Genre analysis of contemporary horror movie trailers

Bachelor's thesis

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Tiivistelmä – Abstract

Elokuvatrailerit ovat tärkein ja näkyvin mainonnan muoto uusille elokuville. Trailerit ovat yleensä n. 2.5 minuutin mittaisia mainosvideoita, joihin on koottu yhteen mainostettavan elokuvan parhaiten myyviä ominaisuuksia. Elokuvan osia editoidaan yhteen montaasiksi, jonka tavoitteena on saada ihmiset kiinnostumaan tulevasta elokuvasta ja näin maksimoida kyseisen elokuvan kaupallinen menestys. Elokuvatrailerin tärkeimpiä osa-alueita elokuvan mainostamiselle ovat ääni, "tähdet" (esim. näyttelijät), sekä elokuvan tarina ja genre.

Kyseisestä aiheesta on vain vähän tutkimusta, erityisesti genreanalyysin keinoin. Tämän tutkielman tavoitteena oli selvittää tarkemmin elokuvatrailereille ominaisia piirteitä, keskittymällä 2017 vuonna julkaistujen kauhuelokuvien mainontaan. Kauhuelokuvien trailereita tutkittiin genreanalyysin keinoin, keskittyen edellä mainittuihin trailereiden tärkeimpiin ominaisuuksiin. Tutkielmassa analysoitiin kymmentä traileria ja näiden pohjalta kehitettiin kolmevaiheinen elokuvatrailerin rakenne ja kuvattiin kunkin vaiheen ominaisuuksia.

Tutkimuksen tuloksena saatiin selville, että lähes kaikki tutkitut trailerit noudattivat samanlaista kaavaa ja hyödynsivät samankaltaisilla tavoilla mm. ääntä, editointia ja viittauksia elokuvan tekijöihin. Trailereiden välillä havaittiin myös eroja mm. elokuvan tarinaan ja genreen viittaamisessa sekä musiikin käytössä. Tutkimuksen tulokset antoivat hyvän yleiskuvan nyky-kauhuelokuvien trailereista ja niiden rakenteesta sekä elokuvatrailereista yleensä.

Structure

1. Introduction

Horror movies seem to be one of the most polarising movie genres, possibly due to their often violent, graphic and otherwise disturbing content. Still, horror has lurked its way into popular culture as most people are likely to recognise different icons of horror stories such as Dracula and Frankenstein's monster as well as various killers like horror cinema's Michael Myers and Jason Vorhees. Although the horror genre has remained a minor one compared to film genres others, it seems to be breaking out of the marginal into the mainstream. In 2017, due to the success of movies like *It* and *Get Out*, the year became the biggest one in the history of horror movies, in terms of ticket sales (Murphy 2017). Could the films' advertising have anything to do with the growth in popularity of the genre? Another interesting question is how such stories of murderers, supernatural beings and other macabre subject matters can be marketed to larger audiences. This thesis attempts to answer this question by focusing on the most important medium of movie advertising, the trailer. Research of movie trailers could also be helpful in understanding the film industry and movie-goers because by studying trailers one can also learn about the hypothetical audience members trailers are created for or 'who the film industry thinks it is addressing within trailer texts' (Kernan 2004: 2-3). Studying trailers can give us an idea of 'Hollywood's implied audiences and their assigned consumer identities' (Kernan 2004: 206).

There has been a lack of research focusing on film advertising (Hixson 2006), not to mention movie trailers, which is only one many ways movies are advertised. The little research done on movie trailers and genre has mostly focused on the films' genre and not on movie trailers as an advertising sub-genre. Thus, the aim of this thesis is to fill this void in marketing and film research by analysing movie trailers as a sub-genre of advertising texts. This study focuses on the way movie trailers marketing films from the horror genre are structured and how audiences are persuaded by these pieces of movie advertising. In order to limit the focus of the study, only trailers for contemporary horror movies are analysed. In addition, this study focuses only on theatrical trailers, leaving out other forms of film advertising such as teaser trailers, posters and the various forms of online advertising.

The following chapter begins by providing the reader with a brief introduction to genre and its meaning. The next section describes characteristics of the horror genre, and especially horror in film-making, by presenting some definitions of horror as well as views on categorising movies. Lastly, different aspects of film advertising and trailers are discussed, referencing already existing literature and research on the subjects. The third section presents the data, some terminology, the current study's research questions and methods used in the study. Throughout the following section of the thesis, findings of the study are analysed, and the concepts presented during earlier sections are discussed further in the light of the results. Finally, a concluding chapter is dedicated to summarising the results and their implications.

2. Background

2.1. Genre

Genres can be defined as 'recognizable communicative events, characterized by a set of communicative purpose(s)...' and 'highly structured and conventionalized constructs' (Bhatia 2013). A defining characteristic of a genre is how its communicative purpose also affects its content and form (Halmari & Virtanen 2005: 19). In fact, genres can have multiple communicative purposes, also known as 'sets' (Swales 1990: 47). For example, the communicative purposes of a movie trailer include selling a movie to consumers, increasing their awareness of it and communicating to investors a movie's quality and potential financial success (Karray 2015). Even though genres are conventionalised, they are not static but can change with time and use (Bhatia 2013) as well as across cultures (Halmari & Virtanen 2005: 18). However, some genres are more static than others while some allow variation and creativity in their use (Heikkinen et al. 2012: 21). For instance, a research article has much more restrictions in the way it can be written when compared to a short story, while the type of language used in a radio interview has changed much more than that used in a court of law. The dynamic nature of genres can be observed by studying trailers as well, as the trailers have greatly evolved only within the context of Hollywood movies alone, from advertisements explicitly speaking to consumers through external narration to more stylised and fast paced mini-movies of today.

