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OH, THE HORROR!
AN ETHICAL GUIDEBOOK FOR PSEUDO-EVENTS AND VIRAL HORROR
FILM MARKETING

A Graduate Project
Presented to
the Faculty of the Communication Division
Pepperdine University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
Carson Abigail Hoard

April 2018

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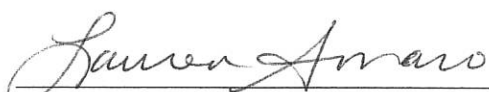
CARSON ABIGAIL HOARD

under the guidance of a faculty committee and approved by its members, has been submitted to and accepted by the graduate faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of


MASTER OF ARTS


April 2018

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Carson Abigail Hoard
April 2018
Dr. Lauren Amaro, Chairperson

ABSTRACT

Hollywood is facing more and more challenges when it comes to theater sales. With the growing use of streaming services, people have more options than ever for consuming entertainment. This is especially evident in younger audiences, as the Millennial generation has one of the lowest rates of theater attendance. At the same time, the media environment has become increasingly cluttered. This has raised the need for creative and non-traditional marketing strategies in order to break through that clutter. Guerilla marketing, pseudo-events, and viral marketing are creative, non-traditional strategies that provide opportunities for consumer engagement, and that create buzz. This study focuses specifically on the use of pseudo-events in viral marketing. While most of the movie industry has been facing a decline, the horror genre has seen growth over the past few years. In using pseudo-events and viral marketing, there are ethical considerations that must be addressed. Martin Buber's I-It, I-Thou philosophy provides an ethical framework that encourages marketers to view target audiences as not just numbers, but as people who possess value. This creates the possibility of a reciprocal relationship, and aids in avoiding exploitation or the perpetuating of stereotypes. In order to examine what practices are likely to lead to success in film marketing, a qualitative research analysis of the marketing techniques used for the top 15 highest grossing horror films from 2007-2017 was conducted, in which five major themes (Prolonging Mystery, Audience Involvement, Immersion, Online Integration, and Creativity in Traditional Outlets), and subsequent subthemes of common practices, were drawn. Two to five best practices were drawn from each sub-theme to inform the formation of a guidebook for communication professionals in the film industry.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

On September 3, 2017, floating red balloons appeared tied to sewer grates around Sydney, Australia. A message written on the street accompanied them: “IT IS CLOSER THAN YOU THINK. #ITMOVIE IN CINEMAS SEPTEMBER 7” (Whitehead, 2017). The scene went viral on Twitter, with many users taking to the social media platform to post pictures and make comments about the film. A few weeks after its theater release, the movie became the highest grossing horror film of all time (Nolfi, 2017). This promotional effort, done to create buzz for the premiere of the 2017 *IT* movie, provides an example of the creative tactics being used to promote modern films. Several films, specifically within the horror genre, have employed non-traditional tactics over the years in order to market their films on a low budget (Fast Company, 2013; Dobeles, Toleman, & Beverland, 2005). These techniques, birthed out of age-old publicity strategies to be discussed in the literature review, have the ability to break through media clutter and provide a less expensive way to turn even low budget films into Hollywood blockbusters.

Though *IT* experienced success at the box office, many films this year did not fare as well. In fact, movie theater ticket sales have been declining, with the summer of 2017 sales showing the lowest numbers since 1992 (Faughnder, 2017). In August 2017, AMC Entertainment, Regal Entertainment Group, Cinemark, and IMAX all experienced a fall in shares, with AMC taking the largest hit (Snider, 2017). Several factors affect the decline in movie audiences. These include rising ticket prices, aging franchises, sequels, film quality, and negative Rotten Tomatoes reviews. One of the greater long-term

influences on the film industry is the growing use of streaming services (Faughnder, 2017).

The public has more entertainment options than ever, giving them several platforms on which they can consume media and discuss their opinions with their network (Faughnder, 2017). More and more consumers are turning to the Internet for entertainment. In fact, in 2017, consumers spent an estimated \$11.9 billion on streaming and on-demand digital movie services (Snider, 2017). According to a recent eMarketer study (2017), more people use online streaming services than own cable subscriptions. This data includes both Millennials and non-Millennials. Because of these streaming services, many people are waiting to watch films until they are released on-demand, and “people are only going to see movies they think they have to see in theaters” (Faughnder, 2017). These challenges require adaptations within the industry and enhanced marketing efforts in order to reach consumers.

The film industry relies heavily on marketing efforts to draw the public into movie theaters (Thompson, 2016). In today’s heavily saturated mass media environment, creativity is becoming increasingly more important in order to capture the public’s attention (Johnson, 2014). There is a need for marketers to understand how to engage consumers and drive them to theaters, while still being economically conscious. However, adopting more creative, out-of-the-box techniques comes with the need for ethical considerations. Because of this, Martin Buber’s ethical I-It, I-Thou philosophy was used as a central ethical framework guide for research and project construction. The following paper will give a description of emerging creative marketing practices and

technologies within the horror film genre, evaluate what market is important to target, and explain the subsequent research and guidebook that will be constructed to offer guidance in navigating the creation of successful and engaging marketing messages for films. This project seeks to illustrate how pseudo-events can be redeemed and used ethically by marketers.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

Emergence of Publicity

The field of Public Relations has a long and ever-evolving history. Throughout this history, and especially during its beginnings, publicity was widely used to promote the entertainment industry and all varieties of products. In discussing the emergence and effects of publicity, it is most useful to start by looking at the life and career of showman, P.T. Barnum.

P.T. Barnum was notably one of the greatest masters of publicity in history. Barnum's career took off in 1835 with his exhibition of Joice Heth, who he described as the World's Oldest Woman. Joice Heth was George Washington's nurse, and Barnum taught her to speak freely about taking care of Washington, as part of the exhibit. This exhibit was widely promoted and grossed about \$1,500 per week (Cutlip, 1995). Thus began, "the age of showmanship" (p. 171). He eventually bought a building and opened Barnum's American Museum in it, where he displayed strange and extravagant exhibits which people would come from all over the world to see. Barnum searched the world looking for new oddities to draw people to his museum.

He became known as "the Prince of Humbugs", as he often used misinformation to make his displays seem more interesting when he did not have a new, real oddity to display. (Fleming, 2009, p. 53). Although people often arrived at the museum to discover they had been duped, Barnum claimed that most patrons did not mind because they "liked being on the receiving end of a practical joke" (p. 54). Barnum did not have qualms about

using deception to draw in audiences, because he claimed that the deceptions were “used as advertisements to draw attraction to the museum” (p. 54). He used dramatized publicity to draw people in for one fake exhibit, but once they arrived, they had the opportunity to marvel at the real fascinations on display. As Barnum stated, “anyone humbugged by me gets their money’s worth” (p. 54).

Barnum was able to take an exhibit with which someone else failed to find success, and using his publicity talents, turn it into a phenomenon. An example of this was the “mermaid” on display at The American Museum. This item, discovered by sea captain Samuel Eades, was a carcass that appeared to have the tail of a fish and body of a human. Captain Eades had attempted an unsuccessful European tour with the “mermaid,” and when he died, Barnum bought the carcass and put it on display in New York. Using advertisements that pictured beautiful mermaids coming out of the sea and circulating fake reports about the mermaids from “Dr. Griffin,” a so-called world traveler, Barnum was able to stir up a feverish fascination for the exhibit, across the country (Fleming, 2009, p. 56-57). To get the most out of his promotions, Barnum often utilized press agents. Throughout his many ventures, Barnum’s press agents helped him reach his goals of publicity. The press agents were often subject to wide criticism for stretching the truth, but they always received publicity (Cutlip, 1995).

Largely inspired by Barnum’s practices, press agency became a widely utilized tool in the nineteenth century, mainly within the entertainment industry. This practice made popular many legends, such as Buffalo Bill. “Buffalo Bill” Cody, the originator of

the famous Wild West Show in the late nineteenth century, owed his legendary status to the dramatized, and largely fabricated, stories circulated by press agents (Cutlip, 1995).

In line with the promotional practices of the age, pseudo-events grew as a popular marketing tactic in the nineteenth century. A pseudo-event can be described as a “staged event as a means of promoting products” (Cutlip, 1995, p. 185). For example, in 1892, the company that manufactured Sapolio Soap sent a 14-foot sailing sloop to Spain in order to observe the fourth centennial of Columbus’ voyages. However, the primary goal of this stunt was to sell soap. Additionally, many manufacturers originally used racing as a tactic to sell cars (Cutlip, 1995). These strategies are still utilized in public relations practices today.

The latter half of the nineteenth century gave rise to some of the more modern public relations practices currently in use. This is when public relations (PR) became widely recognized and established as a professional field. Large corporations began to utilize PR practices for the advancement of their business, to handle public affairs, and to manage issues that arose (Cutlip, 1995). Over time, the industry has grown and changed in order to adapt to changing technologies and culture. The turn of the twenty-first century brought a continual introduction of new technologies that shifted modern culture, and, in turn, has forced communications professionals to find ways to engage with new technology in order to most effectively reach the public.

Guerrilla Marketing, Viral Marketing, and Pseudo-Events

In 2014, the average person was exposed to over 5,000 advertisements or brand exposures per day. This number has likely gone up over the past few years. A human

cannot absorb, or engage with, all of the messages they encounter every day. This makes finding how to best engage with consumers and grab their attention increasingly important (Johnson, 2014). Marketers are constantly looking at how to most effectively engage with the public, especially as technology has shifted the way consumers interact with persuasive messages. For this reason, guerrilla marketing tactics are often used. Guerrilla marketing is “an unconventional way of performing marketing activities on a very low budget” (Guerrilla marketing, n.d.). These tactics often require less economic investment, but require an investment of creativity, time, and knowledge (Guerrilla marketing, n.d.).

Guerrilla strategies have grown increasingly in popularity since their conceptual formation, and have been found to have significant impacts on buying behavior (Nawaz, et al., 2014). The concept gained popularity in the corporate world when Levinson (1984) released a book outlining guerrilla tactics. Businesses began adopting the practices but used them more as a tool to weaken their competition (Hutter & Hoffman, 2011). Over time, that goal has shifted away from weakening the competition to more of a focus on gaining new customers (Solomon et al., 2009). There are several facets of marketing that fall into, or branch out of guerrilla marketing, including buzz marketing and the use of pseudo-events (Nawaz, 2014). Though changing technology may have forced marketers to discover new strategies, technologies like social media networks have opened up a new opportunity for companies to interact with consumers.

The invention of social media and the smartphone have changed how people communicate. Social media can be defined as:

a set of mobile and web-based platforms built on Web 2.0 technologies, and allowing users at the micro-, meso-, and macro-levels to share and geo-tag user generated content, to collaborate, and to build networks and communities, with the possibility of reaching and involving large audiences (Ouardi, M., Ouardi, A., Segers, & Hendericks, 2014).

These online platforms are mainly used for individuals to interact with each other, but they also hold the potential for companies to interact with the public. Social media gives organizations the opportunity to directly engage with customers about their products in order to build and maintain relationships (Ott, Vafeiadis, Kumble, & Waddell, 2016). Social media is often integrated into marketing campaigns not only to interact with consumers, but in an attempt to have a message “go viral” as well. This is often done through creating and posting videos surrounding an event, such as flash mobs, which will be further discussed below.

Viral marketing is “any strategy that encourages individuals to pass on a marketing message to others, creating the potential for exponential growth in the message's exposure and influence” (Wilson, 2000, p. 1). Though it often involves the use of social media, viral marketing is different than social media marketing. Viral marketing allows a brand a greater level of control of the messages being shared, while social marketing requires a brand to relinquish that control. In a viral marketing campaign, a marketer can largely control what platforms the messages will appear on, and it is generally easier to track (Glassman, 2011). The use of viral marketing outside of a social media context is clearly evidenced in *The Blair Witch Project* marketing campaign, as it

included both offline and online elements. Because the film was released in the nineties, social media was not used. This example will be further analyzed below.

Humans have a fundamental desire to be trendy and in the know, and people like to share things with their extended social networks. Viral marketing capitalizes on these characteristics. Viral marketing often uses viral videos, guerilla campaigns, and community engagement in order to raise awareness and incite buzz, and it has become a popular branch of guerrilla marketing (Ferguson, 2008).

To achieve success in viral marketing, messages must have viral qualities. In other words, the message must be something that interests a person so much that he or she is willing to, and wants to, share it with other people. Messages should be creative in order to ignite and maintain the receiver's curiosity (Camarero & San Jose, 2011). Messages must be engaging. Messages that engage the imagination, cause intrigue, are targeted well, use technologies, and are connected to a product that is highly visible will hold viral qualities (Dobele, Toleman, & Beverland, 2005).

Another major aspect to viral marketing is word of mouth (WOM). WOM and viral marketing are not one and the same, but they coincide. If viral marketing is the cause, then positive WOM is the effect. In order for a viral marketing campaign to have success, a message must be picked up and shared by the public. WOM marketing essentially makes the consumer into the marketer. This strategy requires customers to be compelled to become brand advocates, making it imperative that the customer experience is positive and memorable (Ferguson, 2008). Marketers have begun to adapt word-of-mouth practices in order to build loyal customer relationships instead of relying on

buying sponsorships or other more traditional methods (Ferguson, 2008). So while viral marketing needs WOM, WOM may not necessarily be viral.

A strategy similar to WOM is buzz marketing. Buzz marketing relies heavily on word of mouth communication for the spread of information and interest around a brand. This strategy seeks to reach people who are influential in their social circles, so that instead of coming from a company, the marketing message comes from “your coolest friend” (Notarantonio & Quigley, 2009, p. 2). As opposed to using a paid influencer, buzz and WOM strategies utilize people within an individual’s personal network. For example, a person’s neighbor may tell him or her that a certain farmer’s grapes were sweeter than another’s. That person may take that recommendation, or pass it along to another person, even without trying the grapes personally, because he or she trusts the opinion of the neighbor. “Neighbors” are social influencers not because they simply refer a product, but because they convince other people to take action based on their recommendation. This process replicates each time a person’s recommendation is passed on (Glassman, 2011). Influencers can typically be identified by their desire to try new things, their enjoyment in sharing stories with their network of friends, and being intrinsically motivated. Because of these traits, they are always looking for products or stories to share with their network (Stelzner, 2015). Network influencers are significant in perpetuating viral and WOM messages.

The success of the buzz approach relies on building a situation where support will be high for a product, motivating consumers to not only buy the product, but to essentially do product promotion themselves by telling those in their social circle about it

(Notarantonio & Quigley, 2009). This occurs, for example, when a person sees a new movie, takes a picture with the movie's promotional theater standee or poster, and posts it online, or even simply shows it to a friend with a message encouraging others to see the film. In doing this, the person has contributed in creating "buzz" for the film within his or her social network. In their study on the effectiveness of buzz marketing, Notarantonio & Quigley found that buzz approaches are not proven to have more of an effect on purchase intention. However, the buzz approach was proven to be more influential than a more traditional approach, which shows that buzz marketing is perceived as more credible, at least initially. This is a strategy that is utilized in lieu of spending thousands, or even millions, of dollars on an advertising campaign (Notarantonio & Quigley, 2009).

This strategy is advantageous for multiple reasons. It is relatively inexpensive, the message may be viewed more favorably when it comes from a friendly source, and those forwarding the message are likely to know which people in their network will be most interested in the content. This last advantage is especially useful in ensuring that viral messages are targeted to the right audience (Dobele, Toleman, & Beverland, 2005).

Viral marketing and WOM strategies have been implemented by numerous major organizations and have been proven especially successful within the film industry. For example, by utilizing word-of-mouth marketing, the creators of *The Blair Witch Project* were able to create sizable buzz surrounding the film before it was released. With a small promotional budget, the film's creators generated buzz by pushing the idea that the film was a true story about student filmmakers who disappeared in the woods. A website was created with so-called evidence about the case such as police reports and photographs.

This story went viral, and before the film was even released, over twenty fan websites and online chat rooms were inspired by the film. With viral marketing, the \$30,000 film turned into a \$150 million blockbuster (Dobele, Toleman, & Beverland, 2005).

