

INSIGHT REPORT

NYMPHOMANIAC

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INTRODUCTION

The following report analyses Curzon Film World's UK release of Lars von Trier's two-part *Nymphomaniac*¹ films, first as a single one-off 'event' release, and then by a day-and-date multi-platform release.

The release, supported by the New Models fund of the BFI, tests three core aspects of the model.

1. The ability of a film to replicate some of the success of so-called Event Cinema² – the live screening of opera, theatre and other arts performances in cinemas
2. The potential that a one-off screening might generate similar, or higher revenues than a conventional release
3. The impact of the 'event' on revenues from all platforms on wider release.

The report analyses each of these aspects of the release separately before drawing some general conclusions that might be applied to other films.

1.1 METHODOLOGY

The study relied on evidence from a number of sources:

Polls: Two polls of 220 people were carried out by polling organisation Ipsos MediaCT, at Cineworld West India Quays, London (80 respondents), and at the Duke of York's Picturehouse in Brighton

(140). The polling took place in two parts: before and after the performance.

Industry data: The report uses data from a number of sources to provide objective analysis of performance, and to provide useful comparisons. Data includes theatrical box office results and sales information, provided by DVD and a variety of on-demand services.

Analysis: The conclusions are based on a study of all the sources of data and interviews with key stakeholders. The expectations and perceptions of performance from the distributor and key exhibitor, Curzon Film World, were discussed before and after the film.

1.2 BFI NEW MODELS FUND

The release was supported by the New Models strand of the BFI Distribution Fund, with a grant of £50,000.

In supporting the application, the BFI noted that the one-off screening was being shown in a wide variety of cinemas, which would generally have refused to show the film because its later release broke the industry-standard 17-week window.

1. For the purposes of this report, future mentions of the one-off event cinema release will refer to *Nymphomaniac* as a single release, rather than as *Nymphomaniac: Vol.1* and *Nymphomaniac: Vol.2*.

2 The report uses the term Event Cinema to refer to live screenings of non-film content in cinemas, including opera, theatre and art shows, rather than other commonly used expressions, such as 'alternative content.'

And the grant recognised that the combination of special event and multi-platform release had the potential to increase the audience reach of the film.

'If it proves successful, this could become a successful template for other independent and UK films,' the BFI suggested in the application approval.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Curzon Film World released Lars Von Trier's *Nymphomaniac Vol.1* and *Nymphomaniac Vol.2* together as a single, one-off event screening.
- The event element of the film included the only chance to see both parts of the film at a single screening, together with an online interactive cast member Q&A session hosted by Edith Bowman, that was broadcast live to participating cinemas from Curzon Chelsea,
- The event screening was followed by a day-and-date multi-platform release of each film individually.
- The release was supported by the New Models strand of the BFI Distribution Fund, to the tune of £50K.
- *Nymphomaniac* carried an 18-certificate and attracted a lot of hype, largely centred on its sexual content.
- The average age of the male-skewing theatrical audience was 31 with only 13% over the age of 45.
- 78% of the audience rated the film as 'very good' or 'excellent'.
- Most cinemas, included major multiplex chains showed the one-off screening, even though the subsequent release broke the accepted 17-week theatrical release window.
- Curzon Film World predicted that the theatrical gross would be close to 300K with strong performance on VOD platforms.
- The one-night event screening grossed £143,306 – the best-ever opening for a von Trier film – contributing to final theatrical gross revenues of £308,803.
- Curzon claims that to match the distributor share of the combined theatrical and VOD revenues, a traditional release would have needed a box-office of £560K.
- The event screening was the highest opening gross of any Lars von Trier film.
- Exit polls show a 'highly favourable' rating from 78% of the event screening audience, well above the 68% polling norm.
- The various on-demand platforms added further net revenues of £71,050
- The DVD release, featuring both volumes of the film sold 17,184 units in its first two months
- Curzon Film World said it was happy with the overall performance
- 46% of the audience for the event screening of *Nymphomaniac* had attended at least one Event Cinema screening in the last year and 17% four or more.
- The total P&A spend was £204,028
- The event approach to *Nymphomaniac* succeeded in turning the challenging length of the full film into a unique selling point.
- The release established that most exhibitors were willing to screen a one-off event screening, even if it was later released day-and-date, though the definition of an 'event' is not yet clearly established.
- The high number of Von Trier enthusiasts and ardent cinephiles attending the event screening makes it difficult to judge if the approach might attract a wider, or different audience.
- The elements that contribute to a film 'event' have yet to be clearly established and may need to be part of the strategic planning at an early stage.
- The strength of the *Nymphomaniac* release, however, is that it was able to combine an event and a multi-platform simultaneous release into a single, coherent plan.

