertes, 2021, np). The brand might be introduced before or in the middle of the TV programme. Famous sponsored shows include *Geographically Speaking* (1946), a live show which marketed the products of the global biopharmaceutical company, Bristol Myers Squibb (BMS), by showing the host's 16mm home movies about her travels to unusual places with her husband. The BMS brand focused on discovery and innovation of new medicines to treat serious diseases, thus matching the spirit of the show's exploration of new, destinations for travel. The show is regarded as one of the first television programmes to feature advertising through having a regular sponsor. Unfortunately, content of this programme can no longer be found as there was no technology then to record live shows.

Another method of marketing on television is to use the brand's name as the programme's title. One example is *The Colgate Comedy Hour* (1950) as

sponsored by Colgate-Palmolive Company, an American multinational consumer products company. *The Colgate Comedy Hour* was based on NBC's first variety show, *Four Star Revue* (1950-1953), which featured famous comedians and performers as guests in the show's skits. In the Colgate programme, commercials for the Colgate brand are embedded between skits as breaks for the show, advertising household, health care, and personal care Colgate products. For example, in the episode on November 12, 1950, the logos and slogans of several brands of Colgate-Palmolive-Peet Company, such as Halo Shampoo, Colgate, Ajax Cleanser and Palmolive, were played at the beginning and end of the TV show. During the show, there were also interruptions by the sponsor's branding campaigns. This is usually done by models showing the products and talking about their experience with the brand, or by actors in the show giving a speech about the brand. Sometimes, the programme simply shows an animated commercial. There are usually several products placed and advertised in a sponsored show.

However, as advertisers provide the financial sponsorship for the programmes, the content of the programmes is often directed and controlled by them. Such power of control greatly restricted the creative content of television programmes. For example, the ideas conveyed in a television programme must remain consistent with and not contradict the brand's philosophy. In *The Colgate Comedy Hour*, the actors need to present healthy white teeth, and female actors who promote the Palmolive soap need to have good skin. Hence, characters whose visual appearances are inconsistent with these standards cannot be presented on the show, even if integral to the programme's original creative meaning and artistic effect. Such restrictions create conflicts between business and artistic creations, and put pressure on both.

By the 1960s, NBC executive Sylvester Pat Weaver changed the situation. Where advertisers dominated television programming and had complete creative control over content, he returned creative control to the television

networks whereby advertisers could only buy the rights to specific time slots, but could not manage the content of TV programmes. In this way, Weaver changed the state of advertising, specifically the way television commercials were produced (Mertes, 2021). By adjusting the powers of content control in television commercials, both TV programmes and commercials began developing more creatively. Specifically in relation to the latter, television commercials started to be shown as a single section with time and space as separated from TV programmes, rather than embedded in TV shows per Colgate's advertising in *The Colgate Comedy Hour*. Accordingly, their advertising content also no longer needed to be consistent with the TV programme.

Comparing sponsored shows and brand films, one difference lies in the sustainability of the promotion of the brand. The sponsored show has a long-term relationship with the brand by way of the latter's sponsorship, thus providing sustained exposure to the brand through the show's frequency and regularity. Conversely, a brand film is a one-off advertisement created for the brand. The relationship to the viewer is thus not one of temporal duration. Instead, I will argue that the brand film provides prolonged effect on the audience through imposing on them an ongoing emotional experience of the brand.

Another difference is the audience group. The sponsored TV show may include a wider audience as compared to that of brand films as the viewer chooses to watch the show, rather than to specifically receive the promotions. Conversely, the audience for a brand film is a targeted group. Even though a brand film released online is theoretically accessible to anyone on the Internet, its viewer would ostensibly only click to watch the brand film because they are attracted to the brand or, in some cases, to the film itself. The marketing in a brand film is thus more focused on its advertising purpose, rather than diffused across a TV show of wider content.

2.2.4 ‘Advertising films’ after 2000

‘Advertising films’ emerged as a new term after 2000. There is no specific definition of ‘advertising film’ in the scholarship. Rather, it is a commercial term that generally appears in non-academic discussions or video titles on the Internet. The term appears primarily in the creative industry to describe short films which consist only of advertisement of a particular brand or product. In terms of how they are executed, these movies have the potential to be inventive, utilising a range of narrative strategies, aesthetic choices, and production values to draw in viewers and deliver the marketing message. Advertising films generally adhere to a typical three-act framework or narrative arc. They may feature non-linear storytelling, comedy, or emotional appeal to interest the spectator.

Conversely, scholars use other terms to discuss this form of advertising, perhaps concerned that ‘advertising films’ might be confused with 'film advertising' (i.e. advertising shown before the start of a performance in a cinema or during intermission). For instance, Chen and Lee (2014, p. 292) define ‘microfilm advertising’ as a short streaming advertisement designed to go viral. The message about the product or brand in the microfilm and its enjoyability greatly influence the viewer’s attitude towards the brand and helps to communicate the purpose of the ad. Rees-Roberts (2020) uses the term ‘online video promo’ to refer to ‘advertising film’ or ‘contemporary promotional film’ that ‘draws on the heritage of film narrative for inspiration’ (pp. 410-411). He cites Gucci's Autumn/Winter 2017 campaign as an example, where Gucci's photographer at the time, Glen Luchford, shot a commercial that imitated a B-movie trailer. Similarly, the Spring/Summer 2016 campaign included a clip from the film *Christiane F*, a 1981 German biographical film directed by Uli Edel. The aesthetics of these videos show how brands look to cinema and ‘the heritage of film narrative’ for artistic inspiration to enhance their advertising campaigns (pp. 409-410). These films – ostensibly as

advertising film – thus demonstrate a shifting emphasis from online commercial campaigns to producing content that is more engaging.

Finally, Jane Weaver (2002, np) elaborates on forms of advertising and the advertising market landscape since 2002, specifically in response to the evolving information age of digital media and the Internet. She uses terms such as 'advertainment', where 'marketing messages are more about entertainment than a sales pitch'. She also uses other terms, such as 'branded content' and 'brand clips', to describe advertising which use story plots to deliver the brand message. Weaver mentions that, in 2002, some brands have produced longer commercials than traditional ones, so that they look more like mini-films shown at film festivals rather than TV ads. For instance, some advertising films can last up to 10 minutes, providing more creative space for the presentation of narrative content. Specifically, Weaver cites *The Hire* series of the BMW brand (discussed further below) as such a 'new genre of advertising'. Entertainment is thus key in such advertising, made clear also by the combination of 'advertising' and 'entertainment' in the portmanteau word 'advertainment'. Notably, these advertisements are also 'packaged like mini-movies and barely mention the advertiser's name' (Weaver 2002, np), pointing to the creativity of post-2000 advertising films in how they weaken the direct or straightforward marketing of brand content.

I argue that these form of 'advertising films' or advertainment bear close resemblance to my ideas of the brand film because of the creativity they manifest, particularly as compared to the commercials with narratives on TV before 2000. Notably, their creativity can be seen through three aspects. The first is the thinking, expression and production of their audiovisual content, which allows for many possibilities in the arrangement and convergence of shots. This creativity enables advertising films to work according to the rules and conventions of mini-film production, while at the same time allowing for the freedom to innovate.

Secondly, advertising films also manifest scope for creativity through using a complete storyline akin to a film. These storylines generally demonstrate the popular three-act structure: Setup (the initial inciting incident), Confrontation (first climax: obstacles and reactions), and Resolution (last climax: consequence). Having a complete storytelling structure also gives the audience more room for imagination through the continual advancement of the story structure. Because these films have complete plots, their audiovisual content can also be divided into genres, such as animation, horror film, comedy and so on. In these different genres, these films can thus have more variety and achieve a more specific expression of the creative content.

Finally, compared to pre-2000 advertisements, post-2000 productions are more focused on conveying the idea and message of products, i.e. the *essence* that a product stands for. In the framework of such essence, the creativity of these productions also lies in demonstrating more pertinent and individualised messages, thanks to the importance of data-driven targeting and personalization.

An example of a post-2000 advertising film of such creativity is *The Hire*. This film was created by BMW in 2001 and consists of eight mini-films of around 10 minutes each. Across the eight advertising films, the promotion of the BMW vehicle is not limited to product placement. Rather, the brand of BMW is presented in narratives with specific and fascinating plots about BMW cars, typically by being used by the characters in the ad (Ribaric, 2009). The series was primarily released on BMW's website, bar *The Follow* (2001), which was directed by the Hong Kong director Wong Kar-wai (famous for films such as *Chungking Express* and *In the Mood for Love*) and debuted at the Athens Film Festival in September, 2001. Each film features the same protagonist who is the driver of a BMW car. Each film consists of the same scenario of the driver being hired for a different purpose, including escorting important people, chasing targets, and hiding from enemies. For instance, in *Chosen* (Ang Lee, 2001), the driver is assigned to escort an Asian holy boy to a monk. After

evading kidnappers along the way, the driver hands the boy over to the monk. However, he is told by the boy that the monk is a fake, so the driver eventually rescues the boy from the fraudulent monk.

All the advertising films in *The Hire* series have different stories. However, they all convey the same idea: BMW as 'the ultimate driving machine'. The films in *The Hire* show that BMW's products are able to turn the driver's life around many times and make a difference, no matter the situation (Gray, 2012). The creative content of BMW's advertising films not only demonstrates the superior capabilities and driving experience of BMW products, but also the power that is embedded in the BMW image. The creativity of *The Hire* can thus be unpacked as follows: the clever combination of product elements and storytelling; the creative narrative approach to exploring the audio-visual embodiment of the product core idea (BMW as 'the ultimate driving machine'); and the transformation of that idea into the central message of a three-act story. This creative content thus gives rise to a more exciting viewing experience than earlier advertising practices. Here, the product is not simply placed prominently, but is instead involved in a story and audiovisual experience.

In addition, the changing experience and habits of the audience in viewing these films also reflect the films' creativity and creative status. For instance, *The Hire*'s third film, *The Follow*, premiered at the Cannes Film Festival and demonstrated that advertising can also be shown at international film festivals alongside feature films. They are given the same platform to be screened and be judged as professional films. Conversely, the rest of the films in *The Hire* premiered on the BMW website. A larger diversity of opinions and viewpoints may be heard thanks to the more open and democratic spaces offered by online platforms for filmmakers to display their work. As a result, there may be a wider variety of thoughts and aesthetic choices, which may result in advertising films that are more inventive and creative. The internet platform also gives filmmakers greater flexibility in terms of marketing and distribution,

enabling them to test out various strategies and approaches to promote their work, which may enhance the overall inventiveness of their films. Last but not least, the increased connection and engagement that internet platforms provide between filmmakers and their fans can result in more cooperation and feedback, eventually building a more creative and dynamic filmmaking community.

I argue that there are some commonalities between the advertising film and the brand film, such as the feature of creative storytelling and sharing internet-based communications to promote the core value of the BMW products. Nevertheless, there are also some differences. Firstly, the viewer always sees the product in its advertised essense (i.e. the BMW vehicle, advertised as the ultimate driving machine) in *The Hire*. On the other hand, my argument is that the brand film does not show the product in its essence or original use or meaning. Secondly, the core values of the BMW product as expressed in *The Hire* are based on the experience of using them, i.e. as 'the ultimate driving machine'. Conversely, I argue that the core values expressed in the brand film is based on emotional experience, which is more abstract (see Chapter 4 for elaboration in relation to specific close readings of brand films). A brand film is primarily concerned with promoting the overall brand or business and creating a stronger emotional bond with the audience. It focuses on communicating the brand's values, mission, or culture. In this sense, it is not so much about promoting the brand and persuading the audience to purchase its product, as is the primary goal of an advertising film. Furthermore, to engage the audience, advertising films frequently use creative visual effects, storytelling, and humour, whereas brand films may take a more cinematic and emotional approach.

2.2.5 Branded entertainment, film branding and the position of brand film

The discussion above shows that brand films share histories with cinema advertising, sponsored television and post-2000 advertising films. It is also necessary, however, to position the research more clearly in relation to branded entertainment. Hudson and Hudson (2006, p. 492) trace branded entertainment through the development of product placement, and they define it as the integration of advertising into entertainment content, where brands are embedded into the storylines of film, television or another entertainment medium. This is useful for this thesis because it places brand film within a wider movement in which advertising moves from direct display towards story, integration and entertainment experience.

Hudson and Hudson (2006, pp. 493-495) also present the difference between pure product placement and branded entertainment as a continuum based on the level of brand integration with the storyline or plot. At one end, a brand may only be seen or mentioned. At the other end, the brand is woven into the storyline and becomes part of the entertainment structure. Brand film is positioned close to this second end of the continuum, because it depends on story, character and audio-visual design rather than on simple brand visibility. However, I still distinguish brand film from branded entertainment as a wider category. Branded entertainment can include television integrations, video games, online materials and other media forms (Hudson and Hudson, 2006, pp. 494-496; Um and Kim, 2014, pp. 167-168). In this thesis, brand film refers more narrowly to a film-like text whose narrative and emotional structure are produced for the communication of brand values.

This distinction also matters because Hudson and Hudson (2006, pp. 498-500) identify measurement, control and ethics as major management issues in branded entertainment. These issues remain relevant to brand films. A brand film also raises questions of effect, creative control and the ethical use of emotion. Yet this thesis does not measure a brand film only through recall, sales or exposure. It asks how emotional experience is built through film form and how viewers make sense of that experience in relation to the brand. In

this way, the thesis keeps the industry concern with effectiveness, but studies the process before it becomes a measurable outcome.

Um and Kim's practitioner study provides a second point of reference. Their article examines how branded entertainment practitioners understand execution, measurement, brand characteristics and the wider practice of branded entertainment (Um and Kim, 2014, pp. 170-172). Their findings show that practitioners viewed favourable integration of the product or service as the most important executional factor, while brand personality, supporting promotion, recognition, purchase intention, sales and brand attitude were also important in their discussion of brand suitability and measurement (Um and Kim, 2014, pp. 173-175). This study is relevant to my own research because it shows that branded entertainment is not only a textual or aesthetic form. It is also an industry practice shaped by decisions about execution, suitability and evaluation.

My own interview study also works with practitioner perspectives, but it moves the emphasis in a different direction. I do not only ask whether branded entertainment is well executed or commercially effective. I ask how professionals understand the emotional and value-based strategies of brand films. Um and Kim (2014, pp. 164-165, 170-175) therefore help to locate my project within industry-facing research, while also clarifying where this thesis moves away from a general discussion of branded entertainment. The focus here is the more specific question of how brand films use narrative and audio-visual form to construct emotional experience, and how this experience is interpreted by viewers.

The research also needs to be positioned in relation to film branding. O'Reilly and Kerrigan (2013, pp. 769-770, 773-780) introduce the film brandscape to explain how films may be understood as brands through interrelated brand cues, including studios, stars, directors, characters, genres, locations, music

and commercial brands. Their argument is important because it treats film as both a commercial product and a cultural text, and because it shows that film brand meaning is formed through cultural codes, production and consumption relations, and consumer sense-making (O'Reilly and Kerrigan, 2013, pp. 776-780).

This film-branding literature is close to my project because it recognises that viewers do not encounter film as a neutral container. They interpret film through existing cultural codes, previous experience and interrelated signs. Nevertheless, the direction of analysis is different. O'Reilly and Kerrigan (2013, pp. 769-770) ask how a film can be understood as a brand. My thesis asks how a brand uses filmic form to become emotionally and culturally meaningful to viewers. This means that I draw from film branding, but I do not collapse brand film into film brand.

Hart, Kerrigan and vom Lehn (2016, pp. 375-379) further support this distinction by treating film consumption as a holistic and experiential process. They argue that film consumption cannot be fully understood only through isolated marketability or playability factors, and they develop a model based on three interrelated classification dimensions: film characteristics, viewing environment and situational environment. This is useful for this thesis because brand films are also viewed as experiences, not only as marketing messages. The viewer's response depends on the story, the style, the platform, the viewing situation and the viewer's prior associations.

Kohli et al. (2021, pp. 369, 379-382) are also important because they develop a consumer film-brand engagement framework from UK consumer data. Their study shows that film identity coherency can lead to film-brand identification through popularity, sequels and emotional bonding, and that this can lead to engagement behaviours such as word-of-mouth, purchase intention, repetitive viewing and following the brand. This article is especially relevant because it

places coherence, emotional bonding and consumer engagement at the centre of how consumers come to engage with films as brands.

For my thesis, Kohli et al. (2021, pp. 369-370) provide a useful contrast. Their question is how and why consumers come to identify certain films as brands. My question moves in the reverse direction. I begin with brands that use film form, and I ask how these filmic texts create emotional experiences that may shape the viewer's perception of the brand. The value of Kohli et al.'s study for this research is therefore not that it explains brand film directly, but that it supports the importance of coherence, emotional bonding and consumer engagement in any discussion of film and brand relations.

Taken together, these sources position the brand film as a specific form within a wider set of debates. From branded entertainment, the thesis takes the problem of how advertising moves into entertainment and how brand integration differs from simple placement. From practitioner research, it takes the need to understand brand film as an industry practice involving execution, evaluation and creative constraint. From film branding and film consumption studies, it takes the importance of audience interpretation, cultural codes, emotional bonding and experience. The contribution of this thesis is to bring these strands together around the specific object of the brand film, understood as a branded audio-visual text that constructs emotional experience through film form and connects that experience to brand perception.

2.3 The brand film

As mentioned in 2.1, I argue that the brand film displays the following features:

(i) is presented publicly against the norms and conventions of traditional

advertising (more in 2.3.1);

(ii) uses storytelling as its main approach to represent the core value of the brand, and avoids showing the product in its original meaning (more in 2.3.2);

(iii) has a nature of 'mediality' that gives it a social and cultural stance, and enables interactions from the viewer by provoking discussions from viewers through agreement or disagreement with its stance (more in 2.3.3);

(iv) creates an emotional experience to connect the audience with the brand (more in 2.3.4).

I will now discuss each in turn.

2.3.1 The brand film as against the norms and conventions of traditional advertising

I first argue that the brand film rejects traditional channels of communication. These channels are generally regarded as the media forms of text, pictures, audio and video, and communicated through print, radio and television advertising (Karimova 2013, p.160).

Rather, the brand film is mainly transmitted online and/or first launched through social media as an uploaded video. An example would be the John Lewis Christmas brand film, a highlight on the UK advertising scene. The 2021 brand film premiered at 6.30am on November 4, 2021 on YouTube, although the brand film is then shown on ITV the day after the premiere. Presented online, the brand film exhibits a video timeline (progress bar)

through which the viewer can scroll, as well as a comment section (see Fig. 10). An option of ‘skip ad’ does not apply for brand films at this stage, because they are uploaded and posted as an individual video rather than an embedded ad in between YouTube video clips which can be skipped 5 seconds after they appear. Hence, the viewer has to choose to watch or not to watch the entire brand film, rather than skipping it as an interspersed advert when watching other videos. The viewer can also fast forward, rewind, or watch it at different speeds. Like the subject and the attachment of an email, a regular advert can be likened to an email attachment as it is interspersed with the video (the subject) that the viewer is watching. Conversely, the brand film itself is the subject.

In addition, watching a brand film online also gives rise to the interactivity of online and social media. On social networking platforms such as YouTube, viewers can 'like', 'dislike', 'share', 'download', 'save', etc. to express their opinion about a brand film and share it with friends or save the video. They can also post comments, texting any opinion about the brand film and even commenting on other people's comments.

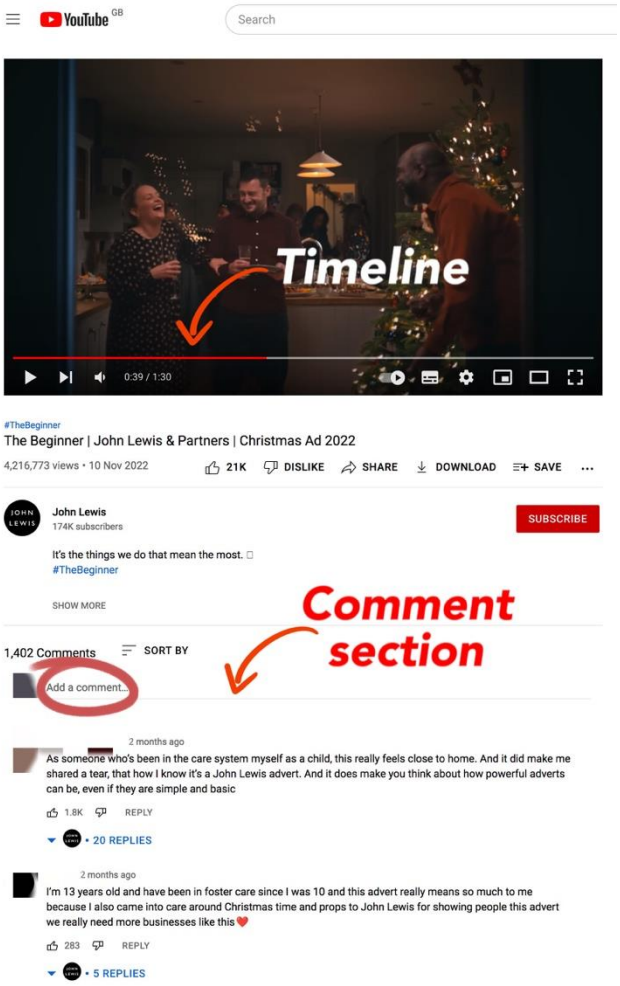


Fig. 10: An example of a brand film post on Youtube

Secondly, I argue that the brand film rejects the conventional linearity of traditional advertising. Traditional advertisement shows the product in a linear fashion, with the consumer comprehending or receiving a prearranged and ordered message about the product (Bezjian-Avery et al 1998, p. 24). For instance, a traditional commercial for Estee Lauder called 'NEW Advanced Night Repair | The Next Revolution in Skincare' begins with a product picture with the tagline 'New Advanced Night Repair'. The product is then referred to as the "#1 serum" in the company. Using the product picture and the beauty of the model's skin, the ad stresses the product's unique advantages, such as so-called rapid repair, new youth-generating power, and protective anti-oxidants and moisturising hyaluronic acid. The commercial then specifies a time frame of three weeks for the treatment to diminish lines, which is one of the product's selling features in terms of effectively repairing skin. Finally, the

commercial once more highlights the product's benefits with messages such as 'skin feels firmer' and 'pores look diminished, evens skintone'. The commercial concludes with the product name and the summary phrase, 'Proven Effective for All Skintones'. Each feature develops on the preceding one in a linear order in painting a complete and convincing image of the product and providing the message about the skincare product. With the intention of encouraging the client to make a purchase, this style of advertisement is created to communicate information about the product in a straightforward and orderly manner. In such advertising, viewers are thus led to expect a straightforward demonstration or description of the product in the advertisement.

In comparison, the brand film subverts or ‘disappoints’ this traditional expectation by deliberately *not* displaying or describing the product in its original meaning. Rather, a brand film usually includes an engaging narrative that highlights the brand's background, culture, or vision (see 3.2.2). Visual metaphors, emotional music, and stunning cinematography may be employed to convey a mood or feeling that represents the brand's identity. The aim of the brand film is to build a strong emotional bond with the audience by creating a memorable and engaging experience, rather than directly displaying or describing the product. The more the brand film – without its final tagline revealing the brand – runs as a conventional film, enabling the audience to have the same experience as watching a film, the more I would define that video as a brand film.

Last but not least, the brand film rejects traditional advertising norms and conventions by providing a different or distinct kind of authenticity that is in line with their objectives and values. For instance, one convention of traditional advertising is to use a documentary format to show consumers the ‘real’ experience of a brand, whereby authenticity is one of the most important factors with which to persuade or convince consumers of the brand’s or product’s credibility (Bruhn et al., 2012, p. 567). Where consumers lose trust

in the brand, they feel uncertain or insecure in deciding to buy the product (Delgado-Ballester and Luis Munuera-Alemán, 2001, np).

In brand films, brand content can be presented in a variety of ways, which include brand idea portrayals, client testimonials, behind-the-scenes clips of the company's operations, brand manager meetings, and other aspects of marketing messages. Brand films achieve their unique authenticity by employing storytelling to tell a story or deliver an idea that is consistent with the brand's values and purpose, instead of exclusively emphasising the good or service being sold. They also use techniques more prevalent in independent film production, including long shots and a focus on character and emotion. Close-up shots (Fig. 11) are also commonly used in brand films, which could develop intimacy, stronger emphases on emotions, and greater involvement between the audience and the stories/characters ((Balazs, 1952; Bouse, 2003; Doane, 2003). By presenting the brand's message with such techniques to achieve a more captivating and creative manner, this strategy aims to forge a different kind of authentic connection with the audience.



Fig 11: A close-up shot from Mr Lim's Reunion Dinner (K. Rajagopal, 2018)

Brand films also up the theatricality of brand content by employing techniques such as exaggerated emotions and dramatic storylines to engage and delight the audience, while keeping a linkage to the brand's message and values. This theatricality enables brand films to produce a more immersive and fascinating viewing experience that grabs the audience's attention and maintains it throughout the entire film. This theatricality rejects the authenticity of traditional advertising, but it better conveys to the viewer the amplified storyline and message, thus delivering the most authentic and closest idea to the brand's core values.

2.3.2 The brand film as creative storytelling

Storytelling is closely entwined with advertising. Lundqvist et al (2013) argue that storytelling has great effect on communicating brand values to consumers, enables the embrace of a brand's core values, and can influence viewers' subsequent assessment of a brand (p. 7). In addition, storytelling can contain positive features about what the brand is promoting without being received as a commercial (Ibid). Kim and Sullivan (2019, p. 8) also argue that a well-told story can be more convincing and better remembered than facts.

Notably, between 1970s and 1990s, a number of TV commercials featured creative stories. While the communication channel is television, the popularity of storytelling content formats on TV advertising might have helped to move advertising into the brand film with its key characteristic of creative narrative. One example of such a creative TV advertisement is Coca-Cola's *Hey Kid, Catch!* ad in 1979, starring Charles Edward Greene, a famous American former football player. Greene had held the position of defensive tackle for the Pittsburgh Steelers of the National Football league between 1969 and 1981. The commercial tells the story of Joe Greene (played by Charles Edward Greene, better known as "Mean" Joe Greene) as a defensive tackle who limps off the pitch. A young boy runs up and says to him, 'I think you are the

best ever' and hands him a bottle of Coca-Cola. With this encouragement, Greene drinks the whole bottle of Coca-Cola and gives the boy his jersey. The ad ends with Greene's smile and the slogan: 'have a Coke, and a smile — Coke adds life'. The story is very short. However, it expresses a narrative of delivering and sharing happiness, and in that way articulates a particular idea of the Coca-Cola brand to the audience (Mertes, 2021). *Hey Kid Catch!* and its focus on innovative story thus contributes to the development of creative storytelling in advertising films. The ad breaks with the traditional view of the audience on what an ad should contain, i.e. the showcasing of a product. Instead, this commercial shows that advertising can also be in the form of a story.

Similarly, Wu et al. (2020, np) also discuss 'mini-film advertising' as online advertising 'built on short plotlines' Likewise, Karpinska-Krakowiak and Elsend (2019) discuss 'mini-film advertising' which use narratives to convey hidden brand messages in online videos between 3 and 10 minutes. They describe the content of mini-film advertising as being able to provide immersive storytelling, while masking product-related information (p. 388). They designate the effect of mini-film advertising as 'digital brand engagement' that earns users' online attention and build brand exposure on the Internet (pp. 389-390).

Aligned with the arguments above, I argue that brand films do not display the brand's products in their original meaning. Rather, they are narrative in nature, whose content is performed by actors and/or written by a scriptwriter. They use creative stories and narrative content as their core content, adding drama and greater artistic creation to turn different forms of brand content into dramatic storylines presented in audiovisual language. Story also holds audiences' attention for a longer duration. Instead of emphasising the product's original significance or use, brand films may include products as props to assist conveying the tale or sustaining the audience's attention. They elicit an emotional response from the audience, enabling the audience to

emotionally identify with, connect to or discuss the core values the brand conveys by portraying the product as a representation of a more significant idea or experience rather than merely highlighting the characteristics and advantages of the product. As such, the presence of a Coca-Cola drink in the *Hey Kid, Catch!* advertisement prompts it as an advertising film rather than a brand film. The display of the product connects the core of its promotion to the idea that Coca-Cola is a product that makes people laugh and adds happiness to their lives. Yet it is unclear whether the core values of the Coca-Cola brand are aligned with that idea. Conversely, brand films frequently incorporate stories that represent the brand's basic principles. An audience-resonant brand film ought to be capable of conveying the brand's values, objective, and purpose. Its narrative aids in expressing the company's identity and values in a more sophisticated and nuanced approach than a conventional advertising campaign. The basic principles of the brand should be reflected in a captivating narrative that emotionally draws in the viewer in order to strengthen their relationship with the brand.

2.3.3 The brand film's 'mediality'

Here I argue that the brand film has a nature of 'mediality', meaning it has audiovisual content that enables information to be encoded and decoded as communication. More specifically, the audio-visual content in a brand film is encoded by the brand designer and decoded by the audience. Encoding is the process of producing audio-visual content with the goal of delivering a specific message about the brand, its principles, and its goods or services. In order to elicit particular emotions and convey a particular tone, the brand designer will decide on the visual and auditory aspects of the film, including the music, colours, lighting, and voiceover. This process of communication via 'mediality' thus performs the unique role of a linking channel between the brand filmmaker and the viewer. Communication as a medium allows the brand film maker, the brand film and the audience to form a communication system. Specifically, the relationship between these three elements is established

through the exchange of information and the formation of the viewing experience, leading to a complete process of transmission of information and response, in which the communication function of the medium is manifested.

During the decoding process, the audience interprets the audio-visual content to understand the brand message. The viewer's background, experience, and personal preferences all have an impact on this interpretation. The audience's interpretation of the content may also be influenced by preconceived notions or biases about the brand. The success of the brand film depends heavily on how well the encoding and decoding procedures work. The brand designer wants the audience to comprehend its message and, as a result, react favourably to the brand. Hence, the brand film should be created with the target market in mind, and the audio-visual material should be customised to the audience's interests, needs, and preferences. The audience will have a favourable impression of the brand when the decoding process is successful, and they may be more likely to interact with it in the future.

Mediality here can also be understood as the autonomy acquired after the brand film has become an individual medium. McLuhan (1964) suggests that 'the medium is the message', where the significance of media lies not only in terms of the message itself, but also the influence of the medium's mediality on the way the message is produced and exists. For narrative content, the characteristics of the medium determine the features of the narrative content and the way it is communicated, reflecting the autonomy of the medium. I argue that the brand film’s mediality in its autonomy, after it has established itself as a medium, means it can also be shared, remixed, or used in different ways because it can be recognised as a unique entity that is distinct from the brand itself. As it is distributed through various channels and platforms and is interpreted and reinterpreted by various audiences, the brand film can take on a life of its own. In short, I argue that a brand film's mediality refers to how the audio-visual content is used to convey a message and how the audience interprets that message. A brand film may develop some autonomy as a

separate medium after it has been released, which may have both advantageous and disadvantageous effects on the brand. The real meaning of mediality is thus this autonomy, where the new characteristics of mediality in brand films enrich its form as advertising and enable change in the form of the text (i.e. content). The interactive space created by brand films allows the viewer at the end of the communication chain to participate in the whole process as both a receiver and a narrator. In their participation, the viewer can extend the original text into different media texts by way of comments, sharing and other interactive methods.

While brand films and other forms of media share some aspects of the communication system, there are also some significant differences. These differences include the communication's purpose, the use of communication strategies, the degree of control the sender has over the message, and the intended audience. For instance, in relation to purpose, brand films are specifically made to promote a brand or service, as opposed to other media that may have a more general purpose (e.g., to inform, amuse, educate, etc.). Brand films use their communication strategies to elicit a certain perception of the brand from viewers and to nudge them towards taking some sort of action, like endorsing the brand. The degree of control the sender has over the message is another distinction. Because there are so many variables that can affect how people perceive and respond to the content in other media, the sender has less control over how the message is received and interpreted (e.g. personal biases, cultural differences, etc.). In contrast, because brand films allow the sender to carefully construct the audio-visual content to promote the messaging of the brand, the sender has more control over the message. Finally, a more focused audience may be involved in brand films' communication systems than in other forms of media. Brand films, in contrast to other media that might have a broader audience, are frequently made to cater to a particular target market, so the communication strategy must be geared towards that audience in order to be effective. As a result, the messaging, tone, and aesthetic of the brand film may be less universally appealing and more specialised than in other media.

‘Mediality’ also distinguishes brand films from 'brand placement in films'. The latter is based on a partnership between the brand and the film using the film as a vehicle for promotion, where the role of advertising cannot be seen as an independent medium. It can be regarded as a “non-commercial” presentation of promotional messages (Park and Berger, 2010, p. 429). Per McAllister (1996), film as a medium offers a non-threatening and metaphoric environment for advertising. Brand placement in films is therefore a more covert, implicit form of advertising that does not rely on the same level of careful creation or delivery as brand films. On the contrary, "mediality" is reflected in brand films when the brand film itself becomes a medium in the ways as described above, viz encoding/decoding and in achieving autonomy.

The brand film thus also reflects cultural patterns, artistic trends and power structures of individuals or institutions, brands, and consumers in the development of the advertising industry. As such, the brand film goes far beyond its own significance as an advertising form; it also carries metaphysical positions, values and identities. It constitutes a medium for interaction, communication and regeneration. In this way, the mediality of the brand film is defined in the sense that the brand film maker adds reflections on the living world and social intentions to the content, and the viewer understands the cultural, artistic and social implications of a particular brand through watching the brand film. This informative interaction between the creator of the brand film and the viewer through the brand film is the core of understanding the mediality of the brand film.

2.3.4 The brand film as demonstration of abstract core values and creation of emotional experience

Finally, I argue that brand films demonstrate the abstract core values of the brand, i.e. the fundamental beliefs that a brand asserts and distributes. They

do so by triggering emotions and creating emotional experience through the film, rather than presenting the experience of using the product or service or their concrete value and impact, as is more commonly seen in other advertisement forms such as ‘advertising film’. As I will show in this thesis, identification with core values enables the audience to be emotionally connected with the brand, and this connection could be extended to the product. A research study found that emotional connection with a brand is achieved when the brand can demonstrate that it is aligned with the customer's motivations and can fulfil the customer's unconscious desires (Magids, Zorfas and Leemon, 2015). Brand films also use taglines to summarize the brand’s core values to explain what the advertisement is really promoting, rather than just being a ‘straight ball’ to sell a product.

Furthermore, brand films typically promote core values by raising social and cultural issues in order to generate social engagement and attract the attention of specific social groups. I will argue that brand films facilitate the gathering, communication, and interpersonal identification of such people who use similar products in a social setting. The film brings together the creation of a community, a group of people who embrace the brand. The core values of a brand conveyed in a brand film can even provoke debate, as it can lead to deviations in certain identity orientations. The discussion, approval or disapproval from the viewer can lead to greater attention and generate social engagement.

An example of an advertisement which demonstrates a brand’s core value is *1984*, an advertisement for Apple released in December 1983, directed by Ridley Scott (at the time famous for directing *Alien*, 1979 and *Blade Runner*, 1982.). The advertisement shows a woman dressed as a track and field athlete. She runs in from a distance, holding a hammer, and smashes it against a large screen representing an anti-utopian figure. The woman’s presence represents the launch of Apple’s Macintosh.

I argue that the *1984* advertisement demonstrates Apple's core values in its use of metaphors to present characters and events, rather than introducing who and what they are. In contrast to previous examples of advertising films, the product that Apple wanted to promote – their Macintosh laptop – was never shown in the film. Rather, the advertisement uses metaphors to replace the product with a character (the woman), expressing similarities about the change and meaning that the arrival of the product will bring to consumers. The film ends with the words 'you'll see why 1984 won't be like 1984' as a sentence which summarises the core value of the whole story, the launching of the Macintosh as a suggestion of the end of IBM's dominance of the computer industry.

Nevertheless, I argue that the 1984 advertisement is not a brand film, notwithstanding the film promotes Apple's core values as a revolutionary company. A brand film usually aims to communicate the values and identity of the brand *as a whole*, rather than just promoting a specific product. This is not to say that the 1984 advertisement was ineffective or insignificant in terms of establishing the Macintosh brand; rather, I do not define it as a brand film.

In other words, a brand film is not a promotion for a newly landed product or service. It is a promotion for a brand's idea and core values. It is not intended to have a temporary promotional effect, such as by featuring a new product, but rather for the long-term impact of the brand. The basic purpose of brand film is the same as other forms of advertising content mentioned by above scholars, which is to build brand awareness, engage the audiences and influence customer purchasing. However, in brand films there is a higher level of core purpose, such as to address what is the purpose of the brand in this world and what do they want to change?

An example of a brand film that more accurately reflects a brand's more comprehensive core values is *The Bridge* (SunTrust and StrawberryFrog,

2019). This is a film for the SunTrust Foundation, a non-profit organization which supports children with autism, helping and guiding families to achieve financial security and a healthy lifestyle. The tagline at the end of the film reads ‘for families living with autism, connecting is hope’, thus pointing to ‘hope’ as a feeling and as a connection being one of the core values about the brand. With their target audience being the families of children with autism, the purpose is to convey the collective mindset of "connecting is hope" to that target audience group. The film’s behavioral suggestions are aimed at the families of autistic children, and whose purpose is to guide them to act accordingly: making connections. It offers suggestions for turning that behaviour into something concrete, by connecting with their organization. This specific direction or method of using more abstract concepts ultimately leads people to understand their brand and enables the audience to establish a connection with the brand on their own. A brand film thus does not have the description of a specific product, but is more about the shaping and communication of a collective thinking. As can be seen, the core value of brand film building is a kind of collective awareness, a broader understanding and image from the brand that emotionally leads the audience to feel and identify with its core values.

The tagline is an important element that helps the brand film to summarise its abstract core values. As I have shown here and will also argue in my thesis, brand films usually rely on a tagline at the end to reveal the relevance of the film to the brand. Its purpose is to induce the audience to identify with a certain idea, rather than become knowledgeable about the function of a certain product. Without the tagline, the film is just a mini-film. When the content of the story and the final slogan are combined for interpretation, the brand film acquires its communication significance.

Finally, a brand film creates an emotional experience that gives the viewer a more lasting and continuous interaction with the brand. A brand film should enable the audience to recognise the brand and connect with it on a deeper

level. Although emotional marketing has now replaced material marketing as a common marketing tool in advertising, the use of emotion is often based on the advertisement's story or its product. In contrast, I argue that the emotional experience of brand films comes from the overall shaping of the brand, rather than from the product. The unique feature of 'brand film' is its audiovisual experience for emotion, and thereby its influence on the behaviour of the viewer.

Characters, storylines, and other narrative components can be used as the narrative brand material in a brand film, but the narrative itself cannot be used. Brand films are essentially an audiovisual medium, and every person who watches one is actually doing so to showcase their own creative endeavours about the narrative rather than those of the brand film's makers.

Specifically, in this thesis, I argue that the brand film's communication of emotion is the audience's evocations of experience or emotions through their personal perception, feelings and understanding. The process of communicating and shaping emotions in this way gives the audience a continuous experience. It is not simply the delivery of a certain emotion, but the manipulation of the emotion by the viewer's personal ideology. In this thesis, I argue that this communication process allows the viewer to feel the interaction between emotions and personal thinking, and this interaction addresses the viewer's values and perceptions of the world as a whole.

Evoking emotions can be seen as a strategy for creating brand films and an answer to the question of 'how to create experience in brand films'. For example, stories are constructed by creating and reconstructing life situations to evoke and pursue authentic desires and life experiences. Another example is the representation of a political issue through storytelling in order to stimulate the audience's awareness of specific political issue and thinking of their political stand.

This position also clarifies how the brand film should be located within the existing literature. Branded entertainment explains the general movement through which brands enter entertainment forms and become integrated with story. Film branding explains how films themselves can gain brand status through identity, experience and consumer engagement. The brand film sits between these two discussions, but it is not identical with either of them. It is a branded filmic text in which the brand's values are communicated through story, audio-visual form and emotional experience. This is why the later chapters examine the selected films through close reading, practitioner interviews and reception study, rather than treating them only as examples of product placement, advertising film, or film brands.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

3.1 Theoretical and methodological orientation

This chapter explains how the thesis investigates the central research question: How do brand films construct emotional experiences and shape viewers' perceptions of the brand? The research design is qualitative and interpretivist. It treats emotional experience and brand perception as phenomena that are interpreted and articulated by brand film makers and viewers in situated ways, rather than as fixed states that can be measured independently of context. On this basis, the thesis brings together three qualitative studies: close readings of three brand films (Study 1), interviews with brand film professionals (Study 2), and a reception study based on an online focus group discussion of the same three films (Study 3). Sections 3.2.1-3.2.3 set out the design of each study in turn, while Section 3.3 explains how their findings are integrated and how questions of reflexivity and research ethics are addressed.

3.1.1 Qualitative interpretivist approach

The thesis adopts a qualitative, interpretivist approach to the study of emotional experience and brand perception in brand films. Qualitative approaches are often underpinned by an interpretivist (or constructivist) paradigm that treats reality as socially constructed, multiple and changing rather than fixed and singular (Glesne, 1999, pp. 4-5). This is consistent with the concerns of the present project. The research asks how emotional experiences of brand films, and the perceptions of brands that accompany

them, are articulated by particular makers and viewers in particular contexts. I therefore seek data that capture how participants themselves describe, interpret and give value to their experiences of brand films, rather than attempting to measure emotion as an abstract variable detached from meaning.

From an interpretivist perspective, reality is not taken as a single, stable entity that can be observed from outside, but as something that is understood through people's descriptions, evaluations and practices. This perspective underpins all three studies. In Study 1, the close readings treat brand films as complex multimodal texts whose meanings can be interpreted through detailed attention to colour and lighting, camera and framing, and editing and sound. In Studies 2 and 3, qualitative methods such as semi-structured interviews and focus-group discussion allow open-ended questions and in-depth accounts, so that practitioners and viewers can articulate their own interpretations, reactions and evaluations rather than choosing from predefined response categories. In Study 2, semi-structured interviews with practitioners elicit their own accounts of how they define brand films, how they design emotional experience, and how they relate it to brand concepts and marketing practice. In Study 3, the focus group reception study investigates how ordinary viewers describe and appraise their emotional responses to the same three brand films, and how they connect those responses to their perceptions of the brand, when they talk together in an online setting.

A qualitative approach also allows the research design to remain flexible and responsive. Open-ended questions and in-depth discussions are used in Studies 2 and 3 so that participants can introduce topics and distinctions that might not have been anticipated in advance. In the analysis, coding is guided by the research questions and the theoretical framework but remains open to themes and formulations that emerge from the data. This combination of theoretically informed and inductive analysis is consistent with the aim of developing a nuanced understanding of how emotional experience in brand

films is constructed, how it is linked in discourse to brand values and identities, and how it shapes viewers' perceptions of the brand across textual, professional and audience perspectives.

3.1.2 Emotional and marketing theories as analytical lenses

The analysis of emotional experience in this thesis is informed by a set of psychological and marketing theories that provide conceptual lenses for reading films and interpreting participants' views. As discussed in the literature review, work in psychology has described emotions as involving both evaluative and bodily dimensions. Two-factor and appraisal theories of emotion emphasise the role of cognitive evaluation in generating feelings: individuals assess situations in relation to their own goals, values and beliefs, and emotions arise from these appraisals. Embodied accounts stress that emotions also involve bodily sensations and sensory experiences, while work on emotional intelligence examines how emotions relate to subsequent attitudes and behaviours.

In this thesis, these theories are not used to measure emotional states directly but to frame how emotional experience is understood methodologically. In the close readings of Study 1, they support attention to how films structure viewers' evaluations of situations and characters, and how colour, framing, gesture and other audio-visual cues are organised to invite particular emotional responses. The analyses consider how scenes present threats, care, responsibility or exclusion, and how these appraisals are likely to be linked to feelings such as sympathy, anxiety or warmth, which in turn are connected, implicitly or explicitly, to perceptions of the brand.

In the reception study of Study 3, appraisal theory is drawn on more explicitly through the use of Affect and appraisal coding. Participants' talk is analysed in

terms of what situations or elements they evaluate, how they position these in relation to their own concerns and values, which feelings they attach to these evaluations, and how they say these feelings influence their attitudes towards the brand. This allows the study to move beyond listing emotion words towards examining the evaluative logic that underpins viewers' emotional responses and brand perceptions. The focus group is not used to gather physiological data, but embodied perspectives inform attention to the bodily metaphors and sensory descriptions that participants use when they explain how the films affected them.

Finally, research in marketing and consumer studies on emotional and experiential marketing provides a broader context for the thesis. This work argues that emotional experience and brand-consumer relationships are central to contemporary branding strategies, and that consumers do not make decisions purely on rational, functional grounds. These debates help to justify the decision to focus on emotional experience and perceptions of the brand, rather than on traditional indicators such as recall or purchase intention, and they inform the questions posed to practitioners in Study 2 about how they understand "success" in brand films. In the methodology chapter, however, these theories are used primarily to clarify the assumptions about emotion, perception and behaviour that underlie the analytical choices made in Studies 1-3, while their substantive content is discussed in more detail in the literature review.

