

## Movie Trailer Types And Their Effects On Consumer Expectations

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**Abstract:** *The following paper aims to explore the main characteristics of movie trailers and to study its various forms (standard trailers, teaser trailers, television spots etc.), taking a closer look on both their history and their role among the other tools used to promote the movie. The paper's goals include mapping out the various channels used to reach the consumers and to study how they generally feel about movie trailers and how these perceptions have changed as time went on. In addition to above, the paper also seeks to answer how movie trailers have changed in their content since their inception, how the main tones and focus points have shifted (fe. how the footage that was used were selected to begin with), what consumer- and marketing trends they tried to adhere to and how early into the movie production process have they started to promote it.*

**Keywords** – advertising, consumer behavior, cultural marketing, movie consumption

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### I. INTRODUCTION

The history of movie trailers is almost the same age as cinema itself, the movie industry as a whole is unimaginable without this form of advertisement. Movie trailers, these free previews of coming attractions, can be seen before the start of a feature film in a movie theatre or online (as these two serve as the main focus points with the greatest consumer reach for trailer releases). As Kernan (2004) points out trailers display images from a specific feature film to assert its excellence, ultimately becoming the "Film we want to see", making movie trailers appear as a hybrid form of advertising and cinema, which aligns with today's heavily commercialized cultural forms that make art and marketing increasingly indistinguishable.

While advertisements are usually treated with tolerance from the consumers' side, trailers on the other hand are perceived positively by most movie-goers, furthermore the various forms of trailers that appear before the release of a new movie are responsible for a sizeable chunk of online video data transmission (behind news and user created contents). Visitors of movie related websites and blogs get their first impression of a movie here, which is often the sole reason behind their decision to watch it at a movie theatre or not (Baski, 2010). Naturally not all trailers are praised, sometimes both the general public and movie critics lash out, with the main concerns being that they spoil too much of the narrative, showcase only the spectacular parts or flat out lie in their advertising (or use footage not included in the final cut of the movie).

### II. ORIGINS OF MOVIE TRAILERS

In the first decades after the birth of cinema there was nothing to promote, attraction was based on the miracle of the moving picture itself, not the specific movies. As time went on and movie theatres started to spread the vanity of the new technology faded, focus shifted from form to content, which first resulted in projecting the movie posters at first, then moving on to actual trailers later on, with the first studio realize to its importance being Paramount, creating a whole department in 1916 on the purpose to create trailers for their productions. In these first iterations they often depicted one scene grabbed from the movie, focusing heavily on action, spectacle, romance and of course the stars involved, accompanied by large animated taglines (later on with voice-over narration as well) promising even more of the above. Originally these trailers were shown after movies, hence the term "trail", which later on proved to be quite confusing with the preview term also in use for movie advertisement, ultimately using both past and future tenses (Johnston, 2009).

As time went on trailers started to shift once again, to better showcase the narrative and characters involved in the movie as well. As the popularity of this sort of advertising increased, the larger releases got extra attention, like Alice in Wonderland (released in 1933) having a musical scene shot only for the trailer in which the characters sang directly to the audience or Alfred Hitchcock showing the future movie goers around the set of Psycho (released in 1960) the same way as if it was an actual crime scene (Bokor & Kerzoncuf, 2005). Later innovations included the use of excerpted dialogues instead of narration to present the characters and plot, the

use of visual montages, cutting footage to the rhythm of music. Similar to advertising agencies, trailer production companies were formed, the so called "boutique" trailer production served as competition to the in-house trailer operations of movie studios (Kernan, 2004). Following the success of titles like Steven Spielberg's *Jaw* in 1975, nationwide releases became common practice for major titles, which made the movie industry embrace the previously neglected television as a viable market to advertise at. In parallel with the kickstart of MTV, the themes of trailers shifted once again, becoming more similar to music videos, with more usage of music and fast cuts. Later on, as digital editing became available, trailer producers got even more room to tailor their work, with the added possibility of making changes (Baski, 2010). Nowadays the process of creating trailers involves collaboration between not only the production company and the studio, but also with the director and producers, which leads to many revisions (and test showings with focus groups) before the final version of the trailer is achieved.