PLANNING AND RELEASE

Curzon Film World set out a clear plan for the film.

First, the film would be released as a one-off special event (the One Night Stand), which would be the only opportunity in the UK to see both parts of *Nymphomaniac* on a big screen at a single sitting and with a questions and answers session with the cast

The energy, enthusiasm and hype around the event would then be carried through a week later to a day-and-date release of the individual films on VOD platforms and cinemas. Curzon billed this second wave as Encore screenings.

Curzon spent £204,028 on a single marketing push, using a mix of trailers, conventional media, PR and social media, promoting both the event and day-and-date releases.

The marketing concentrated on the idea of a unique experience, creating a clear distinction from the normal film campaign.

The 'One Night Stand' tag acted as a playful tagline that caught on with social media audiences. A trailer for the event picked up more than 40,000 views on YouTube.

The campaign was strongly supported through social media, building up from an initial announcement in January.

The *Nymphomaniac*@*NymphomaniacUK* Twitter account attracted more than 1,400 followers.

2.1 THE FILM

Nymphomaniac Vol.1 and *Nymphomaniac Vol.2* are the latest works from Danish auteur Lars von Trier. Their stars include Charlotte Gainsbourg, Stellan Skarsgård, Stacy Martin, Shia LaBeouf, Uma Thurman, Christian Slater, Jamie Bell and Willem Defoe.

Both films received broadly favourable reviews from most UK critics, although the first film was widely considered considerably superior to the second. According to Rotten Tomatoes, *Vol.1* received a 75% 'fresh' approval rating from top critics, and 74% from audiences; while *Vol.2* was given a 57% top critic rating, with 63% from audiences.

Curzon's one-off 'event screening', which it called the One Night Stand, brought together both volumes.

Many UK critics reviewed the film as a single release in December 2013. *The Guardian* gave four stars to the two films shown as a single work, as did *The Telegraph*, *Empire* and *Total Film*.

The film also enjoyed considerable hype before its release, largely focused on the sexual content. A search using the words 'Trier, *Nymphomaniac* and controversy' brings up nearly 100,000 results on Google.co.uk.

The director and cast boosted the hype at a number of sometimes bizarre press conferences. Shia LaBeouf, for example, walked out of a Berlin press conference and then wore a paper bag over his head on the red carpet; while von Trier typically added to the chatter by wearing a T-shirt with the Cannes logo and the words *Persona Non Grata*.

The strong pre-publicity may have contributed to the sense of event but there was also a flip side: films with actual or perceived high levels of sexual content tend to struggle in cinemas, with older audiences, in particular, reluctant to attend. That demographic trend was reflected in the polling.

2.2 THEATRICAL RELEASE

Curzon Film World decided that showing both films in the UK at a single screening offered the opportunity to create an event to compare with the event screenings of theatre and opera, with which Curzon's cinemas had enjoyed success.

The one-off event screenings of *Vol.1* and *Vol.2* took place on Saturday, February 22, 2014, with a Q&A with three cast members, in 24 London venues and 49 regional venues.

The cinemas were predominantly independent arthouse venues but there were also 14 Cineworld multiplexes (11 regional) and four Vue cinemas (one regional) involved.

The decision of multiplex chains to accept the film as a single one-off event, even given the subsequent day-and-date multi-platform release was potentially significant. The other major

multiplex chain, Odeon, did not support the release.

The following weekend (beginning February 28), the two films were released separately in 57 theatres and, simultaneously, on a variety of on-demand services.

As expected, many of the theatres, including all the multiplexes, which had taken part in the event screening refused to show the film because of its breaking of the standard 17-week gap between theatrical and all other forms of release.

2.3 EVENT ELEMENTS FOR NYMPHOMANIAC

The event elements of the release under consideration here included the only chance to see both parts of the film at a single screening.