3.2 Research Methods

3.2.1 Study 1: Close readings of brand films

3.2.1.1 Selection of films

Film	Length	Director	Year	Country	Brand
The Man on the moon	2:00 mins	Kim Gehrig	2015	UK	John Lewis
My Dad is a Liar	3:17 mins	Unknown	2015	Thailand	MetLife
The Bridge	1:34 mins	Jakob Strom	2018	US	SunTrust

For Study 1, I conduct close readings of three brand films in order to develop an initial, theory-informed account of emotional experience in brand films based on repeated study of a focused corpus of texts. The selected films meet several criteria. Each film is recognisable as a brand film rather than a short commercial, in the sense that it presents a coherent narrative and communicates brand values primarily through story and character rather than through explicit product display. The films give sustained attention to emotional experience, for example through scenes of family relations, care or social connection, which are widely used in emotional advertising to evoke "warm" feelings of love, belonging and friendship (Aaker and Bruzzone, 1981, cited in Cartwright et al., 2016). Through this close work with individual films, I examine their multimodal components in depth in order to clarify the significance of particular formal choices and their likely effects on audiences.

I also seek variation across brands and sectors so that the analysis does not depend on the style of a single company or industry. The three films are widely accessible through online platforms, which means they can be seen by large audiences and can also be shown again in the reception study. Publicly available information such as viewing figures, click-through data where available, and qualitative comments provides contextual theoretical data about how these films have circulated and how viewers have responded to them, complementing what can be inferred from the films themselves.

In this study, the close readings have three roles. They offer a detailed map of the formal strategies that these brand films use to invite particular emotions, with a specific focus on the elements that solicit emotions and on how those elements work individually and collectively to construct an overall emotional experience. They allow me to treat the films as a form of theoretical data about how emotion and branding are already being combined in contemporary practice. They also generate focused questions for the later interview and reception studies by highlighting specific patterns that need to be discussed with practitioners and audiences, and by establishing a theoretical departure point from which the subsequent empirical studies can test, refine or complicate the initial insights into how brand films affect viewers' emotional responses and perceptions of the brand.

3.2.1.2 Analytical framework: colour and lighting; camera and framing; editing and sound

The close readings are organised around three interrelated dimensions of audio-visual form: colour and lighting; camera and framing; and editing and sound. This framework draws on multimodal film analysis but is adapted to the short, emotionally focused structure of brand films. It is informed in particular by Bateman and Schmidt's (2012) multimodal film analysis framework, which applies multimodal discourse analysis to film texts by combining insights from systemic functional linguistics, discourse linguistics and film semiotics in order to annotate, describe and analyse discourses composed of complex modalities. This combination provides practical tools for keeping the analysis systematic while leaving room to attend to the particularities of each film.

Bateman and Schmidt's framework treats the film scene as an abstract unit of film discourse and incorporates aspects of systemic functional linguistic theory, especially Martin's work on discourse structure, into a formal model of

film. Their account of cinematic semiosis emphasises that filmic signs have meaning only within particular contexts and that the semiotic resources of film are organised within a social semiotic hierarchy (Bateman and Schmidt, 2012, pp. 57–68, 87–114, 149–190). In the close readings, I draw on this perspective to treat audio-visual choices not as isolated techniques but as elements within broader patterns of discourse organisation. Following Bordwell's distinction between explicit and implicit meaning in film (1989, pp. 8-9), the framework is used to describe the explicit meanings that are directly presented while also attending to how patterns of form suggest more implicit attitudes, values and evaluations. In this sense, colour and lighting, camera and framing, and editing and sound are treated as concrete entry points into the wider visual, auditory, narrative and spatial modalities described by Bateman and Schmidt (2012), while keeping the focus on those aspects that are most directly involved in constructing emotional experience.

The first dimension, colour and lighting, concerns the overall palette, saturation and contrasts between light and dark across and within scenes. I examine how shifts in colour and light mark emotional transitions, separate different narrative spaces, or associate particular moods with particular locations or characters. This attention to palette and illumination follows the broader multimodal concern with symbolic resources at the level of visual composition.

The second dimension, camera and framing, concerns shot scale, angle, movement and the spatial relationships between figures. I analyse how choices such as close-ups or long shots, high or low angles, and static or moving camera positions guide attention and help to construct intimacy, distance, power or vulnerability between characters, and between characters and viewers. Here, the scene-based approach to discourse structure proposed by Bateman and Schmidt (2012) supports an analysis of how camera work and framing choices contribute to the organisation of the film's unfolding discourse rather than functioning as isolated stylistic devices.

The third dimension, editing and sound, covers the temporal organisation of images and the design of the soundtrack. I consider the pace and rhythm of cutting, the use of montage and repetition, and the ways in which music, ambient sound, dialogue and voice-over interact with the images. This dimension makes it possible to describe how emotional crescendos, pauses and shifts are produced through the coordination of visual and auditory cues. In this way, editing and sound are treated as part of a multimodal discourse structure that connects explicit narrative progression with more implicit patterns of affect, helping to link the explicit and implicit meanings of the films' brand messages.

3.2.1.3 Procedure of close reading and note-taking

In practical terms, the close readings proceed through several stages. I begin by watching each film once without taking notes in order to experience it as a whole. I then watch each film several more times to gain a more precise sense of its narrative and emotional movement and to attend to details that may not be apparent on a single viewing. This practice of repeated viewing and slow looking is consistent with recommendations for close visual analysis, which emphasise returning to the same material, often with still images, to support careful observation and reflection (Rose, 2016; McGraw-Hill Film Viewer's Guide).

After gaining an overview, I divided each film into key sequences organised around significant emotional moments and make frame grabs for selected stills. These stills become reference points for more fine-grained analysis and allow me to consider individual frames in relation to their place within the unfolding discourse of the film. For each sequence, I take detailed notes on plot developments, character relations, performance and emotional impact, and I organise these notes under the three analytical dimensions of colour and lighting, camera and framing, and editing and sound. In these notes I

describe the specific formal choices that appear in the sequence and comment on how they seem to contribute to the feelings invited by the film and to the presentation of the brand. As the viewings and note-taking progress, I repeatedly review and refine the notes, relating local observations to the broader emotional trajectory of each film and to the brand context. This iterative procedure reflects the emphasis in multimodal film analysis on building up an empirical record of concrete details before moving to more interpretative claims about meaning (Bateman and Schmidt, 2012).

The notes are kept in a structured format so that observations can later be compared across the three films. Taken together, they form a small multimodal corpus of brand film texts that can be systematically described and analysed. This structure allows patterns to be traced both within each dimension and across dimensions, for example when a particular combination of colour contrast, close framing and musical motif appears at similar narrative points. The resulting corpus provides the empirical basis for identifying themes within and across the films, as discussed in section 3.2.1.4.

3.2.1.4 Deriving themes from close readings

Using the corpus of observations and notes described in section 3.2.1.3, I then undertake a thematic analysis of the close readings. Following Braun and Clarke, thematic analysis is understood as a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns within data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). In this study, themes are treated as patterned meanings that are relevant to the research questions, rather than as simple labels for topics. The aim is to draw out recurrent ways in which the formal strategies identified in the close readings construct emotional experience and illustrate brand values.

The process begins with systematic coding of the notes and analytic tables produced for each film. I re-read these materials with a focus on segments that speak to emotional experience and to viewers' possible judgements about

the brand. Where similar formulations or observations recur across different sequences or across films, I group them together as candidate codes so that the same or similar ideas are captured in a consistent way. Codes are attached both to descriptions of formal devices (for example, particular uses of colour contrast, framing or sound) and to comments on the emotional or evaluative effects that these devices appear to support. In this way, the coding links specific audio-visual choices to more general interpretative claims about how the films may solicit particular feelings and perspectives.

From this coded material, I develop potential themes by organising related codes into broader clusters. For example, codes that refer to the portrayal of family bonds, everyday care or sacrifice may cluster into a theme concerned with intimacy or familial responsibility; codes that refer to social participation or community events may cluster into a theme of social engagement; and codes that concern the representation of marginalised or special-needs groups, such as the autistic child in the third film, may cluster into a theme centred on social inclusion and care for vulnerable groups. These examples illustrate how themes in this study are constructed as patterned relationships between formal strategies, emotional cues and brand values. Codes that do not clearly belong to any theme at a given stage are temporarily set aside in a “miscellaneous” group so that potentially important but less frequent patterns are not lost but can be reconsidered in later rounds of review.

Once provisional themes have been developed, I review them against the coded material and the full close-reading corpus, refining their boundaries and checking that each theme is coherent internally and distinct from others. I then write short analytic memos for each theme. These memos summarise the relevant formal features, indicate the sequences in which the theme appears, and relate the theme explicitly to the research questions and to the broader concern with emotional experience and brand values. The themes are not treated as fixed results at this point. They function as working hypotheses that guide the design of the interview schedule in Study 2 and provide points of

comparison when analysing audience responses in Study 3. In this way, the close readings generate both film-specific interpretations and a set of more general themes that structure the subsequent stages of the research.

3.2.2 Study 2: Interviews with brand film professionals

3.2.2.1 Sampling and recruitment

Study 2 uses interviews with brand film professionals to extend the close readings by bringing in practitioners' own accounts of how emotional experience in brand films is created and evaluated in practice. The interviewees are practitioners working in fields associated with brand films who have experience in either the production or the strategic development of brand-related audiovisual content.

Nineteen practitioners took part in this study. To avoid repeating the participant-by-participant account given in Chapter 5, this methodology chapter summarises the sample only in relation to recruitment and data collection. Eighteen contributions were collected through synchronous interviews and one contribution was collected through an email exchange. The synchronous interviews included twelve Zoom interviews, five face-to-face interviews and one telephone interview. Sixteen contributions were conducted in Chinese and three in English. The sample included seventeen Chinese practitioners and two British practitioners, with twelve male and seven female participants. Participants' professional experience ranged from one to twenty years. These details clarify the scope of the data rather than functioning as findings about the industry.

Participants were selected because their work placed them in contact with brand-related audiovisual production or planning. Their roles included creative planning, producing, directing, screenwriting, editing, digital marketing,

marketing planning, digital communications and short-video creation. Chapter 5 discusses these roles in more detail when presenting the interview findings. Here, the point is methodological: the sample was purposive rather than representative, and it was intended to bring together practitioners who could speak about the making, planning or evaluation of brand films from their own professional positions.

Summary of practitioner interview sample and data collection:

Category	**Details**
Total participants	19 practitioners
Data collection form	18 synchronous interviews and 1 email exchange
Interview format	12 Zoom interviews, 5 face-to-face interviews, 1 telephone interview, 1 email exchange
Interview language	16 Chinese-language contributions and 3 English-language contributions
Nationality	17 Chinese practitioners and 2 British practitioners
Gender	12 male participants and 7 female participants
Professional seniority	1 to 20 years of experience
Professional areas	creative planning, producing, directing, screenwriting, editing, digital marketing, marketing planning, digital communications and short-video creation

The composition of the sample also sets a boundary for the study. Since the sample is weighted towards production-facing roles, the interviews provide particularly useful evidence about how emotional intentions are translated into scripts, images, sound, performance and editing. They provide less direct evidence about earlier strategic decisions, such as market segmentation, client-side brand positioning or long-term campaign planning.

Recruitment drew on publicly available information about practitioners who were active in brand-film-related work. Potential participants were identified

through professional portfolios, company websites, industry listings and existing networks connected to brand films. Invitations were then sent by email or professional messaging, outlining the aims of the research, the focus on emotional experience in brand films, and what participation would involve. To ensure that participants were appropriately placed to speak about brand films, only those whose current or recent work included substantial involvement in brand-related audiovisual projects were invited to take part.

In line with the ethical procedures outlined later in this chapter, participants' professional identities were verified and informed consent was obtained before data collection. This involved asking interviewees to confirm their role and organisation, sending an information sheet and consent form in advance, and obtaining signed or electronic consent. Recruitment materials emphasised that participation was voluntary, that participants were free to decline any question, and that their contributions would be used for research purposes only. The practitioner interviews were treated as non-anonymous because the research design links professional views to named roles and industry experience. The following subsection explains how the interviews and the email exchange were designed and conducted in practice.

3.2.2.2 Interview design and conduct

In Study 2, I designed the interviews as semi-structured, in-depth conversations in order to elicit practitioners' own views of how brand films are made to create emotional experience. A semi-structured format keeps discussion aligned with pre-defined topics, while still allowing participants to introduce issues that matter to them and to develop their answers through examples and stories. Longhurst argues that semi-structured interviews are appropriate when the researcher seeks rich, experiential accounts without imposing a rigid sequence of questions (2003, pp. 143-156). Barriball and While similarly note that semi-structured interviews support open-ended responses to flexible questions and can therefore generate unanticipated insights across different participants (1994).

The interview schedule was organised around three broad subject areas. These were derived from the overall research questions and from the close reading study, so that practitioners were invited to comment on issues already identified in Study 1 without being required to agree with them. The questions were not asked in a fixed order in every interview. Instead, they were adapted to the participant's professional role and to the direction of the conversation. Yu CHEN's interview provides one example of this procedure. It began with an introduction to the project and consent conditions, moved to his current role, and then addressed the definition of brand films, product appearance, standards of success, social and humanistic themes, ethical considerations, emotional authenticity, emotional arcs and the possible short- or long-term effects of brand films on audiences.

Examples of questions used in the practitioner interviews:

Interview subject	**Examples of questions asked**
Subject 1: Definition and recognition of brand films	- Can you briefly introduce your current work and professional role? - How would you define a brand film from your professional point of view? - How is a brand film different from other forms of advertising, such as traditional commercials, short videos or online video ads? - If a product appears in the film, can it still be called a brand film?
Subject 2: Experience and behaviour in promoting a brand	- What makes a good or successful brand film from your professional perspective? - How do you communicate a brand's core values through a brand film? - How do you work with briefs, marketing plans or brand strategy teams?

	- What challenges arise when making films for small or less well-known brands? - How do you adapt the film for different audiences? - What ethical or cultural issues would you consider?
Subject 3: Receptive opinions and emotional experience	- Can you describe a brand film that has created a strong emotional response for you? - How do social or humanistic issues in a brand film affect your perception of the brand? - What creative means can make emotion appear authentic? - Do you design emotional arcs in advance? - Do you think the emotional influence of a brand film is short-term or long-term? - Can brand films act as a medium for social or cultural discussion?

The interviews were conducted after the recruitment and consent procedures described in Section 3.2.2.1. Each synchronous interview began with a brief introduction to the project and warm-up questions about the participant's current role, years of experience and typical involvement in brand film projects. The three subject areas then structured the conversation, but the schedule was treated as a flexible guide rather than a fixed script. I adapted the wording and order of questions where necessary, asked follow-up questions to probe for clarification or examples, and encouraged participants to ground their answers in specific cases from their own work.

The one email exchange, with Yuqi LU, was included because it addressed the same three subject areas and provided a written practitioner response to the research questions. It is therefore analysed with the interview data but is identified as an email exchange rather than a synchronous interview. The

absence of real-time follow-up means that this contribution is less dialogic than the interviews, but it remains relevant because it provides a practitioner account of emotional experience, authenticity and brand-film production.

A complete duration log was not retained for every interview, so interview length is not used as an analytic variable in this thesis. Where precise metadata were retained, Yu CHEN's Zoom interview lasted 41 minutes and 47 seconds. This example indicates the approximate scale of the semi-structured conversations, but I do not claim that every interview had the same duration. This limitation is acknowledged here so that the data collection process is not overstated.

Across the interviews, this combination of open-ended questions and flexible conduct made it possible for practitioners to articulate subjective views, tacit knowledge and everyday problems that are not easily captured in more structured instruments. The resulting material, including interview recordings, written interview records, field notes and the email exchange, was then prepared for thematic analysis.

3.2.2.3 Thematic analysis of interview data

The interview material was analysed using thematic analysis, understood as a flexible method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns of meaning within qualitative datasets (Braun and Clarke, 2006). In this study, thematic analysis was used to organise practitioners' views into a set of recurrent themes that address the research question of how brand films construct emotional experiences and shape viewers' perceptions of the brand. The analysis treated the interviews as subjective, situated accounts rather than as neutral descriptions of industry practice, and sought to make these subjectivities analytically productive.

After data collection, the synchronous interviews were prepared as written records from recordings or interview notes, while the email exchange was retained in its original written form. I read and reread these materials in order to become familiar with each contribution and to retain a sense of each participant's account as a whole rather than as a set of isolated answers. During this process, I made preliminary notes on recurring topics, characteristic phrases, and points of tension or disagreement between participants. These notes provided an initial map of how practitioners talked about brand films, emotion and branding, and helped to ensure that later coding remained grounded in the language and emphases of the participants.

Initial coding proceeded in a largely deductive way, guided by the research question and by the three subjects that structured the interview schedule: (1) definitions and recognition of brand films; (2) experience and behaviour in promoting a brand; and (3) receptive opinions on watching brand films from the perspectives of audiences and practitioners. I drew on prior theoretical work and on the findings from the close readings when identifying codes related to, for example, how interviewees defined brand films, which elements they saw as central to communicating brand values, and which techniques they associated with eliciting emotional responses. At the same time, the coding remained open to expressions and distinctions that came directly from practitioners' thoughts, so that terms and priorities that did not appear in the literature could enter the analysis.

Each written record was coded, with segments of text assigned one or more codes that captured their main contribution to the research question. Codes included, for instance, descriptions of what makes a good brand film, reflections on the role of storytelling versus other forms, comments on collaboration with marketing departments, and examples of ethical or practical constraints such as budget and platform requirements. Codes were also applied to passages where practitioners described how they understood audiences' emotional needs and everyday concerns, and to passages that

linked particular production choices, for example the design of a film setting or the use of social topics, to desired emotional effects.

After this coding stage, I examined how codes clustered across participants and across the three interview subjects. Related codes were brought together to form candidate themes through repeated comparison between coded extracts, whole interview records and the research question. At this methodological stage, the aim was not to present findings in detail, but to explain how the analytic categories were produced. The final practitioner themes identified through this process are named in Section 3.3.1 because they are needed for the cross-study diagram, while their meanings, sub-themes and supporting quotations are presented in Chapter 5.

These candidate themes were reviewed against the full dataset to check that they captured patterned meanings rather than isolated comments, and to ensure that each theme was internally coherent and distinct from the others. Where necessary, themes were split, merged or redefined so that they better reflected both the interview content and the aims of the study. During this stage, I moved repeatedly between coded extracts, whole interview records and the evolving thematic structure in order to retain the connection between individual practitioners' accounts and the more abstract categories used in the analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Once the thematic structure had stabilised, each theme was named and described in analytic terms, and representative extracts were selected for later discussion. The five practitioner themes form the core of the findings presented in Chapter 5. In Chapter 3, they are mentioned only to show how Study 2 is integrated with the close readings and the reception study, while Chapter 5 carries the detailed analysis of practitioners' views.

3.2.3 Study 3: Reception study

3.2.3.1 Selection of film and participants

Study 3 examines how viewers experience the emotional and value dimensions of brand films by inviting a small group of participants to view and discuss three selected films in a focus group setting. The study returns to the same three brand films used in the close readings and in the interview prompts: *The Man on the Moon*, *My Dad is a Liar*, and *The Bridge*.

These films were chosen because they are all recognisable as brand films rather than short commercials. Each presents a coherent narrative in which brand values are communicated through story and character, while explicit references to products remain limited. At the same time, the three films differ in brand, sector, and cultural context. Taken together, they stage emotional situations that involve care for older people, economic pressure and parent-child relations, and the treatment and social inclusion of autistic children. This combination allows the reception study to explore both what audiences share across different kinds of brand story and where their responses diverge when the social issue or target group changes. Using the same corpus of films as in Studies 1 also makes it possible to triangulate textual analysis, practitioner perspectives, and audience responses around a common set of examples.

For the reception element, I convened a single focus group of six participants to watch and discuss the three brand films. In reporting the findings, participants are anonymised and numbered P1-P6. All participants were ordinary viewers rather than brand or advertising professionals, and their ages ranged from approximately 25 to 35 years. The group was largely composed of Chinese participants, most of whom had studied or lived in the UK. This profile was suitable for a small qualitative study of online viewers with cross-cultural media experience, but it also means that the sample represents a narrow demographic rather than a broad audience population.

Participants were recruited through purposive and convenience sampling. Some were contacted through my own network of friends and acquaintances, while others responded to short recruitment messages posted on social media, in online group chats and through university communication channels. They were contacted through the same communication channels through which they were recruited and were given information about the study, the three-film screening, the online discussion format and the voluntary nature of participation. These routes were used to reach potential viewers who were familiar with online video content in everyday life but did not work professionally in brand communication. The demographic narrowness of the focus group is important for the interpretation of the reception findings. Because most participants were Chinese viewers with experience of studying or living in the UK, they had some familiarity with British cultural references and with the John Lewis Christmas advertising context. This may have made *The Man on the Moon* easier for them to understand as a Christmas-related, care-oriented brand film. Their familiarity with the Thai MetLife advertising context was only partial, and they were not familiar with the US SunTrust context or with the autism campaign background associated with *The Bridge*. The group also included participants with personal or family experience relevant to care, parental sacrifice, ageing, loneliness or autism. These experiences may have intensified certain responses, especially to stories about family responsibility and vulnerable groups. The findings should therefore be read as the responses of a small, culturally specific and relatively young group, not as a representative account of how all viewers would receive the cultural references in these films.

3.2.3.2 Online screening procedure and data collection

The reception study was organised as a single online focus group built around a collective screening of the three selected brand films. The session took place in March 2025 on Zoom, lasted approximately 90 minutes, and was conducted in English. This design kept the viewing situation close to the way brand films usually circulate online, while still allowing a guided group discussion that could explore participants' emotional responses in depth. The

films were accessed through their public online releases so that participants encountered the same versions that circulate more broadly online.

At the start of the session, participants received a brief reminder of the aims of the wider project and of this particular study. I summarised the focus on emotional experience and brand perception, explained the format of the session, and restated the ethical assurances already given in the information sheet. Participants were reminded that their contributions would be anonymised, that notes would be taken during the session, and that they were free to decline to answer any question. Only after confirming consent did the formal screening and discussion begin.

Before the screening, I introduced the three brand films with basic factual information such as title, brand, and year of release. This short introduction-oriented participants to the texts without pre-empting their interpretations. The three films were then shown in full in the following order: *The Man on the Moon*, *My Dad is a Liar* and *The Bridge*. The films were screened consecutively within the same online session so that participants could hold them in mind together during the subsequent comparative discussion. The screening itself was not interrupted by questions or commentary, in order to preserve a continuous viewing experience.

Immediately after the screening, the focus group discussion formed the main phase of data collection. The discussion was structured around three linked areas that had already guided the close readings and interview study: initial perception, comparative analysis, and overall reflections. In the initial perception phase, participants described their immediate emotional reactions, noted specific scenes, and commented on formal elements such as storytelling, visual aesthetics, music and sound. In the comparative phase, they contrasted the three films, identified recurring strategies for eliciting emotion, and commented on differences in effectiveness and audience

appeal. In the final reflective phase, participants considered how the films influenced their understanding of each brand and how far they expected these emotional experiences to shape any later attitudes or behaviours. Follow-up questions were used when participants gave brief or unclear answers.

The entire discussion was audio-recorded and later transcribed. In the transcript, participants were anonymised as P1-P6, and all identifying details were removed. These transcribed responses, together with brief field notes on the dynamics of the group interaction, formed the primary dataset for the reception study. They provided rich qualitative material on how ordinary viewers articulate their feelings, values and social concerns when they encounter brand films in an online viewing context. The next subsection explains how these data were analysed, including the use of affect and appraisal coding.

3.2.3.3 Analysis of audience responses (including Affect / appraisal coding)

The audience responses generated in the focus group were analysed using a combination of thematic analysis and affective coding informed by Martin and White's (2005) Appraisal Theory, with an emphasis on its subsystem of Affect. The aim was to identify patterned ways in which participants described their emotional experience of the brand films and to relate these descriptions to their appraisals of characters, situations and brands. The analysis focuses on recorded meanings, themes and evaluative patterns, rather than on detailed linguistic interaction. The analysis treated the focus group as a site where feelings and evaluations are produced through talk, rather than as a neutral report of internal states.

After the online session, the recording was transcribed in full and all identifying details were removed. I read and reread the transcript to gain familiarity with each participant's contributions and with the interactional flow of the group. During this phase I made preliminary annotations on sections

where participants explicitly named emotions, described changes in attitude towards the brands, referred to cultural references, or compared the films' treatment of care, family responsibility and social inclusion. These notes provided the basis for coding the reception data.

The first layer of coding followed a thematic logic similar to that used in Studies 1 and 2. I marked segments where participants discussed narrative affinity, values and social messages, symbolic or metaphorical elements, and the durability of their emotional reactions after viewing. Related segments were grouped and refined into four main themes that structure the reception chapter. These themes are affinity of stories, values and social messaging, symbolism and metaphor, and emotional recollection. This thematic layer captures what participants discussed most when they tried to explain why the films moved them or failed to do so.

Alongside this thematic coding, I applied a more fine-grained affective coding based on the Affect subsystem within Appraisal Theory. In this framework, emotions are understood as the result of an evaluation of events in relation to a person's goals, beliefs and values; the analysis therefore attends both to emotion terms and to the evaluative logic that underpins them. For each emotionally salient note, I identified the situation or element being evaluated, such as a specific scene, a character's action, or a social issue raised by the film. I then examined how the participant positioned this situation in relation to their own concerns and values, noting whether it was construed as favourable or unfavourable, comforting or troubling, close to their own experience or distant from it. Finally, I noted the feelings linked to this evaluation, for example warmth, guilt, anxiety, admiration or disappointment.

This affective coding captured both textual focus and stance. When participants responded strongly to *My Dad is a Liar*, the notes were coded in relation to the film's representation of ordinary sacrifice, parental responsibility

and everyday economic pressure. When participants described a film as too staged or not realistic enough, the coding recorded a negative evaluation of authenticity together with cooler or more resistant feelings towards the brand. In the case of *The Bridge*, comments on autism, difference and inclusion were coded not only for the emotions they expressed, such as empathy or discomfort, but also for the values they invoked concerning social care and acceptance. The lack of prior familiarity with the US SunTrust context and the autism campaign background was also treated as relevant to reception, because unfamiliar cultural references could affect how participants interpreted the film's intended social meaning.

The appraisal perspective was also used to attend to how participants connected emotional experience to later attitudes and possible behaviours. Drawing on the broader appraisal theory literature discussed earlier in the chapter, I treated statements about future support, attention or avoidance as indications of how emotional experience might translate into intentions or dispositions towards the brand. For example, when participants suggested that films dealing with ageing or social responsibility made them "more likely to support" a brand, or that weak storytelling "faded" their connection, these were coded as links between Affect, value appraisal and potential behaviour. Because the focus group was small, these statements are not treated as evidence of actual future behaviour. They are treated as viewers' own accounts of how emotion might influence their brand perception.

After both thematic and affective coding, I reviewed the coding across the transcript to check for consistency and to refine the relationship between the two layers. The four main themes were then described in terms that integrated their formal focus, for example, story affinity, values, metaphors, recollection, with the affective patterns identified through the appraisal-based coding. In the reception chapter, these themes are presented as audience-centred accounts of how emotional experience in brand films is shaped by narrative familiarity, social and moral values, symbolic framing and the persistence of feeling over time. They provide a basis for comparison with the close readings

and practitioner interviews, allowing convergences and divergences between textual strategies, professional intentions and audience appraisals to be traced.

3.3 Cross-study integration, reflexivity and ethics

3.3.1 Triangulating close readings, interviews and reception study

This thesis brings together three complementary studies in order to address the research question of how brand films construct emotional experiences and shape viewers' perceptions of the brand. Study 1 offers a theoretically informed close reading of three brand films, treating emotional experience as something that can be inferred from the organisation of colour and lighting, camera and framing, and editing and sound, in relation to core values such as care, social engagement and identity. Study 2 gathers subjective practitioner views through semi-structured interviews, a telephone interview, face-to-face interviews and one email exchange with brand film professionals, focusing on how they describe the design of emotional experience and the communication of brand values in their own work. Study 3 adds an empirical reception study, analysing how a small group of ordinary viewers talk about their emotional responses to the same films and about the brands they represent. Together, these studies position emotional experience at the intersection of textual form, professional practice and audience response.

The relationship between the three studies is both sequential and analytical. The literature review and methodology first establish a theoretical framework for emotional experience and for the key characteristics that define brand films, including core values, social engagement and social and cultural identity. Study 1 then uses multimodal close reading to examine how these

characteristics are realised in the selected films through specific audio-visual and narrative strategies. The initial patterns identified there, for example the use of emotionally charged storytelling, the raising of social and human issues, and the construction of brand-related values, inform the design of the interview schedule in Study 2. In turn, the reception study in Study 3 returns to the same corpus of films and to themes emerging from both the close readings and interviews, so that audience discussions can be analysed in direct relation to textual strategies and practitioner accounts.

Triangulation operates most clearly at the level of themes, but Chapter 3 uses those themes as a map rather than as a findings section. Study 2 generated five practitioner themes: value identity, interactivity, realism, creating associations and triggering emotional needs. Study 3 generated four reception themes: affinity of stories, values and social messaging, symbolism and metaphor, and emotional recollection. These theme names are included here because they show how the two empirical studies are later read together. Their detailed interpretation remains in Chapters 5 and 6.

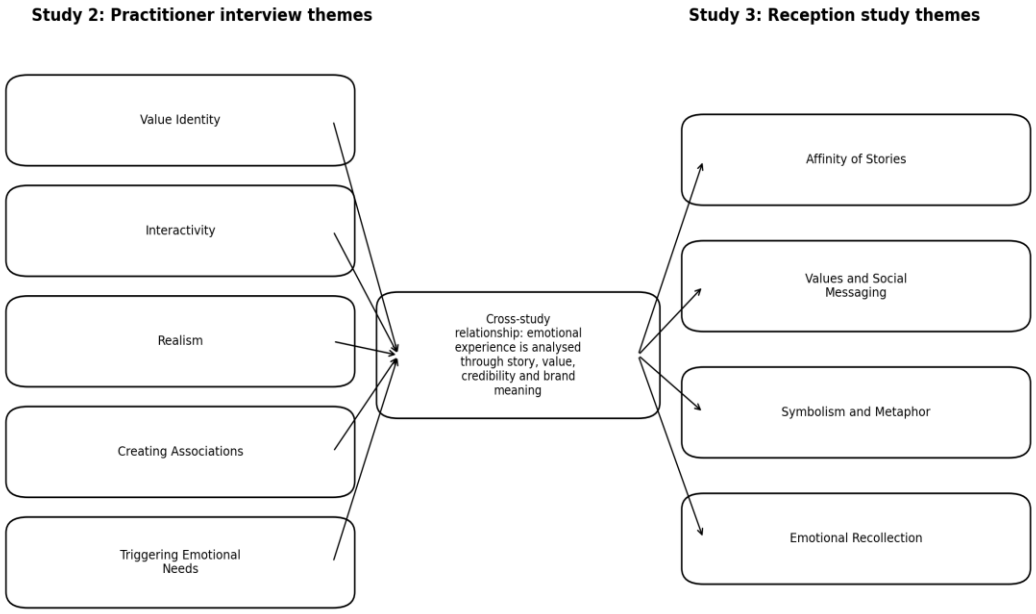


Figure 3.1. Relationship between themes developed across the interview study and the reception study.

Figure 3.1 shows how the themes developed in Study 2 and Study 3 are positioned in relation to one another. It shows that the practitioner themes and audience themes are organised around a shared analytic concern: the movement from emotional construction to brand perception. The lines of relation shown in the diagram therefore indicate questions for cross-study reading, such as whether practitioner accounts of value, realism, association or emotional need are recognised, resisted or reformulated in audience responses.

Triangulation also works across different positions in the brand-film process. Study 1 treats brand film makers in a broad sense by reading emotional experience out of the arrangement of audio-visual elements in the films. Study 2 addresses makers directly as professionals, asking how they define brand films, how they design emotional arcs and how they relate these to brand concepts. Study 3 shifts to ordinary viewers, examining how they appraise characters, situations and brands when they discuss their feelings about the films. This three-point structure is not used to force agreement. It is used to keep differences visible. Where a strategy inferred from close reading is affirmed by both practitioners and viewers, the triangulation strengthens the claim that this is a recurring way in which brand films work emotionally. Where practitioners and viewers describe experiences that do not fully match the textual analysis, these gaps are treated as analytically productive, indicating limits to brand film makers' control, the role of context in reception, or possible tensions between intended and received meanings.

In methodological terms, triangulation in this thesis therefore aims at integration rather than fusion. The three studies retain their distinct methods and forms of data, but their findings are repeatedly read across one another in the later analytical chapters. Agreement across studies supports stronger claims about recurring emotional strategies in brand films, while disagreement and partial overlap draw attention to blind points, constraints and alternative readings that any account of the affective power of brand films must

acknowledge. This cross-study integration underpins the overall argument by showing how emotional experience in brand films simultaneously function as attributes of the film form, a goal of creative practice and a contingent outcome of audience appraisal.

3.4 Researcher position and reflexivity

As a doctoral researcher in Theatre, Film, Television and Interactive Media focusing on emotional experience in brand films, I approach this project from an academic position that is informed by my experience as a viewer of brand films, rather than from a practice-based or industry position. I am both a viewer of brand films and an analyst of them. This dual position shapes how I formulate my research questions, how I read the films in Study 1, and how I interpret the verbal accounts offered by practitioners and audiences in Studies 2 and 3. My own understanding of brand films as online, emotionally driven narratives that communicate core values through story and audio-visual design underpins the definition adopted in the thesis and informed the recruitment of texts and participants.

Reflexivity is important because the project uses a definition of brand films and a set of theoretical lenses that I have actively chosen. For example, in the interview and reception studies I use pre-existing concepts such as emotional experience, core values, and social or humanistic issues as starting points for thematic analysis. These choices risk narrowing the field of vision if they are treated as fixed categories. I respond to this by combining deductive coding, where I test how far my predefined concerns appear in the data, with inductive attention to themes that emerge from participants' own language. Codes that initially fall outside my framework are kept, rather than discarded, and sometimes lead to refinement of the thematic structure. In this sense, reflexivity is built into the analytic procedure: I treat my concepts as working

tools that can be adjusted in response to the empirical material, rather than as a set of assumptions that the data must confirm.

My position relative to participants also requires explicit reflection. In Study 2, I approached practitioners as an academic researcher rather than as a commissioning client or production collaborator. This position may have encouraged participants to explain their practice in reflective terms, but it may also have shaped how they framed commercially sensitive material. To reduce the risk that my own preferences might steer their responses, I used open-ended prompts, emphasised that there were no correct answers, and invited disagreement with my definitions or examples. During analysis, I treated moments of disagreement or practical qualification as important data about the limits of a purely textual account of brand films.

In Study 3, my position as moderator of the focus group and interpreter of audience responses raised further reflexive questions. The participants were recruited through my own contacts and online calls, and were broadly within the 23–35 age range. Most were Chinese participants with experience of studying or living in the UK, and the discussion was conducted in English. This proximity offers advantages for rapport and for shared understanding of some online viewing practices, but it also risked making certain emotional reactions appear self-evident. It may also have shaped the way participants interpreted cultural references. For instance, familiarity with UK life could support recognition of John Lewis Christmas advertising, while limited familiarity with Thai and US advertising contexts could reduce sensitivity to culturally specific references in My Dad is a Liar and The Bridge. I therefore treated cultural familiarity and unfamiliarity as part of reception, rather than as background noise.

Across all three studies, reflexivity takes the form of moving back and forth between my own position and the positions of others, and between theoretical expectations and empirical findings. The triangle between close readings (theoretical and text-based), practitioner interviews (subjective professional

perspectives) and the reception study (audience-based empirical data) is therefore not only a strategy of triangulation, but also a way of checking my own interpretive authority. Where the three strands converge, I gain greater confidence that a particular account of emotional experience and brand values has empirical and theoretical support. Where they diverge, I treat that divergence as a prompt to re-examine my assumptions, to clarify the limits of each method, and to acknowledge that my own position as researcher is one perspective among several in an ongoing conversation about how brand films work emotionally.

3.5 Ethical considerations and limitations

This thesis involves three kinds of material: publicly available brand films, non-anonymous interviews and an email exchange with practitioners, and an anonymised focus group with ordinary viewers. Ethical considerations therefore centre on work with human participants and on the handling of personal data, while the close reading study of films does not itself raise human-subject issues. The project has received ethics clearance from the School of Arts and Creative Technologies at the University of York and follows the procedures set out in the Research Ethics Clearance Form, the Participant Information Sheet and the Consent Form.

For the interview study, ethical safeguards focus on voluntary informed consent, the non-anonymous treatment of data, and data protection. Practitioners received a Participant Information Sheet explaining the aims of the project, what participation involved, the topics to be discussed, and how the data would be used. They were informed that the interviews would focus on professional experiences of creating or conceptualising brand films and that sensitive or distressing personal topics were not expected. Before any interview or email exchange took place, each participant was asked to confirm consent and to acknowledge that their professional role and organisation

could be identified in the thesis. The choice to treat practitioner data non-anonymously is justified by the research design, because the analysis depends on linking practitioners' accounts to their professional roles and to specific areas of brand film practice.

The synchronous interviews were conducted online, by telephone or face-to-face, according to participants' availability. The one email exchange was treated as written data. When interviews were held online, a University of York Zoom account was used where possible so that storage and processing fell under an institutional contractual agreement for secure and compliant data handling. All personal data were stored in accordance with university guidance, using secure university systems where appropriate. Participants did not receive payments or travel reimbursements, which helped to ensure that participation was not influenced by financial inducements.

The reception study follows similar ethical principles, but with different decisions about anonymity. Focus group participants were ordinary viewers, recruited through personal contacts, social media, online group chats and university communication channels. They were not being consulted in their professional capacity. They belong approximately to the 23–35 age group and were approached as everyday online video viewers rather than as specialists in branding or advertising. They were informed about the project, the online screening format and the discussion topics, and they provided informed consent to take part in a Zoom focus group. In the analysis and reporting of the focus group, participants are anonymised and identified only by codes P1-P6, and all potentially identifying details in the transcript are removed. This approach recognises that, unlike industry professionals, they are not seeking public recognition for their views and might be more vulnerable to unwanted exposure if quoted by name. The session discusses emotional responses to fictional narratives about issues such as ageing, economic pressure and autism in family life. These are not in themselves highly sensitive topics, but they can touch on personal experiences.

Participants are therefore reminded that they can decline to answer any question, steer the conversation away from material they find uncomfortable, or withdraw from the study without having to provide a reason.

The focus group discussed emotional responses to fictional narratives about issues such as ageing, economic pressure, parental sacrifice, loneliness and autism in family life. These topics are not in themselves highly sensitive, but they can touch on personal or family experiences. Participants were therefore reminded that they could decline to answer any question, avoid material they found uncomfortable, or withdraw from the study without having to provide a reason. Across both studies involving human participants, the project avoided deception and covert recording. Participants were told in advance what the research was about, what kinds of questions would be asked, and how their data would be handled.

These ethical arrangements introduce several limitations that shape how the findings can be interpreted. The decision to treat practitioner interviews non-anonymously enables a richer linkage between statements and professional roles, but it may also encourage some participants to speak cautiously, especially about commercial pressures, client relationships or internal disagreements, because they know that their names and organisations may be cited. This possibility of self-censorship needs to be kept in mind when interpreting the interviews as subjective but public accounts.

The reception study has a different limitation. The focus group is small, age-bounded and recruited through the researcher's networks and university-related channels. The group was mostly Chinese, with participants who had studied or lived in the UK. This narrow demographic affects the interpretation of cultural references in the three films. Participants' familiarity with UK life and John Lewis Christmas advertising may have supported their understanding of *The Man on the Moon*, while their partial familiarity with Thai

advertising and lack of familiarity with the US SunTrust or autism campaign context may have limited how they interpreted *My Dad is a Liar* and *The Bridge*. Their own experiences of family care, parental sacrifice, older people, loneliness or autism may also have made particular themes more emotionally available. The study therefore provides insight into how one small and culturally specific group received these films, rather than evidence of general audience reception across countries, generations or cultural backgrounds.

A further limitation concerns the nature of the data used to investigate emotional experience. In Study 1, emotional experience is an interpretative construct inferred from film form, rather than a directly measured psychological response. Studies 2 and 3 then supplement this by drawing on practitioners' narratives and audience talk, but the project as a whole still relies on self-reported and discursive accounts rather than on observational or physiological measures. This is appropriate to the aims and scale of a qualitative doctoral study, but it means that the thesis offers an interpretative, context-specific understanding of how emotional experience is constructed and appraised, rather than a generalisable model of audience emotion across all branding contexts.

Taken together, these ethical considerations and limitations mean that the project prioritises respect for participants, transparency about research aims and procedures, and compliance with institutional and legal requirements for data protection. They also mean that its conclusions about the affective power of brand films are framed as qualitative and context-bound. The findings are offered as a contribution to understanding how emotional experience in brand films is constructed and discussed by particular brand film makers and viewers under particular conditions, rather than as universal claims about all audiences or all brand film practices.

CHAPTER 4

Study 1 - Close Readings of Brand Films and the Construction of Emotional Experience

4.1 Introduction

Chapter 4 examines how brand films construct emotional experience through formal design, and how that designed experience can orient viewers towards particular perceptions of the brand. It addresses the thesis research question at the level of the film text by offering close readings of three selected brand films, focusing on how meaning and feeling are organised through multimodal resources rather than through explicit product messaging.

The analyses concentrate on three interrelated dimensions of film form. Attention to colour and lighting clarifies how tonal contrasts and visual emphasis structure mood and appraisal. Attention to camera and framing clarifies how proximity, access, and alignment shape intimacy, distance, and character-based engagement. Attention to editing and sound clarifies how pacing, transition, and sonic motifs regulate intensity and retrospectively reframe earlier moments. Considered together, these dimensions provide an account of how emotional experience is built as a temporal trajectory, and how brand meaning is embedded within that trajectory.

This chapter is organised as a set of film-specific analyses that trace each film's emotional arc and identify recurring patterns across the corpus. The close readings are interpretive by design. They provide a text-based map of strategies and a set of propositions about how emotion and brand perception

are linked, which are subsequently tested and complicated through the practitioner interviews in Study 2 and the audience reception study in Study 3.

4.2 Close reading of *The Man on the Moon*



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5



Fig. 6



Fig. 7



Fig. 8



Fig. 9

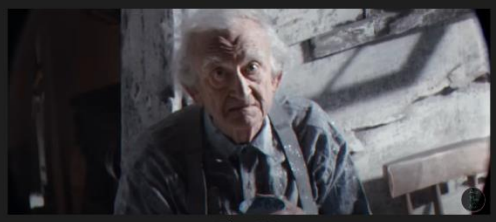


Fig. 10



Fig. 11



Fig. 12



Fig. 13



Fig. 14



Fig. 15



Fig. 16



Fig. 17



Fig. 18



Fig. 19



Fig. 20



Fig. 21



Fig. 22



Fig. 23



Fig. 24



Fig. 25

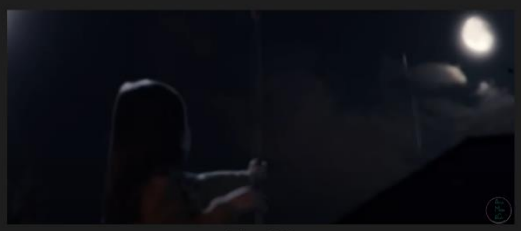


Fig. 26



Fig. 27



Fig. 28



Fig. 29



Fig. 30



Fig. 31



Fig. 32



Fig. 33



Fig. 34



Fig. 35



Fig. 36



Fig. 37



Fig. 38



Fig. 39



Fig. 40



Fig. 41

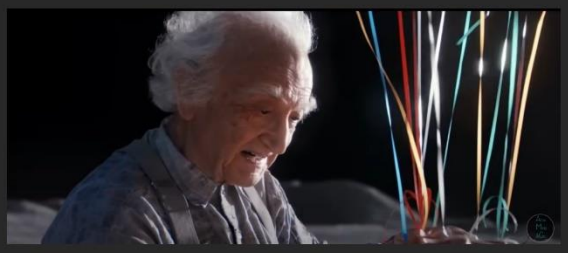


Fig. 42



Fig. 43



Fig. 44



Fig. 45



Fig. 46



Fig. 47



Fig. 48



Fig. 49

4.2.1 Colour and Lighting

4.2.1.1 Saturation and Desaturation: why the image feels warm/cold and near/far

In MoM, the contrast between cool and warm colours constructs the central emotional conflict between loneliness and hope. The cool and warm palettes convey several kinds of information. In terms of time and atmosphere, cool tones indicate the cold winter exterior; blue and white suggest a landscape covered by ice and snow and a strongly cold mood. Warm tones, by contrast, indicate the bright and comfortable atmosphere of the girl's home. In terms of space and depth, cool tones are used for distant or calm spaces and evoke a sense of remoteness and stillness. Warm tones are used for nearby or lively spaces and create a sense of intimacy and activity.

