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Game trailers

A study of game trailer design

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Terminology

Live action trailer

Live action is a video in any video-format that features cinematography that isn't animated ("Live action - Free Merriam-Webster Dictionary" 2013).

Gameplay trailer

Gameplay is actual footage from a video game through the player's perspective and is therefore a way to depict how the actual video game looks and "feels".

Cinematic trailer

A cinematic trailer is a game trailer that is created using animations. These animations are most often built with other tools and graphics editors than the game itself – i.e. the graphics in the trailer doesn't correspond to the graphics in the game.

Sandbox Game

The term Sandbox Game is often used synonymously with open world. However , the difference between the two are that in a true Sandbox Game the player has the tools to modify the world themselves and choose how to play the game while in an open world game the gameplay is simply non-linear, meaning that the player can choose in what order and way the want to approach an objective.

Introduction

The Gaming Industry – From $0.8 Billion to $67 Billion in 30 Years

Today, games are big business. The gaming industry has been growing rapidly over the last decades. In 1983 sales were $0.8 billion(Cunningham et al. 2008) and by 2010 the global video-game market was twice the size of the recorded music industry ("All the world's a game" 2011). Sales are now predicted to grow from $67 billion in 2012 to $82 billion in 2017 ("All the world's a game" 2011).

The main reasons for this growth is online distribution and online usage business models (Gaudiosi 2012) as well as a major increase in market penetration. Previously playing video games was a form of entertainment enjoyed only by a few subcultures but is now considered a normal pastime among the general public ("All the world's a game" 2011).

As the market has grown so has the profitability and competition. In the early years of game development a game was often the work of one or a couple of programmers that did everything (Reimer 2005; "Video game development" 2013). Today the technological development and higher expectations from consumers have drastically increased the resources required and therefore the cost of development. A modern game has an average development cost of between 18-24 million dollars (Mastrapa 2010) and can involve hundreds of people. On top of the development cost you then have to add marketing costs which are often equal to or more than the development costs (Edwards 2006).

The game trailer's significance to the promotion of a game

The importance of marketing in the game industry is clear when you consider the fact that 80% of all games that are released are unprofitable (Reisinger 2008). An over-saturated market or marketing failure are some of the possible explanations for this unprofitability. With an increasing amount of new games released each year, over 1500 games were released for PC alone in 2012[1], it is getting harder and harder to break through the noise and get your game noticed. As the trailer is one of the main tools used to market your game, it is important that the trailer is designed in such a way that it creates as much hype as possible around the game. Hype is built to assure the game a place in potential customers' awareness sets. Sometimes, the hype cycle starts several years before the release of the game. The tendency of

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[1] Calculated by searching for PC games released in 2012 on www.gamerankings.com and counting the titles listed.

games to have a short life cycle increases the pressure on publishers to build up demand before the product is released (Zackariasson and Wilson 2009), as illustrated by Figure 1.
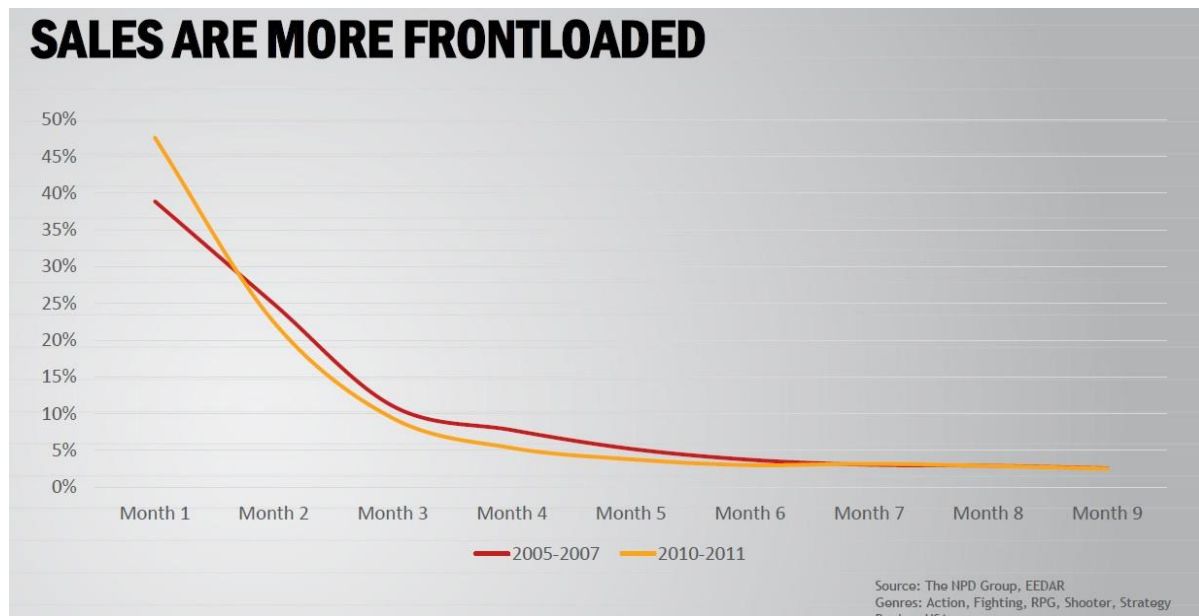
Figure 1 - Percentage of Total Sales per Month
Source: http://www.eedar.com/Uploads/48133b04-7981-436a-b0b3-c2c237ef890a.pdf

The importance of the trailer cannot be overstated. A 2013 report from EEDAR[2] showed that a XBOX 360 game without either a demo or a trailer sold on average less than 100,000 units. Games with just a demo sold around 200,000 units and games with both a trailer and a demo around 250,000 units. However games with just a trailer sold over 500,000 units (Matulef 2013). As the publisher gets on average $16 per unit sold (Edwards 2006) the monetary loss for failing to provide a trailer would in this case lie somewhere in the range of 2.4 to 6.4 million dollars.

The fact that the game trailer is a very important part of the marketing of a game seems clear; however, how to create a trailer that is successful is not so clear. Kelly (2013) states that a trailer's effectiveness is difficult to measure objectively, but also emphasizes that a lack of measurability is not unique for advertisement in the video game industry. Further, he believes that the answer to high sales lie somewhere in the mix of promotional activities – but that there is no formula for it. Yang (2011), on the other hand, considers video trailers the "best way to sell a videogame" and claims that it is the "most important part of promoting a game".

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[2] Founded in 2006 by video game industry veterans, EEDAR is the largest specialty video game research firm in the world. http://www.eedar.com/

As of today research on how consumers are affected by different trailer designs is sadly lacking. With the large amount of games that are being released and the amount of money invested into the development of a game, breaking through the noise is more important than ever. One of the most important tools for this is the trailer and it has therefore a pivotal point in the success of a game.

Current marketing techniques

Games are marketed in both traditional ways such as outdoors advertising, TV-ads, newspaper ads and in more modern ways, such as shoutcasters[3], YouTube and professional gamer sponsorships (Everiss 2009).

The promotion of games, in a majority of cases, starts before the game gets published and is made available to consumers – in contrast to a more standardized marketing approach which would have a continuous marketing schedule from the product's release (Lindgren 2010). According to Lindgren (2010) the majority of sales for a game are typically in a two-week period post-release, which is increasing the pressure on marketing activities to build hype well before and during the product's release. The marketing activities often start as soon as the game is announced (Lindgren 2010).

The two basic principles of game marketing include: (Lindgren 2010)
1. Marketing and hype built well before the game is released
2. The release date promotion

When a company announces the launch of a new game it will also release a number of different trailers as the deadline approaches. The first of those trailers is most commonly referred to as an announcement trailer, or a teaser trailer. The intention of this trailer is to create initial demand for the product, long before the game is released (Lindgren 2010). A game trailer has many traits in common with movie trailers, however as the two products are so different this format might not be optimal. Some of the bigger differences between the two products are for example that a movie is a passive activity compared to the interactivity of video games. There is also a large difference in the length of the interaction with the

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[3] A **Shoutcaster**, or a **caster** is a person dedicated to the broadcasting side of eSports*, providing commentary for games live, online, as well as in pre-recorded videos and on TV
* Electronic sports (eSports) comprises the competitive play of video games. Other terms include competitive gaming, professional gaming and cybersport.

product. A typical movie is slightly over 2 hours long (Acuna 2013) while even short games average 8-10 hours (West 2007). Another aspect is that in a movie, the story is set from the beginning and will not change during the consumption. In many games, the story is either influenced by the consumer, or is mainly created by the consumer.

Types of trailers

Live action is quite an uncommon feature in game trailers, but in recent years Microsoft game studios have used this technique in several game trailers for different launches in the Halo-series[4]. For the launch of Halo 4 the Bungie[5]-team spared no expenses and hired David Fincher (director of the popular film "Fight Club") to direct the trailer. In the Halo-trailer, some background of the main character "Master Chief" is revealed, thus creating some sort of depth to the series itself (Lee 2012).

Gameplay in trailers can mean success or devastation for the games, depending on what the trailers display. Some experts mean that simply showing gameplay in a trailer is not sufficient if there is nothing special to show, eventually viewers will get their hands on a gameplay-trailer anyways if they are interested enough (Kelly 2013). The reason for this is that gameplay trailers can be unofficial, as well as official (released by the publisher). Depending on a game's popularity, unofficial gameplay trailers for a game can range from a few to several thousands. The availability of free software for recording in-game footage has made it a lot easier to record your own gameplay and editing it yourself in a free video editor. If gameplay should be used to build hype, it has to be able to show something unique (Kelly 2013).