Genres can also be used as a tool for categorising things into groups (Swales 1990: 34). For example, movies are categorised into genres with labels such as horror, action or comedy and further into subgenres like, in the case of horror, sci-fi horror, slasher movies and supernatural horror. These labels convey information about a film's content to consumers while also imposing expectations about the film (Altman 2002: 26) and in the case of movies, genres can help consumers to get a visual as well as conceptual idea of a movie and its content (Altman 2002: 24). According to Swales (1990), instances of a specific genre, such as movies, articles or TV-ads, show similarities in their structure, style, content, purpose and intended audience. Also, if this member of a genre fulfils all criteria of the genre's membership, it can be considered as prototypical of that genre (Swales 1990: 58). Bhatia makes a distinction

between advertisements, promotional letters and book blurbs as examples of promotional genres. He uses promotional genres to demonstrate the nature of genre colonies, where genres that share some, but not all, of their communicative purposes are grouped together into a hierarchy also including subgenres (Bhatia 2004: 59-62).

2.2. Movie genres, genre movies and defining horror

The aim of this sub-section is to explain what makes a horror movie and who gets to choose the definition of horror in movies, whether that is the film-makers, movie studios, film critics or audiences who consume these movies. Schepelern (1978) argues that a movie genre is a group of movies that utilise dramaturgical, thematic and aesthetic elements that have been accepted financially and artistically, i.e. by audiences, critics and the film industry. However, Altman (2002: 27-29) rejects the idea of the film industry defining genres in a symbiotic relationship with consumers who are needed to recognise the genre for it to exist. In addition, basing the definition of horror (or any other genre) on the views of movie studios is problematic as studios may market a movie as horror at one time but choose to call the same movie something else at another time, depending on what is popular at the moment (Altman 2002: 106, Hutchings 2013: 3). In addition, what one considers horror is dependent on the historical – as well as cultural – context, therefore, horror can reveal the suppressed fears prevailing in a certain place or time (Hutchings 2013: 8, Prince 2005: 120).

The horror genre can be difficult to define and, as Hutchings (2013) argues, there is often ambiguity in defining the genre as many films 'appear to exist on generic borders' that also 'can be classified in one direction or another' (Hutchings 2013: 2). Horror movies are often referred to as genre movies, which Schepelern (1978) defines as a result of a group of stereotypes that have been institutionalised into a defined whole. Individual genre movies are born within a genre and are marketed as belonging to that same genre, such as horror. With genre movies, a movie's identity as a member of a specific genre can be communicated by utilising conventionalised symbols of that genre, for example by using symbols of death and evil in horror movies' advertising (Schepelern 1978: 13-14). However, according to Oliver et al. (2007), a movie's audio-visual aspects alone, as presented in a trailer, can be used to identify the movie's genre, without having any knowledge of factors such as plot and actors.

As genre movies are often derivative of earlier movies and popular among the genre's fans, the industry mimics successful genre movies, thus establishing the genre further (Schepelern 1978: 14). In addition to using intertextuality, for example by referencing other movies or works of art, genre movies often repeat the same structures and features of the genre they belong to, thus making them highly predictable. Consequently, according to Altman, the pleasure audiences get from genre movies derives from reinforcement, not newness, as audiences can experience new stories but in a safe and familiar manner (Altman 2002: 39-41). Additionally, a genre's clichés can be used to communicate to audiences about a movie's genre (Kernan 2004: 197-199). As genre movies can be highly derivative and exploitative, even more so than other movies, the term 'genre movie' usually has negative connotations (Heikkinen et al. 2012: 20).

Another reason for the difficulties in defining horror movies could be the fact that horror movies, according to Hutchings (2013: 6), 'have no distinctive iconography to bind them all together'. In addition, he notes that horror movies can take place anywhere and at any time while also having large differences in stylistic approaches across the genre's history. A further aspect that makes defining any genre difficult is the fact that newer movies can bring out certain features of older ones, as they are seen differently in contrast to new movies. When trying to create a new hit genre film, movie studios often turn to older movies and the 'generic prototypes' of the genre, thus defining genres for themselves retrospectively (Altman 2002: 61-66).

In 1973, Tudor wrote: 'genre is what we collectively believe it to be' (in Hutchings 2013: 5). However, this idea becomes problematic as the different parties participating in defining a genre, such as audiences, critics and film studios, have differing ideas of a genre's definition; in the case of horror movies, 'all working to construct their own versions of horror' (Hutchings 2013: 4). One way of defining horror comes from Carroll (1990: 14), who states that the horror genre is different from, for example westerns, in that horror is defined by the affect it intends to cause in those consuming it, i.e. the one the genre is named after: horror. However, he also makes a distinction between art horror and natural horror, i.e. horror in fiction and non-fiction, while also arguing that the presence of monsters is a required characteristic of horror (Carroll 1990: 12-14). Carroll's approach is much like that of Sayers (1929 in Schepelern 1978: 38), who makes a distinction between horror stories of the

supernatural and ones of humane and inhumane subjects. However, in this study such distinctions between fictitious and real horror is not made.

