

**Rethinking Viral Marketing:
Exploring the Relationship between Past and Present Film Marketing**

by

Katherine Allen

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in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of**

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in

Film Studies

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INTRODUCTION

*Moviemaking does not come without risk. It's still an art, not a science, and there is no proven formula for success.*¹ – Rich Ross, Chairman of Walt Disney Studios, in reference to Andrew Stanton's 2012 financial flop, *John Carter*.

There is no conclusive formula for ensuring a successful film. There are always films that fail to connect with audiences. A variety of factors influence success and failure at the box-office. Whether genre, story, star power, or budget, no one factor can account for what makes a box office success. Hence, from the days of early cinema, a sure way to combat some of this risk in the filmmaking business is with skillful marketing.

Throughout the history of cinema, filmmakers and film distributors have been concerned to properly position their films on the market. Film marketing refers to “any activity that assists a film in reaching its target audience at any time throughout its life,” and can include film production, distribution, exhibition and consumption.² The business of movie-going is uncertain for audiences as they must pay for a product based only on the promise of industry marketing tactics.³ Film marketing works to diminish the uncertainty of the film market through the strategies of product differentiation.⁴ Moreover, film marketing assists distributors in reducing the risks of releasing a film to an uninformed audience as all promotional materials are used as aids of persuasion in the hope of high profits.

¹ Brooks Barnes, “Ishtar Lands on Mars,” *New York Times*, March 11, 2012, accessed July 27, 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/12/business/media/ishtar-lands-on-mars.html?_r=2&ref=media, para. 7.

² Finola Kerrigan, *Film Marketing* (Oxford: Buterworth-Heinemann Publications, 2010), 9.

³ Philip Drake, “Distribution and Marketing in Contemporary Hollywood,” in *The Contemporary Hollywood Film Industry*, ed. Paul McDonald and Janet Wasko (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2008), 64.

⁴ Drake, 64.

As the cinema has changed over the years, so have its marketing tactics. In the 1910s basic film marketing tools involving film posters and trailers were created. These marketing strategies are still necessary to any successful marketing campaign. In order to stay competitive, film marketing mobilizes the latest technologies as new avenues to market film. For example, radio and television, when introduced in the 1920s and 1940s, respectively, offered new ways to advertise film and reach audiences. Film marketing has changed yet again with the use of the Internet as a new media platform for films to be marketed, distributed, and viewed. Today, the Internet is where important innovations in film marketing are taking place.

Since the late 1990s, viral marketing--also known as word of mouth marketing, postmodern marketing, buzz marketing, social media marketing, and alternate reality gaming--has become a film marketing staple. Viral marketing relies on the peer-to-peer sharing of promotional information related to a product. A viral marketing campaign not only produces anticipation for an upcoming release, but also adds to a spectator's film experience as it extends a film text beyond the theaters where the film is screened. Viral campaigns, which provide an immediate experience before and after viewing a film, are complex endeavors. Viral marketing campaigns must be well-orchestrated, comprehensive and complex to entice audiences into participating. The purpose of viral marketing is to create conversations about a film prior to its release. If a viral marketing campaign is provocative and well-planned, it "can spark a firestorm of buzz that sometimes can be effective for years in non-terminal mediums like the Internet."⁵

⁵ Rick Ferguson, "Word of mouth and viral marketing: taking the temperature of the hottest trends in marketing," *Journal of Consumer Marketing* 25 (2008): 179.

When I refer to viral marketing campaigns, I am not referring to conventional film websites that only offer spectators trailers, clips and plot summaries, but rather websites that take online marketing further by extending the film narrative online. Viral campaigns do so with additional videos, blogs, websites and games that spectators seek out to add to their filmic experience. The film industry seeks potential revenues in a variety of markets, where online viral marketing campaigns are but another instance of technology, advertising and entertainment colluding to capitalize on profits in a competitive media industry. These campaigns have become increasingly sophisticated and elaborate over the years, and continue to engage audiences and build buzz around films. However, there are no guarantees that viral marketing will spin positive buzz. Like the moviemaking business itself, the viral marketing business is risky compared to traditional publicity tactics. The contribution of a viral marketing campaign to a film's box office numbers is difficult to quantify as the return-on-investment is difficult to measure. For viral marketing to work, the campaign content must in fact go viral. Consumers must download, discuss and pass along this content to materialize buzz. What will become clear in this thesis is that viral marketing is a continuous experiment, one that like the moviemaking business is filled with successes and failures.

While a great deal of academic literature exists on viral marketing's purpose and functionality, there are too few attempts to properly contextualize its relationship to film and history. One can find academic research on fandom, promotional culture, and the complex relationship between producers and the active spectator, as in the work by Henry Jenkins, Will Brooker, and Jonathan Gray. While these scholars contribute greatly to our

understanding of the contemporary film industry and its relationship with spectators, these media scholars neglect a significant historical question.

The project of this thesis is to rethink viral marketing and media convergence in a way that avoids the common tendency in media journalism to exaggerate the ‘new’ and ‘revolutionary’ nature of current film marketing. Critics today are far too quick to assume that the active spectator and the “cinema of interactions” enabled by digital technologies are a wholly new phenomenon. It is often forgotten that throughout the history of cinema, film has consistently been distributed and circulated through various media channels, where spectators have engaged with different media practices in their film consumption. To make sense of today’s media culture requires analyzing how engagement in the era of digital cinema is similar to the ways spectators have traditionally engaged with cinema.

This question of contemporary cinematic engagement is approached in the following pages through a historical analysis that compares today’s viral marketing campaigns to earlier ways the film industry has engaged with its audiences. I will attempt to expose how viral marketing campaigns do not offer spectators wholly ‘new’ modes of engagement, but rather rely on updated versions of much older film marketing strategies. The objective is to illustrate not only how the development of viral marketing campaigns have appropriated familiar and traditional marketing discourses, but also how the spectator has always been invited to engage with film through marketing practices. This is not to say viral marketing campaigns have not introduced compelling and innovative means of marketing cinema. Rather, these campaigns have taken characteristics from marketing strategies made popular in earlier historical film moments and relocated them

to the needs of contemporary viral campaigns.⁶ In order to understand viral marketing campaigns one must look to the historical formation of film marketing to fully understand these current processes. A historical based marketing discussion is significant because it illuminates and adds to the history of cinematic spectatorship, as well as understandings of the historical relationship between media producers and consumers. Therefore, I will analyze the ways in which the nature of engagement in the era of digital cinema is similar to the ways spectators have traditionally engaged with cinema. In this project I argue that viral marketing campaigns rely on updated versions of traditional marketing techniques to engage audiences.

Media scholars' attempts to account for the "newness of new media" are becoming common.⁷ Through these discussions many historical parallels have become apparent. For example, Marsha Orgeron provides a discussion of early film fan magazines and the ways these created an interactive fan culture in her article, "'You Are Invited to Participate': Interactive Fandom in the Age of the Movie Magazine" (2009). As well, Jeremy Groskopf argues that online advertising techniques were conceived in the film industry's silent era in his article, "Profit Margins: Silent Era Precursors of Online Advertising Tactics" (2012). I will add to these discussions to account for viral marketing's relation to earlier marketing practices, as contemporary film marketing needs further examination.

I believe viral marketing is a very fluid concept. As the so-called "social media" evolve, so does viral marketing. There is no one structure or formula, or any way to know for certain that a viral campaign will garner positive or negative interest. Rather than

⁶ David P. Marshall, *New Media Cultures* (New York: Oxford University Press Inc., 2004), 3.

⁷ Jeremy Groskopf, "Profit Margins: Silent Era Precursors of Online Advertising Tactics," *Film History: An International Journal* 24 (2012): 83.

approach viral marketing through a single definition, I believe it is more apt to undertake case studies of different film campaigns that have employed viral marketing. The objective is to illuminate the variety of ways viral marketing can be employed with a film text, and provide a more concrete understanding of viral marketing's role within contemporary film marketing. Throughout the following three chapters, a variety of viral marketing cases will be discussed to illustrate the multitude of ways viral marketing can be applied. From big-budget blockbusters to independent films, viral marketing can build great anticipation for an upcoming film, provided the marketers adopt an approach that is sufficiently complex, organized, and inventive.

Also, it is necessary to note that this project will focus on Hollywood cinema. Studies of film marketing have long centered on Hollywood, which has dominated the global film industry for the majority of film history. This analysis will focus on Hollywood's marketing tactics and current blockbusters that have exploited the use of viral marketing. This is not to say that other national cinemas and independent films have not taken up the use of viral marketing campaigns with great success. Rather, Hollywood filmmakers have remained market-driven in their creation of films, where Hollywood holds more star appeal and dominates worldwide distribution and exhibition networks.⁸ The American film industry developed market awareness in early cinema, making marketing and promotional tactics of filmmaking just as important as the art of filmmaking itself. The Hollywood film industry is structured to capitalize on profits and uses a variety of marketing tactics to cultivate high earnings. Hollywood has taken up viral marketing in the last decade to create higher potential earnings, and there are many Hollywood films that provide examples of the success and failure of viral marketing.

⁸ Kerrigan, 36.

Film studies has traditionally treated aesthetic questions separately from questions of the social, economic and technological aspects of film. However, knowledge of the economics of the film industry are needed for studying film even for critics concerned mainly with film art.⁹ The techniques and means of attracting audiences by way of marketing have remained a constant and vital component to the function and success of the film industry throughout the history of cinema. Issues surrounding cinematic marketing have leaked into film-critical discourse as film theorists have attempted to understand the greater implications surrounding film marketing techniques. Contemporary film theory has sought to understand the ways in which the film industry employs different marketing strategies to garner wider audiences and how this alters film spectatorship and the filmic experience.

Thomas Schatz, Justin Wyatt, and Henry Jenkins have all contributed enlightening discussions that have opened up new critical avenues for theorizing film marketing and the film industry at particular points in film's history.¹⁰ Most important to this study are the works of media scholars, Richard Grusin and Henry Jenkins, who sought to theorize and illuminate how the contemporary film industry interacts with a hybrid of different media forms and practices. In this "digital cinema of interactions," as Grusin calls it, film works as a distributed product, working across different entertainment industries such as television, videogames and music.¹¹ According to Grusin, digital cinema entails a new culture of spectatorship and new economics for the

⁹ David Bordwell, forward to *Shared Pleasures: A History of Movie Presentation in the United States*, by Douglas Gomery (Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), x.

¹⁰ See Justin Wyatt's *High Concept: Movies and Marketing in Hollywood* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994), and Thomas Schatz's *Old Hollywood/New Hollywood: ritual, art and industry* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1983).

¹¹ Richard Grusin, "DVDs, Video Games, and the Cinema of Interactions," in *Multimedia Histories: From the Magic Lantern to the Internet*, ed. James Lyons and John Plunkett (Exeter, Devon: University of Exeter Press, 2007), 212.

film industry as both are allocated across production, exhibition, distribution and interaction.¹²

“The digital cinema of interactions” can also be described as the work of media convergence. Henry Jenkins, author of *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (2006) ushered in the topics of the active spectator and media convergence into film discourse. Jenkins describes media convergence as “the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behavior of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want.”¹³ Convergence depends heavily on the active participation of consumers and the social interaction between consumers of media content.¹⁴ According to Jenkins, film marketing is now distributed across different media platforms, showcasing the convergence of media and audiences.

Grusin and Jenkins works have influenced this project and the questions it seeks to answer. Both scholars provide a critical portrait of the current film industry, and the ways in which media convergence is effecting spectators’ consumption of film. Besides the work of Grusin and Jenkins, this thesis draws upon the work of Douglas Gomery, Linda Williams, Tino Balio, and Jonathan Gray, among others.¹⁵ In terms of understanding film marketing, Finola Kerrigan’s *Film Marketing* (2010) and Lisa Kernan’s *Coming Attractions: Reading American Movie Trailers* (2004) provided great insight into the variety of ways the film industry historically and currently uses marketing to its benefits. For the description and outline of campaigns I rely greatly on those who

¹² Grusin, 214.

¹³ Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2006), 2.

¹⁴ Jenkins, 4.

¹⁵ Regarding the works in question see subsequent notes referring to these authors.

participated in the campaign. A series of blogs were cited as bloggers actively reported on the unfolding of each viral marketing campaign. These blogs were critical in my understanding of the way viral marketing functions, as well as the role of consumers in these campaigns.

From early cinema to digital cinema, film marketing has been an active part of filmmaking, constantly evolving and adapting its methods to an ever-changing cinema. As viral marketing has grown in popularity as a means of engaging film spectators, it has repositioned the issues of film marketing in cinematic discourse applicable once again as it has transformed cinematic spectatorship and the film experience. Numerous questions surround viral marketing, media convergence, and the active spectator, and this thesis cannot deal with all of them. Instead it will be strictly concerned with how viral marketing campaigns pull from marketing discourses made familiar throughout the history of cinema, and confront the historical placement of the active spectator. Again, this is not to say viral marketing campaigns do not offer compelling and new platforms to engage with cinema. Rather, I seek to expose the historical relationship between contemporary viral marketing practices and traditional marketing discourses.

In Chapter One I will provide a discussion of broader historical film marketing practices that can be linked to contemporary viral marketing campaigns. It is necessary to look at the history of film marketing in order to understand contemporary cinematic engagement, and the ways in which novelties of the past are being employed in contemporary viral marketing campaigns. Not only will I provide a further explanation of viral marketing, tracing its beginnings to *The Blair Witch Project* (Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sanchez, 1999), but I also provide some examples of different film campaigns to

illustrate the variety of ways viral marketing is employed. As well, it will be helpful to point to specific examples of certain novelties used in early cinema as this will provide a foundation for the discussions found in Chapter Two and Three. Looking as early as 1910 will validate how viral marketing campaigns are part of broader historical and industrial modes of engagement. This discussion will lay the groundwork for Chapters Two and Three, where I will articulate my thesis by way of *The Dark Knight* (Christopher Nolan, 2008) and *Cloverfield* (Matt Reeves, 2008) campaigns.

Chapter Two will compare *The Dark Knight* campaign to longstanding historical marketing techniques discussed in Chapter One. *The Dark Knight* represents a high-budget blockbuster franchise with star power. A longstanding film marketing tactic is to couple saturation advertising with a possible blockbuster to increase the chances of high profits. *The Dark Knight* did this, but moved the mass advertising online. I am concerned with the ways major studios formulate the marketing process in pre-production and consistently revise it throughout production, distribution and exhibition. *The Dark Knight* represents this marketing process to the fullest degree, illustrating the significance of a well-calculated and provocative marketing campaign. I will emphasize the ways a superhero franchise garnered a great deal of hype through viral marketing by providing a campaign outline. In the last part of this chapter, I will discuss how the campaign functioned and argue that *The Dark Knight* campaign pulled from older marketing tactics to build a successful campaign and engage spectators.

Finally, in Chapter Three I will extend my discussion to questions surrounding the active spectator. I will provide a counter example to *The Dark Knight* analysis with a case study of *Cloverfield*. *Cloverfield* employed an intricate online viral marketing campaign

that invited spectators to become investigators and find information online. Unlike *The Dark Knight*, *Cloverfield* did not have the star or franchise power to entice audiences. Rather, the film relied heavily on the mystery and plot of the film to engage spectators. More importantly, the *Cloverfield* campaign raises a number of questions concerning the active spectator. I will investigate whether these viral campaigns allow for greater user agency, or rather limit this agency in some way. I argue the *Cloverfield* campaign did invite spectators to be active, but rather guided their experience through contests, film images and social networking profiles for *Cloverfield* characters. As well, a comparison to the ways spectators have been active agents of their movie going experience in the past will illuminate the ways spectators have previously been asked prior to viral marketing to actively participate in their film consumption. This will illustrate how the active spectator is anticipated in earlier film periods. Finally, *Cloverfield* sought a heightened sense of realism with a documentary aesthetic and unknown actors, I will question what this sense of authenticity contributed to the overall marketing campaign and in what ways these choices contribute to a more successful campaign.

CHAPTER ONE

FROM PAST TO PRESENT: A HISTORICAL DISCUSSION OF FILM MARKETING

This chapter will investigate the history of film marketing practices, specifically pointing to techniques used in earlier periods in cinema history that are found in contemporary viral marketing campaigns. This analysis will begin with an overview of viral marketing's current status as a significant marketing technique, but one whose novelty is much exaggerated. The analysis will then turn to the feature film and how it has historically been marketed, with the aim of showing that viral marketing is, in fact, anticipated in earlier marketing practices. A discussion of how these modern-day campaigns are based on earlier novelties suggests that viral campaigns are part of broader historical and industrial modes of engagement. This will lay the groundwork for understanding the ways in which the spectator has always been an active agent in their film consumption, and how a seemingly new marketing phenomenon derives, in fact, from a forgotten past. Looking into the film marketing situation circa 1910 will validate how current film marketing techniques are inherently connected to advertising novelties of the past. A historical analysis in conjunction with a study of viral marketing campaigns is significant because,

Much of the film marketing literature fails to contextualize the current film market by ignoring the historical development of the film industry. Without setting current practices within their historical context, it is impossible to truly understand why contemporary filmmakers face such problems in accessing the market.¹

The implication of new digital technology and current marketing strategies ignores the film marketing of the past, and pushes the argument that the active spectator and the

¹ Kerrigan, *Film Marketing*, 17.

“digital cinema of interactions” is a wholly new phenomenon, unlike other historical modes of engagement in cinema. This thesis will be telling of the history of cinematic spectatorship and the relationship between media producers and consumers. The active spectator is a complex phenomenon as its categorization is complicated. The active spectator is not completely free-willed in their media consumption choices, nor completely passive. The complicated nature of the active spectator will come to light in this thesis, as it evidently needs further examination. In the following chapters, I will attempt to draw attention to this complicated relationship between media producer and consumer through an analysis of viral marketing campaigns. As well, a historical overview is critical in contextualizing contemporary viral campaigns, and to understanding their function in the film industry. But first it is necessary to further articulate the significance of marketing in the contemporary Hollywood industry.

Today, as much as ever, marketing is intrinsic to the filmmaking process. Marketing is a high stakes business, with a great deal of financial risk involved. For example, “the average marketing cost of a studio film in 2005 was \$36.19 million, which, once added to an average production cost of \$60 million, took the average totally cost of a major released film to nearly \$100 million.”² Additionally, the film industry spent \$1.86 billion on print, television, radio and outdoor advertising in 2009.³ A successful marketing campaign, which typically begins in a film’s preproduction stage, works to secure high box office profits. The ultimate goal for a marketing campaign is to increase audience size and maximize the earning potential of a film.⁴ Promotional discourses work to create meaning for audiences, often by building anticipation for a product. This

² Drake, “Distribution and Marketing in Contemporary Hollywood,” 63.

³ “Movies Put Marketing in the Spotlight,” *Successful Promotions*, 2010, 14.

⁴ Kerrigan, 37.

anticipation is often referred to as hype. Hype refers to the profuse or elaborate publicity of an individual product; this hype establishes an intensified product presence in a competitive marketplace.⁵

Promotional discourses have a dual functionality because they also work as anticipatory texts that create meaning for spectators. Promotional film texts play a critical role in audience reception and interpretation of a film. Audiences construct meaning for a film as a consequence of having encountered its promotional texts. Film advertisements introduce the film's story world and characters before audiences see it on screen. Audiences rarely attend a film without some knowledge of it beforehand. Promotional materials provide audiences with expectations that amplify avenues for possible interpretations of a film text. Like today's viral marketing campaigns, traditional forms of film marketing such as trailers and film posters act as prompts for constructing meaning and have been doing so since the beginnings of cinema. A marketing campaign is critical in persuading audiences to go see a film. Where large marketing budgets can afford to saturate media platforms with film advertisements, these large marketing budgets do not guarantee greater profits. Rather, marketing texts must connect with audiences, as a film campaign that fails to reach audiences will only encounter a problematic box office release.

For instance, Disney's sci-fi blockbuster *John Carter* only garnered \$30.6 million on its opening weekend domestically, and another \$71 million overseas, which was

⁵ Jonathan Gray, *Show sold separately: promos, spoilers, and other media paratexts* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 4.

ultimately a dismal opening next to its \$250 million budget.⁶ Media critics attribute this box office failure to the convoluted *John Carter* marketing campaign, on which Disney spent an additional \$100 million, upping the enormous budget to over \$350 million.⁷ The problematic marketing campaign had ambiguous billboard imagery, and confusing trailers that provided limited plot details, not answering the basic questions: who is John Carter and what is the film about? The marketing campaign failed to connect with audiences, as well as to convey a concrete idea of what audiences could expect from *John Carter*. Not only a catastrophic financial loss for Disney, *John Carter* represents the risk in moviemaking and the significance of a well-planned marketing campaign. The *John Carter* campaign failed to reach consumers during pre-publicity, which ultimately failed to get audiences into theaters. As seen with *John Carter*, a high marketing budget does not promise box office results. For major studio films the stakes are higher, where the marketing process is extremely significant in building audience interest, as big budget blockbusters that go without box office success can turn into a massive financial loss for a studio. The marketing and box office failure of *John Carter* illustrates that without a strong marketing campaign even more risk is added to the film distribution process.

