

**Film Posters and Trailers**  
Are your expectations met?

Student Name: Natalia-Maria Bogdanou  
Student Number: 579333

Supervisor: Mathias Boenne

Master Media Studies – Media & Creative Industries  
Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication  
Erasmus University Rotterdam

Master Thesis

## ABSTRACT

Movies play such a huge part of our lives and we are exposed to them either through streaming platforms or at the movie theatres, particularly pre-Covid19. At the same time, they are integral part of the creative industries, with Hollywood dominating the field. With so many film choices circulating, what persuades us to watch movies and how come sometimes our expectations are satisfied with what we see while others not? Key part of our cinematic experience, are the marketing material which we are exposed to prior to watching a film, especially film trailers but more traditional media as well like posters. Not only do they influence the ways in which we perceive the main movie, but they play a vital role in persuading us to go and watch a particular film. Therefore, the particular research is concerned with answering the following: *How do films create expectations through promotional material?. And are those expectations met?.* In order to do that, the study employed the promotional material, particularly posters and trailers, of the top box office movies in Greece the year 2020. These were *1917* (Mendes, 2020), *Tenet* (Nolan, 2020), *Little Women* (Gerwig, 2020), *The Gentlemen* (Richie, 2020) and *The Invisible Man* (Whannell, 2020). The study proceeded by applying semiotic analysis to the marketing material for these movies in order to expose the persuading strategies they utilized, the derived expectations from each medium but also the synergy and cohesion between. From the analysis it was evident that they highly promote their selling points whether genre, stardom or story through which they appeal to the familiarity and sensations viewers are likely to have with them, but an inconsistency was traced between the two materials. In the second part of the research, 10 semi-structured interviews were conducted via Zoom with Greek audiences that were divided in two age groups, one being 18-30 and the other 30-50s. The interviews were transcribed and thematic analysis was used to trace the emerging patterns though which four main themes were found: 1) Promotional Material and Persuading Effectiveness, 2) Expectations through Paratextual Mediums, 3) Cohesive Expectations and 4) Opposing Expectations. From the study it was concluded that trailers were the most persuasive medium and that movie appeals as well as formulation of expectations are highly related to personal experiences. From the examined movies, only one unanimously met the expectations, *1917* (Mendes, 2020) while the others sparked conflicting views.

KEYWORDS: *film marketing, promotional material, posters, trailers, persuasive appeals, familiarity, sensations, expectations*

## Table of Contents

<i>ABSTRACT</i> .....	2
<i>1. Introduction</i> .....	4
<i>2. Theoretical Framework</i> .....	6
2.1. Film Marketing .....	6
2.1.1 A typical advertising campaign .....	6
2.1.2. The concept of Transmedia Marketing .....	7
2.2. Promotional tools as paratexts .....	7
2.3. Movie Trailers and Posters .....	9
2.3.1. Movie Trailers.....	9
2.3.2. Movie Posters.....	10
2.4 Sensations, Familiarity and Persuasive Communication.....	11
2.4.1. The concepts of sensations and familiarity .....	11
2.4.2. Persuasive Appeals .....	12
2.5. Previous studies and gap in literature .....	15
<i>3. Methodology</i> .....	16
3.1. Sampling Method.....	18
3.2. Procedure and Participants .....	19
<i>4. Semiotic Analysis of Film Posters and Their Trailers</i> .....	21
4.1. 1917.....	21
4.2. Tenet.....	26
4.3 Little Women .....	31
4.4 The Gentlemen.....	35
4.5 The Invisible Man .....	39
<i>5. Interview Results</i> .....	43
5.1. Promotional Material and Persuading Effectiveness.....	44
5.2. Expectations Though Paratextual Mediums .....	46
5.3. Cohesive Expectations .....	48
5.4. Opposing Expectations.....	50
<i>6. Conclusion &amp; Discussion</i> .....	52
6.1. Theoretical/societal and international implications.....	54
6.2. Limitations and Future Research .....	55
<i>References</i> .....	57
<i>Appendix A</i> .....	62

## **1.Introduction**

The motion picture industry is a global, multi-billion one with great cultural and commercial importance. As cultural products, movies go through intense campaigns through which they must successfully create awareness, be positively dispositioned and persuade audiences to take part in the cinematic experience (Davis et al. 2014). This is due to the fact that cinemagoing is a rather risky activity for viewers who are buying a product based solely upon the promised entertaining experience and satisfaction can be gained only after consumption. As a result, film marketing is an essential tool for the industry to establish product recognition as well as differentiation in order to reduce such risks by emphasizing on the marketable aspects of a movie also known as a movie's "marketability" (Drake, 2008). As emphasized by Jerrick (2013), film success is highly influenced and depended on promotional campaigns.