Having all-gameplay in an announcement trailer doesn't necessarily have to be negative, if done in an interesting way it will still draw viewers in (Gartner 2013). If there is nothing unique to show, and the main part of the trailer consists of un-intriguing gameplay, the trailer will not be successful ("Focus group interview" 2013).

A Cinematic trailer is a common type of trailer (Dalton 2012) and may have gameplay included in them although this is not common practice. A cinematic trailer is a game trailer that is created using animations. These animations are most often built with other tools and

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[4] For example http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BfJVgXBfSH8, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BKGhoJ1mgQY, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0jpqqX1ZL_w
[5] Developers of the Halo series of games

graphics editors than the game itself – i.e. the graphics in the trailer doesn't correspond to the graphics in the game.

However, experts argue that every game needs a trailer that fits its tone and feel. What the proper format is for a game trailer can thus be difficult to determine beforehand. (Gartner 2013)

Game trailer controversies

Cinematic trailers have received some criticism in the last years claiming that it is misleading to consumers (Parker 2012), due to the fact that the graphics depicted in a cinematic trailer doesn't correspond to the actual game graphics. When "Call of Duty 2" received this exact criticism, the company released a statement that read: "The footage was intended purely to communicate the subject matter of the game rather than to represent actual gameplay…" (Dudlak 2006).

As a result of the criticism that the video game industry has received due to the cinematic footage in game trailers, one would expect the cinematic footage to take on a smaller role, both because of the criticism itself as well as new technological advances in graphics - which would enable the game industry to use the real graphics of their game in their ad, instead of enhanced bits and pieces (Dudlak 2006). Such a development in the marketing of video games has not yet occurred, even though in-game graphics are getting more advanced and esthetically more beautiful every year. The lack of gameplay shown in trailers could be explained to some degree, by the fact that the developers might not have substantial gameplay to show if the game is still in mid-development when the announcement trailer is presented (Cullinane 2011; Francis 2013; Parker 2012). Svahn (2013) argues that perhaps there is an issue of silent knowledge but claims that there is also a possibility that game trailers are more or less, done arbitrarily.

Problem investigated

This thesis will try and uncover key success factors and potential issues in the design of game trailers. Key success factors in this context are defined as factors that contribute to induce intent to purchase the product advertised. The thesis aims to uncover some of these factors and contextualize them.

Delimitations

To be able to more precisely explain the success of a game trailer, we must delimitate some aspects of the cases, i.e. the games. This will help the study to better isolate the variables of interest and make the cases more comparable.

Only game trailers that can be found on the website youtube.com will be compared, if one of the trailers would not be available on YouTube it would be a big disadvantage for that game since YouTube is the biggest video sharing site in the world (Dickey 2013).

The games will also have to be new launches, so game franchises will not be used as cases. Game franchises are considered a safe investment, marketing budgets are normally higher and the brand itself brings back old customers to new releases (Activision Inc n.d.; Chozick 2012; Makuch and Varanini 2013). To some extent, game trailers from successful franchises will be discussed to underline main arguments, but they will not be used as cases. The authors are aware that the fact that Bionic Commando is a sequel might have an unwanted effect on the research. However, the last Bionic Commando was released 25 years ago in 1988[6] wherefore the authors decided that any effects created by this being a sequel are negligible

The cases will include games from common genres so that the focus group is more likely to have had contact with these types of games previously.

What will this thesis add to the current research

This thesis will contribute to current research by stating key success factors and potential issues in the design of game trailers. Any results pointing towards more effective ways to design a game trailer will only result in a discussion pointing out some of the key aspects that can be further investigated and researched, rather than be a step-by-step guide for the creation of a successful game trailer. The research is primarily focused on if the industry should explore more or other ways of designing game trailers and not on finding a generalized solution on how to design a game trailer.

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[6] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bionic_Commando_(Nintendo_Entertainment_System)

Literature Review

Previous research on game trailers is lacking both in depth and scope. The notion that research has been conducted in this area but is being kept secret is very likely as game developers are very secretive when it comes to development practices and costs (Schreier 2012). Another reason could be that the knowledge in regards to trailer design is silent knowledge (Svahn 2013). To overcome this obstacle the authors have come to the conclusion that research on movie trailers is a suitable analogue. This due to the fact that both movie trailers and game trailers are created to promote awareness around the product and to incite intent to purchase, pre-release of the product. They are both in video format and often displayed through the same advertising channels (television, online and at the cinema) (Brophy-Warren 2010; Seitz 2011).

The design of a movie trailer

The goal of a trailer is to entice potential customers to purchase a product. (Iida et al. 2012) In a study at the Aoyama Gakuin University three main factors were identified that were considered important elements in a trailer for increasing purchase intentions (Iida et al. 2012). These factors were decided upon through a factor analysis of 17 different elements that were combined into 7 elements (see Figure 2). After doing a covariance structure analysis on these 7 elements they concluded that 3 elements were the most important when making a fascinating trailer.

Picture – Inflection, sense of speed and soundtrack that are used to generate impact and excitement

Story – The ability to present the story in a way that draws the viewer in but is still easy to understand

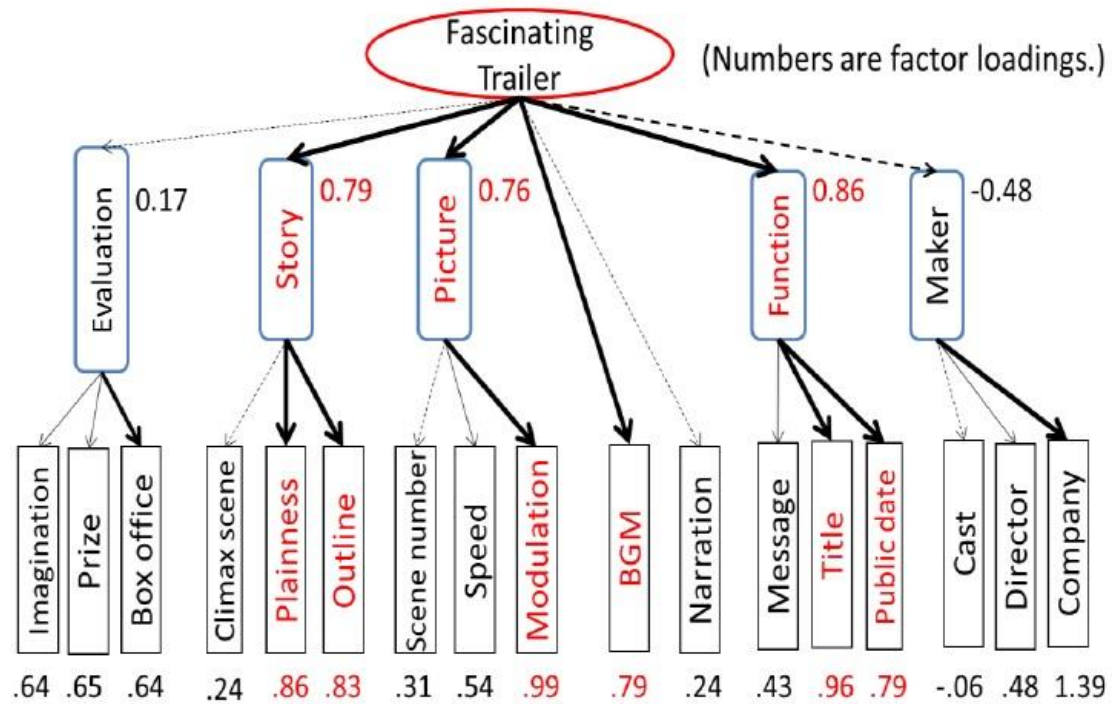**Function** – Title, release date and the ability to communicate the appealing aspects of the movie.

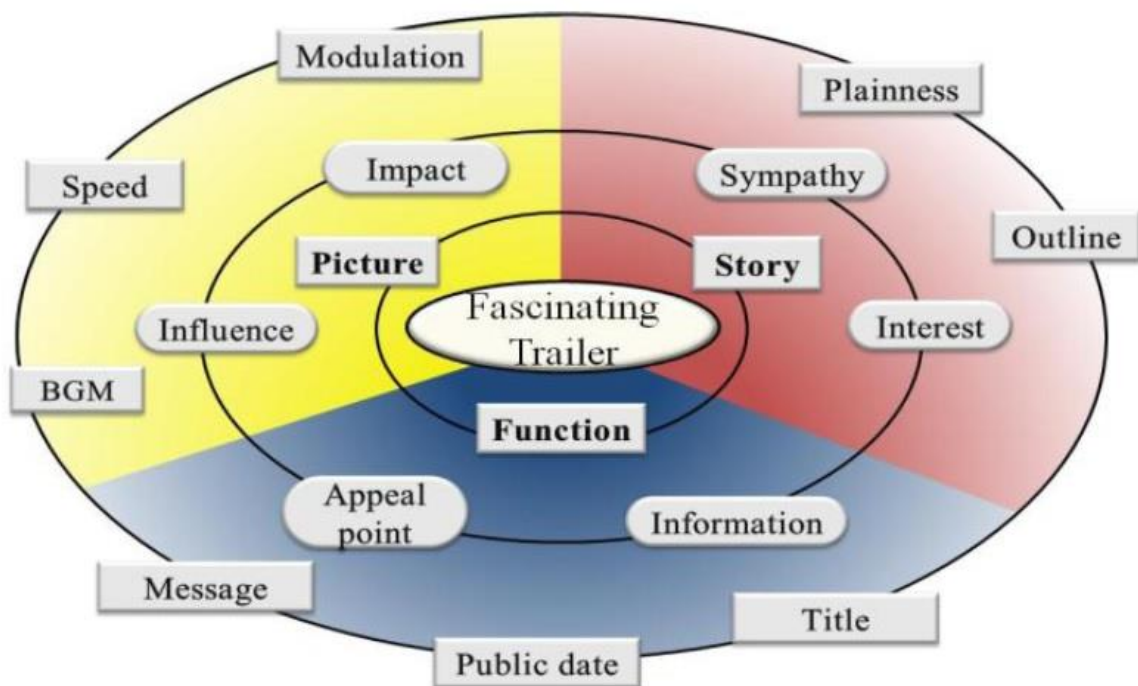**Figur 2: Result of Covariance Structure Analysis**