A cast member Q&A session was broadcast live to participating cinemas from Curzon Chelsea, with guests including Stellan Skarsgård, Stacy Martin and Sophie Kennedy Clarke.

Hosted by broadcaster Edith Bowman, audiences around the UK were invited to send questions via Facebook and Twitter. Participation was further encouraged in a playful way with audiences invited to submit images of their 'O' face – in playful homage to the film's distinctive poster – which were displayed on-screen at the Curzon Chelsea.

Some cinemas added their own extra elements to accentuate the mood; at Curzon Chelsea, for example, a sell-out 700 crowd all wore paper bags over their heads for a photograph, imitating the red-carpet antics of star Shia LaBeouf in Berlin. The Chelsea also had a photographer in the bar area to take pictures of the audience 'O' faces (see above).

The one-night release was consciously intended to test whether the sense of an 'event' behind the success of opera, theatre and other 'alternative content' could be replicated for film.

Event cinema has been rapidly expanding. The initial success of live opera and theatre is beginning to be repeated by other art forms – blockbuster art and museum exhibitions have been an interesting recent trend.

Perhaps most significantly, the release of *Nymphomaniac* came just two months after the most spectacular UK Event Cinema success in the simultaneous television and cinema release of a

Dr Who special, which picked up £2.5m in ticket sales.

Although the decision to experiment with an event release was not directly influenced by *Dr Who*, that release suggested that it is possible to build the sense of a major event around recorded, rather than live content.

2.4 VOD AND DVD

Curzon Film World launched the film on a number of on-demand platforms at the same time as the main theatrical release, a week after the event screening.

Curzon has a strong track record on day-and-date releasing, some of which have been the subject of previous BFI Insight reports, including *A Late Quartet* and *What Maisie Knew*. Its strategy is underpinned by its ownership of both cinemas and a VOD platform, Curzon Home Cinema (CHC).

The on-demand services involved in the release included CHC, Sky Store, FilmFlex, BlinkBox and the BFI Player.

Consumers were able to access these services through a wide variety of devices, including smart televisions, tablet computers and games consoles. CHC, for example, offered the film through curzonhomecinema.com, on Samsung Smart TV and BT TV.

The DVD release, which included both volumes of *Nymphomaniac* as a single package, was released in the conventional DVD window, hitting the market on April 28.

2.5 AUDIENCE DEMOGRAPHICS

The first night audience was at the younger end of the general arthouse demographic, according to the exit polls.

The average age was 31, skewing towards males (57% against 43% for females). The single biggest age group was 25-34, making up 43% of the audience.

The 18-25 attendance was the same as that for over 35s (29%). Just 10% of the audience was over-45, and 3% over-55.

These older demographic groups have dominated the audience for 'event cinema' events, particularly opera and theatre

The sexual content and the 18-certificate may have contributed to the domination of younger cinemagoers.

The audience in London was strongly dominated by avid cinemagoers, with 61% going once a week or more.

Outside London, the majority were still dominated by 'frequent' cinemagoers (at least once a month), again skewed towards males, though a smaller 18% said they went once a week or more.

2.6 AUDIENCE REACTION

The response to the film in the polls was generally positive. Across the two venues, 78% rated the film 'very good' or 'excellent' (against the pollster's norm of 68%) – with Brighton (81%) slightly more enthusiastic than the London multiplex audience (74%).

Perhaps significantly for word of mouth, and potentially VOD and DVD sales, the film was particularly well received by under-25 males (61% rating the films excellent). Younger cinemagoers are the most avid users of social media.

A further 40% of all audiences across both venues rated the films 'very good,' making a total 'highly favourable' rating of 78%, well above the 68% norm.

More than half of the audiences (55%) said they would 'definitely' recommend the film to friends (against a 51% norm).

Again, younger audiences were the most enthusiastic, with 67% of females, and 61% of males under the age of 25 saying they would 'definitely' recommend the films.

Added to the 37% of audiences who said they would 'probably' recommend the film, there was a total of 92% of positive recommendations (against a norm of 86%).



RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

This section considers the results, revenues and lessons of the release of *Nymphomaniac*. It is split into three main themes, to consider how far the release strategy succeeded in its core aims.