Pre-release movie campaigns usually include previews, trailers, posters, billboards, print advertisements as well as the intentional publicity via entertainment media through the form of leaks, gossip, factual news items and rumors (Davis et al. 2014). Such campaigns influence audiences in shaping their opinions about upcoming movies and it is therefore critical for a film to properly market itself and set correct consumers' expectations (Kerrigan, 2017). Zeitham et al. (1993) defines expectations as beliefs that consumers develop about either a product or a service and they are formed when individuals are exposed to promotional material such as WOM (word of mouth), or other types of advertisements. The formation of such beliefs operate as reference points or principles, where performance is evaluated in relation to them when the product or service is consumed (Finsterwalder et al., 2012). Within the field of film, more often than not, expectations are generated prior to the movie's release through the meanings and messages that promotional materials carry, which can accurately capture the essence of films, but they can also be dishonest, misleading potential moviegoers and creating false expectations to audiences, impacting their experience when they eventually watch the movie (Buckerman, 2005). Deceiving audiences, is a common tactic employed by Hollywood as the main goal is to sell their final product, in any way possible. For example, in 2011 a woman in Michigan USA, sued the film *Drive* claiming that the trailer for the film was misleading as it reminded as *Fast & Furious* movie, while the film didn't even have enough driving (Ortiz, 2011). This highlights the power of promotional messages creating expectations and influencing the audiences' opinions prior to seeing the film as well as the importance of studying such meanings.

Thus, as viewers are exposed to a variety of film promotional material, what techniques are movies employing to persuade potential film-goers to attend their movies? And when they are persuaded do films fulfill their expectations? This thesis aims to extend the limited existing literature in the emergent field of film and media promotional tools by investigating how movie trailers and posters as unique texts convince audiences to watch particular films the consequent the expectations they create and if those are indeed met. Marketing film media can be analyzed as texts that communicate information about a movie through a combination of visuals, texts and even sound (Long & Wall, 2012). As Roland Barthes notes, they become a “text” when they are consumed by viewers who actively interact with it (Barthes, 1977 as cited in Gray 2010). In order to examine the persuading techniques and this thesis has two strands of research; first it aims to expose the persuading communicating strategies that film marketing texts employ and the expectations created through them, and second, to examine how such persuading methods are perceived by audiences and if their expectations were met.

Subsequently, one research question that arises is: *How do films create expectations through promotional material? And are those expectations met?* Since not all promotional material for movies can be taken under consideration, this thesis will focus on two prominent and significant advertising tools: film posters and trailers. Both mediums are central communication channels and play a key role in the movie's marketing campaign. Posters usually placed both outside and inside of cinemas function as hooks to check out their movie trailers, while preview trailers run inside the theatre before the movie begins (Alexander, 2011). Thus, they serve as principal advertising outlets through which films are advertised. Moreover, they both carry informational and visual significance in regards to the main film, that is decoded by viewers who base their expectations on them. The scientific relevance of investigating film promotional material, specifically posters and trailers, is that it can bring useful insight into the communication practices that marketing texts employ as well as what film studios believe viewers will be persuaded by. In this way, providing knowledge into the broader field film studies. At the same time, seeing that audiences are not passive viewers but decode and process the information that they are promoted, the societal relevance of this study is getting valuable insights into how promotional material, of both still and mixed media, influence audiences in choosing a particular film and thus their effectiveness towards them in shaping their decision-making processes, consumption habits and expectations. Furthermore, by examining how viewers react to promotional material and their subsequent expectations from their exposure, the study will provide information regarding whether the meanings they decode are accurate and in line with the main film or if they being misled.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