Schepelern (1978: 16) on the other hand suggests that horror movies are (fictional) movies that aim to cause a sense of fear and horror in its audience by using macabre, bloody and possibly imaginary subjects and narration while emphasising suspense, surprises and horror-effects. This seems to also be more in-line with the modern horror genre and how horror movies are perceived today, while also being the definition used in this thesis. Schepelern also argues that horror movies tend to show horrific things instead of only referring to them while utilising darkness, terrifying special effects and horror themed visuals derived from earlier art-forms such as painting (Schepelern 1978: 31). In addition, he makes a distinction between horror and thriller movies, which according to him do not emphasise the macabre, terrifying and oppressive emotions like horror does (Schepelern 1978: 16-18). However, it could be argued that no definition could be exhaustive enough to not leave any ambiguity over the subject of horror movies and what constitutes horror. As also argued by Altman (2002), it does not make much sense attempting to create an exhaustive corpus of all movies that belong to a single genre or approaching movie classification with an 'all or nothing' mentality (i.e. a movie can only belong to a specific genre). Too often, he argues, attempts at defining a film genre only result in a list of movies considered to be the ideal constituents of the genre under scrutiny (Altman 2002: 29-31).

2.3. Movie advertising and trailers

Kernan (2004: 1) defines a movie trailer as 'a brief film text that usually displays images from a specific feature film while asserting its excellence, and that is created for the purpose of projecting in theatres to promote the film's theatrical release.' In a trailer like this, clips from a movie are edited together into a montage to display the content of the movie. The use of editing, montage and other common features of trailers (such as wipes and other transitions) aim to make viewers aware of the trailer's promotional nature (Kernan 2004: 13). In addition to editing, by using music, sound and narration, a trailer speaks to audiences, trying to persuade them into seeing the upcoming movie. When a trailer is created, parts of the movie, such as lines of dialogue or individual shots, are taken out of the context of the movie's narrative and recontextualised into a fractured, new narrative (i.e. the trailer) that may not always accurately portray the

actual product that is being advertised. For example, a single line of dialogue from the movie may get a completely new meaning in the trailer (Kernan 2004: 10-11).

Due to the influence a movie trailer can have over audiences, it is the most important part of a film's advertising campaign (Finsterwalder et al. 2012, Hixson, 2006, Karray 2015). According to the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA), over half of moviegoers watch a movie's trailer before seeing the actual movie. In addition, investors base much of their predictions of a film's quality and success at the box-office on the movie's trailer (Karray 2015). Trailers are often made by companies (or trailer houses) specialised in creating trailers and the creation of a single trailer can involve several 'vendors' competing for their trailer to be chosen by the movie studio (Marich 2013: 13, Sella 2002). In some cases, if none of the competing trailers are what the studio hoped for, the studio may choose the best aspects of more than one trailer and stitch them together into a 'Frankenstein trailer' (Hixson 2006, Marich 2013: 30-31, Sella 2002).

By presenting individual and carefully selected sections of a movie, movie trailers 'give a sample' of the product (i.e. the movie) to the consumers. This way, based on the trailer, consumers can derive information about the movie and make assumptions about its entertainment value and story (Hixson 2005, Marich 2013: 28). As consumers make such assumptions of the movie based on the trailer, trailers need to accurately represent the movie they are advertising. Otherwise audiences will be disappointed when the movie is not what they expected and not what the trailer had promised. A consumer will more likely be satisfied with a movie if it matches their expectations (Finsterwalder et al. 2012). However, while a trailer should accurately portray the movie, it should not give away too much of the movie and its content but also not be too vague (Karray 2015, Kernan 2004: 54). It is a common complaint by consumers that trailers give away too much of the movie and that they do not depict it accurately (Kernan 2004: 1, Schimkowitz 2015, Sella 2002). In order to please audiences, the trailer should communicate the tone and genre of the movie (Flanagan 2012, Finsterwalder et al. 2012). However, trailers can sometimes misrepresent the movie on purpose in order to get people to see it (Sella 2002).

One of the most important aspects of a movie trailer is the use of sound and music (Sella 2002, Kernan 2004: 164). The use of music is crucial for a trailer as it can

strongly affect consumers' enjoyment of a trailer and influence their expectations of the movie's content, genre and tone (Flanagan 2012, Finsterwalder et al. 2012). Contemporary trailers utilise rhythm heavily by editing on-screen action based on the movie's sounds and music. However, this is only one of many trends in contemporary movie trailers. As trends (such as heavy use of rhythm) are used often, professionals in the trailer-making industry complain how every new thing in trailers is copied and then repeated ad nauseam. Other such trends include using specific sound effects (or cues) and including a cover of a famous song, the tone of which often juxtaposes that of the trailer (VICE News 2018). Since trailers are made before the movie and its music are finished, music used in trailers is rarely from the movie's own soundtrack. Licensed songs, custom-made music and archive music are used instead (Marich 2013: 31-32).