SECTION ONE CINEMA AS EVENT?

This section considers how successful was in creating an event and the benefits and drawbacks of the approach.

There are three outstanding questions for this section of the report:

- Was that sense of a special occasion transmitted to audiences?
- Did it influence their decision to attend, and enhance their enjoyment?
- And could the sense of 'event' be compared to the successful 'event cinema' screenings of opera and theatre?

3.1.1 AUDIENCE PERCEPTION

One interesting finding from the exit poll was that 46% of the audience had attended at least one Event Cinema' screening of a live performance and 17% had been to at least four.

The significance of Event Cinema may be that it has been able to redefine the cinema-

going experience for the public. Audiences are becoming used to the idea that the cinema is a place for one-off experiences.

One important judge about changed consumer attitudes is ticket prices and pre-sales. Many cinemas charged a premium rate for the event (See 3.2.3), which audiences seemed to accept in return for a one-off event.

An attractive trait of Event Cinema screenings of live screenings of opera, theatre, art shows etc has been strong advance bookings for exhibitors, more akin to theatres or opera houses.

There were some signs of an increase in advance bookings:

Curzon Chelsea, which hosted the live cast Q&A, pre-sold 97% of its tickets.

Cineworld reported that its West India Quays venue had enjoyed pre-sales of 72% of its capacity, while more than half of seats were pre-sold at the Cineworld in Glasgow Renfrew Street (55%), the Curzon Mayfair (54%) and the Renoir (52%).

The same pattern, however, was not repeated everywhere, suggesting that film has work to do if it wants to change ticket buying habits.

The polls, however, do offer a strong indication that the One Night Stand screening was widely perceived as a special event.

The film had a number of unique selling points: the only chance to see both volumes of a major director's film at a single sitting; and a question and answer session, broadcast live to cinemas from Curzon Chelsea.

The polls offer a strong indication that the one-off screening with Q&As was a factor in booking the ticket.

The second biggest reason given for attending the screening (after the director) was the fact that the ticket price included a chance to see both parts of the film (57% of audiences); the third biggest was the Q&A (45%); 39% said the chance to see the film first was a draw; while 36% said they were influenced by the sense of a 'one-off event'.

Those 'experience' factors were rated more highly as a draw than the cast (34%), the trailer (25%) and advertising (18%).

The fact that they were willing to pay more for a ticket (See 3.2.3) was a further indication of the sense of event.

The sense of event was even clearer in polls taken after the screening.

Despite higher price tickets, 80% of the London audience felt the screening represented good, very good, or excellent value for money (22%); in Brighton, the numbers were even higher (87% good value or better and 32% excellent).

82% agreed (50% strongly) that the screening had 'felt more like an event than a normal trip to the cinema'; 82% said there was a 'different atmosphere'; and 88% said the event 'created a sense of occasion.'

And 89% said they would like to see more such events in future and 59% of them said they strongly supported the idea. 86% said they would recommend event screenings to friends.

3.1.2 EVENT STATUS

The most immediately significant result of the *Nymphomaniac* release, however, may be a rather more prosaic one: the majority of exhibitors recognised the one-off screening as a special event.

Many of the business models currently being tested face significant obstacles from the traditional business.

Many exhibitors, including the major multiplex chains, are strongly committed to retaining the industry standard 17-week window between theatrical and other platforms and, generally, will not support day-and-date multi-platform releases.

However, for the majority of exhibitors, and on this occasion, being a one-off event screening allowed this film to be seen as something different to a conventional release – even if the film was later released day-and-date (which usually means most cinemas will not play it at all).

Odeon was the only chain to resist the consensus that a single event screening could be a special case, though it must be noted that participating cinemas were keen to stress that *Nymphomaniac* is not a clear precedent and that all such releases will be considered case by case. (See 4.1)

SECTION TWO REVENUES AND BENEFITS

This section considers the economic benefits of the event screening of *Nymphomaniac*, compared with a conventional theatrical release.

Before the event, Curzon Film World predicted that the event and encore releases would generate combined theatrical gross revenues of around £300K, which it suggested is roughly what might have been expected through a conventional release.