MoM constructs two colour worlds with great saturation difference. The earth scene where the little girl lives has high saturation hue and rich colours, while the moon scenes where the old man lives use almost completely desaturated hue and a single black, white and grey colour. This contrast in saturation guides viewers to perceive two opposing worlds in the film: a warm, lively and loving Earth, and a desolate, lonely Moon. In the interpretation of emotion, the use of high saturation makes the earth scene look warm and happy, while the use of low saturation makes the moon look hesitant and sad. Kress and van Leeuwen describe bright colours as "attractive", while dim colours are "dull", and colours can make different parts more distinct (2006, p. 350).

Specifically, in the little girl's home, the colours with high saturation arouse the positive emotions of the audience and imply the happiness of the family. Bright colours can enhance emotional intensity (Bellantoni 2005). For example, in the Christmas scenes, colourful holiday decorative lights create neon visual effects (fig. 31, fig. 33, fig. 34), which let the audience feel the lively atmosphere of the festival. Neon lights, as a crucial element establishing

the film's tone, are fundamentally a combination of light and colour (Cachia, p.10, 2023). Corradino (2025) describes neon as a fusion of flamboyant colourism and artificially modulated optical characteristics, a quality that not only challenge classical chiaroscuro effects but also presuppose the application of unconventional saturation levels (Corradino, p.46, 2025). Cachia notes that in the article titled “The Lure of Electric Colour: Neon Light in Film”, Benson (2021) states that neon lighting can create a sense of urban, moody drama (Cachia, p.10, 2023). In the scene depicted in Fig. 33, the use of neon lighting serves as a visual and emotional metaphor for distance and detachment. Viewers perceive the domestic interior through the window, where warm Christmas lights and an intimate family atmosphere contrast with the blurred neon-coloured spots (blue, green, and orange light patches) outside. The contrast between the soft golden interior and the cooler-toned artificial neon hues establishes a visual and emotional counterpoint. The window frames appear in deep blue and green hues, accompanied by orange and green neon lights, colours that intensify the sense of melancholy. A similar use of neon light colours is evident in Wong Kar-wai's cinematic works, where within his visual language, deep blue foreshadows approaching melancholy, while green symbolises sorrow (Cachia, p.9, 2023). The blurred neon lights in the foreground of fig 33 symbolically form a barrier: distancing the viewer from the intimacy of the interior while placing them in an external state. This tension of colour enhances a sense of isolation while simultaneously creating a dreamlike voyeuristic effect. The use of neon here serves not merely as decorative framing, but actively disrupts the viewer's sense of belonging, leaving their emotions suspended between disconnection and longing. The neon lights in the foreground create a luminous barrier, separating the viewer (and the old man on the moon) from the warmth of the little girl's home space. Rather than becoming part of the indoor Christmas scene's lighting, the neon lights remain suspended at the threshold, making the family's intimacy seem “out of reach”. This visual strategy resonates with the ‘Neon City’ aesthetics proposed by Cachia (2023), in which the neon light intensifies ‘loneliness, isolation’. By placing the neon lights at the interface of separation, the film visually conveys the impossible direct contact between the old man and the

girl. Corradino's (2025) ‘Neon Gothic’ theory further elaborates on neon's symbolic function: neon lights may symbolically dissolve social belonging; coloured neon lights can express anxiety and confusion in certain contexts, potentially evoking a sense of disorientation (Corradino, p.60, 2025). In a striking contrast, the girl is surrounded by the Christmas tree's warm festive lights, symbolising familial bonds, community belonging and a joyful atmosphere. The contrast between the cool-toned neon and the warm indoor lighting underscores the scene's core emotion: the old man's loneliness and melancholy at being unable to enter the little girl's warm world, evoking the viewer's emotions of pity and sympathy. In fig 46, the warm neon lights surrounding the girl, seen through the telescope, soften the atmosphere, shifting the tone from distance to intimacy. In the earlier scene (fig 33), the neon light serves as a barrier; whereas here (fig 46) it becomes an intermediating presence, its red and orange hues conveying connection, warmth, and surprise. The neon light aligns with the little girl's gesture, visually embodying the old man's sudden emotional change: he is no longer alone, as the neon light resonates with the discovery of human contact. This effect corresponds to Cachia's observation that neon lighting, when integrated with narrative, can generate ‘poetic motion’ reflecting the protagonist's emotional state (Cachia, p.27, 2023). For the audience, the outcome is an emotional transition from melancholy to hope, as the neon light reshapes the old man's solitude into a moment of connection. Figures 33 and 46 demonstrate how subtle changes in neon lighting can convey emotional significance. The same visual element expresses opposing emotional states: in the first scene (fig. 33), the neon light serves as an obstacle and a source of isolation; in the second scene (fig. 46), it acts as a bridge and a symbol of intimacy. For the viewer, this transformation of colour evokes increasing compassion for the old man's loneliness while simultaneously offering the cathartic relief of connection.

The application of rich warm tones and highly saturated hues evokes feelings of joy and warmth in the audience, allowing them to share in the festive experience presented within the film. This is particularly reflected in the

Christmas scenes, which are dominated by primary colours of red, orange, and yellow, displayed with exceptional saturation. The little girl's hair is lit by fairy lights hanging on the staircase, appearing as a bright ginger-red (fig 31). Her dress is a creamy white, standing out distinctly against the surrounding figures' predominantly dark clothing and the warm tones of the background, further emphasising her youthful vitality (fig 35). Their clothing forms a contrast between deep red and bright white-toned areas.

The young girl's home features a blend of warm hues, characterised by expansive warm yellows transitioning into brighter orange and golden tones (figs 31, 32, 34). Colour richness is not merely about heightened saturation, but it is the contrast between hues. Figure 31 does not apply increased saturation evenly, instead concentrating it on the warm furnishings against a background of white walls. The warm-toned zone above the staircase, which combines a star-shaped light with golden ribbons and string lights, employs medium-to-high saturation amber, gold, and red hues. This contrasts against the neutral base of the white walls and the dark silhouettes of the figures in the foreground, creating a layered contrast of saturated warm colours - neutral - dark. This colour contrast allows the saturated gold to create an intimate feel within the space, directly conveying emotions of closeness, belonging, and welcome. The layered application of colour enhances the perceived richness of hues and the progression of emotion, making the entire scene appear vivid. Figure 32 shows the little girl wearing a red reindeer antler headband, while Figure 33 shows the Christmas tree with gold, red, and green decorations and golden light strands. The appearance of these classic Christmas colours enhances the festive atmosphere. The foreground window displays out-of-focus soft lighting, creating a neon-like visual effect. In Figure 34, the little girl embraces her family warmly, with numerous people celebrating Christmas visible in the background. A plenty of classic Christmas hues are present, such as adults holding red balloons and children raising golden foil decoration ribbons. In Figure 35, the little girl dances joyfully, with other children playing behind her. Among them are children wearing silver sequinned dresses and

others playing with gold foil decorations. These highly saturated colours make the scene of the Christmas family gathering appear full of love and warmth.

The use of highly saturated colours is particularly evident in the Earth scenes. In MoM, the little girl's home is presented as a soft and intimate space, employing warm, highly saturated hues. Figure 1, the film's opening shot, is a close-up of the girl's face. This shot shows her resting her chin on her hand as she gazes into the distance, her face lit in a warm golden tone. Immediately following, Figure 2 as the second shot reveals the girl's surroundings: a living room in warm amber tones with gentle lighting. The overall warm colour palette of the setting conveys an atmosphere of safety and comfort. When viewed together, figure 1 and figure 2 reveal that although the little girl is in a comfortable and warm environment, her slightly furrowed brow suggests feelings of melancholy and loneliness. The close-up in Figure 1 emphasises these emotions, with the girl's face illuminated by warm light while the surrounding elements are softly blurred. This isolation of the girl from her surroundings draws the viewer's attention to the emotional state evoked by her facial expression. Together, Figures 1 and 2 establish the fundamental emotional tone at the film's outset: the girl exists within a warm environment but feels lonely and disconnected. The girl's isolation is further emphasised in Figure 2, where her lively gaze contrasts sharply with her brother's intense focus on his electronic device. Her expression as she watches him reveals a longing for connection and communication, while her brother remains immersed in his own activity, ignoring her presence. This scene portrays the characterisation of the brother immersed in his own world and the little girl longing for companionship. The contrasting personalities suggest the girl's emotional absence and loneliness. The scenes within the girl's home shown in Figure 1 and Figure 2 use moderate colour saturation, imitating the hues of everyday life. This natural and realistic colour palette allows viewers to experience authenticity. MoM opens with a warm-toned scene, establishing an emotional foundation that feels comforting and familiar to the audience. This serves as the basis for the subsequent contrast with the low-saturation colour palette of the moon scenes.

In the second scene, the telescope becomes a visual bridge between the little girl and the moon. Driven by boredom, the girl begins to play with the telescope by the window (Fig 3). The camera then shifts to the image presented through the telescope, revealing the girl's perspective as she gazes through it (Fig 4). As she observes the moon through the telescope, her facial tones shift from the more saturated golden hues (Fig 1) to a slightly less saturated blue-white palette (Fig. 4, Fig. 5). Notably, in Figure 5, the centre of her face appears blue-white while the sides remain illuminated by the warm yellow glow of the home's interior lighting. This illustrates that although the girl is physically within the warmth of her home, her curiosity drives her to yearn for the moon she observes. The blue-white hue at the centre of the girl's face seems illuminated by moonlight, suggesting the moon's great distance, vastness, and enormity, while also implying that the girl seems to feel the moon's coldness. The lunar setting uses low-saturation blue-greys and whites, creating a distinct contrast with the warm lighting and richer colours of the little girl's surroundings. This evokes the cold and solitary existence on the moon. The intentionally desaturated palette in the moon scene serves a narrative purpose by heightening a sense of unreality. These low-saturation hues convey that the lunar setting is not a physical reality, but rather a fairy tale or metaphor. Based on Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) theory of visual modality, the visual effect in Figure 6 may be understood as intentional “low modality”. They suggest that modality is constructed through “modality markers” such as colour saturation, sharpness, illumination, and detail, which serve to indicate whether an image is interpreted as real or fantasy (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 160). The lunar scene can therefore be seen as the one that is “less than real, ethereal, or ghostly” because it is less saturated in colours (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 159). The visual impression presented in Figure 6 appears unreal, evoking a vintage black-and-white film sequence or an antique photograph. Whilst the low-saturation palette emphasises the scene's unreality, the sense of solitude conveyed to the viewer remains authentically felt. The absence of colour and desaturated palette in the lunar scene construct a low-modality image, evoking the

appearance of vintage black-and-white film or old photographs to convey a sense of unreality. This emotional strategy demonstrates that while the lunar scene is explicitly constructed and fantastical, the loneliness it conveys is experientially authentic. When the little girl saw the old man on the moon, her mouth fell open in surprise (fig 7). The close-up shot of her astonished expression further exaggerated this emotion, leaving the audience equally astonished.

Figure 8 shows the old man's residence as an extremely rudimentary cottage, so small it could barely accommodate one person. The walls are missing planks, appearing unable to block the cold wind and looking as though they might collapse at any moment. The little girl's emotions evolve from curiosity upon seeing the moon (Fig. 5), to astonishment at discovering the old man on the moon (Fig. 7), to excitement at wanting to greet him (Fig. 9), and finally to disappointment upon realising the old man cannot see her (Fig. 11). The film uses four close-up shots to amplify the girl's rapidly shifting emotions, drawing the audience into a corresponding emotional rollercoaster. Simultaneously, alternating shots between the girl's immediate surroundings and the lunar landscape demonstrate the contrast between warm and cool colour palettes, high and low saturation levels. This creates the film's central conflict: the warmth and vitality of the girl's life on Earth versus the loneliness and desolation of the old man's life on the Moon.

The entire lunar scene is intentionally desaturated, presented in a monochrome palette of black, grey, and white. These colours portray the moon as a cold and desolate space, creating a visual metaphor for isolation and solitude. The desaturation of the lunar setting serves as a visual symbol, employing monochromatic hues to represent the old man's emotional deprivation and social isolation. The old man's faded clothing and snow-white skin extend the monochrome scene of the moon, merging the character with the background to signify endless desolation and a sense of emotional homelessness. The desaturated clothing and skin tone metaphorically

represent the old man's state of neglect and lack of existence. This low-saturation palette portrays him as a “transparent man”, who is ignored and disconnected from others. Moreover, reduced saturation conveys weakened emotional intensity and decreased authenticity (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006). Specifically, the faded and monochromatic palette in MoM makes the lunar setting emotionally cold and distant, creating sharp contrast with the warmth and vitality of life on Earth. The desaturation of colour in the moon scene functions as a visual symbol, translating complex emotions of solitude, isolation, and absence into an easily understood visual language. The intentionally reduced colour saturation triggers viewers' recognition of emotional loss, guiding them to feel the old man's loneliness and emotional emptiness, thereby facilitating greater understanding and empathy for his situation.

Figure 1 presents the moon's desolate, colourless landscape in sharp contrast to the distant, narrow Earth figure in the background, symbolising the emotional distance and separation between the old man on the moon and the little girl on Earth. The moon's monochrome palette evokes a sense of emotional poverty, reflecting the old man's isolation. Earth, however, remains vividly coloured in the scene, appearing full of vitality whilst remaining an immense distance from the old man. This subtle contrast in saturation between the moon and Earth, along with the great distance between them, metaphorically represents the emotional connection and bond between the old man and the little girl. Though both are real individuals, they remain inaccessible to one another. In this wide-angle shot of the old man sitting alone on a bench (Fig. 2), the lunar landscape stretches out around him, presenting an endless grey and white space devoid of warmth and vitality. The old man remains motionless against the immense, desolate lunar surface, appearing small and solitary. Moreover, the dark space beyond the grey lunar surface visually conveys a sense of distance that is not merely physical but profoundly emotional.

4.2.1.2 The use of localized light for narrative focus

4.2.1.2.1 Localised Warm Practicals as Attentional Anchors

Localised light organises the visual field through small, nearby light sources, such as star lights, garlands, and table lamps, to create concentrated peaks of brightness within darker surroundings. From a perceptual standpoint, these highly distinctive micro-zones function as anchors for attention, because they hold the viewer's focus where interpersonal warmth and social intimacy are about to reach their peak. This is not merely decorative, but a narrative technique. As Blain Brown observes regarding warm focal light sources in film illumination: “Firelight is warm and glowing, associated in the mind with safety, heat, and protection from nature. It draws people towards it, … It provides a visual focus that prevents one’s attention from wandering.” (Brown, Film and Video Lighting, 3rd ed., 2018, p. 14). In figure 31, figure 32, and figure 34, star lights, light strands, and small table lamps perform the function described by Brown rather than literal fire. These three scenes use localised, warm, high-contrast light to pre-create an intimate feeling and bind the viewer's attention to the impending emotion.

4.2.1.2.2 How lighting focuses the audience's attention and shapes emotional climaxes

In MOM, the distribution of brightness and control of lighting serve as primary strategies for directing attention. For interior scenes, localised lighting applications (star-shaped light strips, fairy lights, small luminaires, figs. 21, 28, 31, 32, 34) create concentrated areas of high brightness within relatively dim environments. The brightest local areas of the image serve as staging points for greetings, touch, or entry. By concentrating action there, the film focuses the effect on the same track with maximum brightness. On the moon scenes, the film uses a single-directional key light to outline the old man's face against a dark background; as the surrounding environment is nearly invisible, the audience more easily notices the subtle changes in his expression during moments of recognition or being touched (figs. 18, 20, 36, 38, 40, 42). This

design aligns with Kress and van Leeuwen's description of visual modalities: their designated "modality markers" include "brightness (from the full presence of light to its absence: blackness)".

Key light creates a localised peak of brightness within the film, automatically drawing the viewer's attention to the intended emotional point. In MOM, lighting design works simultaneously on two levels: within the individual shot and within the spatial environment. Firstly, within a single shot, by placing the highest local brightness (key light/object light) on a character's face, gesture, or key prop, the frame precisely directs attention to the point where emotion occurs (gaze: fig 20, 21, embrace: fig 34, tears: fig 47). Secondly, across different spaces, distinct lighting styles calibrate the audience's perception of “intimacy” and “authenticity”. Specifically, Warm and balanced indoor lighting makes the home feel psychologically accessible and socially inviting, and become a space perceived as both psychologically intimate and physically close. Conversely, the moon's directional primary light, supplemented by minimal lighting, silhouettes the old man against a near-black background, making him and the moon feel distant, inaccessible, and remote. Thirdly, when bright “aperture”, like windows (e.g., the telescope view) appear, the young girl and the old man “meet” within the same beam of light. Through the bright circle (the bright telescope circle, figs. 8, 15, 17, 44, 46, 47, 48), the telescope lens becomes a distinct marker of a meaningful area. The concentrated bright light within the telescope's field of view both resets the focus of the viewer's attention and temporarily heightens the sense of accessibility and reality of the distant world (the Moon), thereby completing the emotional transition from disconnection to connection. The use of this key light not only directs attention within the frame but also presents the viewer with emotional intimacy and a sense of connection across space.

4.2.1.2.3 “Windows of regard”: Lighting as a symbol of spatial separation and emotional connection.

“Windows of regard” means to bright window frames, small patches of light in darkness, highlights, and the sparkle in people’s eyes. In this film, the brightest “small window” consistently frames key emotional gestures, such the girl’s wave positioned front and centre within the bright window shot, making the action appear like a social invitation to the outside world (fig 46). On the moon, the opposite occurs, as the surroundings are almost entirely dark. A single directional light highlights the old man's face or silhouette, drawing our attention solely to his changing expression (fig 18). When the gift lands and the ribbon and wrapping flash with highlights, these small and bright reflections act like markers of “arrival”, signalling that a connection has been established between the little girl and the old man (fig 41, 42) . Finally, the tiny highlight in the old man's eye compresses the “moment of being seen” into an extremely small but most easily noticed point of light (fig. 47). Thus, these “glowing little windows” separate the two worlds through light and shadow, while simultaneously aligning and connecting emotions through the same brightest landing point.

4.2.1.2.4 The intensity and direction of light influence the sense of intimacy or distance within a space.

Lunar scenes are characterised by lower overall brightness and directional light sources, creating deep shadows across faces and isolating figures against the black sky of the background. Conversely, indoor settings are defined by higher fill light levels and multiple warm light sources, which soften shadow edges and enhance the sense of social space. Kress and van Leeuwen explicitly categorise brightness and illumination as modal cues: “brightness (from the full presence of light to its absence - darkness)” and “illumination”, alongside colour saturation (Kress and van Leeuwen, p. 160). Indeed, the moon's side lighting against a black background function like an emotional spotlight. It emphasises solitude while suppressing contextual information (see fig. 1: Side-lit moon close-up; fig. 2: Moon's back-lit edge against space) In contrast, the girl's table lamp light and small colourful lights

distribute visibility across her face, fabrics, and decorations, suggesting an intimate, welcoming atmosphere. In Figure 1, light illuminates from the upper left of the old man, forming a solitary shadow as he sits upon the bench. Moreover, beyond the directional white light upon the lunar surface, the universe remains profoundly dark. The white light reveals the desolation of the moon's surface, while the universe symbolises the old man being shrouded by endless darkness. He appears trapped within a cage of the dark universe, unable to connect with the outside world. In Figure 2, the contrast between bright and dim lighting isolates the old man from the lunar background, highlighting his solitude and fragility.

Because these small and warm light sources concentrate brightness and colour within a narrow area, they effectively capture the audience's attention at the moment of heightened emotion and shorten the emotional distance through shared lighting. It is precisely in these aspects of lighting usage that MOM forms an effective framework for reinforcing emotion.

4.2.2 Camera and Framing: who we look at, and how close

4.2.2.1 Scale and framing: from distance to intimacy

Figure 1 presents a scene centred on a wide shot of vastness and emptiness. The old man is positioned in the lower left corner, his figure appearing insignificant against the sharp contrast of the expansive lunar surface and the universe. This contrast deliberately reduces the visual presence of the old man, conveying his fragility, solitude, and vulnerability to being ignored. The desolate lunar surface and universe surrounding him visually embody his state of emotional emptiness. This framing emphasises the visual symbol of isolation through the character's isolation. The overall framing is horizontal, reinforcing the sense of emptiness and loneliness. The primary purpose of the wide shot in Figure 1 is to serve as an establishing shot, providing the audience with the background of the moon scene. By placing the old man

within a desolate, expansive lunar landscape, this shot uses spatial relationships and framing to create emotional distance (Eisenstein, 1949), conveying the old man's state of deep emotional isolation. Figure 2 uses a medium-long shot with a smaller visual frame than Figure 1, allowing viewers to observe the old man's emotions at closer distance. Compared to the distant visual effect of Figure 1, Figure 2 brings the viewer closer to the old man's image, enabling a clearer recognition of this character. Although the old man's figure in Figure 2 still blends tonally with the lunar surroundings, the use of a closer framing gives the character a more humanised presence. By showcasing the old man's facial expressions and body posture, the viewer genuinely perceives him as a real, living person, making it easier to understand and emotionally connect with him.

MOM delivers a distinctive emotional experience by tightening the framing and increasing the visual density. Firstly, within the expansive lunar view, the old man appears small relative to the boundless moon and universe space, thus presenting loneliness initially as a physical reality rather than a feeling (fig 19). Secondly, as the camera shifts to medium and close-up shots, the hands and facial expressions become distinctly recognisable, allowing us to directly observe actions and emotions. This transition draws the audience from a distant perspective towards an intimate connection with the character (fig. 42, 46) Moreover, in extreme close-ups, subtle shifts, such as a glint in the eye (fig. 47), a hint of wetness (fig. 48), or a hollow gaze (fig. 20), all interpretable as inner emotions. They draw the audience into the character's experience, rather than merely eliciting distant sympathy. As the camera advances, the subject gradually enlarges while the background gradually recedes, shifting the density of information from constructing the story's world to facial detail. Correspondingly, the audience's position transforms from distant observer to participant sharing the story's moment. As the shot scale tightens, the framing shifts as well. Moon shots leave large areas of empty space around the figure (fig 15,17,19), while earth shots are fuller and more layered, with people, objects, and lights filling foreground, mid-ground, and background (fig 34,35). This move from empty to full frames changes how the

spaces feel: the moon reads as lonely and distant, the earth as open and welcoming, giving the viewer more places for attention—and for contact—to settle.

4.2.2.2 POV–Reverse–Reaction: Perceptual Alignment and Mutual Recognition.

In MOM, the POV – reverse - reaction chain turns a look into a meeting. A POV shot places the camera where the character stands and points it along the same line of sight, so the spectator is shown the scene as that character would see it (Branigan, p. 6). The following reverse is built on the established eyeline: we are shown the person or object that fits the direction of the initial look, now from an external vantage, which confirms that the look has found its target (Branigan, pp. 6–7). The reaction then shows how the first character responds, completing the exchange on screen. To be more specific, the advert firstlt establishes the look as the old man raises his telescope (fig 44), then locates its object with an insert of the eyepiece in which the Earth appears bright inside the eyepiece circle (fig 45). The shot cuts to a reverse angle—the girl standing at the illuminated window, waving towards the old man—confirms that the old man's look lands on a responsive other (fig 46). The final reaction shot captures the old man's response, his expression gradually softening into happy tears (fig 47). These four steps collectively guide the audience from curiosity (sharing the character's access) to the confirmation of encounter (the look is received), ultimately reaching emotional closure (recognition and relief). It is precisely through this progression that the exchange appears to be a genuine connection rather than two isolated glances. Using Murray Smith's framework, this sequence builds what he calls a "structure of sympathy": "recognition, alignment, and allegiance comprise a structure of sympathy, where that term is distinguished from empathy precisely in virtue of its acentrality" (Smith, p. 42). Put simply, the POV shot gives us alignment by letting us see from the old man's position and follow his look. The reverse shot confirms recognition by showing that his look reaches someone who answers it; because the girl's gesture is welcoming, it also encourages allegiance—a favourable view of his situation. The reaction shot

then shows the emotional result on the old man's face, completing the move from looking to being seen and acknowledged. For Smith, sympathising with a protagonist does not mean reproducing the character's current feelings. It means understanding who the character is and the situation they are in, forming a more-or-less favourable judgement of them, and responding emotionally in ways that fit that evaluation and that context (Smith, pp. 42–43). In short, the POV–reverse–reaction sequence leads the viewer from curiosity to a confirmed meeting, and from quick pity to a considered, context-aware sympathy that ends in relief and warmth.

4.2.2.3 Centre vs. Edge Placement: from marginality to welcome

The advert repeatedly shifts the subject from edge-weighted lunar framing to more central domestic framing to steer feeling. In the wide Moon scenes (fig 17,19), the old man is held near the frame edge with large open surround, which reads as precarious and solitary. In the home scenes (fig 31, 33, 46), figures are more centrally placed within stable frames, so the viewer gets feelings of affirmation and welcome. This is consistent with Kress and van Leeuwen's account of centre–margin composition: elements placed at the centre function as the "nucleus of the information," while margins are subordinate—hence centre placement carries priority of meaning (2nd ed., p. 196). Arnheim likewise describes the "accent on the middle," arguing that central placement conveys rest, stability, and importance across visual arts (1982, esp. p. 73). Studies show that viewers' eyes are naturally drawn to the middle of the screen at the start of looking. So a subject placed near the centre is noticed faster and held more easily (Bindemann, 2010, Vision Research, 50(23), 2577–2587). Taken together, in MOM, the move from edge to centre maps a felt shift from marginality to social availability, and primes the brand to be read as attentive and welcoming at the moments of response.

4.2.2.4 Threshold framing: windows, doorways, and apertures as emotional bridges

In MOM, key shots place the little girl or the old man at a clear threshold—in a window frame, within the telescope's circular edge, or against the hard boundary of light and lunar black. These thresholds work as framing devices. When the framing is strong—window mullions, the telescope rim, or wide bands of empty space—the figures and spaces are kept apart and are read as separate. When the framing softens or drops away, the image reads as joined and open to contact. This follows Kress and van Leeuwen's argument of framing as a compositional resource that signals whether elements "belong together" or "do not belong together," (see Reading Images, 2nd ed., p. 177) realised through lines, apertures, and spacing. In MOM, we can see strong framing whenever a firm boundary encloses the view or the figure is held against a hard edge. The telescope insert has a closed circular rim with bright centre and dark surround, so the look feels sealed off and separate (fig 45). The lunar close-up also reads as strong framing: a hard key light cuts the face from near-black, creating a sharp edge that isolates him (fig 18). The wide lunar shot adds another kind of strong framing through large empty bands of black and grey around a small figure, which pushes the scene toward distance and solitude (fig 19). By contrast, framing softens at the lit window: the edge is still there, but warm spill and an outward gesture make the boundary feel permeable and inviting (fig 46). In the home staircase shots, framing largely drops away—layers of people, garlands and lights fill the image—so the space reads as open and socially available (fig 31, 33, 34, 35). The reaction close-up goes further: the face fills the frame and there is no inner rim or bar, keeping us with felt response rather than separation (fig 42). Finally, when the gift and its ribbons move across the edge into view, the threshold is actively crossed. The motion of gifts weakens the boundary and marks contact/arrival (fig 42, 43).

Film style gives these boundaries emotional weight. The frame selects only a small part of the visible world, and the offscreen area beyond a window or aperture sets up expectations and guides attention, as Bordwell and

Thompson explain (chapter 5, p.186). Devices such as masks and inset views, for example a circular view, concentrate the gaze and create a clear sense of looking through into another place. In MOM, the telescope circle functions as a motivated mask. We look through a defined opening toward the moon, so separation remains visible, while the shot also makes the moment of contact clear within the story.

Ecological optics helps explain why these boundaries carry emotion. Gibson notes that occluding edge (p. 72), the junction where one surface obscures another, determines which parts become visible as perspective or movement shifts; at the edge, the hidden becomes visible (pp. 183-185). In the home scene where the girl steps into the window frame and waves, her movement crosses that edge, which rendering the private interior space visibly present to the outside world (fig 46). While in the moon scene, the gift breaks the black surround as it moves from darkness into light; that edge-crossing turns absence into presence and distance into contact (fig 37,39, 41). The film recreates this transformation at the threshold: once the edge is crossed, the previously invisible becomes something that can be shared.

These thresholds shape how the scenes feel. When the boundary is firm, the spaces stay apart and the mood leans toward loneliness. the shot through the eyepiece presents a bright circular aperture in a black surround, making the gaze appear enclosed (fig 6). This is strong framing, so the Moon-side and the home-side are read as separate. The wide lunar shot holds the man against a hard edge with large empty surround, which also reads as separation (fig 17). Later, the same kinds of boundaries begin to carry empathy once a look or an object crosses them. The cut from the man lifting the telescope to the girl at the lit window turns a one-sided look into an answered one (fig 44, 46). The boundary feels more open in fig 46, because light spills and the gesture faces outward, so the two sides now read as connected. When the parcel enters the framed view, the edge is crossed, so contact is established even though the two settings remain distinct (fig 37, 41,

43). This interpretation aligns with Kress and van Leeuwen's conception of framing as a cue to connection and disconnection. Bordwell and Thompson note that any shot shows only part of the world, and that what remains offscreen creates expectations until it appears (pp. 186-187). In MOM, the shot through the eyepiece implies that someone is out there, but we cannot see them yet (fig 44). The reverse shot then shows the girl at the lit window, which answers the question "who is he looking at?" and gives a small sense of relief (fig 46). Across these steps, the film uses the offscreen to onscreen shift to build anticipation and then provide a clear answer to it.

4.2.3 Editing and Sound: when emotion rises and settles

4.2.3.1 Build–Hold–Release: How Cuts and Music Time the Feelings

Build–Hold–Release is a useful way to describe how the timing of cuts and music modulates emotional intensity in the film. In the John Lewis MOM story, the editing and Aurora's music work together to build tension step by step, momentarily hold it at a peak, and finally release it for emotional fulfilment. This rhythmic shaping of time and emotion is quite deliberate.

In MOM, key scenes illustrate this build–hold–release pattern. The film opens with gentle, long shots that establish the little girl and the old man isolated on the moon. The cross cuts between the girl peering through her telescope and the lonely man on the moon immediately creates a tension, which is a longing for connection (fig 3-11). The cross cuts build tension by juxtaposing two worlds in single timeline. The music at this stage is soft and sparse, led by Aurora's vocal, which set a mood of wonder and empathy. The restrained editing (longer takes, fewer cuts) and the soft vocals work together to build up feeling gradually, inviting the audience to share the girl's curiosity and the old man's loneliness. Each new shot of the man on the moon gazing back toward the earth quietly raises questions in the viewers' mind: Will the girl reach him? How will he respond? This gentle movement between hold and release

pushes the audience to anticipate an emotional breakthrough in the following sequence.

The pace accelerates once the little girl resolves to send a message to the old man on the moon. As her plan unfolds, the editing rhythm tightens, where the shots change more rapidly as she scribbles notes, ties them to a bow and arrow, and later switches to paper airplanes when initial attempts fail. The film conveys the girl's attempt and failure in a concise montage (fig 22-28). This quick cutting rhythm communicates the girl's growing determination and hope. At the same time, the music goes in intensity, with additional instruments and a fuller vocalization from Aurora enrich the soundtrack, it subtly raises the emotional stakes. The quick cuts make the moments feel urgent and the goal seem be almost within reach, effectively building tension toward the film's emotional climax. We see alternating shots of the balloon-lifted gift floating up (fig 39) and the old man looking at the gift (fig 40), which creates an editing pattern that enlarge the viewers' anticipation with each cut. The viewers' attention shifts between cause (the girl's effort) and effect (the old man awaiting a sign), tightening the emotional connection between the two characters across space.

At the climax, when the old man finally receives the girl's gift, the film enters the "hold" phase of the emotional arc. Notably, the editing slows down at this crucial moment. The camera holds on the man's astonished, trembling face as he opens the gift, a new telescope (fig 42). This close-up is a prime example of how a pause or prolonged shot can heighten emotion. The relative lack of cutting at this stage and the hush with Aurora's vocals momentarily soften give the audience a breath to feel the significance of the moment.

The old man's eyes well up with tears as he points the telescope toward Earth (fig 47). The film holds this shot, effectively suspending time. This allows the audience to empathise with the old man's feeling, experiencing his emotions

gradually building to a climax as the audience await the suspenseful ending. In that suspended moment, the editing and imagery work together, each enriching the other, makes the emotional meaning appears naturally throughout the visuals.

Finally comes the release. The little girl looks through her telescope and, for the first time, makes eye contact with the old man as he looks toward her (fig 47, 48). At this point, the emotional tension that had been carefully built up now gently dissolves. The editing shows this release by easing the pace: we see a medium shot of the man on the moon sitting amidst his balloons (fig 44), followed by a medium shot of the girl glowing with happiness down on the earth (fig 46). The film uses slower fades and a calm pace instead of rapid cuts to let the feeling of comfort set in, which bring the emotion directly to the audience. In the final scene, the film cuts to a wide shot with the simple message “Show someone they’re loved this Christmas” (fig 49). This tagline appears just as the music fades, allowing the audience to absorb the emotional resolution. The few seconds of stillness and silence after the climax in the ending scene give viewers a moment to reflect on what they have emotionally experienced. The emotions have been released as the lonely man is no longer lonely, and the kindness of the little girl bridges two worlds.

Through this carefully timed build–hold–release progression, MOM elicits an emotional experience that viewers automatically associate with John Lewis’s brand values. The heartwarming closing scene is not only a narrative conclusion but also a brand statement. By ending on the “Show someone they’re loved” message, the film explicitly links the emotional journey to the brand’s values of caring. The warm emotions we feel for the little girl and the old man extend to how we feel about the John Lewis brand. This is precisely the strategy of emotional brand storytelling: music and editing evoke empathy, and that positive feeling transfers onto the brand itself. In academic terms, the film’s affective cues work as a side route to influence brand perception, bypassing heavy rational messages and instead embedding the brand in a

moment of human warmth. It is a hugely effective approach, where campaigns built on pure emotion are more effective than rational ones in driving audience engagement and loyalty. In the case of John Lewis, this annual Christmas ad with sentimental storytelling has measurably shaped public perceptions of the brand. People are no longer seen the John Lewis brand merely as a retailer, but the brand is now associated with generosity and emotional connection. The John Lewis Christmas film series position the brand as offering Christmas warmness and acts of kindness. The editing and sound design of MOM thus do more than tell a touching story. They create an emotional experience that aligns perfectly with the brand's identity. By timing the audience's feelings to rise and settle at just the right moments, the filmmakers ensure that viewers not only experience profound emotions, but also feeling positively about the John Lewis brand itself.

4.2.3.2. Voice & Meaning: AURORA's cover as the emotional frame

Aurora's haunting cover of Oasis's "Half the World Away" serves not just as background music but as an emotional narrator, its musical qualities precisely aligning with each key moment of MOM's story. The organization behind this brand film seeks a song that can capture the story "light and shade, warmth and pathos". Aurora's soft and airy voice, slow tempo, gradual build-up, and simple background music help support the film's emotional changes—from a sense of wonder, to sadness, and finally to warmth and hope.

In the opening sequence, the little girl first spotted the man on the moon through her telescope. At this moment of quiet wonder and empathy, Aurora's voice enters softly, breathy and intimate. This delicate vocal timbre is crucial because breathy vocals are widely associated with tenderness and intimacy (p. 175), immediately establishing an emotional bond between the audience and the character. Aurora's interpretation of the song possesses a childlike purity, reflecting the innocence and fearlessness of the little girl's character. At the little girl's first sighting, the music is simple: piano with voice. This thin texture matches the man's isolation on the moon. Aurora sings softly and

breathily, which gives a light, distant sound. The slow pace leaves time for the viewer to read the little girl's surprise. The lyrics of this song reinforce the narrative theme: the line ‘you're half the world away’ — in contrast to the little girl gazing in astonishment at the distant figure — literally articulates the emotional and physical distance between them. John Lewis has elevated the use of lyrics to underpin the narrative of its Christmas story to a level surpassing that of other brands. In these early moments, the gentle music and Aurora’s haunting timbre underscore a tone of loneliness and hope, inviting the audience to share the girl’s compassionate wonder.

The middle section of the film turns melancholic as the girl desperately tries to reach her new friend. In one scene, she sends a message via a homemade bow-and-arrow, but the letter falls short and never reaches the moon (fig 26, 27). Aurora’s interpretation of the song deepens in sympathy with this setback. As the girl's attempts fail, the music remains subdued and wistful. Here the music quiets down. The volume falls a little and no extra instruments enter. This restraint matches the hush of disappointment. Aurora’s voice stays clear but delicate; the breathy tone suggests a soft sigh and a feeling of longing. This is the shade and pathos that the song was meant to capture. The pacing may slow or pause briefly as the girl’s letter drifts away (fig 27), creating a musical breath that matches the visual beat of her hope fading. In these moments, the film relies on the song’s emotional nuance to makes such scenes truly tearjerking. The sparse piano melody, perhaps with a minor-key inflection, underlines the girl’s sense of sadness and the old man’s continued solitude. When the choir repeatedly sang the lyrics of "half the world away", accompanied by the scene of the girl looking up at the sky (fig 28), the sadness was clearly audible in the audience’s ears, which further highlighted that there was still an insurmountable distance between the little girl and the old man. The study of advertising music points out that the appropriate soundtrack can “subtly and subliminally” touch the audience's emotions. Whereas at this moment, the music quietly turns into a low and mournful interpretation, which appropriately guides the audience to have empathy and longing. The scene ends up with the old man sitting alone on the moon (fig

29), at the same time the harmony remains hollow and open. The musical emptiness showing the emotional void of failed communication. By halting the musical climax at this point, the film heightens the sense of unresolved longing, setting the stage for the eventual emotional payoff.

The film reaches its climax in the final scene. The little girl sends a present by John Lewis attached to balloons, and it arrives to the man on the moon (fig 37). When the man opens the gift (a telescope) (fig 43) and sees the girl's waving (fig 46), the music grows louder and strings are added. The arrangement becomes fuller: strings are added to the piano, and a brief crescendo marks the moment of recognition. This increase in volume and the addition of strings aligns with the narrative resolution and supports a reading of connection and relief. As the gift touches down, the soundtrack briefly removes the song and foregrounds the sound of the gift scraping against the lunar surface (fig 39). This short muting of music works as an emphasis cue: it isolates the moment of impact, increases the sense of physical reality, and turns anticipation into confirmed arrival. The dry, close sound gives the scene weight and place, so viewers feel that the gift is really there. When the music returns, the scene shifts from waiting to response; the re-entry of the song supports relief and connection rather than suspense. The sequence uses a brief drop to diegetic sound to mark a change of state from waiting to arrival, and to guide the audience from uncertainty to certainty and then to emotional uptake. Adding strings to the piano track increases the sense of joy and relief. The mix becomes slightly louder and denser. Aurora’s voice is louder and more forward in the mix, while the tone remains soft and controlled (fig 40). The arrangement of music does not become large or dramatic. Rather, the higher volume and added instruments mark the sequence’s high point and support a reading of successful connection between the girl and the old man. The move from music limited to piano and voice to a fuller arrangement (piano with added strings) acts as a clear narrative cue. The music becomes louder and denser at the point of contact, which coincides with story resolution (fig 39). When the man tears up on receiving the gift and sees the girl (fig 47), the repeated line “you’re half the world away; I've been lost, I've been found, but I

don't feel down” is heard in a new context: distance is now presented as bridged. In this way, the changes in volume, instrument layers, and vocal level mark the sequence’s high point and support a reading of connection and relief. In the final sequence, the music supports the resolution of the story. The arrangement stays fuller and slightly louder at the point of recognition (fig 44), which aligns with the shift from isolation to connection. The close timing between image and music helps viewers read these beats as closure. When the line “Show someone they’re loved this Christmas” appears, the music lowers in level and thins out (fig 49). The fade-out leaves space for the message and sets a clear closing tone of care and connection.

In short, Aurora’s cover sets the film’s emotional climate through timbre and pace. The arrangement is sparse (piano + voice), the tempo is slow, and the vocal is soft and breathy. Together these choices in music deliver longing, care, and vulnerability, which suit both the girl’s wonder and the old man’s solitude. In Michel Chion’s terms, film sound supplies “added value,” that is, “the expressive and informative value with which a sound enriches a given image” (Chion 1999, p. 5). Here the added value is tenderness: the gentle tone of the music covers the warm interior scenes and the stark lunar exterior scenes, helping the audience feel that these two distant worlds are meant to meet rather than merely juxtaposed. The lyrics give light semantic cues: “half the world away” for distance; later “I don’t feel down” as relief, without overpowering the scenes, so meaning and mood work together. The mechanisms of use of music are clear, in which the slow tempo (calm, reflective), soft timbre (tenderness), and sustained continuity across cuts (emotional carry-over). The audience thus progresses from anticipation to recognition, ultimately arriving at relief and hope. This smooth viewing experience naturally embodies the brand values of connection and optimism without the need for intentional explanation.

4.3 Close reading of My Dad is A Liar



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3

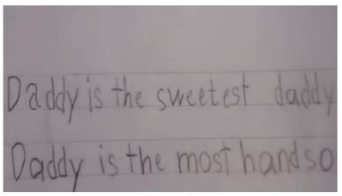


Fig. 4



Fig. 5



Fig. 6



Fig. 7



Fig. 8



Fig. 9



Fig. 10



Fig. 11



Fig. 12



Fig. 13



Fig. 14



Fig. 15



Fig. 16



Fig. 17



Fig. 18



Fig. 19



Fig. 20



Fig. 21



Fig. 22



Fig. 23



Fig. 24

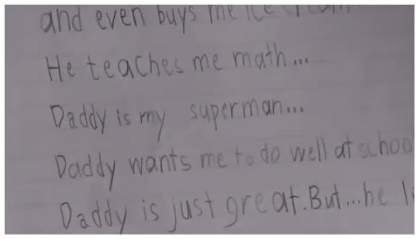


Fig. 25


Fig. 26


Fig. 27


Fig. 28


Fig. 29


Fig. 30


Fig. 31


Fig. 32


Fig. 33


Fig. 34



Fig. 35


Fig. 36



Fig. 37



Fig. 38



Fig. 39



Fig. 40



Fig. 41



Fig. 42



Fig. 43



Fig. 44



Fig. 45



Fig. 46



Fig. 47



Fig. 48



Fig. 49



Fig. 50



Fig. 51



Fig. 52



Fig. 53



Fig. 54



Fig. 55



Fig. 56



Fig. 57



Fig. 58



Fig. 59



Fig. 60



Fig. 61



Fig. 62



Fig. 63

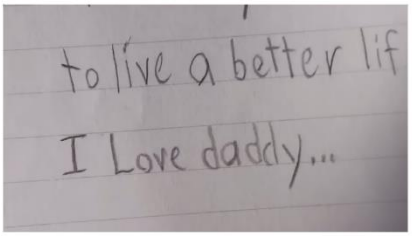


Fig. 64



Fig. 65



Fig. 66



Fig. 67



Fig. 68



Fig. 69



Fig. 70



Fig. 71



Fig. 72



Fig. 73

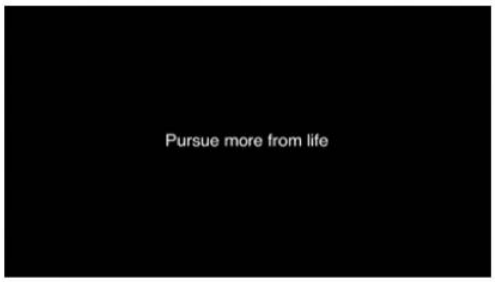


Fig. 74



Fig. 75



Fig. 76

4.3.1 Colour and Lighting: The Chromatic Segmentation from 'Ideal Father' to 'Deception and Sacrifice'

4.3.1.1 A tribute to the father (Daddy is the sweetest… He is my superman)

In the opening sequence of MDIAL, that covers the voice-over "Daddy is the sweetest daddy in the world… He is my superman," colour and lighting build a gently idealized world around the father and daughter, so that the viewer first encounters the father character through the child's emotional lens rather than through his economic reality. The use of warm and golden colours in the father and daughter scenes at the beginning, often in gentle sunlight. This energetic sunshine palette creates an atmosphere of safety and love, which evoke the audience's feelings of comfort and happiness. The father is frequently shown in bright daylight wearing soft, light-toned clothing (fig 3), and even a subtle backlight sometimes surrounds him (fig 21), visually shaping him to the child's personal hero. The walk to school in the first shots

is shown in soft, slightly hazy daylight (fig. 1-6). The colour palette is constructed with light greens from the trees, pale and greyish hue from the road, and sky-blue and pink from the child's uniform and her backpack. There are no strong shadows, and the light is soft and even, which gives the scene a calm and peaceful feeling. The father's brown suit is visibly obsolete, but the colour sits within the warm colour palette rather than seeming out of place. This lets the viewer feel the father character's unpretentious identity without letting it disturb the emotional tone. The main impression is brightness and safety, in line with the opening line "Daddy is the sweetest daddy in the world." The next couple of shots moves inside to the classroom and home, but the film keeps the same gentle warmth (fig. 7-9). The bright, low-contrast lighting and vibrant colours quickly signal happiness and innocence (fig 6, 19, 20, 21). By using the visual tone of warmth and optimism, the opening sequence allows the audience to share the little girl's feeling that her dad is perfect. Such colour and lighting choices are not only aesthetic, but deeply emotional and symbolic. The soft glow around the father, for example, in the scene that he walks his daughter to school in the morning (fig. 5), symbolizes his role as a hero in the daughter's life. The warm colour palette that mainly in soft yellows, oranges, and gentle whites gives the emotions of intimacy and warmth, whereas no cold tones used in most scenes of the opening sequence. In visual terms, the father is portrayed as strong and dependable, but still gentle and caring. The warm lighting on his face reveals kindness. The scenes in the opening sequence are often composed to place the father character in open, well-lit spaces, implying sincere and trustworthiness. By surrounding the father with warm light, the film invokes the cultural archetype of the benevolent, heroic parent. It essentially presents the father character as the child's guardian angel or superman in her daily life. This idealization representation of the father character carries an implicit promise, that a father's love is pure and unwavering. It is much like the protective assurance the brand wants to signify. The technique of colour and lighting used in the opening sequence, the bright backgrounds, warm lighting, and vibrant colours, gently guides the audience's emotions, allowing them to feel the joy and sense of security experienced by the child character. As viewers, they are

led to trust this father figure. This creates an emotional resonance that is precisely the key to the film's persuasive power.