One particular viral pseudo-event trend that arose in the early 2000s was the use of flash mobs. The very first flash mob on record happened in 2003 in New York City. An individual who had no affiliation with a brand organized this, seeking to make a statement (Grant, 2016). From that event, flash mobs became a popular viral trend. However, the first branded, or sponsored, flash mob did not occur until T-Mobile produced a flash mob at the Liverpool Train Station in London in 2009. As of 2016, 137 branded flash mobs have been conducted by 120 unique organizations (Grant, 2016).

Brands may use flash mobs in order to achieve a few different goals: to increase brand recognition, to use the event like an in-real-life television commercial, and for a video of the flash mob to go viral on social media (Green, 2013). The last aspect is likely what perpetuated flash mobs' popularity. They provide useful and engaging content for viral marketers. Flash mobs reached their peak in 2010 and have now become a more outdated form of guerilla marketing. However, in their prime, flash mobs proved successful in creating buzz for several companies and products (Green, 2013).

Flash mobs are useful to create buzz around a company or product. Viewers are not able to cognitively decipher the arguments in the message, if there are any arguments presented, but they can create affective value. Through the integration of viral marketing, branded flash mobs hold the ability to impact brand relationships (Grant, 2016). Flash mobs are an out-of-the-box tactic that catches people's attention, which is likely why

videos of them often go viral. Though these tactics are useful, it is important to continually implement variety and creativity. Grant (2016) asserts the possibility that tactics like branded flash mobs could lessen in efficacy once the idea becomes too familiar with the public. In order to prevent burnout, variations and new concepts need to be created to continue to appeal to consumers.

Both guerrilla and viral marketing approaches hold distinct value as non-traditional techniques, and some may feel the need to choose one over the other. However, integrating the two together can prove to be a successful way to create a creative and wide-reaching campaign. Both strategies can be economical and engage consumers in personal ways. Successful viral marketing campaigns often take a more unique, non-traditional approach by utilizing guerrilla tactics (LaCour, 2012). In using an integrated approach, marketers can use pseudo-events to fuel their viral marketing by either filming the event and posting online for people to share, or by encouraging people who personally encounter the pseudo-event to post about it online. Though WOM marketing has not been proven to be more effective on influencing purchase intention, an integrated approach can bring different elements to make up for the shortfalls in each technique. Integrated marketing campaigns (IMC) utilize multiple communication disciplines in order to form a campaign that delivers “a planned series of consistent, relevant, meaningful brand messages to target audiences” (Juska, 2018, p. 21). The goal of IMC campaigns is to “combine effective creative concepts with efficient media delivery methods” (p. 22). An integrated approach, especially when marketing a new product to consumers, is way to use multiple platforms to reach a wide number of people

in creative and memorable ways. The proposed research will evaluate multiple aspects of the marketing campaigns for a sample of films and pay special attention to the use of pseudo-events in viral marketing. The resulting guidebook will propose the utilization of IMC techniques. Specifically, this would include the integration of public relations, pseudo-events, guerilla marketing tactics, and viral marketing.

In the modern media environment and economic climate, an integrated marketing campaign utilizing guerrilla marketing, viral marketing, and pseudo-events holds almost limitless possibilities for marketers. The strategies discussed in this section hold the potential for increased awareness or buzz around a product and an increased connection or interaction with consumers, especially when marketing a new film.

Film Industry & Horror

The film industry is a multi-billion dollar industry. In fact, in 2016, the film industry grossed \$38.6 billion globally and \$11.4 billion in the U.S./Canada (MPAA, 2016). In order to make those numbers at the box office, filmmakers themselves often invest large sums of money in advertising and marketing costs. Filmmakers spend approximately 60 cents per dollar made at the box office, on advertising. This means that it costs about \$60 million to make \$100 million. Filmmakers rely heavily on outside entities such as marketing, advertising, investors, and others in order to get their films on the big screen (Thompson, 2016). These factors determine if and how the movie will make it there. Because of the high risk and large investments involved, making films is like “professional gambling” (Satchel, 2017, p. 63).

A current growing niche in the film industry is the horror genre. The year 2017 was the highest grossing year for horror films ever (Epstein, 2017). The past few years have shown a rise in the profitability and popularity of horror films, and some have called the present time the “golden age” for horror. Hollywood relies on horror movies as a core source of income, as they typically bring in large numbers at the box office, but are usually made on small budget (Meslow, 2017); even if the film flops at the box office, it will most likely still make a profit (Lev-Ram, 2016).

Horror films are significant in the film industry because of their typically high return on investment (ROI). Through 1997-2016, approximately 53% of horror films were likely to have turned a profit, which is higher than the industry average across all genres. In the best performing years, 80% of horror films were likely to have turned a profit. Found footage films, such as *Paranormal Activity*, are on average the most profitable type of horror film, with monster movies being the lowest (Follows, 2017). Horror films have had the best ROI of all genres over the past years, as thirteen of the top thirty films by ROI since 2010 are horror films. Though action and drama blockbusters typically bring in larger dollar payoffs overall, horror films still tend to produce a larger ROI. For example, *Jurassic World* made \$1.6 billion in profit worldwide, with an ROI of about 533%. Contrarily, *Paranormal Activity 2* made \$236 million but had an ROI of 2,510% (Bui, 2015).

The success of the film industry relies heavily on its frequent moviegoers. As is the case in many trades, though smaller in number, frequent purchasers make up the bulk of the total market share (Thompson, 2016). These frequent goers are not only

enthusiastic about movies, but tend to be early-adopters or technology enthusiasts as well. Frequent moviegoers generally own more technology, such as smartphones and other similar technology as compared to the general population. In fact, more than 79% of frequent moviegoers in 2016 said they own at least four different types of technological products (MPAA, 2016).

Even though the film industry still brings in billions of dollars annually, Hollywood has been facing a dilemma in recent years when it comes to attendance by younger generations. Specifically, the Millennial generation has shown low numbers in annual movie attendance. In 2016, 18-24 year olds went to the movies an average of 6.5 times over the year, which showed the largest growth from the previous year of any age group (MPAA, 2016). This is hopeful news for those in the movie industry. However, that same age group is lower in overall movie attendance than most other age segments (Thompson, 2016). As this Millennial age group is significant when it comes to buying power and sheer size, it is important that movie marketers begin to evaluate how they can most effectively reach this demographic.

Film marketers are spending more and more money in order to entice people into theaters. However, there have been several cases (e.g. *Blair Witch Project*) where movies with miniscule budgets turned into million dollar blockbusters, largely due to their marketing tactics. This proves that huge budgets aren't always necessary for box office success. Thoughtful strategy can lead to huge success on a small dime. Horror films provide the opportunity for significant ROI, with low investment. Based on the statistics discussed above, investing in horror is “the best deal in Hollywood” (Bui, 2015). This

research project will evaluate how guerrilla and viral marketing can be utilized to achieve blockbuster success in creative and inexpensive ways, and offer guidelines on how to potentially reach the Millennial generation.

Millennials

The Millennial generation includes individuals born between 1981-1997. Millennials have surpassed Baby Boomers as the nation's largest living generation, as they now number 75.4 million, whereas Baby Boomers number 74.9 million (Andrews, 2016). They currently make up about 25% of the United States population (Who are Millennials, n.d.). This growth has continued partially due to young immigrants, and the generation is projected to see continued growth through 2036 due to immigration (Fry, 2016). One of the marked characteristics of the Millennial generation is diversity. Millennials make up 27% of the minority population, 38% of voting age minorities, and 43% of working age minorities. Millennials are 55.8% white and almost 30% new minorities, which include Hispanic, Asian, and two or more races (Frey, 2016). This generation is not only the largest and most diverse generation in history, but they hold significant buyer power as well. Millennials make up 21% of consumer discretionary purchases. This percentage is estimated to translate to upwards of a trillion dollars in direct buying power, and this has a large influence on older generations (Who are Millennials, n.d.).

There is diversity within Millennial film preference and viewing behavior as well. The gender differences in theater movie viewing are fairly consistent throughout the generation's age range. However, the gap between men's and women's average tickets

per visit goes up as they age, likely because women are more likely to be taking their children to the movies (Blanchet-Aissaoui, 2016). Millennials are more likely to watch horror movies, urban movies, young-adult comedies, and tentpole films (i.e. “a huge film with a huge budget,” such as superhero films). However, these preferences tend to change as Millennials get older. Generally, their interest in horror decreases and their interest in animation seems to increase as they age (Donovan, 2016). In fact, a Millennial under the age of 25 is twice as likely to have seen a horror film compared to a Millennial over the age of thirty (Blanchet-Aissaoui, 2016). This is important information for creators of horror films, as there is diversity in preference within the generation, and there seems to be a need to keep interest in the genre by Millennials, because of the evidence that their horror viewing and interest declines as they age.

Millennials have piqued the interest of marketers not only because of this buying power, but also because of the elusiveness in how to reach the generation. It is important to understand that “Millennials are buying, they’re just buying differently” (Spenner, 2014). Millennials place high importance on individualization and feelings of connectedness over more traditional, straightforward ads (Ehlers, 2017). Brands that can hone in on this and make consumers feel like the company understands them on a personal level will be able to develop the loyalty that creates brand dominance (Millennial Mindset, 2016).

Those in the Millennial Generation also place value in interactivity and being a part of the customer experience (Millennial Mindset, 2016). A major way in which they express this, is through social media. In fact, 89% of Americans aged 18-29 years old use

social media (USC Dornsife, n.d.). When online, Millennials are active in creating and engaging with content. In fact, 46% of Millennials post original photos or videos online, 40% want to participate in the co-creation of products and brands, and 80% want brands to entertain them. These characteristics have made the generation known for being content creators and users (Who are Millennials, n.d.). Brands that can help customers find fulfillment through customized experiences are likely to find success (Millennial Mindset, 2016).

Millennials are also known as the generation who cares most about brands that “stand for more than their bottom line” (Millennial Mindset, 2016). They are interested in causes, and they look for brands that are doing good for society. In fact, 50% of Millennials are more willing to make a purchase if they know their purchase will be going towards supporting a cause (Who are Millennials, n.d.). Understanding this characteristic of the generation is useful for marketers and communications professionals, as they can utilize the opportunity to implement publicity stunts or guerrilla tactics that connect the organization to a greater cause.

For example, since the first *Saw* film’s release, the *Saw* movie franchise has conducted Halloween blood drives before the release of each new sequel. Leading up to the release of *Jigsaw* in October 2017, the franchise conducted the drive once again in 22 cities across the United States. Participants who gave blood received a free movie ticket to see *Jigsaw*. According to jigsawblooddrive.com, the official website for the event, 120,000 pints of blood have been donated and 360,000 lives have been saved through the past five blood drives. This is the type of strategy that not only provides an interesting

way to get consumers to interact with a brand, but to engage in a greater purpose as well, which is consistent with Millennial attitudes toward brands.

Ultimately, in order to convert Millennial observers into consumers, it is imperative to understand what they want and how to engage with them. Millennial researcher, Katie Elfering, once stated:

First, understand and speak to the values that drive [Millennials] – happiness, passion, diversity, sharing and discovery. Second, understand their realistic lifestyles and experiences and find ways to amplify their reality. And, finally, make sure they feel informed and involved, not just marketed to (Spenner, 2014).

Given these characteristics, reaching Millennials requires a non-traditional approach. It is imperative that marketing messages feel interactive and allow consumers to engage and connect with the brand. Creativity and out-of-the-box approaches are likely to yield more successful results with the Millennial Generation.

Theoretical Foundation

The study of persuasion examines how communication can be used intentionally to influence society. This influence involves “creating, changing, or reinforcing the cognitions, affective states, or overt behaviors of another person” (Miller & Levine, 2010, p. 245). The major concepts connected to persuasion are attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. Attitudes are “evaluative dispositions” towards certain objects, persons, or ideas; they can be viewed as “learned predispositions to respond” and can potentially, though not always, give an indication for future actions (Werder, 2009). A belief is an evaluation that

something “is or is not the case” (Miller & Levine, 2010). Beliefs differ from attitudes in that attitudes merely offer a person’s disposition towards something, but beliefs involve deeper expressions of “true-false” and “exist-does-not-exist.” Finally, behavior denotes evident, recognizable action (Miller & Levine, 2010). A change in behavior is often the final goal of persuasive efforts. Though the extent to which attitudes can serve as accurate predictors of behavior is debated, multiple studies have found that there is a link between attitudes and subsequent actions.

According to Hovland and his associates from Yale University, attitudes aid in guiding behavior. The research conducted by Hovland suggested that a change in attitude is most likely to occur when a source is viewed as “credible, likeable, attractive, and similar to their audience.” The group also proposed that the persuasive message must “gain attention, be comprehended, be accepted, be retained, and be acted upon,” and successful persuasion is more probable when there are incentives associated with each step (Seiter, 2009). Crano and Prislin (2006) determine that attitude-behavior consistency is closely linked with self-interest. This concept assumes that attitudes that are more closely tied to a person’s self are more likely to produce attitude-consistent behaviors.

In seeking to know how and what influences a person’s behaviors, it is important to understand how people process not only messages, but also the world around them. Public opinion theory and the concept of pseudo-environments lend insight into this. Lippmann’s Public Opinion Theory (1922) asserts that an individual’s opinions can differ from those expressed in the outside world. Media and the presentation of information can influence public opinion. Lippmann analyzes propaganda, and claims that in order for it

to be successful, there must be a barrier between the public and the reality of an event. With this barrier, the media has the ability to manipulate the public by presenting information in a specific way (Lippmann, 1922). According to this theory, public opinion is highly influenced by pseudo-environments which impact the way individuals perceive reality and process information.

As defined by Lippmann (1922), a pseudo-environment is “the insertion between man and his environment” (p. 4). Essentially, people create subjective pseudo-environments that are based on their own mental image of the world. There are fictions in every person’s pseudo-environments. People “live in the same world, but they think and feel in different ones” (p. 6). In social life, people adjust to their real environments through fictions. These fictions are not lies, but are representations of the environment made by the person. This helps a person manage the complexities of the real environment. Works of fictions may often have levels of reliability. In this case, fiction is not misleading. It could be assumed that much of what each person does is based on pictures he or she has created, or has been given, and is not based on direct knowledge. A person’s interior representations of the world are determining factors in feeling and action (Lippmann, 1922). For instance, if a child is raised in a home with intimidating parents, he or she may learn to grasp control through intimidation.

From these fictions, new stereotypes emerge and existing stereotypes flourish. Stereotypes are created and solidified based on messages that are spread in society about different types of people. According to Lippmann, “for the most part we do not first see, and then define, we define first and then see”, and “we are told about the world before we

see it” (p. 81, 90). To simplify the process of forming opinions, people often adapt the stereotypes that have already been defined by popular culture (Lippmann, 1922).

Stereotypes are not only defined by the culture, but are also perpetuated through media framing. Framing is “a central organizing idea or story line that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events, weaving a connection among them” (Gamson & Modigliani, 1987, p. 143). Media professionals use this as a way to tell stories and shape how audiences receive messages (Satchel, 2017).

This technique is widely used by journalists, but it is also utilized in entertainment. Filmmakers use frames to formulate stories according to norms that will attract an audience. It is becoming increasingly common for filmmakers to consult with psychological, sociological, and media specialists to help them frame content that will hold the greatest appeal among their intended audience (Satchel, 2017). This begins to play into the distorted pseudo-environments that people hold in their minds (Lippmann, 1922; Satchel, 2017). Marketers study demographics and psychographics to learn how to construct messages that contain the language and meaning that will attract target audiences. Entertainment media uses communication and cultural constructs to reach the widest audience possible, so as to increase the desirability for ad placements and increase profits. When a new movie is marketed, it involves a “complex multiplatform promotional, advertising, and marketing plan that revolves around framing” (Satchel, 2017, p. 28).

An example of this type of framing-based marketing includes the pseudo-event. Daniel Boorstin (1992) coined the term pseudo-event in his work *The Image: A guide to*

Pseudo-Events in America. Pseudo-events are events that are synthetic and calculated in order to stir up sensation or publicity. Boorstin gives four characteristics of a pseudo-event. First, it must be planned out, not spontaneous. Second, it is primarily for the purpose of being reported on or reproduced. Third, the event's relation to the underlying reality of the situation is unclear. Fourth, pseudo-events are normally self-fulfilling prophecies. For example, if a hotel puts on an event and refers to the institution as prestigious, then they make the hotel seem prestigious in the minds of the public.