When audience members form their opinions about a movie they have not seen yet, they usually do this based on three factors: story, stars and genre (Finsterwalder et al. 2012, Kernan 2004: 5). Finsterwalder et al. (2012) state that the story aspect of a trailer consists of plot, dialogue and storyline exposure. A trailer should have a plot like a movie and not only consist of random clips, while containing enough story exposure and other 'curiosity generating content' (Karray 2015) to get people interested but not too much to drive them away. In order to intrigue viewers, a trailer should include what Karray (2015) calls 'knowledge gaps' (i.e. aspects of the plot that are not revealed). In fact, trailers used to rely heavily on mystery and ambiguity so they would not reveal too much of the film's story, especially when compared to 'the tell-all approach' of contemporary trailers (Marich 2013: 32, Schimkowitz 2015). The stars refer to all recognisable talent behind the movie. However, in most cases this means the movie's actors as they are 'the face to the public' and more well-known than directors, producers and writers. Only few well-established directors have enough 'star power' to get audiences interested in a movie (Finsterwalder et al. 2012, Hutchings 2013: 5).

Movie consumers' genre preferences play a large role in movie marketing and their decision-making processes (Hixson 2006, Finsterwalder et al. 2012, Marich 2013, Kernan 2004: 43). By watching a trailer, consumers should get enough information to know what genre a movie belongs to (Rasheed & Shah 2002). Finsterwalder et al. (2012) claim, based on their study on trailers and consumer expectations, that 'genre is one of the most important expectation influencers. As genre preference strongly

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dictates a ''liking'' of a film trailer, it is important that film marketers select the most appropriate scenes from the film which reflect the genre most realistically'. This shows that the film's genre and communicating it to consumers have a great effect on the trailer's success.

To make sure that audiences know what genre a film belongs to, trailers may utilise different clichés of a genre that its fans will be sure to recognise. However, marketers face a problem as they also try make sure that no potential segment of the audience is lost by only appealing to a specific demographic (Kernan 2004: 167, 197-198). This makes marketing of non-mainstream movies difficult as the trailer should appeal both to the general public and genre-conscious fans of niche-movie genres (Hixson 2006). Because of trying to please most consumers, movie trailers have become increasingly homogenous since the 1980s, attempting to provide 'generic spectacles' for audiences with varying preferences (Kernan 2004: 203).

3. Aim, data and methods

3.1. Aim, data and research questions

As mentioned earlier, there is very little research done on movie trailers and the research that exists focuses on trailers' effect on consumers and how trailers are utilised in movies' marketing. Also, most writing about movie trailers has remained at the surface level, mainly focusing on their individual features, such as the use of music and sound. The aim of this study, in addition to looking at movie trailers from the point of view of the horror genre, is also to examine movie trailers' generic features as well as their structure and form. Although the data used here consists only of trailers for horror movies, the findings could to some extent be applied to other movie genres as well because all movie genres utilise the same conventions of film-making and thus are very similar on the surface. As movie trailers have become homogenised and conventionalised with specific trends dominating different time periods, there should be no drastic differences between different movie genres' trailers, especially regarding their general structure. However, differences between movie genres will certainly have some effect on the way they are advertised as well, for example in terms of the trailers' tone and the displayed content in general. While exploring the trailers' structure, their most important and recognisable features are studied and the features' use between trailers within the horror genre is compared. In addition, because film-makers use some general rules of the film genre, such as camera movements and use of sound, often in similar ways (Oliver et al. 2007), many similarities should be found in the visual style and sound design of the movies included in the data.

For the data used in this study, ten movie trailers from 2017 were chosen. For the purposes of this study, trailers for ten of the highest grossing horror movies in the United States were chosen. The data was collected from BoxOfficeMojo (2019), a website that collects box-office grosses of movies both worldwide and in the US. The movies were chosen based on categorisations by BoxOfficeMojo, where all ten movies were classified as either horror, scifi-horror or horror thriller; and IMDB, which assigns one to three genres for each movie; in the case of this study all ten movies were placed into the horror genre on imdb. All trailers for the chosen movies were available on the video-streaming service YouTube, most of them uploaded there by the film studios.

For each movie the first theatrical trailer (or trailer #1; Marich 2013, 28) was chosen as there are usually more than one trailer (even a theatrical trailer) created for a movie (VICE News 2018). The movies included in this study are: *It, Get Out, Split, Annabelle: Creation, Alien: Covenant, Happy Death Day, Jigsaw, 47 Meters Down, Rings* and *The Bye Bye Man*.

Nearly all the trailers used in this study were 2.5 minutes long which is a standard length for a theatrical trailer (Marich 2013: 28, Schimkowitz 2015). In fact, the length of a theatrical trailer has been restricted to the maximum length of 2.5 minutes by the MPAA (Sella 2002). As spatial restrictions are one of the defining characteristics of advertising, this restriction in length must also have had an effect on movie trailers' form and structure (Halmari & Virtanen 2005: 143). However, by using theatrical trailers that have been restricted to a similar length (and meant to be shown primarily in a theatre environment), the analysed data is consistent and more easily comparable.