John Carter illustrates that audiences need to be courted during the marketing process, and must connect with the film in some way to garner a “want to see.” In the highly competitive marketplace of present-day commercial cinema, films must be presented in new and diverse ways to entice audiences. As new media technologies emerge, distributors must take advantage of the latest media platforms to connect with

⁶ Eamon Murphy, “John Carter of Where? Disney’s Bad Marketing Mars Launch of a Fun Sci-Fi Romance,” *DailyFinance*, March 12, 2012, accessed July 27, 2012, <http://www.dailyfinance.com/2012/03/12/john-carter-of-where-disneys-bad-marketing-mars-launch-of-a/>.

⁷ Barnes, “Ishtar Lands on Mars,” para. 4.

audiences, and rework their approaches to film marketing accordingly. That is why film marketing tactics have moved online in the digital age. The Internet has grown into a significant marketing opportunity for film producers, which provides a platform to build anticipation and demand for films in an interactive space at much lower costs. In addition to viral marketing campaigns, films more often than not have their own websites with cast information, plot summaries, soundtrack listings, behind-the-scenes features and film clips, which allow audiences to get a taste of an upcoming film. As well, the Internet became a new means of distribution and exhibition for trailers and films, where video-sharing websites such as YouTube made this content easily accessible for consumers. Audiences can also rent or buy digital copies of films online, which, once again, amounts to a significant alteration in the ways audiences watch and consume films.

Inventive online marketing is most aptly produced through viral marketing. Viral marketing refers to the “forms of promotion that depend on consumers passing information or materials on to their friends and families.”⁸ Viral marketing relies on film producers filling cyberspace with mysterious clips or websites, interactive games, or releasing information, such as plot or character details to build buzz around a film release.⁹ Media producers ask consumers to participate through various media channels and to share information with one another. The purpose of viral marketing campaigns is to create an illusion that spectators are finding information on their own, as spectators must seek out information online and attempt to decipher their findings before their initial viewing of a film. Viral marketing allows for consumers to have a sense of involvement in the marketing of a product, and its potential success.

⁸ Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, 334.

⁹ Robert Marich, “Viral Inflection,” *Variety*, September 8, 2004. 8 Sept. 2004, 42.

Viral campaigns are a synthesis in marketing and a means to heighten focus of a film before its initial release, to pique and maintain interest and to expand audiences. The purpose of a viral marketing campaign is to create dialogue, build brand awareness, and create buzz. Viral campaigns are combined with a traditional marketing campaign to provide audiences with an expanded film experience. Unlike standard film websites that offer audiences screen times, plot details, trailers and opening dates, viral campaigns rather create elaborate websites that invite spectators to linger and investigate the site.¹⁰ Viral promotional materials such as websites, games and videos provide audiences with forms of entertainment that encourage spectators to connect dispersed media in order to optimize their experience of a film. Viral marketing campaigns may be slow to build buzz and have unpredictable outcomes, but they are less expensive than print advertising and reach a greater number of consumers more quickly.¹¹ Viral campaigns develop anticipation and greatly contribute to audiences' understanding of a film text. As well, not unlike other traditional promotional materials, viral campaigns help construct meaning as it opens the story world to audiences before a film's initial release. Also known as alternate reality gaming, or ARGs, viral marketing more often extends the story world of a film text across different media platforms, crossing into transmedia storytelling territory.¹² The transmedia nature of viral marketing will be illustrated in the following chapters, as *The Dark Knight* and *Cloverfield* were transmedia events.

¹⁰ J.P. Telotte, "The 'Blair Witch Project' Project: Film and the Internet," in *Nothing that is: millennial cinema and the Blair Witch controversies*, ed. Sarah Lynn Higley and Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock (Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 2004), 40.

¹¹ Marich, "Viral Inflection," 42.

¹² According to Jenkins in *Convergence Culture*, transmedia storytelling refers to "stories that unfold across multiple media platforms, with each medium making distinctive contributions to our understanding of the world, a more integrated approach to franchise development than models based on urtexts and ancillary products," 334.

Viral campaigns were inaugurated as a staple of film marketing in 1999 with the success of *The Blair Witch Project*. Not only is *The Blair Witch Project* one of the most successful independent films of all time grossing over \$248 million worldwide, but was also the first film to integrate an online and offline marketing campaign with success.¹³ The website was designed to be part of the film experience as it invited curious spectators online to explore and discuss the film with their friends. *The Blair Witch Project* marketing campaign pitched the fictional film as a documentary/found-footage film about three young filmmakers who disappear in the woods. The website provided audiences with “facts” about the Blair Witch, photos of filmmakers’ found belongings, and maps of where the three filmmakers disappeared. This sense of reality found at the website gave *The Blair Witch Project* an authority and believability. Situating the film as a found-footage film grounded it in reality and served to differentiate it from classical Hollywood horror films. *The Blair Witch Project* site displayed how online marketing could guide the film experience and lure spectators into a story world online while working within a small independent film budget. The success of *The Blair Witch Project* is also attributed to its use of online and offline marketing tactics as the film released a fake documentary on the history of the Blair Witch that aired on the sci-fi network prior to the release of the film. This marketing strategy only furthered the sense of reality surrounding *The Blair Witch Project* campaign. *The Blair Witch Project* highlights the ways in which a viral

¹³ “The Blair Witch Project: Summary,” Box Office Mojo, accessed July 27, 2012, <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=blairwitchproject.htm>.

marketing campaign can work in favour of a film and solidified the potential success a viral campaign can garner for film.¹⁴

Since the success of *The Blair Witch Project*, numerous films have made use of viral marketing to entice and engage audiences. These campaigns have become a norm for Hollywood film producers to attract audiences, and blur the lines between reality and fiction. Not only are these films independent productions like *The Blair Witch Project*, but also blockbusters backed by major studios. For instance, Pixar designed a vintage toy commercial for *Toy Story 3* (Lee Unkrich, 2010) to introduce audiences to a new character. Found on YouTube, the commercial for Lots-o-Huggin' Bear was formatted to look like a VCR recording from 1983 with distorted sound and flickering effects. As well, in August 2007 to generate audience anticipation *Resident Evil: Extinction* (Russell Mulcahy, 2007) the third in the popular franchise, launched an online game called *Resident Evil Extinction: Online Convoy Game*. The game allowed spectators to play as drivers of a convoy who must accomplish different missions in the desert. Users had the opportunity to play online together, as well as see different scenes from the film.

Paranormal Activity (Oren Peli, 2007), a supernatural horror film marketed on its found footage conspiracy element much like *The Blair Witch Project*, also employed viral marketing tactics. *Paranormal Activity* initially had a limited release across the United States. Director, Oren Peli, asked spectators to “demand” where the film would be released next after viewing the trailer online. Spectators voted on eventful.com to bring the film to their city, which ultimately led Paramount to undertake a wider release of the film. *Paranormal Activity* put film distribution into the hands of consumers, making the

¹⁴ For further reading on *The Blair Witch Project*, see Sarah Lynn Higley and Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock, *Nothing that is: millennial cinema and the Blair Witch controversies* (Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 2004).

release of *Paranormal Activity* into something of a grass-roots or bottom-up process. As well, the success of the campaign can be attributed to its trailer. This is because the trailer sold the *Paranormal Activity* as a film that must be seen in the traditional theater experience. The trailer juxtaposed scenes from the film with reaction shots of frightened audience members viewing *Paranormal Activity*, thus selling the horror film experience to spectators as something that is best experienced in theaters. As well, by having consumers “demand” the film in their city, they were more likely to go see it in theaters.

However, viral marketing does not always guarantee success and more often has unpredictable outcomes. A viral campaign is only successful if in fact the online content goes viral. As many films are making use of viral marketing, many more are failing at reaching consumers with their viral content. A number of factors influence the success of a viral marketing campaign, such as genre or innovative online content. The substantial amount of hype surrounding viral marketing has lead many film producers to make use of social media marketing even when it may not be appropriate for a particular film or attractive content for consumers.

For instance, in June 2009 the audience at Los Angeles’s Alexander Hamilton High School was surprised when valedictorian, Kenya Mejia, ended her speech with a proclamation of love for fellow classmate, Jake Minor.¹⁵ What seemed like a rare and dramatic moment of bravery was in fact a ploy set-up by Twentieth Century Fox marketing executives for *I Love You, Beth Cooper* (Chris Columbus, 2009). *I Love You, Beth Cooper* is a teen comedy that follows a geeky student as he proclaims his love for

¹⁵ Ethan Smith and Sabrina Shankman, “Fellow Graduates, Before We Greet The Future, a Word From My Sponsor: Marketers Get School’s Valedictorian to Plug Movie in Her Speech, but Flick Still Flops,” *The Wall Street Journal*, July 28, 2009, accessed January 16, 2012, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB124873785621885167.html>, para. 2.

the most popular girl in school during his valedictorian speech. Mejia, who was paid \$1800 for the stunt recreated the scene from *I Love You, Beth Cooper* at her graduation. Fox also hired a company to film the speech in a format that mimicked a home video and put it on YouTube, an attempt to heighten the realism of the video.¹⁶

While this is a creative stunt, Mejia was not really proclaiming her love for Minor. She, in fact, already had a boyfriend at the time, and Minor had a girlfriend.¹⁷ Rather than generating positive buzz around the film, the stunt garnered a great deal of criticism by media outlets. Alongside criticism from the media, school officials from Hamilton High and the Los Angeles Unified School District were shocked that a film studio would place a paid advertisement during such a milestone event.¹⁸ The stunt was pulled off with the hope that it would create online hype for *I Love You, Beth Cooper*. However, the online video never went viral. The video of Mejia's speech only garnered 2000 hits two weeks into *I Love You, Beth Cooper*'s theater release and since then has mostly generated views for its criticism.¹⁹ Not only did the viral campaign fail, but *I Love You, Beth Cooper* was also a box office failure generating only \$13.4 million in its first three weeks and costing \$19 million to produce.²⁰ *I Love You, Beth Cooper*'s attempt at online buzz marketing only garnered negative criticism because the viral event ultimately offended audiences that advertisers would infiltrate a graduation for advertising purposes. The failure of *I Love You, Beth Cooper* highlights the unpredictability of viral marketing, as seen with its variability to attract audiences.

¹⁶ Sean O'Neal, "Daily Buzzkills: I love you, failed viral marketing campaign for *Beth Cooper*!" *A.V. Club*, July 29, 2009, accessed January 16, 2012, <http://www.avclub.com/articles/daily-buzzkills-i-love-you-failed-viral-marketing,31043/>, para. 4.

¹⁷ O'Neal, para. 6.

¹⁸ Smith and Shankman, para. 14.

¹⁹ O'Neal, para. 6.

²⁰ Smith and Shankman, para. 12.

The examples of viral film campaigns are endless. The brief introduction above provides a quick survey of the ways film producers are using viral marketing to their advantage and disadvantage. Detailed analyses of the campaigns for *The Dark Knight* and *Cloverfield* will be undertaken in the following chapters. In the meantime, we can ask how a consideration of the history of film marketing might clarify important aspects of today's viral marketing phenomenon. The remainder of this chapter will lay the groundwork for chapters two and three by exposing the ways in which traditional marketing practices inform contemporary viral marketing campaigns. The discussion will draw attention to techniques that have remained a critical part of film publicity campaigns throughout the history of cinema, specifically highlighting significant film marketing moments. Traditional marketing techniques are still operative today, although they take new forms.

Early film marketing worked to persuade viewers away from competing forms of entertainment, such as vaudeville and other forms of popular theatre, and to situate film as the dominant form of entertainment in society. From the first Lumière screening in December 1895, films were marketed and promoted to audiences as a spectacle not to miss. Initially, film promotional materials relied heavily on print through signs and newspapers. As well, as early as 1904 the film industry began to advertise onscreen with the use of magic lanterns. Also around this time, exhibition venues began advertising the titles of specific films rather than simply announcing the technology. As an early form of trailers, film distributors would include title cards and slides that promoted soon-to-be released films at the end of film screenings.²¹

²¹ Douglas Gomery, *Shared Pleasures: A History of Movie Presentation in the United States* (Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 4.

It was not until the early 1910s with the transition to the feature film that a significant shift in film marketing took place. The inauguration of the feature film in the early 1910s is a critical point in film history to start this analysis as the new multi-reel features “offered audiences something different, something special that distinguished [the film industry’s] product from the regular fare...a feature film came to mean a multiple-reel narrative with unusual content and high production costs that merited special billing and advertising.”²² As a consequence of embracing the feature film as its standard format, the film industry transformed itself from an entertainment based around attraction and spectacle to one centered on self-sufficient narratives. The induction of the feature film set in motion a series of changes that affected all areas of the film industry. This transition created a new structure for production, distribution and exhibition at a time when the film industry was shaping the future direction of the cinema.²³ The term ‘feature’ refers to a film’s potential marketing capability, due to its length, ability to attract audiences and high production costs.²⁴ More importantly, the creation of the feature posed marketing problems, as they required individualized promotional efforts to regain higher production budgets.²⁵ As a result this altered marketing and distribution within the film industry, where the industry looked to innovative promotional techniques to attract audiences.

From 1912 to 1914 almost three hundred feature films were distributed in the United States.²⁶ The wariness towards the feature film ended in 1914 with the release of

²² Tino Balio, “Part II: Struggles for Control, 1908-1930,” in *The American Film Industry*, ed. Tino Balio (Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 110.

²³ Michael Quinn, “Distribution, the Transient Audience, and the Transition to the Feature Film,” *Cinema Journal* 40 (2001): 36.

²⁴ Quinn, 37.

²⁵ Balio, 111.

²⁶ Ibid.

Birth of a Nation (D.W. Griffith), whose large box-office intake debunked any doubts surrounding the economic success of feature films. The film's high production costs, costing five times Griffith's ambitious three-reeler *Judith of Bethulia* (1913), and its epic nature and length, all made *Birth of a Nation* the film that changed film production and marketing.²⁷ The impact of *Birth of a Nation* must be attributed not only to the film's high cost and epic content and length, but to the ways it was consumed. *Birth of a Nation* played in New York for an exclusive run of forty-four weeks at the Liberty Theatre, which was not a movie theatre per se but a legitimate stage house.²⁸ Due to "the exhibition format, consisting of reserved seats, scheduled performances, orchestral accompaniment, souvenir programs, costuming of ushers, intermissions, and the like, [*Birth of a Nation*] consolidated all the deluxe presentation practices of the day."²⁹ Moreover, Griffith screened *Birth of a Nation* through a series of expensive "road show" engagements, traveling around the country with his own orchestra and effects staff. Not only did the road shows generate greater audience appeal, but by stepping outside the established film-distribution system the road shows established the idea of special, "not to be missed" theatrical engagements, usually taking place at prestigious opera houses with higher ticket prices. The significance of the success of *Birth of a Nation* also marks the importance of marketing in the growing film industry. Audiences were presented with a new motion picture experience centered on an epic narrative about the American Civil War. *Birth of a Nation* thus ushered in the 'event' film, one that aimed to persuade audiences that missing the film would prevent them from participating in public

²⁷ Kerrigan, 33.

²⁸ Balio, 113.

²⁹ Ibid.

discussion.³⁰ This is not unlike what viral marketing does today; by creating anticipation for a film a successful viral marketing campaign can turn a film into a cultural event. As the first successful feature length film, *Birth of a Nation* marked the marketing and economic potential for feature films, and also the ability for audiences to adapt to new film forms in a changing industry.

As seen with *Birth of a Nation*, the feature film's success was a consequence of its difference from the standard format of the one-reel film. Essential to any film's marketing mix is its narrative. Invocations of genre are common in film marketing campaigns because marketers rely on genre identification to attract their target audience. Genre refers to a category or a means of classification of a group of films that share similar narrative patterns, settings, character types, iconography, stylistic traits or expectations. Genre labels are used widely by filmmakers, critics and audiences to understand the film experience. Film genres come with set social and cultural expectations where audiences know what they will gain from watching a genre film. Genre films were a staple within the industry by the 1910s, when many of the trademark genres such as the western, slapstick comedy, family melodrama, and the romantic adventure story became popular and successful in ways that proved foundational for subsequent cinema history.

More importantly, as part of the film marketing mix since the 1920s, genre has become legitimated through promotional discourses.³¹ Genre has become a critical element for audiences. As Jonathan Gray explains,

³⁰ Kerrigan, 34.

³¹ Lisa Kernan, *Coming Attractions: Reading American Movie Trailers* (United States: University of Texas Press, 2004), 14.

Genre can be established before viewing, outside the realm of the [film] text, and yet since genre is not just a classificatory tool, but also a set of rules for interpreting a text, when trailers or other forms of promotion propose a genre, it may prove hard for an individual viewer to easily shrug off these rules.³²

Genre and promotional film discourses work together to appeal to audiences' desires for a specific type of narrative and are significant elements for a successful film-marketing campaign. Genres imply a ready-made audience, which reduces the possibility of financial failure. An identifiable genre ensures quick recognition by film consumers, which simplifies the task of advertising.

Along with genre, celebrities can contribute significantly to a film's profitability. The use of stars as a means of product differentiation can guarantee a consumer market for a film.³³ As a recognizable point of reference for audiences, stars enhance the attractiveness of a film. As with genre, an association with a star can give a film a ready-made audience.³⁴ For instance, in 1909 the Edison Company advertised their contracting with Broadway talent for motion picture roles, and entertainment-industry trade papers began featuring articles about famous stars, such as Mary Pickford, Pearl White and Florence Turner.³⁵ By 1910 film companies began to incorporate their popular actors into publicity campaigns through theater lobby photographs and public appearances.³⁶ This focus on stars led to the first fan magazine in 1911, *The Motion Picture Story Magazine*, which was soon followed by *Photoplay* and *Motion Picture Stories*.³⁷ Initially, *Motion Picture Stories* asked its readers to tell the magazine about their favourite film narratives;

³² Gray, 50.

³³ Cathy Klaprat, "The Star as Market Strategy: Bette Davis in Another Light," in *The American Film Industry*, ed. Tino Balio (Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 353.

³⁴ Balio, 114.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Kristen Thompson and David Bordwell, *Film History: An Introduction* (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2003), 42.

³⁷ Suzanne Mary Donahue, *American Film Distribution: The Changing Marketplace* (Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1987), 76.

however its readers replied asking to know more about their favourite actors.³⁸ The realization that audiences were concerned less with favourite narratives than with actors provided producers with further proof that stars were a successful avenue for product differentiation. Fan magazines provided a venue for film producers to advertise, but also for audiences to engage with the spectacle of film and their much-loved stars.³⁹ The induction of the star system meant insuring profit and business, where “in distribution, the star’s name and image dominated the marketing strategy and provided the basis of bargaining rental prices.”⁴⁰ As well, by the 1920s, stars became linked to film genres with the intent of maximizing profits. For example, Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton found great success within comedy and became iconic within the genre and industry. Actors become generic signifiers and thus, furthered the expectations matched by genres.⁴¹

Early film companies sought to attract audiences not only with stars and genre, but also with imaginative promotional tactics. As the star system ushered in early fan magazines, the transition to feature films also led to the dominance and use of image slides and film posters to promote upcoming films.⁴² Film posters entice spectators by creating an image of the mood, tempo and essence of what a film will present to audiences, and provide an essential site to attract potential audiences to theaters.⁴³ The transition to the feature film in the early 1910s also witnessed the creation of the film trailer. As early as 1912 exhibitors, filmmakers and producers began to incorporate movement in projected slide advertisements to sell the action, spectacle and stars of

³⁸ Klaprat, 353.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Balio, 115.

⁴¹ Gray, 51.

⁴² Gray, 51.

⁴³ Kerrigan, 133.

upcoming films. In 1919 the National Screen Service (NSS) sold exhibitors ads they created from transferred film stills to show at the end of feature films.⁴⁴ Trailers gained dominance throughout the 1920s with improving technology, where trailers changed from short presentations to longer montage sequences with graphic titles.⁴⁵ Trailers provide potential audiences with a taste of the film, presenting a concise plot summary coupled with a series of clips from the film shown in a montage sequence. Then as now, trailers must provide audiences with a “want to see,” but must do so by withholding the full experience of a film.

