Quality of Video Game Trailers

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Abstract

Game developers can gain competitive advantage in the market by understanding current trends in video game advertising. Based on the Elaboration Likelihood Model, this study examined the persuasive focus and video production quality of video game trailers. Content of 51 top selling video game trailers across three video game genres (traditional, imagination, physical enactment), and two trailer types (cinematic, gameplay) were analyzed. Results showed that peripheral persuasive route was utilized more in cinematic trailers, and for trailers of imagination and physical enactment genres. Employment of peripheral route approaches predicted video production quality. Trailers of imagination and physical enactment genres had more video production quality than trailers of traditional games.

Keywords: Video game trailers, Content analysis, Persuasive focus, Video production quality, Video game genre

The video game industry is growing steadily with an audience who believes they get more value for their money buying games compared to DVD's, movie tickets and music (ESA, 2015). Given that the industry is expected to be profitable in the years to come, video games are vastly marketable (Marchand and Hennig-Thurau, 2013; PwC, 2016). Video game advertisements have traditionally included various print and digital displays influencing one percent of video game purchasing behaviors (ESA, 2015). But within the past decade there is an emerging trend in video game advertising that companies release gameplay trailers as well as cinematic trailers of their upcoming game on social media (Vollans, 2015), as an effort to expand the scope of game marketing beyond traditional advertising. In relation to the game's genre, these cinematic and gameplay trailers may vary in terms of their persuasive messages, as well as their video production quality.

Previous research on video game advertising focused on game marketing (i.e. Anders, 1999; Jeroen and Stremersch, 2009; Marchand and Hennig-Thurau, 2013) gamification and embedded advertising in games (i.e. Chen and Haley, 2014; Fuchs, 2016; Gangadharbatla, Bradley and Wise, 2013; Hillman and Butterworth, 2015; Yang et al., 2006), video game audience (i.e. Chess, 2011; Greenburg et al., 2010), and types of video game genres (i.e. Apperley, 2006; Lucas and Sherry, 2004). Previous research has also discussed the progress of video games in relation to cinema production as games have been adapting cinematic qualities both in their advertisements and the in-game cut scenes (Majek, 2011). However, to our knowledge there is no previous research that focused on the nature of persuasive messages in trailers of various video game genres. Furthermore, no previous study has empirically examined the video production quality of either cinematic or gameplay video game trailers.

Using the Elaboration Likelihood Model, the purpose of this content analysis study is to examine the persuasive focus and video production quality of cinematic and gameplay trailers of best-selling games across various video game genres. Findings of this study may allow theoretical and conceptual explanations within current game advertising approaches, and lead to improvements in game advertising practices to target different audiences more

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effectively. Furthermore, it may give independent game developers insights on advertising their games to follow video game advertising trends.

Literature Review

Video Game Trailers

Luan and Sudhir (2010) point out that similar to movies and DVD's, video games have short product life cycles, due to constant changes in technology, audience tastes and market dynamics (Jeroen and Stremersch, 2009). In relation to their genre, marketing such media requires an optimal advertising schedule and incorporation of numerous strategies and tactics for the most profitable return on investment (Luan and Sudhir, 2010; Jeroen and Stremersch, 2009). Some of the effective video game marketing tactics (apart from pricing, timing, and console compatibilities) include buzz generation, word of mouth marketing, player-created content, advertising (i.e. trailers, print ads), or behind-the-scenes trailers (Luan and Sudhir, 2010; Marchand and Hennig-Thurau, 2013; Sihvonen, 2011). Among these marketing strategies, trailers have been prominent advertising outlets particularly for visual media such as movies, and more recently video games (Benson-Allott, 2008; Vollans, 2015).

In the movie industry, trailers are promotional short films about upcoming movies, and historically have been good return on investments, as they have borrowed clips from the movies cutting costs significantly (Staiger, 1990). Traditionally, trailers were "condensing appeals and plots into a couple of minutes of screen time" (Staiger, 1990, p.9), while providing the audience a glimpse of the most appealing aspects of the movie. Since the inception of the concept of trailers, they have teased the audience about the visual, audial, or narrative highlights of the movie, and later, evoking suspense and curiosity about what the movie may offer (Staiger, 1990). Ultimately, movie trailers aim to generate a positive attitude towards the key promise of the movie, and evoke a desire in the audience to pay to see the whole movie.

Video game trailers derived from the initial cinematic trailer idea (Vollans, 2015), and video game trailers utilize similar strategies employed in cinema (Majek, 2011). In the video game

industry, trailers have the similar promotional purpose to give the target audience a glimpse of an upcoming video game, while teasing about the game's key promises with visual, audial or narrative highlights. Trépanier-Jobin (2016) suggests that the audience forms an idea about a video game by "decoding the multiple clues" (p.114) within the game's text and paratext, including their advertisements. Ultimately, video game trailers aim to generate a positive attitude towards the key promises of the game prior to its release, and evoke a desire in the audience make a purchase to play the game.