The public interest and overall positive attitude is reflected in the Golden Trailer Awards (started in 1999), an advertisement festival made in the vein of regular feature film award shows, focusing on the trailer producing talents and achievements (Dornaletche, 2012). There are also the case of movies that originated from trailer projects, like *Machete* or *Hobo With a Shotgun* that all originated as trailer spoofs before their success inevitably brought these "demo cassettes" to the big screen (Csiger, 2013), or instances like the 2014 leak of the trailer like test footage of *Deadpool* (the source of said leak unconfirmed to this day), which generated such an overwhelming support that the studio had no choice but start the production of the actual movie (Kit, 2016).

### **III. MOVIE TRAILER TYPES**

There are many different ways how trailers can differentiate from one another in their style, content, purpose or where they were screened, with many different subcategories further refining what we think about trailers (with new ones appearing ever so often as marketers find new ways to use social media, word of mouth etc.). Following is the main branches we can sort the various forms they have.

#### **3.1 Teaser trailers**

However weird it might sound at first glance, nowadays movie trailers get their own trailers. As they play such a flagship role in the marketing campaign of modern movie studios (other materials being the more stationary forms of posters and their various appearances on billboards, displays, banners etc., and the even more rarely used form of radio advertisement), the most awaited movies' trailers get the so called teaser trailers prior to their release to hype up excitement even more (Baski, 2012). This is the closest in form to the trailer, they usually try to tease the audience without revealing much detail about the movie, for which they employ fast cuts to create a 30-90 second snippet, mainly representing the movie's overall mood (Marton, 1992). Most of the time these teasers are made before the shooting is complete and may even be distributed as early as a year before the release date of the featured movie.

#### **3.2 Standard trailers**

The main difference standard trailers have to teasers is their length, as they easily double or triple in time, having the more comfortable 2-3 minutes to introduce characters or better explain the main narrative of the plot (Dornaletche, 2012). Similar to teasers they also often use voice-overs (with a character from the movie or a narrator) and grid editing, which refers to using different scenes of the movie cut together in a fast-paced montage (Kernan, 2004). There are also several versions of the standard trailers as often they have alternative cuts for domestic and international trailers as well as altered trailers for re-releases of movies (usually with more emphasis on the afterlife of the movie, quoting critic responses and listing awards).

The rundown for most of these trailers are usually quite similar, no matter what genre the featured movie is from, setting up the short runtime into 3 acts, one showing the main characters in their natural environment, then the event that spins them out of that habitat and finally the third act with the most visual and emotional tension. These scenes are usually shown to music matching to the footage (pop for comedies, guitar/rock heavy for action, classical instrumental for drama and horror), that often differs greatly from the original soundtrack of the movie (furthermore these music pieces are often made specifically for use in trailers, like the palette of the music production company *Two Steps From Hell*, whose work got so much traction that they started release whole albums filled with "trailer music" (Friedlander, 2013)), but help the video montage in setting pace for the cuts (Baski, 2010).

#### **3.3 Creative trailers**

This type of trailer does not use any footage from the movie itself, instead they are produced independently to promote the movie. Sometimes directors shot their own smaller plots that somehow connected into the movie for advertising purposes (like Hitchcock did for *The Rear Window*, which basically showed the prologue of the movie, putting the otherwise nameless victim in the spotlight (Bokor & Kerzoncuf, 2005)),

though it is a quite often used technique in the case of 3D animation movies as well (like the many promotional short features released for Despicable Me's minions). It goes without saying, that shooting or creating new footage is a lot more expensive, than using the material available from the feature film, thus these kinds of trailers are not commonly used due to their high cost.

### **3.4 Featurettes**

Featurettes are usually longer videos (5-10 minute long even), consisting of two main subcategories, the "Making of" and the "Behind-the scenes". The main difference between the two is that while the former focuses more on the events before shooting (like how the idea for the movie came to the preproduction phase of hashing out the screenplay all the way to the start of shooting), while the latter gives a glimpse of the on-set work. Both types usually show scenes being shot in-between cast and crew interviews about the experience of making the movie, the special effects used (if any) and the issues they have overcome during the shooting (Dornaletche, 2012). While it could be argued that these feel more like short documentaries than trailers, their main purpose is still to create interest and promote the featured movie.