### **2.1. Film Marketing**

Before examining communication strategies used by studios it is important to contextualize this research by specifying what film marketing is and how it works. Drawing on Durie et al., (2000) Kerrigan (2017), argues that film marketing is any type of activity that assists a movie in reaching its target audiences, anytime throughout the product's lifecycle. This entails marketing activities being extended through production, distribution and exhibition. The advertising and marketing strategies that are employed are developed in pre-production and continually modified throughout. Nevertheless, critical elements such as the casting of the actors, the narrative of film or whether it will showcase special effects and action sequences, determine the marketing strategy which is the starting point for the development of the marketing campaign (Drake, 2008). The particular thesis will focus on the marketing strategies and promotional tools utilized pre-release.

#### **2.1.1 A typical advertising campaign**

Advertising a new entertainment product like a movie has two main objectives. First, it aims to make potential consumers aware of the new product by building brand awareness and second, to demonstrate the product's quality by establishing a compelling brand image. Both awareness and indication of quality are crucial for the purchasing of an entertainment product. According to Kafoury (2013), the anatomy of a typical advertising campaign consists of three main parts. Firstly, a teaser campaign is launched a year or more before a movie is released and it includes early footage and sneak peaks of promotional content in order to provide a sense of what is coming and generate awareness. Secondly, approximately five weeks before the launch of the movie, official trailers and television spots are released with original footage that is reassembled from the film. Throughout these, posters are prominent in showcasing the movie's genre, main cast and endorsements while official websites offer additional material such as biographies. Finally, social media campaigns play a key role in bridging the previous parts together and notifying audiences on the latest promotional material and links to media coverage. Many studios employ film-centric accounts on social media platforms such as Instagram and YouTube to post trailers or clips of the film (Kafoury, 2013). Studios benefit from social media platforms as they function as cost-effective distribution systems that have the potential to reach a wide audience (Zeiser, 2015). The marketing phase that this thesis will examine is the second one where a film has already created some buzz and marketing material

are available to the audiences. Thus, consumers are potentially aware about the brand and need to be persuaded about the product's quality, achieved through such material.

### **2.1.2. The concept of Transmedia Marketing**

The dispersal of such promotional material across a variety of platforms, whether analogue or digital, emerges the concept of transmedia marketing. According to Zeiser (2015) transmedia marketing combines old and new concepts. Specifically, although marketing across a variety of platforms to reach audiences has regularly been applied, merging story and content creation with promotional messages is rather new. Drawing on Jenkins (2003), Kerrigan (2017) defines transmedia marketing as a process through which integral story aspects are systematically dispersed across a variety of delivery media platforms with the aim of creating a unified entertainment experience, providing audiences with engaging storytelling and interactive experiences where each medium contributes in unfolding the story (Kerrigan, 2017). The film's text significance is retained but deepened and extended through transmedia stories (Hackley & Hackley, 2019).

From this perspective movie trailers and posters can be seen as promotional tools where each medium has value as self-contained experience, making a unique contribution to the story. Each of them expresses the characters, themes, and aesthetic similarities of the fictional world (Scolari, 2009 as cited in Kafoury, 2013).

### **2.2. Promotional tools as paratexts**

As marketing campaigns create hype among potential moviegoers, they consist of various media messages through attention-grabbing discursive signifiers that generate brand awareness and highlight the film's presence among the public (Davis, et al., 2014). The communication strategies that a film employs plays a vital role in the cinematic experience that it promises to deliver (McDonald, 2013). This is achieved through the production of a series of micro-messages in which symbols, conventions and stereotypes are present. Through them, consumers generate their expectations about what type of film they are going to see. As Daragh O'Reilly and Finola Kerrigan (2011) argue, since films are experiential products, potential consumers have to base their decisions on the limited information transmitted by the film marketers and their existing cultural codes. Therefore, promotional material are communicative media texts that inform audiences about what they are going to experience through a series of hints.