As product category, video games are very similar to movies. In fact, examining video games, Majek (2011) pointed out the cinematic qualities in video game cut scenes. Furthermore, entertainment media such as movies and video games have "experience qualities," which means that the audience needs to take a risk (or minimize this risk by checking product reviews) by purchasing and consuming the product to see if they enjoy it (Marchand and Hennig-Thurau, 2013, p.145). However, different from movies, video games are interactive in nature. The audience is not only a witness to the game narrative, but is also an active participant influencing the narrative, consequently experiencing intense emotions, and immersion (Bateman, 2009). Hence, video game marketing demands advertisers to go beyond traditional trailers adopted from the movie industry. Consequently, two types of video game trailers have recently emerged to capture gaming audiences; namely the cinematic trailer and the gameplay trailer. In addition to traditional advertising efforts, both types of video game trailers are released online via YouTube, Vimeo, gaming websites, and other social media.

The cinematic video game trailer is similar to a theatrical trailer in terms of advertising. Majek (2011) stated that almost every popular game today advertises with a cinematic trailer or similar cut scenes. Vollans (2015) suggested that the cinematic trailer is used to promote the game and sometimes they incorporate a narrative similar to the way a film would be promoted. He argued that cinematic trailers have grown to include abstract representations of the video game they are advertising as well as some of the gameplay concepts. However, trailers are able to add more to the video game narratives by incorporating the game focus into the trailers, giving the audience more information on the game strategy before their release (Vollans, 2015). The gameplay trailer also promotes the game, but it particularly

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gives insights into the gaming experience by incorporating images and scenes captured from the game, demonstrations, and various interface elements into the trailer. Because of their nature, gameplay trailers are, arguably, a more accurate portrayal of the games themselves (Vollans, 2015).

Video game trailers are serious investments, not only for advertisers as the trailers grow in popularity, but also for gamers as trailers generate expectations about games (Moore, 2014). Both cinematic and gameplay trailers are typically released concurrently, so it is difficult to determine which type of trailer is more effective in changing or forming positive attitudes, and consequently persuading the audience to purchase the game. Video game trailers are gaining attention from the industry (Vollans, 2015), so there is need for more empirical research on the nature of different types of video game trailer to show their persuasive characteristics as promotional materials.

Persuasive Focus and Elaboration Likelihood Model

Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986, 1996) is an appropriate framework to examine video game advertising as a persuasive medium. Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) examines the cognitive process of attitude formation and change in relation to motivation and reasoning ability (Benoit and Benoit, 2008; Dainton and Zelley, 2011; Miller, 2005). Attitude is the relatively enduring evaluation of a phenomenon that may eventually influence behaviors (Dainton and Zelley, 2011; Miller, 2005). Attitude formation and change is essential in the process of video game advertising, as attitudes may consequently determine game purchasing behaviors. ELM focuses not only on individual's message processing to form and change attitudes, but also on message characteristics that best fit such cognitive processes (Miller, 2005), allowing the theory to provide insights for persuasive message design in advertising.

ELM suggests that persuasion depends on the message receiver's motivation and ability to process information; therefore, message senders should know their audiences and utilize persuasive messages that would trigger the appropriate route of cognitive processing (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986, 1996). Persuasive messages may utilize a central or peripheral route

approach, where central route provides the audience with issue relevant information with strong arguments, and peripheral route provides the audience with issue-irrelevant decision cues (Petty and Cacioppo, 1998; Kruglanski and Thompson, 1999). Logic based central route is best when the audience is both motivated and able to process the persuasive message with strong and factual arguments. Emotion based peripheral route is best when the audience is not motivated and/or will or can not elaborate on the message (Dainton and Zelley, 2011; Miller, 2005).

The practical approach of advertising overlaps with the messaging approaches postulated in ELM. A hard-sell typically utilizes logical appeals and deliberately gives the audience facts of product and statistics of the product, while a soft-sell utilizes emotional appeals and focuses on the presentation of the product instead of the product itself (Sivulka, 2012). In ELM terms, central route messages can be associated with hard-sell advertising while peripheral route messages can be associated with soft-sell approaches.

Among the two persuasive routes, the central route requires the message receiver to exert more complex cognitive processes, and therefore is the more elaborated route of the two (Dainton and Zelley, 2011). Strong arguments lead to more favorable thoughts (Benoit and Benoit, 2008), and therefore central route leads to more enduring persuasion as well as behavioral outcomes (Miller, 2005; Morgan, 2007). Overall, the audience's message processing can be enhanced by the message sender by attuning the number and nature of persuasive messages.