The restaurant scene continues this warm colour palette while introducing more saturated highlights (fig. 18). The narrow interior scene is illuminated by tungsten lights and soft ambient lights, make the wall in yellow and orange lights. Behind the table where the father and child are sitting, three pendant lights can be seen, which create a warm and everyday-life atmosphere. The warmth of the lighting makes this meal feel intimate and joyful rather than daily routine. The warm atmosphere in these scenes confirms the fact that the father does his best to create moments of happiness for his daughter in everyday life (fig. 19-20). In this scene (fig. 19), the ice cream retail car, the salesman's uniform, the sunshade and the little girl's uniform are all in the same sky blue colour, which forms a very soft and stable colour palette emotionally. The bright colour of the logo on the ice cream retail car includes red, yellow and blue, which echoes the childlike feeling provided. The sky blue colour makes the messy street, pedestrians and retail stalls in the scene a secondary background, which makes the audience focus on the little happy moment of the father buying ice cream for his daughter, thus strengthening the relaxed, happy and safe emotional experience. Sky blue colour looks clean and quiet under the outdoor sunlight. For the audience, this colour tone conveys a feeling of stability. With the little girl praising her father's sentences in the voice over, this blue colour packages the daily small scene into an idealized childhood memory. It is not a big festival day, but an ordinary moment that can be turned into tenderness by this father. These similar blue colours visually group the child, the ice cream retail car and the salesman at the same time, making them form the child's happy world. The brown suits the father wears is slightly out of this group of blue colours. The brown colour does not belong to the relaxed blue colour palette of this child's world, but it is placed in the centre of the scene, suggesting the father is the one who connects his daughter with happy time. This colour relationship emotionally implies that the father supports his daughter's clean, bright and happy living environment through his own labour, where the relatively darker colour gives a

tired feeling from the father. From the brand level, the massive and recurring sky blue colour is also quietly paving the way for emotional association for the MetLife blue brand logo that appears at the end of the film. This scene (fig. 19) makes the audience connects the blue colour with warm fatherly love and the feelings of being cared for in childhood. Therefore, the audience may be passively aroused when they see the blue brand logo at the end of the film, so as to transfer the feeling of security brought by the role of father to the trust in the brand.

Later, when the child was riding on her father's shoulder under the strong overhead light (fig. 21), the sun flared around them, slightly overexposing the colours of sky and sunshine. When the child stretches upward, it creates a soft halo around her head. This shot uses the same gentle and warm colour palette as the previous shots (fig. 19-20), and at the same time, it increases the exposure. The increased exposure and top light make the audience regard the father as a role in holding up his daughter to a sunny and happy life. This scene became the climax of the praise for the father section, creating a sense of contrast for the subsequent sections to expose the father's lies.

As the father sits by the roadside watching his child (fig. 20), soft warm lighting gently highlights his face, softening the appearance of wrinkles and beads of sweat. His skin tone appears warm and healthy under this lighting, lending emotional credibility to the line “Daddy is the most handsome". Though viewers can recognise this father as an ordinary, slightly scruffy man. At this stage, the child's voiceover stays within a gently idealized image of his father, rather than a coldly realistic one. The lighting and colour work together to guide the audience into identifying with this relatable, imperfect father figure, who is flawed, yet still regarded by his child as the best. When the girl writes her essay at the low table, the lighting appears to combine natural light from the windows and the soft yellow light from indoor (fig. 33). A warm beige and cream colour palette is created around the child’s pink pyjamas and the white paper on the table. The small contrast between the bright foreground

and the slightly dark background makes a faint halo of light surrounds the paper. This visual emphasis on the paper through light and shadow reinforces its narrative significance as a medium that carries the child's emotions. This includes the subsequent scene where the child exposes his father’s lies through her essay. Yet at this stage, the use of this halo light consistently keeps the audience’s focus stay on the sincere affection within the child's compliments to his father.

The film maintains a relatively warm tone in the part where the daughter praises her father. However, when the daughter started telling her father's lies (fig. 34), the lights dimmed and the colours shifted to brown and gray. The scene was not projected into a cool or sharp contrast between light and dark that usually marked difficulties. There is usually a visible light source in the scenes of telling the father’s lies, which makes the father's face and hands still visible. This makes the emotion closer to determination than hopelessness, which is consistent with child's belief that her father is the best. It is obvious that it is difficult for the father to make a living, but the film does not completely weaken the ideals of them.

In summary, in the part where this daughter praises her father, colours and lighting establish a stable image of an ideal father. Importantly, the ideal father portrayal is not an isolated artistic choice but part of the film’s branding strategy. In this case, the universal emotion is a child’s love for a caring parent, depicted in universally heartwarming visual terms. By constructing an emotionally uplifting image of a loving, self-sacrificing father, the film is leveraging what researchers call emotional storytelling in branding. Such storytelling in marketing strategies “evokes emotions such as joy, trust, empathy, excitement… thereby forging a deep emotional connection” with the audience (Gowda and Archana, p. 4388). The colour and lighting serve as audiovisual symbols for joy and security, so that the audience not only understands but feels the father’s kindness and strength. The colour palette of the first part of the film (fig. 1-24) contains soft sunlight, warm tone room, blue

and pink around the child, and green and brown in the natural environment. In this part of the film, the visual consistency is maintained through colours, which makes the different spaces, including the school, home, restaurant, and outside road, look like a happy world that belongs to both of the father and child in the ordinary life. For the audience, this consistent warm colour palette and soft lighting create a coherent feeling and bring a safe, gentle and happy emotional experience. This emotional experience is carefully aligned with MetLife's brand message. The father's brilliant presence embodies the values of protection and sacrifice that the brand wants to associate with itself. Viewers have already been introduced to connect the father's selfless love, which is supported by the warm glow light in the film. This is the same as the idea that the brand wants to promise. In overall, the colour and lighting in this first ideal father stage construct an emotional experience that shapes our perception of the father as a heroic, benevolent figure. This not only maximizes audience empathy and affection in the moment, but also lays the foundation for the brand's appeal, subtly inviting viewers to trust the MetLife brand as a guardian of family well-being just as the little girl trusts her father.

4.3.1.2 Daddy's lies

In the second part of the film, the colour and lighting shift from the bright street and school scenes into a series of cramped workspaces in which the father washes dishes, carries heavy sacks, and cleans toilets (fig. 34-39, 48, 52, 56, 58). The palette becomes distinctly desaturated and cool, where the kitchen and washroom are cloaked in greys, blue-greens and dirty whites. Lights comes from small high windows or overhead fluorescent tubes, projecting harsh highlights onto metal, tiles, and the father's wet skin while leaving large parts of the scene in shadow. These choices construct a visual counterpoint to the girl's earlier praise and to the voice-over that now tells the father's lies about not being tired or hungry.

In the kitchen scene where the father washes dishes alongside another worker (fig. 52). The light traced the foam upon the plate and his arm, but the

overall colour palette remained dull. The workers' vests are grey-white rather than bright white, and the walls recede into a dull and green darkness. The washed utensils nearby carry a grey colour, which marked a contrast to the pure sky blue surrounding children near the ice cream van or school gates earlier (fig. 19, fig 13). This reduction of saturation pushes attention away from vibrant colour contrast and towards texture, that the wet arms, stacked plates, sweat on skin. The cold overhead light gives the body a slight green cast, which makes the father's tired face and tense muscles look more worn than heroic. The kitchen becomes a space fraught with tension, so that the repeated line "He lies that he is not tired" from the voice over finds a visual confirmation in the flicker of fluorescent light on his shoulders.

The scenes in which the father carries sacks or works in toilets repeat this cool, lowered-saturation colour scheme (fig. 54, fig. 58). The fabrics of his clothes change to brown and grey, while the background walls and floors are filmed in flat, blue tones. Even when the source seems to be daylight from the side, it is filtered and pale rather than golden. The absence of warm highlights makes the environment look oppressive and stifling. The viewer does not see comforting food or pleasure elements, but the scene is filled with repetition of works. The voice-over line "He lies that we have everything" is therefore in contrast to the father's hard working shots, showing that the prerequisite for having everything is the need to continually work hard to earn it.

In the school scene (fig. 55), a deep red curtain occupies nearly the entire background, while the child in a blue school uniform stands alone under a strong frontal spotlight. The red curtain, a common visual symbol of ceremony and honour, signifies this as a formal setting for publicly recognising achievement. The spotlight isolates the child from the background, making her image, that holding her essay medal aloft, the only focus in this shot. The child is presented under strong and overexposed lighting, creating a clear contrast against the deep red colour behind her and generating a high range of brightness. This shot is intercut with scenes of her father's busy work,

forming a powerful contrast between light and shadow. This use of light metaphorically suggests the child embodies a role living under the spotlight, with a bright present and future, while her father is a figure labouring silently behind her, living in the shadows. This scene therefore gives maximum saturation to the moment in which the child's future and her educational success is made visible, supporting the line that follows at the end of the film, "A child's future is worth every sacrifice" (fig. 72). This arrangement encourages viewers to feel that the father's hardworking scenes have achieved a tangible result.

The scenes of cleaning the toilet and resting seated on the floor take this colour palette to its extreme (fig. 58). When the father sits on the damp floor between two cubicles, the scene becomes almost monochromatic: pale blue-grey flooring, a bright white toilet, and a deep blue plastic bucket. Light cast from the side creates stark vertical shadows that stretch along the cubicle walls and slice across the father's face. His eyes and lips are partially covered with the shadow, while beads of sweat on his neck and arms glisten with reflection. The cool cast of the image makes his skin appear slightly sallow, as if the light has drained warmth from his body. This is a very different use of cool tones from the lunar space in MOM, where desaturation isolates the old man in a poetic, abstract environment. While in MDIAL, the coolness is rooted in hard matter: ceramic, metal, dirty water. Viewers are asked to feel not distance but connection to the father's tiredness and humiliation.

Across these labour scenes, colour and lighting thus translate the abstract lines in the voice-over, "He lies that he is not tired / not hungry", into concrete, physical experience. The cold light insists on the material fact of the father's effort. His body is shown as something that can be soaked, stained and worn down. At the same time, the consistent cool colour palette separates these scenes from the warm, high-saturation colour zones associated with the earlier scenes of joy. The film therefore builds an emotional structure in which the audience moves between two distinct colour zones. One is the grey-toned

labour scenes, a concrete manifestation of the father's sacrifice; the other is the daughter's warm-toned daily life, precisely the outcome of the father's sacrifice. This contrast prepares the impact of the closing slogan "A child's future is worth every sacrifice", aligning MetLife with the invisible labour that parents perform and inviting viewers to know the brand as a partner that recognises and legitimises these hardships.

4.3.1.3 The embrace between father and daughter

In the film's final sequence, colour and lighting change from the faded labour scenes to warm scenes, giving the father embracing his daughter with his authentic self after the truth is revealed. This ultimately resolves into a sequence that presents both public recognition and private reconciliation. Beginning with a close-up of the phrase "I love daddy" from the child's essay, the sequence reaches its climax in the roadside embrace scene. Within these shots, the colour and lighting transition from the earlier, grey and dark tones that shows the revelation of the father's lies to the soft, natural light filtering through the trees (fig. 65-73). These changes guide the audience's emotions from the discovery of the father's lies and the truth towards an intimate sense of release, simultaneously positioning the brand as the guardian of the child's future.

Before the final hug scene, the film shows the sentence "I love daddy…" written in the child's essay (fig. 64). Pure white paper occupies the whole shot, and soft grey pencil lines are clearly visible. This shot reduces colour to near-monochrome while keeping the brightness high. In this close-up, colour drains away so that the viewer concentrates on the words of the child's handwriting. The lighting is even and shadowless, which makes the sentence look very sincere. This brief moment of reduced saturation of colour prepares the emotional arc from the representation of father's lies to the relieved embrace of father and daughter.

The final part of the film links back to the opening sequence (fig. 65–73), where the colour palette returns to the soft greens and brown, but the lighting is now less bright and more diffused. The trees form a green corridor in the background, and the road takes on a steady grey colour. Natural daylight comes from above and slightly from behind, creating a gentle rim of light on the edges of their bodies. The father kneels to embrace his daughter (fig. 69, 71), and their bodies form a compact colour block, which includes the brown jacket, blue dress, and pink backpack in the centre of the scene, surrounded by green leaves on the trees. The saturation of the greens is moderate rather than vivid, and the brightness range is narrower than in the opening sequence. The scene is divided by colours into a private realm, with no other distracting colours or lighting in the background. This isolation within the social scene highlights a touching moment belonging solely to the father and daughter, allowing their emotion to be both emphasised and received by the audience.

In the close-up hug shots that follow (figs. 69, 70), the background softens into out-of-focus greens and greys, while the daughter's face and the father's suit dominate the shots. Light catches the tears on the father's and daughter's, and the daughter cries into her father's shoulder. The colour palette narrows to skin tones, brown fabric, and small patches of blue and pink from the uniform and backpack. The reduced colour differentiation and shallow depth of the scene weaken the visual attraction of the background for the audience, allowing the scene to recede into the background while the tactile tension of the embrace takes centre stage. This visual narrowing supports the narrative voice-over "He lies because of me," translating a complex moral realisation into a simple emotional image of pure dependence.

Immediately after this emotional climax, the film cuts to black scenes with white and blue texts (figs. 72, 74-76). The first line, "A child's future is worth every sacrifice," appears in light grey on black (fig. 72), followed by "Pursue more from life" in brighter white (fig. 74). The MetLife logo then appears in a

saturated blue (fig. 75), the same colour that already appears in the ice-cream car, the school uniform, and the earlier sky scenes. Against the black background, this blue becomes the most prominent colour in the entire closing scene. The move from narrative scenes to graphic text lowers visual realism but heightens rhetorical force, that the brand now speaks directly, claiming the authority to frame this whole emotional story the film tells. As this blue colour (fig. 75, 76) runs through the film, becoming an integral part of the child's daily life scenes, the brand colour retrospectively seems to have been present all along in the father and daughter relationship. The consistent blue tone makes it easier for viewers to connect the story's themes, emotions, and the brand together. Emotional trust built through the hug is therefore redirected toward MetLife's promise that viewers' own sacrifices for their children can "become reality."

Compared with the ending of MOM, where the colour palette changes from the moon's cool desaturation to a brighter, warmer colour tone, MDIAL resolves its colour tension by bringing warm, natural daylight back to the ordinary street rather than scenes that look unreal or fairytale-like. The road with trees has no dazzling lights. Instead, it offers an authentic and believable environment in which sacrifice and love are recognised. The subsequent black screen scenes isolate the brand's blue logo and brand claims, but they do so after the viewer has already experienced an emotional release within a familiar, credible scene. In this way, the film uses colour and lighting not only to separate idealisation, hardship, and reconciliation, but also to connect everyday parent-child emotion with the financial security provided by the MetLife brand. This creates a brand image that resonates emotionally while remaining trustworthy.

4.3.2 Camera and framing: How the visual perspective shifts between father and daughter

4.3.2.1 “Ideal father” sequence: medium and medium-close shots from the daughter’s level

During the opening voice-over that praises the father (“Daddy is the sweetest daddy in the world…He is my superman”), the film holds a consistently intimate camera distance and keeps the lens at, or close to, the girl’s viewing height. This choice limits strong looking hierarchies, that the viewer is not positioned to look down on the child, nor is the father framed from a markedly low angle that would emphasise authority. Instead, the framing implies a shared angle of sight in which the spectator stands beside the girl and experiences her emotional focus on the father.

In the first shot (fig. 1), where the father walks on the road holding his daughter’s hand, is organised as a medium long shot that keeps both bodies centrally framed and closely scaled within the image. The shot reduces the surrounding space in practical terms, where the public setting becomes secondary, while the physical connection between father and daughter becomes primary. The emotional effect is one of everyday proximity rather than spectacle. In this context, the extreme rhetoric in the voice-over reads as a child’s direct appraisal of what is near and familiar, rather than a claim that needs narrative proof.

The mirror shot (fig. 7) makes the viewpoint logic more explicit by staging the father through the girl’s access to him. The camera is placed just behind and slightly above the girl, at roughly her head height. With parts of their bodies positioned in the foreground and their looks visible via reflections from the mirror, the viewer is required to look at the father through the same visual arrangement that the child occupies in the room. The mirror also presents the father as a “framed” figure within the mirror, which aligns with the voice-over’s claim that he is “the most handsome”, since the advert literalises the act of seeing him as an image shaped by her position and attention.

On the way to school (fig. 10-13), the film alternates between wider framing shots that situate the father and daughter among other families and tighter framing shots that return the viewer to the main relationship of them. In figure 12, the father and daughter are held as the compositional centre while other figures recede in visual priority. In figure 13, a medium close shot isolates the child's upward look and holds the father's hand as a protective presence within the same shot. The camera's placement close to her eye level is crucial, as it allows her father's height to be visible without conveying a sense of dominance. Instead, the father's height functions as a visual sign of safety and guidance within an intimate field of view.

In the home shots and restaurant shots (fig. 14-18), the camera shifts into a more horizontal position that aligns with seated, child-level interaction. The medium close framing directs attention toward faces and small gestures across the tables, which supports intimacy as the governing mode of the scene. Daily routine is therefore framed as an affective structure, that the father is presented as responsive and easy to interpret at close range. This closeness supports the voice-over's idealisation ("kindest", "most clever") because the camera makes interpersonal attention become the main evidence of value, rather than material settings.

Taken together, these early scenes establish a tangible emotional resonance between viewer and child through repeated medium and medium-close shots and sustained camera angles that near the child's height. The father's image is presented as the child perceives him, who is near, emotionally legible, and integrated into ordinary routines. This emotional resonance is structurally important for the later turn in the film. Once the narrative reveals hidden labour and sacrifice of the father character, the viewer has already been trained to value the father through the daughter's looking position, which supports an affective reading of protection and care that a life-insurance message can later activate without needing to rebuild emotional credibility.

4.3.2.2 ”He lies…”: the father’s body framed, cornered, and subordinated by labour spaces

This section changes the viewing position away from the daughter’s admiring point of view and toward a more distant look at the father’s daily reality. Across the film shots (figs. 25-58), the camera often places the father’s body inside tight frames made by doorways, partitions, fences, and stacks of objects. These frames not only depict the scene but also make the father look physically contained by work spaces. In this sense, the shots give tangible form to the line “he lies”, while the daughter’s writing tells that the father says he is not tired or hungry, but the use of these frames repeatedly shows his strain as something that cannot be fully hidden.

Figure 58 is the clearest example. The father sits on the floor inside a toilet cubicle. The stall walls form hard vertical boundaries that narrow the space around him. Toilets are visible behind him, and a bucket and cleaning tools sit in the foreground. The camera keeps a full-body view rather than moving into a close-up that might soften the moment. The father’s posture, the leaning back, one leg bent and the other one extended, shows a pause taken out of exhaustion. The emotional force comes from where he is placed, where the low, confined stance and the setting surrounded by cleaning equipment. Even without dramatic action, the shot makes fatigue look tangible.

The worksite shots use a similar logic, although they replace the cubicle frame with weight and clutter. In Figure 39, the father bends forward under a large sack. The load takes visual priority and pulls his body downward, so that his posture is organised by carrying rather than by his own choice. The shot does not isolate the father as a heroic figure, instead, the framing ties him to a repeated pattern of labour. Figure 47 continues this approach by placing the father character among stacked materials and crowded workplace elements. He occupies a limited area in the middle of the shot, while objects and structures dominate the space around him. This makes the labour setting feel

heavy and pressing, which supports the idea that the daughter's line of "he lies that he is not tired" become visible truth.

Several shots also place the father character at the edge or the bottom of the image, which can give a feeling of reduced control to the audience. Figure 41 positions him low beside a fence, while the background space extends behind him. The fence guides the viewer's eye away from him even as it keeps him in place, which create a feeling of the father being held back or stuck into current situations. In Figure 38, the father carries a large advertising board, and the framing gives the object strong visual importance. His body becomes the support for the advertising board, so the board appears to overtake the person. The emotional effect here is subtle but clear, that this shot makes the father look defined and oppressed by the objects he must carry.

Institutional refusal is also expressed through spatial order. In Figure 45, the office scene gives stronger visual control to the HR figure, while the father is pushed toward the edge and appears less dominant in the frame. The desk and office layout act as a physical barrier, marking a division between authority and request. The scene does not need overt conflict to communicate rejection. The framing itself shows that his situation is shaped by systems that can refuse him.

The experience of rejection during job hunting is also conveyed through the framing of the shots. As shown in Figure 45, the office setting shows the HR officer greater visual dominance, while the father character is pushed to the periphery of the frame, appearing less prominent. In Figure 34, the father is seen tidying his hair while awaiting his job interview, surrounded by numerous other competitors, illustrating both his eagerness to secure employment and the difficulty of obtaining it. The desk forms a physical barrier between the father and the HR officer in Figure 35, establishing the boundary between supplication and authority. This shot conveys rejection without overt conflict.

The framing of this shot signifies the father's situation as constrained by a job system capable of rejecting him.

Figure 46 helps connect these labour frames to the daughter's understanding, in which the daughter is shown writing. The doorway and the separation of focus in Figure 53 create a gap between what the daughter can see and what his father experiences. This shows that the daughter quietly discovered her father's lies in places where he could not see. The "lie" is therefore not only spoken, but also it is built into the way the scene divides space. The father's hardship is present, but it stays partly outside the child's main field of attention.

Overall, the second part of this film conveys its emotional resonance through a unified visual language. The father is framed within the shot, positioned in a subordinate position, surrounded by working settings and props that dominate the frame. These choices guide the audience to perceive the contradiction between the daughter's initial praise for her father and his actual life struggles. Through its use of cinematography and framing, this part of the film reveals that the father's hardships are very real, thus making the voiceover that "he lies" become reliable.

4.3.2.3 Roadside kneeling embrace: changes in shot scale as an emotional structure

The roadside sequence organises its emotional peak through a controlled movement between distance and closeness. The early shots (figs. 65-66) keep father and daughter visually separated, even while they share the same space. The scene's emotional turn is prepared through mid-range framing that preserves a small gap between the two bodies. The shots in figure 65 and figure 67 primarily focus on the daughter's face and upper body. The medium close-up shots emphasise her facial expressions, allowing the audience to clearly perceive her emotions. The daughter character is placed in sharp

focus, whilst her father's figure on the left (the blurred section) is intentionally obscured. This immediately directs the viewer's attention towards the girl's facial expressions and psychological state. The blurred, large silhouettes of the father character in the background create a sense of detachment, symbolising the strangeness of their encounter as father and daughter, now meeting in their true identities after the "lies" have been exposed by the truth. This medium shot (fig. 65) also creates a feeling that isolates the daughter, who looks down, her shoulders appear heavy.

Fig. 66 employs an over-the-shoulder shot, with the daughter occupying most of the foreground in the lower right corner. Viewing through the angle of her shoulder allows the audience to adopt her perspective, witnessing her father's reaction to the words she wrote in her essay. The blurred silhouette of the daughter creates a visual barrier or separation. This represents both the daughter and the viewer observing the father from the daughter's perspective, while also potentially suggesting a communication or emotional barrier between the daughter and her father. It also presents the father frontally with visible tears while holding the paper, in which the essay paper functions as both narrative object and emotional trigger. The medium close-up of father's face exaggerates the complex emotions on the father's face: a restrained, reluctant smile and a sense of deeply moved affection. It also restricts surrounding details, directing the viewer's attention to the father's face where subtle emotions of tension and release are conveyed. In figs 65-67, alternating shots of father and daughter emphasise their independent emotional expressions and the tension within their dialogue, rather than their physical spatial relationship. The background's deep blur detaches the figures from their surroundings. This suggests the interaction between the father and daughter is the main focus of the moment, isolating external influences and building emotional momentum for the next shot. It may also leave viewers feeling that the daughter's emotions are isolated and helpless.

In Figure 68, the father lowers himself and opens his arms, and the camera still holds both figures in a medium view where their distance can be seen. The body language is therefore split, that the father's posture signals welcome, whereas the daughter's posture is still cautious. The father's and daughter's closed eyes, the compression of arms around shoulders, and the paper still trapped in the daughter's hand make the reconciliation readable through touch rather than dialogue. The close-up transforms emotions into bodily details, forming a clear contrast to the earlier distanced shots and concealed emotional close-ups (figs. 65-67).

The emotional climax is created from a wider view shot, which no longer reinstates separation. Figure 68 employs a medium long shot, in which the father crouches and the daughter runs, emphasising the rapid closing of the physical distance between them and the yearning and dynamism preceding the embrace. Figure 71 places the figures locked in an embrace against a broad natural background, showing their isolation from the external world in this moment and freezing the embrace as a scene of pure intimacy. Figure 69 presents a close-up shot capturing the father's emotional release following extreme restraint, including the releasing of tears. Figure 70 uses a reverse shot, also a close-up, focusing on the daughter's emotional state as she weeps with eyes closed, allowing the audience to directly confront her love and dependence upon her father. Shallow depth of field is fully used in the both close-up shots (figs. 69-70), completely blurring the background to eliminate all distractions. This concentrates the viewer's entire attention upon the most subtle expressions and movements on their faces, thereby eliciting maximum empathy. Figure 71 shows the father kneeling and holding the daughter in full-body shot. The wide shot scales the figures down within the landscape, so the embrace shows as both intimate and socially exposed. The father's kneeling position makes vulnerability visible through height, that he meets the daughter's level by lowering himself. Therefore, the image frames an emotion of care as a bodily act. The subsequent long shot (fig. 73) extends this resolution into duration, in which the father carries the daughter away along a path, and their movement away from the camera converts a private

repair into an ongoing life course. The closing lines and brand logo (figs. 72, 74-76) translate this emotional climax into the campaign's stated theme, that the sacrifice is not directly stated but conveyed through posture, distance, and the metaphor of bearing.

4.3.3 Editing and Sound

4.3.3.1 Voice-over as the structural framework of the film (sound-driven editing)

In MDIAL, the daughter's voice-over is not an added layer placed over film scenes. It is the organising track that determines how scenes are selected, grouped, and edited. The voice-over is a continuous read-through of the child's essay, moving from highest praise to the repeated phrase "He lies…" and ending with "He lies because of me." The film's editing follows that rhetorical progression, so that changes in sentence structure and tone become audible cues for transitions in pace, shot choice, and montage edit.

This sound-led narrative structure is visible at the level of scene design and cut placement. Early scenes present family routines that can be interpreted as visual "illustrations" of the voice-over's descriptive commentary. For instance, Figure 14 places father and daughter in a calm, intimate setting (a table-based activity), which aligns with the affectionate framing of "Daddy" as tender and caring in the voice-over. The camera does not need dialogue to motivate this bond, since the voice-over supplies the interpretive frame. The edit can therefore remain relatively unobtrusive, allowing the essay's adjectives to function as the primary structuring device while the camera shots supply visual examples of the relationship. A similar logic holds in Figure 12, where the father accompanies the child in a routine public space. The film shot works as a confirmation of the essay's idealising stance, while the voice-over continues to govern what the viewer should notice.

A key implication is that continuity is achieved more through the stability of the voice-over than on narrative voice or dialogue. Because the voice-over persists across changing locations, the film can compress time and move between spaces without requiring audible bridges within the represented world of the film. This is consistent with Michel Chion's account of how sound can control an image's meaning: "Sound adds value to the image, … the expressive and informative value with which a sound enriches a given image." (Chion 5). In this brand film, the "added value" is specifically moral and affective: the daughter's evaluative language ("sweetest," "superman," and later the accusatory repetition "He lies…") provides emotional guidance, ensuring the rapid visual transitions remain comprehensible.

The middle part of the film shifts to "He lies…" from the voice-over, which changes the editing logic. The repeated sentence of "he lies" in the voice-over works like an audible metronome. Each phrase can motivate a new shot, so the repetition of "he lies" sentence becomes a cutting principle rather than only a semantic device. Even when the scenes move into labour environments (kitchen back areas, toilets, carrying loads, etc.), the voice-over provides a stable grammatical pattern that holds the montage together and reduces the need for explanatory dialogue. In practical terms, the soundtrack allows the film to place diverse sites of work side by side, while keeping the audience's focus firmly on the voice-over. The contrast I have already identified before, that between claims such as "He lies that he is not tired/not hungry" and scenes that visualise fatigue of the father, depends on this governance of scenes by sound. The voice-over remains constant, while the image functions as evidence that contests it.

This sound-governed structure also shapes the ending of MDIAL. Once the final line is delivered, the film can withdraw spoken language and transition into a sequence of visual conclusions and brand statements. Figure 71 holds the emotional climax in a long-distance view of the father kneeling while embracing the daughter. Even without dialogue, this scene remains

interpretable as the inevitable outcome of the narrative's revelation. The move to black screens and slogans (fig. 72): “A child’s future is worth every sacrifice.”; fig. 74: “Pursue more from life”; fig. 75-76: brand logo and call to action) continues the same hierarchy. The language remains structurally central, but it changes from the daughter’s essay to written brand declaration. The film therefore uses the voice-over to secure intimacy and resonance, and then replaces it with written language that reframes private sacrifice as a generalisable value proposition associated with the brand.

Chion’s comment that television is partly “illustrated radio” (Chion 157) is useful here because it names a communication model in which speech can lead and images can serve as confirmation or amplification. While this film is not television in a strict medium sense, its persuasive mechanism is comparable: the child’s voice-over becomes the primary vehicle of meaning, while the editing organises scenes as proofs, contrasts, and climax timed to the narration’s structure. That is also where the brand work occurs. The voice-over’s child voice constructs sincerity and moral clarity. The edit, guided by that voice, turns ordinary scenes into a controlled emotional arc that encourages viewers to read MetLife’s promise as aligned with parental sacrifice and children’s futures.

4.3.3.2 Editing rhythm and segmentation: emotional progression through contrast rather than continuity

MDIAL’s emotional arc depends less on continuous development inside a single situation and more on segmented blocks whose contrasts are made clear through editing. This approach aligns with Pearlman’s definition of editing rhythm as the shaping of “cycles of tension and release” through “timing” and “pacing” (2016, p. 18).

The opening “ideal father” section constructs emotional uplift through rapid access to varied everyday scenes that remain morally untroubled. The ice-

cream scene (fig. 19) is typical because the editing positions the father's small indulgence as a visible proof of sweetness and care, even though the film does not build narrative causality inside the scene. The segmentation's affect is therefore made up of choice combination. The praise is made up of moments that are similar in tone but not continuous in time or place. The rhythm in the opening sequence can be seen as relaxed because the film repeatedly resets the viewer into a new proof of goodness before any discomfort can settle.

The "He lies…" section changes the emotional direction through more rigorous, sentence-driven segmentation. The editing no longer allows scenes to unfold naturally, instead drawing the audience into a chain of labour sequences where each cut feels like a new disclosure attached to a repetitive sentence pattern. The dishwashing scene (fig. 52) and the toilet scene (fig. 58) are separated by only seconds in the timeline of the film, but they represent different kinds of work and different physical pressures. The editing logic is therefore not continuity-based, but it is enumerative. The viewer is not invited to keep the focus on a specific job in real time. The viewer is required to watch a set of conditions, that fatigue, hunger, and strain, as a series of impacts. In practical terms, this is where pacing becomes meaning. Bordwell and Thompson's idea of pacing as "frequency of cuts", referenced in Pearlman's discussion, helps describe how repeated cutting can intensify affect by preventing recovery time (2016, p. 20). Here, the rhythm of editing produces tension because the film refuses narrative comfort. Each shot introduces new contradictions to the voiceover's preceding descriptions, thus the emotional experience arises from contrast: idealised descriptions appear repeatedly in the voice-over of the opening sequence, while the present scenes insist on depicting hardship diametrically opposed to what is shown in previous scenes.

The climax reorganises rhythm again by shifting from enumerative disclosure to affective closure. The road-side confrontation and embrace scenes (figs.

65-71) reduce the film's moral argument into a single bodily event that can be held, re-frame as mutual recognition. The montage scenes recede, while the editing concentrates on the same action from different distances rather than relocating the viewer to new sites of evidence. The cut to the black title card, "A child's future is worth every sacrifice." (fig. 72) formalises this transition, that private pain in the story is converted into a general value statement, and the subsequent brand slogan "Pursue more from life" (fig. 74) enters only after the release has been secured through the embrace. The segmentation is therefore not incidental to persuasion. It positions the brand as arriving after recognition, not during suffering, which supports a perception of MetLife as an enabling brand aligned with socially affirmed parental sacrifice and children's futures, rather than as an opportunistic commentator on hardship.

This segmented construction also offers a productive comparison with John Lewis's MOM film. Both films rely on contrast across different sections to shape feeling, rather than gradual narrative modulation. The difference lies in what the contrast is made to carry. More specifically, MOM visualises isolation into a distant and cold space on the moon, whereas MDIAL embeds hardship within physical workplace. By repeatedly changing the spatial correspondence of the voice-over structures between labour scenes through editing, the audience is made to feel this hardship personally.

4.3.3.3 Music and audio intensity: a controlled emotional arc

Across the film, the music is mixed as a controlled affective package that becomes most salient at the moment when the narrative changes from private hardship to an explicit moral claim about sacrifice. The clearest evidence is the change in overall audio intensity around the climax sequence that leads into the ending scene. The average volume level remains relatively low during the five-second period from 02:45 to 02:50, while the volume level around 02:55 to 03:00 rises sharply and remains elevated through the ending scene. This jump in music volume aligns with the emotional release around the roadside embrace scene and the immediate transition into the brand slogan

scene, visible around Figure 69 at 02:55, Figure 71 at 03:00, and Figure 72 at 03:05.

This rising curve of music matters because it performs an affective transfer in MDIAL. The images move from embodied scenes to abstract textual statements at the end, but the heightened audio level sustains the viewer's excitement while the film asks the viewer to read and accept a generalised claim, beginning with "A child's future is worth every sacrifice" and continuing through the brand slogan and logo in Figure 72-Figure 76. The music therefore functions less as background continuity and more as a device that carries emotion across a semiotic threshold, from the intimacy of narrative worlds to declarations within the brand. This transformation is measurable in intensity, while it can also be interpreted through form, since the background music continues to play even when the visual display is reduced to black screens and centred text of brand slogans.

4.3.3.4 Using Silence to Guide Viewer Attention

The film keeps the child's voice-over emotionally central by holding other sounds at a low level. This choice matters because film sound often guides feeling even when the audience does not consciously attend to it. Prince notes that sound is invisible and is deployed by film-makers in support of the image track (1995, p. 41). In this film, that "support" function can be understood as attention management, since the montage edit makes it easier for the viewer to stay with the child's moral framing within the voice-over rather than with environmental detail. The viewer is not pushed to notice poverty through loud noises in labour scenes. The viewer is instead guided to feel the moral meaning of the child's voice-over, especially when the voice-over describes the father as kind and heroic while the images begin to suggest pressure. The viewer is positioned less as a witness to a realistic sound environment, and more as a listener to a child's evaluation of what care costs.

This restraint becomes most significant in the labour montage scenes, especially in the kitchen and toilet spaces that appear around Figure 52 through Figure 58. The images show physical exhaustion and repetitive work, but the soundtrack does not turn this labour into a harsh sensory experience that competes with the voice-over. The labour images do not ask to be felt as sensory shock, since their primary narrative task is to reclassify the earlier praise as incomplete. This reduced background noise works ethically as well as emotionally. It prevents the father's hardship from becoming a spectacle that the audience consumes as tough realism. The emotional focus remains on the child's repeated claims that he lies about being "not tired" and "not hungry", so the audience experiences a controlled discomfort. The viewer is asked to recognise sacrifice without being invited to enjoy the intensity of suffering.

This approach can be clarified through Stilwell's point that silence is not empty but meaningful, since "the space between cues is an absence of music" (1995, p. 439). In the context of this film, the "space" is not only musical but also social. The absence of loud dialogue and exaggerated work noises on screen allows the story's intimacy to remain fully maintained. This "space" also slows emotional judgement, since it keeps the film from converting hardship into a dramatic performance for the audience. As a result, when the brand appears after the emotional climax scene, it enters an already-stabilised emotional field. This is one way the film shapes brand perception, since MetLife appears as an answer to an already-established moral claim about responsibility for a child's future, rather than as a message competing for attention. The brand is therefore not framed as interrupting the family story. It is framed as responding to a moral situation that the film has already made the viewer feel.

4.4 Close Reading of *The Bridge*



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5



Fig. 6



Fig. 7



Fig. 8



Fig. 9



Fig. 10



Fig. 11



Fig. 12



Fig. 13



Fig. 14



Fig. 15



Fig. 16



Fig. 17



Fig. 18



Fig. 19



Fig. 20



Fig. 21



Fig. 22



Fig. 23



Fig. 24



Fig. 25



Fig. 26

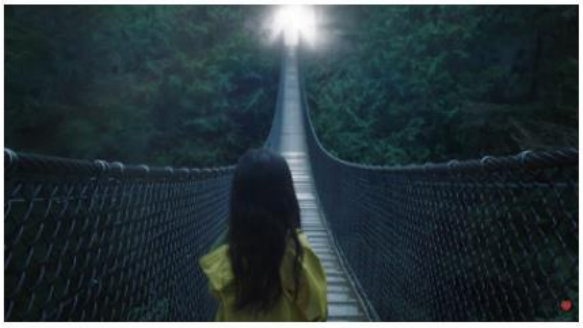


Fig. 27



Fig. 28



Fig. 29



Fig. 30



Fig. 31



Fig. 32

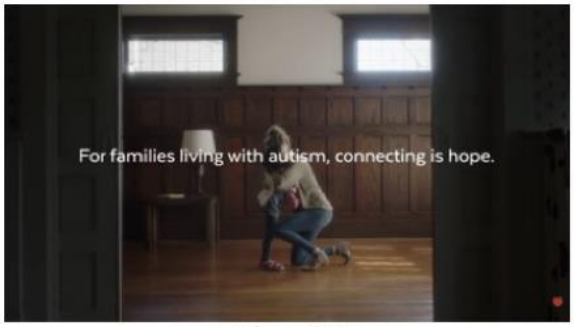


Fig. 33

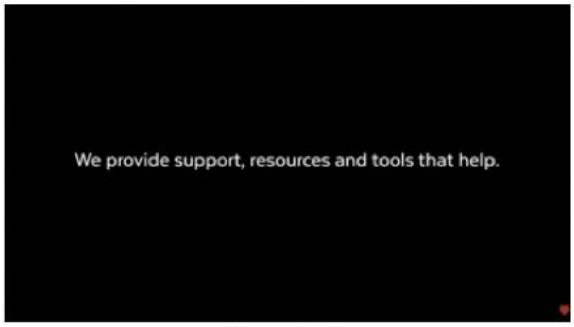


Fig. 34



Fig. 35

4.4.1 Colour and lighting

Rotem argues that colour can function at the level of film syntax, meaning that it structures coherence before it is read as symbolism. Rotem distinguishes colour's symbolic associations from its structuring role, arguing that colour can function internally to bind a film through continuity and unity (2003, p. 2). This is analytically useful for The Bridge (hereafter TB) because the film's emotional address depends on a stable colour and lighting coherence that keeps attention on small relational actions rather than visual spectacle. For Rotem, a film becomes a world when its elements cohere into an intelligible whole that the audience can recognise and respond to (2003, p. 2). TB constructs that recognisable whole through low-saturation colour palettes and

soft home lighting that keep the space readable while refusing melodramatic lighting cues. TB also establishes this coherence from the beginning of film, where the film limits colour variety and controls brightness, directing the audience's attention towards the child's sensory experience rather than decorative details (figs. 1-7).

4.4.1.1 Outdoor colour fields, visual hints of uncertainty, and the bridge as a threshold

Across the outdoor sequences, TB relies on a cool palette dominated by blue and blue-green, which reduces warmth and narrows the emotional range of the environment. In the early outdoor shots of Figures 8-21, TB establishes a bblue-tinged cool palette as the default base tone, with the lake and sky often approaching a single cold colour surface. In Figure 17, the child is reflected against the deep blue waters and distant landforms, while the light on her face remains limited, allowing the surroundings to dominate the emotional tone of the scene. Figure 19 presents a more expansive scene in cool tones, with a thin warm band on the horizon, which reads as a small tonal interruption within the cool tone scene. In the shoreline scene (fig. 21), water and sky approach a single cold colour field, while the rocky edge remains in deep and saturated tones. This compresses the scene's comfort cues into the child's figure, so that her yellow coat becomes the most noticeable colour within the scene. This sustained cool palette makes the space in the film feel emotionally distant, as warm colours and lighting are both visually lacking and confined.

In the forest scenes, warm light appears as a localised intrusion rather than a general ambience. The forest scenes reinforce this logic through darker exposure and heavy greens, which keep detail present but visually subdued. Figure 11 concentrates attention on the child's boot on moss, where the scene is lit low and the greens and browns dominate, while the yellow trim of the boot becomes one of the few warm tones. Figure 12 employs a backlit, upward-looking angle, with the pale sky behind the child and her face falling

into shadow, which makes the child figure clear while keeping her facial expression partially withheld by lighting. The orange-red glow of the fire upon the great fish soaring behind the trees (fig. 22) conflicts with the forest's cool darkness, becoming even more pronounced upon the child's face (fig. 23). The raised hand (fig. 24) is lit in the same warm range, which makes an ordinary gesture read as a moment of heightened contact. Figures 13-14 place the child between giant trees and keep the scenes overall dark, while small orange points of light appear around her as a warm intrusion inside a cold-green environment. The warm-toned lighting, appearing as scattered points of light against dark backgrounds, functions less as a uniform glow than as a set of attention-grabbing accents. Itti and Koch emphasise that saliency is not fixed within a stimulus itself, since what stands out perceptually is shaped by what surrounds it (2001, p. 194). They also give a simple contrast example in which a single red garment within a field of black clothing becomes immediately noticeable, indicating that a small chromatic deviation can dominate attention through contextual difference (Itti and Koch, 2001, p. 194). In their account of bottom-up attention, "what seems to matter in guiding bottom-up attention is feature contrast rather than local absolute feature strength" (Itti and Koch, 2001, p. 197). In Figure 13-14, the warm highlights thus appear out of place against the darker background, so they are more likely to attract viewers' attention and produce a feeling of unease instead of comfort.

The visual guidance of the bridge scenes relies upon a bright vanishing point, which appears overexposed relative to the scenes' mid-tones (figs. 27-29). The bright vanishing point establishes a directional entrance, functioning as a threshold rather than a mere physical endpoint. When the child turns back (fig. 28), the framing keeps her in the foreground while the bright entrance remains behind her, holding the tension between staying and crossing within a single lighting structure. The bridge and shoreline scenes also treat communication as something staged against a large cool field rather than supported by a warm environment. Figure 20 shows the child's hand gesture as a dark shape against blue background, with the lighting reducing fine detail

and leaving the gesture visible mainly through silhouette and movement. This keeps the scene's emotional emphasis on effort and reaching-out, because the sense of scale and the cold atmosphere conveyed by the scene are far more powerful than any facial expression could possibly convey.

4.4.1.2 The low-saturation colour palette as coherence rather than decoration

The home scenes maintain low saturation and medium contrast. Wood panelling and floor hold the scene in warm browns, while daylight is rendered as greyed white through curtains. This restraint in the use of colours produces a unified colour field in which minor changes in skin tone, eye focus, and facial tension become more salient than any expressive colour display. Rotem emphasises colour's role in shaping the film's spatio-temporal organisation, through which a sense of unity and ongoing continuity becomes perceptible to the viewer (2003, p. 2). Figure 31 exemplifies this logic. The mother's side lit close up is organised around warm neutral skin tones against a softened brown background, with highlights kept gentle. As an observational result, this scene is carried by micro movement and timing rather than by colour emphasis.

The opening interior scenes also establish this restrained approach by using warm but softened light rather than bright colour display. In Figures 2-6, sunlight enters the room as a controlled beam and creates a warm patch on walls and objects, while the surrounding space stays dim. This allows the spatial sense to be authentically conveyed, avoiding the transformation of light into a visual spectacle. The initial restraint in colour and light within the interior scenes (figs. 2-6) sets the tone for subsequent home "safety" sequences. Here, care is presented as a matter of low visibility and ordinary illumination, rather than through the effect of progressively stronger and expressive lighting.

