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## **Art in Advertising**

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What first gets an audience either intrigued or disinterested in a movie? Some might say it is the trailer, others might say it is crew and late-night interviews, but what one might totally overlook is the movie poster. The movie poster has been around for over a hundred years, just about as long as the medium of film itself. However, unlike film, some might not understand the work and talent that goes into making them as effective as possible. They too have changed and evolved through the years, moving in and out of trends and styles. Recently though, it seems like movie poster marketing has strayed away from what makes them so vital to film marketing, incorporating strategic advertising approaches.

This brings us to today. We now live in the age of social media and the internet, where these techniques might be more valuable than ever. There are a thousand things a day competing for our attention daily. If a social media user does not immediately connect to an advertisement, they will swipe past it without a second thought. This then begs the question: what change can be made that will affect audiences' interest in going to see an advertised film? In today's world, movie posters should have more attention put on them by filmmakers and studios, utilizing and incorporating their artistic persuasion techniques. This way, audiences will be more swayed to see a movie with a memorable and effective poster advertisement.

Looking into the history of movie posters, the first one was actually created back in 1895, for the French short film *L'Arroseur Arrosé*. At this emerging time for film, they were spread through word of mouth and interest. This led to the addition of marquee advertisements, like theater performances before it. However, it was not until the film boom of the 20s, or the golden

BRADFORD WRITES!

Fall 2023

age of Hollywood, where posters started to evolve decade by decade, the two most influential being the 70s and 90s. According to Zijlstra (2015), the 70s homed in on “sophisticated, clean visual language”. Designs were simple, usually incorporating black and white as color contrasts. To complement this, hand painted traditions were still used, well into the photography era.

To contrast this, we emerge into the 90s. While some of these elements were shown emerging in the 80s, the 90s brought the celebrity marketing, single image headshots, and photo shopped creation to the forefront of design. When discussing the influences of this era, Chojnacki, as cited in Zijlstra (2015) stated, “[t]he film industry’s intention for movie posters lost its way, seemingly becoming an afterthought”. This trend in design has lasted until today with major movie studios, creating the term “floating heads.” With this, audiences are shown uncreative compositions consisting of as many floating celebrity faces as possible.

The conversation among avid film fans, artists, and general audiences today paints a picture of disappointment. On the advertisement side, fans and audiences are feeling major burnout with these designs, as many seem to come from a generic template. On the artistic side, creators feel that these designs do not foster creativity or imagination. So, what is lost? While there is no set list of attributes that make up an effective and persuasive movie poster, many experts, and followers of this topic, such as Jorge Farah and Shubham Kulkarni, have shared agreements. These persuasive techniques include capturing the films, color palette, text and typography, and memorability. According to Kulkarni (2021), it is vital to remember that “the key to a brilliant movie poster design is consistency. All the elements must work coherently around the chosen idea or the theme.” This shows just how complex these ideas are.

Capturing a film’s essence involves the ability to convey what a movie is about without spoiling major story beats. A designer gives a basic idea of a film’s plot, themes, or concepts.

BRADFORD WRITES!

Fall 2023

Introducing main characters, settings, or conflicts all go into letting an audience in just enough to hook them. It is also important to keep in mind what is shown and what information is shared with the audience. Avoiding the inclusion of major aspects or “spoilers” is key. If a design shows too much, it could lead to a disinterested audience, as they could feel they know what will happen before seeing it. It is also important to convey genre. For example, comedies should include funny faces or a comedic scenario, while horror should include scary imagery or monsters.

Color palette includes all colors incorporated, both primary and complimentary, used in a design to grab attention. The chosen colors should convey tone and elicit emotion in the viewer. It has been proven that color and color combinations have a direct connection to the emotions we feel through life. When discussing the relationship between color, emotions, and marketing, Ganezer (2020) stated, “Colors can represent multiple emotions, depending on the context of what it’s in.” This idea is commonly seen in Robert Plutchik’s work, such as his wheel of emotion. According to Robert Plutchik’s color wheel, when presented with a certain color, we tend to change our emotional state depending on the it. For example, most horror movies embrace red, due to us associating red with anger and aggression, eliciting fear within us. The sight of red imagery actually increases our blood pressure and excitement level within the body, making it perfect for putting an audience on edge. In mixing these colors, complimentary color combinations lead to visually interesting and appealing images, which is a vital way in attracting an audience's attention. This is why a lot of indie films use yellow as a main color, as it is the most visually eye popping on the spectrum, perfect for standing out in a crowd.

Text and typography are the printed work incorporated to give an audience information on the film. This must include the title, actors, director, and release date with taglines and

BRADFORD WRITES!