Figure 3 – A visual representation of how the different variables have been combined

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[7] BGM = Background Music

Modulation = The act or process of changing from one key (tonic, or tonal center) to another

The study also indicated that the primacy and recency effects[8] have a large impact regarding trailers. Using galvanic skin response they concluded that a trailer should begin with a high level of stimulation then slow down to end with another stage of high stimulation (see Figure 4 - Suggested intensity level for movie trailers)
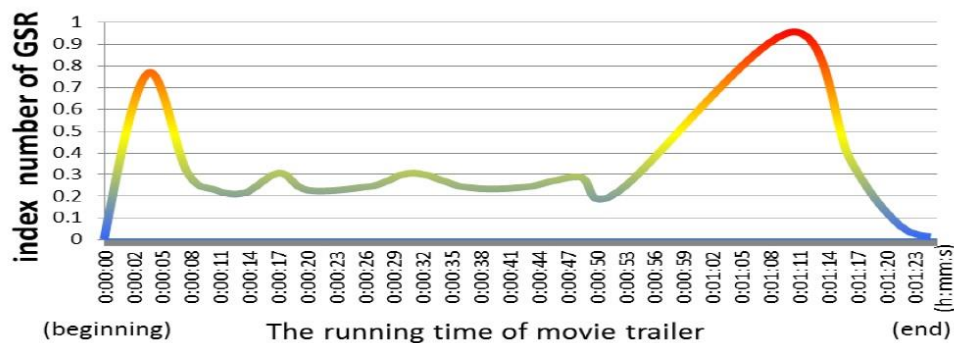
Figure 4 - Suggested intensity level for movie trailers

Viewer abandonment in Short-Form Online Video Content

A study by Visible Measures (2012) measured how long online video viewers watched a video before closing the video. Visible Measures analyzed viewing data on 40 million unique video assets that had collectively been viewed over 7 billion times. The study showed that the viewer abandonment rates are independent on the length of the video and that nearly 20% of the viewers' leave within the first 10 seconds of the video and at the 60 second mark over 44% of the viewers have clicked away. These findings are in line with the results from Iida et al. (2012) that the intensity has to be high in the beginning of a trailer. Failure to interest the viewer within the first few seconds will lead to high viewer abandonment which in turn will make the promotional effort less efficient.

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[8] The serial position effect, a term coined by Hermann Ebbinghaus through studies he performed on himself, refers to the finding that recall accuracy varies as a function of an item's position within a study list. When asked to recall a list of items in any order (free recall), people tend to begin recall with the end of the list, recalling those items best (the recency effect). Among earlier list items, the first few items are recalled more frequently than the middle items (the primacy effect).

Average Viewer Abandonment Rate by Viewing Time

Source: Visible Measures (www.visiblemeasures.com)
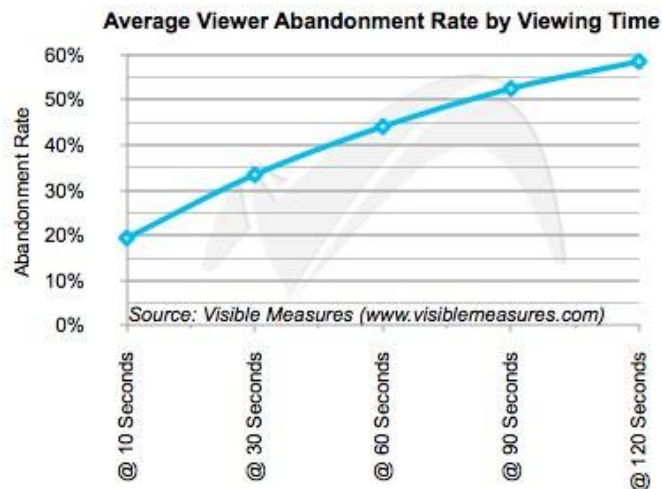
Figure 5 - Average Viewer Abandonment Rate by Viewing Time (Visible Measures 2012)

Abandonment Rate by Clip Duration

: Each bar in this chart shows aggregate abandonment performance for clips of a specific duration (for instance, clips between 50 seconds long and 60 seconds long). The bars are grouped by average abandonment at given time slices in the video clip (again, after 10 seconds of playback, after 30 seconds of playback, etc.). The height of each group of bars is relatively consistent, indicating that viewer abandonment does not vary significantly with clip duration. Or, in other words, viewers are equally likely to leave after 30 seconds of viewing regardless if they are watching two minute clip or a five minute clip.

Figure 6 - Average Abandonment Rate by Clip Duration (Visible Measures 2012)

Buying decision process of games

According to Lindgren (2010), the buying decision process for PC and video games can be illustrated by Figure 7. Awareness is raised by information from friends, a link on the web or advertisement in different forms. The most common form of awareness is recommendation by friends, 49 % rated their friends' recommendations as important or very important according to Lindgren (2010) research. Holmes (2010) reinforces these results by saying that friends are the biggest influence for video game purchases.

The subjects evaluate the product according to their personal criteria and determine if the product matches up to their standards according to genre, graphics, price or o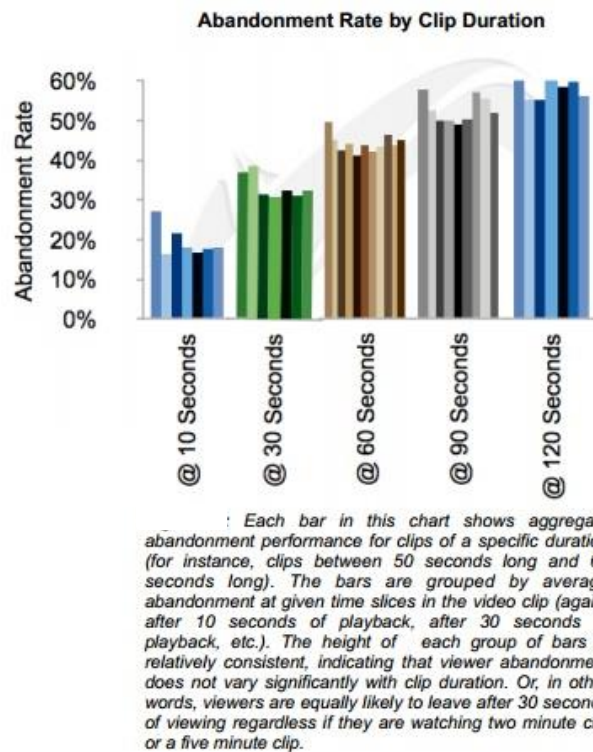ther important personal criteria. If enough personal criteria is satisfied by the game, the subjects decide to purchase the game, they have then made a pre-cursive buying decision – the actual game will be under development when the pre-cursive buying decision is made.

When the game is then released, the subjects revisit the awareness and evaluation stages when they are informed about the actual launch of the game. During this second evaluation, reviews of the game, gameplay trailers and other relevant information concerning the game's quality might be considered and evaluated and affect the subjects' final purchase intentions. When the subjects buy the game, their experiences with the game and the brand will influence their personal criteria when buying other games in the future.