The evolution and development of news media was heavily influential in the growth of pseudo-events. Press conferences changed the dynamic of the news media, especially when President Kennedy began to broadcast live press conferences. This made newscasters less important in relaying the President's message to the public. However, people then began to turn to political commentators to hear interpretations of the conferences, allowing for commentators to take on more dramatic appeals as interpreters of the news, as opposed to their more traditional roles. This sparked journalists to create or rely on pseudo-events for more engaging material, and even adopt pseudo-event characteristics to their programs (Boorstin, 1992).

Sometimes a public official can make news by simply diverting from his or her planned script. President Kennedy also spoke extemporaneously during the course of a scripted speech as a pseudo-event to draw public interest. This set a precedent for other public officials to do the same, and more and more dramatic elements have been added to news events over the years (Boorstin, 1992). Successful politicians have been historically proficient at using pseudo-events. President Franklin D. Roosevelt often used news-

making techniques and knew how to shape the stories for his own purposes. Roosevelt developed the fireside chats and turned Presidential press conferences from a mundane ritual to a national custom, which future presidents continue to follow. The pressures of time and the need to produce content to fill the media cause Washington correspondents to use interviews and other methods for making pseudo-events in aggressive and different ways. The news media has been influential in the creation and growth of pseudo-events, and, because of their ability to stir up buzz, marketers and publicists across varying industries have adapted these techniques (Boorstin, 1992).

Pseudo-events provide unique opportunities for marketers, especially film marketers. These events are useful in creating buzz surrounding a new film. To construct and implement pseudo-events successfully, it is important to understand the psychology and communication of persuasion. The Elaboration Likelihood Model, and the Uses and Gratifications Theory provide insight into individuals' processes of persuasion.

Pseudo-events and Persuasion

Successful use of pseudo-events and viral marketing includes messages that resonate with and engage the audience. In order to construct engaging messages, it is imperative to narrow the focus from how individuals engage with their environments to how individuals process persuasive messages. The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) lends useful insight into how individuals may process messages.

Elaboration is the amount of thinking relevant to a message that the receiver engages in when processing a persuasive message (Petty, Brinol, Teeny, & Horcajo, 2017). The ELM posits that attitudes can be formed or changed based on either high or

low degrees of thinking (Schumann et al., 2012, p.52). Attitudes are an individual's perceptions of issues, objects, and people (Petty, Heesacker, & Hughes, 1997). They are regarded as important because they are thought to influence behavior. Other factors affecting behavior include perceptions of attitudes of others, past behaviors, and competence. Though seemingly different, these factors are still related to attitudes (p. 108). The ELM focuses on the concept that people desire to form the right attitudes after they have been subjected to a persuasive attempt (Petty, Kasmer, Haugtvedt, & Cacioppo, 1987, p. 233). Because an individual's attitudes are so highly involved in persuasion and its resulting behavior, this framework seeks to discover how and what cognitive processes typically make an impact in persuasion.

In the ELM, there are two routes to persuasion-central and peripheral routes. In the central route, individuals with a high need for cognition (NFC), or elaboration, pay closer attention to argument construction and credibility. In the peripheral route, an individual processes a message through cues that are less detailed, such as entertaining aspects of the message (Cacioppo & Petty, 1984). When encountering a persuasive message, the cognitive processes that individuals devote will vary depending on their ability or motivation. Those with high motivation or ability will process messages using a central route. Those with low motivation or ability will rely on peripheral cues to process arguments (Hallahan, 2008).

When it comes to pseudo-events, the ELM cues may have differing interactions depending on how the recipient is encountering the message. When encountering a pseudo-event, a person's processing would likely first fall into the peripheral route

because it is not at the center of the person's attention. However, because the event is out of the ordinary, it may spark curiosity, and then force the person to use central processing to understand the message, and why they are encountering it. On the other hand, a person encountering a pseudo-event being shared second-hand online is more likely to use just a peripheral route to persuasion because they did not encounter the event in its original environment. A person may enjoy what they see and choose to share it, but their processing would fall more into the peripheral route, as it is more normal to see something entertaining or creative online.

Different variables can also have different effects on persuasion, depending on where the individual falls in the elaboration continuum. In individuals engaging with low thinking processes, variables like source traits, message length, and the recipient's mood when receiving the message can impact persuasion. In fact, in both high and low thinking processes, mood can have a major impact on how an individual processes and responds to a message (Petty, Brinol, Teeny, & Horcajo, 2017). There is evidence that consumers' "choices can be based as much on affective-emotional factors as on rational-factual inputs" (Holbrook & O'Shaughnessy, 1984, p. 47). It could be argued that putting people in a good mood could enhance the likelihood of persuasion.

Another factor that can raise the likelihood of persuasion is the personal relevance of the message to the recipient. When a message connects to an individual's values, goals, and sense of self, then they are more likely to be interested in, and persuaded by, the message (Petty, Brinol, Teeny, & Horcajo, 2017). In addition, a person's thoughts, and his or her confidence about those thoughts, can affect persuasion. When a person is

more confident about his or her thoughts about a message or product, then the person is more likely to use those thoughts in evaluating the product, thus leading to more favorable beliefs about a product. This thought process is what typically translates thoughts into action (Petty, Brinol, Teeny, & Horcajo, 2017). Increasing favorable thoughts increases persuasion, while negative thoughts inhibit persuasion.

Advertisers may utilize central route message elements in order to increase argument quality and credibility, which has been shown to raise the chances of persuasion. However, the effectiveness of peripheral cues should not be neglected, as even in high involvement conditions, these message cues often have an impact on ad perceptions, attitudes, and intentions (Lord, Lee, & Sauer, 1995). High elaboration is not always necessary for strong attitude formation, especially in those who see personality as fixed traits, as opposed to those who believe personality traits to be more malleable (Kwon & Nayakankuppam, 2015). All types of cognitive processes and personalities should be taken into consideration in a marketing campaign. Target audiences are likely to include individuals with varying cognitive processes (Hallahan, 2008). Communications professionals would be well advised to consider including different messages in a campaign that would appeal to both high and low-need for cognition individuals. This approach would raise the likelihood that, as a whole, the campaign would effectively persuade and engage with more of the target audience.

The platform on which the message is observed also holds significance. For example, media provides different functions for different individuals. Entertainment, like sports, entertainment news, and television shows, can fulfill excitement or escape needs,

which are different than the cognitive needs of high-need for cognition individuals. Those with a low NFC primarily tend to use media for entertainment and escape (Hallahan, 2008). Because the platform on which a message is consumed can have a significant effect on persuasion, it is important to understand why a person may use certain media platforms. The Uses and Gratifications (U&G) theory seeks to understand what drives people to use different media platforms.

The Uses and Gratifications theoretical approach contends that individuals use mass media in order to satisfy different needs. U&G was formed in the 1940s and gained popularity in the late 1950s and early 1960s after the invention of television introduced the public to more options for media consumption (Blumler, 1979). In the beginning of the formation of U&G theory, researcher, Herta Hertzog, conducted interviews with viewers of soap operas and determined that viewers got three types of gratification from this entertainment: emotional, wishful thinking, and learning. U&G also became popular for analyzing audiences in political realms and for research on how people view and use mass media (David, 2016).

Today, U&G holds even more significance, as emerging technologies provide more and more outlets for the public's consumption of media. Modern research has used this theory in order to evaluate how the Internet is used. The core assumption posited in U&G is that audiences are active, and they are purposely selective, guided by goals, and motivated to satisfy social and psychological needs. These U&G assumptions are arguably best applicable in the context of the Internet and similar technologies (Weiyan, 2015). The Internet and social media sites have introduced a two-way communication

model that provides vast opportunity for more research and a wide variety of motivations for users (David, 2016). Research has shown that people often use the Internet for social gratification. Thus, communicative functions are of high value to consumers (Stafford, Stafford & Schkade, 2004). Social media users are often motivated by differing factors, such as “a need to vent negative feelings, recognition, and cognitive needs” (David, 2016).

Some of the other main needs people use the Internet to fulfill are information seeking, social network interaction, entertainment, to relax, and to incite positive emotions. U&G can play a major role in viral marketing, as consumers will typically share messages on social networks because they believe others might enjoy them, which satisfies their need for social interaction, especially if others then share that message in their own social network (Alhabash & McAlister, 2014). Sharing a viral message on a social media site would most often fall into the networking, entertainment, relaxation, or positive emotion categories. Having an understanding of this theory, its assumptions, and why people may use different media platforms can provide significant insight for the creation of messages that will hold viral potential. U&G, along with the ELM, provides deeper understanding into the thought processes of audiences.

An integration of the ELM and U&G theories, along with consideration, both ethical and psychological, of pseudo-environments and stereotypes within Public Opinion theory, can provide useful insight into how to construct messages that will be most successful in persuading an audience and encouraging them to share the message with others. The dynamics of the discussed theories are evident in the strategies used to market

The Blair Witch Project. First, the film's marketing elements seemed to play to the "irresponsible teenager" stereotype. This encouraged identification in the target audience. The film's creators pushed the story as a true documentary about students who went missing in the woods, and focused the marketing narrative around that precedent. This caught people's attention and engaged central processing of the "facts" of the case. This then involved U&G, as people took to chat rooms and other online outlets to discuss the film and satisfied the need for social interaction and entertainment. People also used the online film website to gather information about the film. This is one example of how the ELM, U&G, and Public Opinion interact with audiences' processing of pseudo-events and viral marketing.

The discussed theories hold potential value for film marketers, particularly in the realm of pseudo-events and viral marketing. However, there are ethical questions surrounding the use of stereotypes and interaction of pseudo-environments; marketers should take careful consideration in formulating messages. As discussed above, film marketing and pseudo-events tend to play off of cultural stereotypes (Satchel, 2017). This can prove successful, but it comes with ethical considerations as well. Stereotypes, while pleasant and convenient for some, "carry with them their histories" that are painful for others (p. 33). Media frames "tend to draw upon problematic stereotypes" that perpetuate certain ideas about different types of people, such as in the categories of race, gender, and positions of power (p. 30). In Boorstin's work, the creation of pseudo-events is described as being influenced by wealth, literacy, technology, and progress. Based on his theories of pseudo-environments and framing, Lippmann attributes pseudo-events to being an

expansion of personal biases and stereotypes. Lippmann's perspective offers a call to produce ethical narratives when concerning pseudo-events (Urbanski, 2012).

Aside from cultural ethical issues that may be present in using pseudo-events, the impact of the events must be taken into consideration as well. Boorstin describes pseudo-events through a critical lens because pseudo-events have historically involved deception, manipulation, and dramatic appeals (1992). Because of this, the content or messages presented in the event have an impact on those who encounter them, especially in regards to the individual pseudo-environments that influence how people experience and process their experiences, as Lippmann described (1922). Pseudo-events can also potentially be disruptive, especially with events like flash mobs. Some may enjoy this, while this could cause distress or other negative emotions in others, depending on the content. These elements must be taken into consideration when marketers employ these strategies. Though Boorstin raises valid ethical questions regarding pseudo-events, it is possible for them to be redeemed, and used positively and effectively by marketers. That is what this project wishes to consider in developing best practices, and this will be discussed further in the Results and Discussion sections. In using pseudo-events, marketers must consider the ethical implications of how they choose to communicate messages to their target audiences. In order to help guide the use of pseudo-events, the following ethical framework regarding consideration of others may serve as a useful guide.

Buber (2000) articulated a dialogical philosophy dealing with the ethical treatment of others sometimes referred to as, "I-Thou, I-It." In it, he described different modes in which humans engage the world. The first of these different modes is

Experience, in which a person collects, analyzes, and theorizes data. The object of experience, or the It, is seen as more of a tool or something to be utilized. In this mode, there is distance between the I and the It. The second mode of engaging the world is called Encounter. In this mode, the I enters into a relationship with the object encountered, the Thou. The Thou is viewed as not just a point in time, but as if the entire universe existed through Thou. Essentially, the Thou is seen as holding immense value. These modes shape how humans interact with objects, whether human, animal, or inanimate. For instance, an I can treat another person as an It in an objectifying way, by stereotyping or reducing the person to simple understandings, such as seeing a female cashier as existing only to help the I purchase something. But treating another as a “Thou” views the cashier as a person with dreams, goals, and feelings who happens to be a cashier. In this way, an I-Thou encounter may lead to a sense of responsibility for the other and engage that person in genuine conversation. Buber’s perspective includes an interactive experience in which both parties are attentive to one another in a reciprocal relationship, inferring the possibility for dialogical engagement (Arnett, Arneson & Bell, 2006).

This ethical framework can aid a person in avoidance of shaping his or her worldview around stereotypes. At the least, it can push someone to think beyond stereotypes to recognize the value and individuality of the other person. Viewing the other as a person with value naturally leads people to reconsider how to form opinions about people and their environment that are not based on assumptions or societal

frameworks. If communication professionals adopted this ethical framework, this could influence media framing and potentially reduce the perpetuation of negative stereotypes.

Utilizing the I-Thou framework, an organization or brand would become a “co-creative” brand where consumers have a mutually beneficial relationship with the brand (Gravitational Marketing, n.d.). This requires a brand to be transparent and integrate relational messaging and strategies that appeal to mutual interests. Where the I-It mentality produces distance between a brand and consumers, the I-Thou mentality creates a reciprocal relationship (Kowol, 2015). In film marketing, this could be evidenced by creating experiences that fans get to enjoy, while being monetarily beneficial for the brand. This aids in growing brand loyalty as well, which can be especially beneficial for horror franchises. It hinges on the brand and marketing messages treating others with value, as I-Thou, and avoiding I-It encounters where the target audience is seen as merely a source of revenue rather than as whole persons.

Because it is a difficult philosophy to understand, it also makes it difficult to apply Buber (Buber, 2000). Thus, in order to navigate the creation of a marketing campaign for a horror film that remains ethical, practitioners should utilize the Potter Box before making decisions. The Potter Box is a method that is often used by media professionals for analyzing a situation to aid in making decisions (Christians, Fackler, Richardson, Kreshel & Woods, 2017). In constructing a Potter Box, first the facts of the situation must be laid out. In the context of the current study, the situation would be the strategies and tactics of a marketing campaign for a new film. Secondly, different values that affect decision-making should be listed out. These could include different

professional values, moral values, logical values, and more. Third, ethical principles relevant to the situation would be considered. In this case, the researcher is arguing that dialogic ethics are a useful and relevant principle to guide decisions; however, a practitioner should consider any relevant principles for their situation to gain a holistic view. Lastly, the loyalties should be listed. This would include any person or organization that would be affected by the situation (Christians, Fackler, Richardson, Kreshel & Woods, 2017). Use of the Potter Box analysis using the I-It, I-Thou framework will be providing in the Discussion section.

When focusing on the Millennial generation, as the proposed study did, it is especially important to consider the diversity of the generation and the stereotypes that affect them. It is imperative to remain ethical and hold a deep consideration for others, even with marketing campaigns. To help navigate this, an industry guidebook on the effective and ethical use of pseudo-events in film marketing could be a helpful tool.

Industry Guidebooks

Guidebooks and style guides are a common tool utilized by professionals in public relations and other communications industries. These guides are often created out of a need for consistency among industry practitioners. They bring together formatting, style, common practices, and other information to create a comprehensive guide for best practices on a specific topic. Guidebooks are often updated over the years to include any changes or new information. There are many, such as the PR Styleguide and the AP Stylebook, that have become industry standards. Any individuals working or learning in the relevant field can use these books for reference. These guides are valuable because

they help professionals to better communicate with audiences, promote consistency within an industry, and ultimately help practitioners implement strategy effectively (Diggs-Brown, 2013).