### **3.5 Clip trailers**

Clip trailers are made by grabbing an interesting short scene out of the movie and using it to promote without editing or retouching it (Dornaletche, 2012). The tricky part of these kinds of trailers is that for positive results they need to be segments that stand on their own, as they are taken in by the viewers with limited context (usually a few sentences to set up the scene beforehand by the promoting actor, producer or director). These types of clips can be most commonly found in night talk shows where the guest stars usually appear on the condition that they also get to promote their latest movie.

### **3.6 TV spots**

Last but not least are the TV spots, with which we already venture on the line to the next chapter which is distribution of trailers. While these ads are stylistically similar to the standard trailers (often appear as just a shortened version), their length, which is between 30-60 seconds is the same as the teaser trailers, and are more commonly timed to appear closer to, or after the movie's release, as part of the final push of the marketing campaign that leads the audience to the movie theatres. The importance of a TV spot is that it brings the movie trailers into the homes of the consumers, extending the movie industry's marketing to other mediums.

## **IV. DISTRIBUTION OF TRAILERS**

The question arises, where and how can and should movie distributors place their trailers to reach their target audience. While advertising in the same medium is generally noted to generate higher influence and usage (Vollans, 2014), the most natural habitat to the trailers of today are the video sharing websites. The internet revolutionized the trailer consumption behaviors, while the format itself has barely changed (so far), with the biggest change being the more dominant appearance of red band trailers (promoting age restricted movies not suitable for children), as previously they could only be found before the showing of other similarly rated movies (as the Motion Picture Association of America [MPAA] states "A trailer advertising a motion picture that is rated R may not be exhibited with a motion picture that is rated G or PG and such trailers will not be considered appropriate to play before motion pictures rated PG-13 that draw younger audiences." (MPAA, 2014)).

The change came naturally, the short length, video-montage style and fast pace are all associated with YouTube to begin with. Seemingly the audience sees the same trailers as before, however their connection to the format became a lot more intimate. Previously it was a question of chance to see a certain trailer, now they can hardly ever be avoided, as thousands of movie related websites, blogs and forums all base essentially their whole operation on showcasing them (Baski, 2010). Even if one does not follow these sorts of sites, social media buzz with friends sharing the videos not to mention their inclusion of "pre-video" ad-spots all guarantee that they get to their audience one way or another. While in movie theatres the common practice is that before the showing of blockbuster (potentially high grossing) movies other blockbusters are advertised, smaller independent ones don't even get the chance, online they still get that shot, as any well made trailer has the opportunity to widespread to all movie sites and social media, no matter who produced it (Baski, 2010).

While lacking the instant availability and intimacy that the internet provides, movie theatres operate with their biggest advantage, which is the setting and atmosphere, where the consumers are allured into the best possible attitude to receive advertising, without most common outer distractions that could stain the experience. Movie goers are generally allowed to enter the theatre half an hour prior to the start of the movie, during which they are shown local advertisement and short commercials, then usually approx. five trailers (taking up 10-15 minutes) before the start, which all contribute to their cinematic experience as an entertaining pre-show.

## V. EFFECTS OF MOVIE TRAILERS ON CONSUMER EXPECTATIONS

While consumer reaction is a process that normally follows the consumption of a good or service, anticipation may be generated in advance to the release with the aid of promotional hype, media coverage and public discussion. The various movie trailers, promising pleasure, spectacle and imagination may give the opportunity for numerous people to form and express their own hopes, expectations and anxieties. All of this may lead to movies be partially interpreted, appreciated and hyped up way before they are even released (Gray, 2008). These pre-viewing activities are especially dominant for highly anticipated movie "franchises" (movies that are interconnected by the same lore, share the same source material or are sequels to one another), with their own dedicated fans (Hills, 2002). These fans appear as the vanguards to all concurrent consumers, showcasing motivations and behaviors that are steadily becoming mainstream, with some more serious fans often developing loyalty to their preferred franchises (Green & Jenkins, 2011). As Davis, Michelle, Hardy and Hight (2014) notes, this loyalty is based on their high regards of the franchises, using them as benchmarks to evaluate any new addition, whether it is worthy of joining the existing canon or not. With the aforementioned movie sites blogs and forums these members of the community are the ones that will step up as opinion leaders, further creating content and word of mouth social media buzz, dissecting each new content (in this case, trailers) for hidden clues and information.