Various factors influence whether or not persuasive messages would be processed centrally or peripherally by the target audience. For instance, central route message characteristics include ideas and content with strong arguments that require cognitive involvement and lead to cognitive response (Benoit and Benoit, 2008; Dainton and Zelley, 2011; Petty and Cacioppo, 1986). Such messages can be further characterized as containing information wealth, argument rationality, presence and presentation of evidence in terms of quality and the arrangement of arguments (Dainton and Zelley, 2011). Peripheral route message characteristics require emotional involvement and lead to emotional response (Dainton and Zelley, 2011). Peripheral message characteristics include ideas and content with an excessive

number of arguments, lengthy arguments, extended narratives, production aesthetics, presence of jingle or slogan, as well as the credibility (authority), likability, and attractiveness or beauty of the message source (Benoit and Benoit, 2008; Dainton and Zelley, 2011; Miller, 2005; Morgan, 2007). Such messages can be further characterized as containing commitment, contrast, liking, reciprocation, scarcity and social proof (Dainton and Zelley, 2011).

One of the critiques of ELM discussed by scholars is the possibility that individuals can parallel process and may engage in various combinations of processing based on their level of involvement, and a specific message cue might be processed centrally or peripherally depending on the context (Benoit and Benoit, 2008; Miller, 2005). Therefore, ELM should not be treated as a theory of dichotomous categorizations, but rather a continuum of persuasive elements (Benoit and Benoit, 2008). Moreover, Morgan (2007) recommends that it is a good practice to utilize both central and peripheral routes in designing persuasive messages to appeal to broader audiences.

ELM in Advertising Research

The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) has previously been used for research on media advertising. For instance, Davis (2003) used the ELM in a content analysis to examine the use of persuasive methods and humor in *Geico* commercials to determine if these commercials used central or peripheral route of persuasion. The study found that most of the commercials used the peripheral route and only five had strong central route elements (Davis, 2003).

Some other studies examined individuals' involvement and issue relevance in relation to persuasive messages. For instance, the Cho (1999) study utilized ELM to examine Internet advertising, specifically focusing on the subject's involvement and exposure to the advertisement. Examining both persuasive routes and the exposure of the content being studied, Cho (1999) found that people were more likely to click banner ads for more information in high involvement situations than low involvement situations. Specifically, people in low involvement situations were more likely to click on banners if the ads were larger than average size, while people with low involvement are more likely to click a banner

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with dynamic animation. In high involvement situations, banner size and animation made no difference, while a high relevance banner ad was more likely to be clicked (Cho, 1999). Similarly, Braverman's (2008) study on testimonial health messages showed that people who were highly interested in the message were persuaded by central routes and factual information, whereas people with minimal interest were more likely to be persuaded by peripheral routes or testimonials. Yahui, Cappella, and Fishbein (2006) also explained that both strong and weak arguments can be effective depending on how well the viewer can understand the message being displayed.

When ELM is applied to video game advertising, it is possible to assume that targeted gamers would be interested and both cognitively and emotionally involved in the advertised video game. On one hand, the audience would be both motivated and able to process the persuasive messages, hence central route is a better fit; on the other hand, the nature of the product is inherently emotional due to their entertainment value, hence peripheral route is a better fit. Therefore, trailers may use either route. Furthermore, due to their focus on artistic verses strategic aspects of the advertised product, it is possible that cinematic and gameplay trailers might utilize different persuasive approaches. The difference in persuasive focus could be more prominent in one form of video game trailer than another, depending on the intended audience. The ELM could help determine how many persuasive elements are typically integrated into video game trailers, and differentiate the persuasive focus of each form of trailer. Therefore, the following research questions are proposed:

RQ1: Are gameplay and cinematic trailers different in number of persuasive elements?

RQ2: Are there differences in persuasive focus across gameplay trailers and cinematic trailers?

Video Production Quality and Persuasiveness of Trailers

The concept of "quality" is problematic, because ultimately it is a subjective term. Moreover, quality can be conceptualized differently including narrative quality, technical quality, or even overall perceived quality. Setting parameters to objectively evaluate video production quality, Luo and Tang (2008) examined the specific, common elements that define high quality videos and photos and identified these elements as composition, lighting, focus

controlling, color, subject region extraction, length of subject region motion, and motion stability. Each of these elements can be seen when studying photographs or videos, and can be applicable in determining the video production quality of trailers, including video game trailers.