Industry style guides and guidebooks also often provide ethical guidance on the subjects they cover. Not all guidebooks include in-depth ethical reflections. However, most all style guides include ethical considerations throughout their content, such as in, *The PR Styleguide*, *The Associated Press Stylebook*, and *The New York Times Manual of Style and Usage* (Diggs-Brown, 2013; Associated Press 2017; Siegal, 1999). Many professional organizations also publish their own ethical codes which professionals within those industries are expected to follow, such as the Public Relations Society of America code of ethics, the American Advertising Federation principles and practices for advertising ethics, and the American Marketing Association statement of ethics (PRSA, 2017; Snyder, 2011; AMA, 2017).

Industry guidebooks help provide a level of consistency throughout the industry and are useful guides for practitioners to navigate successful campaigns. There is not currently a comprehensive guidebook on the ethical use of pseudo-events and viral marketing for films. Because of the potential implications from framing and stereotypes that are involved in pseudo-events, this guidebook would require a heavy focus on ethics, so as to encourage the construction of ethical marketing narratives. The following research project will seek to accomplish the construction of a guidebook on this subject.

CHAPTER 3

Project Construction

As shown above, the use of pseudo-events and viral marketing are prevalent in the communications industry and have proven to be successful when done well. These strategies have been frequently utilized within the film industry. However, there is not currently a comprehensive guide evaluating the successes of various strategies within the film industry, and how these messages should be constructed and implemented, in order to see the greatest chance for success. In response to this, a guidebook of best practices for guerrilla and viral marketing in the movie industry will be constructed based on a systematic review of online marketing of the top fifteen grossing horror films from 2007-2017.

Target Market

The intended audience for this guidebook is movie marketers, public relations professionals, advertisers, and filmmakers within the horror genre, as well as other genres. This research would be of use to anyone in the film communications field who is looking for new ways to engage consumers and market a movie. This guidebook could hold implications for industries outside of the film industry as well, such as other entertainment fields or retail-oriented organizations.

Though the guidebook itself will be most useful for marketing and film professionals, the strategies in the content of the guidebook will be targeted towards Millennials. This means that the guidebook would offer best practices for how to use guerrilla tactics that will best engage Millennial consumers. Millennials hold major

significance in the market, they are highly active online, and they are the generation that, as mentioned earlier, Hollywood has seen recent trouble in trying to reach. Therefore, this seems to be the most significant generation to target for movie marketing with guerilla tactics.

Methodology

The guidebook will focus on Millennial marketing tactics in the horror genre. The project will systematically explore existing films and the available information on their marketing strategies, with particular attention to pseudo-events and online events.

Sample

The sample for the research will consist of the fifteen top grossing horror films between 2007 and 2017. The films were chosen based on lists of the top grossing horror films from Box Office Mojo, Business Insider, and IMDB (Lynch, 2018; Box Office Mojo, 2018; IMDb, 2018). From these lists, the researcher chose the most consistently appearing titles that were released between 2007 and 2017. The sampling method included the years 2007 to 2017, but no top films consistently emerged across the lists during 2007, 2008, 2011, and 2012. Therefore, the sample chosen for the research included films starting in the year 2009, and up through 2017.

This time frame was chosen because it fell after the creation and growth of social networking sites. Facebook was invented in 2004, and has grown steadily over the years (Wagner, 2014). In 2006, Facebook removed their registration limit from just college students to include the general population (Arrington, 2006). Brands who recognized the strengths of social media had developed Facebook pages by 2010, and several companies

began to catch on in the years following (Wagner, 2014). Social media allows filmmakers greater access to networking, building important relationships, and garnering significant views on trailers and other materials (Kirby, 2016). This time frame allowed for a focus on films that were able to utilize social media in their marketing strategies. The specific films in the sample are named in Table 1 in order of domestic gross, with ROI listed as well.

Table 1

List of Sample Films, Gross and ROI

Domestic Gross (boxofficemojo.com)	ROI (Domestic gross - Production cost/ Production cost)	Film
\$327.48 M	835.66%	IT (2017)
\$202.36 M	6.51%	World War Z (2013)
\$176.01 M	3812%	Get Out (2017)
\$138.29 M	1437%	Split (2017)
\$137.40 M	587%	The Conjuring (2013)
\$128.12 M	60.02%	Shutter Island (2010)
\$107.92 M	19758%	Paranormal Activity (2009)
\$104.01 M	1980.58%	Paranormal Activity 3 (2011)
\$102.47 M	156.18%	The Conjuring 2 (2016)
\$102.09 M	580.61%	Annabelle: Creation (2017)
\$84.75 M	2471%	Paranormal Activity 2 (2010)
\$84.27 M	1476%	Annabelle (2014)
\$83.59 M	1571.73%	Insidious: Chapter 2 (2013)
\$54.00 M	2139%	Insidious (2011)
\$52.21 M	422.19%	Insidious: Chapter 3 (2015)

Data collection

Data collection occurred through a systematic exploration of online film content. In the first step, the researcher conducted a basic search using a common search engine

for online articles relating to the film's marketing and specifically marketing events. The second step included a search for official social media accounts on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. This search captured all posts, shares, and "likes" within a three-month period prior to the release of the film. Five comments that reflected the general theme in the comment section from each post, as identified by the researcher, based on each individual post after reading through the comments, were collected as well. The third step included searching official websites for the film and capturing any articles, posts, or other messaging that addressed film events. Examples of such messaging might have included an art gallery of fan art, unusual film trailers that had pseudo-event-like qualities, and information about actual events.

Data analysis

Preliminary data analysis involved qualitative thematic analysis using the constant comparison method of all messaging across all forms of data. A first pass over the data allowed for an initial set of themes to emerge. Each piece of data was read in close detail, with notation of general themes based on commonalities among each film's marketing tactics. These five themes were combined and listed.

A second pass over the data allowed for specific coding of data supporting each theme. In this step, the researcher assigned data items to a specific theme that best described its main marketing technique. This allowed the researcher to organize and provide examples for the collected data. This was determined largely by language used, observed practices, event characteristics, and public reactions observed through either social media comments or media coverage.

A third pass categorized the coded data into sixteen subthemes. At each pass, the researcher constantly connected the emerging themes to existing theory and research on pseudo-events, building best practices through induction. The information that arose out of the subthemes guided the recommendations presented in the guidebook. The recommendations were organized according to commonalities across the themes. Recommendations were specific and evidence-based. For example, if a theme of mystery emerged, the researcher pursued subthemes of effective mystery communication. The subthemes were presented as important facets of the messaging surrounding mystery, and recommendations for how to accomplish this messaging, such as the amount of information needed to maintain and not lose, a sense of mystery. Best practices were determined based on successful examples, marketing research, theoretical foundations, target market demographics and psychographics, and careful ethical considerations. The ELM and U&G informed the psychological component of best practices by maintaining the consideration of a user's intellectual processing of, and motivations for, engaging material. A comprehensive list of best practices and films that demonstrated each practice is provided in the appendix.

CHAPTER 4

Results

The constant comparative analysis revealed themes across the marketing practices of the fifteen sample films. Five themes emerged, along with two to four subthemes in each category. From these themes, the researcher derived three to five best practices within each subtheme, each defined below. The themes and sub-themes are as follows: First, Prolonging Mystery, which includes Trailers and Build Up to Reveal. Second, Audience Involvement, which includes Fan Art, Contests, Screenings, and Fans Have a Voice. Third, Immersion, which includes Personal Virtual Reality Experiences, 4D or Pop-up VR Experiences, and Film Becomes Reality. Fourth, Online Integration, which includes Film Websites, Video Content, and Social Networking. Fifth, Creativity in Traditional Outlets, which includes Press, Special Events, Rumors Create Buzz, and Partnerships. The researcher formed all best practices with consideration of an I-It, I-Thou ethical viewpoint in which marketers should view audiences as real people with value and not just as numbers. Based on this ethical framework, no part of a marketing campaign ought to exploit or stereotype groups of people, and no form of deception ought to occur through any marketing materials.

Prolonging Mystery

Some of the marketing tactics exhibited a prolonged sense of mystery. This means that promotions for these films withheld defining information about the plot or provided vague information that left the audience with questions about the nature and content of the film. This theme was largely present in the *Paranormal Activity* franchise (Peli &

Blum, 2009). *Get Out* (McKittrick, Blum, Hamm & Peele, 2017), *Split* (Shyamalan, Blum & Bienstock, 2017), and *IT* (Lee, Lin, Grahame-Smith, Katzenberg, Muschietti & Muschietti, 2017). Two sub-themes emerged within this category: trailers and building up to a reveal.

Trailers

Four of the selected films used trailers to create buzz and curiosity surrounding the film. *Get Out*'s trailer was released on Facebook in October 2016. This trailer introduced the film but did not give details into the plot or how the story would unfold. It set the tone but left the audience with unanswered questions. This trailer, the only one made for the film, was released on Facebook in October 2016, and, according to the data collected, no other social media marketing was done for the film until January 2017. The trailer went viral on Facebook, with over twenty-one thousand shares, over eight thousand likes, and over twelve thousand comments. In total, the trailer received over sixty million views (Lincoln, 2017). The *Split* trailer also played on mystery by revealing little details about the plot of the film, but focusing on James McAvoy's performance of playing a man with twenty-three personalities. This trailer, similar to *Get Out*, raised curiosity and interest in the film, especially because M. Night Shyamalan is notorious for twist endings. One Facebook user said she typically does not watch Shyamalan films, but the *Split* trailer and McAvoy's presence "peaked [her] interest" (Barragan, 2016). Other comments on the trailer also discussed Shyamalan and his affinity for twist endings.

The *Paranormal Activity* franchise has also taken advantage of trailers to prolong mystery. The first *Paranormal Activity* trailer showed limited clips from the film and

instead showed audience's reactions when viewing the film at pre-screenings in theaters. This withheld most of the content of the film, so that only viewing the movie in theaters would allow a person to fully understand it. This also sold an experience to fans and drove curiosity as to what could be scaring the audiences shown in the trailer so much. By doing this, *Paranormal Activity* avoided revealing any major scenes from the film, which was a common complaint in Facebook comments for the films that released several clips before release. The *Paranormal Activity 2* (Blum, Goldsman, Peli & Williams, 2010) trailer that was embedded on the official film website included hidden Easter eggs that allowed fans to search for more clues about the film. The Easter egg concept involved a progression such that when a person clicked on different scenes throughout the video, a quick separate clip would flash onto the screen, leaving the viewer to speculate about what it could mean. This hunt for clues brought a deeper level of engagement from fans, and caused them to talk with others about their findings. It left people to theorize about what they were seeing and want to know more.

Four best practices were drawn from this theme. First, use trailers like an online pseudo-event to spark curiosity and viral sharing. This would mean intentionally making the trailer mysterious or adding some unique element to drive curiosity and viral sharing. Second, keep the audience wanting more by not revealing numerous scenes or scares from the movie but giving glimpses of what makes the film's story unique without revealing several scenes or most of the film's plot. Third, leave clues for the fans to follow. Fourth, to take from the *Paranormal Activity* strategy, consider showing audience reactions in the trailer. This would be a useful strategy when the film includes multiple

jump scares that induce audience reactions, and if the film's first trailer is more traditional, subsequent trailers could incorporate this strategy.

Build up to reveal

The study revealed many instances of films withholding some content and doing build ups to build anticipation for a reveal. Sometimes, this can be done through events. *The Conjuring 2* (Safran, Cowan & Wan, 2016) full trailer was revealed at WonderCon in front of a large crowd. This can also be done in a more subtle way. Pennywise's image was shown in only five official photos before *IT* was released and only shown in brief glimpses in trailers or clips (Breznican, 2017). This kept Pennywise's image from being over-used before the film premiered. His voice was also withheld until a couple of months before the film's release. A two-minute trailer containing his voice titled "*IT*-Official Trailer 1" was released in July 2017, but the video only revealed two seconds worth of Pennywise saying, "Take it". About a week before the film's release, a one-minute clip of the story's infamous opening scene was released and showed Pennywise talking with Georgie, a young boy in the film, from a sewer drain. This was an intentional move by marketers that caused audiences, especially fans of the 1990 miniseries, to continually check in on the film, and anticipate how the new Pennywise character would be portrayed, as visible through comments on multiple of the film's social media posts. *IT* also did countdowns on their social media pages before releasing a new trailer.

Split's twist ending reveals that it is actually a continuation of Shyamalan's other movie *Unbreakable* (Mendel, Mercer & Shyamalan, 2000). This was kept under wraps, even through multiple pre-screenings of the film. However, *Split*'s poster actually

included a hint to the twist, as the “cracks” on the graphic actually match up to the “cracks” on the *Unbreakable* poster when placed side by side. This is a connection that would likely only be noticed after viewing the film, but is an example of hidden information placed right before the audience’s eyes. *Paranormal Activity 3* (Blum, Goldsman, Peli, Schneider, Joost & Schulman, 2011) took this concept another step further, as all of the clips in the trailer were not actually shown in the film and even portrayed a different plot line. This caused mixed reactions from fans. On the film’s Facebook page, one user said, “I loved that the trailers lied! Everything was a surprise. Enjoyed every moment.” (Kulesza, 2011). Another user said she was “disappointed and confused as to why the clips from the trailers were not even in the movie at all” (Tidwell, 2011). Overall, it did give audiences a fresh view of the film in theaters, as they had not seen any of the actual scenes from the film beforehand. Holding back certain content or information about the film adds a sense of mystery that can incite buzz and build anticipation.

Three best practices were determined from this theme. First, use a special event to reveal teasers and trailers. Second, build anticipation through countdowns to reveals. Third, keep aspects of the main character or antagonist, like voice or image, a mystery.

Audience Involvement

The second theme to emerge was audience involvement. Several of the top films analyzed used marketing strategies to engage with fans and gave fans the opportunity to participate in some way. Audience involvement helps people to feel a deeper connection to the film, which can spark more word-of-mouth communication about the film because

feeling more connected heightens their incentive to share a film recommendation with their networks. Four subthemes emerged from this theme: Fan Art, Contests, Screenings, and Fans Having a Voice.

Fan Art

One strategy used to get audiences involved is a fan art contest. *IT* asked fans to create and submit art inspired by the film. One or more pieces were chosen and shared every week on the film's official social media pages (see fig. 1). The winning pieces were eventually displayed in a temporary art exhibit at Gallery 1988. *Get Out* also asked fans to submit film inspired art and shared the pieces on official social media pages, as well as in an online art gallery on the film's official website (see fig. 2).

Through creating art, fans engaged with the film on a different level because they applied their own vision to the piece and made it personal. Fan art contests also result in the artists sharing their work on their personal pages, which gives more exposure for the film. When fan art was posted on official social pages, many comments included users tagging their friends to either encourage them to submit art or show a friend the art piece. This form of audience involvement is useful in inciting organic film exposure.

Three best practices were drawn from this theme. First, use social media to ask fans to create art inspired by the film. Allow fans to create art with their interpretation of content from the film. Second, share fan art on official pages. Third, require fans to share their art on their personal social media pages to enter the contest so that there is added exposure.

Figure 1



Figure 2



Contests

Some films also conducted contests and offered incentives to gain audience involvement. This often involved partnerships with blogs and other organizations for the giveaways. *Paranormal Activity 2* offered a chance to win a free ticket to see the film if they were in the top twenty cities who “demanded” the film. Participants entered through eventful.com. This gave fans an added incentive to engage with the film’s marketing campaign.

Other films didn’t give away tickets, but gave away something related to the film. Before the release of *Annabelle* (Safran, Wan & Leonetti, 2014), a film about a demonically possessed doll, entertainment news site, Collider, offered an *Annabelle* sweepstakes for a chance to win a merchandise bundle. Fans had to email Collider with their name and address, and like Collider on Facebook for a chance to win *Annabelle*-themed glow in the dark playing cards, a cinch bag, heat-changing mug, *Annabelle* eyes

sleeping mask, an #ilikeyourdoll t-shirt, and a paper mask. To promote *Annabelle*'s release in the United Kingdom, a contest was held for a chance to win a trip to a haunted hotel in England. Only UK residents could apply. Participants filled out a sweepstakes form to enter, and one winner was chosen at random. Cineworld Cinemas Limited promoted this contest in partnership with Warner Bros. These two examples from *Annabelle*, though they did not offer tickets to see the film, encouraged brand awareness and loyalty. The winners of a merchandise giveaway are given tools to self-promote the film just by using the merchandise, and using the merchandise gives them a connection to the brand. Offering a trip to a haunted place helps to establish the brand's horror image and further the fear or spookiness connected to the film's story.