But Curzon also expected strong day-and-date VOD sales at a premium rate, creating all-platform net revenues that would have required a far bigger box office than such a challenging film could have realistically commanded from a traditional theatrical release. (See 3.2.3)

3.2.1 TOTAL REVENUES

Date	Theatrical release	Gross
Feb 22	One Night Stand release	£143,306
Feb 28	'Encore screenings' Vol.1	£104,403
Feb 28	'Encore screenings' Vol.2	£61,094
	Total theatrical revenues	£308,803

Date	VOD release	Net
Feb 28	Sky	£23,667
Feb 28	FilmFlex	£16,686
Feb 28	BlinkBox	£6,809
Feb 28	Curzon Home Cinema*	£19,022
Feb 28	BFI Player*	£4,866
	Total VOD revenues	£71,050

Date	DVD release	2-month unit sales
Apr 28	Two-disc edition	17,184

3.2.2 COMPARATIVE BOX OFFICE

Curzon's original estimates for *Nymphomaniac* were partly based on previous performance of von Trier's films.

The Dane's biggest success in the UK, and worldwide was Curzon Artificial Eye's release of *Melancholia* in 2011, which took £583k and £9.3m worldwide.

Nymphomaniac's One Night Stand screening was in fact a record opening night gross for any von Trier film, partly as a result of higher ticket prices for the events.

It was not expected to match the overall theatrical box office of *Melancholia*. While it is impossible to characterise any von Trier film as 'mainstream,' the 2011 hit was certainly less controversial than *Nymphomaniac* and carried a 15-certificate in the UK.

A better comparison is with another 18-rated controversial work, from von Trier, 2009's *Antichrist*, which was again released by Curzon Artificial Eye. It grossed £396,181 in UK cinemas.

Nymphomaniac fell short of that performance but it had significant disadvantages: the long running time of the two films meant fewer shows were possible, while the multi-platform release meant some exhibitors would not screen the film.

But the day-and-date VOD grosses were much higher than for the 2009 Cannes competition entry, bringing the final gross revenues much closer. *Nymphomaniac* did have another significant disadvantage at the box office in the relatively poor performance of Vol.2 of the film – where Vol.1 was strongly reviewed and acclaimed by audiences, the second film attracted a more muted response, which was reflected in social media.

The Curzon release in the UK follows a pattern that mirrored the release in other countries.

- In France, Vol.1 took £255K and Vol.2 £128K
- In Germany, Vol.1 took £760K, Vol.2 £314K
- In Spain, Vol.1 took £364K, Vol.2 £148K

The poorer performance of the second film strengthens the argument for the strategy of releasing both at once.

3.2.3 REVENUE COMPARISONS

Comparisons between new models and traditional releases often rely on a strong amount of speculation, and there is a good case that the value proposition of new models tends to be underestimated.

For example, one interpretation of the *Nymphomaniac* revenues – and the one advocated by Curzon Film World – is that total returns from all platforms already represent distributor returns that are at least as strong as a traditional release.

The calculation is not precise because VOD splits vary and there is a reluctance to share gross revenues, but it works as follows:

Rough net theatrical revenues (minus 19% VAT and theatrical split estimated at 35%) = £87.50K

Net VOD revenues = 71K

Total net multi-platform release = £158,500

Using the same calculation of shares and tax, a distributor, £158.50 revenues would require a theatrical gross of £560K, close the best ever for a Lars von Trier film.

The obvious response is that conventional releasing still earns VOD revenues just at a later date. And, as with all new forms of release, it is hard to disprove, or prove counterfactual arguments about the level of cannibalisation of revenues.

Nonetheless, the day-and-date release did allow Curzon to premium pricing into the VOD release. And the day-and-date release did not include a key platform in iTunes, which demands a single price.

Curzon believes that there were other key commercial benefits, including cost savings in an all-platform marketing campaign; the knock-on to later ancillary platforms, such as DVD, from the increased awareness of a single-push release; and the medium-to-long-term benefits in promoting premium-rate VOD.

3.2.4 PRE-BOOKING AND PRICE

An important factor in the calculation of the benefits of event releasing is pre-booking and ticket price.

As already mentioned some cinemas enjoyed strong pre-sales, akin to the kind generated by Event Cinema screenings. Advance bookings at premium prices could add considerably to the attractiveness of the model.