Although there is no previous research directly linking video production quality of trailers and advertising persuasiveness, literature suggests possible connections. A set of studies have focused on the relation between the quality and effectiveness of advertisements focusing on the audience responses to and evaluations of the medium and content. For instance, in relation to video quality, Dobrian *et al.* (2011) study focused on technical quality of online videos watched by an audience, using a dataset examining client-side instrumentation and video scale; and found that video quality did matter when watching online video content. Furthermore, the researchers suggest that online video consumers have higher expectations of video quality today than in the past to engage with the content. Another study linked audience engagement with audience retention in relation to television commercials. Hoping to inspire advertisers to create better commercials for television, Zigmond, Dorai-Raj, Interian and Naverniouk (2009) used a second-by-second measurement to determine how often and when users viewed or turned off an advertisement system. The researchers concluded that advertisements that were perceived as high-quality and creative had a measurable positive influence on audience viewing behavior. Such audience engagement and retention is essential for online advertising, including video game trailers released on YouTube, because audience engagement and retention means more exposure to the message content and the trailer's persuasive elements.

Another set of studies have focused on the relation between the quality of advertisements and the audience perceptions of the brands. This literature suggests that depending on individual characteristics (Snyder and DeBono, 1985), some audiences may associate the production quality of certain advertisements with the quality of the product being advertised, generating favorable attitudes toward the product and even the brand. For instance, Lohse and Rosen (2001) focused on visual quality, and found that Yellow Page advertisements with full color and higher resolution generated more favorable attitudes towards the advertisement itself and the brand, as well as greater perceptions of quality and credibility for the brand. Schmalensee

(1978) discussed how consumers may believe the quality of a product higher than what the ad claims because of the advertisement itself. They suggest that consumers are willing to believe that the higher production quality of an advertisement is in direct relation to the quality of the product it is trying to sell. More recently, analyzing the issue from the advertiser-medium relationship perspective, Hillman and Butterworth (2015) examined how sports videogames market themselves as a culture in terms of the way companies choose to project their image. They point out that prestigious brands expect a certain quality within the medium their brands are advertised. These studies suggest a possible association between the qualities of the game being advertised with the (video) production quality of the trailer.

Connecting previous studies with postulates of Elaboration Likelihood Model, it is possible to draw a conclusion that higher video production quality of video game trailers may function as decision cues (Lohse and Rosen, 2001), and be processed peripherally by the audience (Petty and Cacioppo, 1998; Kruglanski and Thompson, 1999) forming positive attitudes towards the advertised game. In other words, given the postulates of ELM, video production quality could be an indicator of peripheral route of persuasion due to the trailer's potential reliance on imagery and sensation. Hence, it is hypothesized that:

H1: Video game trailers focusing on peripheral route of persuasion will have higher video production quality compared to those focusing on central route.

As discussed earlier, the concurrent release of cinematic and gameplay video game trailer is a recent trend of advertising in the video game industry (Vollans, 2015). The audience reaction to cinematic and gameplay trailers can change the way the game is viewed and advertised as a whole, yet due to the novelty of this trend, there is no previous research on whether or not production quality may be upheld or limited by the trailer type. Given that video games have been adapting cinematic qualities in their cut-scenes (Majek, 2011), the video production quality of the gameplay and cinematic trailers may be similar. On the other hand, cinematic trailers may be able to utilize more variety of video production quality parameters such as composition, or subject region extraction compared to gameplay trailers. To shed light into this issue, the following research question is presented:

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RQ3: Are there differences in video production quality between gameplay trailers and cinematic trailers?

Video Game Genres

Video game genres and subgenres capture a specific style of gaming, and appeal to different audiences, and hence are marketed differently (Jeroen and Stremersch, 2009; Marchand and Hennig-Thurau, 2013). Because game genres are different from one another, their advertisements may employ different persuasive messages and production quality considerations to appeal to their different audiences.

Although some have criticized the concept of genre (Arsenault, 2009), some have separated video games based on their core characteristics, allowing video games to be grouped into genres (Apperley, 2006; Lucas and Sherry, 2004). Due to shared characteristics, Apperley (2006) categorized video games in multiple ways including genre, platform, mode, and milieu, while looking at similarities and how their differences relate to other forms of media. Apperley then continued to separate the genre into even small subgenres such as simulation games, strategy games, action games, and role playing games (2006). Lucas and Sherry (2004) and Greenberg, Sherry, Lachlan, Lucas and Holmstrom (2010) studies further categorized video games into traditional, physical enactment, and imagination macro-genres based on their factor analysis: genres of arcade, card-dice, quiz/trivia, puzzle, board, and platform make up traditional games as the concept and examples of these games have been around for a significant amount of time in classic forms. Genres of fighting, action, first person shooter, sports, and racing are considered physical enactment games because of their reliance on intense competition. The top selling video games are typically physical enactment games (Statista, 2016). Finally, genres of action, adventure, fantasy role playing, simulations, and strategy deemed to be imagination games due to their reliance on imaginary lands and situations.