In analysing the trailers, first their structure is studied to see if there is some kind of pattern to be found in the way horror movie trailers are structured. The basis and starting point for analysing the structure will be presented in the following subsection. After the analysis of the structure, other aspects of the trailers will be focused on. This includes analysing the way sound, music and editing are used as well as what kind of things are used to persuade the viewers, i.e. the use of star power, story elements and references to the movie's genre. The aim of this is to discover what are the generic features of horror movie trailers, i.e. which features one can expect to find in a horror movie trailer. The features mentioned above were chosen for analysis based on the writing and research done on the subject of trailers, as the way narration, sound and editing are used is integral to the way trailers are structured. In addition, as discussed earlier, a movie's story, stars and genre are the most important aspects affecting consumers' behaviour and their expectations of a movie.

The trailers contained information in text form during the last seconds after the proper trailer had ended. This information was excluded from the analysis as it was not a central part of the advertisement and only appeared on-screen for one or two seconds. Other more prominent uses of texts, such as release dates, were included in the analysis. A couple of the trailers contained a short section introducing the trailer.

These were also excluded from analysis because they were not part of the actual trailer but were instead added for the online version of the trailer.

Research questions:

1. How are contemporary horror movie trailers structured?

2. What are the generic features of contemporary horror movie trailers?

3. In what ways do these trailers persuade consumers into seeing a movie?

3.2. Trailer methodology and genre analysis

Schimkowitz (2015) argues that a trailer consists of three parts: the first part introducing the characters and the environment, the second part introducing the story's conflict and the third part showing the climax of the movie while leaving the resolution open. He refers to these three parts as 'setup', 'confrontation' and 'climax' (Schimkowitz 2015). Similar structures have been proposed by Finsterwalder et al. (2012) and Flanagan (2012). However, in this study, the aim is to see if a more detailed structure can be found and if the structure of horror movie trailers differs in any way from the ones introduced above.

Schimkowitz (2012) also describes some features of a movie trailer that will be referred to when discussing the trailers' structure and generic features. These include 'the turn line' (a moment where all music stops for a line of dialogue spoken by a character), 'the rise' (intensifying finale of a trailer, often following the turn line), 'hits' (dramatic drum or drum-like sounds used to create rhythm in the trailer) and 'the button' (a joke or a scare used to end the trailer), also called the 'stinger' by Flanagan (2012).

In analysing the trailers, a structure similar to that used in Swales' move analysis (e.g. Swales 1990: 140-148) will be used. The proposed horror movie trailer structure will include the different parts (or moves) of a trailer while also trying to describe these parts, their content, order of appearance and purpose. The aim is also to recognise any features that seem to be found in all trailers and ones that are optional. This will answer the first research question. In an attempt to answer the second research question, the generic features of horror movie trailers will be discussed and explained. In addition, if possible, these features and their use will be placed in the structure proposed in the first research question's answer. Throughout

this discussion, the various ways in which the trailers attempt to persuade consumers will be also discussed.

4. Results and discussion

4.1. The structure of horror movie trailers

The trailers mostly followed the 'introduction, conflict and climax' structure introduced earlier. All the trailers had a distinct introductory part, although in some trailers it was not the first thing shown in the trailer. For example, the trailer for *Rings* starts with a short opening immediately establishing the movie as horror before the proper introduction is presented. The introductory section of the trailers was in most cases fairly upbeat and did not communicate the movie's genre clearly. For example, the trailer for *Get Out* shows a happy couple, a man and a woman, going to visit the woman's parents. Only after approximately 30 seconds, it is made evident for the viewer that the movie belongs to the thriller or horror genre as the tone of the trailer changes. Four of the ten trailers, however, immediately make sure that the viewer knows they are watching a horror movie trailer. The introduction in all trailers shows the main characters, and more specifically the protagonists who the viewer is expected to identify with. This section gives the viewer an idea of the movie's setting as well as the story's starting point. For example, the trailer for *Annabelle: Creation* shows the main character, a disabled orphan child, arriving at a farm that functions as an orphanage. In addition, other characters, such as the people living in the house and other orphans, are introduced. During this introductory section, the movie studios' logos are presented, either immediately at the beginning or just before the next section begins.

In the following section presenting the movie's conflict, the movie's horror tone is established properly. The move from the introduction to this section is communicated by 'a turn', with the use of sound, editing and what is shown on screen. For example, in the trailer for *It*, the turn is communicated with the use of sound and dialogue, when the main character's description of his childhood summer takes an ominous turn, accompanied with a sound cue. This is followed by the Warner Brothers logo and the introduction of a darker tone. Prior to this the trailer could have been one for a drama or even a kids' movie. Unlike with the introduction, there is not always a clear cue that communicates the transition between this section and the following one: the climax.

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The trailer's climax is the most intense part, which is evident in the way sound and music are used, in addition to the trailer's editing which starts to incorporate quicker cuts, sometimes making it difficult for the viewer to decipher what is happening. For example, the trailers for *It, Get Out* and *Rings*, all feature fast paced editing, resulting in a chaotic and intense finish for the trailer. During the climax, the trailer's soundscape often includes sounds rising in intensity and pitch. These rises create a sense of urgency and intensity in the trailer, often leading to the film's title in a thunderous crescendo of sounds followed by silence. Trailers can also include a short bit after the film's title, such as the trailers for *Split* and *Alien: Covenant*. The end-bit for the *Split* trailer contains an ominous line of dialogue, while in *Alien: Covenant* the end-bit presents an action scene involving the titular alien creature, which has not been properly shown until that point.