This decision process for PC and video games is based on Kotler's model of buying decision process and consists of four steps instead of Kotler's five steps (awareness – information search – evaluation – buying decision – Post-purchase behavior) (Kotler 2009). Lindgren (2010) argues that the information search in his model is integrated into the awareness and evaluation stages, since the subject is drowned in information during the stages. The buying decision and the actual purchase are processes that take place in the fourth step of Kotler's model, unlike Lindgren's (2010) model where the customer don't yet have access to the product. Thus, if a customer decides to purchase something according to the Kotler-model, there is no need to revisit the awareness and evaluation stages of the buying model.
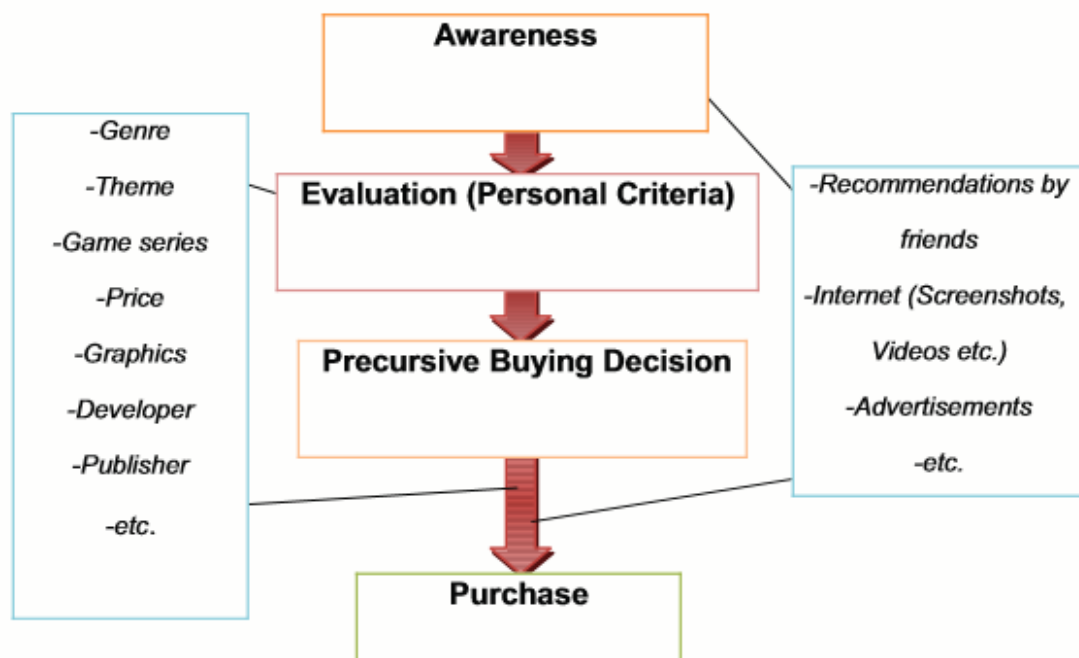
Figure 7– Purchase process for video games according to Lindgren (2010)

Theory of Buyer Behavior

We have used a reduced version of Howard & Sheth's "Theory of Buyer Behavior" (Howard and Sheth 1969) to explore how purchase intention for games can be affected by different factors. The theory is focused on purchase behavior, which is why we are using a reduced version to see the effects on purchase intention.

The model is an input-output model that shows in which ways consumers think, consciously and subconsciously about commercial messages – and in the end, if the consumer actually buys the product advertised. The inputs affect the hypothetical constructs which in turn can be affected by exogenous variables; the hypothetical constructs then influence the response variables for the consumer. The model also contains a dimension of feedback between variables.
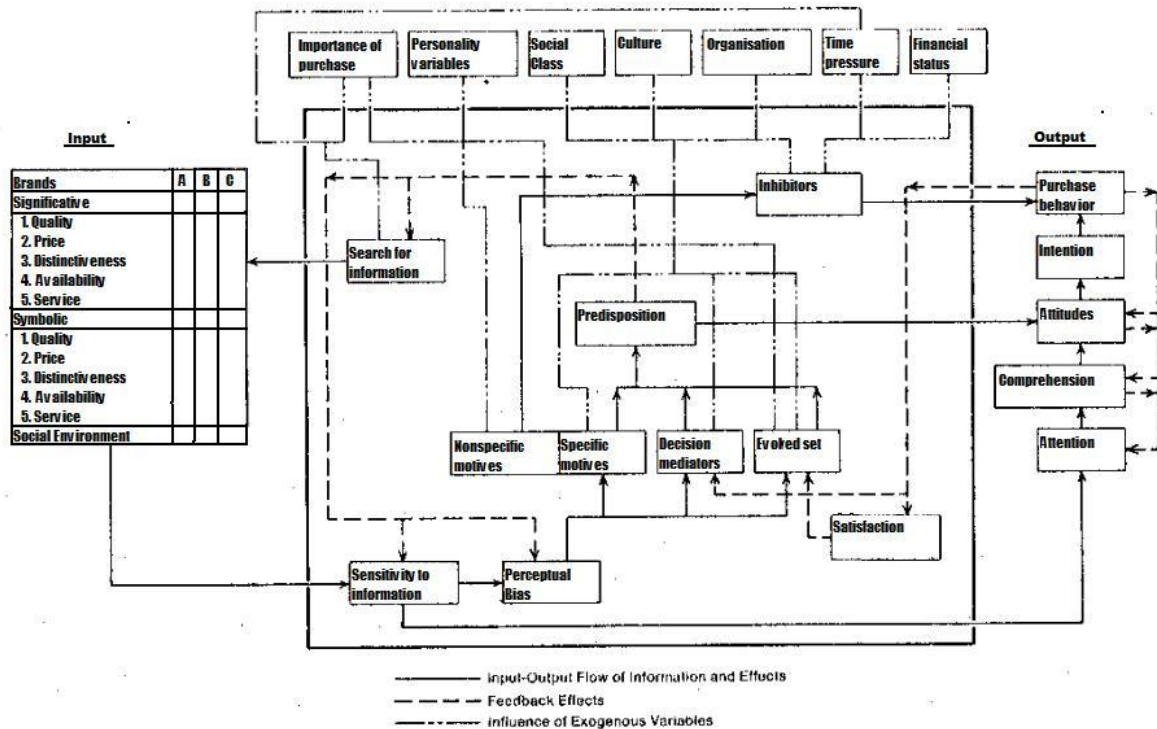
Figure 8 – Theory of Buyer Behavior (Howard and Sheth 1969)

The model consists of four components:

- **Stimulus variables** are different inputs that are communicated by a company or ones social environment. Significative input is communication through brand objects – e.g. price, quality and service. Symbolic input is communication through different promotional activities, spoken or shown, such as billboard ads, television ads or press statements. Environment input is communication by the social environment, reviews in magazines or word-of-mouth. Input is shown on the left side of the model.

- **Hypothetical constructs** can either affect perception such as process information, or it affects the learning of the consumer. They are located inside the large rectangle at the center of the model.

- **Exogenous variables** are variables that are more or less complex for the purchase, depending on the purchase and the consumer. Financial status, culture and social class are examples of exogenous variables. They are located at the top of the model.

- **Response variables** are output variables that are affected by the hypothetical constructs – the final stage of the response variables is an actual purchase. They are located at the right of the model

Since this thesis is focused on announcement trailers and its ability to induce intent to purchase, some variables will be discarded for being outside of the framework of this research. Exogenous variables that are based on the buying situation are therefore not important for this research. Trailers are our only focus; therefore only symbolic input is of interest of the stimulus variables.

Hypothetical constructs

Sensitivity to information works as a gatekeeper for information entering the buyer's nervous system.

Perceptual bias means that the quality of information is likely to be altered by the buyer, either distorted or selectively attended as the information is processed in the buyer's nervous system.

Search for information is an action where the buyer actively seeks information.

Specific motives are part of a consumer's purchase criteria, closely related to attributes of a product class.

Non-specific motives are motives that are set by the personality of the buyer (personality variables in the model).

Brand potential of the **evoked set** is the alternatives (that the buyer is aware of) in a product class that can satisfy the consumer's purchase criteria.

Decision mediators are rules set in the mind of the consumer; their function is primarily to establish what alternatives match the motives and to what degree the consumer wants the brand and how good it will satisfy his needs, i.e. choice criteria.

Predisposition is the sum of effects of specific motives, brand potential of the evoked set and decision mediators.

Satisfaction is the degree to which the consumer is satisfied with a previous purchase and the consumption of that purchase.

Information search is when the buyer takes action and actively seeks out new or more information on the brand.

Exogenous variables

Personality variables are the traits that make up the buyer's personality.

Response variables

Attention – Indicates if a communication message has been received or not by the buyer, or to what degree there has been information intake.

Comprehension – Comprehension consists of several marketing concepts compressed into this category. The concepts are recognition, recall and awareness, so comprehension is how the buyer sees, thinks and knows about the brand.

Attitude – defined as the preference map of the buyer for the brand in question. Attitude is considered as a motivational tool to induce behavior.

Purchase intention – Purchase intention is the forecast of which brand the buyer will purchase. A purchase intention is also a "buyer's forecast" of his inhibitors, meaning that a suitable marketing strategy should work towards removing the inhibitors for the buyer in order to make sure that the intent leads to a purchase. It is further described as a "response short of actual purchase behavior".

Methodology

This thesis will use three empirical methods: case studies, interviews with experts and a focus group interview.

Research design

The goal of this thesis is to establish a stable ground for further research on the subject. The thesis focuses its efforts on deriving patterns of what components of a trailer have a positive or negative effect on customers' purchase intentions. Thus, the thesis is of an inductive nature (Bryman and Bell 2011).

Research on game trailers and their effectiveness is currently lacking, this is why we approach the research with a case study. The expert interviews served as a framework for the thesis, aiding in the interpretation of the results. Other relevant information was also used to provide further background into the research area as well as a control function for the credibility of sources.

A qualitative approach to the topic was chosen because of the lack of data and theories in the research area; thus, the thesis aims to contribute with general advice on how to increase customers' purchase intentions through game trailers.

Case studies

The case studies will focus on investigating the relationship between the quality of the trailers and customers' purchase intentions. The quality of the trailers will be judged on the criteria set forth by Iida et al. (2012) regarding movie trailers due to the distinct lack of theory on how a game trailer should be designed.

Selecting cases

The cases have been selected based on some different criteria:

- All games are launched on the same platforms (PC, PS3 and XBOX 360) to increase comparability.
- The game trailer received the most attention out of the promotional activities for the game – or all communication received little to no attention. This is to try to limit the effect from other promotional activities.