Different cinemas charged different prices for tickets for the event but audiences both perceived, and largely accepted, the higher tariff.

The exit polls showed that 95% of audiences knew, or believed, they had paid more for a ticket than for a conventional screening (one in four did not know how much they had spent).

In London, 60% said they spent at least £4 more on a ticket, while that dropped to 38% in the Brighton poll. As already mentioned (See 3.1.1), the increased price was overwhelmingly seen as offering value for money.

3.2.5 MARKETING AND MOMENTUM

The decision to combine the event screening with a day-and-date release was an important factor in the release.

The idea was to capitalise on the immediacy and excitement around a one-off event as soon as possible, and to capture the value on a range of other platforms.

The building of momentum may become essential to the event model in future, and may be refined with time.

The approach taken for *Nymphomaniac* may offer a solution to one of the issues for day-and-date releases: the lack of a big bang of theatrical hype to generate interest across all platforms.

There is an obvious immediate economic benefit. Curzon combined the marketing of event, general release and all ancillary platforms into its day-and-date campaign, followed by a smaller than usual DVD push.

It spent £204,208 on a combined event cinema/day-and-date release campaign, rather than treating the two releases separately.

It believes that the efficiency of the single campaign allowed it to maximise the impact of the event on later releases.

SECTION THREE THE IMPACT OF EVENT MODEL

This section considers the impact of the event screening of *Nymphomaniac* on the later multi-platform simultaneous (day-and-date) release in theatres and other media formats.

3.3.1 DAY-AND-DATE RELEASE

Nymphomaniac Vol.1 and Vol.2 were released separately in a simultaneous multi-platform release in the week after the one-off event.

The decision to release the films day-and-date led, as expected, to a number of venues refusing to show the film, including the multiplexes, which had screened the event.

Vol.1 and Vol.2 both screened separately at 56 venues around the country.

In line with the experience of most territories, there was a marked drop off in gross box-office revenues for the second film. The total gross revenues for the first film were £105,856, while the second film dropped to £63,043.

Reviews for the second film were substantially less favourable than the first, while a percentage of the audience for the first film may have decided not to return.

There were no obvious signs that the initial event screening had had any substantial impact on the box office grosses, which were in line with initial Curzon predictions.

3.3.2 ECONOMIC IMPACT

It is difficult to make definitive judgements on the impact of the event screening on the multi-platform release: both models are relatively new.

There is, however room for informed speculation.

In terms of the theatrical audience, avid cinemagoers and Lars Von Trier fans dominated the audience for the event screening and it may be reasonably assumed that a percentage of those would have gone to one or both films anyway.

Although there may have been repeat screenings, it is likely that customers for the one-off event screening included many of those, who might have gone to both parts of the film later.

The cannibalisation argument, however, is undermined by the fact that the One Night Stand was the biggest opening for any von Trier film. The polls strongly imply that the event cemented the decision to see the films in a cinema and at a higher ticket price.

It seems unlikely that the loss of those who went to the event screening were responsible for the disappointing figures for *Nymphomaniac* Vol.2, which was probably more a reflection of the film than the release strategy.

In most two-part releases, it would be hoped that the momentum from the first film would lead to even bigger numbers for the second and, had that happened in this case, the conclusions might be more unequivocally positive.

Curzon argues that the strategy of an event, followed by a day-and-date release increased the reach of the films and, the company believes, substantially boosted VOD revenues. There is no real evidence to counteract that argument.

Another counterfactual argument is whether a conventional release of *Nymphomaniac* would have been more economically effective cannot be proven. And Curzon's own estimates of a conventional release were exceeded. The other argument is whether a conventional release, inside the 17-week window, following the event screening would have been more effective.

It would almost certainly have increased the number of screens but Curzon argued that the need for additional marketing and the loss of momentum from the initial event would have led to a poorer overall performance. It is not an argument that can be proven one way or the other.

3.3.3 MULTI-PLATFORM MOMENTUM

The polls of cinema audiences did not offer a clear picture about the impact of the event on the decision to download, buy or stream the film later.

In the cinema polling 38% agreed or strongly agreed (18%) that the film would make it more likely that they would buy or download the film, against 28% who disagreed or strongly disagreed.