Some films also gave away exclusive tickets for film events. *Insidious 3* (Blum, Peli, Wan & Whannell, 2015) held a meet-and-greet lunch in Los Angeles with the cast and filmmakers. Tickets to the event were exclusive and given away through online horror blogs and websites, including Bloody Disgusting and Dread Central. Each of these were sweepstakes style and included tickets to the meet-and-greet, tickets to a film screening, and tickets to the 4D Into the Further experience. This giveaway included exclusive and valuable prizes, which stirred up excitement among fans. These examples show that conducting contests or offering extra incentives can generate media coverage and induce excitement in horror fans.

Four best practices emerged from this theme. First, put on a contest or giveaway for fans that focuses on exclusivity and privileges the most engaged fans. Second, offer tickets or other extra incentives (i.e. merchandise, trips, and events) as prizes. Third,

partner with genre specific websites or other relevant organizations for giveaways.

Fourth, be creative with contest rules by requiring contestants to create or do something that involves social media so that they are more invested and more people will hear about the film or contest.

Screenings

A common tactic amongst film marketing is to put on pre-screenings months before the film premieres. However, analysis revealed that some of the sample films put a twist on their screenings. Some debuted at festivals in front of exclusive audiences and used secrecy. *Shutter Island* (Medavoy, Messer, Fischer & Scorsese, 2010) screened at the invitation only Butt-Numb-A-Thon in 2009. *Get Out* played as the secret screening at the Sundance Festival. *Split* was also the secret screening at Fantastic Fest. There are typically high levels of anticipation surrounding what the secret screenings at these events will be, so the reveal caused extra hype and media coverage for these films. Other films also conducted their own screenings as special events for fans. *Get Out* scheduled about 200 pre-screenings, with some hosted by celebrities, such as Chance the Rapper. *Split* put on twenty-four free screenings across the country on Friday the 13th. Twenty-four were done in accordance with the twenty-four split personalities of the film's main character. *Paranormal Activity* hosted several small screenings in college towns and places where fans "demanded" the film, which will be covered in more depth under the next subtheme. These screenings each included some sort of promotional angle. They were different than traditional screenings, as they played off of special dates, used an element of surprise, or involved notable public personalities. These events worked to

incite media coverage and buzz amongst the public. Pre-screenings allow for word-of-mouth reviews of the movie both online and within an individual's personal social networks.

Three best practices were drawn from this subtheme. First, put on secret or surprise screenings. Second, capitalize on special dates, like Friday the 13th or Halloween. Third, use festivals or other events for initial screenings.

Fans Have a Voice

The Paranormal Activity franchise is widely recognized by their marketing campaigns with high audience involvement. Before the first film's release, their "Demand It" campaigns gave fans a voice and allowed them to decide where the movie would be shown. If at least 5,000 people in a city demanded it through the website, it would be shown there. Eventually, Paramount offered that if the film hit one million demands, they would release it nationwide. This not only caused huge amounts of buzz and demand for the film, but it also allowed for the production company to discover in what areas the film was most popular and focus on investing marketing dollars there. The second film was scheduled for a nationwide release for the beginning. However, a "demand it" option was offered for early screenings in the top twenty cities around the world. For Paranormal Activity 3, fans could "tweet to see it first", which, similarly to the "Demand It" campaign, gave pre-screenings in the areas where the most tweets came from. The website kept a real-time global leaderboard. Each of these campaigns were focused on giving. The first film gained a small cult following before it was picked up by Paramount, and the "Demand It" campaigns increased the follower base exponentially

and increased brand loyalty. This also gave the film marketers insight into understanding who the film's fans were, and what they wanted, as opposed to audiences being simply numbers and data.

Four best practices emerged from this category. First, give fans a voice in campaigns. This could mean allowing fans to vote for screenings, affect marketing or content, or anything else that would give them the ability to help influence decisions regarding the film. Second, maintain some exclusivity. Third, seek to understand the audience instead of seeing them simply as data or targets. Fourth, determine where the most buzz is by listening to the fans.

Immersion

A consistent theme that emerged from data analysis was immersion. Several of the films' marketing campaigns incorporated opportunities for people to be immersed in the experience of the film. Three subthemes emerged in this category: Personal Virtual Reality Experiences, 4D or Pop-up Virtual Reality (VR) Experiences, and Bringing the Film into Reality.

Personal Virtual Reality Experiences

A few of the films created virtual reality experiences that people could access or download on mobile devices. These could be viewed on the device's screen, or enhanced using personal VR equipment. *The Conjuring 2* and *IT* released 360-degree virtual reality videos on Facebook and on their official websites ("Float: VR Experience", 2017; "Experience Enfield", 2016). *Insidious 3* released a VR experience that could be downloaded through a mobile app. VR videos allow users to personally experience the

film, which can then lead to more excitement about seeing the actual film in theaters. For example, under *IT*'s VR Facebook post, several comments exhibited increasing excitement for the film. One user tagged a friend to watch the video and said she was “getting so hyped for the movie [sic]” (Thorsberg, 2017), while another user also tagged a friend and said “the hype to real [sic]” (Ojeda, 2017). This is an enhanced way for fans to engage with the film’s content and provides an experience that a person can share with their friends.

Four best practices were drawn from this subtheme. First, create virtual reality videos. Second, make them easily accessible on multiple platforms. Third, use pivotal scenes or settings from the film for the video. Fourth, make it seem as realistic as possible, not overly animated, and easy to follow.

4D or Pop-up VR Experiences

Two films took the VR videos a step further and created traveling pop up VR experiences. *IT* created a VR school bus where participants were able to “travel around Derry” and experience different scenes from the film. This traveled around the United States with limited tickets available. *Insidious 3* also created a 4D pop up experience called Into the Further. This was a truck that traveled to select cities in the U.S. and included both a virtual reality component and a haunted house component. There was also a limited availability of tickets for this event. These pop-up events not only generated excitement among fans, but also created a deeper level of engagement and excitement for the films. The limited availability made the events more exclusive, which fueled a desire to participate and pay attention to announcements about the films. One

comment under an announcement for the Into the Further experience said, “I JUST CAN’T WAIT I LOVE Insidious! [sic]” (Beynon, 2015). Another user inquired about how to get tickets saying, “I’m trying to find tickets to the Miami event. Can you give me a link to their event page?” (Jennett, Jr., 2015). These events generated more fan engagement and further established the brands’ tone and reputations of being interactive and scary.

Three best practices emerged from this category. First, fully immerse people in the film through personal or pop-up VR experiences. Second, take the experience to the fans, but offer limited availability. Third, use a mix of tangible elements and technology for a holistic 4D experience.

Film Becomes Reality

This subtheme was present in many of the film’s marketing practices. This category represents instances when elements of certain films were brought to life for fans to encounter, whether for scheduled attendance or as a surprise. Some films set up events that fans could buy tickets to. These events were different from the pop-up events above because they did not include VR, ran for a longer duration of time, and remained stationary. *IT* set up a haunted house in Hollywood, California that looked like the Neibolt house from the film. *Insidious 2* (Blum, Peli & Wan, 2013) set up the Insidious: Into the Further Maze at Universal Studios’ 2013 Halloween Horror Nights. *Annabelle: Creation* (Safran, Wan & Sandberg, 2017) also offered a haunted house experience in East London where participants “babysat” Annabelle in a house filled with props from the film. Each session lasted 20 minutes. These events gave fans opportunities to interact

with the brands and for their excitement to grow about seeing the actual films when they were released. They also gave the brand a chance to interact with fans and generate media coverage. One example of this stands out because of the ethical questions it brings up. To promote the film, Annabelle-branded holy water was sold. This effort, though some may call it creative, pushes the ethical boundaries on stereotyping and exploiting religious, particularly Catholic, audiences.

There were also examples of free experiences people could willingly engage with. *Insidious 3* offered a chance to message with “Quinn”, the main character in the movie, on the mobile app Kik. *Paranormal Activity 2* held an online “Paranormal Surveillance” event where people could live stream a room by leaving their webcams on overnight, and in the morning they would receive an analysis and report telling if there had been any unusual activity overnight. These are more examples of events that encourage engagement with the film and grow anticipation in audiences.

Films also enacted other events that confronted random people with something scary from the film. During the week before *IT*’s release, red balloons were tied to sewer drains around Sydney, Australia with a message written on the sidewalk promoting the film. This went viral on Twitter. For *Annabelle: Creation*, Annabelle dolls were hidden throughout Ripley’s Believe It Or Not in New York City. Shortly after being hidden in the museum, Annabelle dolls began “escaping” and appeared in random places around New York City, like subway stations and retail stores. *Annabelle: Creation* also partnered with Complex Magazine to set up a prank in LA’s Bearded Lady’s Mystic Museum. In this prank, unsuspecting individuals entered a room and were scared by a moving doll

and a child jumping out and screaming. A video compilation of the prank was made and uploaded online. All of these events generated vast media coverage (Connellan, 2017; Whitehead, 2017; Stuart, 2017; Eisenberg, 2017; Rylah, 2017; Fu, 2013; Lewis, 2013; Rowney, 2017; Miska, 2017; Sloane, 2015; Massively Inc., 2015; Moore, 2017; Kane, 2017; M, D., 2017; Johnson, 2010). Some also went viral on social media. These events were inexpensive and subtle ways to not only create immersive experiences by confronting people with their fears, but to turn people's attention toward thinking about the film.

Five best practices were drawn from this subtheme. First, take something iconic or notable from the film and bring it into reality. Second, utilize apps and other online technology to create fun, immersive experiences. Third, play off of current trends in technology or culture. Fourth, do not perpetuate stereotypes or exploit people. Fifth, do not be overly invasive. The last two practices are especially important to ensure that the practitioner is acting ethically in every aspect of the campaign.

Online Integration

Another theme that became evident through data analysis was online integration. Campaigns that exhibited this theme contained elements that utilized online technologies and interaction. Three subthemes emerged in this category: film websites, video content, and social networking.

Film websites

A trend that emerged was the use of viral websites, themed websites, or interactive elements on official film websites. A viral website is one that generates large

traffic through word-of-mouth. In this context, the website would have some sort of hidden connection to a film that may not be revealed right away, thus generating curiosity and some excitement. *World War Z* (Pitt, Gardner, Kleiner, Bryce & Forster, 2013) released the Crisis Zero website, which talked about a worldwide disease outbreak that was causing widespread chaos. The site contained videos and a countdown to crisis zero (the release date of *World War Z*). *Paranormal Activity 3* created darrentimelessmemories.com, along with flyers promoting a fictitious company called Darren's Timeless Memories. This was supposedly a VHS to digital conversion service. From the beginning, people speculated on whether this was a *Paranormal Activity* viral marketing tactic, and it was eventually revealed that the site was connected to *Paranormal Activity 3*, as the film was set in the 1980s and some marketing and film elements revolved around VHS tapes (Billington, 2011). Both the *World War Z* and *Paranormal Activity* sites generated hype for the films and helped grow a following.

Insidious (Blum, Schneider, Peli & Wan, 2011) built two viral sites:

spectralsightings.com and the Voice from the Further blog. The first site was a page for a fictional paranormal investigating team called Spectral Sightings that offered services and sold equipment. They also had a Facebook page, which is still active, where real people would make posts asking for the team's help with their own supernatural occurrences, as some assumed the group was real. One user posted on the timeline asking the team to contact him because he was having paranormal experiences (Schiller, 2016). Another user noted the group's appearance in *Insidious* by stating, "so cool that the makers of the movie used a real life team of investigators" (Shores, 2011). Others questioned the

validity of the group or informed others on the page that it was part of *Insidious* viral marketing. The *Insidious* page eventually began to share Spectral Sightings posts and tag them in their own posts, which revealed the connection. The Spectral Sightings group were actually characters in the *Insidious* movie. The Voice from the Further blog was written by “Valerie”, a woman who mysteriously went into a coma for twenty years at the age of seven. The blog posts were centered on supernatural occurrences and the woman trying to connect the dots to what had been happening to her. All of the experiences the woman described were connected to *Insidious*. Both the Spectral Sightings and *Insidious* Facebook pages began to share Voice from the Further’s blog posts. Both of these sites developed a following, and added a different element to tell the story of *Insidious*, without revealing too much about the film itself. This all came to a culmination the day the film premiered.

Some films also created themed websites in which the audiences could participate. *Get Out* created a “you have to get out” website that allowed users to upload a picture of themselves and add text warning others to “get out” of whatever location they designated. *Annabelle: Creation* released the Annabelle’s Presence photo creator, where people could upload their own photos and Annabelle would be placed somewhere in the photo. These online photo generators were not only a fun way for people to engage the film, but also acted as extra self-promotion for the film when the users shared their photos online. Additionally, *The Conjuring* (DeRosa-Grund, Safran, Cowan & Wan, 2013) asked people to share their stories of supernatural encounters on yourhauntedstories.theconjuringmovie.com. *Paranormal Activity*’s website had an

interactive feature where individuals could describe the film in one word, and it would be displayed on the website on repeat with other submitted words. *Insidious 2* also had an interactive website where the viewer could “find spirits” in different rooms of the house that was shown on screen by using different filters. Each of these examples brought another level of interaction for audiences.

Four best practices emerged from this category. First, make official film sites interactive. Second, create viral sites connected to the film that help tell the film’s story. Third, slowly reveal viral sites’ connections to the film to allow buzz to grow. Fourth, create fun, interactive online elements that give users takeaways (i.e. a picture).

Video content

The data also revealed a wide use of video content online. *World War Z* released a few videos showing “real life” zombie attacks. They also released a “PSA” about Crisis Zero. Both of these videos were posted on the Crisis Zero website and went viral online. *Insidious* also created viral videos that were connected to their viral websites: Spectral Sightings and Voice from the Further (Caldwell, 2011). *The Conjuring* franchise largely promotes that the films are based on true events. Because of this, they made multiple featurettes with the real people who were involved telling about their experiences. *The Conjuring* released “The Devil’s Hour” and *The Conjuring 2* released “Strange Happenings in Enfield” and “Audio Recordings” on YouTube. *The Conjuring* also created an advertisement that showed reactions and interviews with audiences who had seen the film. These videos raised anticipation for the film, and the fear or excitement they caused, led people to share the videos with their friends on social media. Under a

Facebook post for the *Conjuring* featurette, one user stated that she had heard about Lorraine Warren, “so [she] knew that this movie would be even more scary because it's a true story” (Velgara-Savala, 2013). On another *Conjuring* Facebook video post captioned “Beware the Devil’s Hour”, a user said she was “so scared but [couldn’t] resist wanting to watch this movie” (Anthony, 2013). In order for videos to go viral, they must contain qualities that are intriguing or unique so that people will be drawn to share the content with their networks.

Four best practices were taken from this subtheme. First, create and share viral videos. Second, when the film is based on real events, create content with spotlights on real people and testimonials. Third, avoid showing too many scenes from the film, and instead create content that adds to the film. Fourth, create videos related to viral websites.

Social networking

Overall, the research showed high levels of social networking among the films. All of the films, excluding *Shutter Island*, were active on social media sites. However, a few of the films implemented strategies on their social media outlets that were out of the ordinary or particularly interactive. *Get Out* created the #getoutchallenge, which encouraged users to upload a video of themselves running towards the camera to mimic a scene in the film. This caught major traction amongst fans of the film. Professional basketball player Steph Curry also participated. His participation was significant because *Get Out* contains social commentary about racism, and Curry has been known for being an advocate on race issues in America (Villas, 2017). His participation sparked media

coverage for the challenge and the film (Lang, 2017). Challenges like this give people a chance to participate and often go viral, which brings more exposure for the film.

Paranormal Activity asked people to “Tweet their screams”, which meant that people would share a positive review or recommendation of the film on their personal Twitter. *The Conjuring* also used Twitter to interact with fans by doing #askjameswan, where one day users were able to tweet question to Director James Wan using that hashtag and he would answer them. *The Conjuring* Twitter page retweeted his responses. *Insidious* co-creator Leigh Wannell also engaged with the public by creating a blog focused on his experiences during the U.S. press tour for the film.