- The game must have received a Metascore[9] of 80 or below out of 100, to delimit our results from good-game-sells-well-syndrome (Kuchera 2012).

By analyzing trailers from a scientific point of view and then relate those findings to the sales we can identify common traits that are connected to high sales.

Expert interviews

Three individuals with insight into the gaming industry were interviewed about the gaming industry and/or the use and design of trailers. Mattias Svahn was interviewed for one hour in person, while Tadgh Kelly and Kert Gartner were both interviewed via e-mail and received the same questions.

Mattias Svahn is a PhD student at the Stockholm School of Economics; he is also a researcher at the SSE Institute for Research. He researches casual and social games and how they affect different aspects of consumer intentions.

The reason for interviewing Svahn was to get a clear picture of the gaming industry, so that we could better assess the information that we were about to process. Understanding how the different stakeholders act and react in the gaming industry was our primary goal for the interview. Svahn was interviewed with open questions as our initial knowledge of the industry was limited and we did not want to unintentionally impose those limits on Svahn.

Tadgh Kelly has more than twenty years of experience from the videogames industry; he has worked as a game designer, writer, producer, game consultant, teacher and startup founder. The reason why we contacted Kelly was because of his blog post on the deceptive nature of the Dead Island-trailer (Kelly 2011), after that we found a few more blog posts concerning game trailers and how they affect consumers. Kelly is one of the few on the web who discusses trailers and their effect on consumers.

Kert Gartner is a freelancer that works with providing video services, specifically game trailers. He is an Adobe After Effects and Photoshop Certified Instructor who teaches at the Red River College and the New Media Manitoba.

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[9] Metacritic.com is a website that aggregates reviews of music albums, games, movies, TV shows, DVDs, and formerly, books. For each product, a numerical score from each review is obtained and the total is averaged into a **Metascore** http://www.metacritic.com/

We contacted Gartner after we discovered his blog and guide on how to create a successful game trailer for indie games; it is the only guide to creating a game trailer that we have managed to find.

Focus Group

We conducted a focus group interview with 5 participants, ranging in age from 19 to 23 years. It was a convenience sample and the focus group interview took place on the evening of the 15th April.

We believe that the benefits of having a focus group would be to gain an increased understanding of why people felt differently about the chosen trailers, and to study how the participants collectively discuss the trailers and construct meanings around them. (Bryman and Bell 2011)

Reliability

The qualitative research conducted in this thesis is quite easy to replicate when it comes to time, resources and method. However, the views and opinions presented in this thesis will change as the gaming industry changes, which it tends to do often. In our interviews (Gartner 2013; Kelly 2013) we asked the same questions; most of those questions were also very similar to each other. The secondary sources used consist of books, articles, reports and blog posts. To underline main arguments or trends, established sources were used as references. When no such sources existed, researchers looked for concurring opinions among less established sources. The lack of research in the topic is the reason why these trade-offs were needed.

 There has been very little dispute between the authors of this thesis regarding differences in observations. The focus group and the observations from that interview was the most discussed issue and to a high degree the authors were agreeing to the interpretations of the material from that focus group.

Validity

Control questions and other measures of controlling information have been used as tools to ensure internal validity in the research. After discussing a certain topic with the focus group, the moderators stated what they interpreted as the group's opinions, and the focus group could then reject or accept the moderator's views. If rejected, the topic was discussed again until an understanding was reached. Furthermore, facts from non-established sources have been controlled against other sources (where possible) to maintain a high degree of validity. As goes for external validity, the aim of this thesis was never to provide a generalizing guideline on how to create a successful trailer; rather the aim was to identify traits and components that seem to have that effect. We are well aware that this thesis is not extensive enough to cover the whole picture.

Results & Analysis

Cases:

Bionic Commando:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-VbBHSwl8rA

Description of the game:

Bionic Commando is an action-platformer and is the second in the Bionic Commando series. At its release in 2009 it received mixed reviews and has a Metacritic score of 70. With only 27,000 (Fahey 2009) sold units in the U.S. in its first month Bionic Commando could arguable have been on of Capcom's biggest flops (Pereira 2010).

Description of trailer:

The trailer starts out with violins tuning and the display of the developer's logos. At 23 seconds the music then suddenly changes and becomes faster as the title of the game appears as the camera moves rapidly through dense clouds. After the release date of the game is displayed a pre-rendered cut scene is shown and we are then rapidly thrown into random scenes of gameplay which focuses on displaying the varied environments of the game as well as the defining feature of Bionic Commando, the extendable arm of the main protagonist. The trailer ends with a couple of pre-rendered scenes as the music changes to soft piano music and the name of the game as well as the URL for its website are shown. The total length of the trailer is 1 minute and 56 seconds.

Is this a "good" trailer?

Function

Developer, publisher, title and release date are clearly displayed in the beginning as well as the web site address in the end which fits well with the serial positioning effect theory. It clearly displays the games' most differentiating feature which is the extendable arm and also displays the varying environments.

Picture

The intensity of the Bionic Commando trailer begins at a high level and stays there until the very last moments. This goes against the results from Iida et al. (2012) which showed that the intensity of the trailer should be high in the beginning and at the end while slowing down in the middle.

Story

The story is not presented in a coherent or easily understandable way. We are presented with different scenes that are not linked in any obvious way. It is only at the end of the trailer that we get a hint of a story with a short scene of the protagonist looking at a screen displaying photo of himself and his bionic arm. This goes against Iida et al. (2012) study that showed that the story needs to not only draw the viewer in but also be easy to understand.

Only the 1 out of the 3 different criteria is in accordance with the definition of an effective trailer and therefore this trailer must be considered to be of a suboptimal design.

Results from focus group

The focus group's first reaction to Bionic Commando was rather reserved. All the participants agreed that the trailer was lacking something, some elaborated around what was lacking while others just weren't content with what they had just seen. Participant 3 said that the trailer "had no story" and the rest agreed with him. Two of the participants also complained about the main character, stating that they had no idea of who he was or what his story was in the game. All of the participants agreed that the main character must not be liked by the gamer, but at least they have to know something about him/her, whether it is background information or just a name. They said that the trailer failed to deliver any such information.

As we started talking about the actual feeling that the trailer conveys, everyone agreed that the music was very typical for a good game – pompous music played by an orchestra. The actual timing of the footage selected with regards to the pompous music was "horrible" as one participant stated. Better timing with trailer sequences as well as a narrator was voted as the best ways to improve the trailer, if it was to be done again.

Dead Island:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Old41bsSXU

Description of the game:

Dead Island is an action RPG horror game developed by Techland. It is played from a first person perspective in an open world. The story revolves around a few survivors on a tropical island vacation resort where the majority of the population has been transformed into zombies. The goal of the game is for the survivors to contact the outside world and escape the island alive. The game received for the most part positive reviews although it received criticism for its excessive and graphic violence and have a Metacritic score of 74. The game was a commercial success for the publisher Deep Silver with over 5 million units sold globally by February 2013(Mallory 2013).

Description of trailer:

The first 15 seconds of the trailer is dedicated to displaying publisher and developer logos. The trailer then begins to play some very calm music and displays a zoomed in shot of an eye. As we slowly zoom out we see that it is the eye of a little girl lying dead on a lawn. The trailer then cuts to a scene where the camera moves down a corridor and you hear a little girl running and catching her breath. The scene then quickly changes back to the dead girl on the lawn. This repeats two times before the camera stays for a little longer on the girl on the lawn as time starts flowing backwards and you see the girl "falling up" together with shards of glass. The scene cuts back to the corridor showing the girl trying to run away from zombies and then back to the girl "falling up" as she goes back in through the window and onto the back of a man that it seems she has just bitten. The scene keeps switching back and forth between the girl running in the corridor and a fight in the hotel room between the man, a women and zombies. As the two scenes, one going forwards in time and one backwards, closes in on the same moment in time you can see how the man saves the girl from the zombies. It then cuts to scenes that are designed to look like holiday movies taken by this family before the zombie outbreak. All of the scenes are pre-rendered and no actual gameplay footage is shown.

Is this a "good" trailer?

Function

The publisher and developer logos are shown in the very beginning of the trailer and the title is shown in the very end which fits well with the primacy and recency effects. As the trailer does not show gameplay at all there is no depiction of any differentiating features, one of the criteria of the function part of a trailer according to Iida et al. (2012)

Picture

The calm music in the Dead Island trailer creates an emotional setting that is in stark contrast to what is depicted visually. That the victim is a young girl also creates an uncomfortable feeling in most people. The emotional impact is therefore very tangible. The intensity levels are however not in accordance with what Iida et al. (2012) suggests for a more effective trailer design.

Story

The Dead Island trailer tells the story from two points in time. The dead girl in the beginning creates questions in the head of the viewer. Who is she? Why is she dead? Etc. As the trailer continues these questions are revealed to us bit by bit. The story told might be confusing to the viewer at the start but quickly becomes clear.

All of this combined makes for a very unusual trailer that stands out from the crowd. It does however not conform to the guidelines proposed in Iida et al. (2012) study from Aoyama Gakuin University on 2 of the 3 criteria and judged on these criteria it is not as efficient as it could be trailer.

Results from focus group

The Dead Island trailer was considered "amazing", "mind-blowing" and "revolutionary" when shown to the focus group. The responses corresponded quite well to the comments left in the comments section on the trailer's YouTube-page, participants spoke about the trailer's depth and the emotional mayhem they experienced during the short trailer. Participant two was more critical than the rest of the focus group, and claimed that the game could never reach up to the trailer's highly set expectations. He said that it was "basically too good to be true", after having said this, the other participants seemed to buy into his reasoning with the argument "if the game corresponded to the trailer, I would have the game right now".