From her analysis of the film trailer in her book, *Coming Attractions: Reading American Movie Trailers*, Lisa Kernan posits that the film trailer is a critical promotional tool that works to attract and target audiences. Kernan demonstrates that from studying the trailer one can also learn about the developments and evolution of film marketing discourses in relation to film history. For instance, in the Classical era trailers were dominantly used to promote upcoming films, where this changed with the introduction of television to more persuasive trailers to sway audiences away from the new entertainment medium.⁴⁶ This is not unlike how current film producers use viral marketing as an online tool to lure audiences to theaters. As the Internet allows for innovative marketing to take place, it is also necessary to recognize that the Internet is a platform for piracy. Piracy refers to the copyright infringement of audio-visual works, where unauthorized copies of films are reproduced and circulated through digital downloading or physical pirated copies. A 2011 study conducted by Ipsos and Oxford Economics for the Canadian

⁴⁴ Kernan, 25.

⁴⁵ Keith M. Johnston, *Coming Soon: Film Trailers and the Selling of Hollywood and Technology* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2009), 18.

⁴⁶ Kerrigan, 142.

Motion Picture Distributors Association (CMPDA), investigates the level of harm film piracy has on the Canadian economy in 2010. According to the CMPDA 2011 report, as a result of film piracy direct consumer spending losses were \$895 million.⁴⁷ Piracy persists on an international level and continues to harm the industry. Rather than only letting the Internet be a site for piracy, the film industry uses it as an opportunity for creative and innovative marketing to take place and guide audiences to the traditional experience of cinema in theaters.

Like the introduction of sound and color did in earlier decades, today the Internet serves to make the cinematic experience new once again and position cinema as the dominate form of entertainment. Throughout its history, cinema has competed with other forms of technology such as the telephone, radio, and television to situate itself as the leading entertainment. Along with the use of such novelties as stars and genre to attract audiences to theaters, film marketing also latches onto technological developments that encourage new avenues for profit. A business's ultimate goal is to make the highest possible earnings and technological innovations are but one avenue for businesses to do so.⁴⁸ Technological advancements allow a business to renew its product for consumers, creating novel and fresh experiences. Technology acts as a mode of experimentation for marketers to see what will and will not work with audiences as technology are often positioned as gimmicks to attract audiences to the theaters. The marketability of technology and success at the box office of new advancements can illuminate the success or failure of technological developments. Not only did the coming of sound, colour, widescreen and three-dimensional technology encourage new ways for the cinema to be

⁴⁷ Canadian Motion Picture Distributors Association (CMPDA), *Economic Consequences of Movie Piracy: Canada*, presented by the CMPDA, Ipsos and Oxford Economics, February 2011, 3.

⁴⁸ Balio, 128.

marketed, technology such as the radio, television, videocassettes and DVDs provided new markets for film to conquer.

The film industry uses new technology as a means to lure audiences away from rival media. Since its inauguration as a popular entertainment the cinema began to compete against other forms of technology, often by making strategic use of them. The new cinematic technologies of the 1950s were means to create the cinema as a “site of difference,” which emphasized, “experiential qualities of size, depth, smell, hearing or touch.”⁴⁹ For example, the film industry introduced Technicolor in the 1930s and 1940s, which differentiated film from the emergent entertainment of television.⁵⁰ As television ushered in a new form of entertainment that could be enjoyed from the comfort of one’s home, the new colour systems allowed cinema to separate itself from the competition and have success for some time. American television moved to full colour in the 1960s, where Hollywood followed in a manner that involved self-transformation once again.⁵¹ For instance, Hollywood made use of new widescreen technology, with the hope that widescreen images would lure audiences back to theaters. In the 1950s Cinerama offered wide-screen effects to create an overwhelming spectacle for audiences, and not too soon after 3-D technology was introduced with the expectation that it might mirror the similar success of the Cinerama.⁵² 3-D technology was named the “savior of the American film industry,” but quickly became a fad that dissolved into the film industry as another marketing gimmick.⁵³ 3-D technology has come in and out of fashion in cinema, it appeared again in the 1970s and 80s, but could not make enough profit. 3-D technology

⁴⁹ Johnston, 28.

⁵⁰ Gomery, 234.

⁵¹ Gomery, 237.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Gomery, 240.

has reemerged once again in the digital age of filmmaking, as it works to showcase the latest digital effects to audiences. What seem initially to be novelties and marketing gimmicks can ultimately become new filmmaking norms, renewing the spectacle of cinema for audiences in a competitive media environment.⁵⁴

Competing forms of technology also provide a means to market films. Not only did television provide a new platform for movie watching, but also a new means for film advertising. Similar to the ways the film industry made use of radio advertising, television presented a similar avenue. The traditional and simple formula of promoting a film through newspapers, radio, magazines and trailers transformed in 1975.⁵⁵ Audiences became increasingly fragmented in the 1960s and into the 1970s, where new marketing techniques needed to target this challenge.⁵⁶ In the 1970s the Hollywood film industry grew larger and become a profit-driven industry. The conglomeration of the film industry in the 1970s transformed films into commodities for major conglomerates. As theorized by Thomas Schatz, the techniques of film marketing have flourished in “the New Hollywood.” Film style became increasingly concerned with advertising aesthetics throughout the 1970s and 1980s, redefining how films were created and marketed to audiences.⁵⁷

The emergence of “the New Hollywood” was marked by *Jaws* (Steven Spielberg, 1975), which provided a template for “the modern blockbuster: a high-cost, high-speed, high-concept entertainment machine propelled by a nationwide saturation release

⁵⁴ While colour and widescreen have had lasting success within cinema, the results regarding 3-D are still uncertain. Hyped greatly in recent years, the staying power of 3-D is still unknown. See Kristin Thompson, “Has 3-D already failed?” *Observations on film art*, August 28, 2009, accessed July 29, 2012, <http://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/2009/08/28/has-3-d-already-failed/>.

⁵⁵ Gomery, 295.

⁵⁶ Drake, 67.

⁵⁷ Deron Overpeck, “Subversion, Desperation and Captivity: Pre-film Advertising in American Film Exhibition Since 1977,” *Film History: An International Journal* 22 (2010): 220.

campaign.”⁵⁸ *Jaws* ushered in an industry focused on releasing the modern blockbuster. Universal Pictures radically changed the ways films were marketed and would be marketed in the future as *Jaws* introduced the use of saturation advertising on television.⁵⁹ This use of television advertising, a standard in contemporary film marketing, was deemed a risky marketing tactic in 1975, but proved to be highly profitable as *Jaws* earned more than \$200 million dollars at the box office.⁶⁰ This led to the extended release of films across a greater number of theaters, which rose from 500 to 2000 screens in the mid-1970s.⁶¹ Television advertising also involved the creation of entertainment television programs that discuss upcoming films, film stars, and the happenings of the film industry; examples include Paramount’s *Entertainment Tonight* (1981 – present).

Moving onwards to the late 1970s where the invention of the VCR and eventually the technological improvement of the DVD, made the home into a viable marketplace for film. The introduction of the DVD format has established a new product development stage, where producers can revitalize an audience’s interest in a film with DVD special features, extended editions and director’s cuts. The DVD launch of a film requires a marketing campaign itself, involving print advertisements, radio and television spots and billboards.⁶² Growing increasingly competitive, the DVD market mirrors the theatrical market with three to four titles being released on the same day.⁶³ New

⁵⁸ Tom Schatz, “The Studio System and Conglomerate Hollywood,” in *The Contemporary Hollywood Film Industry*, ed. Paul McDonald and Janet Wasko (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2010), 19.

⁵⁹ Gomery, 295.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Drake, 67.

⁶² Thomas K. Arnold, “Stakes are Higher in DVD Marketing,” *Video Store Magazine*, February 29, 2004, 1.

⁶³ Ibid.

technologies have allowed the film industry to gain even more economic power and hold its place as the dominant form of entertainment in popular culture.⁶⁴ Again, film is still marketed in these ways, through traditional marketing tactics and the latest technology, such as with Blu-Ray Discs, promising an improved filmic experience. Film marketing always begins with the initial theater release, where technology such as television and DVDs merely provide a further avenue for marketers to explore and take advantage of, giving films a second life and rejuvenation through other forms of technology.

Once again, cinema is colliding with technology to reinvent the film experience. The film experience no longer takes place in only the traditional theater experience or home theater, but before, during and after on the Internet. A film has an extended life by way of viral marketing. The success of viral marketing at the end of the 1990s shifted the film industry towards making online marketing a vital component of film publicity campaigns. The Internet provides the industry with content control, new avenues for creativity, and further consumer engagement. The quality of a film is not the driving element to a successful film, as the motion picture business relies heavily on a variety of promotional discourses to attract audiences. Through this overview of film marketing history it is evident the ways in which marketing has relied on technology to renew itself, as well as the ways marketing relies on larger filmic discourses, such as genre and star power. Traditional marketing means, such as posters and trailers have been a staple since the inauguration of the feature film, and are a critical part of any contemporary marketing campaign. Moreover, fans have remained an integral part to film marketing since the advent of the feature film, as their early interest in stars and fan magazines drove consumer interest in film. All of these ways cinema has been marketed in the past are

⁶⁴ Gomery, 298.

synthesized in viral marketing campaigns. Rather than presenting spectators with wholly new modes of engagement, viral marketing campaigns are built on updated versions of these marketing strategies that have been made familiar throughout film history.

For instance, *Toy Story 3* relied on nostalgia for the past, a videocassette format, to appeal to audiences, and *Paranormal Activity* relied on the traditional experience of horror to entice audiences to “demand” the film in their city. Viral marketing pulls from traditional modes of engagement, and even older media forms to engage audiences. In the following chapters, it will become apparent the ways in which film marketing relies on the novelty appeal of stars, genre and technology to lure audiences to theaters and successfully promote feature films. It is necessary to closely analyze how viral marketing works, and what these intricate campaigns provide for spectators and the contemporary Hollywood film industry. The following chapter, a case study of *The Dark Knight*, will provide insight as to how viral marketing campaigns are pulling from novelties of the past to engage audiences.

CHAPTER TWO

REBUILDING A FRANCHISE BUILT ON THE PAST: MARKETING *THE DARK KNIGHT*

The adventures of Batman have been retold countless times via filmmaking, television, video games and graphic novels. Adapted across different media platforms over a span of 70 years, Batman has become a worldwide cultural icon. As a popular cultural figure, Batman has been linked to many different authors, and the meanings associated with him have changed over time. Whether the patriotic crime fighter of the 1940s or the pop and campy Batman of the 1960s, each interpretation of the character suggests that Batman's significance will continue to evolve over time.¹ At the same time, the character, in certain respects, has not changed, and this has allowed him to remain a staple within popular culture through multiple decades.² The protagonist of a classic story, Batman has a way of enduring over time, comparable to cultural icons like James Bond or Sherlock Holmes. Batman's narrative has remained within popular consciousness, continuously debated by fans and critics, but never wavering in popularity and success.

In a competitive film industry saturated with studio franchises, Warner Brothers approached director Christopher Nolan in 2003 to reboot the Caped Crusader franchise to a new generation of fans. Reeling from the end of *The Matrix* (1999-2003), Warner Brothers sought to stay competitive against 20th Century Fox's *X-Men* (2000-2006), and

¹ Will Brooker, *Batman Unmasked: Analysing a Cultural Icon* (London; New York: Continuum, 2000), 9.

² Brooker, 40.

Sony's *Spiderman* (2002- 2007) franchises.³ Once thought of as a lost cause with fans, the Batman brand has found its greatest critical and commercial success in its latest film interpretation led by Nolan. Nolan's franchise reboot began with *Batman Begins* in 2005, followed by its sequel *The Dark Knight* in 2008, and concluded in the highly anticipated final chapter *The Dark Knight Rises* in 2012. Nolan's films return to the 'dark' Batman made popular by earlier Batman interpretations. Nolan, a creative and inventive Hollywood filmmaker, offers audiences a personal vision of Batman, one that stands in stark contrast to earlier visions in important respects.

Innovative marketing has allowed the Batman brand to be resold to audiences with great success. Essential to Nolan's relaunching of the Batman brand to a new generation was viral marketing. Using *The Dark Knight* as an exemplar of viral marketing, and drawing upon the historical discussion in Chapter One, this chapter will examine how *The Dark Knight*'s viral campaign relates to longstanding historical marketing techniques to illustrate the relationship between traditional and contemporary marketing discourses. While extremely innovative, the provocative viral campaign for *The Dark Knight* rested upon traditional marketing structures. Through this discussion historical parallels will emerge between traditional and contemporary marketing discourses. It is first necessary to look at the history of the various Batman interpretations since this history had an evident impact on Nolan's Batman reboot and its strategic marketing campaign. Due to the vastness of the Batman universe and topic, this historical overview will restrict itself only to the cinematic visual interpretations.

³ Marc Graser and Cathy Dunkley, "The bat and the beautiful: WB revives 'Batman' while rivals rummage through the attic to dust off franchises," *Variety*, February 8, 2004, accessed June 7, 2012, <http://www.variety.com/article/VR1117899714?refCatId=13>, para. 12.

A critical aspect to marketing Nolan's Batman was convincing audiences that Nolan's franchise marked a departure from the previous tumultuous history of Batman interpretations, specifically the Batman films of the 1980s and 1990s. These films sought to avoid the view of the campy 1960s *Batman* television series in order to instead return to the glory exhibited in the classic Batman texts of the 1940s and 1950s. However, these films rather ended up returning to the campy 1960s Batman, and left the Batman brand in disarray at the end of the 1990s. In 1989 Warner Brothers' first brought the popular story to theaters with its feature film *Batman* (Tim Burton). *Batman* was commercially successful, grossing \$43.6 million at the box office, setting a new record in 1989 for the biggest Hollywood weekend ever.⁴ The success of the film can also be attributed to the turn the Batman character took. The choice of Burton as a director was a strategic choice made by Warner Bros.' Burton's previous films *Beetlejuice* (1988) and *PeeWee's Big Adventure* (1985), both successful, had dark and quirky narratives, and a unique visual aesthetic.⁵ Warner Bros. choice of Burton rested on the notion that he would take the Batman brand in a particular direction, one that was not campy, but dark and realistic. Burton's *Batman*, like all of his films, showcases a gothic, dark and quirky style, and returned the Batman brand to its initial glory.

Burton followed *Batman* with the much darker sequel *Batman Returns* in 1992, which received great financial and critical success, pulling in \$45.6 million in its opening weekend, setting the highest record in 1992.⁶ However, the film was highly criticized for its dark themes, unsuitable violence, and sexual explicitness. This reasoning led Warner

⁴ "Batman Sets Record And So Does Hollywood," *New York Times*, June 27, 1989, accessed June 7, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/1989/06/27/movies/batman-sets-record-and-so-does-hollywood.html>, para. 1.

⁵ Brooker, 292.

⁶ "Batman Returns: Summary," Box Office Mojo, accessed June 7, 2012, <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=batmanreturns.htm>.

Brothers to go in a new direction with the following two sequels, one leading to a mainstream and family-friendly Batman. *Batman Returns* was the last Batman film directed by Burton, the sequel *Batman Forever* (1995) directed by Joel Schumacher, led the franchise in a new creative direction. *Batman Forever* and its sequel *Batman and Robin* (Joel Schumacher, 1997) stand in stark contrast to its predecessors in content and style. In contrast to Burton's Batman films, Schumacher's are lighter in tone. In fact, the widely panned *Batman and Robin*, with its exaggerated costuming, its outlandish sets and poor acting, was criticized for returning to the campy style of the 1960s Batman.⁷ Burton's tormented, dark and depressive Batman had been replaced by Schumacher's more comic and less coherent Batman.

The sequels to Burton's Batman did not achieve the success of the first film, and they left the Batman franchise in disarray. Whereas Burton's Batman films, however dark and gloomy, offered audiences consistency and a story of transformation, Schumacher's Batman films were inconsistent, offering audiences too much in set design and action and too little in the way of a strong narrative. As reviews of Schumacher's Batman films reveal, many critics had begun to long for the gloomy and dark Batman Burton created, feeling that the new direction that Schumacher had taken was unfaithful to the comics.⁸ *Batman and Robin*, the most critically panned of the Batman films and termed the 'worst' of the series, ultimately left the Batman brand tarnished as hokey, campy, and light. The immense failure of *Batman and Robin* left the Batman franchise in question. Warner

⁷ Brooker, 295.

⁸ Brooker, 300.

Bros. then decided to abandon the original 1999 release for a fifth Batman film, where plot, director and cast were left open and put on hold indefinitely.⁹

Ten years and four Batman films later, the future of the Batman film franchise remained in question, and “the conflict between fandom and Time-Warner’s subsidiaries for ‘ownership’ of the character – [h]ung very much in the balance.”¹⁰ Though the Batman brand was tarnished as a consequence of the poorly conceived sequels, the character still retained great potential as a cultural phenomenon. The 1990s Batman film series broadened the Batman fandom and audience to a global one. With widely distributed sequels and merchandise, the Batman brand had become multi-national. This broad popularity helps explain why Warner Brothers never fully abandoned the idea to produce another Batman franchise.

In his execution of a new Batman franchise with *Batman Begins*, Nolan aimed for a dark and realistic tone in a story about the genesis of the Batman character. Nolan sought to replace the campy Batman of the past with a younger, vulnerable and realistic character that audiences could care for. As WB Pictures President of Production Jess Robinov explained, “there’s an emotional component to the film which grounds it and really tells us about Bruce Wayne’s struggle.”¹¹ From the on-location shooting to the elegant narrative and stark cinematography, *Batman Begins* proves that a superhero film can be fantastical as well as have an emotional dimension. It was difficult to reintroduce Batman, especially after a decade that saw the brand become a campy version of itself; however, Nolan proved that Batman could become the dark knight audiences always wanted. *Batman Begins* grossed over \$205 million domestically, and racked in \$48

⁹ Brooker, 307.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Graser and Dunkley, para. 13.

million in its opening weekend.¹² The success of the reboot led to the revitalization of the Batman name, giving the superhero credibility, success and respect.

The difficulty with rebooting Batman lay in convincing the public that Nolan's Batman was contemporary and innovative. The marketing campaigns for the Batman reboots had to win over an already existing audience, and new audiences, too.¹³ To do so, Warner Brothers employed elaborate and meticulous planned marketing campaigns for Nolan's Batman films, which were intricate and large-scale. Beginning with *Batman Begins*, Warner's marketing campaign included eight film posters, over twelve trailers and television spots, cross promotions with novelizations and video games, and a sophisticated website with videos, photo gallery, a 'comics' section concerning Batman's origins, and e-mail updates.¹⁴ Also included in this elaborate marketing campaign were Nolan, along with actors and co-writer David Goyer, who participated in a full press campaign to further promote the film. The *Batman Begins* campaign emphasized the new direction Nolan was taking, a film overwhelmed with somber, dark and realistic tones. The marketing campaign separated *Batman Begins* from earlier interpretations, eventually leading to its widespread success, and to its highly anticipated sequel.

In July 2006 Warner Brothers confirmed the sequel to *Batman Begins*, entitled *The Dark Knight*. This announcement was met with great anticipation and excitement, with Warner Brothers releasing casting choices, citing that Christian Bale would return to play Batman and newcomer to the franchise, Heath Ledger would play the Joker. After

¹² "Batman Begins: Summary," Box Office Mojo, accessed June 7, 2012, <http://boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=batmanbegins.htm>.

¹³ Suzette Major, "Cultivating a classic: marketing strategies for the *Lord of the Rings* films," in *Studying the Event Film: The Lord of the Rings*, ed. Harriet Margolis et al. (New York: Manchester University Press, 2008), 47.

¹⁴ Chris Thilk, "Movie Marketing Madness: Batman Begins," *Film Threat*, June 15, 2005, accessed June 7, 2012, <http://www.filmthreat.com/features/1479/>.

Nolan proved that his Batman could escape the failure of past interpretations, audiences and critics readily awaited the much-anticipated sequel. *The Dark Knight* follows Batman in his continuing war on crime as he fights Gotham's newest villain, the Joker. With help from Gotham's new District Attorney, Harvey Dent, his childhood friend, Rachel Dawes and the police, Batman must choose between being Gotham's hero or its masked vigilante. Not only was there a large amount of excitement for *The Dark Knight*, but the marketing campaign offered audiences a new level of entertainment. It is clear that the Batman brand has an evident history within the film industry, one that has influenced Nolan's reinterpretation of his Batman and the need for calculated marketing campaigns. This history, along with the history of marketing, has influenced *The Dark Knight's* contemporary viral marketing campaign. The Batman brand has a tumultuous past and tactical marketing has served to fix the Batman brand and make it into the success it is today.