A “photo tour” was conducted with *Annabelle*, in which pictures were taken of the doll in front of various landmarks and uploaded onto the film’s official Facebook page (see fig. 3). As evidenced by Facebook comments on the pictures, some saw this as comical and others as scary, but nevertheless, it gained attention on social media. Features within social media networks were also taken advantage of. *Insidious* created a “chromospectrometer” Facebook app that allowed people to upload a picture and see if any paranormal activity was revealed. This app was exclusive to Facebook and was not a real indicator of paranormal activity. The app would place a fake photo of a “monster” or “ghost” into the user’s uploaded photo. Additionally, *Annabelle: Creation* made a Snapchat filter that made the user look like Annabelle (see fig. 4). Both of these led to

Figure 3



Figure 4



sharing on social media, which gave organic exposure for the film and further established the films' brands (Horror News, 2011; Turek, 2011; Duran, 2017).

Five best practices were drawn from this subtheme. First, post consistently on social media sites and engage with followers. Second, create social media challenges for followers to participate in. Third, give a direct call for people to share about the film on social media. Fourth, create themed apps, filters, or other unique content for social sites. Fifth, encourage filmmakers and cast to engage with followers on social networks. This could be done through a "behind-the-scenes" blog, Q&As, posting photos working on the films, and more.

Creativity in Traditional Outlets

Some of the data revealed that more traditional marketing outlets were used in these campaigns, but there was often a more creative twist to their tactics. Four sub-

themes emerged in this category: press, special events, rumors create buzz, and partnerships.

Press

Each of the films engaged with the press in some way. For *Shutter Island*, Director Martin Scorsese made several appearances at events and did many interviews. Tokyo promotions were done for the film as well, and Leonardo DiCaprio skipped the Oscars that year in order to promote the film overseas, which generated buzz. To promote *Split*, M. Night Shyamalan conducted several interviews, and the film was positioned as his “big comeback”. The New York Times and GQ did profiles on Jordan Peele for *Get Out*, where he talked about film, politics, horror, and other subjects. Peele also did interviews with several other publications which varied in genre. This type of mainstream news exposure is uncommon for horror films, but *Get Out* gained this attention because of its social commentary. Some of the films, namely the *Paranormal Activity* franchise, put a different angle on how they released information to the press. For *Paranormal Activity 2*, bloggers and reporters were sent USB drives with different film clips on them that the recipients were to release. *Paranormal Activity 3* went a step further and sent VCRs and VHS tapes with film clips on them to bloggers and reporters. This not only generated media coverage, as the reporters would then share the videos, but the method of delivery also furthered the brand’s mysterious, “found footage” image.

Five best practices emerged from this category. First, hold press tours/press conferences that conflict with special dates or events to draw more attention. Second, be creative in how information is released. Third, give exclusive content or information to

certain sources. Fourth, have the director or cast make public appearances and conduct special interviews. Fifth, emphasize the unique aspects of the film.

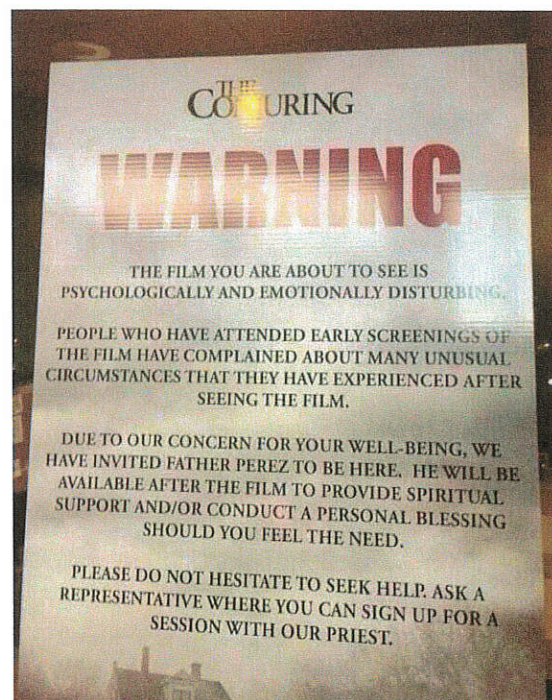
Special events

The data revealed that some films put on more traditional special events but included some sort of spin. At the *World War Z* world premiere, the band, Muse, performed. This was broadcast live online on Yahoo. This was relevant because the band's music was used in the film, but it also drew the attention of fans of the band. *Insidious 2* screened a showing of their new trailer at Linda Vista Community Hospital, a key location in the film. This included a Q&A session and tour of the facilities. The trailer was released to the public the next day. This gave the press and fans a unique chance to view the trailer before anyone else.

Some films added special twists to screenings in theaters. *World War Z* offered a Mega Ticket Package. This package, a partnership with Regal Entertainment Group, was offered for special screenings in Los Angeles, Houston, San Diego, Atlanta, and Philadelphia on June 19th, two days before the film's wide release. The \$50 package included tickets to a RealD 3D early screening, small popcorn, digital copy of the movie when available, *World War Z* collector 3D glasses, and a full size limited edition movie poster. Four of the five theaters offering the package sold out. This package generated news coverage and buzz amongst moviegoers. The extra incentives drove audiences into theaters, and the film made approximately \$60,000 from the event (Kroll, 2013). *Insidious 2* offered double features of the first film and the new sequel in select theaters on the night before the wide release.

At a theater in Chicago, *The Conjuring* hired a priest to come to the showing and posted warning signs that stated the film was “psychologically and emotionally disturbing” and that the priest was available to “provide spiritual support and/or conduct a personal blessing” for those who felt they needed it (see fig. 5). The event generated media coverage and buzz.

Figure 5



Five best practices were drawn for this category. First, offer special packages for film showings. Second, put on double features for continuing franchise premieres. Third, add extra interactive elements to the screenings. Fourth, put on a special event for new reveals (i.e. teasers, trailers, etc.). Fifth, incorporate guest stars or performers at events.

Rumors create buzz

Some of the films “leaked” information that created buzz and generated media coverage. The set of *Annabelle* was rumored to be haunted (Casas, 2014). An exorcist was hired to bless the set of the *Conjuring 2*, and a video of this was posted on producer, Rob Cowen’s, Facebook page. It was reported that *The Conjuring* received an R rating because it was just “too scary” (Negroni, n.d.; Shaw-Williams, 2013; Buckwalter, 2013). *Shutter Island* moved its release date from October 2009 to February 2010. The studio stated it was because the marketing budget was not large enough for that time frame. However, it was speculated that the move was done so that the film would stand out more and be better received outside of awards season and because the film’s star, Leonardo DiCaprio, would not be available for international press for an October release (Goldberg, 2009; Gleiberman, 2010). Regardless, the move gained a lot of publicity for the film. The release of these rumors resulted in people talking about the film and raised the hype for their releases.

Four best practices arose in this subtheme. First, release interesting information to create buzz. Second, direct speculation about the experience of the film’s creation. Third, sometimes a risky move can pay off. However, this should only be done after extensive research and with a strategic, long-term plan in place. Fourth, stay ethical and never release false information.

Partnerships

A few of the films utilized partnerships with other organizations outside of the horror or film markets to promote the film. *Paranormal Activity 3* did a partnership with

television show, Big Brother UK 12, where an entire episode included “paranormal” challenges, and the winners got the chance to watch an advance screening of the film in a glass case suspended over a live audience (McCabe, 2011). Clips from the film were also shown in the episode when it aired on television. *Pretty Little Liars*, another television show, showed a glimpse of the *Insidious 2* trailer, which led the characters to briefly talk about the film and how “terrifying” the first movie was (Season 4, Episode 8). *Shutter Island* ran several Winter Olympic advertisements and sponsorships, which resulted in wide exposure for the film and greater recall of the ads amongst Olympic watchers (Carter, 2010). Tipsy Bartender on YouTube created a drink called “Black Bride” as inspired by *Insidious 3*. Each of these partnerships reached a more mainstream audience that a horror genre-specific blog or outlet would not be able to reach.

Four best practices emerged from this subtheme. First, partner with organizations with appeal to the campaign’s target audience. Second, think outside of horror to find more mainstream media partners. Third, take advantage of broadcasted special events with large audiences to run promotions. Fourth, have the film incorporated into entertainment media (i.e. television, YouTube videos, etc.).

Potter Box

As discussed above, the Potter Box is a useful analytical method of making ethical decisions in different situations. An example of the Potter Box can be shown using the Annabelle holy water example given in the Immersion theme. First, the perceivable facts can be acknowledged. *Annabelle* was a new film that needed a promotional campaign. The film was loosely based on a true story of a demon-possessed

doll. Hispanic audiences are typically a large demographic drawn to horror films, especially about exorcisms, because of the religious themes present (Kang, 2014). Holy water is a commonly used sacrament in the Catholic faith for exorcising demons. Catholic sacraments are holy and esteemed by those who hold the faith. Second, some of the main values of this situation would be profitability, brand growth and awareness, audience engagement, and effectiveness. An important value that should be included is empathy and consideration for the audience.

Third, a useful principle in navigating this situation is the I-It, I-Thou framework. This would require the practitioner to regard members of the target audience as people who hold intrinsic value and not as simple data points to be manipulated. This would bring a deeper level of understanding and desire to treat others with respect. Fourth, the loyalties in this situation would include the filmmakers, the production and distribution companies, the general public, horror fans, Hispanic Americans, Catholics, religious people, movie theaters, marketers working for the film, and the press.

Once the process is complete, the practitioner may analyze the situation more deeply and hold any strategies and tactics against their situational analysis to determine how he or she can be most ethically responsible. According to the Potter Box as demonstrated above, the Annabelle holy water was not an ethical approach, as it was exploitive of a religious sacrament and stereotyped the Hispanic demographic. Had this consideration gone into the initiative beforehand, this could have been avoided or another, more ethical, initiative could have been put in place to acknowledge the Hispanic audience.

Even after completing the Potter Box, extensive research will likely need to be done when constructing marketing pieces to check against content that could be exploitive for certain people groups. Interviews, focus groups, and other market research will aid in gaining knowledge about consumers and help determine ethical practices for the situation.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion and Implementation

Based on the results of the research study, this chapter will first give an overview of ethical considerations regarding the results, and then will offer further ethical analysis of each sub-theme. The chapter will then go on to discuss the construction of a best practices guidebook and its implementation.

Overview of Ethical Considerations

The results can be reflected in five overarching ethical guidelines. Buber's ethical framework, as described above, provides a useful guide and starting point for ethical marketing practices. The following guidelines were drawn from the results based on Buber's framework. First, extensive quantitative and humanistic research should be done for new campaigns. An adaptation of the ethical principles would require the marketer to take extra steps to understand and gain insight into audiences. These extra steps would include extensive research on the general target audience and specifically on any groups of people who could be marginalized by potential campaign tactics. A useful method for this would be conducting focus groups to test participants in the target audience's reactions to proposed marketing strategies and tactics. This would work to prevent the practitioners from viewing consumers and target audiences as faceless data points, but instead, to acknowledge the lives and individuals that make up those target audiences. This would also help the practitioner to develop strategies that allowed for audiences to co-create meaning and raise interactivity. This is a shift from an I-It to an I-Thou approach. By embracing and committing to this philosophy, the marketer should feel the

compulsion to care for and connect with the people who make up the target audience, and therefore, allow that to guide campaign decisions to avoid the exploitation, manipulation, or stereotyping of certain people groups. This framework should then not simply be an additional consideration in the campaign construction process, but should essentially be the basis and guide for the formation of marketing campaigns.

Building off of audience research, the second guideline is to uphold honesty. At no point in a campaign should intentional lies be spread. Intentional deception treats the deceived party as I-It, or an object unworthy of complete respect. While a consumer may attend a movie knowing it is fictional, the marketing tactics should avoid misleading potential audiences prior to their viewing of the film. This would involve not releasing false information about the film as a marketing strategy. While such behavior may have some utility in the short term, the long-term damage caused by such treatment is not effective for any practitioner. This could damage brand loyalty and create negative buzz around the film that could detract from future audiences.

Third, no elements of a campaign should exploit or stereotype any demographics, specifically religious or minority groups. Because many of the top horror films revolve around demonic possessions and involve religious themes, Catholic and Latino audiences are both drawn to the films, and targeted for marketing, as evidenced by the research and discussed further below. In light of this, it is important to avoid tactics that perpetuate stereotypes, belittle, or denigrate the humanity of any group, whether they are the target audience or otherwise.

Fourth, campaigns should include diversity. This diversity should not only be evident in the strategies within the campaign but also in the team who creates the campaign. Diverse marketing teams gain a wider range of perspectives and have a wider range of opinions present to create and approve ideas. This aids in creating more inclusive campaigns that do not rely on stereotypes, and further guarantees the consideration and understanding of others' experiences. Diversity is also important in targeting Millennials, given their demographic makeup.

Fifth, think outside the box. Pseudo-events and viral marketing are non-traditional approaches that require creativity. This gives marketers opportunities to engage with audiences, allows consumers to co-create content and meaning, and may add an extra benefit for consumers. The best practices provide a guide for campaign elements, but it is up to the practitioners to make the practices come to life in the context of their films.

Sub-Theme Ethical Analysis

The guidelines discussed above provide a general overview of the themes as grounded in ethics. The following section will discuss the ethical considerations within each sub-theme found in the study.

Examples of ethical and unethical practices can be noted from the research data under each theme. 1.) The films used as examples for the Trailers sub-theme seem overall to have acted ethically. An unethical use of the best practices would include any intentional deception. For example, creating a trailer with audience reactions that seem genuine, but were actually from a paid or instructed audience would be unethical. 2.) In the Building Up to a Reveal sub-theme, most of the data exhibited ethical practices.

However, *Paranormal Activity 3*'s use of withholding content and building to reveal was questionable, as all of the clips in the trailer were not actually used in the film. This could be seen as misleading. 3.) Under the Fan Art theme, all of the data examples met the ethical criteria. In order to remain ethical in this theme, films should always give credit to the artist when fan art is shared, and consideration should be given to what art is shared in order to avoid sharing art that involves gratuitously disturbing or gory images that could trigger feelings of trauma or anxiety if a person were to stumble across the image in a social newsfeed.

4.) The Contests theme involves best practices that should promote strong ethical practices. However, it is important to ensure that all contest winners are chosen fairly and that rules are upheld for everyone involved. This would involve extra diligence and attentiveness on the part of the studio for contests that are conducted by a third party. 5.) Under the Screenings theme, no unethical practices are evident in the data. In order to remain ethical in this practice, studios should make sure that there is no false advertising about who will be at the screening, or what it will involve. 6.) Based on what the data revealed, *Paranormal Activity* remained ethical in the way they conducted the "Demand It" campaigns in the Fans Have a Voice theme. To act ethically, studios should allow for fans votes or suggestions to carry weight on decisions and not use audience voting as a gimmick or front that will not affect decision making. Otherwise, participants would be misled and used strictly for profit.

7.) Personal virtual reality experiences, as evidenced by the data, are typically available on most mobile platforms and available to anyone who was to access them. A

way to maintain ethicality in this area would be to include an advisory disclaimer about the content and suggested age limit on the video, based on how scary or disturbing the content might be. The given examples did not provide an advisory. 8.) In conducting a 4D VR experience, it is important that people are clearly aware of an option to exit the experience at any point. This way, people are protected in case the experience is overwhelming or provokes too much anxiety. It could also be advisable to give an advisory to participants or have them sign an informed consent statement before entering so that they are aware of what the experience will entail. Based on the information gathered for data analysis, it is unclear if the provided examples offered these options or disclaimers.