When the Metacritic score and sales figures for Dead Island were revealed, the focus group started talking about how bad the trailer was instead. When asked why the trailer was suddenly a bad trailer, participants said that it doesn't matter if the trailer is good on its own, if the game doesn't meet the expectations set through a trailer, the trailer is "worthless". Participant 4 went on explaining that "gamers never forget" and that it would probably hurt the developers and/or brand in the long run.

Mirrors Edge:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2N1TJP1cxmo

Description of game:

Mirrors Edge is a first person platform game developed by DICE. The player takes on the role as a messenger in the future where the only safe way to transfer information is physically. The game received mostly positive reviews and holds a score at Metacritic of 79,6. The game was projected to sell three million copies and although it only sold two million copies(*Edge Games, Inc. v. Electronic Arts Inc., Document 67* 2010) it can still be considered a commercial success.

Description of trailer:

The first 20 seconds of the trailer is used to display the logos of the developers and publishers and it then displays a text stating that what is about to be shown is in-game footage. For about 30 seconds we are shown actual gameplay. It shows the protagonist running across rooftops, sliding under obstacles and balancing on pipes. This section ends with a slow motion jump that cuts to a scene in which the protagonist is standing on a crane and the camera is slowly rotating around her. This scene is interrupted several times by other more action-oriented scenes where the protagonist is fighting, both with weapons and hand-to-hand combat. It all ends with a quick close-up off her face and then the camera zooms and fades out to display the game title.

Is this a "good" trailer?

Function

Publisher and developer are clearly shown at the start of the trailer. The title is only presented at the very end and there is no publishing date information at all. The defining feature of the game is the "flow" of the movement as well as the first person perspective and as this is a

pure gameplay trailer this is shown all throughout the trailer. This does to a slight extent fit with the recommendations from Iida et al. (2012) although not completely so.

Picture

Although the gameplay depicted creates a sense of speed and action, the music does not convey the same feeling which slows down the tempo somewhat. The intensity of the trailer somewhat increases towards the end but remains fairly constant throughout. Iida et al. (2012) suggests a high intensity in the beginning of the trailer, followed by a slower section and then ending with high intensity again which this trailer does not conform to.

Story

The story of the game is however not presented at all in the trailer. There is no information or hints on why she is running or why she is fighting with the police. The lack of story is an indication that this trailer is not as effective as it could be (Iida et al. 2012).

If we compare these observations with the guidelines from the Aoyama Gakuin University study by Iida et al. (2012) Mirror's Edge misses the mark and must therefore be considered to be sub optimally designed.

Results from focus group

Mirror's Edge was received as "interesting" and "unusual" by the focus group. The participants thought that it conveyed a certain atmosphere of being a sandbox-game, almost being able to "breathe in the fresh air 200 meters above ground-level". Although the initial response was generally positive, the group felt that as the trailer progressed, the message of the trailer was somewhat lost. What has first been portrayed as a free world didn't seem so free anymore; participant 1 for example mentioned the last half of the trailer feeling "claustrophobic" in contrast to the first half – it was unclear "what they wanted the game to be". They also stated that it was unclear to what extent "bad guys" were going to be part of the game; they thought that was more confusing than intriguing.

Aliens: Colonial Marines:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EgHCTriRiWY

Description of game:

Aliens: Colonial Marines (ACM) is a first-person shooter (FPS) developed by Gearbox Software and published by Sega. It follows a classic FPS format with linear story and gameplay that takes place in the universe created for the Alien movie series. The game received mostly negative reviews with complains regarding the Artificial Intelligence, unbalanced gameplay, bugs and graphics that were worse than what was shown in early footage. Is Metacritic score is 45. Despite the bad reviews the games initial sales were very positive but dropped heavily in the weeks following its initial release (Usher 2013) and total sales are at the writing of this thesis 1,31 million units (SEGA Sammy Holdings Inc 2013).

Description of trailer:

The first six seconds are used to display the publisher logo. The trailer then begins with a shot of a devastated landscape with burning structures in the background. It cuts to a shot of Hicks (a character in the Alien universe) sending a distress call. It then continues with different shots of dark and desolate areas and between each scene they display text which ends up saying "They said in space no one can hear you scream. They were wrong", which is referring to the tag line from the movie alien. All the while the music gets faster and faster to suddenly end when a clip of a "facehugger" egg hatches behind a marine.

Is this a "good" trailer?

Function
The publisher and developer logos are shown in the beginning and in between the scenes in the first 10 seconds of the trailer and the title is clearly shown at the end. The only defining feature about the game shown is that of already know characters from the Alien movies. This is not optimal according to Iida et al. (2012) but could be considered sufficient enough to create a selling point.

Picture
The intensity is low in the beginning but keeps on increasing until a climax at the end. The music is used to great effect to speed up both tempo and intensity. Although high in intensity it does not fit the High-Low-High format suggested by Iida et al. (2012)

Story

The dialog does convey the premise of the story to some degree although it is not entirely clear it does at least create a point from where the viewer can start to speculate about the story.

This trailer does conform to some degree on all aspects of the guidelines presented in Iida et al. (2012) study from Aoyama Gakuin University. This trailer should therefore be classified as an efficient although not perfect trailer.

Results from focus group

The group members' initial responses were that this trailer was not something new to them. They described the concept of aliens and humans fighting as old news and said that the trailer didn't contribute with anything new. Stylistically, the participants approved the trailer, but the general feeling was that it was lacking an edge. When discussing how the actual game might have corresponded to the trailer, the participants felt that the game would be "somewhat decent" according to the trailer's quality. When asked to guess the game's Metascore, the group had guesses between 60-70, consistent with their review of the quality and innovation of the trailer. They were quite surprised to hear that the game only had a Metascore of 44; one of them stated that a 44 in Metascore is for "really awful games".

All trailers, with perhaps the exception of Aliens: Colonial Marines, suffer from the fact that they do not capture the attention of the viewer within the first 10 seconds. As shown by the video abandonment study (Visible Measures 2012) this leads to a significant drop-off in the number of viewers that will actually watch the trailer in its entirety.

General discussion about the cases (focus group)

The focus group found discrepancies in the story of three out of the four trailers, Dead Island being the exception. Trying to get to the bottom of how the story could be presented in a better way, the participants gave us a few different suggestions to what could enhance the story in the trailers. Some of them believed that a narrator could easily be applied to e.g. the Bionic Commando-trailer, and reveal some background information on the character and/or the goal of the game. Others thought that the Aliens: Colonial Marines-trailer could benefit from showing the more original parts of the game – instead of presenting the mainstream-parts of the game. When it came to the Mirror's Edge-trailer, the focus group wasn't too sure about what could be done to improve it. One participant suggested some cogent text cards that could better explain the contrasts in the first and second half of the trailer, as a suggestion he thought that "Run." could be something used in the first half to show the viewers that the game is a challenge. The participant got some acclaim for this suggestion from the other focus group members. The story from the Dead Island-trailer was again, praised on all aspects – emotionality, originality and quality.

Problems with the results or research

Our study focuses on finding specific elements common to game trailers in general. A larger study which tries to separate trailers for different genres might give more detailed and accurate answers. The small scale of this study makes it difficult to generalize our findings. A larger number of trailers needs to be analyzed as well as presented to a larger number of focus groups which would give the study greater reliability and generalizability.

The focus group participants were all acquaintances of ours, which was a convenience sample. Adopting this kind of sampling strategy is often criticized since generalizing the findings is difficult. It is unclear to what population this sample is representative. (Bryman and Bell 2011)

These approaches has been chosen due to resource and time restraints

As both authors are avid gamers this might have influenced our perspective. The authors have done their best to remain objective but cannot exclude the possibility that this have influenced our study.

Discussion

Our results do not clearly indicate that there is one format for trailers that is superior to others. Trailers that fit well with Iida et al. (2012) study on movie trailers, was not more well received by the focus group than trailers that fit badly with the theory. Depending on the circumstances, some trailer-formats or components are more suitable than others, and there are pitfalls to avoid - depending on the format.

Presenting the story for a game in a good way is something that is not easily done. The combination of visual imagery and music must be carefully planned to enhance the message you are trying to communicate. The focus group indicated that even though a trailer looks immaculate, this may still not imply that the trailer will influence the viewers in the right way.

The trailers for Mirror's Edge, Bionic Commando and Aliens: Colonial Marines were all perceived as standard trailers, but viewers still found inaccuracies or inconsistencies just from watching these trailers once. Mirror's Edge was perceived as inconsistent due to the selection of footage in the trailer, but the story was quite clear. Bionic Commando was seen as boring although displaying a large variety of in-game environments, mainly because no story was presented. Aliens: Colonial Marines was regarded as a cliché game with a deceptive feel in the quality of the trailer – but viewers understood the story. Even though the participants didn't understand the story of the Dead Island-trailer, they still loved the trailer. Skillful use of audio and visual cues created a trailer that stood out in the viewer's mind, despite them not fully comprehending the story.

Contrasts in a game can be done in both good and bad ways. If you introduce the game and what the viewer think is the general setting in the first half of the trailer – you should not be so hasty to contrast that in the second half of the trailer. Variation of the game can be shown in the trailer, but it must convey a consistent image of the game.