Beginning over a year before its July 2008 release, *The Dark Knight* studio-led marketing campaign officially began in May 2007. *The Dark Knight* viral campaign was led by 42 Entertainment, an American independent producer specializing in original content production and innovative marketing campaigns. Subcontracted by Warner Brothers, 42 Entertainment also created viral campaigns for films such as Warner Brothers' *Artificial Intelligence* (Steven Spielberg, 2001) and Disney's *Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest* (Gore Verbinski, 2006). 42 Entertainment created an alternate reality game (ARG) using *The Dark Knight's* tagline, *Why So Serious?* as inspiration. The *Why So Serious?* ARG allowed audiences to explore and participate with *The Dark Knight* world, specifically the timeframe between *Batman Begins* and *The Dark*

Knight. The *Why So Serious?* ARG provided audiences with an immersive story world where its participants became characters in *The Dark Knight* story world and could become Harvey Dent, Joker, or Batman supporters. The *Why So Serious?* ARG was part marketing, scavenger-hunt and role-playing game that created a community of fans that worked together to decipher clues about the film.¹⁵ More specifically, “playing out the events of Gotham City in real time, the ARG provided the opportunity to explore the strong characters, themes and backdrop of the world.”¹⁶

It is important to note the elaborateness of this viral campaign. As mentioned above, *The Dark Knight* campaign began over a year before its release, in the film’s pre-production stages. The ARG spanned over 40 websites and had 10 million participants in over 75 countries.¹⁷ The analysis of the campaign presented in the paragraphs below will draw attention to the most significant and outstanding components. More than a typical viral campaign, *The Dark Knight* campaign offered a transmedia storytelling experience, expanding the film universe and allowing audiences to bridge the story between *Batman Begins* and *The Dark Knight* online. The campaign was more than just film advertising, as Los Angeles Times writer Chris Lee describes,

By employing a variety of untraditional awareness-building maneuvers and starting the film’s promo push strategically, more than year before the film’s release, marketers at the firm 42 Entertainment...seem to have struck a chord with “The Dark Knight’s” core constituency: fan boys and comic-book geeks. The promotional efforts – part viral marketing initiative, part “advertisement” – fit into an absorbing, nascent genre-bending pastime called alternative reality gaming...¹⁸

¹⁵ Chris Lee, “Bat infiltration: Raising their Internet game, ‘Dark Knight’ promoters use genre-bending, viral ways to pull in viewers,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 24, 2008, accessed June 7, 2012, <http://articles.latimes.com/2008/mar/24/entertainment/et-batmanviral24>, para. 7.

¹⁶ “Why So Serious?” 42 Entertainment, accessed June 7, 2012, http://www.alternaterealitybranding.com/tdk_sxsw/.

¹⁷ “Campaign Overview,” 42 Entertainment video, 4:26, accessed June 7, 2012, http://www.alternaterealitybranding.com/tdk_sxsw/TDKVIRAL42.wmv.

¹⁸ Lee, para. 4.

There are a multitude of layers to *The Dark Knight* ARG, as the complexity and sophistication of the campaign will come through further in the following campaign outline as *The Dark Knight* radically altered the viral marketing experience, by turning it into a cultural event.

This outline will start in May 2007 when the official Warner Brothers website for *The Dark Knight* went online, however as mentioned above buzz began around *The Dark Knight* with its announcement in 2006. With the official website launch also came the start to *The Dark Knight* viral marketing campaign. The first piece of the viral campaign concerned *Dark Knight* character Harvey Dent. The official *Dark Knight* website linked to a Harvey Dent campaign website: ibelieveinharverydent.com. The website featured a poster for Harvey Dent's political campaign, displaying Harvey Dent in front of an American flag with the caption, "HARVEY DENT FOR DISTRICT ATTORNEY: I BELIEVE IN HARVEY DENT, Paid for by Friends of Harvey Dent."¹⁹ Soon after the Harvey Dent campaign website was launched, the first game in the *Dark Knight* ARG began with another site launch, ibelieveinharveydenttoo.com. The webpage featured the Harvey Dent campaign poster from ibelieveinharveydent.com, however the poster was vandalized. Similar to the look of the Joker, Dent's face featured blacked out eyes and red lipstick where the bottom caption read, "I BELIEVE IN HARVEY TOO."²⁰ As well, below the defaced poster was an email sign-up, this email sign-up allowed visitors to reveal one pixel of a new image 'hidden' behind the defaced Dent poster.²¹ When enough emails were generated, the new image revealed Heath Ledger as the Joker, the first image

¹⁹ "ibelieveinharvey.com," Why So Serious Redux, accessed July 27, 2012, <http://www.whysoseriousredux.com/investigations/ibihdearly.htm>.

²⁰ "I believe in Harvey Dent too," Why So Serious Redux, accessed July 27, 2012, <http://www.whysoseriousredux.com/investigations/ibihd2.htm>

²¹ Ibid.

released of the *Dark Knight* character. Soon after the image was released, the page was removed and replaced by an error message, but when participants highlight the entire page hidden text could be seen. The hidden text read, “ha ha ha” repeatedly, where a number of different letters were implemented into the hidden text and when unscrambled revealed the message, “see YOu In DECeMbER.”²² A message that would hold true with the release of the first *Dark Knight* trailer in December, as well as a sneak peek of the prologue before IMAX screenings of *I am Legend* (Francis Lawrence, 2007).

These events in May 2007 were only the beginning to a complex viral marketing campaign. The viral campaign continued in July 2007 at the world’s largest comic book convention, San Diego’s Comic-Con, where the viral campaign turned into a transmedia event that combined online and offline marketing tactics to attract audiences. On July 26th, 2007, the first scavenger hunt part was launched. In this Joker-focused scavenger hunt, participants offline at comic-con had to interact with participants online to unlock the first teaser trailer. At San Diego’s Comic-Con on July 26th, 2007, over 10 000 dollar bills were altered with Joker face paint and the infamous tagline, “Why So Serious?”²³ Given to comic-con visitors, the dollar bills led participants to whysoserious.com, the central website of the *Dark Knight* viral campaign. The page featured an advertisement to recruit Joker henchmen, and provided hopeful henchmen with GPS coordinates to a location across from the Comic-Con convention center with a countdown clock for July 27th at 10:00 A.M. As well, the recruitment page encouraged participants to ask a friend at home with Internet access to help.

²² Ibid.

²³ “Comic-Con Event,” 42 *Entertainment* video, 2:16, accessed June 7, 2012, http://www.alternaterealitybranding.com/tdk_sxsw/Comicon08.wmv.

On July 27, 2007 several hundred people gathered across from the convention center at 10:00 A.M., the *whysoserious.com* webpage was updated with instructions to look up, information offline participants gathered from their friends online.²⁴ At 10:00 A.M. the game began when a phone number was written in the sky by five jets, and when participants called the number they were told the joker had taken a hostage and threatened to kill him if instructions were not followed.²⁵ Players on the ground had to don Joker makeup and work with their friends online on a scavenger hunt on the streets of San Diego (friends online had to decipher the clues of the next scavenger hunt location).²⁶ The purpose behind the scavenger hunt was to keep the Joker out of the hands of the police and Gotham's crime lords, and a test to see what participants were willing to become the Joker's new henchmen. At the end of the scavenger hunt, one fan was chosen to be kidnapped and "killed" by two mob leaders instead of the Joker, saving the Joker at the end of the game.²⁷ Participants' offline were given clown masks from *The Dark Knight* for their participation, and online participants were rewarded with the first *Dark Knight* teaser trailer.²⁸ An elaborate online and offline viral campaign move resulted in over 250 participants onsite, 650 000 online, 2 000 000 downloads of *The Dark Knight* teaser trailer and an enormous amount of press covering the online/offline Comic-Con event.²⁹

The campaign continued on October 17th, 2007 with the reactivation of the *Why So Serious?* site. The site featured a countdown to Halloween and a jack-o-lantern with a

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

bat-shaped mouth, where as October went on, the jack-o-lantern slowly rotted.³⁰ On November 1st, 2007, the pumpkin's candle virtually burnt out and the image of the pumpkin was replaced with a list of 49 locations across the United States.³¹ A new Joker recruitment game started, as participants were sent on a scavenger hunt to take photos of letters displayed on buildings throughout American cities. Once all of the letters were recovered they spelt out the message, "The only sensible way to live in this world is without rules."³²

After this message was viewed an image of the Joker appeared, starting another scavenger hunt, which asked participants to send in photos of themselves with clown-like face paint in front of public landmarks to rorysdeathkiss.com.³³ On November 19th, 2007, the photo submissions were closed and participants were alerted that they would receive something in the mail. Days later participants were sent copies of *The Gotham Times*.³⁴ Featured in the issue of *The Gotham Times* were articles covering Batman's place in Gotham's war on crime, and Harvey Dent's campaign for Gotham's district attorney and plans to curb Gotham's crime. As well, in the newspaper the Joker advertised an e-mail address, humanresources@whysoserious.com, where if emailed by participants led to more viral website reveals. Soon after, a vandalized copy of *The Gotham Times* is found online at thehahahatimes.com.³⁵ The discovery of *The Ha Ha Ha Times*, leads to the discovery of multiple other websites associated with the marketing campaign. Among the websites found were wearetheanswer.org, rememberinggina.org, gothampolice.com,

³⁰ "Gotham Police Department: GPD Report Overview," 42 Entertainment, accessed June 7, 2012, <http://www.whysoserious.com/reports/rory.htm>.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

gothamcityrail.com, and gothamnationalbank.com. The founding of these websites only led to more discoveries. For example, participants could submit their phone number to wearetheanswer.org, a site for citizens to report any suspicious police activity. At the end of the month if participants did this, they received a threatening phone call from a corrupt police office. Not only does this highlight the intricateness of the campaign, but if participants were willing to spend enough time deciphering clues they were rewarded with more viral websites, clues and parts to the game they could discover and interpret.

The elaborate campaign continued in December 2007 with an even-more sophisticated scavenger hunt than its campaign predecessors. On December 3rd, 2007, a new email from humanresources@whysoserious.com was received by participants, which lead to whysoserious.com/steprightup, a carnival-themed scavenger hunt. The webpage allowed participants to play an online carnival game, one in which they had to ring a bell and were awarded with a stuffed animal, pinned to the stuffed animals were the locations of 22 bakeries across the United States.³⁶ Participants were instructed to go to these bakeries using the alias, “Robin Banks,” where the first participant to get to the bakery would receive a cake. After every cake was distributed, the webpage was updated with a phone number, when participants with a cake phoned this number, their cakes started ringing.³⁷ Inside the cake participants found an evidence bag with a cell phone, a charger, a Joker card, and a note.³⁸ The note read,

³⁶ “Gotham Police Department: GPD Report Overview,” 42 Entertainment, accessed June 7, 2012, <http://www.whysoserious.com/reports/cake.htm>.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Alex Billington, “The Dark Knight’s Viral Marketing Gets Very Real – Cakes, Cell Phones and All!” *Firstshowing.net*, December 5, 2007, accessed June 7, 2012, <http://www.firstshowing.net/2007/the-dark-knights-viral-marketing-gets-very-real-cakes-cell-phones-and-all/>, para. 3.

Wow. You really took the cake! Now put the icing on it. Call [number] immediately from this phone and this phone only. Do not give this phone number to anyone else. Let's hope your fellow goons come through as well as you. Once all the layers are in place, you'll get your just desserts. I'm a man of my word.³⁹

After calling the number, a woman from Rent-a-Clown answered and thanked the caller. Shortly after the call, participants received a text message reading, "Good work, clown! Keep this phone charged and with you at all times. Don't call me. I will call you...eventually."⁴⁰ This alerted participants that the phone would come into play later in the ARG. Not only were these cakes picked up by participants, but also sent to various television and radio stations, leading to increased coverage of campaign. Following the distribution of the cakes, the webpage was updated once again with two rewards for its participants, a teaser poster for *The Dark Knight* and a link to a registration page for free IMAX film passes to *I am Legend*, in which spectators would be able to see the prologue of *The Dark Knight* before the film. As well, the first theatrical trailer for *The Dark Knight* was released online via one of the ARG's viral sites.

On January 28th, 2008, actor Heath Ledger passed away. This changed the course of the campaign as it switched from a heavily Joker influenced campaign to Harvey Dent focused. In February 2008, the ibelieveinharveydent.com was updated, allowing participants to submit their contact information. Participants soon after received a phone call from Harvey Dent (actor Aaron Eckhart participated in this stage of the campaign, recording a phone call for participants), where Dent gave a speech about his campaign for District Attorney and asked for support from fellow concerned citizens for change.⁴¹ In

³⁹ Ibid., para. 5.

⁴⁰ Ibid., para. 7.

⁴¹ Alex Billington, "Harvey Dent's Campaign Tour Continues – Phone Calls, Website, and More!" *Firstshowing.net*, March 8, 2008, accessed June 7, 2012, <http://www.firstshowing.net/2008/harvey-dents-campaign-tour-continues-phone-calls-website-and-more/>, para. 1.

March 2008 the viral campaign picked up once again, where ibelieveinharveydent.com changed into an elaborate political campaign page, promoting Harvey Dent for Gotham district attorney. The website was very patriotic and promoted the public support of Harvey Dent. This change signaled the beginnings of an involved Harvey Dent campaign-related game, where participants were encouraged to submit photos and videos of themselves supporting Dent; as well participants were able to print Dent posters and flyers in support of Dent.⁴² Participants who submitted photos and videos by March 26th were sent Gotham City voter registrations cards for the June election.⁴³ As well, the Dent campaign included a cross-country tour of the Dentmobile. The Dentmobile, a white van with Dent promotional banners on its sides, visited over 36 cities in the United States, which handed out Dent buttons, stickers and t-shirts to interested participants.⁴⁴

At the end of March, a new issue of the *Gotham Times* was posted announcing Harvey Dent's campaign against Roger Garcetti and Dana Worthington. A series of supplementary websites were found within the new issue of the *Gotham Times*, such as danaworthington.com, gothamcablenews.com, and citizensforbatman.org.⁴⁵ However, after the release of the *Gotham Times* issue, a smear campaign begins against Harvey Dent at *The Ha Ha Ha Times* and *Concerned Citizens For a Better Gotham* at ccfabg.org.⁴⁶ The website smears Dent and his character as a suitable candidate for District Attorney. In regard to the smear campaign, participants receive another phone

⁴² Ibid., para. 5.

⁴³ Alex Billington, "Harvey Dent's Dentmobile Schedule Released – Vote for Harvey Dent!" *Firstshowing.net*, March 15, 2008, accessed June 7, 2012, <http://www.firstshowing.net/2008/harvey-dents-dentmobile-schedule-released-vote-for-harvey-dent/>, para. 3.

⁴⁴ Ibid., para. 2.

⁴⁵ Alex Billington, "Updates on The Dark Knight's Viral Marketing – New Gotham Times Released!" *Firstshowing.net*, March 26, 2008, accessed June 7, 2012, <http://www.firstshowing.net/2008/updates-on-the-dark-knights-viral-campaign-new-gotham-times/>, para. 1.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

call where Dent asks for support to work against political attacks.⁴⁷ Dent supporters also receive pins from ccfabg.org, where the left side of Dent's face is burnt out, a gesture to his Two-Face alter-ego in *The Dark Knight*.⁴⁸ As well, Joker cell phone owners are contacted once again by text message, sending owners on a scavenger hunt that leads them to clowntravelagency.com, signaling that the Joker campaign is not over and will begin again April 1st.⁴⁹ The elaborateness and complexity of the Dent campaign mirrors that of the previous July's Comic-Con Joker scavenger hunt. The Dent campaign garnered 100 000 emails, 10 000 video and picture submissions, over 2 million website visits, 70 000 phone calls, and contributing players in 56 countries, where the LA Times heralded the campaign as "one of the most interactive movie-marketing campaigns ever hatched by Hollywood."⁵⁰

Continuing into April 2008, the viral campaign launched yet another scavenger hunt. Clowntravelagency.com directed participants to bowling alleys in 26 countries around the world, when participants arrived at the bowling alley they received green and purple bowling ball engraved with a phone number, a message from the joker, one 'Joker' playing card, and new Joker cell phones.⁵¹ When all the bowling balls were picked up around the world, the website was updated with new instructions from the Joker. The Joker asked his participants to disable an alarm system found on acmesecuritysystems.com. However, when participants entered their phone number onto

⁴⁷ "Ibelieveinharveydent.com."

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Alex Billington, "Latest on The Dark Knight Viral – Clown Travel Agency and April 1st News!" *Firstshowing.net*, March 31, 2008, accessed June 7, 2012, <http://www.firstshowing.net/2008/latest-on-the-dark-knight-viral-clown-travel-agency-and-april-1st/>, para. 11.

⁵⁰ "Harvey Dent Campaign Video," 42 *Entertainment* video, 1:12, accessed June 7, 2012, http://www.alternaterealitybranding.com/tdk_sxsw/HDVIRAL60.wmv.

⁵¹ "Gotham Police Department: GPD Report Overview," 42 *Entertainment*, accessed June 7, 2012, <http://whysoserious.com/reports/bowling.htm>.

the website they received a phone call from Lieutenant Jim Gordon, proving the entire operation to be a trap. Gordon demands the participants' cooperation in the ongoing investigation of the criminal network of Gotham and its associates around the world or they could risk jail time.⁵² This leads participants to gpdmcu.com, the website for the Gotham Police Major Crimes Unit.

A constant element throughout the *Dark Knight* viral campaign was its narrative-based content, which sought to link *Batman Begins* to *The Dark Knight*. For example, the viral campaign involved getting participants to support a character, whether the Joker, who wants assistance for his heists or Dent, who needs to win the election. These events lead up to where *The Dark Knight*'s narrative begins. In mid-April the campaign continued to unfold the *Dark Knight* narrative with corruption allegations against Gotham police officer Francis Notaro. Francis Notaro accused Dent of bribing him to testify against an innocent cop, whose claims of innocence were later disproved by *The Gotham Times*. In addition Notaro's partner was killed in a car bombing, pushing him to extreme paranoia.⁵³ The Harvey Dent for DA campaign hosted a press conference for Harvey Dent on April 13th, however the press conference was cancelled due to a hostage situation at Rossi's Deli involving Notaro and Dent. Instead of the press conference, the audio stream on ibelieveinharveydent.com was of the ongoing hostage situation, which Dent ended with successful negotiations, contributing to his later election win.⁵⁴

On April 23rd, 2008, yet another game was launched in relation to the viral campaign. Participants that were caught by Lt. Gordon are contacted to participate in

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Alex Billington, "Harvey Dent's Press Conference Interrupted by Hostage Situation," *Firstshowing.net*, April 13, 2008, accessed June 7, 2012, <http://www.firstshowing.net/2008/harvey-dents-press-conference-interrupted-by-hostage-situation/>, para. 2.

⁵⁴ Ibid., para. 1.

“Operation Slipknot,” launched on the Gotham Police Department’s Major Crimes Unit website. The purpose of “Operation Slipknot” was to capture corrupt police officers, specifically officers involved with “Concerned Citizens for a Better Gotham,” the smear campaign against Harvey Dent. Participants were instructed to call the concierge at Gotham Intercontinental Hotel, its number found at gothamintercontinentalhotel.com, and intercept a package for the suspect by pretending to be the person of suspect.⁵⁵ If successful, participants were shipped the packages intended for the suspects, the packages provided participants with information to catch the suspected corrupted police officers, who were then instructed to upload the material online so the suspects could be captured.⁵⁶ The game proved to be a success as participants intercepted packages from mob associate Joseph Candoloro and multiple suspected police officers, finding their fake ID’s, plane tickets and travel plans from around the world.⁵⁷

Finally, April ends with one more scavenger hunt, found at whysoserious.com/itsallpartoftheplan. The website’s page features twelve defaced presidential portraits, where each portrait links to a city—9 American and 3 international cities—and to instructions on how to gather at certain locations found in each city on April 28th.⁵⁸ On April 28th, 2008, twelve groups in twelve different cities met and ventured on a scavenger hunt together throughout their city with the aim to unlock a safe online to see the new *Dark Knight* trailer.⁵⁹ The game led the twelve groups to movie theaters in their cities where they were screened the new *Dark Knight* trailer, and one

⁵⁵ “Gotham Police Department: GPD Report Overview,” <http://whysoserious.com/reports/bowling.htm>.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ “Gotham Police Department: GPD Report Overview,” 42 Entertainment, accessed June 7, 2012, <http://whysoserious.com/reports/presidents.htm>.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

participant from each group received a vandalized Joker film reel to share with the online community.⁶⁰ Also, the game led to the discovery of whysoserious.com/sittingducks, which then led to whysoserious.com/happytrails.⁶¹ Shortly after in May, the second theatrical trailer was released for *The Dark Knight* on whysoserious.com/happytrails.