Table 1 presents the structure used in contemporary horror movie trailers, containing the sections' titles and their most common features:

Table 1. Three-part structure of horror movie trailers

Trailer Section	Section Features
Introduction	Introduces the characters and the movie's setting.
	Does not involve strong horror elements.
	Presents the story's starting point through dialogue from the movie.
	Lasts less than 30 seconds.
	Either begins or ends with the movie studios' logos.
	Proceeds in a linear and stable manner.
Confrontation	Introduces the movie's conflict.
	Establishes the movie's tone and hints at its genre.
	Introduces horror elements in the form of sounds, visuals and ideas (e.g. story elements).

	Uses dialogue to provide information about the movie's conflict.
	Contains information about the film's creators by using text.
	Has an irregular pace and occasionally slows down.
Climax	Contains more intense editing, sound design and horror imagery.
	Builds up tension and pace of editing while also growing louder.
	Occasionally slows down.
	Ends by revealing the movie's title.
	Relies more on showing rather than telling.
	Can use text for narration accompanying dialogue.
	Does not contain a clear chronology of events.

4.2. Features of horror movie trailers

In this section, some of the trailers' common features are discussed while also placing them in the general structure discussed in the previous section. These features are references to the horror genre, use of sound, editing, story exposure and usage of well-known people (i.e. 'stars'). Some of the most important aspects are presented in Appendix 1.

4.2.1. Genre

As consumers' genre preferences play a large role in their expected enjoyment of a movie (Finsterwalder et al. 2012, Hixson 2006), emphasising the movie's genre in a trailer is important while other aspects of the movie and its trailer, such as story, music and actors, can be used to persuade those who are not fans of the movie's genre. The ten trailers analysed for the study used several elements associated with the horror genre, such as supernatural forces, emotions of fear, violence, dark colours and eerie

music. By including these things in the trailer, consumers will come to expect the movie to include much of similar content in the actual movie (Oliver et al. 2007). However, more graphic imagery, such as blood, gore, sexual content and graphic depictions of violence and death, were not explicitly shown but instead implied to, for example by having violence happen off-screen or cutting just before something is about to happen. This could be due to the MPAA's restrictions but also because showing these things could potentially drive away consumers from seeing the movie. In fact, it has been argued that depictions of violence and sex in trailers do not necessarily improve audiences' willingness to see a movie (Oliver et al. 2007, Marich 2013: 22).

As discussed earlier, six of the trailers did not emphasise their horror genre immediately during the introduction. However, at some point, all trailers made sure that the audience understands that the movie in question is in fact horror. One of the ways this was accomplished was the use of lighting and colour. As suggested by Rasheed & Shah (2002), horror movies utilise low-key lighting (i.e. dark lighting and strong contrasts of light and dark colours). This, they argue, plays a large role in setting the mood and creating atmosphere. Indeed, all trailers had at least parts of them set in dark and dimly lit environments, some more than others. The trailers for *Alien: Covenant, Rings* and *The Bye Bye Man* were especially dominated by dark colours and shades of grey. Still, the rest of the trailers used also some more colourful scenes in presenting the movie. For example, the trailer for *Happy Death Day* was the most colourful and brightly lit one. The trailer in question was also tonally less serious and even comedic at times. This shows the variation that horror movies can have even within the genre.

4.2.2. Sound and music

As 'horror is primarily a sound-based medium' (Hutchings 2013: 128), trailers for the genre also utilised sound heavily. However, unlike what was discussed earlier, the trailers hardly used any licensed music, or any distinct music for that matter. The only trailers using licensed music were those for *Jigsaw, Happy Death Day* and *Annabelle: Creation* (although in the latter the music is diegetic, i.e. existing inside the movie's story (see e.g. Hutchings 2013: 130)). The trailer for *Jigsaw* uses an upbeat song (performed by Roy Orbison), juxtaposing it with violent imagery and other horror visuals. In the trailer for *Happy Death Day*, the song 'In Da Club' by the rapper 50 Cent is used. However, at the beginning of the trailer, the song is shown to be the main

character's alarm tone, but later as the trailer progresses, elements of the song are worked into the trailer's own music. This modification of an existing song to fit the needs of a movie trailer has been called 'trailerisation' (VICE News 2018). In both cases where licensed music was heavily utilised, the tone of the songs did not convey the horror genre in any way. All the other trailers utilised mostly music consisting of abstract sound cues and, as a consequence, five of the trailers had no distinct 'song' or theme for the audience to attach to. The other five trailers had distinct theme or song that was carried out through the entire trailer. One trailer without such song was *Get Out,* which uses only abstract musical sound cues and effects instead of traditional music that would constitute a cohesive song for the trailer. The use of music and other sounds in eight of the trailers conveyed the horror genre very clearly. However, the lack of recognisable music was surprising, as Finsterwalder et al. (2012) found that the audience's enjoyment of and familiarity with a trailer's music can positively affect their assessment of the movie and make them more interested in seeing it.