4.4.1.3 Soft daylight and backlighting as an ethics of attention

The film repeatedly positions the characters near windows and doorways, so that backlighting becomes a structural boundary that separates characters from setting without stylising the scene into strong contrasts of light and shadow. Wang et al. summarise this broader function of cinematography in general terms. They characterise cinematography as an expressive visual system. In their account, mood, emotion, narrative direction, and atmosphere are shaped through various choices in camera movement, framing, lighting design, and compositional arrangement (2025, p. 2). In TB, such choices remain consistently restrained. Figure 32 places the mother beside a bright window with sheer curtains, while her face and the child remain softer and darker in exposure. The lighting does not embellish difficulty through extreme contrast. It holds an attentive viewing stance in which looking, listening, and careful instruction remain the primary actions.

Wang et al.'s definitions also help specify what the film avoids and what it prefers. They describe low-key lighting as a high-contrast approach that relies on distinct shadow depth to establish a darker, more suspense-oriented mood (2025, p. 27). The home scenes in TB do not pursue this low-key aesthetic. These scenes correspond more closely to Wang et al.'s notion of soft light, where illumination is spread evenly and the transitions from highlight to shadow is smooth rather than abrupt (2025, p. 27). Figure 31 and Figure 32 show this through soft, even lighting and gentle shadows, which present care as an ordinary, everyday practice rather than a heightened dramatic moment.

The outdoor scenes use backlight differently, not to soften faces, but to withhold detail and to make the environment feel larger than the child. Figure 12 is a clear example, since the bright sky sits behind the child and the face remains comparatively dark, which preserves figure separation while limiting emotional legibility through facial detail. This difference matters because it sets up the later interior contrast, where the film allows faces to be seen more fully under calmer, softer light.

4.4.1.4 Localised accent colour as a perceptual anchor

Within the quiet world built by TB, the child's pink plush toy in Figure 32 becomes the most saturated element. Its prominence works less as a symbolic claim and more as a perceptual anchor that keeps the child's presence visually centred. This is compatible with Rotem's argument that colour can organise viewing by coherence, since he states that colour can function as a unifying force that persuades viewers to experience the film as a coherent world (2003, p. 4). In Figure 32, the accent colour supports coherence locally by stabilising attention within a softened colour palette, which allows emotional resonance to unfold gradually rather than erupt suddenly.

Across Figures 11-14, the same anchoring logic operates outdoor scenes through the pairing of the yellow coat and the pink toy, which remain visible even when the forest is mainly in dark and green colours. In Figures 13-14, the child's coat holds the brightest warm colour in the images, while the toy adds a second warm colour close to her body, so attention stays attached to the child even when the setting is visually dense. Because these anchors persist across locations, they contribute to continuity at the level of viewing, since the audience can track the child through colour stability rather than through constant close-ups of facial expressions.

The same accent logic also operates outdoors, where the yellow raincoat separates the child from the forest's dark green colour (fig. 22) and from the desaturated bridge environment (fig. 27). In the bridge close-up shot (fig. 28), the cool lighting reduces skin warmth and reduces intimacy, while the toy's pink colour remains eye-catching, sustaining a visual sign of care within an unwelcoming setting.

4.4.1.5 Mood as a multi-channel construction of ambience

Moses's argument of mood clarifies why this colour and lighting restraint matters for feeling. Moses argues that outstanding films do more than deliver narrative information. They also establish a sustained emotional atmosphere. She further suggests that this atmosphere is produced through coordinated sensory cues, including colour, lighting, music, and sound, which work together to address viewers' senses directly (2008, p. 52). Read through this lens, TB uses low-saturated colour and soft light as part of an ambience to create an enduring rather than sentimental atmosphere. The film's restricted palette limits the risk of sentimental excess, while the stable colour and lighting field keeps the viewer oriented toward small relational changes.

The outdoor scenes reinforce this sense of permanence by maintaining a narrow colour palette over extended distances, especially through persistent blues in the shoreline scene and persistent greens in the forest scene, so the atmosphere feels sustained rather than episodic. When warm hues appear in outdoor scenes, they tend to manifest as small and localised occurrences, which supports a mood of cautious attention rather than relaxed reassurance.

4.4.1.6 Ending scenes and the controlled withdrawal of sensory complexity

The closing scenes simplify luminance relationships and reduce colour information, shifting from story world to institutional discourse. Figure 33 places the embrace in a wide shot within a symmetrical decorated room. The window rectangles operate as stable blocks of brightness above the wood panelling, supporting legibility for the overlaid brand message without using bright colour palette. Figure 34 removes colour and texture almost entirely through a black background with white text. Figure 35 continues the black field with the brand logo. This closing strategy corresponds with the film's overall approach. Colour and lighting hold a coherent world for attention, then colour is withdrawn to mark closure and reposition the viewers as recipients of a public statement.

Combined with the analysis of the outdoor scenes, the ending of TB also completes shifts in tones from large, cold exterior fields into a warmer, more accessible interior scene, and finally into a near-colourless institutional statement. This transition achieves closure precisely because it moves from environmental uncertainty toward communicative clarity, and then frames that clarity as a public statement rather than as a private feeling.

4.4.2 Camera and framing

4.4.2.1 Micro-scale attention as an affective entry point

TB builds its emotional experience through camera and framing choices that regulate what the viewer can notice, how much context the viewer receives, and how stable the viewing position feels across the film. This aligns with the general claim that cinematography shapes mood and emotion through decisions about camera movement, shot composition, and framing (Wang et al., 2025, p. 2).

TB opens by placing the viewer extremely close to perceptual detail. Figure 1 frames an eye in extreme close-up. The frame scale narrows the world to looking itself, which sets up an emotional mode that depends on attention and sensitivity rather than on narrative speed. Rooney and Bálint propose that inserting close-up shots of a sad expression draws viewers' attention to a character's mental states, makes those states more accessible, and makes them more likely to be integrated into the viewer's narrative model (2018, p. 9). Although their theory focuses on sadness, it offers a clear mechanism for why the extreme close-up shot (fig. 1) in TB's opening sequence prompts audiences to interpret the character's inner state before the broader context is revealed. Figure 2 presents only a partial view of the child's body, with the framing focusing on the tiny feet rather than the entire body. This allows the viewer to perceive the child's physical fragility before gaining a broader

understanding of the background context. The frame widens in Figure 3 to include the child on the bed with the toy, but the room is still organised around a strong beam of light, so the scene remains structured by the limited visible area rather than a complete representation of the space.

Figure 5 repeats this strategy through a close view of a hand held in a light beam, with floating particles becoming visible within the shallow space of the frame. Since the viewer is invited to notice minor changes and small movements as meaningful events in the opening sequences of TB, the emotional effect of intimacy is first established through observation.

Figures 2 and 6 continue the framing technique of a child's perspective by keeping the camera low, close to the floor and close to the body. In Figure 6, the close framing of a foot stepping down onto stacked books treats movement as careful and precarious rather than confident. This low-angle framing makes the child's body feel small in relation to her surroundings, which supports a mood of caution and resolve. Figures 6-7 also keep the child intermittently constrained by edges and partial occlusion, so the viewer's access feels limited in a controlled way rather than openly panoramic.

4.4.2.2 Framing through barriers as a visual form of distance

TB repeatedly uses physical structures to divide the frames into distinct zones. Figure 7 isolates the child from her toys via window frames, whose vertical bars form a dividing line between them. The frame of window could also be seen as a visual separation between inside and outside, as well as between the child's need and the world beyond her, because the viewer is positioned to look at her through a barrier rather than alongside her. This segmented presentation drives viewers to track the child's movements through fragmented scenes, creating an atmosphere of caution.

A related strategy appears in outdoor scenes through framing which use the environment as a partial barrier. In the forest sequence, TB repeatedly places huge trees and dark edges between the camera and the child, so the perspective of the scene feels as if it is looking through obstacles rather than offering full access. Figure 13 frames the child through two massive trees that form a narrow gap, while the darker frame edges further compress the visible space around her. Figure 14 enhances this effect by placing the child deeper inside an even tighter vertical gap between trees, so her body is visible but visually confined by trees. Figure 15 changes the viewpoint upward from inside a dark hollow, with tree bark and shadow shaping the image like a natural frame, so the viewer's access to the sky is mediated by the enclosing tree. Figure 16 repeats the same logic at a wider scale, using a large out-of-focus mossy branch in the foreground to partially block the scene while the child remains small in the distance.

This repeated partial obstruction functions as a visual form of uncertainty. The viewer is not positioned to "stand with" the child in an open field of vision. Instead, the viewer is repeatedly placed at a distance, where seeing is incomplete and must be worked for. This matters for the film's emotional progression because it establishes the outdoor world as hard to read and hard to navigate visually, which strengthens the later contrast in the indoor scenes where faces and relations are presented with fewer visual barriers and clearer framing.

4.4.2.3 Low-angle point-of-view and the enlargement of the world

Figures 12-15 use sustained film tilt up shots that keeps the camera very low, which make the viewer feel close to the child's bodily level and experience the child's point-of-view. In Figure 12, the lens sits below the child's face so that the bright sky becomes a dominant background, while her facial detail is partly subdued by backlight and movement. This shot places the emotional focus on her searching act of looking rather than on a fully visible facial expression, so emotion is organised as alertness and uncertainty.

Figures 13-14 continue to use the low-angle shots, placing the child between tall trees that extend beyond the frame. The trees function like vertical walls, producing a sense of spatial pressure and making the child appear visually minor in relation to the setting. The small warm points of light embedded in the dark surroundings further guide the viewer's gaze upward and into depth. Because the camera keeps looking upward, the frame gives the viewer height and darkness but withholds clear information about where the child stands and where she can move next. As a result, the forest is presented as a space that must be read from partial cues rather than a space that is already made clear.

Figure 15 reinforces this effect by switching entirely to a tree-canopy view. With the ground removed and vertical scale emphasised, the viewer's orientation is pushed toward height and distance. This supports the brand logic because the low-angle shot makes the child's vulnerability feel continuous and hard to manage within the outdoor world, produced through her small scale within a vast environment. When TB later moves to indoor scenes, the more stable framing and closer distance gain force through contrast, allowing care to be emotionally experienced as a practical response that reduces the child's vulnerability and clarifies the relationship between mother and child. Through more stable and close-up framing, the indoor scenes at the end of film present care as a specific response and redemption to the vulnerability from previous outdoor scenes.

4.4.2.4 Insert close-ups that translate unease into clearly visible details

Figure 10 establishes the emotion of unease as a spatial condition by holding the child inside a large, hard-to-read outdoor setting, where the viewer's attention is distracted by trees, depth of field, and distance. The cut to Figure 11 then changes the film's emotional address by re-scaling perception. Instead of asking the viewer to observe the environment, the shot forces the viewer's attention onto a single and specific intrusion as ants crawl across the

child's boots. This transition matters because it converts a vague atmosphere of uncertainty into a physical discomfort that is immediate and difficult to ignore.

The persuasive power of close-up shots lies not only in their narrative function but also in their mechanism for capturing attention. When the frame removes most contextual information, viewers encounter fewer distracting cues, allowing the crawling motion of ants and textural differences to dominate perception. This function of directing attention is consistent with Rooney and Bálint's analysis of shot scale as a formal device that can redirect viewing priorities by "directing attention toward character mental states" (2018, p. 9).

In TB, the close-up shots compress the scene into single and clear details, so the emotion of unease is no longer dispersed across the wider forest space but becomes concentrated at the child's body. Even though Figure 11 is not centred on a face, the same principle applies at the level of cinematic form, because the shift in scale reorganises what the viewer can perceive first and most strongly. This makes the scene perceptually strong even without any explicit depiction of danger.

This is also where the film begins to prepare the brand logic more clearly. The outdoor wide shots present the child as small inside an uncertain world. The insert close-up reframes that uncertainty as something that can become specific and actionable once it is noticed. In other words, TB teaches a viewing ethic in which care begins with recognising small signs that the wider scene does not automatically clarify. This cinematic revelation supports the later indoor scenes, where the mother's attention is shown as practical, patient, and responsive rather than dramatic.

4.4.2.5 Wide framing and isolation as an emotional baseline

The film shots in TB are not limited to close-ups. It repeatedly changes to wide-angle framing, placing the child within expansive scenes and presenting her as a small figure. In these wide framings, the emphasis for conveying emotional expression has shifted from subtle facial expressions to posture, movement, and the proportional relationship between the child and her surroundings, as the face occupies a significantly reduced portion of the frame. This matters because Cutting and Armstrong note that, in shorter-scaled shots, “faces are larger” and therefore emotional expressions “might be easier (and faster) to discern” (2016, p. 893). By implication, when TB holds the child at a distance, it withholds the fastest route to reading feeling, so the viewer is left with a slower, more effortful form of recognition, which can enhance the emotion of being alone in a large world.

Figure 16 captures the moment she balances while walking along a fallen tree in the forest. The camera distance creates a sense of solitude, as no other figures provide contextual support. The identical distance also makes the actions appear as if performed independently rather than collaboratively, as the camera offers no close-up relational anchor points to stabilise the child’s risks and efforts. Figure 19 places the child as a small silhouette at the shoreline against a broad expanse of water and sky. These wide framings stabilise an emotion of loneliness, which makes later moments of contact or care become emotional releases rather than simple plot progression. This logic is established early in the transitions between outdoor scenes as well. Figure 9 places the child against an expansive shoreline, with open water and horizon dominating the frame, and Figure 10 expands the shot further so the viewer must visually search for the child within a much larger field. This “search” effect can be supported through attention research, because Itti and Koch argue that perceived salience depends on surrounding context, and that bottom-up attention is driven by feature contrast rather than absolute strength (2001, pp. 194, 197). When the scene is dominated by large and relatively uniform fields (sky, sea, horizon), the child’s small figure has fewer strong contrasts to rely on, so the viewer must work to locate and hold attention upon

her. The emotional result is that distance is felt as a condition of perception rather than merely as a measure of spatial scale. In brand terms, this perceptual distance prepares the later shift toward scenes of support and care, because the film first makes “being hard to reach” feel like an embodied viewing problem rather than an abstract narrative idea.

4.4.2.6 Keeping things partly unclear as a way to shape emotion

In TB, the film sometimes restricts what can be clearly seen in the image, so that attention is guided by what remains perceptually available rather than by fully legible information. Figure 20 presents a hand gesture against an open blue background while keeping the gesture in soft focus. This choice reduces the amount of visual detail available, so the viewer is encouraged to work to recognise what is being shown instead of receiving an immediately clear message. When the image is softened in this way, the gesture’s edges and fine details become less distinct, so there is less feature contrast for the viewer to rely on. Within Itti and Koch’s account of bottom-up attention, “what seems to matter in guiding bottom-up attention is feature contrast rather than local absolute feature strength” (2001, p. 197). The shot can therefore be seen as a controlled form of visibility that remains only partially legible, keeping the emotional experience oriented toward trying to understand rather than being clearly informed. As a result, the viewer’s attention changes from knowing what it is to trying to know what it is, which supports an emotional experience organised around effort and uncertainty rather than certainty and control. Also, the use of soft focus is a technique that deliberately reduces realism or credibility, pushing the scene towards fantasy rather than factual representation. This is achieved through the deliberate lowering of modality effect produced by soft focus and soft colours (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 159). “As detail, sharpness, colour, etc. are reduced”, the “modality decreases” (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 159). Consequently, the scene can be judged to be less realistic. It suggests that the outdoor scene is one imagined by the child, rather than a real one.

Figure 18 can be read as a deliberate counterpoint within the same logic of restricted access. It presents a tight close-up of the child's hand touching moss, compressing the world into a small zone of contact. Although the frame still limits context, it offers a different kind of clarity because surface texture and physical contact are easier to see than a distant gesture in Figure 20. Through this contrast, TB implies that when visual signals are difficult to confirm, an emotion of reassurance can come from immediate and local contact. This matters for the film's brand argument because it prepares the transition from uncertain cues in the outdoor world to the later indoor scenes, where communication becomes more organised and support becomes practical rather than abstract.

4.4.2.7 The bridge as a framing channel rather than neutral space

In the bridge sequence described by Figures 27-29, the camera uses bright opening at the far end of the bridge to organise the viewer's orientation. Figure 27 frames the bridge as a narrow corridor, with the wire mesh fencing on either side forming strong converging lines pointing towards a single vanishing point. This makes the scene almost entirely focused on the "front" with little else visible. This corridor framing matters emotionally because it turns the bridge into a channel that restricts choices, which can make the child's movement feel less like free exploration and more like being guided or forced toward a decision. When the vanishing point is visually dominant, crossing the bridge is staged as a decision under visual pressure, because the frame itself "pulls" the viewer's eyes forward while keeping the destination hard to see. In Figures 27 and 29, the far end of the bridge is so bright that it loses detail, so the film gives the viewer direction without fully revealing the visual information ahead, which maintains a feeling of uncertainty at the level of perception. Figure 28 reinforces this pressure by zooming in on the child while keeping the fence of bridge and the bright exit in the frame, so the scene holds the child's hesitation inside the same framing structure. When the child turns back (Fig. 28), the scene keeps the bright vanishing point behind and to her side, which creates a tension between "staying" and "crossing"

within the same restricted space, rather than presenting them as two independent choices.

Across the film's framing structure, the film repeatedly changes between close-up shots and wide shots of expansive spaces, so the emotion of safety is framed as what the child can hold or face directly, while the wider world in the film is framed as uncertain and difficult to interpret. The bridge sequence works as a hinge within this alternation because it combines both characteristics: it is wide enough to show the child's smallness within a larger structure, while it is also tightly framed by the fence, so the world appears large but controlling. Given that this bridge sequence occurs shortly before the indoor scenes of mother and child (Figs. 30-33), it can be seen as a visual transition from spaces where the child is exposed to spaces where care becomes organised and shareable, which prepares the ground for the brand's later emphasis on providing support and tools.

4.4.2.8 The family context as a stabilising factor in relationships

The interior scene reframes emotion through stability and proximity. Figure 31 places the mother in a close-up shot, where facial movement becomes the main carrier of meaning. Figure 32 positions mother and child in a clearer relational arrangement beside the window, so instruction and listening become the scene's visible actions. This scene further illustrates care as a shared and accessible practice, since the mother's posture and distance maintained from the child aim to keep their interaction on the same level rather than in a hierarchical stance where the adult is positioned above the child. The "PIG" card in Figure 32 further functions as a mediating object, enabling both characters to focus their attention together. This demonstrates that connection is shown as something made through a simple tool and repeated steps, not only through facial emotion. Figure 33 expands to a wider shot for the embrace, allowing the act of care to occupy the frame without distraction. By maintaining the clarity of the embrace within a distinct spatial setting, the film presents this gesture as a satisfying relational posture rather

than a heightened dramatic climax. Compared with the forest and shoreline scenes, the camera of interior scenes reduces spatial uncertainty and replaces it with an intelligible relation between two characters. This supports emotional resolution without relying on visual spectacle. The framing becomes more stable, so the viewer does not need to search the image for emphasis and can stay focused on the interaction between the mother and child. This shift also sets the stage for the brand's broader purpose by making care appear ordinary and achievable, so that to ensure subsequent deliveries of branded messages appear grounded in observable behaviour rather than in abstract emotions.

4.4.2.9 Title cards as a shift in address

Figures 34 and 35 replace the story world in the film with centred white text on a black screen. This is a visible change in address because the viewer is no longer asked to see faces, spaces, or actions. The screen provides only a statement of the brand and, in the following frame, a brand logo. This ending has a specific emotional function. By removing image detail, movement, and interpersonal cues immediately after the embrace scene, the film reduces the viewer's options for further empathic with and interpreting the characters. The emotional connection that has been built through observation is therefore not extended through additional story. It is held in suspension, giving the viewer a moment in which the feeling can settle rather than being redirected by new plot. The black background and high-contrast text may also be interpreted as cues for a serious emotion. This visually reduces the emotional feel of warmth from the embrace scene, replacing it with a calm and formal presentation of the brand slogan and brand logo. This ending technique clearly demonstrates how the film introduces the brand's core value. The narrative sequence can remain open to interpretation unless the brand provides an explicit framing. The title cards then serve precisely as that framing device. They convert the story's emotional experience into a declarative statement by telling the viewer what claim is being made, while the logo functions as a signature that assigns responsibility for that claim. In this structure, the emotional bond established with the child and mother is redirected toward a branded addresser. The

viewer is positioned less as a witness to a private moment and more as the recipient of a public message that asks for recognition, agreement, or action.

4.4.3 Editing and Sound

4.4.3.1 Cutting as attention guidance

The editing of TB guides the audience's attention by controlling both the information they can gather at each moment and the duration they spend on that information. In practice, the cutting repeatedly changes what the viewer is allowed to see clearly, and it decides when the viewer must re-orient from one scale of information to another. The opening indoor sequence from 00:00 to 00:22 contains only eleven shots, whereas the forest scene from 00:22 to 00:45 features sixteen shots. This acceleration in editing rhythm is crucial, as it transforms “attention” into a perceptible state within the film, rather than merely a technical choice. Julie Lambden argues that spectators’ attention is inherently mobile, and their eyes are “attracted by different stimuli” (2022, p. 163). Given this mobility, the editing of this film does not simply piece the information together, but rather organises the emotions into a coherent path by controlling where the audience's attention falls within each shot. This aligns with Lambden’s argument of montage as a form that must “position the viewer quickly and precisely” so that meaning can be tracked through rapid re-orientation rather than extended exposition (2022, p. 23).

In the opening sequence, cutting establishes a micro-perspective mode of view before the story world is fully defined. Figures 1-2 move rapidly between an extreme close-up of an eye and another close view of the feet of child, so the film begins by restricting the field of vision and placing emotional importance on perceptual details. Figures 5-6 extend this logic through the close-up sequences of tactile bodies, including a hovering hand within a beam of light and a foot stepping onto a pile of books. Because the cuts keep switching between small details rather than giving an orienting overview, the

viewer is positioned to treat minor actions as consequential, which supports an emotional tone of sensitivity and caution rather than confidence. In this opening sequence, the editing combines gazes, touches and cautious movements into coherent pieces of attention, allowing subtle changes in perception to be given emotional significance.

When the film cuts to outdoor scenes, the editing shifts the viewer's attention from capturing details to searching within an expansive, unrecognisable space, before cutting back suddenly to close-ups. Figures 10 place the child within a wide shot of the expansive landscape, distracting the viewer's focus across the water's surface, the horizon, and depth of field cues. The cut to shot 11 changes the emotional appeal by focusing on a single intrusive event: ants crawling over a boot. This transition transforms pervasive unease into immediate physical discomfort. The audience no longer needs to interpret the environment but confronts specific contact incidents directly. Lambden's claim that "Ideas and connections would be made at the moment of change" is useful here because it frames the cut itself as the point where scoping a field becomes recognising a specific problem (2022, p. 82). In TB, this recognition is not conveyed through dialogue, but achieved through a compulsory shift in attention. More specifically, it means the viewers' attention changes from the environment to the body, from a generalised sense of unease to specific, actionable details. The film continues this strategy in the forest and seashore scenes in Figures 16-20, where multiple shots are noticeably shortened and information is conveyed in fragmented form. More broadly, the editing between wide-angle shots and close-up shots shifts the emotional appeal from open-ended uncertainty to focused concern, because the editing narrows the film setting until the communication between child and mother dominates perception. The quicker editing rhythm in this section establishes a functional logic of attention: the information repeatedly received by the audience is sufficient only to perceive vulnerability, but not enough to stabilise their overall perception of the scene. This matches Lambden's argument of the cut as a moment that can create "dislocation for the viewer" and therefore forces re-orientation, because the viewer must stop focusing on the wider space and

immediately pay attention to a single close detail (2022, p. 27). In montage terms, the viewer is required to connect the two scales of information, since the point of the moment is produced when viewers carry what they have understood from one shot into the next and forge a connection across the change.

The bridge sequence and indoor scenes reduce editing frequency, allowing audiences to immerse themselves longer in relational information. Frames 27 to 29 use the bright end of the bridge sequence as an organisational anchor throughout the sequence, the slower editing pace guide viewers' attention to follow a stable directional structure rather than being distracted by other details. The indoor sequence from Figure 31 to 33 further slows its editing pace, reducing cuts and extending the duration of shots focused on characters' facial expressions and interactions. This slowdown in editing pace allows "care" to become sustained attention rather than an isolated event, as the film gives time for guidance, listening, and embracing to unfold within continuous shots. In TB's brand argument, the editing does not only create suspense or pace. It also demonstrates what "care" looks like in practice. The film first places the child in wide and hard-to-read spaces, where the viewer must see the scene without immediately knowing what is important. It then cuts to tight close-ups, where a small detail becomes recognisable. By repeating this shift from searching to noticing, the film suggests that care begins when someone recognises minor signals that a broader scene does not clearly explain, and responds to those signals before they become larger problems.

The final edit, featuring text centred on a black background in Figures 34-35, ends its control over attention by completely removing the story world scenes. The film thus concludes the brand value, transforming the audience's carefully observed attention into a direct dialogue. This direct connection between narrative and brand message enables viewers to quickly associate the story's

emotional content and themes with the brand's core values, without any further distraction from character action or setting.

4.4.3.2 Sound perspective and restraint

Sound in TB is not used as a continuous device to guide audience emotion. It is used more selectively, so that listening becomes a form to manage viewers' attention. Lambden notes that film sound can be used expressively, including to "infer a character's psyche or to direct how the viewer feels" (2022, p. 124). In TB, the significance of this perspective is that the soundtrack does not need to be dense or continuous to guide emotion. Films can achieve emotional guidance through a few precise sound effect transitions, as audiences cannot entirely escape the auditory experience. Lambden states that we cannot "close our ears" and that we can only "shift our attention" (2022, p. 125).

This treatment is crucial to the film's structure, as restraint heightens the significance of each sound change. In the audio track of TB, the overall volume of the closing sequence decreases rapidly, descending into near silence in the final seconds. This decrease is not merely a technical fade-out effect but constitutes a narrative shift. The film departs from its earlier sensory world that immersed viewers in a child's experience, instead using a straightforward narrative form of texts (figs. 34-35). Lambden's discussion of silence proves particularly inspiring here: she suggests that the absence of sound can heighten auditory perception and provoke questioning rather than offering comfort, even when this silence is achieved through relative volume rather than absolute silence (2022, p. 139).

The opening sequence locates the viewer's attention upon highly localised details, such as close-ups of eyes (Fig. 1) and the close-up framing and detailed motion capture of a child's feet (Figs. 2, 5, 6). Within this narrow visual space, restrained musical tracks guide the audience towards immersing in the immediacy of the moment rather than rushing towards narrative

certainty. This underlines Lambden's idea that attentional focus during listening requires selective management, as listeners cannot stop hearing and must be guided towards key information (2022, p. 125). In the opening sequence of TB, the audience is led to interpret the child's cautious actions as deeply meaningful, even before the overall situation has fully clarified.

The shift into the outdoor sequences (Figs. 10-20) changes the sound perspective in a way that complements the film's change in spatial scale. Wide framings expand the field of view, and the soundtrack correspondingly becomes an important tool for stabilising orientation. At the transition around Figures 8-10, the audio track shows a noticeable textural change compared to the preceding indoor scenes. This change functions as an auditory boundary between enclosed indoor setting and open outdoor setting, corresponding to the film's shift from close-up detail to expansive space. Once the child is placed within a large environment (Fig. 10), the soundtrack does not resolve uncertainty through heavy explanation. Instead, it maintains an atmosphere in which the viewer must continue to attend carefully, because the outdoor world remains hard to read through vision alone.

When examining TB within the context of mainstream film's increasing trend towards intense auditory stimulation, its restrained approach in audio elements becomes particularly noticeable. Kerins notes a tendency toward "louder, busier, and more aggressive soundtracks" in recent decades (2015, p. 151). TB largely avoids this persistent auditory pressure, relying instead on a limited number of perceptible variations in its soundtrack, thereby making each sound transition more meaningful. This characteristic is particularly evident at key structural moments. Before and after the bridge sequence (Figs. 26-29), the intensity of the soundtrack noticeably increases compared to earlier and later scenes. This increased intensity reinforces the sequence's function as a transitional threshold, as the camera focuses on the child approaching the space of decision, allowing the audience's sensory orientation to be heightened to a more powerful state. The film does not need

excessive volume across the whole work, because it concentrates emphasis at moments where orientation and emotional engagement are most crucial.

The return to indoor scenes (Figures 31-33) is characterised by a reduction in sound intensity compared to the bridge scenes. This reinforces the scene's more stable, relationship-oriented cinematography, as the interaction between mother and child occurs naturally without other sensory distractions. The end credits card most clearly demonstrates sound as a controlled form of expression. At Figure 34, the audio track exhibits a clear emphasis compared to the previous indoor scene (Figure 33,) and the final credits (Figure 35). By cutting away the story scenes at the end and instead presenting text centred on a black background (Figs. 34-35), TB reduced visual complexity without removing the audio track, instead narrowing its scope. The remaining audio is not literal silence, as the sound has been refined to make the child's humming the dominant auditory element. This reduces distracting cues, offering viewers a clearer signal structure where text and humming jointly form the central anchor points for attention. According to Lambden's previously mentioned perspective, silence in film is often achieved through relative volume, whilst a marked reduction in noise heightens auditory perception and stimulates reflection (2022, p. 139). This principle finds application in TB's ending. In TB, the near-silent soundtrack sustained by a child's humming, combined with the editing technique of transitioning to a black background with white text. It keeps the audience immersed in the child's emotional state. Thus, the brand's statement becomes a direct address concluding the viewing experience.

4.4.3.3 Sound design and emotional orientation

TB uses sound to stabilise the emotional perspective, even when the visuals lack a clear context. The film opens with the girl's humming, this persistent auditory thread firmly anchoring the audience within her sensory world. The humming continues throughout the opening and for most of the film, enabling the audience to repeatedly return to the child's unique rhythm even when situated in different scenes. This continuity proves essential, as it reduces the

need for descriptive dialogue while making the subsequent interruption of the humming a turning point in both narrative and emotion.

A second organising device in TB's sound is the off-screen calling voice. Film sound theory often describes an unseen sound source as "acousmatic", meaning that the viewer hears a sound while the cause remains outside the frame (Muns, 2020). In TB, the mother's voice initially works in this way. In Figure 4 the viewer hears an adult woman calling the child's name while the caller remains unseen, and the voice returns several times across the outdoor journey. This pattern sustains uncertainty because the viewer receives an address without access to its source, so the voice becomes a directional pressure rather than a confirmed presence.

Chion's view of off-screen voices describes how sound cinema can show a barrier or an empty space while allowing the viewer to hear a voice that is "there" but outside the frame, which produces a play of presence and absence (as cited in Anderson, no date). TB aligns with this logic because the voice is repeatedly heard as a call toward connection before the film allows the viewer to locate the caller within the story world.

The film also builds emotions through environmental sound that gradually thickens the outdoor soundscapes. From Figure 8 onward, water sound enters the sound mix, and later the soundtrack includes bird calls and the low buzzing of fireflies. These natural sounds broaden the sense of space while also keeping it difficult to read, because the viewer hears activity around the girl that the frame does not always clarify. The result is a soundscape that supports the film's broader emotional structure, which moves between small, private perception and an outside world that remains larger than the child's immediate control.

The turning point occurs when the film returns to “real-world” scenes. After multiple calls, the mother calls the child’s name again in Figure 30, and this is the first moment when the mother’s voice becomes clearly present rather than distant or ambiguous. At this point the girl’s humming is removed from the soundtrack. This subtraction is not merely a reduction of sound. It is a reorganisation of auditory priority. By removing the child’s self-contained vocal layer, the film gives the mother’s voice a clearer channel, so the emotional emphasis shifts from solitary perception to relational guidance.

The indoor scenes reinforce this shift through audible feedback and verbal confirmation. In Figure 31 the child says the word on the card, “pig”, and the mother’s relieved laughter becomes an audible sign of recognition. In Figure 32 the mother says, “you got it”, which frames understanding as an achieved interaction rather than a private effort. This is where sound supports the brand message through an everyday context. The ending sequence of TB does not rely on dramatic music, but instead uses clear dialogue, precise timing of interactions, and the mother's audibly warm response to present care as a practical and replicable action.

The ending returns to the earlier auditory motif. After Figure 32, the cut to Figure 34 brings back the girl’s humming, and it continues through the end of the film. This return matters because it does not cancel what has changed. Instead, it keeps the child’s sensory at the same time as the film has already shown who is calling and why. Earlier, the viewer hears a calling voice without a stable visual source, so the film lets the situation remain unclear and aligns the viewer with the child’s uncertainty. By the indoor sequence (Figs. 30-33), the mother’s voice becomes clear and is confirmed through direct interaction between the mother and child, so the viewer can retroactively understand that the earlier calls belonged to the mother rather than to an abstract or anonymous presence.

In this sense, the soundtrack closes the film by holding together two states, the child's initial autistic state of mind and the later connection between mother and child, because the humming carries the emotional experience of isolation while the narrative has already established contact as real and achievable. In short, the ending allows the audience to experience two things at the same time: that the child continues to perceive the world through an innocent lens, and that this innocent way of seeing can still receive care and guidance. When the humming sound returns at Figure 34, the viewer is no longer in the same interpretive position as at the start, because the film has already supplied new anchoring information in the indoor sequence. Earlier in the film, humming is heard while the relational context is unclear. The viewer may understand it as the child's self-contained auditory world, because the film withholds a confirmed social frame for what viewers are hearing. By Figures 31-32, the film shows an explicit and ordinary interaction (the child reads "pig"; the mother responds "you got it"). This provides a confirmed relationship, that the child is not alone, and the mother is a stable partner in their communication. When Figure 34 reintroduces the humming, it now sits inside a different narrative knowledge state. The viewer therefore interprets the same sound differently, not because the humming changes, but because the viewer's understanding of situations has changed. To be more specific, the humming is re-heard as the child's continuing her inner mode of experiencing the world, while the viewer now knows that a real interpersonal bridge has been established around that inner mode. The ending can therefore feel like closure without adding more dialogue, because the soundtrack itself performs the integration of emotions between isolation and connection.

4.5 Discussions and Conclusion

This chapter has examined how three brand films construct emotional experience through the coordinated organisation of colour and lighting, camera and framing, and editing and sound. The close readings treat the

brand film as an audio-visual narrative form that is designed to elicit feeling, guide interpretation, and shape the viewer's sense of what the brand stands for (Plantinga, 2009). Rather than treating emotion as an add-on to narrative meaning, the close readings show that emotional experience is built as a structured trajectory in which visual and sonic cues repeatedly organise attention, regulate intensity, and guide appraisal at key turning points (Tan, 1996).

Across the corpus, colour and lighting repeatedly separate experiential worlds and mark transitions between them, including a sustained contrast between a warm, saturated domestic register and a cooler, desaturated register associated with isolation or strain, which is especially explicit in the film that contrasts Earth and Moon spaces. Film style scholarship has long treated lighting and colour as central to how cinema creates mood and modulates the viewer's orientation to what is shown (Bordwell and Thompson, 2019). In these brand films, shifts in warmth, saturation, and contrast repeatedly function as cues for intimacy, isolation, reassurance, or vulnerability. From a multimodal perspective, these tonal choices operate as meaning-making resources that shape what feels emotionally near or distant by altering perceptual conditions of visibility, warmth, and emphasis, therefore influencing how situations and characters are evaluated (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006). The close readings suggest that these visual tonal structures do not merely illustrate story events. They organise the affective conditions under which story events are understood and remembered, which is crucial when a brand seeks to attach itself to a distinctive emotional register. The close readings also show that lighting frequently functions as a localised "bridge" across separation, for example through small, concentrated light sources that pull attention towards a relational point of contact and make connection perceptible even when characters remain physically apart.

The analyses of camera and framing indicate that brand films also manage emotion through the regulation of proximity, alignment, and interpersonal

access. Patterns of shot scale, angle, and spatial separation guide the viewer's closeness to characters and steer how sympathy and identification are distributed. This is consistent with film theory that explains emotional engagement as structured through cues that position viewers in relation to characters and their situations (Smith, 1995). In the corpus, this work of alignment is often staged as a movement between distance and closeness, where wider framings and boundary devices make separation visible, while closer framings increase legibility of facial and bodily cues at moments of emotional decision. In the chapter's three case studies, framing patterns repeatedly mark moments of disconnection and reconnection, as well as transitions from observation to intimacy. The cumulative effect is that the viewer is not only shown emotional states but is also placed into a controlled viewing relation that makes some feelings more available than others.

The close readings further show that editing and sound are decisive in shaping the temporal profile of emotional experience. Montage, pacing, and the management of transitions guide the viewer through emotional peaks and releases, while recurring sonic motifs and the placement of voice and music stabilise meaning across visual change. Work on audiovisual perception emphasises that sound and image operate together as a unified perceptual event rather than as separable tracks, which is precisely why sound can redirect the meaning of what is seen (Chion, 1994). In the corpus, sound frequently operates as an organising layer that holds together two emotional states without additional explanation, including the use of a recurring vocal motif that returns at the ending and retroactively reframes earlier isolation as part of a later relational context (Chion, 1994). In this sense, the films' emotional design can be understood as a temporal construction in which the viewer's feelings are guided through structured sequences, supporting the view of narrative cinema as a system that organises affect through form (Tan, 1996).

Taken together, these findings clarify how the films connect emotion to brand perception. The close readings suggest that brand meaning is not added after the fact through logos or explicit claims, but is embedded in the emotional logic of the narrative and in the formal techniques that make that narrative affectively compelling. This aligns with experiential marketing arguments that contemporary branding increasingly competes through designed experiences rather than through functional messaging alone (Schmitt, 1999). It also resonates with research on brand experience that conceptualises experience as a combination of sensations, feelings, cognitions, and responses evoked by brand-related stimuli, including communications (Brakus, Schmitt and Zarantonello, 2009). In the films analysed here, brand perception is repeatedly shaped through narratives in which care, responsibility, and social connection operate as evaluative frames, so that the brand can be read as aligned with protection, recognition, or support rather than with product utility alone. This is particularly salient where the narrative foregrounds vulnerability and inclusion, so that emotional engagement depends on viewers' appraisal of whether care is convincingly staged and sustained through the film's formal organisation.

Methodologically, the chapter demonstrates the value of close reading for making visible the fine-grained formal patterns through which brand films organise emotional experience. At the same time, close reading remains an interpretive method that cannot, on its own, establish how actual viewers respond, nor how practitioners conceptualise their own creative decisions. Study 1 therefore establishes a film-specific map of strategies that can be carried forward into Study 2 and Study 3, including questions about how practitioners account for these recurring patterns of tonal contrast, alignment, and sonic closure, and how viewers articulate the links between felt experience and perceived brand values when responding to the same films. In this way, the close readings provide a theory-informed baseline for cross-study triangulation, strengthening the thesis's overall claim that emotional experience and brand perception are constructed through the interaction between formal design, professional intention, and audience interpretation.

CHAPTER 5

Study 2 – Practitioners' Interviews on Emotional Experience, Brand Values and Brand Perception

5.1 Introduction

This interview study examines how practitioners describe the making of brand films that seek to create emotional experience and influence brand perception. Chapter 4 has shown, through close reading, how selected films use colour and lighting, camera and framing, and editing and sound to guide emotional response. This chapter asks how practitioners understand these processes in their own work. It focuses on their choices, limits and working assumptions when they plan, produce or judge brand films.

This study draws on material from 19 practitioners working in areas related to brand films, including marketing, creative planning, directing, producing, screenwriting, editing, digital communication and short-video production. Most participants worked in production-facing roles, while a smaller number worked in planning, marketing or communication. The following table gives a short list of the interviewees, including their names, occupations, organisations and seniority.

Name	Occupation	Organization	Seniority
Yue CAI	Serving the visual and program development of marketing; roles in	Marketing company serving the world's top 500 companies	12 years

	creative planning, producer, and director.		
Jiayu CHEN	Digital marketing consultant	PingPong Digital	2 years
Yu CHEN	Legal representative; roles in planning, shooting and posting production of film and television advertisements, micro films, documentaries, promotional films, etc.	Guangzhou Baishi Culture Communication Co., Ltd.	10 years
Yu HOU	Founder of film and television advertising company; roles in producer, director, screenwriter	Film and television advertising company	20 years
Gang HUANG	Screenwriter, director in advertising and films	Freelance	5 years
Jie (Eddy) LI	Head of Digital Marketing and Communications	Tupperware	2 years
Tianhang LU	Film and advertising director, art director	Freelance	15 years
Guanyang WU	Short video making, advertising and promotional film director, producer, executive producer	Freelance	6 years
Yuhan WU	Producer, director, new media	"Beautiful China Tour" column team	1 year
Yanxiang XI	Editor	Editing Studio	19 years

Sile ZHANG	Marketing planner	Cross-border e-commerce company for environmentally friendly women's shoe brand	2 years
Yizhi SHI	Film reviewer for the short film unit; postgraduate student in drama and film and television studies	Shanghai International Film Festival	2 years
Yuxiao HAN	Screenwriter	Freelance	1 year
Yuqi LU	Creative producer	Filmmaking studio	4 years
Gu ZHANG	Director, producer	Freelance	5 years
Shun HAN	Marketing executive	Advertising company	3 years
John Anderson	Director, producer	Freelance	2 years
Neeko Hall	Editor	Freelance	1 year
Jiahao LUO	Short video creator	Freelance	3 years

In precise terms, the dataset consists of 18 synchronous interviews and one email exchange. Twelve interviews were conducted on Zoom, five were face-to-face, and one was conducted by phone. Yuqi LU completed the same question schedule through an email exchange. All synchronous interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis. The email exchange was not recorded, but it was treated as written interview data because it followed the same subject areas as the interviews. Interviews lasted between 40 minutes and 1 hour and 50 minutes. As one example, Yu CHEN's Zoom

interview on 27 February 2024 lasted 41 minutes and 47 seconds. Sixteen interviews were conducted in Chinese and three in English. The sample included 17 Chinese practitioners and two British practitioners. The interviewees are identified by their real names because they consented to non-anonymous participation.

The reason for speaking to practitioners from these different roles was to understand how brand films are made in practice. Marketers and planners could explain how a brand message is shaped before production, while directors, producers, editors and other production staff could explain how that message is turned into images, sound, rhythm and story. Their accounts therefore add a practical layer to the close readings in Chapter 4, without claiming to represent the whole brand film industry.

In this study, most interviewees are production staff, such as directors of photography, editors and videographers. This focus is deliberate. These practitioners are directly responsible for the audio-visual realisation of brand films, including photography, lighting, sound and editing, which are the very dimensions that Study 1 identifies as central to the construction of emotional experience and to the way viewers perceive the brand. By talking to practitioners who translate scripts and concepts into concrete images and sounds, the interview study gains insight into how emotional intentions and brand-related ideas are negotiated under practical conditions of production, such as time, budget and technical constraints, and how particular choices of framing, colour, pacing or sound design are justified in relation to what a brand film should make audiences feel and think.

At the same time, this emphasis on production roles brings specific limitations. The sample contains fewer participants whose primary responsibilities lie in branding strategy or market positioning, such as creative directors, brand managers or marketing strategists. As a result, the study offers a more

detailed view of how emotional storytelling is crafted at the level of execution than of how it is initially aligned with brand goals, marketing strategies or audience segmentation. Production staff in many projects also work from scripts or briefs that have already been developed, which means that their accounts only partially illuminate how ideas are first generated and refined, and how a brand's broader vision shapes the earliest stages of concept development. The interview findings should therefore be understood as a perspective on emotional experience in brand films from the standpoint of those who implement, adapt and negotiate creative decisions in production, rather than as a comprehensive map of all strategic actors involved in branding.

This interview study offers a deliberately focused perspective on brand filmmaking from the standpoint of production practice. Rather than mapping the entire multidisciplinary ecology of branding work, it examines how emotional experience is constructed and how brand meaning is shaped through concrete audio-visual decisions in cinematography, lighting, sound and editing. As a qualitative study with a purposive sample, the findings are not intended to be statistically generalisable across the wider field of brand filmmaking, where multiple roles contribute to the final work. Perspectives centred on strategy, market positioning and client-facing decision-making are less fully represented in this sample. These perspectives should therefore be understood as complementary to, rather than competing with, the production-centred account developed here.

The purpose of this chapter is therefore not to present the interviewees as a single professional voice. It uses their accounts to identify recurring ways in which practitioners talk about emotion, brand values and audience response. These findings are later compared with the reception study, where viewers' responses provide a different form of evidence.

5.2 Interview Content, Data, and Findings

The interviews were organised around a semi-structured question list. The list began with an introduction to the project, confirmation of consent, and warm-up questions about the participant's role and recent work. It then moved through three subject areas that followed the research question and the close reading findings. The same subject areas were also used for the email exchange, although this produced written answers rather than spoken data. The schedule gave the interviews a clear structure, but the wording and order of questions were adjusted where necessary so that participants could speak from their own experience.

Examples of questions included: Can you briefly introduce your current work and professional role? How would you define a brand film from your professional point of view? How do you distinguish brand films from traditional advertising, short videos or product-focused commercials? Can a product appear in a brand film, and what role should it have? Can you describe a brand-film or video campaign you have worked on? What makes a good brand film? How do you judge whether a brand film is successful? How do you make a brand film fit the wider marketing and branding strategy of the company? How do you adapt the film to different target audiences? What ethical issues should be considered when producing brand films? How do you include social or human values in brand-film content? Which brand film has recently moved you as a viewer? What steps do you take to make the emotion in a brand film feel real? Do you design an emotional arc in advance? Do you think the emotional effect of a brand film is short-term or long-term?