9.) The Film Becomes Reality theme involves a broad range of examples, but it is one of the themes that will require special consideration within the given ethical framework. The fourth best practice given for this theme is to not play on stereotypes or exploit people. An example of this is the *Annabelle*-branded holy water. In the Catholic faith, holy water is a sacrament that is taken seriously. Demonic possessions are also not regarded lightly. Offering *Annabelle* holy water is an exploitation of a symbol that is regarded as holy in the Catholic faith. This trivializes an item that a demographic of people holds as having great value. The fifth best practice in this theme is to not be overly invasive. Though the purpose of this type of tactic is to catch attention by blurring the lines between the film and reality, avoiding being invasive would mean that the person encountering the event would have the ability to avoid the experience if it is overwhelming for them. For example, with the *IT* red balloons promotion in Australia it

would have been easy for a person to simply walk away from the balloon, and there was a written message beside the balloons that made it clear that they were part of the film's marketing campaign.

10.) In creating viral websites, it is again important not to lie. There is a fine line between creating an interactive outlet that furthers the story of the film and passing something off as truth when it is not. With the *Insidious* and *Paranormal Activity* websites, the sites never made direct claims to be true or real and their connections to the films were made evident. An example outside of this study's data set would be *The Blair Witch Project's* (Cowie, Hale, Myrick & Sanchez, 1999) viral marketing tactics. Though the film was fictional, it was framed as a true story, and the viral websites and other marketing elements provided information that was presented to be true, but was later revealed to be all fabricated. Though this strategy helped lead to the film's success, there are major ethical questions that it evokes because of its levels of dishonesty.

11.) The ethical considerations of the Video Content theme are similar to those in the Viral Websites theme. In creating and sharing videos, any content that is false should not be passed off as true. *The Conjuring* is based on true events, so the featurettes they produced included the real people on whom the stories were based. All of the information presented was true. The viral videos connected to *World War Z* and *Insidious* did not claim to be real and their connections to the films were made evident. 12.) Most of the data in the Social Networking theme reflected ethical practices. In order to remain ethical, a social media challenge should not call people to engage in any behavior that could be harmful to the participant. To be generally safe, this would exclude any

challenges that involve the person eating something or promoting other risky behaviors without fair warning of risk. Overall, the safety of participants should be of high priority.

13.) In the Press theme, most of the films appeared to have acted ethically. A main ethical concern would be to find creative ways to release information without telling lies or playing on stereotypes. 14.) The examples used in the Special Events theme seem to have been ethical. In order to remain ethical with the best practices, it is again imperative to not exploit people or play on stereotypes when involving groups such as minorities or religion. This is a situation that, unlike the Annabelle holy water mentioned above, used a religious element but did not exploit or stereotype anyone in doing so, as the priest was there by his own agreement and simply offered blessings. This seems to have been handled more ethically.

15.) The Rumors Create Buzz theme is another theme that requires special attention to ethics. None of the data used in this theme seem to be unethical. However, it is imperative that nothing fabricated be released by the studio, and that anything that is “leaked,” be accurate information. 16.) The data presented in the Partnerships theme does not appear to have unethical practices. In order to remain ethical when partnering with more mainstream channels outside of the horror genre, it is important that content or messaging is created with sensitivity to the general public, as those who are not avid horror film watchers may not be accustomed to the startling content in horror films.

These ethical principles should be taken into consideration when evaluating the best practices provided in the results. The best practices, in conjunction with the given

ethical framework, provide unique insight and perspective that have the opportunity to be especially useful for communication practitioners in the film industry.

Project Reflection

The entire process of constructing this project was a tremendous learning experience. Overall, this experience has contributed significantly to my academic development. From the beginning and throughout the process, there were multiple goals I hoped to accomplish. A major goal I had was to be efficient and timely in meeting deadlines in order to complete the project on time. This required discipline and focus and taught me to prioritize and manage time in order to stay on track. I also sought to grow and improve through every process of revisions and learned to continually ask questions and seek clarification if I did not fully understand the feedback I was given. This was important in strengthening my work, and in improving as a researcher. Another goal I set out to achieve was to gain a deep understanding of my subject matter so that I could create a list of useful and insightful best practices. Through reviewing existing literature for the research proposal and the research conducted, I was able to accomplish this goal.

In constructing this project, I used skills and knowledge that I have gained throughout the duration of my master's education. I have developed greater awareness and mastery of professional and academic writing, research methodologies and data collection, applications for theory and ethics, and industry practices. In constructing a sample of the guidebook, I drew on design skills that I have learned in my program. This knowledge and skill set that I have gained through this program aided me in this project,

and I expect that I will use these skills and this knowledge on a daily basis as I enter a career in the communication field.

Upon completion of this project, I have gained not only significant knowledge on the specific subject matter but also the marketing and film industry in general. I was able to get a wide glimpse of common marketing strategies within the film industry, and see which ones were most successful. Overall, this experience helped me to grow exponentially in academic writing and researching literature. Through guidance from my committee, I learned important writing etiquette, style, and formatting. I also learned a great deal about constructing a research design and conducting research, particularly a constant comparison qualitative analysis. This is vital knowledge that will not only be useful in any further academic research I conduct, but it will also be incredibly valuable in my future career. In order to further reflect on the project, its strengths, and limitations, I have constructed the following S.W.O.T. analysis.

S.W.O.T. Analysis

Strengths

Qualitative studies are used to discover patterns and trends in behavior or practices. According to Tracy (2010), the eight criteria for excellent qualitative research include a worthy topic, rich rigor, sincerity, credibility, resonance, significant contribution, ethicality, and meaningful coherence (Tracy, 2010). The current study meets these criteria. The topic is relevant and unique, and the study included a structured methodology with theoretical construct. There is also self-reflection, evidence for arguments, transferable findings, and practical professional contribution. The study also

includes expansive ethical discussion and achieves the goals set by the researcher.

Because this form of research can measure behavior, attitudes, and trends, qualitative studies are useful for developing marketing strategies. An advantage of this study is its ability to analyze not only the presence of certain practices, but the reactions of fans, and the nuances and differences within each piece of data analyzed. This depth of analysis could not have been achieved through a quantitative study. This study also returned strong internal validity and reliability, as there was a consistency in themes across the sample.

Another major strength of this project is that there is not currently anything available that contains this information, or has focused specifically on the use of pseudo-events or viral marketing for horror films, especially with an ethical consideration. The research study provides an in-depth analysis of viral marketing, pseudo-events, and other creative marketing tactics implemented by the top fifteen horror films from the past ten years. No other study has been conducted the same way and on this specific topic. Because the data analyzed included at least five pieces of data, which provided examples of the films' marketing tactics, and a comprehensive look at three months of postings and follower engagement on their Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram pages, this study gives in-depth insight into the themes found among top-grossing horror films. Another strength is the practicality of the guidebook. The best practices guide is intended for communication practitioners, so, although the results could be utilized in an academic setting, the suggestions given are meant to be directly applicable in a professional setting. This makes the project multifunctional and useful in different spheres. The ethical

considerations offered throughout the project also provide another dimension and add a greater sense of responsibility to the guide, as most industry guidebooks do not give careful attention to an ethical framework.

Weaknesses

One weakness is that the research lacked interviews with film marketing professionals about their experiences. This could have provided deeper insight into what specific practices have proven to be successful in the field. Another limitation, as is common with qualitative research studies, is the small sample size, which potentially limits external validity. Due to the nature of the research and time constraints, the sample size was limited to fifteen films. A larger sample could increase external validity, as this could ensure the consistency of the themes that emerged over a larger number of films. The analysis in this study involved subjectivity, as themes were drawn and categorized based on the researcher's observations. The researcher's personal perspectives and privileges may narrow the interpretation of the data in such a way that other themes may not have been adequately explored. Though there are limitations due to the nature of the research study, the results do provide insight into themes present across top-grossing horror films' marketing campaigns and could provide a basis for continued research on the subject.

Opportunities

As the media environment becomes more cluttered, the best practices presented in this project will become increasingly useful. As marketers continue seeking to find new forms of reaching audiences and viral marketing continues to grow, the opportunities to

further explore this topic will expand. Though this study was focused on the horror genre, the results could be reflective and useful in other genres as well. Some of the practices may need modification outside of the horror realm. For example, the best practices to show audience reactions in the trailer and for virtual reality experiences would not be directly applicable outside of horror films. However, the best practices for fan art, social networking, and screenings would be generally applicable outside of the horror genre. Regardless, they could provide a guide or different perspective for marketers looking for new ideas. This guidebook provides practitioners with fresh ideas, common marketing themes among successful films, and ethical considerations to follow when constructing campaigns. Further studies could be done to explore the themes present in other film genres and determine the usefulness of pseudo-events and viral marketing in those realms.

The guidebook would be a free resource for practitioners. The guide speaks to the problem of decreasing cinema audiences, and the best practices provide insight into strategies and tactics that could be used to create an engaging and creative film campaign that will draw in audiences. The research did not reveal a single campaign that exhibited every one of the best practices. Based on the findings, campaigns that were to take each of these practices into consideration would have the potential for vast success. Also, the ethical considerations in the book would ideally produce campaigns that are more inclusive and considerate of diverse audiences. The guidebook provides an opportunity for campaigns to not only succeed at the box office but also to establish an ethical standard in marketing practices.

Threats

A main threat to this qualitative study is establishing validity. There are a few possible threats to validity in this study. Researcher bias poses a threat, as every investigator has some sort of bias that could affect how he or she interprets data. Though the data was mainly discovered and analyzed based on coverage from outside sources and official film outlets, some interpretational bias could be present in the findings. Additionally, there may be reactions or coverage of the marketing strategies provided in the data set that were not covered in the study, therefore some perspectives may not have been represented in the results.

A threat to the guidebook would be a lack of trust in the findings or an unwillingness to change. Some experienced practitioners may be more hesitant to enact new or non-traditional ideas for campaigns despite the research presented. There may also be companies who would push against the ethical framework, as it could at times interfere with the company's monetary bottom line. This is where ethical decision-making would be threatened. Additionally, some may have financial limitations or be opposed to doing extra research to determine the ethical standard of their campaign tactics.

Next Steps

Construction of Guidebook

The guidebook will contain six sections. The first section will include a brief history of publicity and pseudo-events. The second section will give a short theoretical grounding using the ELM and U&G described in common terminology for the non-

academic audience. Because the best practices included in the guidebook will draw heavily from a theoretical and evidence base, this section will help to inform the reader on what those theories are and why they are relevant to film marketing. Third, there will be a section describing Millennials. Because the suggestions in the guidebook will be targeted at Millennials, this section will educate the reader on the psychographics and demographics of the generation.

The fourth, and largest, section of the guidebook will outline the best practices for pseudo-events. This section will describe each film in the sample, the relevant data, and the best practices that emerged from data analysis and their connections to ELM and U&G. Each best practice will emphasize the ethics of the decision and appropriate communication.

The guidebook will be constructed and designed into a physical guidebook that would be available in both hardcopy and online. Producing the guidebook in a hard copy would allow for easy distribution. A hard copy, as opposed to a strictly online form such as a website, would allow for the content to be all in one place and easy for the reader to reference. Providing a PDF online would make the guidebook easily accessible and shareable. This book will be aesthetically appealing, easy to read, well organized, and easily digestible. The guidebook should be something that marketers and communications professionals in the film industry can use for guidance and inspiration in the creation of new campaigns.

Theoretical and Ethical Integration

This project was selected because it filled a need within the communication and film industries. There is not currently a comprehensive guidebook on this subject. The ethical considerations also add a unique perspective to the guide. The decision to put an ethical focus on the guidebook was made because of this unique perspective, and the ethical considerations also add a deeper level of purpose and significance to the guidebook.

This project seeks to illustrate how pseudo-events primarily can be redeemed and used ethically by marketers. As described in the literature review, Boorstin (1992) holds that pseudo-events are often dishonest and manipulative. Pseudo-events were made largely popular by news reporters and other communication professionals, as they used them to fill the news cycle and engage more audiences. As Boorstin (1992) describes, pseudo-events raise ethical questions.

Such ethical questions arise because pseudo-events rely heavily on media framing. Media professionals create frames as a way to tell stories and shape how audiences receive messages. Film marketers have utilized framing in marketing to create messages that speak to specific audiences (Satchel, 2017). A form of framing based marketing includes the use of pseudo-events, which generate from cultural stereotypes and individual pseudo-environments. Lippmann (1992) argues that individual pseudo-environments work to shape how a person views the world around them. Pseudo-environments contain fictions that then inform stereotypes in a type of feedback loop (Lippmann, 1992).

Because pseudo-events have traditionally been based on media frames, they hold the likelihood of perpetuating stereotypes. In some of Boorstin's (1992) criticisms of pseudo-events, he also addresses their misleading nature. Pseudo-events that are misleading, manipulative, or exploitive are unethical and do not treat target audiences with respect. Though there are many traditional examples of unethical practices of pseudo-events (Boorstin, 1992), this project seeks to respond to those practices by demonstrating that pseudo-events can actually be enacted ethically and can be useful tactics to use in film marketing. Buber (2000) provides an ethical framework for analyzing and assessing how pseudo-events can be implemented with respect to the ethical treatment of consumers.

The presented ethical principles encourage a person to look beyond a personal or "bottom line" lens in order to view other people without presuppositions. They also favor fair treatment of others, which would include honesty, and exclude the exploitation of specific people groups. Buber's principle allows for framing, stereotyping, and pseudo-events to be evaluated and show how these things should be done in an ethical manner. By using an ethical framework, the pseudo-event can be redeemed as a creative and effective marketing strategy that remains ethical in its presentation to, and treatment of, audiences. Acting ethically not only creates a better media environment but also holds the potential to build good will, and deepen brand connections with consumers. The I-It, I-Thou approach purports that valuing and respecting a human life is significant and ultimately more important than a company's bottom-line. In the long run, this will grow a bank of goodwill for the company and may positively influence film marketing culture.

Implementation

The main competition to the guidebook would be any current blogs or websites that discuss pseudo-events, viral marketing, or guerilla marketing strategies. However, many of these sites are not grounded in primary research and are often more generalized instead of tailored to a specific field or genre. Ultimately, there is not major competition for this guidebook, as it fills a need within a specific niche.

The guidebook stands to be a useful tool for marketers who are working with a small budget and looking for new ways to engage with consumers. Because of the decreasing number of in-theater patrons, the best practices guide is meant to give practitioners a new framework for campaigns with strategies that are likely to draw in consumers. This could also aid in alleviating some of the struggles the film industry has faced in recent years by providing insight into marketing to Millennials and breaking through the clutter of the current media environment. The ethical considerations throughout the guide also call marketers to feel a sense of responsibility for others, and to see consumers as more than numbers. If this were to be followed, fewer marketing practices would be built on stereotypes, and marketers might learn to seek more extensive and humanistic research on their target demographics. This would not only be effective in the creation of ethical promotional materials, but also would aid the practitioner in creating a more knowledgeable and informed campaign.