Fall 2023

accolades being optional. These short phrases, that only consist of no more than a few words, can peak audiences' attentions, causing them to want to seek more. In this aspect of design font design is key. It should not only pop but be memorable as well. A visual hierarchy should also be created, with the main stars, titles, and directors positioned to the top of the frame with larger sized font. In turn, the studios, smaller stars, and crew should be grouped towards the bottom of the frame with smaller sized font.

Lastly, recognizability, or the memorability factor, is the technique that allows an audience to remember an image and relate it to its specific film. Think of any movie poster you remember. What made it stick in your head? For most, it is the visual quality. Mia Wallace positioned on Pulp Fiction's poster, the looming shark and hopelessness in Jaws' poster, and the chilling lighting and framing of The Exorcist's poster. All these well-known examples stick with an audience member, creating a burned in intrigue. This pairing between film and image should create an unforgettable association. Inclusions can be a character, an object, or a scene. Through this, designers aim for simplicity as the goal. Creating a busy image can overwhelm an audience, in turn, making them uninterested or confused.

These concepts may seem obvious at first glance but actually putting them into practice can be incredibly challenging. Factoring in how to do all of this, while maintaining the artist's vision and craft for the piece and it becomes even more complicated. We are finding ourselves at a pivotal moment in the history of film and film advertising. It seems as if the importance of reevaluating the practice of poster creation for studios and incorporating methods of persuasion is gravely needed. With technology becoming more available and assessable to people, we are seeing a massive boom in filmmakers, whether that be through shorts, films, or tv shows. We are at the point where a platform such as YouTube can offer easier distribution than any production

BRADFORD WRITES!

Fall 2023

company. At the same time, film studios are becoming more powerful and influential on the market, gaining, and monopolizing Intellectual Properties (IPs). What is stopping them from completely taking over the film landscape, crushing any chance of a young filmmaker finding their footing? Marketing! Smart poster design can go a long way in standing out amongst heavy competition, especially given recent world events. 2023 is still 25% percent down in ticket sales compared to 2019, before the Covid-19 pandemic, according to Idrees (2021). Audiences are just more selective of the films they see, given the risk it was during and after lockdown. Effective marketing can tip the odds between major studio and independent releases.

While there is plenty of research done surrounding the topic but not a lot specific to it. A lot of research, tests, and studies are conducted in advertising in general, whether that be for billboards, commercials, or trailers, not a lot of is done on movie posters themselves. It can be seen as a very niche topic to some. For the general public, it can seem not important and for suits, it can be seen as an afterthought for intern #18364 to figure out. I know that is a major overstatement but not every aspect of a film and its production can be put at number one priority given deadlines, budget, and studio mandates. It also does not help that a lot of this specific research done on poster design is kept in house. Focus groups are a major cornerstone for studio's decisions in advertisement. The problem is that a lot of the information gained through these company market surveys is not shared with the public. This is due to a multitude of reasons, mostly retaining to confidentiality. The studios want this information for their success, not others. When discussing guidance for focus groups, researchers at the University of San Diago (n.d) states:

In the consent document and during the consent discussion, participants should be informed that the information shared in the focus group session should not be shared with

BRADFORD WRITES!

Fall 2023

anyone outside of the group, and that the confidentiality of anything they choose to say during the session cannot be guaranteed.

Not only do these companies want to protect the information gathered but the participants as well, making it extremely hard to access the data.

This does not mean we cannot gather anything related to this topic. As previously mentioned, Robert Plutchik's color wheel provides a lot of information related to how we can obtain feelings and emotion from colors. His visual chart was created to "understand" and "show the relation and intensities the eight primary emotions have with each other which includes: anger, disgust, fear, sadness, anticipation, joy, surprise, and trust," according to Ganezer (2020). This approach was taken by Plutchik (1982) as he believed the topic as not being fully explored, starting "aspects of the broader topic of emotion and their interrelationships are not recognized." While we have come a long way in research since then, our findings related to poster design can be detrimental to overall progress. We can however transfer Robert Plutchik's findings to our modern-day research into how colors affect us when viewing advertisements.

Using modern day technology and a culmination of effective persuasion designs, researchers are developing tools to predict film success based on elements found in its poster. Madonga and Zhongjun (2023) model proposes "a novel Deep Multimodal Feature Classifier Neural Network model (DMFCNN) for predicting a film's opening weekend box office revenue using deep multimodal visual features extracted from movie posters and movie metadata." While this technological discovery is very new and ever evolving, its achievements of 78-80% accuracy could become a valuable resource in gathering poster effectiveness research that we are can be hard to gather.