The viral campaign gained momentum in June and July 2008 in preparation for the film's July release. In June 2008, there were various updates to websites related to the campaign, such as gothampolice.com, gothamcityrail.com and gothamcablenews.com, as well participants with Joker cell phones were once again contacted, alerting them that another Joker-related viral game would happen in the near future.⁶² Moreover, participants were able to vote for Harvey Dent in the Gotham District Attorney election, where participants were able to register and vote at gothamelectionboard.com.⁶³ On June 13th, another issue of *The Gotham Times* was released alerting its readers that Dent won the election and is Gotham's new District Attorney.⁶⁴

Again, the Joker vandalizes the June issue of *The Gotham Times* and releases it under the name, *The Gotham Mimes*, not unlike the previous, *The Ha Ha Ha Times*.⁶⁵ Included in this vandalized version of *The Gotham Times* were leads to the discovery of the next viral game, along with clues gathered from text messages received by owners of

⁶⁰ Alex Billington, "It's All Part of the Plan – Joker's Nationwide Trailer Hunt!" *Firstshowing.net*, April 28, 2008, accessed June 7, 2012, <http://www.firstshowing.net/2008/its-all-part-of-the-plan-jokers-nationwide-trailer-hunt/>, para. 2.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Alex Billington, "Go Vote for Harvey Dent! The Dark Knight Viral Returns!" *Firstshowing.net*, June 9, 2008, accessed June 7, 2012, <http://www.firstshowing.net/2008/go-vote-for-harvey-dent-the-dark-knight-viral-returns/>, para. 1.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Alex Billington, "New Edition of The Gotham Times – Dent Victorious! Updated!" *Fistshowing.net*, June 13, 2008, accessed June 7, 2012, <http://www.firstshowing.net/2008/new-edition-of-the-gotham-times-dent-victorious/>, para. 1.

⁶⁵ Alex Billington, "The Joker's Viral Game Continues: New Edition of The Ha Ha Ha Times – Updated!" *Firstshowing.net*, June 25 2008, accessed June 7, 2012, <http://www.firstshowing.net/2008/the-jokers-viral-game-continues-new-edition-of-the-ha-ha-ha-times/>, para. 1.

Joker cell phones. A hidden message found in *The Gotham Mimes* led to the website, whysoserious.com/redballons. Here participants were presented with a game where they must pop a series of balloons in a carnival-type game. When the game was completed, players were then taken to whysoserious.com/redballons/ineptlackeys.htm where they were presented with an ominous message from the Joker that refers to the murder of two of Gotham crime boss Sal Maroni's men.⁶⁶

As well, throughout the month of June, Comcast Subscribers were able to watch episodes of the faux television news program, *Gotham Tonight*. Through a partnership with Warner Bros., Comcast launched six mini-movies, which were "exclusive original-content episodes, of a show called *Gotham Tonight*, featuring the film's actors providing commentary in character and in a news format that tell the story of what has occurred between *Batman Begins* and *The Dark Knight*."⁶⁷ In conjunction with the release of the six *Gotham Tonight* episodes, Comcast also released exclusive behind-the-scenes footage, cast and director interviews, and *The Dark Knight* HD trailers online through its website and gothamcablenews.com.⁶⁸

Finally, the culmination of the campaign peaked in July with the release of *The Dark Knight* on July 18th and the end of the viral marketing campaign.

Whysoserious.com was updated at the end of June with a checklist of the completed tasks, or viral marketing games, and also exposed that the Joker still had three remaining jobs to complete before the release of *The Dark Knight*. Not only did this provide

⁶⁶ Ibid., para. 8.

⁶⁷ "Comcast Partners with Warner Bros. Pictures The Dark Knight to Bring Exclusive Content to Batman Fans," *Comcast Press Releases*, July 14, 2008, accessed June 7, 2012, <http://www.comcast.com/About/PressRelease/PressReleaseDetail.ashx?PRID=776&SCRedirect=true>, para. 2.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

participants with knowledge of the remaining parts of the viral marketing campaign; it also allowed new participants to recap the entire viral campaign before the release of *The Dark Knight*. When participants clicked on a specific event they were taken to a new page that recapped the entirety of the details of that viral marketing event, as well on the main page of whysoserious.com there was a ripped phone book page that linked to the all websites involved in the ARG.

However, the viral marketing game did not end with a mere checklist, but an impressive conclusion. In late June, a timer was added to www.citizensforbatman.org that was counting down to events in New York and Chicago on July 8th. The events in New York and Chicago sent participants on a final scavenger hunt, concluding in the bat signal being shown on the Woolworth Building in New York City and the Sears Tower in Chicago. As well, yet another timer was discovered at www.whysoserious.com/overture. On the website, participants found a bomb with a time counting down to July 10th. However, finding this second timer was anything but easy for participants, as they had to work through four online games before reaching it. When the Joker time bomb went off on July 10th every website in the viral game were defaced by the Joker, as well as the Bat symbol projected in New York and Chicago, which was changed into Joker graphics.⁶⁹ Not only did this defacing strike near the end of the viral game, a puzzle game found on select vandalized websites when solved spelt out the phrase “kicking and screaming.”⁷⁰ This led players to whysoserious.com/kickingandscreaming, where free *Dark Knight* screening tickets were found.

⁶⁹ Alex Billington, “The Joker’s Overture – All Good Things Come To An End! Update – Free Screening Tickets,” *Firstshowing.net*, July 10, 2008, accessed June 7, 2012, <http://www.firstshowing.net/2008/the-jokers-overture-all-good-things-come-to-an-end/>, para. 1.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, para. 4.

Finally, on July 18th, 2008, *The Dark Knight* was released to enormous critical and commercial success worldwide. The lengthy, multifaceted campaign demonstrates the extensive and elaborate lengths the film's marketers went to. The film's success can be attributed to the anticipation built by the highly effective viral marketing game in combination with traditional marketing tactics, which created and absorbed the film's audience over a year before the film's release. In a sea of what seems to be an endless release of superhero films, *The Dark Knight* campaign positioned the film apart from the rest. Much of the success of the campaign relied on the power and participation of fans, as well as the online blogging community and the interest of various media outlets. What is interesting to note is the viral campaign consistently supported both online and offline communities, providing both groups with opportunities to interact with *The Dark Knight* campaign. *The Dark Knight* campaign showcases the 'active' fan, which were not just seeking out information about *The Dark Knight*, but highly involved in unfolding a story and participating in the film's ultimate success. Where *The Dark Knight* successfully reached its target audience, it was also successful in gaining the attention of the public at large as it was covered by various media outlets.

The genius in the *Dark Knight* 's viral campaign was the combination of online and offline marketing tactics, which merged the Gotham world with our own reality to fill in the story between *Batman Begins* and its sequel. The entire campaign perpetuated the idea of a 'real' Gotham City. With the Gotham news segments that fans could watch online, fans interacting with the Gotham world in their own city, and the numerous websites, the *Dark Knight* viral campaign infiltrated the lives of consumers for over a year. The campaign's seamless infiltration into our own everyday reality was assisted by

the fact that Warner Bros. was not mentioned throughout the ARG, once again disconnecting this game from what it is, an adjunct to, a major studio's film marketing campaign. The success of the campaign also lies in the combination of viral marketing, alternate reality gaming and film advertising, which never grew stale over the course of the campaign as it was consistently renewed with innovative scavenger hunts and websites. The discussion will now conclude by illustrating the ways in which *The Dark Knight* campaign has been influenced by longstanding film marketing practices. This historical analysis will provide a greater understanding of where current film marketing strategies stem from.⁷¹

One of the most innovative and interactive campaigns since the inauguration of online viral marketing turned *The Dark Knight* into more than just a film, but an event. Spanning multiple platforms, the *Dark Knight* campaign was a concealed advertising campaign that took the film experience and infiltrated it with activities that "eventized the web."⁷² The various scavenger hunts, the offline Harvey Dent campaign, and even having participants dress up like the Joker, all contributed to creating the release of *The Dark Knight* as a "multifaceted promo push [that] transcends marketing to exist as a standalone cultural event."⁷³

The cultural event that was *The Dark Knight* harkens back to the 'event' films of the 1910s such as *Birth of a Nation*. Like *Birth of a Nation*, *The Dark Knight* exemplifies the importance of marketing a new experience to audiences in a competitive marketplace. Not only did the campaign keep fans interested in *The Dark Knight* far before its release, but also the online and offline experience created a massive amount of anticipation for

⁷¹ Groskopf, "Profit Margins," 84.

⁷² Lee, para. 3.

⁷³ Lee, para. 9.

the film that made the marketing campaign into its own cultural event that was discussed prior to *The Dark Knight*'s release. As many aspects of the filmmaking process have changed throughout its history, the event film signals a phenomenon that has become commonplace in today's contemporary film marketplace with superhero franchises and the trilogy film.

According to Harriet Margolis in *Studying the Event Film: The Lord of the Rings* (2008), the contemporary event film is "a conglomeration of actives, including film production, film marketing, merchandising, tourism, entertainment journalism, and scholarly endeavors."⁷⁴ The event film has an advantage in the marketing process as unlike regular blockbusters, prior to its release the event film creates buzz all on its own due to something about the project, be it a trilogy, its event status, or stars.⁷⁵ While much larger in scale now, the 'event' experience was marketed to audiences as early as the 1910s. The event film differs from the ordinary blockbuster because its characters, images, scenes, music and storylines can be repositioned to work self-sufficiently in different media texts apart from the sole film text.⁷⁶ *The Dark Knight*'s campaign, involved characters, scenes, and storylines that were distributed across different media platforms even before the release of the film. However, as these event films are new phenomena in their monetary size and relation to media conglomeration, the event film has a past. The event film has occurred throughout film history. For instance, *Star Wars* (George Lucas, 1977) and *King Kong* (Merian C. Cooper and Ernest B Shoedsack, 1933) were both cultural events in their respective times. *King Kong*'s marketing campaign

⁷⁴ Harriet Margolis, "Introduction: how to study an event film," in *Studying the event film: The Lord of the Rings*, (New York: Manchester University Press, 2008), 2.

⁷⁵ Margolis, 13.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

relied on various novelty tactics. In conjunction with promotional studio materials and mass media advertisements preceding *King Kong* screenings, elaborate prologue stage shows were performed. As well, exhibitors advertised the film on its romantic narrative appeals to set it apart from other “mediocre animal pictures.”⁷⁷ *King Kong*’s marketing campaign illustrates “a text highly amenable to proven promotional and exhibition strategies of the early 1930s...in which multiple viewing frames became possible.” These earlier examples signal that *The Dark Knight* campaign relies on marketing strategies that have been made familiar throughout film history, one in which a film relies on multiple marketing strategies to create buzz for a film that ultimately changes it into an event.

As Lisa Kernan argues in *Coming Attractions: Reading American Movie Trailers* (2004), promotional film discourses mirror Tom Gunning’s “cinema of attractions” because film advertisements privilege spectacle over narrative coherence.⁷⁸ A great deal of *The Dark Knight* campaign built itself on attracting the attention of its audience, while simultaneously invoking the narrative between *Batman Begins* and *The Dark Knight*. While the narrative of the ARG was part of the campaign, the spectacle of the various scavenger hunts, online and offline games, and the sheer size of the campaign overshadowed the narrative components.

I relate the viral marketing campaign tactics of spectacle back to Kernan’s argument because it draws attention to basic principles. The “system of attraction” appeals to “audiences’ idealized memories of films they haven’t seen yet, they attract audiences not only to themselves as attractions...but to an ever renewed and renewable

⁷⁷ Cynthia Erb, *Tracking King Kong: A Hollywood Icon in World Culture* (Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 1998), 60.

⁷⁸ Kernan, *Coming Attractions*, 7.

desire for cinematic attraction per se.”⁷⁹ Throughout history, as discussed in Chapter One, a dominant marketing strategy for film producers and distributors is to couple technological innovations with marketing strategies to lure audiences into the prospect of a ‘new’ cinematic experience. The possibility of a ‘new’ film experience reconfigures the cinematic attraction, transforming the film product into a renewed experience for audiences.⁸⁰ *The Dark Knight* viral campaign offered audiences a new film-going experience, one based in spectacle, anticipation and attraction through its various games, ultimately being a marketing attraction that ends in the traditional film experience for its participants.

The Dark Knight relied on the spectacle of the event that the viral marketing campaign created, but even more, it created a great sense of anticipation by way of its ARG. This anticipation built by the ARG is comparable to the renewed desire for the cinematic attraction, allowing spectators not only to participate in this anticipation by contributing to the growth of the viral campaign but to flock to the theaters to see the film. More importantly, as new as these viral campaigns are, they still rely on the tradition film experience, and end with its participants consuming the film in the traditional cinematic experience, in theaters. Promotional film texts and “the center to which they attempt to draw audiences – the narrative and promotional world of ‘Hollywood’ – is all the more compelling for the degree to which its lures are repeated and reconfigured, in ever novel yet ever familiar ways.”⁸¹ The basis of the *Dark Knight*

⁷⁹ Kernan, 208.

⁸⁰ Thomas Elsaesser, “The Blockbuster: Everything Connects, but Not Everything Goes,” in *The end of cinemas as we know it: American film in the nineties*, ed. Jon Lewis (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 16.

⁸¹ Kernan, 209.

viral campaign is the element of attraction, however unlike a traditional film campaign it has been reconfigured to function in new ways via the Internet.

The element of attraction in a marketing campaign is not the only part of the marketing text found in *The Dark Knight* ARG. As discussed above, viral marketing campaigns rely on similar lures and novelties of the past to entice audiences to ‘Hollywood,’ which have been repeated throughout film’s history. As described in Chapter One, genre remains an integral part of the film marketing process. The superhero film has become increasingly popular within the past ten years of filmmaking. Adapted from popular comic books, the superhero film is an action film mixed with fantasy and science fiction elements that follows the actions of a superhero through his quests against a villain. Like any genre, the superhero film has come in and out of popularity in film history, finding its greatest popularity in the 2000s. The superhero film warrants big box office openings, sequels, endorsement deals, and various merchandising options, recent franchises include, *Iron Man* (Jon Favreau, 2008), *Thor* (Kenneth Branagh, 2011) and *Captain America: The First Avenger* (Joe Jonston, 2011). As well, the superhero comes with an already built-in fan base.

Viral marketing campaigns seem to work best with certain genres, notably the horror, mystery, action or fantasy genres. This may be because of their target audiences, who most aptly have taken up the Internet as a site to discuss their opinions as blogging has become increasingly significant in the realm of film marketing. Innovative marketing campaigns celebrate their fans needs, and the possibilities of a genre as seen in *The Dark Knight* ARG. *The Dark Knight* ARG created a realistic sense of Gotham online and offline, creating a superhero world where Batman existed, and where fans could interact

and participate. Fans became passionate about working within a fake city, becoming citizens of the fictional city by supporting the Joker, Harvey Dent or Batman. The immersive anticipatory campaign included real websites, which allowed participants to forget that the entire ARG was a marketing tool to lure them to theaters. Participants were asked to believe in the possibility of the existence of a real Gotham City.

Furthermore, as discussed above in the overview of the history of Batman, the difficulty in marketing *The Dark Knight* lay in convincing the public that Nolan's Batman films were more than just another Batman interpretation. In what seems like a flood of endless superhero blockbusters, the Nolan franchise was set apart by its viral campaign. The campaign achieved this stature with a reliance on genre discourses and especially a strong focus on story and characters. A significant part of the campaign was introducing audiences to the main characters, and developing the story between *Batman Begins* and its sequel. More so, the campaign develops these characters into who they are in *The Dark Knight*. For example, throughout the campaign participants follow Harvey Dent on his District Attorney campaign, and witness his victory during the viral campaign, when *The Dark Knight* begins audiences learn that Dent is the new district attorney, with no mention of his campaign. Participants also were given the chance to understand the mischief the Joker would create in the film by following his heists and scavenger hunts in the viral campaign.

Genre provides a means of interpreting a film text, and the viral campaign for *The Dark Knight* encouraged participants in the ARG to interpret and understand *The Dark Knight's* narrative, characters, themes, and style. Nolan was attempting to do something darker than usual with the superhero franchise, creating a more realistic storyline. With

the aid of the viral marketing campaign this notion was furthered as Gotham was made into a realistic city participants could interact with. Genre functions alongside the spectacle of *The Dark Knight* ARG to set-up the film, as well as reach *The Dark Knight*'s target audience.

Buzz is not only created by a film itself, spectacle, or genre, but also by movie stars, who are a significant focus of consumer and commercial interest. A significant part of the success of the campaign is the believability of the reality of a real Gotham City; this would not have been possible without the participation of the film's actors. *Dark Knight* actors, Heath Ledger and Aaron Eckhart's performances left the film and extended to the viral marketing campaign. Without the participation of the actors, the viral marketing campaign's realism would have dwindled. A tactic mirrored in more recent viral campaigns, such as the participation of actors in the *Prometheus* (Ridley Scott, 2012) viral campaign. The actors' interaction with the *Dark Knight* campaign allowed for participants to be immersed in Gotham City, and the narrative to be bridged between *Batman Begins* and *The Dark Knight*. Actors dominate many marketing campaigns, however this typically is restricted to press tours, interviews and premiers, usually marketing a film on an actor's stardom. While *The Dark Knight* actors participated in a press tour, the actors' involvement with the campaign worked to reduce "the star's persona to a servant of character, without affirming the actor's craft."⁸² The viral campaign presented the actors as characters, introducing fans to their character personas. The active influence of these actors allowed for another level of immersion in the narrative. The campaign had participants support the Joker, Dent, or Batman, which

⁸² Barry King, "Dispersing Elijah: stardom and the event film," in *Studying the event film: The Lord of the Rings*, ed. Harriet Margolis et al. (New York: Manchester University Press, 2008), 132.

allowed for participants to become more involved and passionate about the ARG. As well, this offered participants options in the ARG, the campaign may have become stale if only following one character, with three options the ARG opened the interest of the campaign to more audiences, and provided audiences with different areas of the campaign to follow.

As well, *The Dark Knight* cast were not only a group of box office stars, but rather pedigreed and well-respected actors within Hollywood. Christian Bale, Michael Caine, Heath Ledger and Gary Oldman are critically praised actors. With these celebrated actors attached to the project, the commercial viability of the film was raised. The actors differentiate the campaign further from the competition, as the inclusion of their character personas provided recognizable trademarks from *The Dark Knight* and prepared audiences for the film text. The participation of the actors allowed for the more dramatic elements of the film to come forth, such as the Dent campaign or Lt. Gordon's quest to rid Gotham of crime. The use of actors in the viral campaign reconfigures traditional star discourses in film marketing to be renewed for the Internet, as the marketing mix continues to expand and evolve.

To conclude, *The Dark Knight* ARG provided audiences with a new movie-going experience by expanding the ways a film could use viral marketing tactics to create buzz for a film. Through this discussion it is apparent how the viral campaign relied on traditional film marketing appeals to entice audiences to see *The Dark Knight*. Alternate forms of promotion like viral marketing allow audiences to be more critical in their media consumption choices, and take a more active role in their film experience. *The Dark Knight* ARG left no room for criticism as its inventiveness and success with audiences

and media outlets, left critics and fans stunned. The success of the campaign can be attributed to *The Dark Knight* ARG working seamlessly with its target market. By using the appropriate media channels and marketing strategies, *The Dark Knight* ARG was able to reach potential audiences and build excitement with its fans through various offline scavenger hunts and online games. The purpose of this chapter was to draw attention to the idea that as new and innovative as *The Dark Knight* campaign is, there are underlying traditional marketing discourses that filter through the campaign to make it work for contemporary audiences. There is also a history that surrounds the Batman brand that evidently impacts this contemporary franchise. As film marketing continues to innovate with evolving technology, one will continue to see a relationship to traditional marketing tactics. The next chapter will investigate *Cloverfield*, providing a different perspective on viral marketing as it is a non-franchise film, with a new narrative, and did not have a ready-made audience. As well, this chapter will investigate questions surrounding the active spectator.

CHAPTER THREE

ENGAGING THE ACTIVE SPECTATOR: THE AMBIGUITY, MYSTERY, AND SPECULATION OF *CLOVERFIELD*

Matt Reeves' *Cloverfield* demonstrates the complex hype and speculation that can surround a film with the aid of a viral marketing campaign. Released on January 18th 2008, the American horror film follows a group of friends attending a going away party on a night when a monster terrorizes New York City. The Godzilla-inspired scenario employed an intricate and calculated viral marketing campaign that invited spectators online to discover information about the film. Unlike *The Dark Knight*, *Cloverfield* did not have the star power or franchise backing to entice audiences; rather *Cloverfield* relied heavily on the generation of mystery, ambiguity and speculation concerning the film's narrative. The purpose of any viral campaign is to create dialogue. *Cloverfield* created dialogue in its less-is-more marketing approach, as the film's narrative content was kept secret until the release of the film. The film's unexplained and puzzling narrative served as the focus for its publicity. The film can be said to have taken a backseat to its own pre-publicity because the amount of dialogue created by its campaign was so unforeseeably large that it threatened to overshadow the film itself.¹ The *Cloverfield* campaign subverted long-standing ideas behind traditional campaigns by withholding information from prospective audiences. Ultimately, *Cloverfield* created "a new model for cultivating narrative and emotional engagement in an unreleased feature while leaving its actual content under wraps."² By building anticipation through a "series of absences,"

¹ Ben Walters, "Two-Point-Zero: A Guaranteed Premonition," *Film Quarterly* 61 (2007): 67.