All the while the narrative and tone of the particular movie have little restriction on the creative freedom of the trailer producing companies. During editing they are able to cut the needed segments to cater to the client's (in this case the studio) needs, which may or may not represent the true nature and structure of the original work. As they are not required to mind the time and space integrity of the movie, they are free to create new contexts in their montages, add or change meanings to scenes/shots (possibly turning an ordinary look into an important glance), place otherwise separate lines in the same dialogues. With these techniques and the tweaks to timelines they can suggest conflicts that may not even exist, make effects seem like causes and turn causes into effects (Baski, 2010). These possibilities give even more precise opportunities to the clients to reach their target audiences, like control over the general tone of the trailer (as it is not enough to be a horror movie, but it also needs to look like one in its trailer presentation), the choice to shift the focus on the leading actors and actresses star power or the plot of the movie etc. (famously for Signs 34 different trailer versions were made until they found the right balance of horror and comedic scenes (for male audiences) mixed with family and actor Mel Gibson centric ones (aimed for female audiences)) (Baski, 2010).

In their work Bostock, Carter and Cox (2013) demonstrated on a small number of academy nominated movies how liberal they were in their choices of trailer materials, that they choose according to their genres. On Fig. 1 we can see the standard rundown of trailers on the example of Silver Linings Playbook, which mostly followed the order of the movie in its presentation, with a handful of shots not present in the final film (mostly alternate camera angles).

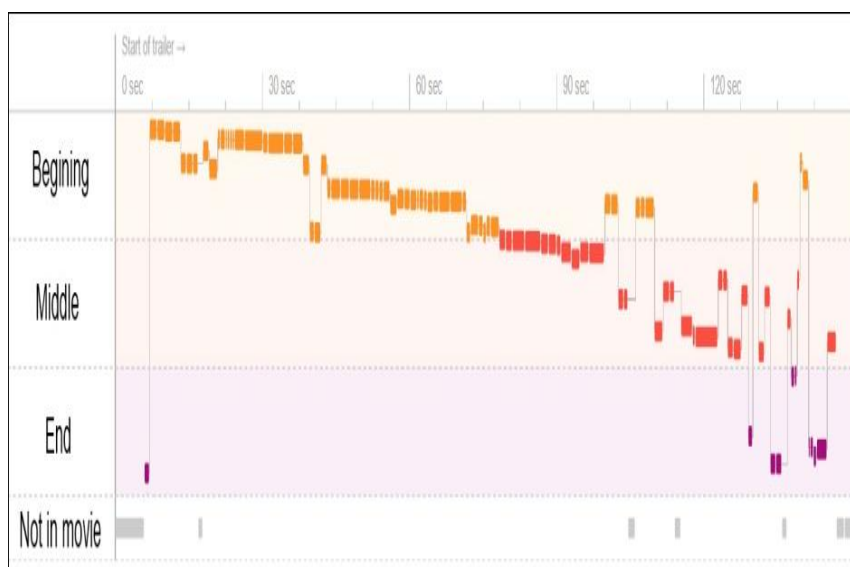


Figure 1: Silver Linings Playbook trailer montage

Source: <http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2013/02/19/movies/awardseason/oscar-trailers.html>

All the while Fig. 2 shows a much more hectic use of the original footages, more in the style of teaser

trailers where the scenes shown are not at all chronological (with the seemingly increased number of not in movie footage being mostly long blackouts, with the goal to help with the progression of the trailer).

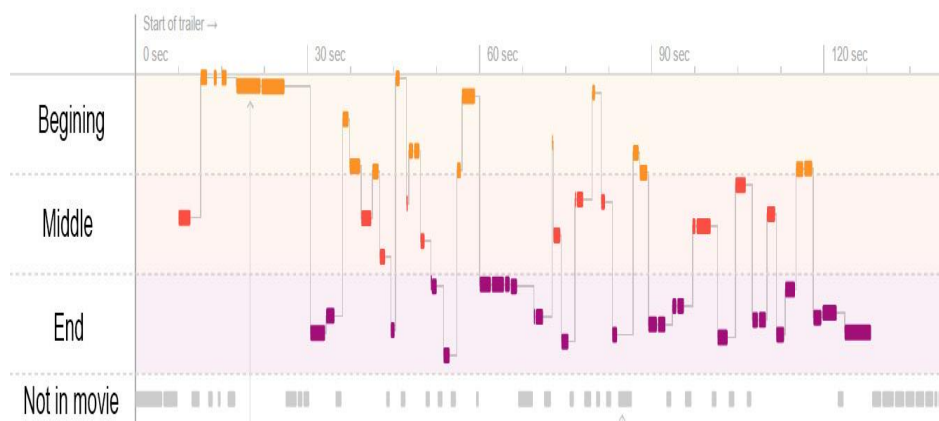


Figure 2: Lincoln trailer montage

Source: <http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2013/02/19/movies/awardsseason/oscar-trailers.html>