According to Greenberg, Sherry, Lachlan, Lucas, and Holmstrom (2010) study, different audiences are attracted to different game genres. Separating games into specific genres can mean advertisers are able to target a specific audience who may be more inclined to buy that

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particular video game. Furthermore, trailers of different genres of video games may employ different routes to persuasion in line with their content. For instance, an advertisement for a strategy game might be more likely to incorporate central route to persuasion due to the cognitive demand of the actual game. However, since games are inherently emotional products, peripheral routes might also be applicable. Therefore, to identify the persuasive difference between video game trailers and video game genres, the following research questions were formulated:

RQ4: Are imagination, physical enactment, and traditional game trailers different in number of persuasive elements?

RQ5: Are there differences in persuasive focus of different video game genres?

Arsenault (2009) challenged the term "genre," and used the term to help define specific video games and how they can be placed in different categories. Arsenault (2009) studied the evolution and innovations of game genres in relation to the history and how video games succeed or "revolutionized" their genre. For instance, sports game players as well as advertisers expect a level of realness about their game experience (Hillman and Butterworth, 2015). Since the content of video game genres overlap with technological innovations, and different genres demand different levels of realness, production quality may differ depending on the genre being advertised. Based on previous research of video game genres, the following research question was presented:

RQ6: Are there differences in video production quality of game trailers across video game genres?

Methods

Sampling

This study observed the content of 51 different video game trailers across three different video game genres. To determine which game trailers would be analyzed, researchers identified four top ten and best-selling lists of the most popular video games of 2015 from *Time*, *Metacritic*, *Venturebeat*, and *The Verge* websites to ensure consistency and

inclusiveness (Dietz, 2015; Grubb, 2016; Peckham, 2015; Verge Staff, 2015). The websites were selected based on their traffic and credibility. To include in the analysis, a total of 30 most popular games were identified across the three genres of traditional games (seven titles), imagination games (11 titles), and physical enactment games (13 titles). Table 1 lists the games included in the analysis.

Table 1: List of Games Analyzed

Genre	Game	Trailer
Physical enactment	*Batman: Arkham Knight*	Both cinematic and gameplay
	Call of Duty: Black Ops III	Both cinematic and gameplay
	Call of Duty: Advanced Warfare	Both cinematic and gameplay
	Destiny: The Taken King	Both cinematic and gameplay
	Fallout 4	Both cinematic and gameplay
	FIFA 16	Both cinematic and gameplay
	Grand Theft Auto V	Both cinematic and gameplay
	Mortal Kombat X	Both cinematic and gameplay
	Madden NFL: 16	Both cinematic and gameplay
	NBA 2k16	Both cinematic and gameplay
	Rocket League	Gameplay only
	Splatoon	Cinematic only
	Star Wars Battlefront	Both cinematic and gameplay
Imagination	*Bloodbourne*	Both cinematic and gameplay
	Her Story	Cinematic only
	Journey	Cinematic only
	Lego Dimensions	Cinematic only
	Life is Strange	Cinematic only
	Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain	Both cinematic and gameplay
	Ori and the Blind Forest	Both cinematic and gameplay
	Rise of the Tomb Raider	Both cinematic and gameplay
	SOMA	Both cinematic and gameplay
	The Room 3	Cinematic only
	The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt	Both cinematic and gameplay

	Downwell	Gameplay only
	Mario Kart DLC Pack 2	Gameplay only
	Prune	Both cinematic and gameplay
Traditional	*Ryan North's To Be or Not To Be*	Both cinematic and gameplay
	Shovel Knight	Both cinematic and gameplay
	Super Mario Maker	Gameplay only
	The Binding of Isaac Afterbirth	Cinematic only

After the games were identified, YouTube was utilized to find official trailers for each game, which were uploaded to YouTube by their production companies or advertisers. Most gameplay trailers were titled as "gameplay" while cinematic trailers were titled as "cinematic", or "movie trailers". Two researchers categorized trailers as either cinematic or gameplay based on not only the title of the trailer, but also literature on video game trailers (Vollans, 2015). Among these 30 games, 20 had both cinematic and gameplay trailers, six had cinematic trailers only and four had gameplay trailers only, totaling 51 trailers.

Procedures and Materials

After the trailers were identified on YouTube, each trailer was downloaded using Safari's Video Downloader App to ensure access to the videos for analysis. In order to conduct the content analysis of the trailers, a coding scheme was developed based on relevant literature on ELM and video production quality (see measures below). The unit of analysis was determined as the whole trailer considering all graphic, textual, and audio content. Finally, two researchers trained in the media field watched and coded the trailers simultaneously for trailer type, genre, persuasive focus and video quality using an Excel spreadsheet. Coders' agreement rate was 92.6%, and inter-coder reliability was π=84%.