It might be argued that the results are positive in that more than a third of the audience were more motivated to buy but it is not clear whether that motivation was stronger than it would have been if they had been to a standard screening

The younger audience offered a greater chance for the buzz of the event to be spread through social media.

Under-25s were more likely to recommend the film to their friends than over-25s: 94% of younger men and 100% of younger women.

And there was evidence from the polls of a pervasive use of online services and social media.

50% of the under-25 male audience had heard about the event through YouTube, while 35% of the whole Brighton audience had become aware of the event through Facebook.

The polls, however, also showed a lack of awareness of the later multi-platform release of the film, with 75% unaware. That may represent a marketing challenge in finding the right way to create momentum from the event.



OVERALL CONCLUSIONS

The support of the BFI New Models fund was mainly predicated on trying to find out if the Event Cinema approach, followed by day-and-date screening represented a significant new model for independent film. This concluding chapter looks at the evidence.

There are obvious dangers in drawing general conclusions from one film and trying to apply it to all.

There are a number of unique factors in the *Nymphomaniac* release that will not easily be replicated.

The first of those is Curzon Film World itself. Ownership of a cinema chain is clearly a major advantage and six Curzon venues accounted for nearly a quarter of all revenues from the event screening (23%).

Curzon also has its own on-demand platform, which creates a business incentive to experiment with release windows and other new models.

The film itself also had unique aspects that made it a strong candidate for the event release.

1. A controversial director with an existing following
2. The opportunity to screen both parts of a two-part film at the same time
3. The much-hyped sexual content
4. The social media buzz generated by controversy around the film
5. A strong ensemble cast

6. Challenges for a standard release film

The positive aspects of the hype and the strong following for the director are not easily replicated in most independent releases.

Curzon also used the event approach to turn potential negatives into positives. In particular, it turned the length of the film into a virtue and negated the weaker response to the second volume by packaging it with the first part.

In von Trier's native Denmark, the two volumes of the film were released together and they struggled at the box office, taking less than a tenth of the admissions of the director's 1996 breakthrough *Breaking The Waves*.

Danish distributor Nordisk Film Biografdistribution said the length of the two films had 'frightened' audiences but Curzon's addition of event elements, including cast interviews, created a unique buzz, as did the decision that the event screening would be the only chance to see the whole of the work at a single sitting.

The strategy then worked for this particular film but the same conditions would not necessarily apply to other independent work.

4.1 ECONOMIC BENEFITS

Curzon makes the case that the event screening and simultaneous multi-platform release maximized the revenues from a film that proved a tough sell in most countries.

Its claim that its day-and-date VOD and theatrical net revenues were equivalent to a conventional cinema box office of £560,000 is impossible to prove.

How far the changed windows merely cannibalised revenues requires a lot of counterfactual speculation.

Nonetheless, Curzon is convinced that *Nymphomaniac* represents a breakthrough with a commercially logical proposition for distributors, which can be achieved without undermining exhibitor relationships.

One economic factor that may prove significant in the long run is pricing. Curzon was able to successfully introduce premium pricing into its model, both in the initial event screening and then in the Premium VOD (day and date) model.

Differential pricing could become a critical element of viable new models.

4.2 DEFINING AN EVENT SCREENING

The *Nymphomaniac* event made a potentially important breakthrough for future day-and-date releases.

With the exception of the Odeon chain, exhibitors were willing to host a one-off screening, even though it was due to be released on all platforms a week later.

The idea that a one-off screening might be treated as a special case opens up a fresh approach for independent film committed to simultaneous multi-platform release.

But copying the *Nymphomaniac* model is not as clear-cut as it may seem.

Cinema operators, interviewed for this report, were not keen to offer on-the-record assurances of future policy, and certainly not to say that *Nymphomaniac* represented a firm precedent.

There was, however, a general consensus among those who did take the one-off screening, that a single evening event could be considered as something distinct from a general release.

Dr Who was quoted by one chain as an illustration: cinemas were willing to show a special anniversary episode of the popular BBC sci-fi series, screened simultaneously with the free television broadcast. They were rewarded with record-breaking revenues.

On the other hand, it is not clear at this stage what actually constitutes a single 'event' screening.