The trailers analysed here did not rely on a steady build up towards the big ending that reveals the movie's title. Instead, the trailers' pace is irregular as they often slow down and are interrupted with slower parts, despite there being a limited amount of time for the trailer to present a movie to audiences. This type of slow parts always ends in some kind of scare. This is because, in order for the scare to work, there needs to be some build up and tension before the scare is revealed (Hutchings 2013: 135-136). The slow and quiet parts also function as a necessary contrast for the loud and sudden scare that follows. Interestingly, the trailers utilised the lack of sound often. In many cases music and most other sounds cease prior to a scare. Five of the trailers had fairly long periods of silence when building up to something to startle the audience. For example, in the trailer for *It*, the trailer gets quiet as a character is shown walking inside a room filled with clown dolls. After a short moment of silent build-up, the movie's main villain, Pennywise the clown, jumps out accompanied with a loud sound, scaring the movie's character and the audience.

4.2.3. Editing

As was discussed earlier, movie trailers tend to rely heavily on rhythm. This was also the case with horror trailers. Nine of the ten trailers had some kind of rhythm, created with cuts and sound effects. However, the rhythm was more noticeable and more prevalent in four specific trailers. The only trailer that did not contain a noticeable

rhythm was the one for *Rings*. An example of a trailer that did use rhythm was the one for *It*. In the trailer, as the pace increases and the intensity grows, the cuts are timed to sound cues, such as water drop sounds and low hits, as well as the repetition of the trailers tagline, repeated by one of the characters in growing intensity. The trailer for *Get Out*, while not using proper music, created rhythm by cutting between scenes of the movie to diegetic sounds (e.g. punching and crashing sounds) and non-diegetic sound effects. Regarding the trailers' sound and editing, one common characteristic was the exaggerated use of sound effects. Often an action taking place on-screen was accompanied by a noticeably audible sound effect that, in some cases, was also used to accompany the trailer's editing. For example, the trailer for *It* heavily emphasises some actions, such as the unsheathing of a knife, with a loud sound effect.

The most common type of cutting was fading to black: a shot slowly fades to black before the next shot is revealed. This technique was often utilised to change between locations and show scenes taking place at different times in the story. Most often utilised during the introductory section to show various locations and characters, fading to black also emphasised the ominous tone of many of the trailers, before being replaced by faster editing as the trailer progresses. Another way this type of editing was used was by having the trailer 'stutter', i.e. cutting rapidly between a black screen and visuals from the movie, resulting in a flickering effect. This was often used during the most intense point of the trailer's climax, accompanied by a similar 'stuttering' and simultaneously rising sound. This type of stuttering, as well as slower fading to black editing, were used in all trailers.

4.2.4. Story elements and movie plot

None of the trailers used an external narration to tell about the story and plot. Instead story elements were revealed with lines of dialogue from the movie and occasionally with the use of text. However, the use of text was in all cases directed at the viewer with statements such as 'This year face your deepest fears' (*47 Meters Down*), 'You know his name' (*Jigsaw*) and 'Make every death count' (*Happy Death Day*). Often individual words or pieces of a phrase were revealed gradually with clips of the movie shown between them, for example in the trailers for *Happy Death Day* and *Jigsaw*. The use of text in this manner takes place during the trailer's climax and is used to accompany the characters' narration which is more informative of the story and plot while text is mainly used to convey tone and excite the viewer.

The amount of story elements and the way the movie's conflict was presented varied between the ten trailers. Five of the trailers reveal the story's conflict for the viewer by explicitly explaining and showing it. As discussed earlier, the movie's conflict is revealed in the second section of the trailer. However, the rest of the trailers were very vague in this sense, such as the trailer for *It,* which shows that there is an evil clown entity who seems to be involved in the disappearance of a small town's children, or the trailer for *The Bye Bye Man,* which tells about an urban legend that haunts the characters if they think of him or say his name. In a similar fashion, the other five trailers did not clearly specify what the main conflict of the movie is, apart from the fact that the characters must face some evil and dangerous force. As a consequence, the trailers ended up being more like montages presenting different events and settings, rather than being a shortened version of the movie, clearly presenting the movie's event in a linear and chronological manner.

4.2.5. Stars and 'star-power'

Contrary to other writing and research on movie trailers, none of the trailers made any reference to the actors appearing in the movie. However, other creators, such as directors and producers, were used as a selling point. This also applies to production companies as three of the trailers referred to Blumhouse, a company behind many recent popular horror movies such as *Annabelle: Creation* and *Get Out.* The only people whose names were included in the trailers were Stephen King, the author of the novel that the movie *It* is based on; Jordan Peele, the writer and director of *Get Out*; M. Night Shyamalan, the writer and director of *Split*; Ridley Scott, the director of *Alien: Covenant* and James Wan, the producer of *Annabelle: Creation.* All of the names above are quite well known even for general audiences. Interestingly, even though *Get Out* was Jordan Peele's directorial debut his name was included in the trailer as he is well known from doing comedy. In addition, the producer James Wan's name was attached to the trailer of *Annabelle: Creation* as he is also a well-known director, responsible for movies such as *Saw, Fast and Furious 7* and *The Conjuring.* Another director who is referred to is David F. Sandberg, who directed *Annabelle: Creation.* However, he is only referred to as 'the director of *Lights Out*'. In a similar fashion, many trailers used the creators' earlier movies as a selling point. For example, the trailer for *Split* lists some other movies done by the director.