Measures – Trailer type

Based on Vollans' categorization (2015), this study examined cinematic trailers and gameplay trailers. Gameplay trailers focus on the game interface and features, game demonstration, and images captured within the game. Cinematic trailers are concentrated on a

particular narrative, may include characters, or storylines that have less to do with the actual game strategy. Cinematic trailers may portray characters from the actual game, but does not demonstrate the gameplay experience. Out of 51 trailers, 47% were gameplay trailers, and 53% were cinematic trailers.

Measures – Video gamegenre

The concept of video game genres, and genres in general, is sometimes considered inconclusive as there is no official definition of video game genres and the categorization of most popular games may not be mutually exclusive (Arsenault, 2009). Therefore, this study examined the content of video game trailers from three different video game macro genres: Traditional games, Physical Enactment games, and Imagination games (Greenburg, Sherry, Lachlan, Lucas & Holmstrom 2010; Lucas and Sherry 2004). Traditional games are based on conventional games such as arcade, card-dice, quiz/trivia, puzzle, board, and platform games; physical enactment games are based on intense physical competition such as fighting, first person shooter, sports, and racing games; and imagination games are based on problem solving in imaginary environments and situations such as action, adventure, fantasy role playing, simulations, and strategy (Greenburg, Sherry, Lachlan, Lucas and Holmstrom, 2010; Lucas and Sherry, 2004). The industry classifications advertised in game descriptions were utilized to categorize the games into the three broad genres. Out of 51 trailers, 35% were imagination, 47% were physical enactment, and 18% were traditional game trailers.

Measures – Persuasive focus

This study utilized the ELM (Petty and Cacioppo, 1984) to determine what persuasive focus each trailer may have utilized as shown in Table 2. To determine if the video game trailers focused on the central route or peripheral route of persuasion, the coders looked for nine elements adopted from the literature, namely argument strength, message focus, number of arguments, source of credibility, evidence focus, technical versus narrative game feature focus, sensation, realism, and use of music (Benoit and Benoit, 2008; Dainton and Zelley, 2011; Miller, 2005; Morgan, 2007; Petty and Cacioppo, 1986). Reliability for central route of

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persuasive focus was α = .683 (*M* = 2.08, *SD* = 1.83); and for peripheral route of persuasive focus was α = .428 (*M* = 5.24, *SD* = 1.37).

Table 2. Video Game Trailers Persuasive Focus Coding Scheme

Persuasive Focus	Persuasive Elements		Coding
1. Central Route	a.	Informational	0- No; 1- Yes
	b.	Strong argument	0- No; 1- Yes
	c.	Enough arguments	0- No; 1- Yes
	d.	Logical evidence	0- No; 1- Yes
	e.	Experts	0- No; 1- Yes
	f.	Technical game features	0- No; 1- Yes
	g.	Novelty	0- No; 1- Yes
	h.	Realistic image	0- No; 1- Yes
	i.	Music background	0- No; 1- Yes
2. Peripheral Route	a.	Testimonial	0- No; 1- Yes
	b.	Weak argument	0- No; 1- Yes
	c.	Overwhelming argument	0- No; 1- Yes
	d.	Endorsements	0- No; 1- Yes
	e.	Senses	0- No; 1- Yes
	f.	Narrative game features	0- No; 1- Yes
	g.	Sensation	0- No; 1- Yes
	h.	Artistic Imagery	0- No; 1- Yes
	i.	Music foreground	0- No; 1- Yes

The game trailers that were coded to have more central route persuasive elements were then considered as central route focus (6%), and those that were coded to have more peripheral route persuasive elements were categorized as peripheral route focus (83%). Video game trailers that were coded to have an overlapping number of elements (difference of zero or one) were categorized as both (13%).

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Measures – Total persuasive elements

Since central and peripheral routes are parts of a persuasive continuum, where a trailer can contain both central and peripheral processing elements (Benoit and Benoit, 2008), a persuasiveness variable was created by adding both central and peripheral route elements to measure the total number of persuasive elements (M = 7.31, SD= 2.21), ranging between two and 12.

Measures – Video production quality

Video production quality was assessed based on seven factors and accompanying sub factors determined by Lou and Tang's (2008, p. 387-397) previous literature as shown in Table 3. The video game trailers with more factors present were determined to have a higher video production quality, ranging between four and 15. Cronbach's Alpha for video production quality was α = .817 (M = 11.31, SD = 3.08).

