3 Interpreting Place Branding
Absorbing or Alienating?

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A “horrible pseudo-scientific normative psychological analysis” is “still the dominant mode of analysis (...) in consumer research.”

(Wilk, 2009: 301)

How do active audiences respond to advertised agora, these gathering places for consumer citizens viewed in screen media and shopping malls? What can we say about the consensual or critical relationship between these located “commercial rationalities” and people’s “individual subjectivities” (Du Gay, 2004a: 99)? How does media branding “fit” buyers’ banal experience?

Drawing upon media reception theory’s narrative of understanding as a structured process, the “thick” talk of everyday life can be treated theoretically. Analysis moves “out of the misleading rhetoric of causes and effects into the more transparent terminology of meanings and rules” (Harre, 2004: 1451). We are able to explore in people’s actual or imagined stories their immersively experiencing an extended consumption(escape on media screen or in shopping mall. Some are actively absorbed in the flow of narrative, others sip globally marketed coffee in cafes. People appropriate branded meaning, bringing agora (in)to life.

Place branding narratives present the space and time of city or nation (Sinclair, 2008) for reliable consumption. Malaysia’s One Golden Celebration video invites its audience to visit: “it’s the place for us to be, it’s the time to feel so free.” Here we consider consumer citizen responses to the marketing presentation of nation on screen.

MAKING SENSE:
MEDIA MARKETING RECEPTION THEORY

In writing about consumers from the perspective adopted in media reception studies or seeking to understand the process of people understanding advertising we are positioning ourselves with critical marketing theory. Pursuing such a focus on consumption as interpretation, we distance ourselves from an “inductive-statistical” positivism in research method (Brian Jones and