If you have enough features to show off using gameplay in a trailer, the public will be interested in seeing it. What is enough is up to the developer and publisher to decide upon. If there is something new to show, it can very well contribute to the buzz around that game which will hopefully lead to purchase intentions among viewers. If the gameplay isn't new or unique, it is a better idea to build the trailer around other concepts, such as live-action or cinematic footage to induce intent to purchase. Generally, those types of concepts are initially

efficient when it comes to creating a buzz – simply by hyping the game's story or some particular concept of the game.

Three out of the four trailers discussed in this thesis take at least 10 seconds to show any images related to the game (disregarding brand and developer logo). This tells us that the video abandonment-figures are something that the industry does not consider when designing trailers.

The video abandonment-figures should teach designers of trailers some important lessons when it comes to drawing in your viewers. Comparing this to the GSR theory of how a movie trailer should be constructed we can derive that game trailers should focus their efforts on capturing the attention of the viewer in the first few seconds of the trailer. The Dead Island-trailer clearly shows that this does not have to be done with a big dramaturgical explosion. The trailer should, generally, aim to amaze the viewer with whatever content they have in the beginning moments of it.

 The video abandonment-figures are also important for determining an adequate length of a trailer – industry insight into this matter is also a good input for a decision. Somewhere around 90 seconds, give or take a few seconds, is a good benchmark. You will have lost slightly over 50 % of the viewers (if the trailer is not dramaturgically enhanced) so the attention of the big crowd is dying out, but you will have had time to get your most important points out to the viewers. Keeping trailer-length down to 90 seconds also leaves room for a little mystery, which in turn can be a good spark to inspire hype-building from the media and gamers – and hype is what publishers should be striving for.
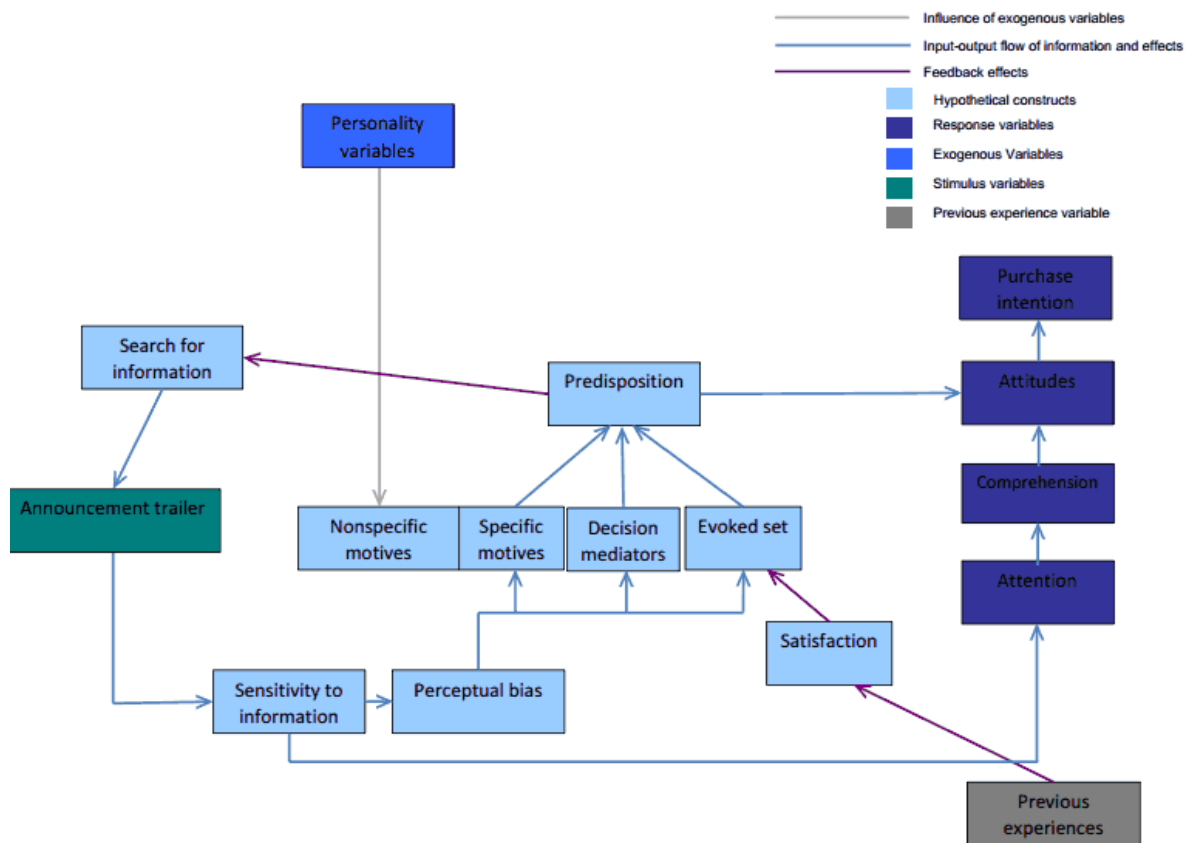
A good approach to keep the viewer interested in the trailer is relating to their personal criteria when it comes to video games. Genre, theme and game series are more or less always part of a trailer, but thinking about the video abandonment-figures it is a good way to display these as early as possible in the trailer, to keep the viewer watching. Showing hype-building reviews and a famous developer brand are also good ways of giving the game credibility and relating to the personal criteria of the gamer.

Based on the discussion above we have put together a model for creating purchase intention through game trailers. The model is based on Howard & Sheth's "theory of buyer behavior" previously introduced in the theories-section of this thesis. When we reduced the "theory of

buyer behavior" to fit the perspective of an announcement trailer as input, where the desired result is purchase intention, the result is our model. The only adjustments except reducing the actual model was the feedback from previous purchase behavior and how that affects satisfaction, a high level of satisfaction would make it part of the evoked set. This has instead been named previous experiences – meaning that brands associated to previous purchases have had different effects on the consumer; any of those brands that are relevant to the trailer may create good associations to the trailer and make it part of the evoked set. Just as well, the consumer may have bad associations from brands presented in a trailer, thus the game is less likely to enter the evoked set. Information search in our model is simply a feedback effect from a viewer's predisposition – it has little significance to the model since there is not much information to find when the announcement trailer has just been released. Personality variables and nonspecific motives are included in the model since they are related to the individual viewer; however, they are very difficult to alter through a communication message and will therefore not be discussed in more depth. According to both our model and Howard & Sheth's model, to induce intent to purchase in the viewer, there are two ways.

- A positive predisposition leads to a general favorable attitude and motivation that induces intent to purchase.

- If the viewer is easily influenced by certain types of information, the viewer acknowledges the communication message since information intake is high. If the viewer then understands and/or can put the brands into context, brand recognition and recall are high and the awareness of the viewer is gained. This leads to a general favorable attitude and motivation that induces intent to purchase.

Advisory model on creating purchase intentions from game trailers

Legend:
- Influence of exogenous variables
- Input-output flow of information and effects
- Feedback effects
- Hypothetical constructs
- Response variables
- Exogenous Variables
- Stimulus variables
- Previous experience variable

So to induce purchase intention in viewers, the message has to be convincing or attention-grabbing.

To **convince**, you have to relate the trailer to the specific motives of the viewer. This can be done by clearly showing what type of game it is in the trailer, genre and other relevant information. Decision mediators can be affected in the same way as specific motives.

The evoked set can be triggered by relating to good brands in the trailer, for e.g. a famous publisher or developer, so that the viewer can relate to this new game as well. Hopefully, the arguments in the trailer are convincing enough to induce intent to purchase in the viewer.

To **grab attention**, the trailer must stand out from the "noise", i.e. stand out as a trailer. Whatever the norm is or how the average types of trailer look – it must break through that wall of noise. The viewer must be able to comprehend the trailer and contextualize it; therefore the trailer should give the viewer the possibility to relate brands to the trailer, to the extent of which that is possible.

Conclusion

It seems like the attribute that is most important for an announcement trailer is to stand-out from the crowd. The announcement trailer does not necessarily need to convey an accurate image of the product itself, the important thing is to cement its place in the consumer's mind. If it does this through a fantastic trailer or game attributes, is of less concern. Once the game is in the consumer's awareness set, it is the first step towards inducing purchase intent.

Understanding the full potential of the game trailer is difficult, the inability to measure how a view on YouTube converts into a sale will require more research. For now, developers will have to settle with the little data that supports the importance of the game trailer, as well as marketing experts that consider the trailer an important part of the marketing mix.

Suggestions for future research

Although an especially good trailer can give a massive boost to sales for a game, if the game fails to live up to the hype created it might damage the long term reputation and sales for publishers and developers. Some claim that gamers never forget, while others believe that some gamer segments are more forgetful than others – we believe that an interesting approach to this problem would be to research the game, publisher and developer brand image of games that fell short compared to their trailers. Following up the new Dead Island-title "Dead island riptide" would be a logical small step towards finding out what the consequences to the brand have been.

We would also like to encourage more detailed research on what consumers characterize as good elements in trailers. This could be done by studying a large sample of trailers with many more focus groups and conducting many more interviews with consumers and industry experts. Using galvanic response to try and determine the key success factors of different trailers or simply rate one trailer over another would also be a resource-demanding research, but necessary for the field in the long run. Does the consumer value high levels of excitement over accumulated excitement?