Related to O'Reilly's and Kerrigan's (2011) approach on marketing materials is Gray's (2008) cultural studies proposition of pre-coding texts through hype and synergy before they even exist. According to Gray (2008) hype is an essential aspect within the mediascape as it creates frames through which individuals make sense of a text before consuming it. Specifically, it successfully provides potential consumers with reasons to consume a product or a text, such as watching a particular film, and creates expectations among audiences who interpret what a text is all about, before arriving to the product. Another critical element to the entertainment industry, similar to hype is synergy (Gray, 2008). Synergy is in line with the concept of transmedia marketing as it refers to the ability of studios to create multi-platformed textual experiences for their products, reaching audience members from a variety of channels. Both hype and synergy are factors that create meanings, expectations and interpretations. As a result, each promotional material, such as movie trailers and posters, carries its own hype, generating a synergy together to target their viewers, extending their reach (Gray, 2008).

Additionally, Gray (2008) focuses on the textual interpretive role of hype and synergy by drawing on the concept of paratexts, which are defined as elements which surround a text.

Drawing on Gennete (1997), Gray (2008) argues that paratexts are thresholds of interpretation where audiences can experience a text solely through them. They occur naturally and organically in our mediated environment and function similarly to advertisements which attach a product's brand identity to other established units of meanings or texts such as individuals or events. Most importantly, paratexts set up meanings, guide interpretations and set expectations about the inside content of a text by conveying variety of impressions regarding the aesthetic style, preferred reception and intended audience according to which others built up their anticipations and hopes (Gray 2010). Additionally, paratexts are divided into peritexts and epitexts. Peritexts are appended to a text such as the cover of a book, and name of the author while epitexts are found apart from the text which consider discussions about the text such as reviews and public responses (Gennete, 1997 as cited in Gray, 2008). In the context of film promotion, peritexts can be characterized as the information regarding the actors that will star in a movie or the director and epitexts can be any critical acclaims that movie has received. Both peritexts and epitexts highly shape expectations about the inside content of a text, which is the main entity or entire text.

Within the entertainment industry, paratexts establish a film's public presence through frames and strategies which are interpreted before the final product consumption (Davis et al., 2014). They are pre-consumed by audiences on their way of consuming the main film, and they

carry certain interpretations which are often constructed by producers themselves. As a result, it can be argued that promotional paratexts shape the viewer's reading strategies as they regulate the early frames through which moviegoers examine, evaluate and react to the main text, the film. As Jonathan Gray (2010) notes when spectators come across paratexts they engage in speculative consumption where audiences create an idea of what kind of pleasures a text will offer as well as the influence it will have on them. When deciding whether to watch a particular film where people pay for the chance of being entertained, audiences are provided with important images and information that hint what the film might be. A variety of factors influence individuals in eventually watching a film such as the actors, word of mouth, the cinema it is playing at or whether it is based on previously released content (adaptation, sequel etc.), and those in combination with the way that the film will position itself through its marketing campaign play a significant role in the decision-making process and persuasion of individuals in eventually consuming the film (Gray, 2010).

Movie trailers and posters, the principal promotional tools examined throughout, can be characterized as important paratextual devices through which audiences generate expectations as well as opinions about what type of movies they will watch. Both marketing materials carry significant meanings and micro-messages that prepare viewers on the type of film they will watch while from their end audiences expect that what is present in promotional paratexts will also be present in the main text (Oja, 2019). Thus, the theoretical lenses of paratextuality is utilized to examine the kind of hype that movie trailers and posters generate while synergy to analyze the relationship between them. Moreover, peritexts and epitetxs will also be considered during the analysis.

But before diving into the investigation of the promotional material, it is important to define the marketing tools analyzed throughout this thesis and continue by exploring the kind of persuasive communication that movie trailers and posters apply as well as how this is connected to expectations they generate among audiences. It is crucial to understand what draws towards consumption movies and how marketing materials employ that to convince audiences to buy a ticket.

## **2.3. Movie Trailers and Posters**

### **2.3.1. Movie Trailers**

Movie trailers are the most influential element of a film's marketing campaign, as captured by Terry Press "[The trailer] is the single most important piece of advertising...