² Ibid.

Cloverfield defied traditional marketing conventions that advertise to mass audiences.³ In light of its challenge to established marketing strategies, *Cloverfield* will provide an evocative case study for this final chapter.

Led by Amy Powell, Paramount's then Senior Vice-President of interactive marketing, *Cloverfield*'s provocative viral campaign began six months prior to the release of the film. In conjunction with this intricate viral marketing campaign, there was also an extensive television campaign with fifteen television spots, and a guerilla street campaign. This ultimately contributed to the successful opening weekend of *Cloverfield*, which made \$41 million domestically, and grossed almost \$170 million worldwide at the box office.⁴ Opposed to traditional marketing campaigns that rely on the release of authoritative information, viral campaigns rather work to build positive awareness and buzz through the concentrated release of information.⁵ *Cloverfield* did this to an elevated level by marketing absence. The viral campaign emphasized gaps in narrative and character information, as did the film itself. Fans who pieced together information from the viral campaign, the film, and post-film viewing discussions, were able to mobilize the same information to piece together answers to the film's main narrative enigmas.⁶ The stress on mystery, lack of information, and ambiguity contributed to a less-is-more approach that made for a dramatic pre-release campaign. While not as extensive as *The Dark Knight* campaign, *Cloverfield* demonstrates how viral marketing can create anticipation and buzz for a film without star and franchise power. The *Cloverfield*

³ Daniel North, "Evidence of Things Not Quite Seen: *Cloverfield*'s Obstructed Spectacle," *Film & History* 40 (2010): 77.

⁴ "Cloverfield: Summary," Box Office Mojo, accessed July 23, 2012, <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=cloverfield.htm>.

⁵ North, 80.

⁶ North, 77.

campaign thus illuminates the active role played by the spectator in constructing a film's meaning. It invites questions such as, do viral campaigns allow for greater user agency, or is this agency illusory? As I see it, the *Cloverfield* campaign did invite spectators to be active in how they approached the film's meaning, but it also imposed limits on the spectator's activity through contests, film images and social networking profiles for *Cloverfield* characters. This discussion will additionally serve to expose the complicated relationship between media producers and consumers, as well as the complexity surrounding the categorization of the active spectator. An analysis of the campaign will also examine the role participants play in these campaigns, as well as the alleged novelty of the active spectator in contemporary cinema. An additional question concerns what the marketing campaign meant for the film's attempt to balance a heightened sense of realism with a faux documentary aesthetic and relatively unknown actors. Because the campaign for *Cloverfield* started during the film's production process, a question arises. To what extent did these aesthetic choices contribute to its successful marketing campaign?

Prior to the release of the first teaser trailer and the start of its pre-publicity campaign, the production of *Cloverfield* was kept highly secretive, even to the actors and production crew. Upon signing up to work on *Cloverfield* actors were not made aware of the plot of the film, and even after filming had already started, actors were still kept in obscurity about the plot. In order to keep the film secret during production and pre-publicity the film held numerous faux titles during production such as, *Cheese*, *Chocolate Outrage* and *Slusho!*, before the title *Cloverfield* was settled upon.

In July 2007, the first *Cloverfield* teaser trailer was released and screened in front of *Transformers* (Michael Bay), one of the biggest summer blockbusters of 2007.

Conventionally, trailers consist of excerpts from scenes from the film that demonstrate what the audience can expect from the main characters and plot. The purpose of a trailer is to offer audiences a sense of what they can expect from a film.⁷ However, *Cloverfield*'s first teaser provided audiences with no clear summary of the film. Running just under two minutes, the teaser features a condensed version of the first act of the film, and thus forgoes conventional trailer structures and elements, such as an introduction to main characters, a voiceover, music or quotations from the dialogue.

The trailer begins with a series of scenes from Rob's goodbye party, which is filmed from the point-of-view of a partygoer. The teaser features different shots of the party, with the cameraman getting other partygoers' goodbye wishes to Rob, when suddenly the party-goers feel an earthquake and hear an ominous distant roar. Next, the partygoers watch a news anchor discuss the thunderous earthquake, which leads them to quickly go up to the roof to get a better look at the aftermath. The partygoers soon after witness an explosion in the distance and hear a loud roar. The group then rushes down to street level as fireballs begin to hit the buildings around them. The following shots reveal panicked civilians. Cut quickly, the sequence shows the partygoers rushing downstairs from a variety of angles. These shots are intercut with blank frames, which brings out the candidness of the amateur footage and the terror of the situation. As the partygoers reach street level, they are surrounded by crowds of New Yorkers running in the opposite direction of the explosion in a panic looking for their friends. A loud roar is heard in the distance, as the camera pans from a fearful partygoer's face to a large object flying at

⁷ Kerrigan, *Film Marketing*, 144.

them. The large object that hurls onto the street in front of the cameraman turns out to be the head of the statue of liberty. A man in the background is heard screaming, “Oh my God! Oh my God!” The teaser then cuts to a credit title, stating the film is from producer J.J. Abrams, and finally finishes with the opening date of *Cloverfield*: 1-18-08.

The teaser evinces authenticity, terror and mystery through its documentary aesthetic. The puzzling teaser intrigues spectators by what is shown but even more so by what is not shown. The trailer offers no indication of what is terrorizing New York City and who the main characters are; and while some plot points are provided, the majority of the plot is kept mysterious. However, the mention of J.J. Abrams implies a specific target audience aware of Abrams’ work in the science fiction and drama genres. In 2008 Abrams was well known for his work on the television series’ *Alias* (2001-2006), *Lost* (2004-2010), and films such as *Mission Impossible: III* (2006). The mention of his name in the trailer allows audiences to garner some meaning and expectations from the untitled film. This point is important since the trailer refrains from naming the film’s title, leaving audiences with the question, what is it? The absence of a title is perhaps the most provocative aspect of this trailer. The intent seems to have been to spark audiences’ imagination in an age where information is so readily given to audiences, ultimately driving thousands of spectators online to dissect the teaser trailer and find the beginnings of an inventive viral campaign.⁸

This teaser trailer spun an enormous amount of buzz simply through its stress on the release date provided at the end: 1-18-08. In concealing the film’s title, the mystifying trailer sent curious spectators on a hunt for clues or information concerning the mysterious film, sparking the beginning of *Cloverfield*’s viral marketing campaign. After

⁸ North, 78.

the teaser trailer was released online speculators and various media outlets theorized about possible film narratives. Commentators proposed that the film could be a *Lost* spin-off, a film based on H.P. Lovecraft's works, a new *Godzilla* or *Voltron* movie, or an original film project.⁹

This pre-release plot speculation led spectators online where they found a highly structured setup of clues about the film. Rather than reciting and spoiling the film's narrative, the *Cloverfield* viral campaign provoked interest in the mythology behind *Cloverfield*, allowing participants to piece together different clues that provide links to the meaning of the film. One critic has suggested the *Cloverfield* marketing campaign, "distributes the task of publicizing the film by urging spectators to become active participants entering into the narrative space of the film, and drawing others in with them in order to collaboratively construct its meaning."¹⁰ The *Cloverfield* campaign, like *The Dark Knight* campaign, is more than just a publicity campaign, as it rather works alongside the film to compliment its tone of paranoia, mystery, and limited knowledge the film perpetuates.¹¹

The teaser trailer gained a great deal of attention by leading viewers to the official *Cloverfield* website, www.1-18-08.com. Spectators could browse through images of the film that provided narrative clues.¹² This website presented a series of time-stamped images that appear to have been gradually added to the site over time.¹³ Throughout the month of July 2007, the website was updated five times. The five images released in non-

⁹ Anthony Breznican, "Mystifying Trailer Transforms Marketing," *USA Today*, July 9, 2007, accessed July 23, 2012, http://www.usatoday.com/life/movies/news/2007-07-08-abrams-trailer_N.htm, para. 13.

¹⁰ North, 84.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Kerrigan, 202.

¹³ Ibid.

chronological order were of Rob drinking at 12:01A, a party photo of characters Jamie, Hud, and Rob at 12:04A, two unknown frightened women at 12:48A, and finally a soldier at 1:24A.¹⁴ These photos pieced together a timeline for audiences and an idea of the terror that unfolds for the characters. Also, these images caused much fan speculation and critique; some even had hidden messages on the back where if participants shook their cursors they could discover these messages. Throughout the campaign additional photos slowly leaked onto the website. Not only did the teaser led spectators to the 1-18-08.com site, but to multiple other viral websites, all coordinated together as part of the same viral marketing campaign.

Perhaps the most interesting of these additional websites is the one for the fictional Japanese drink Slusho. In July 2007 after the release of the teaser trailer for *Cloverfield*, a website appeared for Slusho, which had already been seen in the *Cloverfield* trailer, in which one of the partygoers wears a Slusho t-shirt. The Slusho website, a brightly animated site with various characters promoting the Slusho drink, was updated throughout the campaign with new happy talk quotes, distribution opportunities, a store where participants could actually buy Slusho products, and a contest. The website was very much interactive, participants could submit Slusho happy talk quotes, which are simple taglines for the Slusho drink, as well as email about potential distribution opportunities, learn about the company's history, download Slusho desktops or AIM icons, and create their own Slusho flavours online. In December 2007, a Slusho contest was introduced where participants were invited to create a Slusho commercial, where the

¹⁴ Dennis, "1-18-08 – Photo #5," *Cloverfield Clues*, July 27, 2007, accessed July 23, 2012, <http://cloverfieldclues.blogspot.ca/2007/07/1-18-08-photo-5.html>.

top five commercials would receive Slusho laptop covers.¹⁵ Potential contestants were asked to make a commercial about how happy and fun Slusho is to drink.¹⁶ The fictional drink company also released their own Japanese commercial in December 2007 on their website for reference, which was strange and included a talking moose in space, floating talking heads, a mermaid, and various animated characters with the jingle, “Slusho! We got the Flavor! You can't drink just six!”¹⁷

The Slusho site led to the discovery of the fictional Japanese Tagruato Corporation website, which surfaced in September 2007. The Tagruato Corporation first made an appearance via a photo added to 1-18-08.com at the end of September. The photo featured a Japanese chef holding a food dish and had a recipe written in Japanese on the back.¹⁸ All of the ingredients are familiar, except for the one pinch of deep-sea nectar required. If participants had been following the viral campaign closely they would have read about this deep-sea ingredient on the Slusho website. The deep-sea ingredient is mentioned in the Slusho company history. Discovered on the deep ocean floor by the ocean scientist, Ganu Yoshida, who incorporated the ingredient into the Slusho drink.¹⁹ This discovery led participants to the fictional Tagruato Corporation website as various connections between Slusho and Tagruato are suggested on the Tagruato website, for example the C.E.O. is Ganu Yoshida and Slusho is featured as a subsidiary company.²⁰ A deep sea drilling company, Tagruato is described as “a collective of top scientists,

¹⁵ Dennis, “Slusho Happy Commercial Contest of Joy!” *Cloverfield Clues*, December 5, 2007, accessed July 23, 2012, <http://cloverfieldclues.blogspot.ca/2007/12/slusho-happy-commercial-contest-of-joy.html>.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Dennis, “Slusho! Commercial,” *Cloverfield Clues*, December 6, 2007, accessed July 23, 2012, <http://cloverfieldclues.blogspot.ca/2007/12/slusho-commercial.html>.

¹⁸ Dennis, “1-18-08.com – Photo #6,” *Cloverfield Clues*, September 29, 2007, accessed July 23, 2012, <http://cloverfieldclues.blogspot.ca/2007/09/1-18-08com-photo-6.html>.

¹⁹ “Company History,” accessed July 23, 2012, <http://slusho.jp/>.

²⁰ Dennis, “Tagruato.jp,” *Cloverfield Clues*, September 30, 2007, accessed August 1, 2012, <http://cloverfieldclues.blogspot.ca/2007/09/tagruatojp.html>.

engineers, and businessmen committed to leading our investors and the whole of mankind into the future,” with a focus on “groundbreaking deep-sea drilling technology...energy resources, medical research, advanced technology production, and consumable product.”²¹ Among the bits of information on the Tagruato website, the most critical concerned their new drilling location, the Chuai station, which opened in September 2007 and was located close to New York City on the Mid-Atlantic Ridge. This discovery led to the speculation that this drilling location had something to do with the monster, which as the campaign moved forward more information would be discovered to validate this speculation.

The campaign focused upon the background not only of the *Cloverfield* monster but also of the characters’ lives prior to the attack. At the end of July MySpace profiles were discovered for some of the characters. The characters’ MySpace profiles were updated throughout the campaign, and provide an interesting back-story to the characters lives leading up to Rob’s goodbye party that begins *Cloverfield*. These updates on their profiles provide a context to understanding the character’s relationships more deeply when viewing the film. Profiles for Rob Hawkins, Jamie Lascano, Lily Ford, Beth McIntyre, JJ Hawkins, Marlana Diamond, and Hudson Platt, were created. All of which are main characters in the film, except for Jamie Lascano who plays a major role in the viral marketing game as described below. Profiles included photos of the characters, blog postings, their interests, and messages back and forth between characters. This simple tactic turned into a significant opportunity for spectators to learn about the characters they were not introduced to in the teaser trailer.

²¹ “Tagruato Profile,” Tagruato Corporation, accessed July 23, 2012, <http://tagruato.jp/profile.php>.

For instance, before viewing the film participants of the campaign learned about the friendship between Rob and Beth, and how Rob has feelings for Beth. This is seen in comments the characters make towards one another to make plans, Beth consistently cancels their plans for other dates, such as to go to Vermont for a weekend away with a friend and a dinner at a four star New York restaurant. Also, Rob describes this unrequited crush in a blog posting in December 2007. Rob discusses how he needs to move on, and is tired of being the overlooked guy, presumably by Beth, and considers leaving New York. Also, from browsing the characters' MySpace pages participants learn of a job interview Rob has as Beth comments on Rob's MySpace page, wishing him good luck at a job interview. Not too long after Rob updates with another blog posting in January 2008, announcing he is moving to Japan to become the new vice-president of marketing and promotions of Slusho, helping a team bring the drink to the western world. This unfolding relationship online was noteworthy because the film opens with the two after they have spent the night together.

Also, through the MySpace updates spectators learn that Hud and Rob are best friends, Jason and Rob are brothers from Minneapolis, Jason is involved in fantasy football, and Jason and Lily are in a relationship. More so, the character's MySpace profiles were updated on January 18, 2008 that point to Rob's surprise party. For instance, Lily updates at 4:35pm stating, "*Current mood: stressed* DOES ANYONE HAVE AN ICE BUCKET!?!? – Ahhhhhh hate boys they are lazy and don't help ahhh!" and Beth comments on Lily's MySpace page at 4:29pm, "Alright, I think I'm still gonna come. I might be late, though."²² The various MySpace updates provide a context to why

²² Dennis, "MySpace Update – Rob's Party," *Cloverfield Clues*, January 19, 2008, accessed July 23, 2012, <http://cloverfieldclues.blogspot.ca/2008/01/myspace-update-rops-party.html>.

Rob is leaving, Rob and Beth's relationship, and why Jason is wearing a Slusho t-shirt at Rob's goodbye party.

In September 2007 another viral website connected to the film was discovered through the close analysis of the characters MySpace Profiles. In her blog posting on August 31, 2007, Jamie Lascano comments how she misses Teddy Hanssen, a man she has just started a relationship with, but has left the city. On September 10, 2007, Jamie comments on Marlena's page that the blog posting she made got Teddy's attention as her comments says,

Hey Girl! Well that certainly got his attention. Teddy-bear called me each of the last three days, and each time we've ended up talking for like 3 hours. I miss the man behind the voice! He says he already watched it ten times and demanded more! Such a sweetie!²³

As a result of this comment the viral website Jamieandteddy.com was discovered, which featured an image of two teddy bears with the caption, "Just for you Teddy-bear! I miss ya like CRAZY already!!! Love, your Lil' Lascano."²⁴ When participants clicked on the image they were taken to a login page, by inputting the password: jllovesth, they were redirected to a page with video messages to Teddy from Jamie. Eleven videos were added to the site over the course of the campaign, which feature Jamie talking directly to a camera set-up in her bedroom, often starting with her fumbling with the lens cap and lastly only two to three minutes. While these videos seem like the ramblings of a girlfriend working on a long-distance relationship, these videos were critical in unfolding the *Cloverfield* mystery overall.

The first video features Jamie in her bedroom telling Teddy how much she misses him, and how she thinks these video messages will be a great way for the two to stay in

²³ "LenaDia," MySpace Profile, accessed July 23, 2012, <http://www.myspace.com/marlenadiamond>.

²⁴ Accessed July 23, 2012, <http://jamieandteddy.com/>.

touch.²⁵ The second and third videos were added in October 2007. The second video message features Jamie discussing a gift she received from Teddy that she cannot open until December 9, 2007.²⁶ The third video features Jamie as she describes a run-in she had with one of Teddy's ex-girlfriends, where his ex-girlfriend threatens to tell Teddy that Jamie was cheating on him.²⁷ Jamie pleads for Teddy to believe her while he is off saving the world, as well she references three of the film's characters, Lily and Jason, who according to Jamie do not have a perfect relationship, and Marlana, who's cousin is seen sleeping in Jamie's bed as she ends the video.

In November 2007, the viral marketing campaign began to gain momentum as more information concerning the *Cloverfield* mythology was discovered. Firstly, the fourth video was added to jamieandteddy.com. In this video Jamie performs a striptease for Teddy because she had not heard from Teddy in a few days.²⁸ Also, Jamie refers to "the cause" that Teddy is working on, hoping to learn about it the next time Teddy calls her. This added more mystery around a character that participants of the campaign knew very little about, where is Teddy and what "cause" is he working for? Also, in November there was a great deal of activity on the Tagruato website. The investors' page was updated with news concerning an article by the Ravaille Research Center (RRC) that may have shocked and angered investors. The Slusho Board of Directors ensured their investors that no Seabed Nectar was available outside their factories, and the RRC's claims were false.²⁹ This piece of investor news led participants to the article by the RRC

²⁵ "Video 1," accessed July 23, 2012, <http://jamieandteddy.com/mynumber1vid.mov>.

²⁶ "Video 2," accessed July 23, 2012, <http://jamieandteddy.com/myvideo2.mov>.

²⁷ "Video 3," accessed July 23, 2012, <http://jamieandteddy.com/video3.mov>.

²⁸ "Video 4," accessed July 23, 2012, <http://jamieandteddy.com/number4.mov>.

²⁹ "To Investors: Concerning the RRC Article," Investor News, accessed July 23, 2012, http://tagruato.jp/investors.php?story=news_07_11_21.

on “The Original Science Forums,” a forum for scientific discussion.³⁰ The RRC article revealed that their tests on the Seabed Nectar showed “accelerated cell growth, increased strength, increased soft muscle tissue growth, sharper eyesight, better digestion, smoother skin, and a full-body, pleasant sensation.”³¹

After this information was leaked, the Tagruato website was hacked twice by an unknown source. The image of Ganu Yoshida on the homepage of the site was altered with devil horns, multiple sea creatures, and a tidal wave destroying a city with the title, “TAGRUATO IS DESTROYING OUR OCEANS.”³² Soon after, the site was replaced with an under construction warning and restored, only to be hacked again in late November. During this month the recent news found on the Tagruato site included a recall of one of their subsidiary company’s products, Parafun Wax products, and the launch of its satellite “Hatsui” by subsidiary company, Bold Futura.³³ As well, Slusho began to ship clues with their merchandise to participants purchasing Slusho products. The clues included torn Tagruato memos, which announced that all outgoing letters will go through the Tagruato communication center.³⁴ In addition to the torn Tagruato memo, on the backside of the memo a handwritten note reads, “American, The Chuai station hides a dark secret. Good people are going missing. Expect further communication in the near future. – the Whistle Blower.”³⁵ Now, participants of the campaign would recognize the mention of Chuai station, which appears to have some complications. These clues

³⁰ Dennis, “Tagruato Update – RRC Article,” November 22, 2007, accessed July 23, 2012, <http://cloverfieldclues.blogspot.ca/2007/11/tagruato-update-rrc-article.html>.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Dennis, “Tagruato Website Hacked!” November 24, 2007, accessed July 23, 2012, <http://cloverfieldclues.blogspot.ca/2007/11/tagruato-website-hacked.html>.