Subject 1: Definition and recognition of brand films

Subject 1 looked at the definition and recognition of brand film, including the key elements of its content and the difference between brand film and other types of advertising.

Subject 2: The experience and behaviour of promoting a brand

Subject 2 delved into the interviewee's experience and behaviour in promoting a brand. Criteria for measuring the success or failure of brand films, audience research and analysis, the importance of including social and human values in brand films, and ethical considerations are discussed.

Subject 3: The receptive opinions on watching brand films from the perspectives of audiences and practitioners

Subject 3 examined the viewing experience of brand films. The interviewees discussed the emotional experience of watching brand films from the perspectives of both an audience and a brand film practitioner. The text covers various aspects of audiovisual content, including memorable and emotionally engaging brand films, criteria for judging such content from two perspectives, emotional transmission and reception, emotional feelings and effects of social and cultural message or issues implicit in brand films, and the impact of emotional experience on the audience.

These three subjects constitute the overall structure of the interviews, and their specific content will be elaborated later.

This chapter presents a thematic analysis of the interview data. The material consists of 18 audio-recorded interview transcripts, related interview notes, translated or cleaned extracts where needed, and one written email response based on the same question areas. The interviewees' comments are treated as situated professional accounts. They are used to show how practitioners explain their work, not as neutral evidence of the whole industry.

5.2.1 Interview data and findings from subject 1

In the interviews with 19 practitioners in brand film-related domains, it became apparent that many were not familiar with the term 'brand film'. While they may have been exposed to this type of advertising film that uses storytelling as its main technique, they were unable to provide a clear definition. To investigate practitioners' comprehension and definition of brand film, I introduced my definition of the term to the interviewees and asked them to provide their personal or professional definition. They were also asked to give a brief explanation of the key elements of brand film content and the difference to other forms of advertising.

The majority of interviewees agreed with my proposed definition of brand film and provided additional insights. Some respondents were unable to distinguish brand film from other forms of advertising and remained neutral towards my definition. However, a few respondents disagreed and provided their own views on the definition of brand film. The definition of brand films is discussed in this section. Figure 1 displays the identified themes and their associated delineations.

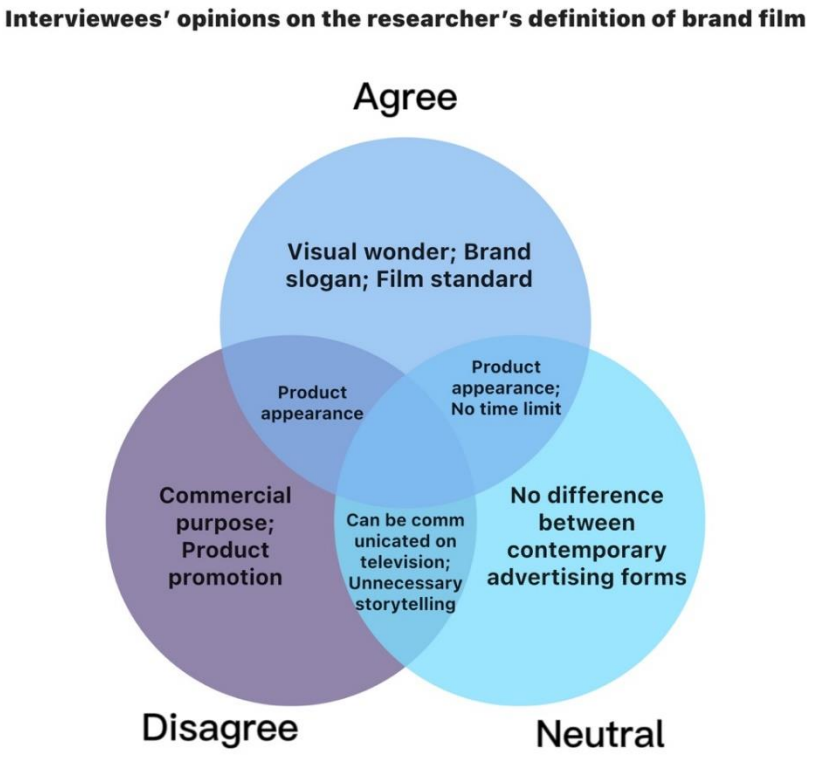


Fig. 1: The chart showing key points of interviewees' opinions

Many interviewees believed that the primary channels of communication for brand films were network and social media platforms, and they believed that this difference in communication channels was one of the ways to distinguish brand films from traditional advertising. Yizhi SHI agreed that differences in communication channels are a key factor that differentiates brand films from traditional advertising, saying: "Because brand films typically use digital platforms, social media, and streaming services, while traditional advertising typically relies on product-centric messaging delivered through television, radio, or print media, I see brand films as having a broad impact, while traditional advertising is a direct impact." However, respondents also mentioned that it is difficult to distinguish brand films from other emerging forms of advertising, such as commercials and short videos, as they have all become networked. "The popular short videos on the Internet now also have advertising components. These short videos have short, engaging clips. They

convey the brand message in a form that quickly grabs attention. I think it's similar to brand films, so we need to understand how to distinguish them when defining brand films," said Yu HOU. Yuhan WU said, "some online digital video ads are usually displayed before, during or after streaming content, and I think this format is similar to brand films. I think brand films need to have a more unique definition."

The majority of interviewees agreed that storytelling is the primary technique for brand films, as it effectively conveys a brand's core values and message through stories. Some interviewees disagreed with this view, arguing that brand films can take any form and do not necessarily need to tell a story to convey the brand's values. For instance, interviewees cited the example of a commercial in the form of a music video, which can still be considered a brand film as long as it conveys the brand's values. Sile ZHANG said, "I think some brands have unique personalities, they have their own unique style of promotion. For example, many luxury brands, I see a special image style in them, that is unique. But these luxury brands rarely use storytelling to promote the brand value. What they do is incorporate the brand's unique style and aesthetic standards into their advertising." Some interviewees believed that storytelling was one form of content for brand films, but not necessarily the main form. Tianhang LU said, "in my creative work, I use many different forms of brand film content. Storytelling is one, and others I use more often are musicals, documentaries, speech films, etc. I feel that different forms give me new and wide-ranging ideas for creation, and I can also cope with different styles of brands. It is important to note that there are other forms of content that can be used as well.

Regarding the product's appearance, the interviewees provided a range of responses. Most interviewees endorsed my thesis definition of the brand film and broadly aligned with the four characteristics outlined in Section 3.2. They accepted that brand films are positioned against conventional advertising norms, privilege storytelling to express core brand values, and seek to

connect audiences with the brand through emotional experience, while also recognising the role of mediality in establishing a social and cultural stance (Section 3.2.1-3.2.4). However, their agreement was not evenly distributed across these characteristics. Several participants qualified the claim about avoiding product display, and the notion of mediality was more often affirmed after it was introduced explicitly in the interview, whereas interviewees did not develop a clear stance on the emotional impact of brand films or the incorporation of social and cultural themes. A few interviewees said product can appear as any characteristics in brand films. “I don't think the role of the product needs to be played as a prop in a brand film. I think this is irrelevant because the product cannot be shown in a brand film completely without the product itself. I think the product can appear in any form in a brand film as long as it is not overly showing the function and message of the product,” said Yuhan WU. In the 'mediality' discussions of brand films, fewer individuals initially raised this viewpoint, but more interviewees concurred after I introduced the concept. Guanyang WU said, “when I heard you mention the definition of the ‘mediality’ of a brand film, I thought it was very clever. I think the brand film can make the audience discover the problem, participate in the discussion of the problem, and share the problem through its content, which is a manifestation of the ‘mediality’. The interviewees did not express a clear stance on the emotional impact of brand films or the incorporation of social and cultural themes.

5.2.2 Interview data and findings from subject 2

Drawing on practitioners’ case-based accounts, this section examines how brand films are described as promoting the brand through specific creative decisions and their translation into audio-visual form.

Subject 2 explores the various aspects of brand film making, including the challenges, characteristics and strategies associated with creating high-impact content. Interviewees highlight their experience and reflections on projects they are most impressed with and proud of. They suggest that

innovation and alignment with the brand's core values are important factors for success. The essence of a good brand film is then discussed with the interviewees, including key elements such as an engaging storyline, emotional resonance, and visual wonder. These elements and their interplay help to communicate brand values to the audience.

Additionally, the interviewees were asked to provide further details on how to communicate brand value through the elements that constitute a good brand film. The interviewees discussed the strategies they use in their work, including designing a storyline that fits the brand's context, selecting visual elements that reflect the brand's message, and incorporating social topics that fit the brand's theme. These strategies are considered essential for communicating the brand's core values. Regarding the measurement of success in communicating a brand's core values, interviewees mentioned that metrics such as audience engagement, brand emotion, and tangible impact on brand perception are considered measures of the communication effect of a brand film. It was emphasized that these metrics have a broad nature.

I also queried the interviewees on "how a brand film aligns with the brand or company's broad marketing and branding strategy?" The interviewees stressed the significance of collaborating closely with the marketing team, adhering to the guidelines of the brand planning department, and aligning with the brand's strategy department. As the interviewees were predominantly production staff, they were not usually involved in the pre-marketing planning and strategic analysis of the brand. The brand analysis and planning team usually completes the theme and core values of a brand in advance. Based on the brand's overall image and values, they formulate a marketing direction. Then, the team responsible for creating the brand film will subsequently create content based on the predetermined marketing direction. Communication with the planning and marketing departments is crucial throughout the process, as the content of the brand films must align with the

themes and core ideas provided by the planning department. The interviewees on the production team emphasized this point.

A very small number of interviewees worked in pre-production brand marketing and planning roles. They emphasised that defining the brand concept is crucial. In their accounts, this involved clarifying what the brand aims to communicate and determining how the product, if included, should be integrated into that concept. This aligns with the type of “insight” that Eddy LI referred to. He emphasises the importance of this 'insight' as it can lead to the creation of content once the brand is established. According to Eddy LI, if a brand film only focuses on the products or services it offers to the target audience, then the content is too shallow. The key to what he calls 'insight' is that a brand film can build on this shallow content to reach the next level. If the content of a brand film discusses a particular problem or phenomenon faced by the audience and presents the brand's attitude or suggestion on the matter, it can be considered successful for early marketing analysis. This approach aligns with the broad brand strategy of a company. In pre-brand marketing planning, Eddy LI believes that conducting 'insight' analysis, which includes determining the brand concept and analysing the target audience, is essential.

However, when producing brand films for small or lesser-known brands, interviewees mentioned several challenges. These challenges stem from limited resources and audiences. Budget was a common issue that could not be ignored, as the limited budget for niche brands led to encountering more specific problems during production. Tianhang LU noted that due to budget constraints, certain desired scenes were unattainable and filming equipment had to be selected within the budget. This limited the creative process, resulting in a narrower design and less freedom in the content. To address these issues, strategies such as targeting the audience, emphasizing unique brand value propositions, and promoting social participation can be employed. Tailoring brand films to different audiences is essential and requires

comprehensive audience research, segmentation, and crafting narratives that resonate with different demographic groups. Many interviewees considered ethical factors, such as authenticity, inclusivity, and social responsibility, to be a positive aspect of brand film content, but not a requirement. Most interviewees believed that conveying social responsibility and positive values can result in a positive brand perception for the audience and improve brand image.

Most interviewees believed that integrating social and humanistic values into brand films can establish deeper ties with audiences, cultivate trust, and promote positive social impact. However, Yizhi SHI disagreed and argued that explicit discussion of social and cultural issues in brand films is not necessary. She offered two reasons. She suggested that brands that are not public welfare organisations may not see a need to articulate an explicit stance on social and humanistic issues through brand films. She also argued that when such themes do appear, they often function as a rhetorical cover or transition into commercial messaging rather than as a genuine engagement with responsibility or morality. From her perspective, brand films are more persuasive when they depict ordinary and personal emotions that audiences recognise from everyday life, because this is where empathy is most readily evoked. She also acknowledged that companies inevitably have social consequences, but maintained that brand films remain primarily commercial communications and that social themes should not be treated as a substitute for substantive corporate responsibility. Yizhi SHI stated that “brand films do not have to deal with issues such as concern for human destiny and global environmental protection. Instead, they can focus on the emotions and values present in our daily lives. If brand films can convey subtle and essential content that is true, kind, and happy, they can be very powerful.”

Across the wider sample, interviewees repeatedly emphasised connection, trust and social impact as desirable outcomes of brand films. Several participants also described the practical challenge of addressing culturally

diverse audiences without diluting authenticity, often suggesting that widely recognisable themes and careful audio-visual choices can support cross-cultural accessibility.

Furthermore, interviewees emphasised the importance of promoting connection, trust and social impact. To address a global audience while respecting cultural diversity, they plan to utilise common themes, captivating visuals, and culturally appropriate content that maintains authenticity. Overall, the discussions in subject 2 provide valuable insights into the diverse nature of brand film production, highlighting consistency of brand themes, creative complexity, audience engagement and ethical considerations as important considerations when creating influential content.

5.2.3 Interview data and findings from subject 3

Subject 3 focuses on how practitioners understand the role of emotion in brand film as a form of brand communication. Participants discussed their own emotional responses as viewers alongside their creative methods as practitioners, clarifying how emotional experience is intended to shape brand meaning and audience engagement.

The interviewees provided insight into the power of storytelling to evoke emotional responses and identified key elements that contribute to the memorability of brand films. Neeko HALL said, “the arc of emotional change is particularly important in storytelling, as it creates emotional contrasts to evoke emotions. For me, memorable stories have moments of conflict, and ups and downs. This allows me to feel the emotional ups and downs that the story brings to me, reminds me of experiences and challenges in my own life and feels emotionally familiar”. Yu CHEN said, “I often mention the importance of storytelling to my colleagues in my creative work. When a story resonates on

a personal level with the audience, it engages their minds. Emotional engagement inspired by storytelling makes a brand film more than just promotional, it creates a story that audiences can relate to or aspire to. I think this emotion drives people to take action, including sharing the brand's film with friends and purchasing the brand's products or services. They will also remember the brand for a long time as a result."

Yuqi LU discussed the factors that make brand films create lasting memories and emphasised authenticity as central. She stated that "authenticity is paramount. An authentic brand message builds a trusting relationship with the audience quickly. Authenticity also enables the viewing experience of storytelling to be genuine. This trust affects the audience's memory of the brand film." In this thesis, authenticity is treated as a viewer judgement of perceived brand authenticity rather than as an objectively verifiable property of a film, and is therefore approached as something audiences infer from cues within brand communication (Napoli et al., 2014). This positioning is compatible with work that conceptualises perceived brand authenticity as multidimensional, including credibility and integrity alongside symbolism and continuity (Morhart et al., 2015). Prior research has also associated brand authenticity with outcomes such as trust and loyalty (Portal et al., 2019, as cited in Södergren, 2021). They also highlighted the importance of establishing an emotional connection between the audience and the brand. An emotional connection can transform a passive viewing experience into an active, meaningful engagement. "There are so many brands out there today that authenticity and identity are often not enough for a brand to stand out," said Jiahao LUO. "A brand film that evokes emotion in the audience makes it memorable. A strong emotional connection can make the audience feel that the brand film is not just a commercial pitch, but a symbol or experience that they long to be a part of." Sile ZHANG said: "I may share content that moves me. When I connect with the brand film on a deeper level, I share that experience with others and amplify the brand's message in my mind." Yu HOU linked deeper audience connection to what happens after viewing, when viewers engage with the social issue raised by a brand film and carry it into

discussion. In this account, “interaction” refers less to any formal interactivity within the film and more to audiences’ interpretive and evaluative work. Viewers absorb information while watching, form a position in relation to the issue, and then articulate that position in conversations with others. This matters for the present thesis because it suggests a pathway through which emotional experience can extend beyond the screening event. A brand film may shape brand perception not only through what it depicts, but also through the social exchange it prompts, as discussion becomes a site where viewers confirm, contest, or refine the value stance that they attribute to the film and, by extension, to the brand. Yu HOU’s point therefore supports treating issue based storytelling as a mechanism that connects narrative emotion to wider circulation and audience sense making, rather than as a simple “message delivery” function. This account is echoed by other interviewees who emphasised discussion as part of a brand film’s social life, although they differed on whether controversy strengthens emotional engagement or risks audience scepticism. John Anderson said: "when I create brand films, I often join broader cultural or social movements. These include racial equality, feminism and other sensitive but currently hot social topics, which I use in the content of brand films. I think they are global issues that resonate with modern people. Brand films can also be seen as a medium to promote social progress or encourage some kind of positive group thinking.” Gu ZHANG framed issue-based brand films as a form of “deep communication” that seeks to raise audience awareness and to position the brand as an actor that can contribute to social change. Reflecting on his own work, he explained that such films aim to educate audiences about an issue and to articulate “a plan or attitude for the brand to actively contribute to the issue”. This emphasis on contribution is developed further in Tianhang LU’s account, which focuses on what the audiovisual medium allows a brand to demonstrate rather than merely claim. As he put it, “the advantage of brand films is the use of audiovisual content to show how the brand can help solve a critical problem, show progress or transformation”. His point is echoed by another practitioner who described working on films designed to “empower marginalized groups”, arguing that the force of such films lies in making change visible to audiences “going beyond words” through embodied and observable transformation. Taken together,

these accounts suggest that, for some practitioners, issue based storytelling is valued not only for signalling brand stance but also for evidencing action, where emotional engagement is tied to viewers' appraisal of whether the brand's stated values are translated into credible, visible practice.

They also identified situations where brand films may not be effective and provided suggestions for improvement. "Some brand films fail because of the lack of content that engages the audience emotionally," said Eddy LI. "Because the producers haven't realised that brand films need to use emotion as the main means of promotion. When a brand film focuses too much on the brand identity or product message, and fails to build emotional depth through the story and characters, I think it's a failure." As for the solution, Eddy LI said: "I think brand films should highlight relevant human experiences and put people - not products - at the centre of the narrative, and use audiovisual content as a powerful tool for enhancing emotional engagement. The message of the brand product can exist, but it should be secondary to the story." Eddy LI's account is significant because it frames "success" and "failure" in brand films not primarily in terms of brand visibility or informational clarity, but in terms of whether the film constructs emotional depth through narrative situation and character. His emphasis on placing people rather than products at the centre of the narrative articulates a practical criterion for how emotional experience is expected to emerge, namely through viewers' recognition of relatable human experience and through sustained engagement with characters over time. This criterion aligns closely with the analytical focus of Study 1, where emotional experience is examined through formal choices in colour and lighting, camera and framing, and editing and sound. From this perspective, a brand film's emotional impact depends on how these audio-visual resources are organised to support story and character development, for example by sustaining attention on facial expression and gesture, by using pacing and sound to guide appraisal of situations, and by shaping intimacy or distance through framing. Eddy LI therefore describes a mechanism through which brand films can shape brand perception. When emotional engagement is foregrounded, brand meaning is

more likely to be inferred through the values and attitudes embodied in the narrative world, whereas a film that foregrounds product messaging risks reducing the viewing experience to persuasion cues that audiences may resist or disregard. His comments also provide a bridge to the reception study, suggesting specific questions to test empirically. For instance, do viewers report stronger emotional engagement and a more favourable perception of the brand when they perceive the story and characters as emotionally “deep”, and do they describe product cues as distracting when these cues appear to override narrative development? This point is therefore treated as a cross-study proposition that is first articulated by practitioners, examined textually in close reading, and then tested against audience talk in the focus group data.

In overview, Subject 3 examines practitioners’ accounts of how brand films are designed to organise viewers’ emotional experience and, through that experience, shape perceptions of the brand. Interviewees repeatedly emphasised the role of emotional arcs, understood here as the planned sequencing of evaluative moments across a narrative. This framing corresponds with appraisal-based theories of emotion, in which feelings arise from how situations are interpreted and evaluated rather than from stimuli alone (Scherer, 1993; Oatley and Johnson-Laird, 1987). Interviewees also stressed the need for the emotions invited by a brand film to remain congruent with the brand’s core values and themes, which positions emotional design as a vehicle for brand meaning and relationship formation (Fournier, 1998). This emphasis aligns with experiential marketing arguments that brands compete through designed experiences rather than solely through functional claims (Schmitt, 1999), and with work on brand experience that treats affective and sensory responses as structured dimensions of brand evaluation (Brakus, Schmitt and Zarantonello, 2009). Several theories further implied that story-centred emotional design supports audience immersion, which transportation theory links to shifts in evaluation and persuasion within narrative contexts (Green and Brock, 2000). On this basis, Subject 3 is analysed as evidence of practitioners’ working models of emotional construction, which can be

compared with the close reading findings and with viewers' appraisals in the reception study.

5.3 Thematic Findings

The five themes were developed through repeated reading and coding of the 18 interview transcripts and the one written email response. I began from the three interview subjects, but the final themes were not simply copied from the question schedule. Codes were created when participants explained how brand films define the brand, use story, handle social or cultural issues, make the film feel real, or imagine audience response. Similar codes were grouped, checked against the full dataset, and revised where they overlapped. This process produced five themes: value identity, interactivity, realism, creating associations, and triggering emotional needs (see Figure 2).

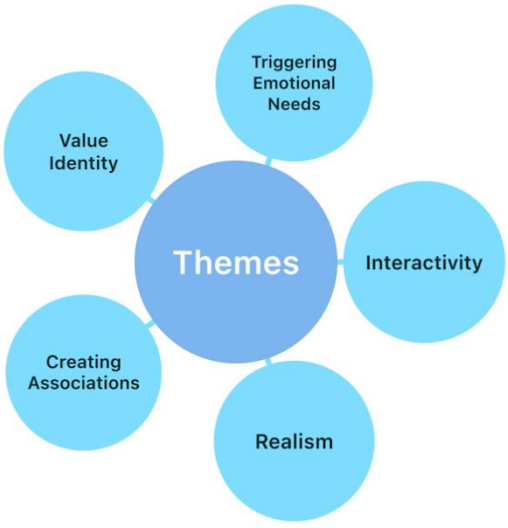
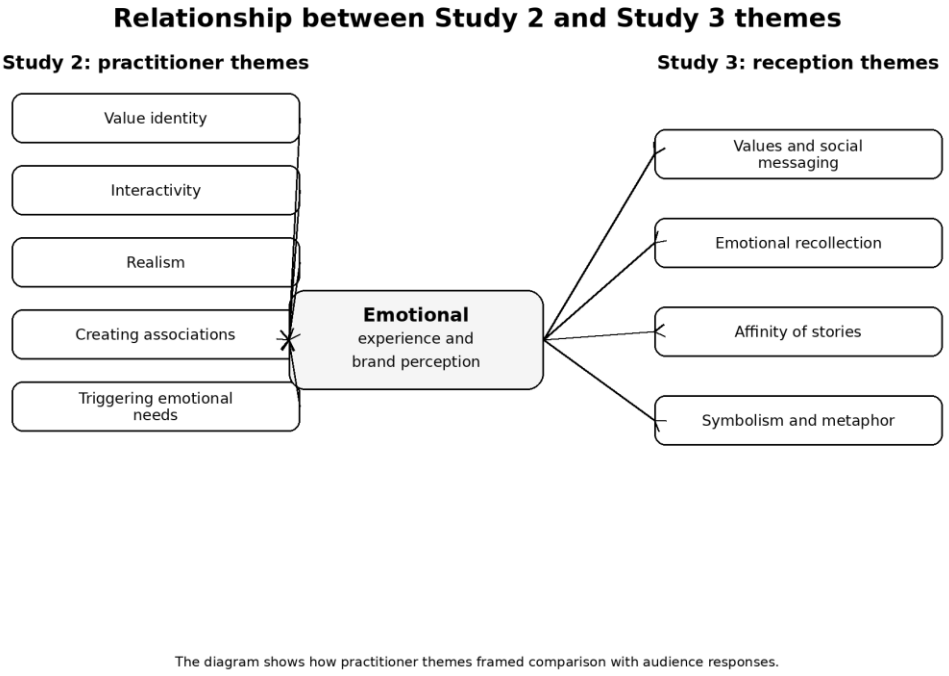


Fig. 2: The five themes from thematic analysis

Figure 2a gives the cross-study link between the five practitioner themes and the four reception-study themes. It is included here only to show how the

interview findings were later brought into comparison with audience responses; the fuller methodological explanation is given in Chapter 3.

Fig. 2a: Relationship between Study 2 practitioner themes and Study 3 reception themes.



The diagram shows how practitioner themes framed comparison with audience responses.

5.3.1 Theme 1: Value Identity

Theme 1 identifies the methods by which brand films create emotional experience as involving a number of factors (see Figure 3): (a) the presentation and concern of brand films for a specific group, (b) the content of brand films based on a certain era or communication background, (c) brand films showing a certain attitude or point of view, (d) brand films showing a variety of cultures, and (e) brand films showing certain social and cultural values, including reactions to social issues, revelations, etc.

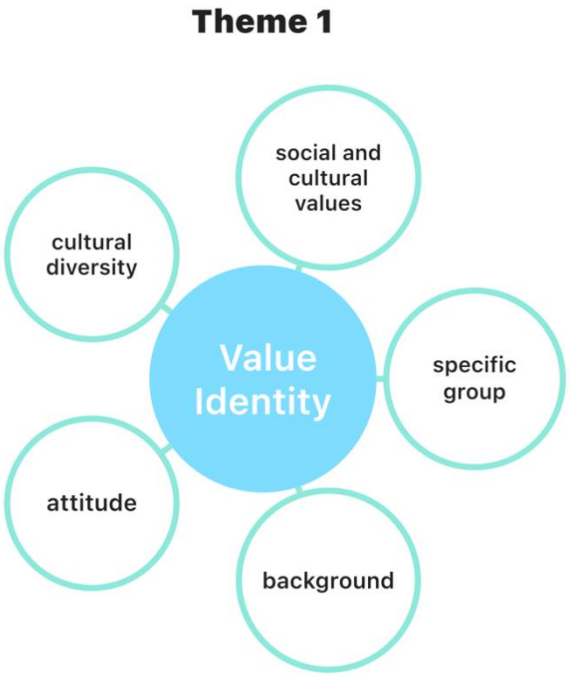


Fig. 3: Theme 1 and sub-themes.

The presentation and concern of brand films for a specific group

The research results indicate that practitioners consider value identity as a key factor in creating emotional experience through brand films. Specifically, some practitioners suggested that showcasing the image or life of a particular group (a), such as left-behind children, the elderly living alone, couriers, etc., can effectively convey a group image and evoke emotions in the audience. Within the experience from interviewees, brand films often depict the image or life of a specific group, showcasing the experience, struggles, and successes of individuals within that group. Brand films can evoke emotions such as sympathy or empathy by portraying the diversity and humanity of a particular group of people. Additionally, brand films can serve as a powerful representation and visibility platform for marginalized or underrepresented communities, validating their experience and identities. Interviewees suggested that this portrayal of a particular group of people promotes inclusivity, challenges preconceptions and prejudices, and encourages

reflection and dialogue among audiences. Brand films can initiate meaningful conversations and promote social change by highlighting the distinct stories and perspectives of various groups. Interviewees utilised this method to produce brand films, which established deep emotional connections with audiences, ultimately strengthening the brand's influence and resonance in society.

The content of brand films based on a certain era or communication background

Some practitioners highlighted the importance of the era and communication background. They suggested that brand film content is often developed in relation to a particular historical moment, for example by drawing on storylines associated with social events in the 1970s and 1980s, or by developing narratives about AI that reflect the contemporary digital information age. They also emphasised that content choices are shaped by the prevailing communication environment, understood here as the socio-cultural climate of public discourse, which may be relatively open or more conservative and risk-averse. In their opinions, attending to these contextual conditions can support content diversity and reduce the risk of cultural misalignment by aligning themes, references and modes of address with audience awareness in a given context. In this sense, context-sensitive storytelling may contribute to audience acceptance and identification with the values implied in the film.

Several interviewees further suggested that era or context based content can evoke emotion by situating viewers in a recognisable world. By capturing aesthetic, cultural and social nuances associated with a particular time or place, brand films may prompt memories and associations and elicit feelings such as nostalgia, fascination or curiosity. Interviewees also stressed that historical or contextual grounding can provide a richer frame for storytelling, enabling brands to explore universal themes and human experience within a specific cultural or historical setting. They argued that connecting a narrative to a particular era or communication environment can add perceived depth

and authenticity, increasing the likelihood of resonance when viewers find the depicted context personally meaningful, which in turn may support deeper emotional engagement and a stronger sense of connection with the brand.

Brand films showing a certain attitude or point of view

Furthermore, practitioners also mentioned attitudes as an important factor in the formation of emotions (c). Brand films can express attitudes and opinions on both significant social issues and minor figures and events. Regardless of the specific attitude conveyed, it can evoke a sense of identification with certain values in the audience. Some interviewees stated that brand films can evoke emotions in the audience by conveying unique personalities, values, and ethos that resonate with them on a personal level. They believed that the attitudes portrayed in brand films, whether bold and adventurous, compassionate and empathetic, or witty and irreverent, are powerful tools to elicit emotional responses from the audience. When brands communicate their stance through storytelling, they establish a sense of alignment and connection with an audience that values the brand's position on certain issues. In addition, respondents mentioned that compelling attitudes can trigger emotional responses, such as identification or discussion, which can drive engagement and stimulate dialogue around the brand. Interviewees have experience showing distinctive attitudes or stance in brand films. They use this tool to tap into the emotional landscape of the audience, allowing the brand to build a strong emotional connection with the audience and cultivate brand loyalty.

Brand films showing a variety of cultures

Interviewees suggested that brand films may foster audience identification across cultural difference when they foreground cultural diversity. Several participants argued that representing varied characters, backgrounds and perspectives can enable some viewers to see aspects of their own experience on screen, while allowing others to encounter unfamiliar traditions and social worlds. In this sense, cultural diversity was described as a potential resource

for emotional resonance, curiosity and empathy. However, participants' opinions also imply that this process is not straightforward. The effects of cultural representation depend on how diversity is framed, whose perspectives are centred, and whether the portrayal is perceived as credible rather than instrumental. In practice, attempts to "celebrate diversity" can be read as superficial or tokenistic if cultural difference appears as a decorative sign of inclusivity without meaningful narrative integration. Moreover, interviewees suggested that cross-cultural resonance is contingent on audience context and prior knowledge, which means the same film may be experienced as inclusive by some viewers while being experienced as stereotypical, appropriative or politically risk-managed by others. For these reasons, interviewees' comments point to cultural diversity as a site of both opportunity and constraint within brand film production, where emotional connection and brand perception are shaped through audience appraisal rather than guaranteed by representation alone.

Brand films showing certain social and cultural values

Many interviewees suggested that brand films can evoke emotion not only through cultural representation but also through value-based framing, where a film positions a social or cultural issue in a way that invites viewers to evaluate what is right, important, or worth caring about. In this account, emotion is elicited through the organisation of appraisal. The narrative encourages audiences to interpret a situation through specific norms and priorities, and this evaluative orientation can generate feelings such as concern, admiration, indignation, or reassurance, depending on the stance the film promotes. Several practitioners also implied that this strategy works most strongly when the film's value claims are integrated into story and character rather than added as a general "message", because viewers are more likely to respond to values when they are experienced as part of a lived situation. At the same time, participants' comments indicate that value-based positioning is contingent. When a brand engages with social or cultural issues, audiences may read this as meaningful alignment with shared concerns, yet they may also read it as instrumental if the stance is perceived as inconsistent with the

brand's broader conduct. For this reason, this sub-theme treats social and cultural values as a mechanism of emotional construction that operates through audience appraisal and judgement, shaping brand perception through perceived stance, coherence, and narrative integration rather than through cultural diversity alone.

5.3.2 Theme 2: Interactivity

Theme 2 identifies the ways in which brand films create emotional experience as involving several factors (see Figure 4): (a) emotional commonalities, (b) product and character interactions, (c) audience and character interactions, and (d) generating controversy.

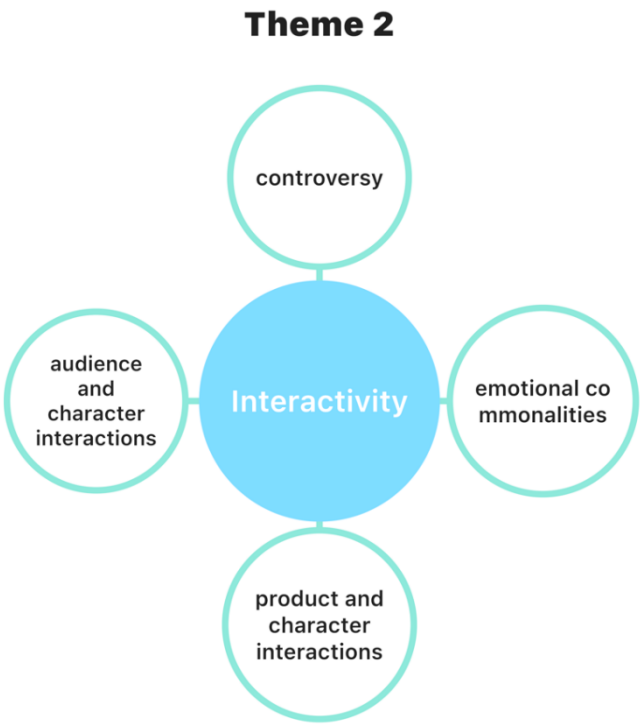


Fig. 4: Theme 2 and sub-themes.

Emotional commonalities

The interviewees noted that emotional commonality has become a crucial tool for brand films to evoke emotions (a). Brand films establish a shared emotional experience with the audience, including emotions that occur in the audience's life or the specific emotions of the target audience. By creating this shared emotional experience and integrating it into the content of brand films, emotional commonality is achieved. This emotional commonality allows the audience to easily experience a certain familiar emotion when watching brand films, and form experience.

Product and character interactions

Secondly, interviewees also mentioned that the interaction of products and characters in brand films can also trigger emotional changes in the audience (b). In a brand film, characters interact with products and form intimate relationships with them. For instance, a product may become a prop used by the protagonist on a daily basis, or a brand film's characters may be filmed using a brand product (see *Three Minutes*, a brand film for iPhone, directed by Peter Chan Ho-sun). Using products to establish relationships with characters, create story plots and form connections between them, is a creative method that practitioners believe can evoke emotional responses from the audience.

Audience and character interactions

Another type of interaction between the audience and the characters (c) occurs when a brand film asks the audience questions from a first-person perspective, or the audience feels that they are similar to the characters in the brand film, or the audience feels that a character in the story is similar to the people around them. The interviewees suggest that this type of interaction allows the audience to empathise with the characters in the story, to communicate emotionally with the characters in brand films.

Generating controversy

Finally, regarding the generation of controversy, interviewees suggested that when a brand film becomes a topic of public discussion, the resulting debate constitutes a form of interaction between audiences and the brand's message. They argued that this interaction can elicit intensified and sometimes polarised emotional responses, for example curiosity, discomfort, irritation, or moral approval and disapproval, because viewers are prompted to take a stance and to evaluate what the film is implying. The interviewees believed that controversy can cultivate participation, critical thinking and empathy. When the narrative of a brand film can trigger meaningful debate or discussion among the audience, it will invite the audience to actively participate in the dialogue intellectually and emotionally. Brand films create opportunities for the audience to reflect on their own views, values, and experience by presenting opposing viewpoints, exploring complex issues, or addressing contentious topics. This engagement stimulates cognitive and emotional processes that lead to increased emotional engagement and empathy with narratives by the audience. The depth and complexity of audience interaction with brand film content fosters a deep connection between the audience and the brand and its message. This connection is achieved through controversy. Ultimately, brand films generate interaction through debate or discussion, serving as a catalyst for emotional engagement. This enables brands to forge meaningful connections with audiences by triggering intellectual curiosity, emotional responses, and active engagement in narrative discourse.

5.3.3 Theme 3: Realism

In Theme 3, the means by which brand films create emotional experience include several factors (see Figure 5): (a) the audience have similar experience with the storylines of brand films, including the audience's childhood memories and past experiences. (b) brand film content adapted from real events, (c) social and global phenomena or problems, i.e. problems

known to the general audience, and (d) authenticity brought about by the actor's real acting and mise-en-scene.



Fig. 5: Theme 3 and sub-themes.

Similar experience

Firstly, similar experiences may include childhood memories, past experiences, or fate (a). Interviewees believed that by incorporating these similar experiences into brand films, they can evoke emotions. The interviewee thought humanistic childhood memories can evoke nostalgia and innocence, arousing warm, longing, or sentimental emotions when the audience recalls their own growing years. Past experiences, whether positive or negative, can evoke resonance and reflection in the audience as they contemplate their life journey and the challenges they have faced. Interviewees also noted that brand films about destiny can elicit emotions such as hope or melancholy if they resonate with the audience's belief in fate and life. By incorporating familiar and relatable elements into the stories, brand films create a sense of realism that encourages viewers to engage on a

personal level. This reinforces the brand's message or values in a meaningful and memorable way.

Real events

Secondly, interviewees commonly use the method of adapting real events to create the content of brand films (b). This is because such brand films have the ability to make the audience feel authentic and evoke emotions by tapping into collective memories and fostering a sense of connection with the world. When adapting real events, interviewees mentioned three methods. The first involves interviewing the parties involved to understand their inner thoughts and feelings, which are then integrated into the story characters. The second method involves experiencing the lifestyle of a character or group through personal experience. For example, Tianhang LU mentioned that before creating a brand film for Tencent Games brand, he would play the game himself, observe different players, and communicate with them in the game. This personal experience can inspire the creation of the brand film content to be realistic and objective. The third method is that when some interviewees adapt the real events that have occurred into stories, they may investigate the real location and relevant information through internet reports to provide a realistic basis for brand film content, such as making choices on film locations, environment, weather and other information. Obtaining this information allows the interviewee to better understand and convey the realism of the event presented in the brand film. Brand films draw inspiration from real events, whether historical, cultural or contemporary, to bring authenticity and relevance to their storytelling, basing narratives on shared human experience. Interviewees discovered that audiences are frequently moved by witnessing familiar events portrayed in brand films, whether these events evoke a sense of triumph or tragedy. Moreover, by revealing important moments in history or current events, brand films can trigger reflection, dialogue and even action among the audience, prompting them to confront social issues head-on, challenge mainstream narratives, or advocate for change. By incorporating real events into brand films, the interviewees have made them emotionally

resonant with the audience, reinforcing the brand's values, mission, or social responsibility in an engaging way.

Social and global phenomena

In addition, interviewees also include social and global phenomena or issues that are familiar to the general audience in brand films (c). This can be achieved by evoking the audience's emotions through tapping into common human concerns, empathy, and a collective sense of responsibility. The presentation of urgent issues such as climate change or inequality is believed to attract the audience on a deep level, triggering reflection, resonance, and a desire for action. When the audience is confronted with the reality of the world around them and their role in solving these problems, watching familiar social challenges depicted in brand films may evoke emotions such as anger, sympathy, or determination. Also, by focusing on social and global phenomena, interviewees say that the creation of audiovisual content has the potential to stimulate dialogue, raise awareness and mobilise audiences for positive change. The interviewees suggest that addressing this significant generally believed matter can influence public discussion, drive social impact and strengthen the connection between brands and their audiences.

Acting skill and mise-en-scene

Finally, some interviewees mentioned that to create an authentic emotional experience, they will choose the actors who can demonstrate their genuine acting skills and pay attention to mise-en-scene (d). They believe that an authentic emotional experience can establish credibility and immerse the audience in the performance. Interviewees noted that a realistic or naturalistic performance by an actor can enhance the audience's belief in the story when viewing a brand film. When costumes, make-up and props are carefully crafted to match the era, cultural background or character traits of a story, they add to the overall authenticity of the brand film, placing the audience in the world of the story and increasing their emotional involvement. The interviewees mentioned that whether it was the nuance in the actor's

expression or the historical accuracy of the mise-en-scene, these details added credibility and depth to the story, allowing the audience to suspend disbelief and fully invest in the story. Interviewees created authentic emotional experience by prioritising the authenticity of the performance and the design of costumes, make-up and props in their work.

5.3.4 Theme 4: Creating Associations

In Theme 4, the methods by which a brand film creates an emotional experience include several factors (see Figure 6): (a) the script is designed to allow the audience to associate with a brand simply through the storyline, (b) the connection between a particular emotion and the brand culture, (c) the consistency between the brand style, feelings and the emotional direction established by the brand film, and (d) the connection between the brand history and a certain emotion.

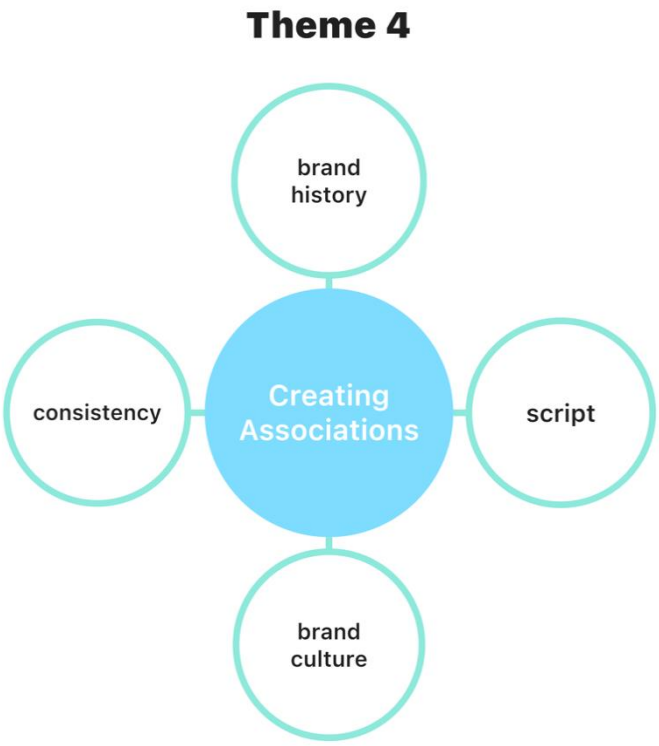


Fig. 6: Theme 4 and sub-themes.

Script

The first is the design of the storyline. Most interviewees believed that brand films can create an association that makes the audience think of a brand by seamlessly integrating the brand's message, values and identity into the storyline (a). Interviewees identified several methods for creating the storyline. The first is to integrate the brand organically into the narrative so that it becomes an integral part of the story rather than an intrusive advertisement. This can include integrating the brand's products, service or values into the story in a meaningful and authentic way. The second point is the design of the character. Interviewees often create a character whose personality and behaviour can reflect the spirit of the brand. Whether it is the protagonist who embodies the brand's values or the antagonist who represents the brand's opposite values, the consistency of the roles is the interviewee's vehicle for reinforcing the brand's identity. The third point is to create a narrative arc in the script to reflect the journey or evolution of the brand over time. The interviewees use this narrative arc to show the growth, challenge and successes of the brand. In addition, some of the interviewees' work involves more visual design. This group of interviewees believes that adding subtle brand references or cues throughout the storyline to remind people of the brand's existence, without overtly advertising it, is a very effective way of creating associations. Added elements include visuals, dialogue or plot points. These methods are commonly used by screenwriters in their work. They design scripts in such a way that brands are seamlessly integrated into the narrative, so that brand films can effectively evoke brand associations and make an impression on the audience. Interviewees create associations through script design because storytelling is a tool for making connections and triggering emotional responses. When compared with the close readings in Study 1, these practitioner accounts clarify how script design functions as a narrative blueprint that is realised and intensified through audio-visual choices. Across the three films, moments that anchor brand values in plot and character are repeatedly supported by colour and lighting cues, framing and performance emphasis, and editing and sound patterns that shape pacing and

intimacy, thereby linking narrative meaning to emotional experience and to viewers' inferences about the brand.

Brand culture

Second, interviewees mentioned using the connection between brand culture and a specific emotion to create associations and emotional experience (b). According to the interviews, brand films that establish a link between a specific emotion and brand culture can effectively trigger the audience's emotions by linking the brand's identity with relevant human experiences and values. Some interviewees will continuously reinforce some emotional themes related to brand culture in various marketing points (from marketing activities to customer experience) in order to cultivate the audience's emotional loyalty and affinity. This group of interviewees believed that associating specific emotions with brand culture can create a long-term emotional bond between the audience and the brand.

Consistency

Brand films that maintain consistency in brand style, emotion and emotional trends can be effective in arousing emotions in the audience by creating a sense of familiarity, trust and empathy (c). A small number of interviewees additionally noted this view. These people believe that audiences are more likely to feel a sense of continuity and connection with the brand narrative when they encounter brand films that follow the established style, tone and emotional themes of previous marketing activities. Consistency of brand style and emotional trends helps to reinforce brand identity and values. While adapting to the changing society, these interviewees will continuously adjust the style and emotional trends of brand films to maintain relevance with the target audience by studying current emotional trends and cultural shifts. They believe that this allows them to adapt to changing consumer emotions and preferences. This consistent approach was seen by this subset of interviewees as an important way of building brand loyalty and affinity over time.

Brand history

In explaining the use of brand film to evoke emotion, interviewees also explained that by showing key moments, iconic milestones or valuable traditions in the brand's history, it can evoke pride and admiration in the audience (d). When audiences see the journey and evolution of the brand over time, they appreciate its value, authenticity and lasting impact. In fact, the interviewees associated these historical narratives with specific emotions (such as perseverance and innovation) in order to evoke an emotional response from the audience and resonate with their own experience and aspirations. The interviewees believe that this approach can even cultivate loyalty and affinity for the brand among future generations of audiences.