The results of the study will be used to construct a printed guidebook of best practices. This book can be printed as a physical bound book, and can also be offered as an eBook online. This would likely be self-published and could be sold for a fee online

on a site like Amazon. If any new developments or trends begin to arise in the area of film marketing, viral marketing, or pseudo-events, modifications could be made to update the best practices or add any new theme developments. Further research could also be done to include an analysis of any successful new horror films to determine any new practices or trends. Ultimately, this guidebook is meant to be an aid for marketing practitioners, so it should be easily accessible and available for anyone who would desire to use it.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1

List of Best Practices and Films

Best Practices	Films Demonstrating Best Practices
<i>Trailers:</i>	
1.) Use trailers like an online pseudo-event to spark curiosity and viral sharing. 2.) Keep the audience wanting more by not revealing numerous scenes or scares from the movie, but give glimpses of what makes the film's story unique without revealing several scenes or most of the film's plot. 3.) Leave clues for the fans to follow. 4.) Consider showing audience reactions in the trailer.	<i>Get Out, Paranormal Activity 2, Split</i>
<i>Build up to reveal:</i>	
1.) Use a special event to reveal teasers and trailers. 2.) Build anticipation through countdowns to reveals. 3.) Keep aspects of the main character or antagonist, like voice or image, a mystery.	<i>The Conjuring 2, Paranormal Activity 3, Split, IT</i>
<i>Fan art</i>	
1.) Use social media to ask fans to create art inspired by the film. 2.) Share fan art on official pages. 3.) Require fans to share their art on their personal social media pages to enter the contest so that there is added exposure.	<i>IT, Get Out</i>
<i>Contests</i>	
1.) Put on a contest or giveaway for fans that focuses on exclusivity and privileges the most engaged fans. 2.) Offer tickets or other extra incentives (i.e. merchandise, trips, events) as prizes. 3.) Partner with genre specific websites or other relevant organizations for giveaways. 4.) Be creative with contest rules by requiring contestants to create or do something that involves social media so that they are more invested and more people will hear about the film or contest.	<i>World War Z, Annabelle, Paranormal Activity 2, Insidious 3</i>

<i>Screenings</i>	
1.) Put on secret or surprise screenings. 2.) Capitalize on special dates, like Friday the 13th or Halloween. 3.) Use festivals or other events for initial screenings.	<i>Get Out, Paranormal Activity, Shutter Island, Split</i>
<i>Fans have a voice</i>	
1.) Give fans a voice in campaigns. 2.) Maintain some exclusivity. 3.) Seek to understand the audience instead of seeing them simply as data or targets. 4.) Determine where the most buzz is by listening to the fans.	<i>Paranormal Activity, Paranormal Activity 2, Paranormal Activity 3</i>
<i>Personal virtual reality experiences</i>	
1.) Create virtual reality videos. 2.) Make them easily accessible on multiple platforms. 3.) Use pivotal scenes or settings from the film for the video. 4.) Make it seem as realistic as possible, not overly animated, and easy to follow.	<i>The Conjuring 2, Insidious 3, IT</i>
<i>4D or pop-up VR experiences</i>	
1.) Fully immerse people in the film through personal or pop-up VR experiences. 2.) Take the experience to the fans, but offer limited availability. 3.) Use a mix of tangible elements and technology for a holistic 4D experience.	<i>IT, Insidious 3</i>
<i>Film becomes reality</i>	
1.) Take something iconic or notable from the film and bring it into reality. 2.) Utilize apps and other online technology to create fun, immersive experiences. 3.) Play off of current trends in technology or culture. 4.) Do not play on stereotypes or exploit people (i.e., cultural, ethnic, religious groups 5.) Do not be overly invasive.	<i>IT, Annabelle, Annabelle: Creation, Insidious 2, Insidious 3, Paranormal Activity 2</i>
<i>Film websites</i>	
1.) Make official film sites interactive. 2.) Create viral sites connected to the film that help to tell the film's story. 3.) Slowly reveal viral sites' connections to the film to allow buzz to grow. 4.) Create fun, interactive online elements that give users takeaways (i.e., a picture).	<i>World War Z, Get Out, The Conjuring, Paranormal Activity, Annabelle: Creation, Paranormal Activity 3, Insidious 2, Insidious</i>

<i>Video content</i>	
1.) Create and share viral videos. 2.) When the film is based on real events, create content with spotlights on real people and testimonials. 3.) Avoid showing too many scenes from the film and instead create content that adds to the film. 4.) Create videos related to viral websites.	<i>World War Z, The Conjuring, The Conjuring 2, Insidious</i>
<i>Social networking</i>	
1.) Post consistently on social media sites and engage with followers. 2.) Create social media challenges for followers to participate in. 3.) Give a direct call for people to share about the film on social media. 4.) Create themed apps, filters, or other unique content for social sites. 5.) Encourage filmmakers and cast to engage with followers on social networks.	<i>Get Out, Paranormal Activity, The Conjuring, Annabelle, Insidious</i>
<i>Press</i>	
1.) Hold press tours/press conferences that coincides with special dates or events to draw more attention. 2.) Be creative in how information is released. 3.) Give exclusive content or information to certain sources. 4.) Have the director or cast make public appearances and conduct special interviews. 5.) Emphasize the unique aspects of the film.	<i>Get Out, Shutter Island, Paranormal Activity 2, Paranormal Activity 3, Split</i>
<i>Special events</i>	
1.) Offer special packages for film showings. 2.) Put on double features for continuing franchise premieres. 3.) Add extra, interactive elements to the screenings. 4.) Put on a special event for new reveals (i.e. teasers, trailers, etc.). 5.) Incorporate guest stars or performers at events.	<i>World War Z, The Conjuring, Insidious 2</i>
<i>Rumors create buzz</i>	
1.) Release interesting information to create buzz. 2.) Direct speculation about the experience of the film's creation. 3.) Sometimes a risky move can pay off. 4.) Stay ethical and never release false information.	<i>Annabelle, The Conjuring 2, The Conjuring, Shutter Island</i>

<i>Partnerships</i>	
1.) Partner with organizations with appeal to the campaign's target audience. 2.) Think outside of horror to find more mainstream media partners. 3.) Take advantage of broadcasted special events with large audiences to run promotions. 4.) Have the film incorporated into entertainment media (i.e. television, YouTube videos, etc.).	<i>Paranormal Activity 3, Insidious 2, Shutter Island, Insidious 3</i>

Appendix 2

Sample Guidebook Pages

WELCOME!

Hollywood is facing more and more challenges when it comes to theater sales. With the growing use of streaming services, people have more options than ever for consuming entertainment. This is especially evident in younger audiences, as the Millennial generation is one of the lowest in theater attendance. At the same time, the media environment has become increasingly cluttered. This has raised the need for creative and non-traditional marketing strategies in order to break through that clutter. Guerilla marketing, pseudo-events, and viral marketing are a way to do that. These strategies offer a unique and often more economical way to reach consumers and build buzz surrounding a film.

Within the horror genre, these strategies are highly prevalent. While most of the movie industry has been facing a decline, horror has seen growth over the past few years. For this reason, this guidebook was created. A qualitative research analysis of the top 15 highest grossing horror films from 2007-2017 was conducted, in which five major themes and subsequent sub-themes of common practices were drawn. From these themes, the best practices presented in this guidebook were formed. This book is meant to be a resource for communications practitioners, in the hope that it would inspire creativity and aid in the construction of effective, ethical, and engaging film marketing campaigns.



“THE WORLD IS NOT COMPREHENSIBLE,
BUT IT IS EMBRACEABLE: THROUGH THE
EMBRACING OF ONE OF ITS BEINGS. ”

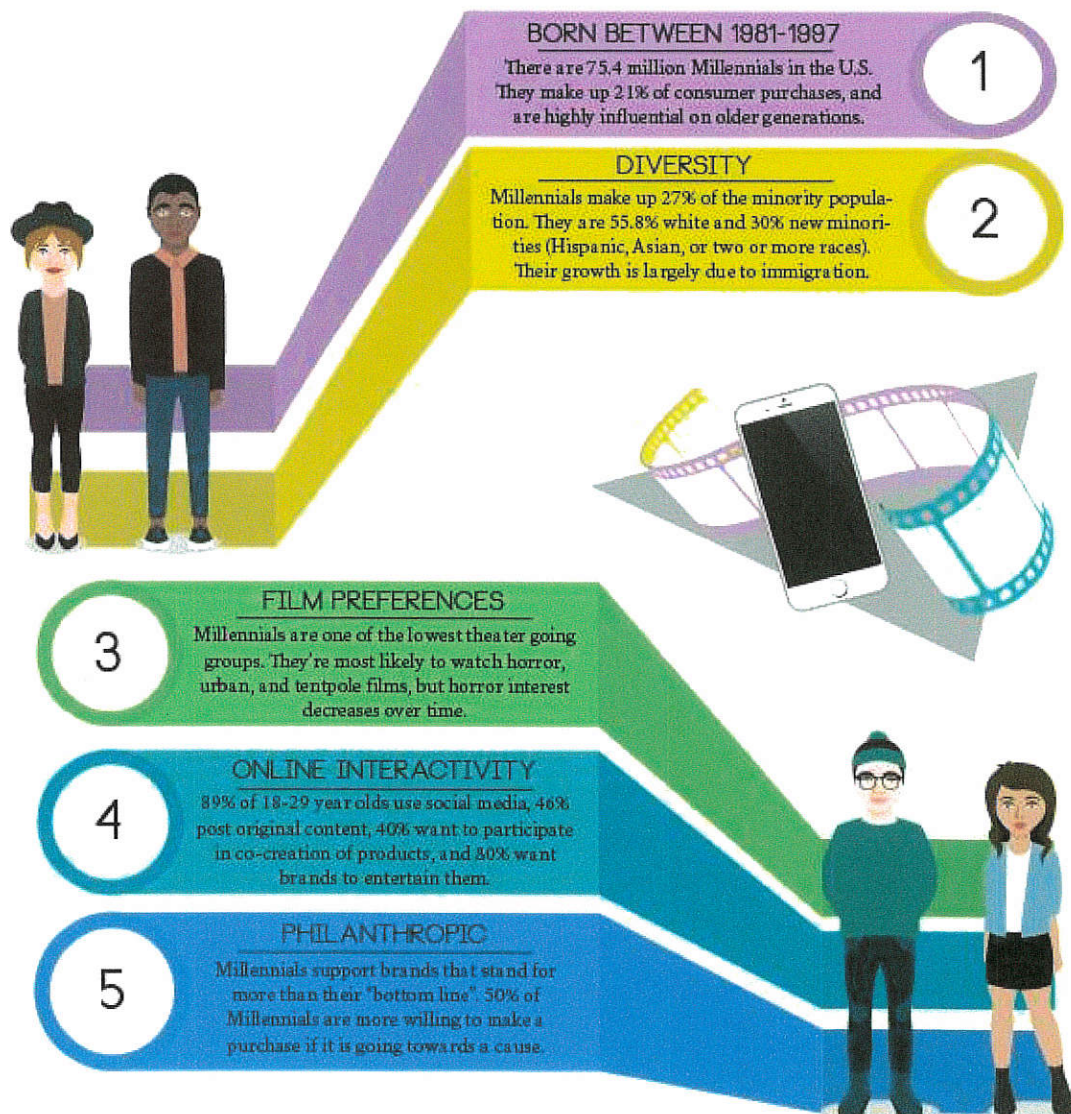
-MARTIN BUBER-

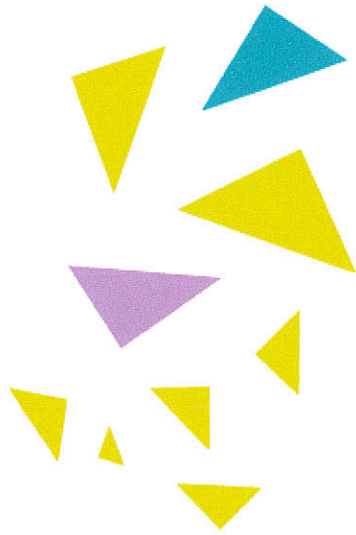
This guidebook was also created to give a guide for ethical practice in using pseudo-events and viral marketing. The main ethical framework for consideration in this guidebook draws from Martin Buber's dialogic ethical principle of I-It, I-Thou. Essentially, this principle puts major focus on seeing other people not as objects or "tools" to be used (known as "I-It") but as beings that hold immense value (known as "I-Thou"). Engaging in an "I-Thou" mindset then leads to a feeling of responsibility and care for the other.

In embracing this ethical philosophy, target audiences would be seen no longer as simple data points but as real people that deserve respect. Communications practitioners may use this as a guide for creating marketing campaigns that are not misleading, do not perpetuate stereotypes, and do not exploit people. Campaigns of this sort, especially those that incorporate the non-traditional strategies to be discussed in this book, hold the potential to build significant goodwill for an organization, grow brand loyalty, and engage diverse groups of people. The best practices in this guidebook offer suggestions for the use of pseudo-events and viral marketing that are grounded in the aforementioned ethical philosophy.

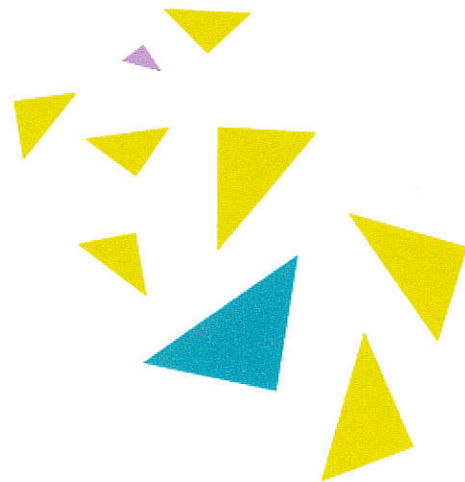
MILLENNIALS

Millennials are a significant demographic for marketers to reach. Marketers have become increasingly interested in this group because of their power and elusiveness. It's important to understand them, what they like, and how they think. This guidebook is centered on reaching this generation. In order to better understand them, here are 5 key points about Millennials.





IMM ERS ION



A MAJOR THEME IN SUCCESSFUL
HORROR FILM MARKETING IS
IMMERSION. THIS INVOLVES
CREATING EXPERIENCES THAT
ALLOW FANS TO ENGAGE WITH
THE FILM IN REAL LIFE.

PERSONAL VIRTUAL REALITY EXPERIENCE

20

CREATE VIRTUAL REALITY VIDEOS

Virtual reality (or 360°) videos allow fans to experience the film. This is a unique way for people to engage with the brand.

MAKE IT EASILY ACCESSIBLE ON MULTIPLE PLATFORMS

There are many mobile options people are using for media and entertainment. Make VR videos available on social media, websites, or through an app- the easier to access, the more likely they'll watch!



MAKE IT AS REALISTIC AS POSSIBLE

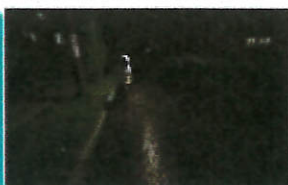
The video will likely be animated, but try to make it look as real as possible. Keep it easy to follow, and use a lot of detail! Create an eerie atmosphere that builds suspense and anticipation.

USE PIVOTAL SCENES FROM THE FILM

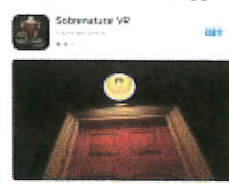
Give viewers a chance to "walk through" the film. Those memorable scenes from the movie are even more impactful when a person can experience it firsthand!

WHERE HAVE WE SEEN THIS?

IT: FLOAT VR Experience



Insidious 3: VR App



The Conjuring 2: Visions & Experience Enfield



13

4D OR POP-UP VR EXPERIENCES

IMMERSE PEOPLE IN THE FILM THROUGH 4D VR EXPERIENCES

Take VR a step further by setting up pop-up 4D experiences that fully immerse individuals in a haunting film experience. This is a great way to build hype and engagement with the brand.

OFFER LIMITED AVAILABILITY

Take the experience on a tour to major cities. Offer a limited amount of tickets for each event to maintain exclusivity. This grows anticipation and keeps people interested!



INTEGRATE TECHNOLOGY WITH TANGIBLE ELEMENTS

Create a holistic experience with many elements in play. This can be done through haunted houses, moving vehicles, or other fun set-ups. Interactivity is key!

WHERE HAVE WE SEEN THIS?

IT: FLOAT 4D School Bus Experience



Insidious 3: Into the Further 4D Experience



FILM BECOMES REALITY

14

BRING SOMETHING ICONIC FROM THE FILM TO LIFE

Make the film come to life in a way that is hard for people to ignore. This can involve many things, from haunted houses to installments around cities. Bring the nightmare into reality!

PLAY ON CURRENT TRENDS

Pay attention to trends in technology, media, and culture. These can provide insight into creating tactics that hold viral qualities and more potential for engagement.

UTILIZE APPS & OTHER TECHNOLOGY

Many apps and other popular online technologies provide unique opportunities for interactive film marketing. Find apps and other outlets to partner with for events or special features that your target audience will be drawn to engage with.

DON'T PERPETUATE STEREOTYPES OR EXPLOIT PEOPLE

This is an ethical consideration that seeks to value and respect others. This requires research into people groups that may be affected and intentional care to avoid manipulation or dishonesty.

DON'T BE OVERLY INVASIVE

This is an ethical consideration that seeks to respect people's autonomy. This would mean ensuring that a person would always have the ability to not participate in any event that makes them too uncomfortable.

WHERE HAVE WE SEEN THIS?

IT Balloons in Australia



Annabelle: Creation Dolls in New York



Insidious 3: Kik With "Quinn"



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