³³ “Tagruato Launches First Satellite,” Investor News, accessed July 23, 2012, http://tagruato.jp/investors.php?story=news_07_11_27.

³⁴ Dennis, “Slusho! Store Sending Secret Clues?” November 30, 2007, accessed July 23, 2012, <http://cloverfieldclues.blogspot.ca/2007/11/slusho-store-sending-secret-clues.html>.

³⁵ Ibid.

would lead to larger discoveries in the *Cloverfield* campaign in the two months leading to its release.

Besides the viral campaign, *Cloverfield*'s promoters also ran a traditional campaign, and it, too, was periodically updated. In November the official trailer for *Cloverfield* was released prior to *Beowulf* (Robert Zemeckis, 2007) and with this new trailer a lot of the speculation about the film was laid to rest. Picking up where the first teaser left off, the official *Cloverfield* trailer provided greater context for the film and gave audiences confirmation of a title. Along with the release of the official trailer, the official Paramount *Cloverfield* website was launched, as well as the official *Cloverfield* poster, which featured a decapitated Statue of Liberty.

In early December 2007, the fifth Jamie video was uploaded to Jamieandteddy.com. The video features Jamie opening the gift Teddy sent her in October and Jamie complaining that she has not heard from Teddy in a month.³⁶ Inside the box Jamie finds a Slusho hat, a sample of the Seabed Nectar, which is labeled, "primary evidence, freeze a.s.a.p., Jamie don't eat this," and a message from Teddy. In Teddy's message he says he has been captured by Tagruato who have found something on one of their stations, and does not want Jamie to call the authorities, but to wait to hear from Randy. Unfortunately, Jamie does not believe Teddy, and breaks up with him at the end of her video message. As well, the Tagruato website hack led to the discovery of a new website in the viral game, tidowave.com. Tidowave represents a "nonprofit, grassroots, environmental activist organization dedicated to saving our planet from the world's most nefarious corporations."³⁷ Tidowave's current fight is against Tagruato because they

³⁶ "Video 5," accessed July 23, 2012, <http://jamieandteddy.com/video5.mov>.

³⁷ "What is the T.I.D.O. Wave?" Accessed July 23, 2012, <http://tidowave.com/blog/?paged=2>.

claim the company is polluting the ocean with their deep sea drilling. The Tidowave website allowed for participants to comment on their articles, as well as to browse through the “Cruel-etin Board,” which outlines Tagruato’s problematic past. Moreover, in the news postings on the Tidowave site there are mentions of a Randy, who is mentioned in Teddy’s message to Jamie confirming that Teddy works for Tidowave. Also, two additional whistle blower memos were released, insinuating there was something happening at the Chuai station, and that something had been seen on Tagruato’s sonar, possibly the first sightings of the monster.³⁸ Finally, the sixth video was uploaded to jamieandteddy.com at the end of December. In this video Jamie still does not believe Teddy’s claims in his last video and decides to call Tagruato.³⁹ The company claims they have never heard of a Teddy Hanssen and ask Jamie for her address.

At the beginning of January 2008, weeks before the release of *Cloverfield*, the viral marketing campaign picked up momentum and provided participants with information concerning Tagruato, Tidowave and the Chuai station. On January 1st, 2008, Tidowave posted a blog describing a December mission that went haywire, where team members went to a station to recover their fellow comrades; the blogger, however, claimed that the station had disappeared. Shortly after, Tagruato updated their website stating there was an altercation at Chuai station citing the cause of the problem is thought to be an eco-terror cell.⁴⁰ With this news several videos were found online on YouTube of news programs from Germany, Italy, Spain, France, America, Russia, and Japan

³⁸ Dennis, “Whistle Blower Message #3 – Sonar,” *Cloverfield Clues*, December 29, 2007, accessed July 23, 2012, <http://cloverfieldclues.blogspot.ca/2007/12/whistle-blower-message-3-sonar.html>.

³⁹ “Video 6,” accessed July 23, 2012, <http://jamieandteddy.com/Number6.mov>.

⁴⁰ “Update,” Tagruato Headlines, accessed July 23, 2012, http://tagruato.jp/headlines.php?story=news_08_01_03_1.

reporting an environmental disaster at Tagruato's Chuai station. All short two to three minute news segments covered the disaster at the Chuai Station, sharing similar information and the same footage. According to the American news segment, on December 27, 2007, an environmental disaster occurred on Tagruato's Chuai station off the coast of Connecticut, where their deep sea-drilling platform was put down for unknown reasons.⁴¹ The footage caught on scene by Tagruato workers shows the platform violently collapsing, as well as citing a dark shape below the platform as an oil spill. The footage also includes Tagruato workers trying to escape the platform and another clip showing a group of workers as they escape on a boat as a shower of debris hits them.

In January the remaining news updates on the Tagruato website included that the terrorist environmental group Tidowave attacked Chuai station, Slusho's deep sea nectar would be distribution in the United States, Yoshida would visit New York City, and finally, news that Tidowave publicly attacked Yoshida. The Tidowave website also had several interesting updates during the news of the Chuai station explosion. Updates include, warning their fellow members to stay away from "the farm," a possible safe haven for T.I.D.O Wave members, as well as explaining that they are attempting to lay low while Tagruato hunters are after them. Finally, on the film's release date, the Tidowave website was locked by the Internal Affairs Department due to their possible involvement in the Yoshida and Chuai station attacks.⁴²

⁴¹ "Chuai Station English News," January 7, 2008, video clip, accessed July 23, 2012, YouTube, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KarNwKx5mGY>.

⁴² Dennis, "TidoWave- Locked," *Cloverfield Clues*, January 18, 2008, accessed July 23, 2012, <http://cloverfieldclues.blogspot.ca/2008/01/tidowave-locked.html>.

As well, in relation to this explosion several new photos were added to 1-18-08.com. The seventh photo was from one of the news videos related to the explosion, it shows three men on a boat as the deep sea drilling platform collapses behind them.⁴³ An eighth photo was added of what appears to be the aftermath of a ship explosion, where the bottom of a capsized boat was blurred out.⁴⁴ Soon after a ninth photo was added, a night vision image of the ship explosion and military attack.⁴⁵ A tenth photo was added of the aftermath of this attack, depicting a man in a smaller boat floating on top of bloody water.⁴⁶ Finally, an eleventh photo was added of large sea life washed up on shore with large bite marks on them, again presumably from the monster.⁴⁷

In addition to these updates in January, videos seven to eleven were uploaded to jamieandteddy.com. The videos feature an upset Jamie over her breakup with Teddy. In video seven Jamie leaves a drunken video message for Teddy, where she accuses of Teddy having a new girlfriend who she calls a variety of nasty names.⁴⁸ In video eight, even more displeased over her breakup with Teddy, Jamie decides to eat the evidence that Teddy sent her. The substance has an immediate effect on her, as she describes feeling great.⁴⁹ But strange effects soon follow, as can be seen in videos nine to eleven. In video nine, Jamie acts erratic, yelling into the camera, and performs a very strange interpretive dance for Teddy claiming she is seeing everything much clearer after eating

⁴³ Dennis, "1-18-08 – Photo #7 – Tagruato Ninjas!" *Cloverfield Clues*, January 7, 2008, accessed July 23, 2012, <http://cloverfieldclues.blogspot.ca/2008/01/1-18-08-photo-7-tagruato-ninjas.html>.

⁴⁴ Dennis, "1-18-08 – Photo #8 – Another Attack," *Cloverfield Clues*, January 14, 2008, accessed July 23, 2012, <http://cloverfieldclues.blogspot.ca/2008/01/1-18-08-photo-8-another-attack.html>.

⁴⁵ Dennis, "1-18-08 – Photo #9 – Night Vision," *Cloverfield Clues*, January 15, 2008, accessed July 23, 2012, <http://cloverfieldclues.blogspot.ca/2008/01/1-18-08-photo-9-night-vision.html>.

⁴⁶ Dennis, "1-18-08 – Photo #10 – Chum," *Cloverfield Clues*, January 16, 2008, accessed July 23, 2012, <http://cloverfieldclues.blogspot.ca/2008/01/1-18-08-photo-10-chum.html>.

⁴⁷ Dennis, "1-18-08 – Photo #11 – Beached," *Cloverfield Clues*, January 18, 2008, accessed July 23, 2012, <http://cloverfieldclues.blogspot.ca/2008/01/1-18-08-photo-10-beached.html>.

⁴⁸ "Video 7," accessed July 23, 2012, <http://jamieandteddy.com/number7.mov>.

⁴⁹ "Video 8," accessed July 23, 2012, <http://jamieandteddy.com/video8.mov>.

the evidence.⁵⁰ In video ten Jamie cuts off the arms, legs and head of a teddy bear.⁵¹ In the final video, Jamie, who is unexplainably happy, hyperactive, and talking quickly, tells Teddy she is finally over him, although she is clearly under the influence of Slusho's secret ingredient.⁵² Also, in this video Jamie declares that she is going that night to Rob's going-away party. After close analysis of the film, Jamie can be spotted at the party sleeping on a couch. Though she is only a minor character in the film, her importance in the viral campaign in defining the *Cloverfield* mythology was critical.

Unlike other viral marketing campaigns that end when the film is released, the *Cloverfield* campaign continued months after to prepare audiences for the DVD release. In April 2008, a twelfth photo was added to 1-18-08.com of Teddy Hanssen, known from jamieandteddy.com, apparently captured by Tagruato with his photo on a missing person's poster citing he was last seen 12/07/2007.⁵³ Tidowave had an ominous update on April 11th, 2008, concerning the disappearance of Teddy Hanssen. The blog posting was in reference to a comment made by user, MissingTeddyHanssen in a previous blog posting calling Tidowave out for not finding their brother and blaming Tidowave for his disappearance. Tidowave's response read "To MissingTeddyHanssen. There's no help coming. Stop your campaign. There's nothing here."⁵⁴

MissingTeddyHanssen replied to this and encouraged others who were being lied to to come to her blog. This led to the discovery of another website part of the viral campaign, missingteddyhanssen.blogspot.com. The website features the missing poster

⁵⁰ "Video 9," accessed July 23, 2012, <http://jamieandteddy.com/number9.mov>.

⁵¹ "Video 10," accessed July 23, 2012, <http://jamieandteddy.com/number10.mov>.

⁵² "Video 11," accessed July 23, 2012, <http://jamieandteddy.com/number11.mov>.

⁵³ Dennis, "1-18-08.com – Photo #12 – Teddy Hanssen Missing," *Cloverfield Clues*, April 1, 2008, accessed July 23, 2012, <http://cloverfieldclues.blogspot.ca/2008/04/1-18-08com-photo-12-missing.html>.

⁵⁴ April 11, 2008, blog entry, accessed July 23, 2012, <http://tidowave.com/blog/?p=20>.

for Teddy Hanssen and is run by Teddy's sister, Alyse Hanssen. In her blog description, Alyse says Teddy worked for Paraffun, a subsidiary of Tagruato, and later started a new job at Tidowave. Throughout her blog postings, Alyse searches for answers to the Chuai station disaster, and Teddy's old girlfriend Jamie. Most importantly, Alyse makes a posting about a missing usgx file website in which she needs the username and password. Participants of the viral campaign unlocked the website through a secret chapter at the end of the *Cloverfield* DVD. The site, USGX8810B467233PX.com is unlocked using the username, alysehanseen and the password 11112014349. On the site are a series of images that reveal Tagruato subs discovery of the monster and its parasites, presumably awakening the monster and causing the Chuai station attack, and finally a copy of a transcript between someone on the Chuai station platform and a submarine down below.

Finally, there was a DVD contest run by Paramount called, "When Cloverfield Hit," with the theme question, "where were you when the monster hit?"⁵⁵ The contest had contestants make their own *Cloverfield* inspired videos, the winner chosen from the top three user-voted videos by director, Matt Reeves and received a Paramount DVD prize pack and \$4500. With the release of the DVD on April 22, 2008, the final video contest and the discovery of all of the viral websites, the viral marketing campaign finally ended eleven months after its start in May 2008.

The *Cloverfield* campaign renewed a sense of discovery and engagement for spectators, as it allowed spectators to take on an investigative role in solving the mystery behind *Cloverfield*. It is necessary to explain how the campaign invited spectators to be

⁵⁵ Dennis, "When Cloverfield Hit DVD Contest," *Cloverfield Clues*, April 5, 2008, accessed July 23, 2012, <http://cloverfieldclues.blogspot.ca/2008/04/when-cloverfield-hit-dvd-contest.html>.

active in their *Cloverfield* film experience. This will lead to greater questions surrounding the active spectator and its role in the contemporary age of filmmaking.

To begin, the campaign's less-is-more approach was unusual. Conventionally, a pre-publicity campaign offers audiences a "narrative image, in which a poster, trailer, and other promotional devices form a unified, but incomplete picture that the film promises to resolve once you pay admission."⁵⁶ The narrative image circulates a certain promise about the film and not much more. Spectators are largely kept in secrecy about the film's narrative during the pre-publicity campaign and then this secrecy is dispelled once they see the film.⁵⁷ *Cloverfield* however does not provide this sort of closure. *Cloverfield* is best seen not as a typical stand-alone film but rather as one part of a larger transmedia event. In the film itself, the monster attack against New York City, its cause, and questions of the monster's origins all take a backseat to the protagonists' narrative. The film concentrates on Rob's mission to save Beth who is trapped in her apartment across the city, while the monster attack occurs around Rob and his friends. It is only through an investigation of the marketing campaign and film that spectators can garner enough clues for discovering the answers to their lingering questions left by the film's restricted narrative.⁵⁸

However, this restrictive narrative and use of viral marketing is not new. *Cloverfield* is very much comparable to *The Blair Witch Project* as both viral marketing campaigns use the film as another piece of the puzzle that spectators are meant to put together to form a cohesive understanding of the film. As J.P. Telotte explains in relation to *The Blair Witch Project*, "we see the film not as a film but as one more artifact, along

⁵⁶ North, 78.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ North, 79.

with the materials gathered together at the website which we might view in order to better understand a kind of repressed or hidden reality.”⁵⁹ This quote can also be applied to *Cloverfield* as the film is one piece in the *Cloverfield* mythology, and as discussed above to fully understand the *Cloverfield* mystery one must collect all of the clues found in the film and publicity campaign to solve its mystery.

Almost ten years apart, both films also fall within the horror genre, use relatively unknown actors, and are shot in the found footage documentary aesthetic. The use of unknown actors, lack of musical score and its documentary aesthetic contributes to a sense of realism, where “the fascination of the 1-18-08 ARG lies in its deft insinuation of a movie world into the “real” pages of the Internet.”⁶⁰ The absence of star and franchise power created an “illusion of authenticity,” where the science fiction narrative asked to be treated as reality.⁶¹ Moreover, this authenticity was due to the seamless infiltration of the campaign online. Whereas *The Dark Knight* campaign had a central website with whysoserious.com, and notices when fans could expect more information, the *Cloverfield* campaign relied on its participants investigating the Internet for potential clues. Participants visited social networking sites, browsed through images, read news concerning the fictional companies Slusho, Tagruato, and Tidowave, and speculated about the underlying *Cloverfield* conspiracy, all of which are daily Internet engagements.⁶² This contributed to a greater sense of authenticity because participating in the *Cloverfield* campaign was not unlike any other regular Internet browsing.

⁵⁹ Telotte, “The ‘Blair Witch Project’ Project: Film and the Internet,” 42.

⁶⁰ Walters, 67.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

As well, the *Cloverfield* campaign included many interactive opportunities for fans to take on an investigative role. The *Cloverfield* campaign was very much participatory and had participants' work together to find new information or decipher clues. The level of consumer engagement with *Cloverfield* was outstanding, as this campaign inspired a number of blogs and fan scrutiny over a film months prior to its release. From the moment the trailer was released, thousands of spectators took to the Internet to dissect the puzzling trailer. For example, on the film news website, FirstShowing, an article on the teaser trailer for *Cloverfield* garnered 1479 comments from online users.⁶³ Moreover, countless blogs served to shroud the campaign in mystery, encouraging fans to share information, discover websites, dissect information found, and piece together the *Cloverfield* mythology. Blogs that played a critical part in piecing together the *Cloverfield* mystery in 2007 and 2008 include: cloverfieldclues.blogspot.com, 1-18-08.blogspot.com, 1-18-08.livejournal.com, and finally, the Unfiction fan forums, a forum for those interested in alternate reality gaming.

With the growing popularity of transmedia storytelling, viral marketing campaigns, and alternate reality gaming, it is evident that audiences are made up of active consumers who will work across different media texts to learn about a film. Behind this "smart storytelling," there lie strong economic motives, and the campaigns while inventive are best seen as a form of "smart marketing."⁶⁴ It is necessary to remember that viral campaigns and ARGs, such as with *The Dark Knight* and *Cloverfield*, are smart advertising tools that invite consumers to promote and discuss a film prior to its release.

⁶³ Alex Billington, "J.J. Abrams Top Secret Trailer for Cloverfield in Front of Transformers!!" *Firstshowing.net*, June 29, 2007, accessed July 23, 2012, <http://www.Firstshowing.net/2007/jj-abrams-top-secret-trailer-for-cloverfield-in-front-of-transformers/>.

⁶⁴ Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, 106.

All of the various blogs and media outlets that reported on the *Cloverfield* campaign contributed to keeping the film visible in the eyes of consumers. While participants in viral campaigns and alternate reality gaming are engaging in mere fun and games, these participants are, in fact, simultaneously advertising mass-distributed films, games, music, and related media productions. Numerous media scholars have tackled this topic relative to the concepts of media convergence, transmedia storytelling, and the active consumer. Henry Jenkins, for instance, celebrates the active consumer and the participatory culture that recent media convergence has spawned.⁶⁵ However, not all have welcomed the age of media convergence. Rather, discussions of the active audience are complex because they illustrate the ways in which media industries easily make use of free audience labor to enhance the visibility of their media texts.⁶⁶ The only way the *Cloverfield* ARG existed is with the discussion created by the *Cloverfield* fandom, constructing and maintaining its “trans-media presence” through “unpaid audience fan labour.”⁶⁷

The *Cloverfield* campaign did allow for greater user agency, allowing participants to vote in contests, produce fan videos, and dissect and discuss the film and its related media texts via the Internet. However, I argue this agency is problematic as it illustrates how the film industry uses fans for their own benefits. For instance, the *Cloverfield* campaign asked participants to create advertisements. From creating Slusho advertisements to producing “where they were when the monster hit” videos, participants work to consume and create advertising for the film.⁶⁸ As complex as these campaigns

⁶⁵ Emanuele Wessels, “Media Convergence, Branded Security Citizenship, and the Trans-Media Phenomenon of *Cloverfield*,” (paper presented at the National Communications Association 95th Annual Convention, Chicago, Illinois, November 12-15, 2009), 11.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Wessels, 2.

⁶⁸ Wessels, 19.

may seem in terms of utilizing unpaid fan labor, these active users are not exploited laborers in any ordinary sense since they participate enthusiastically and receive compensation in the enjoyment and fun these campaigns produce.⁶⁹ As well, these campaigns do offer participants an enhanced movie going experience, one that can begin long before and continue after a movie is released, ultimately prolonging the traditional movie going experience. This discussion highlights the complex nature of the active spectator, as there are positives and negatives to the active spectator experience. Where the active spectator is active in their film engagement and participation in viral marketing campaigns, this activity is rather complex as it doubles as free fan labor and free advertising for producers. It is difficult to categorize the active spectator as its nature is complicated and sways between active and passive categorization. Discussions surrounding the active spectator will need to continue and further examination of the relationship between producers and consumers will aid in understanding this complicated relationship.

While the active audience is an integral part of the contemporary age of cinema, one can look to the past to see the ways in which film marketing has historically called on its spectators to take an active role in their film consumption. Throughout its history cinema has attached itself to new media to renew the cinematic experience, a marketing tactic traced in the historical overview of Chapter One. Once again, the film industry is embracing new media. Emanuelle Wessels explains, “rather than falling into obsolescence, so called ‘old media’ have embraced new media forms, such as online

⁶⁹ Emanuelle Wessels, “Where were you when the monster hit? Media convergence, branded security citizenship, and the trans-media phenomenon of *Cloverfield*,” *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* 17 (2011): 78.

blogs and interactive campaigns, to extend the scope and reach of their products.”⁷⁰ The use of viral marketing campaigns invites spectators to participate in the film distribution process, and extend the reach of a film. However, as discussed in Chapter One this is not unlike how film has historically been marketed, which has long involved linking a film to competing new media, like television, to stay relevant. As well, Chapter Two has explained how viral marketing campaigns make use of traditional film marketing appeals, like genre and star discourses. It is necessary to take this discussion of past marketing forms relation to contemporary film marketing one step further. The active consumer has populated discussions of media convergence and viral marketing, it is critical to investigate whether the active consumer is a phenomenon of the digital age, or rather a larger part of film history?