There's nothing else that comes close.” (Terry Press, 2014 as cited in HennigThurau & Houston, 2019). Similarly, Lisa Kernan defines trailers as “a unique form of narrative film exhibition, wherein promotional discourse and narrative pleasure are conjoined.” (Kernan, 2004, p.1). The quotes highlight both the importance of trailers for the entertainment industry as well as their unique complicated format. With the help of the Internet and digital video platforms they have become ubiquitous as they have migrated from movie theatre to the screens of laptops and phones, and from mass spectatorship to individual active participation (Johnston, 2008). Nowadays, they come into a variety of formulas such as teasers, international teasers, and many more, but the focus here will be on the official trailers (Kehe, 2013).

The purpose of trailers is to encapsulate what the promoted film is all about by giving audiences a sense of the story through key scenes but without revealing everything at once (Zeiser, 2015). According to Hennig-Thurau and Houston (2019), trailers provide three types of information that signify quality and generate expectations. First, they reveal the kind of branded attractions that are involved within the film such as the actors that are starring. Second, quality is signified through indirect cues such as awards and critical acclaims. Third, potential consumers can sample the product as they are provided with excerpts of the actual film. This unique sampling element emphasizes their hybrid format that combines communication features with features of the product itself (Hennig-Thurau & Houston, 2019). In a similar way, Grainge and Johnson (2015) characterize trailers as unfinished open texts that allow viewers to glimpse into the broader filmic world while triggering a shared discussion and conjecture around the film. As a result, the composition of a common film trailer that exposes viewers to the narrative elements such as character relations and plot development generates suspense among audiences who anticipate what will happen next (Kernan, 2004). According to Finsterwalder et al. (2012), trailers consist of three main sections. First, the trailer introduces the characters and the setting in which the movie takes place. Second, a form of tension is introduced or an obstacle in storyline and finally, the trailer escalates while hinting at a potential resolution. Through this structure, movie trailers function as entryway paratexts since they construct a primary framework for viewing the film. They play a key role in setting viewers' expectations and are significant contributors to the text's meaning as they are pivotal to the audience's reaction to that text (Gray, 2010).

### **2.3.2. Movie Posters**

Trailers might be the most dominant form of advertising but not the only content format for entertainment promotion. Movie posters are a powerful communicative medium that works

as the movie trailer for the written text (Zeiser, 2015). More often than not they are found both inside and outside of movie theatres for spectators to see what other films are available, but they also have an online presence on a movie's website or on streaming platforms such as Netflix.

Posters are important paratextual promotional material due to the fact that they need to create hype both among audiences in a very limited time, and that the cinematic experience that they are promising is going to be worth it since what they are seeing is likely going to be in the film as well. Therefore, their aim is to impress and entice potential moviegoers while conveying all the necessary information about the movie in just a glimpse (Chen & Gao, 2014). Its content creators try to express how they view the film through one-representation while marketing it to a wide audience. This is achieved through the use of images and text that are designed to provide the essential information of the movie which aim to effectively be comprehended with just a glance while capturing their interest (Aley & Hahn, 2020). At the same time, posters create expectations among viewers regarding what the movie might contain. Drawing on framing theory, Aley and Hahn (2020) argue that movie posters can be perceived as frames that regulate how the movie is understood by viewers. For example, the film poster for *Die Hard* shows Bruce Willis holding a gun while a flaming building is behind him. This does only provide insight into a scene from the film that audiences expect to see but it communicates the type of action that they should anticipate (Aley & Hahn, 2020).

## **2.4 Sensations, Familiarity and Persuasive Communication**

### **2.4.1. The concepts of sensations and familiarity**

As it was previously highlighted, the goal of communicating entertainment products such as movies, is to make potential consumers aware of the product's existence while providing them with valuable information that will reassure them about the product's quality, in order to convince them to watch a film. But what attracts audiences to film entertainment and how is that communicated?

To begin with, there are many reasons why viewers are drawn to films, key to which, is the framework of sensations and familiarity. They are consumers' instant perceptions of the main appeals provided by an entertainment stimulus. Particularly, sensations and familiarity are crucial because they trigger emotional and cognitive processes which eventually lead to a pleasure state, the main reason consumers spend money and time on entertainment products (Hennig-Thurau & Houston, 2019).