Table 3. Video Game Trailers Video Production Quality Coding Scheme

Video Production Quality	Quality Elements	Coding
1. Composition	a. Rule of thirds	0- No; 1- Yes
	b. Contrast	0- No; 1- Yes
	c. Clear subject	0- No; 1- Yes
2. Focus Control	a. Isolate subject	0- No; 1- Yes
	b. Subject in focus	0- No; 1- Yes
3. Color	a. High contrast	0- No; 1- Yes
	b. Black and white	0- No; 1- Yes
4. Subject Extraction	a. Clear subject	0- No; 1- Yes
	b. Blurred background	0- No; 1- Yes
5. Length of Subject Range Notion	a. Changes focus	0- No; 1- Yes
	b. Changes angle	0- No; 1- Yes
6. Motion Stability	a. Smooth	0- No; 1- Yes
	b. Purposely Shaky	0- No; 1- Yes
7. Lighting	a. 3D effect	0- No; 1- Yes

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	b. Attention to subject	0- No; 1- Yes

Results

Trailer Type, Total Persuasiveness, and Persuasive Focus

To answer the first research question on differences between cinematic and gameplay trailers in number of persuasive elements, an ANOVA test was performed. Results showed that there were no differences in total persuasiveness across trailer types, F (1, 49) = .04, p = .849. Both cinematic and gameplay trailers contained similar number of persuasive elements.

To answer the second research question on differences in persuasive focus across gameplay trailers and cinematic trailers, a Chi-Square test was first used. Results showed that although only gameplay trailers utilized dominantly central route, both gameplay and cinematic trailers were equally likely to have central or peripheral route in persuasive focus, X^2 = (2, N = 51) = 5.03, p = .081. Only three trailers out of 51 were found to be utilizing dominantly central route approaches, and six trailers utilized central and peripheral route approaches equally.

This research question was further examined with two ANOVA tests. There was no significant difference across cinematic or gameplay trailers in terms of how many central route persuasive elements were utilized, F (1, 49) = 3.02, p = .089. However, there was a significant difference in using peripheral route across trailer types, F (1, 49) = 7.66, p = .008. Specifically, cinematic trailers (M =5.70, SD = 1.07) utilized significantly more peripheral route elements of persuasion than gameplay trailers (M = 4.71, SD = 1.49).

Persuasive Focus and Video Production Quality

Hypothesis one predicted that video game trailers employing peripheral route of persuasion would have higher video production quality compared to those employing central route. To test this hypothesis, an ANOVA was performed, and results showed there was no difference of production quality across trailers that utilize dominantly central, peripheral, or both routes, F (2, 48) = .29, p = .750. However, video quality was positively and significantly related to

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the number of peripheral route approaches utilized in a trailer, r (48) = .49, $p < .001$. Furthermore, a linear regression analysis showed that the number of peripheral approaches employed in a trailer predicted video quality, β = .49, t (50) = 3.90, $p < .001$; explaining a significant proportion of variance, R^2 = .24, F (1, 49) = 15.23, $p < .001$. Hypothesis one was partially supported in the sense that the more peripheral route persuasive elements were integrated into a trailer, the higher was the video production quality (but not in comparison to central route).

Trailer Type and Video Production Quality

To answer the third research question, an ANOVA test was used to determine if there was a difference in production quality across gameplay and cinematic trailers. Results showed that there was no significant difference in production quality between trailer types, F (1, 49) = .92, p = .342. Both cinematic (M = 11.7, SD = 3.06) and gameplay (M = 10.9, SD = 3.10) trailers were of high quality. So, video production quality was consistent across trailer types.

Game Genre, Total Persuasiveness, and Persuasive Focus

To answer the fourth research question on differences between imagination, physical enactment, and traditional game trailers in number of persuasive elements, an ANOVA test was performed. Results showed that there were differences in total persuasiveness across trailer genres, F (2, 48) = 11.04, p = <.001. Additional post-hoc analyses showed that traditional game trailers (M = 4.78, SD = 1.79) were significantly lower in the total number of persuasive elements utilized than imagination (M = 7.39, SD = 2.23) or physical enactment (M = 8.21, SD = 1.59) game trailers at p = .005 and $p < .001$ levels respectively. Hence, trailers for traditional video games contained the lowest number of persuasive elements.

To answer the fifth research question and determine if there was a difference in persuasive focus between different video game genres, first a Chi-Square test was used. Results showed that trailers of different game genres were equally likely to utilize central or peripheral route approaches in their persuasive focus, X^2 = (4, N = 51) = 1.77, p = . 778. Next, two ANOVA tests were performed. Results found that there were no differences across game genres in

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terms of how many central route approaches were used, *F* (2, 48) = 1.42, *p* = .252. However, there was an omnibus effect of game genre in terms of trailers' use of peripheral route approaches, *F* (2, 48) = 13.16, *p* < .001. Additional Post-hoc analyses showed that traditional game trailers (*M* = 3.56, *SD* = 1.51) utilized significantly lower number of peripheral route approaches than both imagination (*M* = 5.33, *SD* = 1.14) and physical enactment (*M* = 5.79, *SD* = .93) game trailers at *p* = .001 and *p* < .001 levels respectively. Hence, trailers for traditional genre video games contained significantly less persuasive messages that would be processed peripherally by the audience.