This question can be answered by looking back to the historical overview found in Chapter One. This will reveal a number of historical parallels as the active consumer is anticipated during earlier cinematic periods. As Alan L. Montgomery argues, “the introduction of many personalized selling and customer relationship methods on the Internet are really reintroductions of concepts that fell out of favor over the past 50 years.”⁷¹ This relationship between producer and consumer was made popular in the film industry in the 1910s, and has reemerged with viral marketing. As previously discussed, the star system ensured commercial value for the cinema, as it had success within other entertainment mediums in the early 1900s, such as vaudeville.⁷² Popular actors became a sight of discussion and wonder for spectators, which only grew with the induction of fan

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Alan L. Montgomery, “Applying Quantitative Marketing Techniques to the Internet,” *Interfaces* 31 (2001): 90.

⁷² Balio, “Part II: Struggles for Control, 1908-1930,” 114.

magazines in the 1910s. Fan magazines and the ways in which they created dialogue with fans, constructed an early interactive fan culture within the film industry.⁷³

In her article, “You Are Invited to Participate: Interactive Fandom in the Age of the Movie Magazine,” (2009) Marsha Orgeron argues that fan magazines constructed an “ideal reader,” who was trained to take on an active role by way of fan mail and magazine contests.⁷⁴ Fan magazines not only illustrate an interactive culture, but a greater history surrounding the active spectator. This highlights a history in which the active spectator is anticipated much earlier. This is because spectators were invited to actively participate with the film industry through fan magazines from the 1910s to the late 1950s.⁷⁵ Fan magazines allowed passive spectators to become active participants by encouraging interactivity.⁷⁶ Fan magazines encouraged spectators to interact by inviting them to send in their opinions, questions, and ideas via fan letters. Fan mail was motivated through contests with a monetary prize, as well as through advice columns that provided spectators with star worthy advice.⁷⁷ More so, the fan magazine contest fostered great fan participation, as it required spectators to act. Contests varied to a great extent, examples include *Photoplay*’s “Wanted” contest in 1929 that asked readers to rename “talkies” for a reward of \$500, and *Screen Book*’s 1933 Disney contest that invited readers to complete a four-panel Mickey Mouse cartoon.⁷⁸ The winner won a cash prize and Walt Disney redrew the entry in a later issue.⁷⁹

⁷³ Marsha Orgeron, “You Are Invited to Participate: Interactive Fandom in the Age of the Movie Magazine,” *Journal of Film and Video* 61 (2009): 3.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Orgeron, 5.

⁷⁶ Orgeron, 4.

⁷⁷ Orgeron, 7.

⁷⁸ Orgeron, 13, 15.

⁷⁹ Orgeron, 15.

Early fan magazines illustrate the presence of an active fan culture, one in which media producers and consumers interacted. I extend Orgeron's discussion of fan magazines to the ways in which consumers interact with viral marketing campaigns today. Early fan magazines affected the behaviour of spectators, just as viral marketing campaigns do today. The most notable similarity is the way both historical sites employ contests to actively engage spectators. Whether script writing or creating an online video, these contests come with the similar intentions that "celebrate the goal of winning but try to make the act of playing the game the goal."⁸⁰ These contests, like the Mickey Mouse drawing contest or *Cloverfield*'s Slusho commercial contest, ask for spectators to be creative and put forth a significant effort. The interactive fan cultures that flourished from fan magazines, and today's viral marketing campaigns share the marketing of fan empowerment and creativity.⁸¹ Fan magazines, like current viral campaigns, invited spectators to seek out information about films and actors, as well as opportunities to create and participate.

In addition to the interactive fan culture created by early fan magazines, movie fans of the 1910s were presented with opportunities to participate with the film industry through various contests and events led by studios and exhibitors. In relation to promotional materials released by studios and mass media texts, exhibitor's marketing practices were an additional avenue to market film. Exhibitors offered more intricate and diverse marketing practices. Such practices included, "marquee and lobby displays, promotional contests, [and] live prologue shows."⁸² These practices were influenced by

⁸⁰ Orgeron, 5.

⁸¹ Orgeron, 15.

⁸² Erb, *Tracking King Kong*, 51.

vaudeville strategies, and became marketing norms within Classical Hollywood cinema until the 1950s.⁸³

Film studios also provided opportunities for fans to participate. For instance, Universal held beauty contests, where fifty women from across the United States competed in Universal City for the chance to star in a Universal film.⁸⁴ Other contests include: Francis X. Busman day at the 1915 World's Fair arranged by Metro, and Paramount's best script writer contest in Victor O. Freeburg's scenario class at Columbia University, where the winner won a trip to Hollywood.⁸⁵ Contests, parades, and giveaways also occurred in smaller cities across the United States, giving many spectators a chance to participate and interact.⁸⁶ These contests, extravagant and ambitious for their time, are not unlike marketing appeals found in viral marketing campaigns today, such as the *Cloverfield* contests or the various offline *Dark Knight* events. Spectators of the 1910s, like contemporary participants of viral marketing campaigns, were invited to take part in pre-publicity film campaigns. These avenues to participate in early and contemporary cinema illustrates that evident parallels exist between past and present marketing discourses, and the active audience.

Moreover, marketing methods that encouraged spectators to engage more greatly in their experience only grew in preceding decades. A popular example of a compelling and inviting marketing campaign far before the Internet age and well after early cinema is Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960). Famously recognized as the beginning of the slasher film and one of the most popular horror films ever, the film is also known for its

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Staiger, 10.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

revolutionary marketing campaign. The *Psycho* marketing campaign altered the way in which audiences attend the movies. Setting viewing rules for its audience, the *Psycho* campaign changed the movie going experience into a regimented activity, where spectators arrived on time and waited in line.⁸⁷ Hitchcock implemented a number of rules in order for the film to be screened as Hitchcock intended it to be seen, from beginning to end without interruption. As well, Hitchcock's viewing policy was a ploy set-up to keep *Psycho*'s twist ending a secret.

The pre-publicity campaign included newspapers advertisements, trailers, and a pre-recorded message that played over theater announcement systems while spectators waited in line, all of which built mystery and suspense. The newspaper advertisements warned audiences of Hitchcock's special viewing policy, warning "no one...BUT NO ONE...will be admitted into the theater after the start of each performance of *Psycho*."⁸⁸ Also, there were three promotional trailers for *Psycho*, which further emphasized and encouraged the viewing policy Hitchcock perpetuated, citing either to arrive on time or to not discuss the ending as the film is best viewed without knowing the ending.⁸⁹ The final element in encouraging this viewing policy was a pre-recorded apology from Hitchcock played when spectators were in line, explaining their new movie going experience. In this message Hitchcock explains,

You see, 'Psycho' is most enjoyable when viewed beginning at the beginning and proceeding to the end. I realize this is a revolutionary concept, but we have discovered that it is unlike most motion pictures and does not improve when run backwards.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ Linda Williams, "Learning to Scream," *Sight and Sound* 4 (1994): 15.

⁸⁸ Ransom Riggs, "Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho*," *Mental Floss*, 5 (2006): 27.

⁸⁹ Williams, 16.

⁹⁰ Riggs, 27.

The campaign encouraged a great deal of suspense as spectators were reminded before and after their viewing experience that *Psycho* is best seen in its entirety without spoilers. Hitchcock's viewing policy illustrates the ways in which a marketing campaign can call on its spectators to play a larger role in their film experience.

The *Cloverfield* campaign invited spectators to take on an active role, just as it guided their experience through an intricate set-up of clues and contests online. This distinction is significant because while spectators do actively participate with these campaigns, it is necessary to recognize that their experiences are structured, organized, and planned by a studio. *Psycho* guided spectators into a new movie going experience, just as viral marketing campaigns do today. Where *Cloverfield*'s viral campaign expands and prolongs the movie going experience across different media platforms, the *Psycho* marketing campaign encouraged audiences to attend the film in a particular way prior to viewing. It is important to recognize the power marketing campaigns have in the overall film experience, as they have been altering the movie going experience for decades. More importantly than instilling a discipline in the audience, the *Psycho* marketing campaign made spectators into active agents in their movie going experience. The marketing campaign asked spectators to change the way they went to the movies, encouraging them before, during, and after they see the film. Through this discussion of early fan magazines and promotional contests, as well as *Psycho*'s marketing campaign, it is apparent that historically, film spectators have been guided in their film going experience and invited to participate in their film experience. Not only being active agents in the digital age of cinema, but in preceding cinematic moments. Even in the 1910s, spectators took an active role in engaging with the film industry by way of contests and events, where they were

rewarded with grand prizes, not unlike the winners of the *Cloverfield* contests. The marketing strategy of encouraging greater spectator engagement strongly demonstrates that “advertising ideas do not die; they float – waiting to be retired,” where the active spectator has yet to retire.⁹¹

The publicity campaign for *Cloverfield* illustrates questions of the active consumer in this contemporary age of filmmaking, such as questions of labor and whether the active consumer holds a larger role within film history. These questions concerning the active consumer are critical because film marketing is very much built on its past, and without acknowledging this past, understanding current practices such as viral marketing becomes far more difficult. As well, the notion that the active consumer is a wholly new phenomenon is problematic since film marketing has historically given great agency to the film spectator. Historically, film spectators have not only been passive agents in their film experience, but rather active agents who participate in their film going experience. However, as questioned above, the nature of activity is complicated as media producers influence the active consumer’s experience, blurring the lines between active and passive consumers. Evidently, contemporary film marketing practices rely on updated versions of marketing strategies that have been made familiar throughout film history, where the marketing of the past has not entirely disappeared, but reappropriated to suit the needs of present spectators.

⁹¹ Jeremy Groskopf, “Profit Margins: Silent Era Precursors of Online Advertising Tactics,” *Film History: An International Journal* 24 (2012): 84.

CONCLUSION

The year 2008 opened a new age in film marketing, with fans having played an unusually large role in marketing two of the most anticipated films of the year. The investigation in the preceding chapters of *The Dark Knight* and *Cloverfield* campaigns brings out the endless opportunities and creativity viral marketing offers to promoters of a film. *The Dark Knight* and *Cloverfield* case studies demonstrate the originality, inventiveness and sheer size a viral marketing campaign can present.

While the campaign outlines are lengthy, they provide a fuller understanding of the numerous ways viral marketing engages consumers. From the Harvey Dent campaign to the Chuai station explosion, both campaigns offered spectators an expanded film experience, one where they could learn more about a film's narrative and prepare for viewing the film. Both viral marketing campaigns steadily engaged consumers through a pre-publicity campaign. By engaging consumers consistently with new information, games, trailers or images, these campaigns remained relevant with a steady stream of buzz and dialogue. These campaigns stayed relevant because they offered consumers novel interactive narratives they can engage with online. These case studies illustrate the significant role viral marketing plays in the current film marketing landscape. As Jeff Ulin explains,

You cannot successfully and fully market any comic book or similar genre movie in this day and age without a viral campaign on the Net starting ten months to a year prior to a release if your intention is to build a franchise and market a brand.¹

Both campaigns solidified their respective film's brand, while *The Dark Knight* campaign provided further success for its franchise; the *Cloverfield* campaign built the potential for

¹ Jeff Ulin, *The Business of Media Distribution: Monetizing Film, TV, and Video Content* (Burlington, MA: Focal Press/Elsevier, 2010), 387.

a franchise by provoking discussion among fans of a sequel to the film. Often coupled with a traditional marketing campaign, viral marketing offers a film an alternative route to engage audiences. It is difficult to imagine these films without their viral campaigns, as the amount of discussion and anticipation fueled by their campaigns was immense. While both campaigns share similar features, it is what they did differently that is significant to this project.

Unlike *The Dark Knight* publicity campaign, *Cloverfield* had many different challenges to face in creating discussion about an original film, and used its viral campaign to spread its narrative across different media platforms. Where *The Dark Knight* ARG was narrative-based in terms of telling the story between *Batman Begins* and *The Dark Knight*, the *Cloverfield* ARG spread its narrative partly across the Internet and the film. As a sequel and part of a successful franchise with well-known actors, *The Dark Knight* already had a built-in audience and buzz surrounding the sequel, whereas *Cloverfield* used relatively unknown actors, a lesser-known director, and was successful in hiding its narrative from audiences. As a film built on a nontraditional film marketing tactics, the *Cloverfield* campaign built dread, anticipation, and speculation with a calculated teaser trailer and an ARG built on a renewed sense of discovery.

Given the fluidity of viral marketing, this study of viral marketing has emphasized the necessity of incorporating historical analysis into any study of contemporary film marketing and advertising. This is because today's viral marketing, whatever its genuine novelties, relies on techniques that have a history that traces back to the beginnings of cinema. Where there are genuine innovations within social media and marketing, how new is social media? The historical discussion in Chapter One seeks to

provide an overview of marketing discourse in order to connect current marketing practices to the marketing methods of the past. Chapter Two makes these connections through an analysis of *The Dark Knight* campaign. With an emphasis on star and genre discourses, the success of *The Dark Knight* campaign can be attributed to traditional marketing discourses that underline the campaign. Finally, Chapter Three proposes that spectators have been invited to actively engage with film-industry promotions not only in recent years but also throughout the history of cinema. Chapter Three argues that the active spectator is not just a contemporary result of media convergence, but a phenomenon with a much longer history in the cinema. As well, this discussion of the active spectator also seeks to confront the nature of the relationship between spectators and media producers. Rather than acting as free agents in their participation in viral marketing campaigns, the media consumers' participation in the campaign is carefully mediated and guided by the media industry. This discussion exposes the complicated nature of the active spectator.

A number of conclusions are drawn from this project. First, there is a significant relationship between contemporary marketing and traditional marketing tactics. Established cinematic values such as spectacle, star, and genre are critical also to modern online film campaigns, such as the one associated with *The Dark Knight*. Rather than only providing spectators with wholly 'new' modes of engagement, viral campaigns are built on traditional marketing modes, signaling an important historical question involved with studying these contemporary campaigns.

A second conclusion conflicts with dominant readings of the active spectator. The relationship between media producers and consumers is not as fluid as once thought, and

rather a very complicated relationship. This relationship is controlled and mediated by media producers. Fans are necessary components to the ultimate success of viral campaigns, as viral marketing only works if, in fact, the content goes viral and this only happens with the participation of spectators. However, it is ultimately the studio that controls the release of information and online promotional materials. *The Dark Knight* and *Cloverfield* campaigns set up sophisticated websites, designed to guide spectators toward specific bits of information. While spectators do have the sense they are discovering these sites on their own, the producers of this viral content plant clues that enable their movement from one site to the next. *The Dark Knight* campaign did this to a higher degree by warning participants when events would take place, and guiding them through games. Where *Cloverfield* participants had the opportunity to participate in contests and create videos, this chance for fan creativity was based on strict rules set by Paramount. Ultimately, while these campaigns do offer audiences opportunities to actively engage on a number of media platforms to optimize their film experience, a great deal of this activity is controlled and mediated by media producers.

However, this relationship complicates the very definition of the active spectator. I conclude that the contemporary spectator, one that actively takes control of their media engagement, participates in viral campaigns, and also deploys their free fan labour, is too complicated for strict categories such as active or passive. The active spectator is a complex phenomenon, one that is engaged in a number of active and passive roles in their media engagement. I cannot accept that the contemporary spectator is completely active. I conclude that the active spectator is rather a complex role made up of active and passive tasks, where these very active and passive categories need further definition and

examination. The lines between the active and passive consumer are blurred in relation to viral marketing campaigns, and the nature of the active spectator will need further discussion to make sense of its complexity.

Furthermore, in relation to the active spectator and the greater historical discussion inherent to this project, a third conclusion is that spectators have historically been invited to engage in their film experience through marketing discourses. By drawing attention to previous marketing campaigns found in earlier historical film periods and early fan magazines, it is apparent that spectators in earlier times have been invited to become an active agent in their film consumption. This signals an earlier interactive fan culture present within cinema, and draws attention to the history of spectatorship as well as the history of the relationship between media producers and consumers. Spectators are not just being invited in the age of media convergence to take control of their film experience, but have been doing so since the 1910s. This provides a greater understanding of where contemporary film marketing tactics historically stem from, and how they have evolved into their current forms.² To understand this history of spectatorship further, greater attention and research will need to be made on the past and the ways film has historically invited consumers to engage with film.

Since the 1970s questions of the film marketing have only grown in film studies, from the discussion of the blockbuster and the high stake revenues it may hold for production companies to the ways in which the digital revolution has changed the landscape of film marketing practices. As well, film marketing connects to other major fields in film, such as auteurism, film style, genre and spectatorship as films have been marketed in a variety of ways to attract audiences to the cinema. As film marketing has

² Groskopf, "Profit Margins," 84.

entered into contemporary debates it will need to be further explored as it continues to affect and change the overall film experience. New technology offers the film industry new markets to explore, and has increasingly altered the experience of film into an interactive mode of engagement, which is proliferated through cinematic viral marketing campaigns.

The past decade has only shown the beginnings of a new marketing tactic, which film producers and distributors are still experimenting with. However, just like the moviemaking business, viral marketing comes with risk. As *The Dark Knight* and *Cloverfield* demonstrate, viral marketing can garner a great deal of success for a film, but what can make or break a viral marketing campaign? I offered some explanations with film genre, or innovative content. However, greater investigation into the successes and failures of this risk fuelled marketing tactic will serve to foster a fuller understanding of viral marketing. There are still lingering questions surrounding this experimental marketing tactic. There is limited academic research on solely viral marketing campaigns and will need to be expanded. Further analysis around viral marketing and the complex nature of the active spectator is necessary as this will help future film scholars understand the implications surrounding viral marketing, and its relation to historical marketing discourses, spectatorship, and the film experience.

As I have argued throughout this thesis, there is an inherent relationship between contemporary marketing discourse and marketing discourses that have been familiar throughout the history of cinema. Our understanding of current marketing tactics, such as viral marketing, must include historical analysis to fully account for the functionality of these contemporary campaigns. The traditional film experience involves a short duration

of several hours at the most; viral marketing campaigns expand this experience over weeks and months with creative and imaginative content. I hope I have contributed to our understanding of viral marketing and that this study will open further discussions surrounding viral marketing, the active spectator, and film.

APPENDIX: FILMS CITED

<i>Artificial Intelligence.</i>	2001. Steven Spielberg.
<i>Batman.</i>	1989. Tim Burton.
<i>Batman and Robin.</i>	1997. Joel Schumacher.
<i>Batman Begins.</i>	2005. Christopher Nolan.
<i>Batman Forever.</i>	1995. Joel Schumacher.
<i>Batman Returns.</i>	1992. Tim Burton.
<i>Beowulf.</i>	2007. Robert Zemeckis.
<i>Birth of a Nation.</i>	1914. D.W. Griffith.
<i>Blair Witch Project, The.</i>	1999. Daniel Myrick, Eduardo Sanchez.
<i>Captain America: The First Avenger.</i>	2011. Joe Johnston.
<i>Cloverfield.</i>	2008. Matt Reeves.
<i>Dark Knight, The.</i>	2008. Christopher Nolan.
<i>Dark Knight Rises, The.</i>	2012. Christopher Nolan.
<i>I am Legend.</i>	2007. Francis Lawrence.
<i>I Love You, Beth Cooper.</i>	2009. Chris Columbus.
<i>Iron Man.</i>	2008. Jon Favreau.
<i>Jaws.</i>	1975. Steven Spielberg.
<i>John Carter.</i>	2012. Andrew Stanton.
<i>Judith of Bethulia.</i>	1913. D.W. Griffith.
<i>King Kong.</i>	1933. Merian Cooper, Ernest Shoedsack.
<i>Mission: Impossible III.</i>	2006. J.J. Abrams.
<i>Paranormal Activity.</i>	2007. Oren Peli
<i>Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest.</i>	2006. Gore Verbinski.
<i>Prometheus.</i>	2012. Ridley Scott.
<i>Psycho.</i>	1960. Alfred Hitchcock.
<i>Resident Evil: Extinction.</i>	2007. Russell Mulcahy.
<i>Star Trek.</i>	2009. J.J. Abrams.
<i>Star Wars.</i>	1977. George Lucas.
<i>Toy Story 3.</i>	2010. Lee Unkrich.
<i>Thor.</i>	2011. Kenneth Branagh.
<i>Transformers.</i>	2007. Michael Bay.

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