5.3.5 Theme 5: Triggering Emotional Needs

Theme 5 shows how brand films create emotional experience through several factors (see Figure 7): (a) content that evoking a specific core human emotion, (b) content that conveys caring, and (c) content that demonstrates knowledge and understanding of the audience's everyday life.



Fig. 7: Theme 5 and sub-themes.

Human emotion

Brand films that evoke core human emotions in their content have the ability to arouse the audience's emotions by drawing on universal experience, desires and aspirations (a). This is the idea added by Yizhi SHI and Sile ZHANG They argued that brand films often mobilise emotions that are widely recognisable in everyday life, such as love, happiness, fear, sadness, loneliness and hope. Guanyang WU additionally foregrounded anxiety as a particularly salient affective concern for younger audiences today. This view is consistent with survey evidence showing that younger adults report higher levels of anxiety than older age groups in the UK. (ONS, 2022; Mental Health Foundation, 2024) Therefore, he believes that integrating anxiety into brand films can arouse the emotional resonance of the audience. These kinds of brand films can establish emotional connections with the audience across cultural and demographic boundaries by depicting the relevant characters, situations and dilemmas that trigger these core emotions. Yizhi SHI and Sile ZHANG believed that this is not easy, because they believe that the smaller

and more ordinary emotions are often more difficult to portray through audiovisual content. Yizhi SHI and Sile ZHANG said that whether it is through touching storylines, inspirational message or thought-provoking narratives, brand films that evoke core emotions in their content have the ability to impress the audience because they touch on the emotional needs of the audience.

Caring

Some interviewees mentioned that the content of brand films that convey care can trigger the emotional needs of the audience (b), which can reflect a brand's empathy and commitment to addressing the audience's concerns and aspirations. Some interviewees believe that when brand films effectively convey a certain type of care, such as the brand's care for its customers, employees and the community at large, these brand films create a sense of connection and security in the audience. Interviewees agreed that brand films that prioritise care can evoke gratitude and appreciation in the audience. They feel that sincere care can meet the emotional needs of the audience.

Everyday life

Finally, expressing understanding of the audience's everyday life is explained by the interviewees as showing understanding and support for the audience's life by depicting scenes, challenges and aspirations that reflect the audience's everyday experience (c). Interviewees considered that audiences are more likely to feel understood, recognised and valued by the brand when they see themselves reflected in the characters, scenes and issues portrayed in the brand film. In the same way, the interviewees will include content that recognises and addresses the audience's everyday concerns, desires and wishes in their creation, demonstrating empathy and concern for the audience's wellbeing. The brand film, which embodies an understanding of the audience's normal daily life, can evoke empathy or comfort and become a common method for the interviewee to meet the audience's emotional needs.

5.4 Discussions and Conclusion

This chapter has set out the design and findings of Study 2, a qualitative interview study with brand film professionals. The semi-structured format elicited practitioners' accounts of how emotional experience is designed, discussed and evaluated in contemporary brand film production, while allowing interviewees to draw on concrete work cases and production decisions. In methodological terms, the chapter treats practitioners' discourse as an important form of industry knowledge that can be analysed in its own right, rather than as a simple report on an objective production process (Caldwell, 2008; Mayer, Banks and Caldwell, 2009).

Across the interviews, five recurring emphases organised practitioners' accounts of emotional experience in brand films. Value identity concerns how brand films position viewers in relation to a set of values and identities that can become associated with the brand, which aligns with work on brand meaning and relationships that treats brands as cultural and relational resources rather than as functional markers (Fournier, 1998; Holt, 2004). Interactivity concerns how films are designed to invite talk, sharing and social circulation, and how such circulation is often understood as being driven by emotionally arousing content rather than by positive tone alone (Berger and Milkman, 2012). Realism concerns credibility, ordinariness and the appearance of sincerity, which interviewees repeatedly framed as a precondition for trust. This resonates with consumer research that conceptualises perceived brand authenticity as a multi-cue judgement that shapes evaluation and attachment (Beverland, 2005; Napoli et al., 2014). Association concerns the integration of brand references and brand identity into story and character so that branding is experienced as narrative meaning rather than as explicit selling. This connects with work on narrative processing and transportation, which suggests that story absorption can shape attitudes through interpretation and identification rather than through overt argument (Escalas, 2004; Green and Brock, 2000). Emotional needs concerns the view

that brand films are most effective when they draw on recognisable human concerns and organise these into an emotional arc. This framing is consistent with experiential marketing and brand experience research that positions affect, sensorial cues and memory as central to how brands are encountered and valued (Schmitt, 1999; Brakus, Schmitt and Zarantonello, 2009).

Taken together, these themes show that practitioners do not treat emotion as an incidental by-product of story, but as a designed pathway that links audio-visual form, narrative appraisal and brand perception. Their accounts also clarify the practical logic through which emotion is aligned with brand aims. In many interviews, emotional experience was described as a means of shaping how viewers evaluate characters and situations, and then carry those evaluations into a perception of what the brand stands for. This emphasis supports the thesis's theoretical orientation in which emotional experience is analysed as evaluative and situated, and brand perception is approached as an interpreted outcome rather than a direct behavioural measure.

The interview findings also sharpen the relationship between Study 2 and Study 1. The close readings provide detailed evidence of how colour and lighting, camera and framing, and editing and sound pattern viewers' attention and affect. The interviews add a complementary account of why such formal choices are selected and how practitioners understand their consequences. Film scholarship on character engagement and the affective organisation of cinematic form provides a useful bridge here, because it shows how viewers' feelings are guided through cues that organise alignment, identification and the perception of significance (Smith, 1995; Plantinga, 2009). The interview chapter therefore helps to interpret close-reading observations as part of a production-facing logic of emotional design, without reducing the films' meanings to authorial intention.

A further implication concerns the interviewees' ambivalent discussions of social and cultural themes. Some practitioners framed value-led content as a way of building connection and trust, while others were sceptical about the sincerity of social issue framing when it functions mainly as a route into commercial messaging. This tension can be situated within debates on authenticity and brand activism, where perceived alignment between a brand's messaging and its practices is central, and where mismatches can provoke accusations of strategic moral signalling (Vredenburg et al., 2020). Although the present study does not evaluate corporate practice, the interviews indicate that practitioners themselves recognise authenticity as a fragile judgement that is negotiated through narrative choices, performance and tone, as well as through broader knowledge about brands (Napoli et al., 2014).

These findings generate focused propositions for Study 3. If practitioners are correct that emotional resonance depends on perceived authenticity and narrative integration, viewers' discussion should foreground evaluative talk about credibility and motives, and not only lists of emotion terms. If circulation and discussion are understood as being shaped by arousal and controversy, viewers' accounts should also make visible how agreement, discomfort, or moral judgement relate to brand perception (Berger and Milkman, 2012). Narrative transportation theory further suggests that the reception study should attend to how viewers describe immersion, identification and after-effects on attitude, because these processes are one route through which stories can influence brand evaluations (Green and Brock, 2000).

The interview study has limits that also inform the overall research design. The sample leans towards production-facing roles, which means the findings illuminate how emotional experience is operationalised through audio-visual craft and practical constraints more than they illuminate upstream brand strategy. This is not a weakness to be removed, because it aligns with the thesis's analytic focus on film form and multimodal design. It also clarifies why

triangulation with Study 3 is necessary, since audience talk provides an additional perspective on whether the intended emotional pathways are recognised and how they shape brand perception.

CHAPTER 6

Study 3 – Audience Focus Group Reception of Emotional Experience and Brand Perception

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents Study 3, the reception study, which examines how ordinary viewers describe and evaluate their emotional experiences of brand films and how these experiences shape their perceptions of the brand. In line with the thesis's qualitative, interpretivist orientation, the chapter treats audience response as situated meaning-making, focusing on how participants articulate feelings, appraisals, and value judgements when discussing the films together. The reception study complements Study 1 and Study 2 by providing audience-facing evidence that can test, refine, or complicate the interpretive claims derived from close readings and the practitioner accounts derived from interviews.

The study was conducted as a single online focus-group discussion on Zoom in March 2025. It lasted approximately 90 minutes, was conducted in English, and was audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis. The group watched the three films together during the session, in the order *The Man on the Moon*, *My Dad is a Liar* and *The Bridge*. The chapter outlines the rationale for selecting participants and films, explains the screening and discussion procedure, and sets out the analytical approach used to interpret participants' responses, including Affect and appraisal coding.

Six ordinary viewers took part in the focus group and are referred to as P1-P6. They were not brand, advertising or marketing professionals. Their ages

ranged from 25 to 35. The group included four female participants and two male participants; five participants were Chinese and one participant was English. Their occupations included promotional content production, online media editing, branded content creation, public relations, freelance work and influencing. The participants also had different levels of UK experience and different degrees of familiarity with the films. This profile is useful for a small qualitative study of online viewers with cross-cultural media experience, but it also confirms that the group was demographically narrow.

Participants were selected through purposive and convenience sampling. I looked for everyday online video viewers who could discuss the films in English and who did not work professionally in brand communication. They were recruited and contacted through personal networks, social media, online group chats and university communication channels. Before the session, they received information about the research purpose, the three-film screening, the online discussion format, voluntary participation and anonymisation.

Table 6.1 Participant profile in the reception study

Participant	Age	Gender	Nationality	Education / occupation	UK experience	Familiarity with films
P1	29	Female	Chinese	Promotional content producer	6 years	70%
P2	29	Male	Chinese	Online media editor	6 years	60%
P3	27	Female	Chinese	Branded content creator	6 years	80%
P4	35	Male	Chinese	Public relations	0 years	20%
P5	27	Female	English	Freelance	27 years	90%
P6	25	Female	Chinese	Influencer	6 years	80%

This demographic profile shaped the reception of cultural references in the films. Most participants had several years of UK experience, and P5 had lived in the UK for 27 years, which may have supported recognition of John Lewis Christmas advertising and the care-oriented setting of *The Man on the Moon*.

P4, by contrast, had no UK experience and reported lower familiarity with the films, which is relevant when interpreting his responses to UK-specific references. The group's familiarity with the Thai MetLife context was uneven, and their familiarity with the US SunTrust and autism campaign context was limited. For this reason, *My Dad is a Liar* and *The Bridge* were often discussed through broader themes such as family, parental sacrifice, vulnerability and social inclusion, rather than through detailed knowledge of their national campaign contexts. Cultural familiarity and unfamiliarity are therefore treated as part of the reception data, not as background details.

At the start of the session, I reiterated how the reception study sits within the wider thesis and explained that the discussion aimed to capture participants' own accounts of emotional experience and brand perception rather than to test recall or purchase intention. I outlined basic discussion expectations, including that there were no "correct" answers and that disagreement was welcome as part of exploring how interpretations differ. I also reminded participants that the discussion would be recorded, transcribed and anonymised. An icebreaker activity was then used to help participants become comfortable speaking in a group setting. Participants were provided with minimal contextual information about each film, including title and brand, to ensure shared reference points while avoiding extensive pre-framing that might steer interpretation.

The sessions were organised around the screening and discussion of three brand films, *The Man on the Moon, My Dad is a Liar, and The Bridge*. The discussion guide was structured to move from individual response to comparative evaluation, so that participants' talk could illuminate both film-specific emotional experiences and broader patterns across the corpus. The first discussion phase focused on initial perception. Participants described immediate reactions and emotions, then identified elements they regarded as most influential in producing those feelings, including features of storytelling, visual aesthetics, music, and other audio-visual cues. This phase also

included explicit discussion of perceived brand meaning, where participants articulated how the viewing experience shaped their impressions of the brand and its values.

The second phase involved comparative analysis across the three films. Participants were invited to compare how the films attempted to generate emotion and to evaluate differences in effectiveness, credibility, and appeal. This comparative structure is methodologically important because it encourages participants to make criteria explicit. Instead of offering isolated reactions, they articulate what they treat as persuasive or unpersuasive emotional design and how such judgements relate to brand perception. The final phase invited overall reflections. Participants summarised what they took away from the three films, discussed their expectations of brand films more generally, and reflected on the kinds of emotional strategies they found engaging or problematic. Disagreement and conflicting interpretations were treated as analytically valuable because they reveal the variability of appraisal and the conditions under which emotional experience supports, rather than undermines, positive perceptions of the brand.

6.2 Findings

This section presents the main findings from the reception study. The analysis was conducted on the full transcript of the focus-group discussion, supported by notes made during and immediately after the session. The transcript was treated as situated talk about emotional experience and brand perception. I worked through the transcript line by line, noting where participants named emotions, evaluated characters or situations, interpreted film form, referred to cultural context, or linked the viewing experience to impressions of the brand. These initial codes were then compared across participants and across the three films.

The theme development moved between open coding and more focused grouping. Initial codes included story familiarity, personal memory, family relationships, perceived authenticity, cultural reference, symbolic device, social value, brand intention and emotional after-effect. I then grouped related codes into broader categories and checked them against the transcript to make sure that each category captured repeated patterns rather than single comments. The final themes were not decided only by frequency. They were selected because they showed how participants connected emotional experience to brand perception.

Four reception themes were identified through this process: (a) Affinity of Stories, (b) Symbolism and Metaphor, (c) Values and Social Messaging, and (d) Emotional Recollection. In the extracts presented below, the six participants are anonymised as P1–P6. Film titles are abbreviated for readability: *The Man on the Moon* (TMOTM), *My Dad is a Liar* (MDIAL), and *The Bridge* (TB). These four themes were also compared with the five practitioner themes developed in Study 2: Value Identity, Interactivity, Realism, Creating Associations and Triggering Emotional Needs. This comparison is used later in the thesis to show where practitioner accounts of emotional construction are recognised, revised or resisted by viewers.

Figure 6.1 shows the relationship between the themes developed across the practitioner interview study and the reception study. It does not merge the two datasets. Instead, it shows how the reception themes can be read in relation to the practitioner themes through a shared concern with emotional construction, appraisal, cultural familiarity and brand perception.

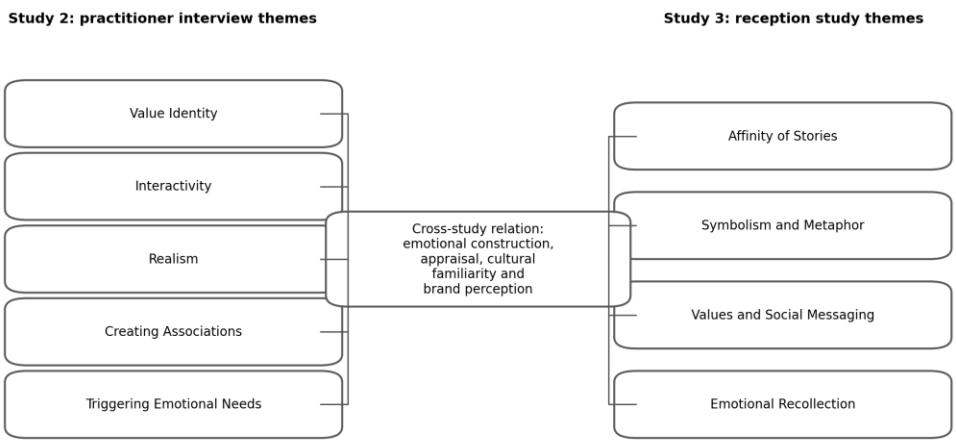


Figure 6.1 Relationship between practitioner themes and reception study themes

Affinity of Stories

The affinity of the story of a brand film can promote emotional experience, and this affinity is often grounded in a sense of lived plausibility. In practice, it can be difficult to maintain this plausibility across a complete emotional arc, since audiences tend to notice when narrative motivation, dialogue, or resolution feels forced rather than arising naturally from the situation.Participant 1 (P1) said: “*My Dad is A Liar* (*MDIAL*) doesn't take a linear narrative, nor does it choose a major event in life, but carefully selects a few fragments from the father's life and cuts them together to develop the narrative in a point-by-point manner. I think this makes the story very relatable. The images are not obviously related, and they seem to be a little scattered, but they don't feel scattered after watching them. The reason is that there is a spiritual thread running through it, which is the purpose and determination of the father's hard work and dedication to the good of his daughter." P3 said: "In my impression, fatherly love is presented in an obscure and indescribable form, but *MDIAL* better solves this problem, that is, it puts the father's love in many fragmented scenes and vivid situations, and presents it through details, which enhances the affinity of the story and the visibility of fatherly love. This makes me deeply

feel the warm emotion of fatherly love." P4 also agreed with P3, saying: "I do see the image of fatherly love full of affinity in *MDIAL*, and I think of my father because of it. I feel that I have an emotional resonance." All participants agreed that *MDIAL* was the most story-friendly of the three brand films. P6 said: "This is probably because *MDIAL*'s story is the simplest and most straightforward in expressing the theme of fatherly love, and each of us may experience such emotions in our lives." The conversation between P1 and P6 gave me an idea of where the affinity they said was reflected. P1 mentioned the importance of ordinary stories, saying: "The father and daughter in *MDIAL* seem to come from an ordinary family, neither rich nor beggar. This is more relevant to the lives of ordinary people." P6 added to this point: "I agree with P1. If the brand film depicted a life that was too poor, then I would find it a little unreal and too dramatic. At least I would not have an emotional resonance personally. Right now, the story is very satisfying. I feel it closer to my life and my understanding of fatherly love. "

In addition, for the characters, the participants also mentioned that the close characters brought them emotional experience. P2 said: "*MDIAL* wanted to express the parents' dedication to their children, and it chose to use the role of the father instead of the mother, which I thought was very clever. In my heart, father's love is more slow-paced and silent than mother's love. The role of the father can make me feel more sad and hard-working emotions, and it makes me want to cry." P6 said, "My father is very similar to the father role in *MDIAL*, always supporting me but never telling me. So, when I watched the brand film, I felt like I was watching my own father, and I felt very moved." P1 said: "*MDIAL* tells a story that is more Asian style, and I think it was wise to choose Asian actors to perform it. I personally feel that the Asian fatherly expression is more euphemistic and fits the theme of the whole story, so it makes me feel close." P5 also mentions the closeness of the story in *The Man on the Moon* (*TMOTM*) to it, which affects P5's desire to act. P5 said: "In fact, *TMOTM* also makes me feel affinity. Because my grandmother currently lives alone, I often worry that my grandmother will feel lonely. After watching *TMOTM*, I have the urge to buy gifts for my grandmother." P3 said: "All three films are very

ordinary stories in my opinion, so ordinary that I can immerse myself in the story and feel the emotions naturally."

Participants expressed the importance of the theme of family in shaping the affinity of the story and making them emotionally resonate. P1 said: "Yes, family as the theme of the story is too prone to emotional fluctuations. All three brand films contain this theme. Although the old man in *TMOTM* is not related to the girl, the purpose of the story is to express care for the elderly, which covers family, but not just family." P4 said: "When I watched *The Bridge* (*TB*), I didn't know if the woman who appeared at the end of the film was the mother of the little girl, until the last slogan appeared in the film. I think the film also contains family relationship. I was very touched by the hug at the end of the film, which made me think that the brand is very focused on family harmony." Most of the participants felt that the story was very relatable because of the universality of the story and the inclusion of family-related themes, which also has relations with another theme, "Symbols and Metaphors". The participants felt close because they got the symbol of "family" from the film, and therefore associated with their own family. Participants associated with their family and felt emotional engaged. The display of family relationships and affection in the brand film made them feel moved, sad, and cherished. The emotional experience influenced their understanding of the brand.

Symbolism and Metaphor

The recurring and fixed images in John Lewis' annual Christmas brand films include the scene of Christmas Day, innocent children, imaginative images, etc. When the above symbolic elements first appeared in John Lewis' Christmas advertisements, they may have been associated with a special emotion. However, when these symbolic elements appear frequently in the same series of advertisements and are used repeatedly in the same brand's subsequent films, they become a fixed symbol of John Lewis' brand film

series, or an emotional archetype. It forms and builds the unique symbolic and metaphorical space of John Lewis' brand films.

The participants gave their own insights into the discussion of symbols. P4 said: “In *TMOTM*, symbols and metaphors are not just presented in a single shot, but are integrated throughout the film, forming a large and closely related symbol and metaphor." P1 mentioned: “Every time I see a scene on Christmas Day, I feel happy because I always love Christmas. So, when I first watched *TMOTM*, my first reaction was happy.” P6 believed that John Lewis' brand films are the most effective in using symbols, and said: “I watch John Lewis' brand films every Christmas and I really like their style. Innocent child characters, imaginary animated characters, unexpected gift appearances, etc. These are all elements that I often see in the John Lewis brand advertisements. These elements have formed a complete symbol system, which makes me think of the John Lewis brand every time I see these elements.” P1 added: “Indeed, I feel that these symbolic things or scenes can represent the image and culture of a brand. As I mentioned before, symbols are emotionally connected to me. For example, when I see innocent children, I feel lively, and when I see animated characters, I feel curious. Snow scenes remind me of Christmas and gifts, and I feel happy.” Using *TMOTM* as an example, participants discussed the impact of these brand films on the John Lewis brand. Brand films use repetitive symbolic content to familiarize audiences with the style and successfully create a positive image of the John Lewis brand, adding warm, happy emotional symbols to the brand.

The use of audio-visual language also provides space for symbols and metaphors for brand films. The use of windows and telescopes in brand films was regarded as a form of metaphor by the participants. P2 said: “The little girl in *TMOTM* often stands by the window and looks at the outside world through the window. I think the window symbolizes the desire for the unknown world in the film. Therefore, in *TMOTM*, the little girl's many shots of looking outside and the moon through the window and telescope symbolizes that she

is a free and outgoing person. The telescope becomes a bridge for her to communicate with the old man on the moon, and also a projection of her inner emotions. The images in the telescope allow us to observe the old man on the moon through the perspective of the little girl, and at the same time experience a little girl's understanding and reflection on the world." P1 also said: "Yes, I think the lens in the telescope in *TMOTM* is very meaningful. It has become a symbol of the conversation between the little girl and the old man. At the same time, the image in the telescope also forms a dialogue, which makes us feel the urgency and torn of the little girl wanting to communicate with the old man." P6 added: "I think the message conveyed by the lens in the telescope is not just the surface image, but more the embodiment of the character's inner emotions, wishes and thinking about reality." P3 said: "Elements like windows and telescopes that often appear in brand films can often be metaphors for certain emotions and personalities of characters."

Participants repeatedly described metaphor and fantasy as devices that make value claims emotionally legible rather than merely stated. In TB, several participants interpreted the daydream sequences as a way of externalising the protagonist's inner world, so that viewers can appraise the character's vulnerability and needs through a visualised experience of withdrawal and return. P1 noted that daydreams "intertwine reality and imagination", giving characters space to express inner emotion, while P4 argued that these scenes are not simply "pleasant fantasies" but can also function as metaphors for fear and psychological struggle, particularly where the imagined landscapes appear "more spacious than home". Taken together, these interpretations suggest that the daydream structure provides a perceptual bridge between private feeling and shared social meaning. It allows participants to discuss the film's values, including care and inclusion, through the logic of emotional experience, rather than through abstract moral statements. This also clarifies why P5 described daydreaming as enabling empathy and a "deep and real emotional experience", since the fantasy scenes were treated as a route into the character's perspective.

Participants' accounts also indicate that symbolism functions as a practical mechanism for translating abstract emotion into graspable form. P2 made this point explicitly by suggesting that emotion is "abstract" but becomes easier to feel when metaphor turns it into "specific images or symbols". This meta-commentary helps explain why viewers did not only report feelings, but also justified those feelings by pointing to formal devices as evidence for what the film "means" and what values it promotes. A related pattern appears in discussion of MDIAL, where participants treated the girl's composition device as more than narrative framing. P1 associated the child's writing with sincerity, describing it as a marker of "authenticity and warmth", while P5 framed the same device as positioning the viewer as a listener, which intensified emotional engagement with the father–daughter relationship. Across these examples, participants' talk suggests that symbolic forms do not sit alongside value messaging as decoration. Instead, they are interpreted as the means through which brand films make values experienceable, thereby shaping how the brand is perceived.

Values and Social Messaging

Many participants mentioned that when the theme of a brand film is in line with their personal values, it makes it easier for them to experience emotions and empathize with them. P6 mentioned that brand films are like a medium that prompts audiences to think. P6 believes that the personal beliefs, social responsibility, social engagement and other elements presented in brand films represent a deep reflection and exploration. P6 said: "For example, *TMOTM* made me think about caring for the elderly, and *TB* made me understand the situation of the autistic community. Through this, I was exposed to different cultures, ideas and concepts, which broadened my perspective." P5 said: "*MDIAL* explores the parent-child relationship, and this theme evokes my thoughts on family love and the power of human emotions. Through the behaviour of father in the film, the monologue of the little girl, and the inner dialogue between the father and daughter, I started to think about my family

relationship.” Of the values that *MDIAL* embodies, P1 said: “I think it wants to express the values that family relationships and emotional bonds are important. In *MDIAL*, I can see that the character's behaviour and value orientation is to be family-oriented and selfless, and these values are emphasized and play an important role in the development of the plot. However, I feel that valuing family and family ties should be the values that most people agree with, and *MDIAL* chose this position very wisely because it makes more audiences identify with it and resonate with it.” P2 also mentioned that the brand's display of values and social issues in the film can inspire him to reflect on himself and society, and this reflection makes him have a more violent emotional response. P2 said: “The display of the father's hard work in *MDIAL* made me think and reflect on my own behaviour and philosophy. I would reflect on my usual attitude towards my father and want to pursue a higher goal, that is, to care more about and thank my parents for their dedication to me. I get a feeling to repay my parents for their support. This reflection magnified my feelings of being moved, sad, and remorseful after watching *MDIAL*.”

Participants suggested that some brand films invite viewers to align themselves with particular value positions, which can shape how they perceive the brand’s identity and intentions. Here, “guide” does not imply a single correct morality. It refers to how a film foregrounds certain values through narrative emphasis and characterisation, thereby making particular judgements feel more salient or desirable. P5 framed “excellent” brand films as those that present society in an affirmative register and convey values such as courage, responsibility, and love, arguing that these values can influence audiences subtly through storylines and character building, and in turn affect viewers’ own value judgements.

At the same time, participants also stressed limits and unevenness in how value messaging travels. P1 emphasised the commercial conditions of brand films, noting that producers weigh audience needs and profit, which can lead

to social issues being selectively amplified or minimised. On this basis, P1 questioned whether the social information in brand films can ever be "completely true", since it is necessarily interpreted and performed. P2 added that interpretation varies because viewers bring different experiences and opinions, so the same film does not have the same effect across audiences. This variability becomes concrete in P5's comparison across the three films. P5 described strong resonance with the values perceived in TMOTM and MDIAL, including care for older people and parents' labour for children. By contrast, TB did not produce the same alignment for P5, partly because autism was not present in their everyday experience. While P5 suggested that TB may encourage attention and support for autistic children, they also expressed hesitation about endorsing the film's value message, arguing that insufficient knowledge of the group limited their confidence to make judgements. Taken together, these comments indicate that value messaging in brand films is not simply transmitted to audiences. It is mediated by the perceived commercial framing of the text and by the viewer's situated capacity to recognise, evaluate, and personally connect with the social issue represented.

In addition, the participants mentioned the importance of social discourse when it comes to the social phenomena and values displayed by brand films. P3 said: "If a brand film contains social issues, it does provoke discussions with my friends around me. When I saw *MDIAL*, I was very eager to forward it to my friends to watch and discuss the content with them. This kind of discussion has brought me lasting feelings. After watching the brand films for a long time, I will think about the problems and concepts contained in the brand films. Every time I think about it, I will be immersed in the emotions of watching the brand films." P6 takes a different view, saying: "I think brand films are ephemeral medium, and my interest in them diminishes over time. When I first watch a brand film, I may discuss the message with my friends, but generally by the next day I don't want to discuss it anymore. This means that the continued discussion of social issues is limited in my opinion." P4 said: "The issue of population ageing covered in *TMOTM* makes me feel that

there is a strong relationship between brand films and social change. Brand films may not be enough to solve complex social problems on their own, but they can be catalysts and agents of social change." P1 agrees with P4, adding: "There is a certain interaction between brand films and social issues. I think brand films can help us recognize the existence of social issues. When we learn about the scale and severity of some issues through brand films, we will be more likely to support measures to address them. This may also affect our subsequent behaviour towards the brand, such as consumption or continued attention and support of the brand." P5 said: "I feel that brand films that cover social messages and broader values are more likely to make me emotionally volatile. Because social issues or phenomena are something that the audience needs to pay attention to as a whole, it makes me feel a sense of social responsibility or ethnicity. I get more excited and nervous when I see brand films that express social issues, and it amplifies my emotions." P4 said: "Brand films are like a tool that guides me to think and act, it inspires my emotions and desire to act, and makes me want to do something to support the brand."

Emotional Recollection

Participants' discussions indicated that they were impressed by the sustained emotional experience of the brand film. After watching the brand film, participants said they were still able to recall and relive the emotions they experienced, which seemed to have a longer-term impact on their emotions. This emotional recollection suggests that the brand film effectively builds a lasting emotional connection with the audience and may influence the audience's future behaviour towards the brand. P5 said: "I may not remember the specific storylines after watching three brand films, but the emotions I experienced at the time lasted and influenced my impression of the brand." P3 said: "Emotional memories seem to me to be more enduring than other memories. When I recall the stories of the three films, I need to think for a long time to push myself to piece together the memory of the story. Emotions are different. When I recall emotional experience, the emotions that happened

at that time will come out of my mind subconsciously. Therefore, my impression of each brand film is to remember them by recalling the emotions."

P1 mentioned that the lasting emotional impact comes from the musical elements in the brand film. P1 said: "Music, as an emotional medium, can directly touch my heart through melody, lyrics and performance. The music in *TMOTM*' has brought me a deeper emotional experience. I followed the melody of the background music step by step to feel the emotional state of the protagonist and the emotional bond between the little girl and the old man." If the music of the brand film can be integrated with the plot, it can leave a deeper impression in the audience's memory. When the audience overhears the same or similar soundtrack on other occasions, they often associate the plot and characters related to the music. Even if the audience's memory of the plot and characters is blurred, they can still recall the emotions of the time. The specific melodies and themes of the music can bring emotional memories to the participants, which allows them to gain a deep understanding of the theme and plot of the film, thus deepening their viewing experience. P2 said: "I also feel that music has a great impact on my emotions. In *TMOTM*, when the little girl tries and fails to connect with the old man on the moon, the music reaches a point of decline. This melodic change makes my emotions rise and fall along with the emotions experienced by the character in the film." Regarding the rhythm, melody and tone of the music, P1 adds: "The music in *TB* is gentle and soft, and it relaxes my emotions and allows me to watch the full film in peace. I really enjoyed the calm atmosphere, which impressed me with the *TB* film. After the screening, I kept recalling the emotional atmosphere and experience the music brought to me." P4 said: "I think the music choices of the three brand films are very good, and they all fit well with the storyline and style. Although everyone's aesthetic preferences, understanding, and acceptance of musical elements are different, this will affect the audience's emotional response to the brand film. In addition, different cultural backgrounds and social experiences will also affect the audience's understanding and experience of the music, editing, lighting and other storytelling techniques in the brand film. These factors may lead to differences

in the audience's emotional response to the brand film. But I think what is constant is that the impact of the audience's emotional experience when watching the brand film is usually long-lasting, because the deep emotion itself can exist for a period of time. The brand film uses so many techniques to stimulate emotion, which makes its emotional experience more lasting. At least for me, I will remember for a long time the emotions I experienced when watching brand films, which is a pleasure for me."

On the other hand, the brand film, as an external stimulus element, can temporarily enhance the emotional needs of the participants. P2 said: "The emotional stimulation brought by the brand film is short-lived, but it can transform the short-lived emotion into a lasting emotional need. For example, *TMOTM*, I feel very warm after watching it. When I recall this warm emotion later, I will have a need to continuously obtain this emotion. Therefore, this emotional need makes me want to know the John Lewis brand again or consume it." In addition, the participants' emotional connection to the brand film lies in the storyline, which is full of strong emotional expressions. P6 said, "*MDIAL* had a strong and persistent emotional response to me. In *MDIAL*, the father wants to hide the difficulties of life, but his children can see, feel and understand. The father doesn't really want to lie, he just wants his children to be happy and have a good future. The story expresses that parents can do anything for their children, and they can resist difficulties, just for the sake of the child to be better. The characters and emotions in the film made me feel very amazing. It led me to experience the relationship between me and my father as a child. I also experienced even if I become a parent in the future, the difficulties I would have faced in life and the pain I have hidden from my children, and the feelings of trying to support my children. This kind of viewing experience allows me to experience the different emotions of the two characters. When I become two characters in real life, I will often recall the emotions at that time."

6.3 Discussion

Where participants have lived experience or familiarity with the social situations represented, recurring scenes can prompt memory and association and make the film feel emotionally close; where such experience is absent, the same scenes may remain intelligible but less resonant. For younger generations, the confusion and stress of real life may prompt them to prefer to watch brand films that are close to life and real feelings. The personal experience or collective memory reflected in a brand film is not restricted to historical events. It may also refer to contemporary social concerns that are widely discussed, which can make the film feel more immediately relevant to some audiences. For example, the metaphorical issue of the 2015 aging of the British population in the *TMOTM* is a topic that every audience can participate in. At the same time, such a symbolic story has also triggered the possibility of discussing many related social phenomena. Participants have their own interpretations of family relationships, the elderly living alone, and the company of family members. Some participants may feel sad, while others may feel warm. These emotions allow them to experience the impact of the brand film on them and also allow them to connect and understand the characters in the story. The affinity of the story is specifically manifested in that the participants find a familiar life from the characters. The participants recalled and perceived their own experiences, and examined the experiences from the perspective of the characters. In the three brand films, the small things include the joy of a mother teaching her autistic daughter a word successfully in *TB*, or the daughter talking to her father with a short composition in *MDIAL*, or a small gift from a little girl to an unfamiliar old man at Christmas in *TMOTM*. These scenes may be insignificant in life, but they are incisively and vividly portrayed in the brand films. Most of the participants said that when the small things in life were portrayed in brand films, they felt more authentic and touched.

In addition, due to different personalities and living environments, each participant's perceptual and memory abilities are different. However, from the participant's perspective, individual memory is still part of group memory. This may be because brand films can crystallise an issue through a specific character or incident, and that concreteness can leave a strong impression that encourages viewers to think about the wider implications. Participants were able to relate individual experiences to group experiences derived from social environments. As a text shared by a social group, a brand film allows each participant to enter the text based on their personal daily life experiences and find their own perceptions and experiences in specific characters and events, thus forming their own emotional experience. At the same time, a brand film also provides a response or value establishment for individual experience, and the participants believe that they find a sense of collective belonging. Participants believe that the success of a brand film lies in whether it can bring together different individual experiences, perceptions and memories in a social group, and complete the transformation of individual experience into collective experience, thus becoming a brand film with group image power and group emotion characteristics.

Moreover, participants believed that the role of symbols and metaphors in brand films is to deepen their understanding and experience of the content conveyed by the brand film through perceptual and emotional resonance. Symbols may be specific objects, actions, colours, or other symbolic forms that go beyond the literal meaning and represent deeper meanings. The use of symbolic symbols in brand films can enhance the expression of themes, deepen the psychological depiction of characters, and emotionally resonate with the audience. Participants discussed in depth the positive impact of symbols and metaphors on brand films. Symbols and metaphors enrich the viewing experience of the film through visual techniques, such as the unique telescopic perspective in *TMOTM*, the storytelling technique in *MDIAL*, and the daydreaming scenes in *TB*. Participants' comments can be analysed as evidence that symbols and metaphors work as multimodal meaning-making resources, rather than as decorative "visual enjoyment". Conceptual metaphor

theory proposes that viewers often understand abstract themes through more concrete domains (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). In screen media, such mappings can be realised through image composition, perspective, movement, and sound, not only through language (Forceville, 1996; Forceville and Urios-Aparisi, 2009). From a social-semiotic perspective, resources such as perspective, colour and framing organise salience and relations, including felt distance or intimacy, which helps explain why participants treated formal devices as meaningful rather than purely aesthetic (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006). In this sense, the telescopic perspective that participants discussed in TMOTM, the compositional "writing" device in MDIAL, and the daydream sequences in TB can be read as symbolic structures that translate thematic concerns into perceivable patterns. These symbolic structures also support emotional engagement, because they provide a route into characters' inner states and guide viewers' alignment with what matters in the story world, which film emotion scholarship treats as central to how films move audiences (Smith, 1995; Tan, 1996; Plantinga, 2009). In brand communication terms, this matters because symbolic storytelling can position brand values as lived experience rather than as explicit claims, shaping brand perception through narrative association and value-inflected imagery (Holt, 2004).. Through the use of these symbols, the participants felt the rich psychological description and shaping of the characters. Symbols and metaphors also conveyed the ideas, opinions or values implied in the brand film, which made the participants think and interpret it repeatedly. Finally, the participants also mentioned the embodiment of emotional resonance in symbols and metaphors. Most of the participants sensed and understood the story through symbols or metaphors in the brand film, and established an emotional connection with the characters, resulting in deep emotional resonance and experience.

Furthermore, participants felt that the brand films evoke awareness of social issues and phenomena by showing real-life challenges and dilemmas, which in turn led to their thinking and discussion of social issues. The three brand films revealed the dilemmas faced by different groups, such as the loneliness

of elderly people living alone, fathers who work hard to earn money for their children, and the loneliness and difficult treatment of children with autism. These social phenomena can prompt participants to reflect and act. In the participants' discussion about the relationship between values, social messages and emotions, they mentioned that if they could understand and care about the social issues depicted in the film, they would be able to empathize with the characters. This emotional resonance helps the audience develop inner empathy and emotional engagement, and then respond to the brand's call to act or respond positively to the brand. Brand films touch the emotions of the participants and evoke empathy through well-structured storylines and characterization. This empathy helped participants understand and care about the social issues and the fate of the characters depicted in the film, which in turn generated emotional responses and a desire to act. To add this, the psychology of the participants was also influenced by the brand film. The brand film led the participants to reflect on their own values and behaviours by showing the complexity of human nature and the diversity of social messages. Participants believed that the brand film showed many social messages and influential values through artistic expression, which had a profound impact on society and culture. These three brand films not only convey positive values but also promote the participants' understanding and tolerance of the social issues and social groups depicted in the films. The discussion of social phenomena and problems prompts the participants to reflect, which affects their values and lifestyles to a certain extent. In short, the values and social messages in the brand films have an impact on the participants to re-shape their values, influence their way of thinking, and reflect on their behaviour habits. The stories in brand films will instil different values in participants through various themes, and some of the concepts advocated by brand films are accepted and passed on by a number of participants. Participants framed brand films not only as commercial messages but as audio-visual experiences that can generate aesthetic enjoyment and sustained attention. This aligns with accounts of cinema’s affective address in which stylistic organisation of image and sound shapes spectators’ feelings and modes of engagement. (Plantinga, 2009; Tan, 1996). When participants suggested that their understanding of the social and

cultural information in the films shifted during viewing, this can be interpreted through narrative transportation, a form of absorption that can influence beliefs and attitudes by concentrating attention, intensifying imagery, and reducing counter-arguing. (Green and Brock, 2000). Participants' comments that narrative situations may shape their ways of thinking, and that they may wish to reproduce certain interaction patterns in everyday life, can be framed as perceived modelling effects. Social cognitive theory proposes that audiences can acquire behavioural scripts by observing mediated models, particularly when these scripts are presented as emotionally rewarding or socially validated within the narrative. (Bandura, 2001). In addition, entertainment-education scholarship helps to clarify why participants may regard narrative-based brand films as influential. It argues that value-laden messages embedded in story and character can be processed with less resistance than overtly persuasive communication. (Moyer-Gusé, 2008).

6.4 Conclusion

This reception study used an online focus group to examine how viewers articulated emotional experience while watching three brand films and how they connected those experiences to their perceptions of the brand. The analysis followed a qualitative, interpretivist orientation, treating participants' talk as situated meaning-making rather than as direct measurement of internal states. The transcript was analysed through thematic analysis, moving from initial coding to theme development through iterative checking against the dataset (Braun and Clarke, 2006). In addition, attention to Affect and appraisal-oriented language supported analysis of how participants evaluated situations, characters, and implied brand meanings through their wording, rather than only through explicit emotion labels (Martin and White, 2005).

Across the discussion, participants described emotional engagement through four interrelated patterns: story affinity, symbolism and metaphor, values and

social messaging, and emotional recollection. Story affinity emerged as a central route into emotional involvement, particularly where participants perceived narratives as close to ordinary life and family relations. This emphasis is consistent with narrative persuasion research, which argues that absorption in a story can shape subsequent judgements and attitudes through transportation-like engagement (Green and Brock, 2000). Values and social messaging were frequently discussed as cues through which participants inferred what the brand “stands for”. Such accounts align with cultural branding arguments that brand meanings can operate as symbolic resources in broader cultural negotiation, while the reception data in this study indicates that viewers do not uniformly endorse or identify with the same value positions (Holt, 2004).

Participants’ discussion of symbolism and metaphor suggests that interpretive work is often central to reception. Several participants framed symbolic devices as enabling them to make abstract feeling states more graspable and to infer character interiority and value positioning through film form. This is analytically significant because it shows that emotional experience, as reported in group discussion, is often mediated by evaluative interpretation rather than expressed as a list of feelings (Martin and White, 2005). Emotional recollection appeared in participants’ accounts as a marker of memorability and continued reflection. This should be framed as reported sense-making and intention rather than as demonstrated behavioural change. Accounts of mediated modelling nevertheless help to contextualise why participants may describe films as influencing how they think about relationships or social issues, since observational learning can contribute to the uptake of behavioural scripts and norms under certain conditions (Bandura, 2001).

A further finding is that emotional engagement is not guaranteed by the “brand film” format alone. Some participants reported difficulty sustaining involvement when they perceived the audio-visual design or narrative direction as bland, which reduced the sense of connection to the brand. This indicates that

participants' engagement depended on whether storytelling was experienced as coherent and whether audio-visual choices were perceived as emotionally expressive. Such claims are consistent with experiential marketing scholarship that emphasises designed experience as a mechanism through which brand meaning is felt and remembered, although this study does not attempt to measure downstream behavioural outcomes (Schmitt, 1999).

The study also has limitations. As Table 6.1 shows, the sample was small, socially connected and demographically narrow: six participants aged between 25 and 35, five Chinese participants and one English participant, with four women and two men. Most participants worked close to media, communication or online content, so their responses cannot represent wider audiences. Their UK experience ranged from no UK experience to 27 years, and their reported familiarity with the films ranged from 20% to 90%. This matters because the three films depend on different cultural contexts. Stronger UK experience or higher familiarity may have supported recognition of the John Lewis Christmas advertising context in *The Man on the Moon*, while limited familiarity with Thai MetLife advertising and the US SunTrust or autism campaign context may have shaped responses to *My Dad is a Liar* and *The Bridge*. Their personal or family experience of care, parental sacrifice, ageing, loneliness or autism may also have made some themes more emotionally available. The findings should therefore be treated as analytically informative rather than representative of wider audiences across countries, generations or cultural backgrounds. Moreover, focus groups produce data shaped by interaction, including consensus formation and productive disagreement, which affects how opinions are expressed and developed in talk (Krueger and Casey, 2015).

CHAPTER 7

Conclusion

7.1 Restating the aims and defining the brand film

This conclusion returns to the central research question of the thesis: how do brand films construct emotional experiences and shape viewers' perceptions of the brand? This question is also the basis of the project's contribution. The thesis does not simply ask whether brand films use emotion. It asks how emotion is built through film form and narrative, how viewers interpret that experience, and why these matters for brands, agencies and film makers that use narrative video to communicate values, trust and cultural relevance rather than product information alone.

The thesis addresses this question through a qualitative, interpretivist design that treats emotional experience and brand perception as situated and discursively articulated phenomena rather than as variables that can be detached from context (Glesne, 1999). Within this orientation, a brand film is approached as a narrative-led, publicly circulated audio-visual text that communicates brand values primarily through story, character and atmosphere, while product or service information is reduced, displaced, or embedded as background cues.

This definition positions brand film as a form of branded cinema that draws on conventions of film narrative and film style while remaining embedded in the strategic aims of branding. The definition is consistent with scholarship that treats brand meaning as something that is produced through cultural narratives, symbolic forms and audience interpretation rather than through

functional claims alone (Holt, 2004). It is also consistent with work in experiential and affective marketing that treats consumer response as shaped by feeling, memory and lived experience rather than by rational benefit calculation alone (Schmitt, 1999; Pine and Gilmore, 1998; Brakus, Schmitt and Zarantonello, 2009).

The thesis did not treat this definition as a purely theoretical claim. It was tested against practitioner discourse and viewer discourse. In the interview study, practitioners were asked to reflect on the criteria they use when they label a film a brand film rather than a conventional advertisement. In the reception study, viewers were invited to describe what they believed the films were trying to do, how they experienced them emotionally, and how their impressions of the brands were shaped through those experiences.

The research design brought together three studies that examine brand film from complementary angles. Study 1 developed close readings of three brand films through detailed analysis of colour and lighting, camera and framing, and editing and sound. Study 2 investigated practitioners' accounts through semi-structured interviews with brand film professionals. Study 3 examined viewers' talk through an online reception study in the form of a focus group discussion of the same films. This three-part design allowed the thesis to examine emotional experience and brand perception at the level of film text, professional intention, and audience interpretation, while remaining within a coherent interpretivist logic.