While it is a common understanding that advertisement does not always cover all aspects of its subject, still movie goers still get fazed from time to time by not getting what the trailers promised to them. The potential disappointment comes from the misinterpretation of these videos, as the concept of free sample is too widely adopted (Vollans, 2014). Their true purpose however is rather to position the movie and persuade the target consumers into action. Sometimes trailers also have to reposition, as sometimes the test views show bad results on certain aspects of the plot, like to tone down the tragedy plotline in a dramedy movie to focus more on the comedic aspects. This reorganisation of the films narrative is done to serve its economic role, but it is also a creative action (Johnston, 2009). While they do not wish to fully mislead the audience, heavy persuasion, shifting expectations and small scale manipulation are all essential parts of creating trailers, which creates many risks and side effects for the consuming audience (Baski, 2010). One of these risks is the potential of spoilers, the less certain a studio is about the success of a movie the more they want to reveal in the trailer, as Kernan (2004) noted among the most common criticisms were that trailers "give away too much of the movie" as well as "all the best jokes are in the trailer". Another is the aforementioned creative use of footage as well as scenes not included in the final movie, as thanks to YouTube and the like the consumers may not only see trailers of upcoming movies but also past releases' trailers are available to compare as well, which aids to expose all the small shifts and false promises. In his work, Vollins (2014) presented several widely documented incidents where trailers being perceived to mislead, like an instance of lawsuit on the trailer of Drive, or the case of Jack Reacher where the studio was forced to refund the movie goer on his claims of the trailer depicting scenes missing from the final movie.

Another possibly damaging aspect is the way studios manage the viewer expectations, as other viewpoints cited by Kernan (2004) note "They're better than the films." "They only show the spectacular parts." "They lie." "They're the best part of going to the movies." "They're too loud." Indeed, if the trailer has promised a comedy but the movie is actually a drama, audience members might be so disappointed that they might even not acknowledge that the movie is otherwise good and stands its ground in its actual genre.

## VI. CONCLUSION

A special sort of duality is hinted throughout the various aspects of movie trailers. This started from the point of their creation, with carrying both the characteristics of representing the movie in a shorter form (under the sentiment of offering a free preview sample) and to be persuasive in their nature (as their main goal is to get consumers to purchase movie tickets); Being a form of advertisement, yet still being actively sought by the consumers (a treat which with the hard exception of the rightfully famous Super Bowl advertisement spots is not shared by many); Mainly trying to convince audiences to watch movies in movie theatres, yet reach the most success on screens of home computers; Trying constantly to raise consumer expectations, yet not overly raise them.

What is clear is that movie trailers seem to be undisputed in their flagship status to the communication campaigns of movies. It is also noteworthy that true to their ever changing nature, the newest trends show that in some cases even regular trailers get their own mini teaser spots of 5 second shorts right before regular 2:30 trailers, as if the production companies were trying to convince viewers not to change channel. An interesting implication of the over-reliance on trailers to market the movies is the studios being somewhat forced into

having several set piece sequences (especially in the case of blockbuster movies). As movies and the competition between studios have grown to be more and more spectacle based, these marketable (and trailer compatible) moments in their movies with little regard if they make any sense plotwise (Huber, 2014). Ultimately some of these scenes might end up on cutting floor and their absence may or may not be noticed by the movie audiences, with the former case rightfully generating sour taste for many.

The paper was limited as it had no primary research. Future studies should also consider to examine in particular how much consumers differentiate between the different types of trailers and whether (and for what reasons) they favor any particular type to the rest. It might also be of interest to look into the general timeframes between watching a trailer and the movie it promoted and how the expectations might correlate in their detail and strength to the amount the trailer has revealed and how much time has passed between the two viewings.

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