The use of well known songs in trailers is also an area that we feel deserves a closer look. Does the use of a well-known song from a famous band increase the attitude of the consumer towards the trailer, game, developer or publisher? Is it a good way to catch the attention of the

consumer to try and negate some of the viewer drop-off effect that so heavily affects online videos?

Many interesting questions still remain and we truly hope that the scientific community feel, as we do, that the marketing of video games is an exciting field of study and is deserving of further research.

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Appendices

Interviews

Kert Gartner

- Should a game trailer have any sort of responsibilities towards the consumer, showing them some/all product features? Does the responsibilities shift as a game series develops (Halo 1 compared to Halo 3)?

I think a trailer has three main responsibilities: To engage and entertain your viewer, and make sure the viewer leaves with some kind of understanding of what the game is about. There's many different ways to accomplish this, and I think speaking directly about a game's features is generally a bad idea, depending on the context.

The purpose of a trailer is to get capture your viewers attention, and convey the tone and feel of the game in the most entertaining way possible. Whether the game contains feature x or y is really irrelevant at this point. If the viewer is engaged by the trailer, they will go to the game's site or another page where there's more detailed information about the game.

The trailer isn't the place for a list of bullet points or marketing BS. It is the place to convey a sense of what the game is about, engage and wrap the viewer in that world, and entice them to learn more while being honest about whats' being shown.

- Why do you think there is so little research on the effectiveness and/or styles of game trailers? Is it all silent knowledge within the developers/studios?

I think one reason has to do with the difficulty of tracking views of a video and seeing if they convert into a purchased copy of the game. Right now, there's no BUY button on a youtube video that will directly add the game to your iOS device or to your steam library. The best tracking software can offer (to my knowledge) is if someone clicks on a link to the steam page or app store in the video or on the page the video is hosted on. At that point, whether the viewer hits the buy button is a complete unknown so it is impossible to know if a view converted to a sale.

As for the effectiveness of different styles of trailers, I think the reason that this doesn't exist is because every game should have a trailer that fits its specific tone and feel. Some games lend themselves to live action trailers and others to more gameplay focused trailer and there's an infinite variety of combinations in-between. I think it would be pretty foolish to try and create a trailer that matches a certain style simply because x style of trailer gets more views etc… Generally, the most effective approach i've seen is to make sure your trailer matches the tone and feel of your game.

Another interesting statistical question would be video thumbnails, and whether a different thumbnail will result in more views of a trailer. At the moment, Youtube does not offer A/B split testing of video thumbnails, but this is something i'd love to see them add in the future.

- Does including gameplay in a trailer benefit sales or other desirable outcomes?
- What do you think about a game trailer that doesn't correctly portray the game, i.e. trailers without any actual gameplay or in-game footage? When is this okay/not okay?

I think it is always a good idea to include some gameplay in a launch trailer. Teaser trailers can definitely be a bit more mysterious, but if your final launch trailer does not contain any gameplay footage at all, I think your audience might be turned off by that. Beautiful trailers with no gameplay can run the risk of masking a boring or unoriginal game. Viewers can sniff out deception very easily, so you need to be honest about what you show.

A great example of this problem is the Dead Island trailer. It is a fantastic CG short, but it doesn't really accurately portray the gameplay accurately at all. Some people complained that they expected the game to play out in reverse like the trailer, but that's not the case. Another interesting example is the trailers for Aliens: Colonial Marines. The pre-release gameplay footage used in the trailer was so different than the final game footage that the UK Advertising Standards Authority had to get involved, and a disclaimer was put in place.

- An all-gameplay trailer compared to a trailer using cinematic footage can look like it is lacking a story, is there any way to overcome this? Specifically, take a look at the following trailer: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-VbBHSwl8rA
The game was a huge failure (sales-wise) although it received "okay" reviews. With this in mind one must ask; How big of an impact does a trailer really have on sales?

There's so many things that go into creating a successful launch that even the best games can get buried and lost. Having a good trailer is just one of the many variables involved. How much that variable contributes to the overall sales numbers is also a complex problem that depends on the size of your marketing budget and how much press you're able to interest in your game.

Looking at the Bionic Commando example specifically that trailer is pretty mediocre and the reviews for this game are around 70%. It is a mediocre title, and I think that's the main reason it failed. With so many games and so many options out there, you really need an awesome game that offers a unique experience to break through all the noise and clutter that's out there. Would a better trailer have helped in this situation? Potentially. But I think there were bigger problems with the game its self that contributed to its failure.

That being said, sometimes even having an amazing game is even not enough. Take the iOS game Gasketball. We created a really [fun/professional trailer](#) for that game, and it was [praised by critics](#) and sites all over over the web, but the game's sales were extremely poor due to a [botched Fremium/IAP business model](#).

Another interesting example is the [trailer for Super Hexagon](#). It is EXTREMELY simple, and shows 1 full run-through of a level from the game. This gameplay trailer is super successful, since the game is brutally hard, and it shows that it is possible to complete. It is not cinematic at all, but I would argue that it does have a story. There's a beginning, middle and end to the trailer, and you can feel a form of progression as the level gets more and more difficult to the point where the player eventually dies. My heart starts pounding as I watch it as the intensity increases to the point where the player finally succumbs to the difficulty. It is an awesome trailer, and has the views to prove it (1.3 million views).

Tadhg Kelly

- What do you think about a game trailer that doesn't correctly portray the game, i.e. trailers without any actual gameplay or in-game footage? When is this okay/not okay?

I personally think it is never okay because a trailer is an advertisement for a product. Yet at the same time, trailers that don't show much gameplay, or spend a lot of time talking up their story or concept, are often initially very effective at getting the gaming media and beyond buzzing about possibilities. The question becomes whether that ultimately is a deceptive act though, and whether the game lives up to its trailer.

- Should a game trailer have any sort of responsibilities towards the consumer, showing them some/all product features? Does the responsibilities shift as a game series develops (Halo 1 compared to Halo 3)?

Yes I think so. I also think that responsibility maintains across all releases.

- Why do you think there is so little research on the effectiveness and/or styles of game trailers? Is it all silent knowledge within the developers/studios?

Probably because their effectiveness is hard to objectively measure, like most advertising. You can look at the trailer, promotion, on-the-ground marketing, previews, reviews, publicity, free media coverage and so on and conclude that any of them is responsible for generating sales. Likely it is in the mix somewhere.

The other aspect is that, like any form of commercial, formula is boring. Many commercials become formulaic, and subsequently only succeed by virtue of brute force (they are advertised everywhere all the time) and positioning (the product is promoted in stores) and that also looks like success. The makers of those bad commercials will quite happily justify their work on the basis of sales and claim it is all them. But few people really believe that to be so.

- Does including gameplay in a trailer benefit sales or other desirable outcomes?

It depends. If it looks great then, yes, probably.

- An all-gameplay trailer compared to a trailer using cinematic footage can look like it is lacking a story, is there any way to overcome this? Specifically, take a look at the following trailer: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-VbBHSwl8rA
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It depends on the format and audience type. Trailers for the E3 crowd, the gamers who own powerful consoles and consider themselves a part of a culture, are very affected by trailers that speak to their cultural sense of what games are. However trailers for iOS games rarely have any effect at all. Here's a post I wrote a while ago about the differences between the two mindsets:

http://www.whatgamesare.com/2011/03/muggles-casual-and-social-gamers.html

Focus group

Appendix focus group

The focus group consisted of five participants of ages 19, 21, 22, 23 and 22. All of the participants play games on at least a monthly basis (averaging 5 hours per month of game time to 120 hours per month within the group). The majority of the focus group consists of students, one had a steady job and one was unemployed. Some of the gaming genres which they play are mainly FPS, MMORPG, RTS, RPG, action and strategy. All of them play online with other people to some degree, and all occasionally play single-player modes. We have avoided trying to define them as belonging to certain gamer groups, since those definitions vary between people. They are however, not competitive gamers, i.e. they do not compete professionally in games. The interview was conducted over Skype.

 The focus group was first shown a trailer and then a discussion around that trailer followed. The procedure was repeated for all trailers, and the interview was concluded with a general discussion on game trailers.

 Examples of questions being asked after the focus group had watched a trailer:

· What did you think about the trailer? Was it good or bad?

- What certain aspects of the trailer were good/bad?
- How did the music fit in with the cut-scenes? Could it have been done better?
- How could the trailer be improved?
- Based on the trailer, what is the story in this game?
- Does the gameplay seem interesting in this trailer?
- What do you think about the graphics shown in the trailer?
- Is this trailer engaging? Can you picture the game in front of you?
- What do you think about the main character? Is there a main character in this trailer?
- What Metascore do you think this trailer has?

Questions that were asked during the general discussion:

- Which is the best trailer you have ever seen? Why? What makes it so good?
- Which is the worst trailer you have ever seen? Why? What makes it so bad?
- What do you want to see in a trailer? What do most trailers lack?
- When you buy a game, what role does the trailer have in that purchase?
- Do you always watch a trailer before you buy a game?
- What role does gameplay have in a trailer? Do you want to see gameplay in a trailer?
- What do you think about live-action trailers? Are they cool or not?
- For Battlefield 1942's announcement trailer only cinematic footage was shown. When Dice released Battlefield Vietnam some years after the announcement trailer only showed gameplay graphics. Why do you think they did that? What is the difference between showing gameplay and cinematic footage (or live-action footage)?