BRADFORD WRITES!

Fall 2023

With all of this said, I decided to do a small poll of my own. Now of course these findings are not going to apply to every individual in every part of the world, but they should at least give us an idea of whether these persuasion techniques work when put up against modern studio decision making. To do so, I gathered a small group of 20 participants, ranging in age from twelve to seventy. These participants were chosen as basic general audiences, with only surface level knowledge of the film and advertising world. I then chose 20 comparison questions to ask them. For these 20 questions, it involved me selecting a studio molded poster and a persuasively designed poster. The participants would then choose what movie they would want to see, given the design of the poster. I did have a few rules I wanted to follow in the selection and comparison process. I chose to only compare movies that were in the same genre/subgenre and released within a five-year period. I also chose to pick movies that were not mainstays of the genre and known to billions of people. If for instance if I chose to pit a movie such as Avengers: Endgame, the second highest grossing movie ever, against a movie like Birds of Prey, there would obviously be some bias in answers.

It is in these answers that I found a discovery I was not expecting. Out of the twenty questions asked to the twenty participants, I got an average of 15/20. This means that out of the twenty questions, an average of fifteen persuasively designed posters were chosen over the “generically” designed posters. I got this average by adding up the number of persuasive designed posters chosen out of the twenty and dividing by the twenty participants. This yielded an average of 14.5, or 15 when rounded to the nearest whole number. These findings were surprising, as I had no preconceived thoughts about the result going in. This small poll shows a favor towards the involvement of persuasion techniques of modern template ones. Now of course this is just a small study, and its result should not be taken as absolutely true and applied to

BRADFORD WRITES!

Fall 2023

everyone. It does, however, give some idea of general audience opinion when choosing films. It should also be said that this subject matter is incredibly subjective, so what might work for one group or individual might not for another.

If I were to develop this study more in the future, I would like to expand to include more participants with bigger variables such as living area and income status. Other demographics might have other perspectives that I had not factored into my conclusion and results. While not as important, it would also be useful and an interesting idea to compare general audiences and avid film fans to see if there really is a contrast in opinion or if they line up. This would allow for more information in regard to what can be improved on for general audiences.

With these results, a new question becomes clear: what value does this change have for the future of this medium? As mentioned earlier, we are living in a new and ever developing age. The increasing presents and popularity of social media and the internet has created a constant struggle for attention. We are shown hundreds of things a day, so it is nearly impossible for everything shown to grab our attention and stick in our head. With the further integration of the persuasion techniques mentioned, it could allow for an advertisement to cut through the noise of everyday internet use. This would be most beneficial for up in coming, low budget, or independent film makers. With effective poster advertisement design, viewers might be made aware and interested in these projects they might have paid no mind to. This in turn would lead to more eyes and possible success for the “under dog” filmmakers. Even for larger studios, applying these techniques can bring light to well made yet niche movies that are not guaranteed a block buster audience. Studios contain many creatives in the film industry. Success for them can lead to more faith in creativity.



BRADFORD WRITES!

Fall 2023

On the artistic side of this argument, this change can lead to more success for the actual artists who design these posters. Designers such as Dylan Haley want to put craft first in this creative endeavor. When interviewed, Haley, quoted in Kemp (2019), explained, "I'm trying to make something that would be good enough for someone to put it in a frame and hang it on their wall. I like to make something that gives you a kick." This type of graphic design is an art form, so why constrict its expression and vision? Success with this type of advertising can lead to a bigger trend of artistic driven work, leading to more exposure and work for the artist. We are starting to see this type of thinking emerge with companies like Mondo, who specialize in limited-edition screen-printed posters, Criterion, who distribute "important classics and contemporary films," and A24, who focus on film and tv production and distribution. While nothing is guaranteed, their financial success and popularity does lead to some hope of change in this field, reinvigorating interest for the future.

To some, it does feel like an obvious solution. Changing the poster making process would please fans, general audience, artists, studios, and lead to a more productive film process. It would be an option where the studio can make money and the creatives can ensure their vision and talent is not compromised by an overdone and ineffective style of design. This point in time does not seem impossible to reach, as things are constantly changing in Hollywood. Just look at the recent writer's and actor's strike for example. In a matter of months, the whole Hollywood system was flipped on its head and their dream of an Artificial Intelligence (A.I.) written future was put on hold. Who is to say something similar might not happen for this. Artists uniting and saying no to the mediocrity. As things continue to change in the industry of Tinseltown, hopefully the art can be brought back into advertising.

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BRADFORD WRITES!  
Fall 2023

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