One potentially effective way to sell a movie is to rely on the audience's familiarity of, for example actors, stories and characters, as selling some completely new thing is more difficult (Marich 2013: 8). Surprisingly, the four trailers that were made for a sequel or a prequel film, did not strongly use earlier movies of a franchise as a selling point. Even the movies' naming conventions suggest this. For example, *Rings* is the third instalment in the series; *Annabelle: Creation* is part of a film franchise; *Jigsaw* is the eighth *Saw* film and *Alien: Covenant* is part of the *Alien* series. None of the film titles suggest that they are part of a franchise that would require knowledge of the prior movies in order for the viewer to understand the new film (i.e. none of the four movies have a number in their title). The use of a subtitle instead does not indicate that a movie is a sequel as strongly as using a number does. It also seems that the trailers tried to appeal both to fans of the franchises' other films as well as those who are not familiar with the franchises. All four trailers include things that fans of the earlier movies are sure to recognise, such as the Jigsaw character and elaborate traps in *Jigsaw*, the cursed Annabelle doll in *Annabelle: Creation*, the cursed videotape in *Rings* and the xenomorph creature in *Alien: Covenant*. However, at the same time, the trailers provide new audiences with sufficient background information and suggest that the movies are their own independent stories. If the trailers emphasised that a movie is a sequel, for example, this could potentially drive away audiences who are not familiar with the earlier movies. In fact, the only trailer clearly communicating that it is advertising a film belonging to a franchise was *Annabelle: Creation*, as the trailer states: 'Nothing can prepare you for the next chapter in the Conjuring universe'.

5. Conclusion

In this study about contemporary horror movie trailers, the trailers' generic structure was proposed. The structure developed in this study, despite on the surface level being similar to others from previous research and writing, offers a more detailed picture while additionally elaborating on the use of movie trailers' most prominent features, i.e. sound, editing, story, stars and genre.

Out of these features the use of sound was one of the most important ones and one that could differ from trailers for other movie genres as horror trailers hardly used licensed music (or any distinct music). Another common feature was the lack of external narration. Instead, dialogue from the movie was used to present elements of the movies' story directly, even though the overall story was not exposed in detail. Horror trailers' use of stars (or the lack of it), especially actors, was one interesting factor and one that likely differs from other trailers. Instead other people involved with the movie were often referred to. The editing of horror movie trailers was found to be inconsistent as their pace and chronology was not linear but instead often slowed down the trailer's pace. However, all trailers utilised 'fade to black' type of editing and quick stuttering effects at some point. The movies' horror genre was made clear for viewers through editing, sound design and various visual means, even though disturbing or violent aspects were only implied and not shown.

Overall, according to this study and earlier work done on movie trailers, horror movie trailers are unique in several ways when compared to trailer advertising for other movie genres. The trailers within the horror genre were also found to contain many similarities especially in the way they were structured. Still, the group of trailers in this study were not a homogenous whole as there was also some variation between the trailers, especially in the way they utilised music, how much they revealed of the story and how strongly the films' genre was used as a selling point.

As prior research on the subject of movie trailers, especially in genre studies, is extremely limited, this study could provide important information about the subject by helping both consumers and advertisers to read movie trailers differently. This study could also provide information for further analysis of movie trailers and film advertising. As this study is limited to only contemporary theatrical trailers in a single movie genre,

further studies on the topic could expand these findings by focusing on other movie genres and subgenres as well as movie advertising from the past or in other mediums, such as posters or teaser trailers.

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Appendix 1. Most important features of the analysed trailers

Movie	Introduces the horror genre	Sound and music	Editing and rhythm	Story	Stars	Follows the trailer structure
It	After the opening	No distinct music, sounds	Editing to rhythm	Through dialogue	No actors, Writer of the book.	Not entirely (no distinct climax or resolution)
Get Out	After the opening	No distinct music, sounds	Editing to rhythm	Through dialogue	No actors, producer, director/writer	Yes
Split	Immediately	More sounds than music	Editing to rhythm	Through dialogue	No actors, director writer.	Yes
Annabelle: Creation	After the opening	Some music, sounds	Some editing to rhythm	Through dialogue, text	No actors, producer.	Yes
Alien: Covenant	Later in the trailer	Music	Some editing to rhythm	Through dialogue	No actors, director.	Yes
Happy Death Day	Later in the trailer	Licensed music	Some editing to rhythm	Through dialogue, text	No actors, producer.	Yes
Jigsaw	Immediately	Licensed music	Some editing to rhythm	Through dialogue, text	None.	Yes
47 Meters Down	After the opening	More sounds than music	Some editing to rhythm	Through dialogue, text	None.	Yes
Rings	Immediately	More sounds than music	Little use of rhythm	Through dialogue, text	None.	Yes, after the opening
The Bye Bye Man	Immediately	Music	Some editing to rhythm	Through dialogue	No actors, producer.	Yes