As discussed in Chapter 1, this question matters because brand films now sit within a video-led advertising environment. The statistics presented there show rising investment in digital and video advertising, together with wider patterns of platform-based viewing. These figures do not prove the effect of any single brand film. They show the industrial setting in which the research question becomes important. Brands have more reasons to invest in moving-

image communication, but they also need clearer ways to understand how emotional experience is built, how audiences interpret it, and how that interpretation becomes connected to the brand.

7.2 Summary of findings

Across the three studies, the findings indicate that emotional experience in brand films is constructed through an interaction of formal design, narrative appraisal and social meaning. The close readings show how film form structures evaluation and feeling, in the sense that colour, framing, editing and sound organise attention, establish interpersonal distance, and guide the viewer's sense of what is at stake in a scene (Bordwell, Thompson and Smith, 2019; Chion, 1994). The interviews show how practitioners articulate this work as emotional design, where story development and audio-visual decisions are used to build resonance and to make brand values inferable rather than declarative. The reception study shows how viewers evaluate these invitations in practice, linking emotional engagement to recognisable stories, symbolic and metaphorical devices, and the feeling that the film's stance is credible and meaningful.

The findings also indicate that brand perception is shaped less by any single cue than by the coherence of the overall viewing experience. When viewers described a film as authentic, moving or memorable, they commonly connected these evaluations to a sense of what the brand stands for. When the viewing experience was judged as emotionally flat, inconsistent or overly instrumental, the perception of the brand was correspondingly weakened. This pattern supports the thesis argument that brand films do not automatically deliver emotional engagement by virtue of their format. Emotional engagement emerges when viewers experience an integrated relation between narrative stakes, film style and brand stance, and when they can map that relation onto their own values and memories.

The triangulated findings further clarify that emotional experience is not equivalent to positive feeling. Viewers and practitioners described emotional design in terms of tension and release, vulnerability and repair, and the management of empathy, discomfort, or uncertainty. This supports the thesis's use of appraisal-oriented perspectives, in which emotions arise through evaluations of situations and relations rather than through a simple stimulus-response model (Martin and White, 2005). In this thesis, emotional experience is therefore treated as an organised pattern of appraisals and felt intensities that develops across the film's unfolding form.

The opportunity identified by the thesis is therefore not to replace industry metrics such as views, shares, completion rates or purchase intention. The opportunity is to add a qualitative account of what happens before those measures become meaningful. The findings show how emotional coherence, brand relevance, authenticity and viewer appraisal can be examined as parts of the same process. This is the main "so what" of the project from an industry perspective: brand films need to be understood not only as content that reaches audiences, but as filmic experiences that viewers must interpret as credible before they can support brand perception.

7.2.1 Close reading of brand films

The close readings demonstrate that emotional experience is built through formal organisation across multiple modes rather than through story content alone. The analyses therefore approached the films as multimodal compositions, in line with multimodal film analysis that treats meaning as emerging from the structured interaction of visual, auditory, narrative and spatial resources (Bateman and Schmidt, 2012).

In colour and lighting, contrasts in saturation, brightness and tonal temperature create differentiated emotional worlds and orient the viewer's appraisal of spaces as warm, safe, isolated or threatening. This supports the claim that colour functions as a modality marker that contributes to meaning, evaluation and affect, not merely to pictorial description (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006). Across the three films, colour is repeatedly used to separate social worlds and to guide viewers' feelings about belonging, absence, care and social connection.

In camera and framing, the films repeatedly modulate interpersonal distance through shifts between medium and close framing and through changes in perspective that align the viewer with a character's vulnerability or agency. Such choices operate as a form of affective address, since they shape how viewers relate to characters and how they experience scenes of care, pressure, absence or connection (Smith, 1995). The close readings therefore treated framing not as a neutral record of action, but as a key mechanism through which the viewer is positioned in relation to emotional stakes.

In editing and sound, the analyses show how rhythm, continuity, and the placement of music, voice and ambient sound stabilise or destabilise emotional meaning. Sound often carries emotional continuity across cuts, allowing the film to hold together earlier and later states without adding explicit explanation. This supports film sound theory that emphasises how audio can extend space beyond the frame, connect separate images, and guide interpretation through what is heard rather than what is shown (Chion, 1994).

The close readings also show that each film constructs emotional experience through a specific configuration of these resources. The Man on the Moon builds an emotional contrast between social warmth and isolation through strong differences in visual tone between the Earth and Moon settings, while also using distance, framing and sound to stage a gradual movement from separation towards connection. My Dad is a Liar organises emotional experience around family relations, care and moral evaluation, drawing

viewers into a child's perspective and using audio-visual restraint to sustain empathy as the film reframes the father's situation. The Bridge constructs emotional experience through a narrative about a child with autism, and it uses symbolic and fantasy-like sequences to externalise inner experience and to stage transitions between inner and outer worlds.

Taken together, the close readings establish a map of strategies that brand films use to solicit feeling and appraisal. They show how emotional experience is generated through a designed relation between what the viewer sees, what the viewer hears, and how the viewer is positioned in relation to characters and spaces. This provides an analytical baseline for comparing practitioner intention and viewer interpretation in the later studies, while also offering a structured account of film form as a mechanism of brand communication.

7.2.2 Interview study

The interview study indicates that practitioners conceptualise emotional experience as both a creative aim and a strategic problem. Practitioners described emotional resonance as central to the distinctiveness of brand film relative to shorter advertising formats, since story and character allow viewers to stay with a situation long enough for feelings to develop and for brand values to be inferred rather than stated. This practitioner emphasis aligns with film theory that treats emotion as shaped through viewer alignment with characters and through the unfolding organisation of narrative situations (Smith, 1995).

Practitioners also described emotional design as a multidisciplinary task. Although many interviewees worked in roles closely tied to production craft, their accounts repeatedly connected audio-visual execution to the broader

communicative aim of the film. In this sense, attention to cinematography, lighting, editing and sound was not treated as a purely technical matter. It was described as a means of shaping how viewers evaluate situations and how they connect those evaluations to the brand. The interviews therefore complement the close readings by offering professional accounts of why particular formal choices are made and what kinds of audience response those choices are expected to invite.

The interviews also indicated that practitioners do not treat product absence as an absolute rule. Several accounts suggested that product elements can appear in brand films, although their role is generally constrained. Product cues were described as effective when they are integrated into the narrative world and do not collapse the film into an explicit sales message. This nuance is important for the thesis definition of brand film, since it frames brand film as a continuum of degrees of explicitness rather than as a rigid category boundary.

Practitioners described emotional design in relation to several recurring aims. Emotional arcs were framed as crucial, in the sense that the film should guide viewers through a shaped movement of feeling rather than remaining in a single emotional tone. Emotional resonance was framed as dependent on story credibility and on what practitioners often described as authenticity, meaning that the film's stance and emotional logic should be perceived as plausible rather than manipulative. Emotional design was also framed as linked to social meaning, where social themes may be used to open discussion and to connect brand values to broader cultural concerns.

These accounts can be read in relation to cultural branding, which emphasises how brands seek cultural relevance by aligning themselves with wider narratives and values (Holt, 2004). They can also be read in relation to experiential marketing, where the brand relationship is understood as rooted

in memorable experiences rather than informational claims (Schmitt, 1999; Pine and Gilmore, 1998). The interviews, however, make clear that such aims are negotiated under constraints, including budgets, time, platform distribution and the practical division of labour across production roles. Emotional design is therefore presented as both intentional and contingent.

The interview themes further show that practitioners differentiate between social messaging as genuine engagement and social messaging as rhetorical surface. Some accounts emphasised that social and humanistic themes can build trust and connection when they are consistent with a brand's practice. Other accounts expressed scepticism, suggesting that social themes can be used as a cover or transition into commercial messaging. This tension is analytically productive for the thesis, because it connects to reception findings that viewers can evaluate social themes as either meaningful or instrumental depending on how they read the film's stance and the brand's credibility.

7.2.3 Reception study

The reception study indicates that viewers' emotional experience is articulated through comparison, evaluation and the sharing of personal associations in the group. The thematic findings show that viewers consistently linked emotional engagement to story affinity, values and social messaging, symbolism and metaphor, and emotional recollection. These themes clarify how brand perception is shaped through the way viewers interpret a film as a meaningful experience rather than as an advertisement.

The focus group accounts show that story affinity is often grounded in recognisable everyday situations and in emotional relations that viewers can map onto their own experience. When viewers described a story as close to life, the point was not that the film was factual. The point was that the

narrative logic felt plausible and emotionally legible, allowing viewers to appraise characters and events without experiencing the film as forced. This finding aligns with accounts of narrative persuasion that emphasise how engagement depends on being transported into a narrative world that is experienced as coherent and involving (Green and Brock, 2000).

Viewers' discussion of values and social messaging suggests that brand perception is shaped through moral and evaluative judgements as much as through emotional intensity. Participants described how films can invite reflection on care, responsibility, social inclusion and vulnerability, and how such themes can shape their sense of a brand's stance. At the same time, participants also noted that interpretation varies across viewers, and that resonance can depend on prior experience. In discussion of The Bridge, for example, some participants described weaker resonance where they lacked familiarity with autism, even while recognising the film's social intention. This provides a clear instance of how brand perception is shaped through situated appraisal rather than through uniform effects.

Viewers also interpreted symbolism, metaphor and stylistic devices as resources for emotional understanding, since they turn abstract feelings and values into concrete images and scenes. This reception pattern supports the claim that multimodal meaning in film operates through layered signification, where visual and sonic forms carry evaluative and affective meanings beyond propositional content (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006; Chion, 1994). It also supports the close reading finding that formal choices such as framing, viewpoint, and sound motifs can become the means through which viewers articulate emotional meaning and personal connection.

A further reception finding is that emotional engagement was not guaranteed by the brand film format. Some viewers reported difficulty sustaining engagement when they perceived the audio-visual design or narrative

direction as bland. This provides an important counterpoint to practitioner emphasis on emotional arcs and crafted affect. It indicates that viewers evaluate emotional expressiveness as an emergent property of the whole film, and that perceived flatness can weaken the connection between feeling and brand stance. In the triangulated design, this negative case becomes a key analytical prompt because it identifies conditions under which intended emotional design may not translate into experienced emotional engagement.

The reception study also provided a method for examining viewers' evaluations in a more precise way through Affect and appraisal coding. The analysis treated participants' talk not only as a list of emotion labels, but as a set of appraisals in which viewers evaluate events, characters and brand stances in relation to their own values and concerns (Martin and White, 2005). This strengthened the analytical link between emotional experience and brand perception, since it showed how feeling was articulated through judgements about responsibility, care, credibility, and social inclusion, and how these judgements were used to justify attitudes towards the brand.

The group format also shaped the production of data. Participants refined their accounts through agreement, disagreement and comparison across the three films, and this made it possible to observe how collective discussion can surface shared values as well as divergent interpretations. Focus group research is often valued for precisely this capacity to produce interactional data rather than isolated individual accounts (Krueger and Casey, 2015). In this thesis, the focus group therefore functioned as a site in which emotional experience and brand perception were articulated as social processes rather than private reactions.

7.3 Triangular comparison between the three studies

This section compares the thematic findings of Study 2 and Study 3 with the formal patterns identified in Study 1. It also clarifies how the themes were produced from the empirical data. The Study 2 themes were developed through coding the practitioner interview transcripts and the written email response. The Study 3 themes were developed through coding the reception-study transcript. The comparison below does not treat one perspective as definitive. It shows what becomes visible when film text, practitioner accounts and audience talk are read together.

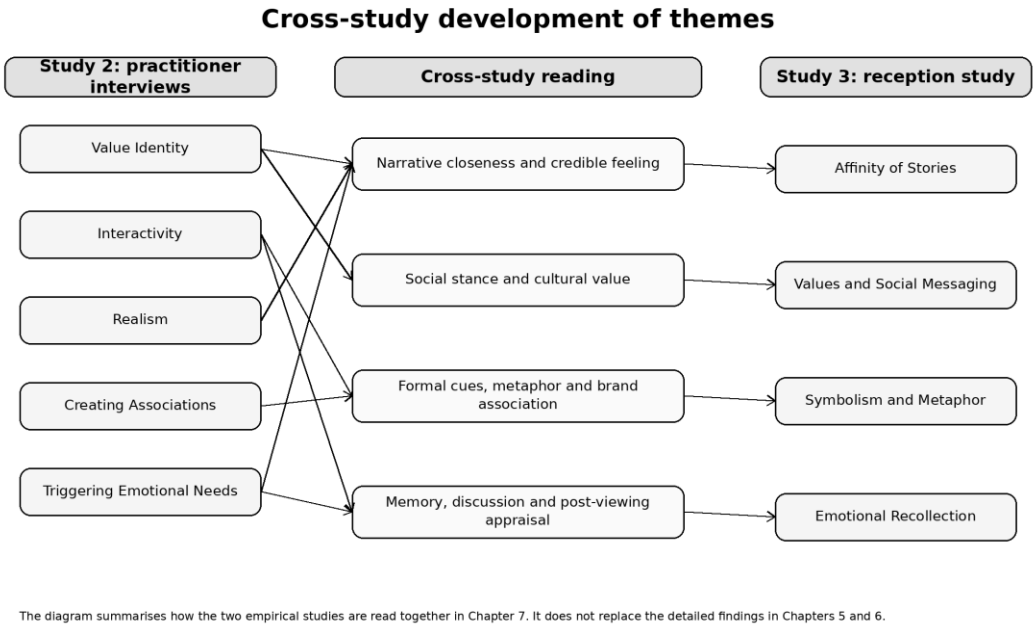


Figure 7.1 Relationship between practitioner themes and reception themes across the two empirical studies.

7.3.1 Narrative affinity, realism, and emotional needs

Study 3 foregrounds Affinity of Stories as a primary condition of emotional engagement. Participants repeatedly frame “affinity” as a sense that the story is close to ordinary life and, therefore, credible and emotionally legible. This emphasis aligns with two themes in Study 2. Theme 3 Realism identifies how practitioners deliberately pursue “similar experience”, “real events”, and believable acting and mise-en-scene, in order to keep viewers inside the story world. Theme 5 Triggering Emotional Needs further frames emotional impact through “human emotion”, “caring”, and “everyday life”, which echoes the reception study’s recurrent linking of family or ordinary situations to emotional involvement.

Study 1 clarifies how this “closeness to life” is not only a narrative claim but is supported by multimodal design. Across the three films, the close readings show repeated use of intimate framing, controlled pacing, and emotionally directional sound to keep attention on relational situations rather than on product explanation. In this triangulated view, “affinity” is an audience label for a cluster of textual and production choices that collectively reduce distance between the viewer’s everyday interpretive resources and the film’s story situations.

7.3.2 Values, social messaging, and value identity

Study 3 separates Values and Social Messaging from Symbolism and Metaphor, which indicates that participants sometimes treat “what the film is saying” as analytically distinct from “how the film says it”. In Study 2, Theme 1 Value Identity provides a parallel structure at the production level. Practitioners discuss value identity through brand films’ concern for a specific group, the projection of a stance or point of view, the display of cultural plurality, and the presentation of social and cultural values.

Study 1 shows that these value positions are rarely presented as explicit arguments. They are framed as emotionally apprehensible situations, supported by cues that organise appraisal. In the close reading of The Bridge, for example, the film's focus on an autistic child and family care operates through relational scenes and affectively marked shifts between everyday space and imaginative scenes. Study 3 then demonstrates the boundary condition of such value identity strategies. Some viewers can articulate the film's intended social concern, while still reporting limited resonance when the represented issue feels outside their experience or when they feel unable to evaluate it. This divergence is analytically productive because it shows that value identity is not transmitted as a stable "message". It is inferred through viewers' own evaluative resources, which vary across social experience.

7.3.3 Symbolism, metaphor, and multimodal cueing

Study 3 indicates that audiences often use the language of symbolism and metaphor to explain why a film "feels" emotionally meaningful. Participants cite symbolic devices and imaginative sequences, especially in The Bridge, as mechanisms that make abstract emotion graspable. Study 2 supports this reception emphasis from a different angle. Theme 4 Creating Associations frames "script", "brand culture", "consistency", and "brand history" as deliberate strategies for making viewers connect the film's story world to a brand's identity. Theme 2 Interactivity adds that audience engagement can be created through "emotional commonalities", designed interactions between product and character, designed interactions between audience and character, and, in some cases, the generation of controversy and discussion.

Study 1 provides the descriptive bridge between these perspectives. The close readings specify how symbolic and metaphorical meanings are realised through recurring motifs, framing patterns, colour and lighting contrasts, and

sound continuity. In the triangulated reading, symbolism and metaphor are not only interpretive claims made after viewing. They are also production strategies for managing brand presence without overt product messaging, while still giving viewers objects, scenes, or audio motifs that can carry meaning across the film.

7.3.4 Brand association, authenticity claims, and brand inference

A key comparison across studies concerns how “brand perception” is formed. Study 2 repeatedly treats association building as a design problem, especially through scripting and brand consistency. Study 3 shows that brand inference is often mediated by credibility judgements. Participants link brand perception to whether the story feels sincere and whether the film’s emotional direction feels coherent rather than manipulative or “bland”. This is the point at which the reception data complicates an exclusively production centred account. High technical competence is not sufficient if viewers interpret the film’s emotional cues as generic.

Study 1 explains why these judgements emerge. In the close readings, brand presence is commonly indirect, embedded in narrative structure, point of view, and audio visual motifs. Such indirectness can support perceived sincerity when it is coupled with coherent story direction and emotionally expressive design. Conversely, indirectness can be interpreted as evasive or uncommitted if the film’s aesthetic choices fail to produce a felt sense of intention. This triangulated pattern shows why “authenticity” operates as a reception criterion that is partly anchored in textual form and partly anchored in viewers’ broader persuasion knowledge.

7.3.5 Interactivity and post viewing talk as an extension of the text

Study 2 treats interactivity as a property of brand films' design and circulation. Practitioners describe controversy, discussion, and audience response as forms of engagement that extend the film beyond the screening moment. Study 3 provides the empirical counterpart, because the focus group is a setting in which this extension becomes visible When participants debate social messaging, symbolism or narrative credibility, they are not only reporting private feelings. They are turning affect into talk, judgement and shared interpretation. This matters for the research question because constructing emotional experience is not confined to the duration of the film. It also includes the conditions under which viewers can make that experience socially meaningful.

7.3.6 A compact mapping across studies

Study 2 Theme 3 Realism and Theme 5 Triggering Emotional Needs converge with Study 3 Affinity of Stories and Emotional Recollection, and Study 1's emphasis on intimate framing, emotionally directional sound, and pacing that foregrounds relational situations.

Study 2 Theme 1 Value Identity converges with Study 3 Values and Social Messaging, and Study 1's pattern of staging value positions through situation and appraisal cues rather than explicit argument.

Study 2 Theme 4 Creating Associations converges with Study 3 Symbolism and Metaphor, and Study 1's analysis of recurring motifs and formal repetition as carriers of brand meaning.

Study 2 Theme 2 Interactivity connects to the focus group's disagreements and comparisons, which make visible how brand film meaning becomes a topic of social negotiation after viewing.

Taken together, these concrete comparisons show how each method addresses a different segment of the same mechanism. Study 1 specifies the formal resources through which brand films organise appraisal and alignment. Study 2 explains how practitioners rationalise and design those resources under constraints. Study 3 shows how viewers re articulate or resist those designs in evaluative talk, which is where brand perception becomes explicit.

7.3.7 Convergences across the three studies

A consistent pattern across studies is the centrality of narrative involvement. Close readings showed that emotional experience is organised through narrative situations that foreground care, responsibility, vulnerability, and relational repair, supported by audio visual design that guides attention and alignment. Interviewees frequently framed story as the vehicle through which brand meaning becomes experiential rather than declarative. Reception participants repeatedly described story affinity, especially in ordinary or family themed scenes, as the primary condition for emotional engagement and for forming a favourable sense of the brand. This convergence is consistent with narrative persuasion research, which argues that absorption in story can shape attitudes and judgements through transportation and reduced counter arguing. (Green and Brock, 2000). It also aligns with consumer research that treats narrative processing as a route through which viewers connect brand meaning to self-relevant experience. (Escalas, 2004).

A second convergence concerns the role of multimodal orchestration. Study 1 identified how colour and lighting, framing, and sound work together to structure mood, intimacy, and appraisal cues. Practitioners likewise discussed audio visual design as integral to emotional impact, even when they approached it through the language of craft and execution. Reception participants often named music, pacing, and visual motifs as reasons a film felt emotionally expressive or, conversely, as reasons it felt flat. Film emotion scholarship supports this cross study pattern by arguing that films organise feeling through audiovisual cues that shape attention, character alignment, and interpretive inferences. (Smith, 1995; Tan, 1996; Plantinga, 2009). Sound studies further clarify that audio can bind scenes, guide affect, and shape the sense of space and presence. (Chion, 1994).

A third convergence is that brand perception is strongly mediated by perceived values rather than by product information. Across studies, brand meaning was discussed as a stance or set of commitments, often articulated through care, inclusion, responsibility, or social concern. This resonates with cultural branding, which argues that brands can become meaningful by offering symbolic resources that connect to cultural narratives. (Holt, 2004). It also aligns with relational views of branding, which treat consumer brand relations as shaped by meaning and affect rather than only by functional benefits. (Fournier, 1998).

7.3.8 Divergences and productive frictions

Alongside convergence, the comparison shows several tensions that are central to the research contribution. One friction concerns the difference between production-centred accounts and reception-centred evaluations. Practitioners often described emotion as an outcome of planning, craft, and constraint management, including scripting, performance direction and technical execution. Viewers, however, evaluated emotional impact primarily

in terms of how coherent and intimate the story felt and how expressive the audio-visual choices seemed. Some viewers described the same film as emotionally powerful, while others described it as bland. This divergence is compatible with the persuasion knowledge model, which suggests that audiences actively interpret persuasive intent and may accept or resist messages depending on their attributions and trust (Friestad and Wright, 1994; Campbell and Kirmani, 2000). It also indicates that technical competence is not sufficient on its own. Emotional engagement depends on whether the viewer experiences the film as meaningful and aligned with their own evaluative concerns.

A second friction concerns social messaging and personal relevance. Interviews suggested that social themes can be used to deepen resonance and trust, while also revealing reservations about instrumental use of social issues. Reception data shows that social messages do not produce uniform resonance. Viewers may recognise a film's intended social concern yet feel limited alignment when the represented issue does not connect to their own lived experience or when they feel insufficient knowledge to judge it. This is important because it clarifies that social messaging operates through appraisal and identification rather than through exposure alone. Appraisal perspectives treat emotion as linked to how viewers evaluate situations in relation to their own goals, values, and felt responsibilities. (Scherer, 1993; Martin and White, 2005). Therefore, the same social theme can invite divergent emotions and brand perceptions across viewers, which helps explain the variation found in the focus group.

A third friction concerns symbolism and interpretive openness. Study 1 traced symbolic and metaphorical devices as filmic strategies that render themes perceptible. Reception participants often reported that metaphor and symbolism helped them grasp abstract feeling and character interiority, yet their interpretations were not always stable or shared. This is consistent with multimodal and social semiotic theory, which treats meaning as realised

through resources such as framing, perspective, and colour, while also emphasising that interpretation depends on contextual and cultural knowledge (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006; Forceville and Urios Aparisi, 2009). The friction is productive because it supports the broader claim that brand perception is shaped by interpretive work, and that emotional experience is partly negotiated in reception rather than fully controlled by makers.

7.3.9 Overview of the triangular analysis

Reading the three studies together supports an integrated account with four linked stages.

The first stage is multimodal cueing. Brand films organise attention and appraisal through colour and lighting, framing distance, pacing, and sound. These cues do not determine emotion, but they scaffold how situations and characters are evaluated. (Bordwell, 1989; Chion, 1994).

The second stage is narrative alignment. Story structure and character relations invite viewers to align with particular concerns such as care, responsibility, or exclusion. Alignment is supported by intimate framing, point of view patterns, and audio continuity, which help viewers track who matters and why. (Smith, 1995; Plantinga, 2009).

The third stage is evaluative articulation. In reception talk, viewers translate these cues into appraisal language, describing what they value, what they judge as fair or unfair, and what feelings follow. This is where differences in experience, cultural background, and prior knowledge become visible, because viewers evaluate the same scenes in different ways. (Martin and White, 2005; Hall, 1980).

The fourth stage is brand inference. Viewers connect their emotional experience and evaluations to a sense of the brand, including what the brand represents, whether it appears trustworthy, and whether the film feels authentic rather than instrumental. This stage resonates with work on brand relationships and authenticity, which treats trust, credibility, and self relevant meaning as central to brand perception. (Fournier, 1998; Beverland, 2005; Napoli et al., 2014).

This staged account clarifies why a brand film can be well made in technical terms yet fail to sustain engagement for some viewers. If multimodal cues are perceived as bland, if narrative direction is unclear, or if social messaging lacks perceived sincerity or relevance, brand inference may weaken rather than strengthen.

The international context of the project also matters here. The three films analysed in the thesis are not drawn from one national market or one brand sector. *The Man on the Moon* is a UK retail brand film, *My Dad is a Liar* is a Thai insurance-related brand film, and *The Bridge* is a US foundation-related brand film. The interview study brought together practitioners working across advertising, marketing, film production, digital communication, editing, screenwriting, creative planning and short-video creation. The reception study adds another layer, since most participants were Chinese viewers with several years of UK experience, while one participant was English. This means that the project should not be read as a claim about one national advertising culture alone. Its more careful claim is that brand film can be examined as an international form of branded moving-image communication, while reception still depends on cultural knowledge, personal experience and the viewer's relation to the social issue represented.

7.4 Contributions to the interdisciplinary field of branded cinema

The thesis makes four connected contributions to the interdisciplinary study of brand film, advertising and moving-image culture. The first contribution is conceptual. By defining brand film as narrative-led branded cinema oriented towards emotional experience and brand perception, the thesis clarifies how brand film differs from short-form advertising without setting up a simple opposition between art and commerce. This definition is useful because it makes space for brand film to be studied as a cultural and affective text, while still recognising its position inside brand strategy and commercial communication.

The second contribution concerns the research question itself. The thesis shows that the question of how brand films construct emotional experiences cannot be separated from the question of how viewers infer brand meaning from those experiences. Emotional experience is not treated as decoration around a marketing message. It is part of the route through which brand values become visible, memorable and open to judgement. This contribution develops existing work on experiential and affective marketing by showing how feeling is organised through film form, narrative development and viewer appraisal rather than through a general appeal to emotion alone (Schmitt, 1999; Brakus, Schmitt and Zarantonello, 2009).

The third contribution is analytical. The close readings provide a structured account of how colour and lighting, camera and framing, and editing and sound organise emotional address and value positioning. This matters because industry discussion of brand films often moves quickly towards audience response or campaign outcome, while the formal construction of the viewing experience receives less detailed attention. The thesis shows that film style is one of the places where brand meaning is made. It is not an

embellishment added to a completed idea, but a mechanism through which the viewer is guided towards care, responsibility, social inclusion, trust or scepticism.

The fourth contribution is comparative and practice-facing. By bringing close reading, practitioner interviews and audience reception into one design, the thesis shows how brand-film meaning is negotiated across film text, professional practice and viewer interpretation. This is where the project benefits different groups. For scholars, it offers a way to connect film analysis, advertising studies, branding and reception research. For practitioners, including brand strategists, creative directors, film makers, producers, editors, marketing planners, advertising agencies and communication professionals, it offers a language for discussing how emotional experience is built and where it may fail. For brands, it clarifies why emotional storytelling needs to be coherent with brand stance and brand behaviour if it is to support trust rather than suspicion.

This practice-facing contribution should be stated carefully. The thesis does not claim to predict the commercial success of brand films, nor does it offer a universal model for all audiences or all markets. Its contribution is more specific. It provides a qualitative framework for examining emotional coherence, brand relevance, authenticity and viewer appraisal before these are reduced to campaign performance measures. This is important in an industry context where investment in video advertising is growing, but where emotional engagement can still be treated too generally. The thesis therefore contributes a way of asking not only whether a brand film was noticed, but how it invited feeling, how viewers made sense of that feeling, and whether the feeling could be credibly connected to the brand.

7.5 Methodological reflections

Methodologically, the thesis demonstrates the value of combining close reading, interviews and reception discussion within an interpretivist qualitative design. Close reading provides a disciplined way of describing how film form invites feeling and appraisal, while interviews and focus group discussion provide access to how practitioners and viewers interpret these invitations in their own terms. The integrated design responds to the limits of single-method approaches, since textual analysis alone cannot establish how interpretations are made, while interview or focus group data alone cannot show how film form organises invitation and constraint (Glesne, 1999).

The approach also clarifies how qualitative analysis can operate across different kinds of data. The interview and focus group material was analysed through thematic analysis, allowing patterns to be identified while remaining open to unexpected formulations that emerged from participants' language (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The reception analysis also drew on the appraisal framework to examine how evaluation and feeling are linguistically organised in talk, which provided a systematic bridge between emotion words, moral judgements, and claims about brand stance (Martin and White, 2005).

Triangulation in this thesis should not be understood as a procedure for establishing a single truth about brand films. Within an interpretivist paradigm, triangulation offers a way of exploring how different perspectives illuminate different aspects of the phenomenon, and how tensions between perspectives can be analytically productive (Denzin, 1978; Flick, 2018). This perspective was important in interpreting divergences between practitioner discourse and viewer discourse.

In particular, the thesis shows that practitioners' accounts often begin from intended design logics, including the management of emotional arcs and the alignment of narrative values with brand identity. The reception findings, by contrast, often begin from lived experience, where viewers judge story plausibility, emotional expressiveness and value stance in relation to their own histories and social positions. The close readings help to connect these perspectives because they describe the formal resources that carry those invitations. In this respect, triangulation allows the thesis to make a more precise claim about process, namely that emotional experience and brand perception arise through designed multimodal invitations that are taken up, resisted or reworked through situated viewer appraisals.

The methodological reflections also highlight the importance of negative and divergent cases. Instances where viewers did not sustain emotional engagement, or where participants disagreed about social messaging, were treated as analytically significant rather than as noise. They allowed the thesis to specify conditions under which brand films are less likely to produce the intended experience, which strengthens the explanatory value of the findings.

7.6 Limitations and directions for future research

Several limitations shape the scope of the claims that can be made. The close reading corpus was necessarily small, since detailed multimodal analysis requires sustained attention to individual texts. The study therefore offers depth rather than breadth, and its value lies in identifying mechanisms and patterns that can be tested in wider corpora rather than in claiming representativeness of all brand films.

The interview study drew on a specific group of practitioners, with a stronger representation of production and craft roles than of brand strategy or market

positioning roles. This sampling profile shaped the kind of knowledge that the interviews produced. It strengthened the thesis's capacity to link emotional experience to audio-visual craft and to the practical translation of scripts into screen form. It limited the degree to which the interview study could speak directly to strategic decision-making within brand organisations. In future research, broader sampling across creative direction, brand management and strategy could extend the account of how emotional experience is aligned with brand positioning and organisational objectives.

The reception study involved six viewers within a limited age range. The participants were aged between 25 and 35, and the group included five Chinese participants and one English participant. Most had several years of UK experience, while one Chinese participant had no UK experience. This profile allowed the study to examine responses from viewers with some cross-cultural media experience, but it cannot represent a broad audience population. The online focus group was suited to eliciting comparative evaluation and shared meaning-making, although it cannot capture all aspects of embodied response or private feeling that may not be articulated in a group (Krueger and Casey, 2015). The reception findings therefore support interpretive insight into how these participants talked about emotion and brands, rather than a population-level measure of effects.

The limitations also indicate specific directions for future research. A larger reception study across different demographic groups and cultural contexts could test how robust the identified audience themes are and how they vary with social experience. A longitudinal design could examine whether emotional recollection and brand perception persist over time, rather than being confined to immediate discussion after viewing. Further practitioner research could extend sampling to include creative directors, brand managers and strategists so that the interaction between film craft and brand positioning can be described in more detail.

In methodological terms, future work could combine reception discussion with individual viewing diaries or follow-up interviews, which may capture aspects of emotional response that are difficult to articulate in a group. It could also extend appraisal-based coding into comparative analysis across films and participants, which would strengthen the account of how evaluation patterns link emotion to brand perception (Martin and White, 2005).

7.7 Implications for practice

The practical implication of the thesis is that a brand film should be planned as an emotional experience, not as an ordinary campaign with a story added to it. The findings suggest that story, film style and brand stance need to be developed together. If these elements are separated too early, the finished film may still look polished, but viewers may not read its emotion as credible or connected to the brand.

For screenwriters, the findings point to the importance of building the script around a recognisable emotional situation rather than around a message statement. A script can begin by asking whose experience is being represented, what problem or desire organises the story, and how the brand's value can be inferred through action rather than explained through dialogue. For example, a film about care for older people is more likely to invite feeling when it develops a concrete relation of distance, attention and repair, rather than ending with a general statement that the brand "cares". The same applies to stories about parental sacrifice, autism or social inclusion. The social issue should shape the character's situation from the beginning of the script, not appear as a slogan at the end.

For producers, the findings suggest that emotional coherence needs to be protected across the whole production process. Producers can use the

research findings as a checklist during development: what emotion is the film trying to build, which scenes carry that emotion, how does the brand enter the story, and where might viewers become sceptical? This matters because production constraints can easily weaken the emotional arc. A producer may therefore need to protect budget and time for casting, performance direction, music, editing and colour work, because these are not secondary details. They are part of how viewers judge whether the film feels sincere.

For directors, the findings show the importance of performance, space and point of view. Viewers in the reception study responded strongly to scenes that felt close to ordinary life and to characters whose feelings could be understood through gesture, silence and situation. A director can therefore avoid over-explaining emotion and instead use blocking, facial expression, pacing and the relation between characters to make emotional change visible. When the film deals with a vulnerable group or a social issue, direction also needs to avoid using the group only as a symbol of sympathy. The represented person or group should have a credible place in the story world.

For cinematographers and production designers, the thesis suggests that colour, lighting, framing and mise-en-scene should be discussed as part of brand meaning. Warm lighting, close framing or soft colour are not automatically emotional. They need to fit the story situation and the value the brand wants viewers to infer. A scene of isolation, for instance, may need visual distance before it can move towards connection. A scene of care may need controlled intimacy rather than decorative beauty. In this sense, visual style is a practical tool for guiding appraisal.

For editors, composers and sound designers, the findings suggest that emotional rhythm should be treated as a central structure of the film. Viewers often remember music, pauses, pacing and shifts in tone because these elements help them relive the emotional experience after viewing. Editing

should therefore protect the development of feeling rather than cut only for speed or product visibility. Music and sound can carry emotional continuity across scenes, but they can also make a film feel manipulative if they push emotion harder than the story can support.

For brand strategists, creative directors and agencies, the findings suggest that social themes need to be linked to brand conduct and audience knowledge. Edelman's 2025 Brand Trust report states that 73% of respondents said their trust in a brand would increase if the brand authentically reflected today's culture (Edelman, 2025). This statistic does not mean that every socially engaged brand film will be trusted. It suggests that cultural relevance has become a real concern for brand communication. Before using a social issue, practitioners should ask whether the brand has a credible relation to that issue, whether the audience is likely to understand the cultural reference, and whether the film gives the represented people enough specificity.

The reception findings also suggest that audience testing should look beyond whether viewers liked the film. Kantar's 2025 Media Reactions report states that campaigns can be seven times more impactful among receptive audiences, drawing on responses from more than 21,000 consumers across 30 markets and more than 1,000 marketers (Kantar, 2025). For brand films, receptivity can be explored through qualitative questions: which scene did viewers remember, what emotion did they name, where did they locate the brand, what felt credible, and where did scepticism appear? These questions can help practitioners understand the connection between emotional experience and brand perception before relying only on campaign performance data.

The international examples in the thesis add one further recommendation. Brand films may use themes such as care, family, vulnerability or inclusion,

but these themes do not travel without context. A UK Christmas retail film, a Thai family-centred insurance film and a US foundation-related film can all invite emotion, yet viewers may not recognise the same cultural references or social implications. Practitioners working across markets should therefore test not only language or distribution format, but also the cultural readability of the emotional situation itself.

Taken together, the practice-facing value of the thesis lies in giving practitioners a more precise way to discuss emotional engagement. Instead of asking only whether a film performed well after release, creative and brand teams can ask how the film builds emotion, how the brand enters that emotion, and how viewers are likely to appraise the relation between the two. This does not replace quantitative campaign data. It gives practitioners a way to interpret what such data cannot fully explain.

7.8 Concluding remarks

This thesis has argued that brand films construct emotional experiences through multimodal film form, narrative appraisal and social meaning, and that these experiences shape viewers' perceptions of the brand when they are interpreted as coherent, credible and meaningful. The central research question has therefore been answered by tracing a process across film text, professional practice and audience interpretation, rather than by identifying a single cause of emotional response.

The close readings showed how colour and lighting, camera and framing, and editing and sound organise emotional worlds, guide alignment and carry meaning across short narrative forms (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006; Bordwell, Thompson and Smith, 2019; Chion, 1994). The practitioner interviews showed how emotional design is understood as a creative and

strategic task, shaped by story, values, production craft and practical constraints. The reception study showed how viewers articulate emotional engagement through story affinity, values, symbolism and recollection, while also showing that engagement can weaken when the film feels flat, inconsistent or insufficiently connected to the viewer's own evaluative world.

The contribution of the thesis lies in bringing these three levels together. It shows that the affective power of brand films is not located only in the films themselves, nor only in the intention of their makers, nor only in the private feelings of viewers. It is produced through the relation between designed audio-visual cues, narrative and social meanings, professional assumptions and situated viewer appraisals. This account benefits academic work by giving brand film a clearer conceptual and analytical position within branded cinema, advertising studies and reception research. It benefits industry practice by offering a way to examine how emotional experience is constructed before it is judged through campaign outcome.

The "so what" of the project is therefore clear. In a media environment where brands invest heavily in video-based communication and where cultural relevance and trust remain central industry concerns, brand films cannot be understood only as attractive stories or as softer forms of advertising. They need to be examined as affective and cultural texts that organise feeling, invite judgement and shape how viewers understand the brand's position in the world. This thesis contributes to that understanding by showing how emotional experience is built, how it is interpreted, and why its connection to brand perception must be carefully constructed rather than assumed.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Example Participant Information Sheet

[The Affective Power of Brand Films]

UNIVERSITY of York

School of Arts and Creative Technologies

Participant Information Sheet – Non-Anonymous Interviews

Project background

The University of York would like to invite you to take part in the following project: The affective power of brand films.

Before agreeing to take part, please read this information sheet carefully and let us know if anything is unclear or you would like further information.

What is the purpose of the project?

This research focus on brand films. I define a brand film as a mini-film (up to 30 minutes) that communicates the core values of a brand, company or organisation in the marketing of its products. My research explores how viewers may emotionally identify with or discuss the core values conveyed by a brand film, ultimately leading to a reaction and connection to the brand.

The purpose of this research is to more deeply consider how brand films form core values, social engagement and brand identity by raising social and cultural issues. This project also aims to explore how the key characteristics of brand films (core values, social engagement, social and cultural identity) collectively solicit emotions and create emotional experience. Analysing how brand films use emotional experiences to affect the audience's reactions/response to particular brands is also a big concern in this research.

I hope this research will help practitioners to explore how brand films can be used as a medium to bring about emotional experiences and trigger decisions, perception, and trust from audiences. I wish to provide them with new ideas and communication strategies, accelerating creative ideas and critical thinking.

This project is being undertaken by Ms Tianyi Tang (tt975@york.ac.uk), who is a doctoral student at the University of York.

The work is being conducted according to restrictions that have been subject to approval by the ACT Ethics committee. The Chair of the ACT Ethics committee can be contacted on ACT-ethics@york.ac.uk.

Your participation in this project will involve being interviewed for about 30-60 minutes. Participants will be asked several questions related to brand films, e.g. their experiences in designing or conceptualising a brand film. The audio of interviews will be recorded with the knowledge and consent of the participants.

Please note that to comply with the approved Ethics requirements of this work, we do not intend to discuss sensitive topics with you that could be potentially upsetting or distressing. If you have any concerns about the topics that may be covered in the research study, please raise these concerns with the researcher.

Your participation in this project is voluntary. If you wish, we will provide you with access to the link of the final report of this research. If you would like to receive access to these, you can indicate as such on the consent form.

Why have I been invited to take part?

You have been invited to take part because you have related experience in creating a brand film.

Do I have to take part?

No, participation is optional. If you do decide to take part, you will be given a copy of this information sheet for your records and will be asked to complete a participant consent form. If you change your mind at any point during the research activity, you will be able to withdraw your participation without having to provide a reason. To withdraw your participation, you need to let the researcher know you wish to withdraw, and all your data will be deleted as soon as possible.

Will I be identified in any outputs?

Yes. Your participation in this interview is non-anonymous and therefore you will be identified in the following outputs: the thesis.

Privacy Notice

This section explains how personal data will be used by 'the affective power of brand films' project at the University of York.

For this project, the University of York is the Data Controller. We are registered with the Information Commissioner's Office. Our registration number is Z4855807.

What is our legal basis for processing your data?

Privacy law (the UK General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and Data Protection Act 2018) requires us to have a legal reason to process your personal data. Our reason is we need it to perform a public task.[1]

This is because the University has a public function, which includes carrying out research projects.[2] We need to use personal data in order to carry out this research project.

Information about your health, ethnicity, sexual identity and other sensitive information is called "special category" data. We have to have an additional legal reason to use this data, because it is sensitive. Our reason is that it is needed for research purposes.[3] All research projects at the University follow our research ethics policies.

How do we use your data?

The data will be used only for academic research, i.e. this PhD project.

Who do we share your data with?

The data will be securely stored by University of York Research Data York service.

As well as this, we use computer software or systems to hold and manage data. Other companies only provide the software, system or storage. They are not allowed to use your data for their own reasons.

We have agreements in place when we share data. These agreements meet legal requirements to ensure your data is protected.

How do we keep your data secure?

The University is serious about keeping your data secure and protecting your rights to privacy. We don't ask you for data we don't need, and only give access to people who need to know. We think about security when planning

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[1]This refers to UK GDPR Article 6 (1) (e): processing is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest or in the exercise of official authority vested in the controller

[2] Our charter and statutes states: 4.f. To provide instruction in such branches of learning as the University may think fit and to make provision for research and for the advancement and dissemination of knowledge in such manner as the University may determine.

[3]This refers to UK GDPR Article 9 (2) (j): processing is necessary for archiving purposes in the public interest, scientific or historical research purposes or statistical purposes in accordance with Article 89(1) based on Union or Member State law which shall be proportionate to the aim pursued, respect the essence of the right to data protection and provide for suitable and specific measures to safeguard the fundamental rights and the interests of the data subject.

projects, to make sure they work well. Our IT security team checks regularly to make sure we're taking the right steps. For more details see our security webpages.

How do we transfer your data safely internationally?

If your data is stored or processed outside the UK, we follow legal requirements to make sure that the same level of privacy rules still apply.

How long will we keep your data?

The University has rules in place for how long research data can be kept when the research project is finished. For this project, data will be kept 10 years from the date of last requested access, which follows the University's default period for research data retention.

What rights do you have in relation to your data?

You have rights over your data. This sheet explains how you can stop participating in the study, and what will happen to your data if you do. This information is in the section 'Do I have to take part?'

If you want to get a copy of your data, or talk to us about any other rights, please contact us using the details below.

Questions or concerns

If you have any questions or concerns about how your data is being processed, please contact researcher (tt975@york.ac.uk), University postal address (University of York, York, YO10 5DD, United Kingdom), departmental phone number: +44 (0)1904 325220.

If you have further questions, the University's Data Protection Officer can be contacted at dataprotection@york.ac.uk or by writing to: **Data Protection Officer, University of York, Heslington, York, YO10 5DD**.

Right to complain

If you are unhappy with how the University has handled your personal data, please contact our Data Protection Officer using the details above, so that we can try to put things right.

If you are unhappy with our response, you have a right to complain to the Information Commissioner's Office. You can also contact the Information Commissioner's Office by post to **Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF** or by phone on **0303 123 1113**.

Appendix B: Example Consent Form

[The Affective Power of Brand Films]

UNIVERSITY of York

School of Arts and Creative Technologies

Participant Consent Form – Non-Anonymous Interviews

Thank you for your interest in this project. This project aims to find the key features that contributing the core values of a brand in the brand film, and how the emotional experience is created and the subsequent effect on viewers. This project is for the PhD research: 'The Affective Power of Brand Films' in the School of Arts and Creative Technologies.

Please read the following statements carefully and tick the appropriate box:

	YES	NO
I have read the information sheet about this project		
I agree to take part in this project		
I consent to being interviewed for this project		
I consent to the interview being audio recorded		
I understand my right to withdraw and/or destroy my data from this project at any time		
I consent to be identified by name in the outputs from this project		
I am over the age of 18		

Participant Name:	**Researcher Name:** **Tianyi Tang**
_____	_____
Participant Signature:	**Researcher Signature:**
_____	_____
Date:	**Date:**
___/___/_____	**_10__/_8__/__2023____**

If you wish to be informed about the outcomes from this project, please provide your email address:

_____

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