Game Genre and Video Production Quality

Finally, an ANOVA test was used to answer the sixth research question, to determine if there was a difference in video production quality across trailers of different video game genres. Results showed that there was a significant omnibus effect of game genre on the trailer's video production quality, *F* (2, 48) = 36.31, *p* < .001. Additional Post-hoc tests revealed that imagination game trailers (*M* = 11.72, *SD* = 2.61) and physical enactment game trailers (*M* = 12.88, *SD* = 1.12) in general were equally high in video production quality, while traditional game trailers (*M* = 6.33, *SD* = 2.35) were significantly lower in video production quality both at *p* < .001 levels.

Conclusion

This study found that the majority (82%) of trailers of top selling video games predominantly utilized peripheral route approaches in their persuasive focus. Cinematic trailers incorporated more peripheral route persuasive elements than gameplay trailers. The number of peripheral route approaches integrated in a trailer predicted their video production quality. The video production quality was equally high for cinematic and gameplay trailers. However, the production quality of imagination and physical enactment game trailers were higher than traditional game trailers. Finally, imagination and physical enactment game trailers had more persuasive elements, and utilized more peripheral route approaches than traditional game trailers.

Results of this study highlight the importance of the product characteristics in choosing advertising message approaches. The commercials on YouTube were analyzed, where the audience would be both motivated and able to understand the messages as they pull the content from social media themselves. So, it makes sense that the trailers had predominantly peripheral route approaches to keep the audience willingly watch the trailer. However, according to ELM, typically high level of involvement would require central route message approaches (Benoit and Benoit, 2008; Miller, 2005); and people are more likely to be persuaded by central route messages if they have an interest in the product being advertised (Morgan, 2007). However, in game advertising, the product itself is inherently interesting and requires affective, cognitive, and physical involvement. This dilemma explains the existence of both gameplay and cinematic trailers, although the persuasive focus of the trailers were not much different in essence. Based on ELM, gameplay trailers should focus more heavily on strong arguments in addition to their aesthetic qualities, since strong arguments lead to more favorable thoughts (Benoit and Benoit, 2008), and central route processing is more predictive of enduring attitudes and behavior (Miller, 2005; Morgan, 2007).

In addition to its contributions to the literature, this content analysis study has some limitations. First of all, the official trailers of video games analyzed in this study were purposefully selected from a variety of top-game listings based on their popularity in 2015. By narrowing the scope to popular games, this study aimed to keep the success of the game consistent and therefore eliminating popularity as a confounding variable. Therefore, the generalizability of this study is limited to most successful games. A second limitation is that the sample size of this study is relatively small with 51 trailers for 30 games. Furthermore, not all video games had both gameplay and cinematic official trailers, making the sample size even smaller than intended. Third, it is possible that game sequels may have benefited from the brand equity of previous game trailers (Jeroen and Stremersch, 2009; Marchand and Hennig-Thurau, 2013), influencing the new game trailer content in persuasive focus. Trailers could have been limited to original games to address this issue. Finally, although the researchers have categorized the game genres diligently based on industry classifications, the taxonomy of genre can be problematic. Categorizing traditional games was more clear-cut, yet differentiating between physical enactment and imagination games was particularly challenging due to crossovers. Furthermore, because most of the best-selling games were

physical enactment games, there was a disproportional representation of traditional games. Future research can extend the number of trailers analyzed to cover top 100 best-selling games to introduce more variability, and include more traditional game trailers.

This study can help advertisers better understand the relevance of persuasive focus in video game advertising, specifically video game trailers. Future researchers may look at a different definition of production quality and apply it to other video game genres and subgenres or compare popular games to less popular ones by randomly selecting games from lists. As discussed earlier, in light of ELM, future research can also examine the perceptions of the audience incorporating the dimensions of interest, need for cognition, and attitude change with an experimental design.

In addition to its contribution to literature by empirically examining video game trailers in persuasive focus and video production quality with ELM, this study also has potentially practical implications for the growing gaming industry. As the number of games and interest in video game development is increasing, the competition relies heavily on efficient game marketing. Findings of this study may provide insights on current trends in video game advertising. Moreover, this study could also be a basis for future research on audience perceptions of the effectiveness of video game trailers.

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