It is likely that such definitions may be arbitrary and inconsistent in the short term, perhaps based upon factors such as PR pressure and subject to the policies of individual managers.

In short, there is no guarantee yet that a similar release strategy would get the same amount of support from the cinema operators.

4.3 EXTENDING THE AUDIENCE?

The biggest hope for event screenings is that they will extend the reach of specialised films beyond an arthouse core.

Event Cinema has brought new people into theatres and it is hoped that a proportion of the audience will be irregular cinemagoers attracted to the idea of a special event in a way that they would not for a normal screening

More generally, Curzon Film World's multi-platform release strategy for this and other films is based on the same hope that there is untapped demand for films.

For *Nymphomaniac*, the exit polls suggest that the majority of the audience was already strongly cinephile.

In London, exit polls suggested a predominance of frequent cinemagoers and indeed Lars von Trier fans: 76% of the audience, and 80% of under-25 males, said the director was the biggest motivation in attending the screening.

The content of the film may have been a contributory factor in that relatively narrow make-up of the audience.

For some, the controversy was a plus (39% citing it as a draw) but it may have been a negative influence on others. Only 10% of the audience was over 45 and only 2% went with either a date, or a family member, for example.

Nymphomaniac then had its own particular characteristics that were likely to appeal to committed cinephiles. But while there is not

evidence of a broadening of the audience, the polls do seem clear in suggesting that the special event screening was a motivation in ensuring that more people saw the film on a big screen.

And the multi-platform release ensured that there were a range of options for those who could not go to the cinema for whatever reason.

What is not clear from this release is the potential that an event screening or a multi-platform release is able to reach those who might not generally be motivated to watch a film.

4.4 MULTIPLEX AND REGIONAL DIFFERENCES

The difference in performance between multiplexes and arthouse venues was not particularly marked. Vue and Cineworld cinemas made up 21% of all those cinemas screening the film and took 17% of total revenues.

Four of the top-20 performing cinemas were multiplexes – three in London and one in Glasgow.

The willingness of those venues to host an event, and the box office return, perhaps indicates future potential, although there are some concerns for arthouse venues. Exit polls from Cineworld West India Quay (the top performing multiplex) suggests that the core of the audience was made up of young cinephiles.

One of the success stories of Event Cinema is its ability to take London (and indeed New York and Moscow) shows to regional cinemas. The screening of live opera, theatre etc., clearly extends the audience reach of cultural institutions.

Film, however, is, by its nature, already a cultural form where the geographical limits are less clear-cut.

It is certainly true that the breadth of films shown in the capital far exceeds those in any city. It would be hard, for example, to find anywhere in the UK where 77% of an audience for a film visited the cinema at least once a week.

Cinemas in London represented 34% of the venues but made up more than half (53.4%) of gross revenues.

Those numbers are arguably better than many independent and arthouse film titles, which are often strongly reliant on London audiences.

Clearly, the ease of access to a diverse range of venues is an important part of that fact but there is also an issue around the marketing, and what one might call the zeitgeist of would-be events.

From Tube advertisements to readership of critics, the conversation in London around film and the arts is often of a different order than the regions.

The reach to the regions remains a challenge for independent film that may still require new kinds of marketing innovation.

4.5 FINAL CONCLUSIONS

The combination of a one-off theatrical event and a day-and-date release holds some promise on the basis of this release.

There are critical factors that may become more apparent as the approach is tried further and refined. This release, for example, offered promising signs that consumers were willing to pay a premium for both the event and for the early access to the film on VOD.

The single biggest point is that the film must lend itself to some form of event that is recognised as such by both audience and industry.

The sense of event that the exit polls say was generated by *Nymphomaniac* will not be easily replicated.

The elements that contributed to its performance – a once-only screening of a two-part film, a name director, considerable hype – are not easily replicated for the large majority of films.

And, while exhibitors were willing to treat the event screening as a separate release to the day-and-date multi-platform release in this case, there is no clear rule at this stage on what constitutes an event that might be treated in the same way. (Curzon Film World has the considerable advantage of being distributor and exhibitor, and owning a VOD platform.

Nonetheless, there is much promise for the future in the *Nymphomaniac* release. It represents a genuine cross-media approach, combining the strength of the cinema 'experience' with the broader access of the multi-platform release.



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