On the one hand, sensations are sensory reactions that a consumer experiences resulting from the exposure to external stimulations (Zuckerman, 1979 as cited in Thureau and Houston, 2019). Such reactions can be physiological or bodily processes and can be triggered by sights, sounds or tactile sensations and since films are hedonic products, consumers value the ones that bring out novel sensations by telling stories in unknown ways (Bohnenkamp, 2014). On the other hand, familiarity is when consumers identify a strong sense of connection with the entertainment product via its' characters or elements which they have interacted with over time (Green, et al., 2004). For example, the character of Batman will be familiar to those who have read DC comics or watched the films. Familiarity is an essential factor in helping consumers fantasize or understand what the product will be about as well as minimizing the consumption risk that viewers take when experiencing a new film (Bohnenkamp, 2014).

Both sensations and familiarity that a film triggers is highly based on its' affiliation to a pre-existing brand. For instance, unbranded movies can potentially offer new sensations while sequels and adaptations can offer a combination of sensations and high-levels of familiarity (Bohnenkamp, 2014). As a result, these two key concepts influence a consumer's decision on whether or not to spend time on a certain entertainment product and the expectations he/she generates from that product (Hennig-Thureau & Houston, 2019). But how are these important concepts incorporated into promotional material? The answer lies within the persuasive appeals that are dominant with the marketing tools.

#### **2.4.2. Persuasive Appeals**

According to Kernan (2004), there are three main rhetoric appeals of movie trailers that are used as selling points towards consumers, which I argue can also be applied in movie posters. Particularly, the appeals are the film's genre, story and its stars. They all play an important role in creating expectations about the promoted film and they encompass the concepts of sensations and familiarity as a persuading mechanism.

##### *Genre*

Genres as cultural categories used by the industry, audience members, reviewers etc., function as paratexts that have a shared or dominant definition and widespread meaning (Gray, 2010). At the same time, genres employ persuasive communication means by relying heavily on familiarity and drawing audiences on the comfort of the known. This is based on the fact that consumers desire to re-inhabit a generic world by rewatching their favourite genre films or new films of the same genre (Kernan, 2004). Genres might also trigger specific sensations in consumers. For example, an action film will most possibly generate adrenaline and

excitement among audiences. Thus, consumers might develop expectations from genres with which they have correlated specific sensations.

Both trailers and posters signify particular genres through iconography and graphics in a hyperbolic fashion which are highly tangled with sound effects (Kernan, 2004). Different genres have different trailer styles such as percussive noises or flashing titles to signify action or fast-cutting shots to indicate thrillers and physiological dramas (Zeiser, 2015). According to Strobin et al. (2015) music is a vital variable that is employed in theatrical trailers and has a significant influence on movie genre perceptions. Patterns between music and movie genres can be detected such as romantic comedies which employ quirky, fun-loving orchestral songs while action films have bombastic and loud music. Therefore, music is significant in hinting audiences the genre and persuading them through the use of songs and tracks.

Moreover, Kernan (2004) and Gray (2010) note that movie trailers might indicate more than one genre by offering a more holistic representation of different filmic elements. For instance, trailers for thrillers might focus on high-speed moments to suggest action while character focused films might be pitched as action or plot-based (Gray, 2010).

Likewise, depending on the genre of the film, posters are often constructed accordingly through the positioning of the characters and visual cues such as colors. For example, action movies frequently give prominence to a lone often male hero that looks ready for action with wide open eyes, bulging muscles and carrying weapons while often prominent colors are blues, grays or black to depict the movie's masculinity. On the contrary, romantic films usually show either a close-up of a content woman or a couple, utilizing flesh or pink tones to emphasize the femininity of the movie (Aley & Hahn, 2020). Other genres, such as horror movies, display either a symbol of innocence that is being harassed or an icon of the murderer.

### *Story*

Stories as paratexts relate to the available information that hint to the not-yet-seen story elements that predisposes potential viewers about the type of occurrences that will take place in the imaginary world of the film. The particular appeal is related to the concept of sensations since it is directly associated with the assumptions that studios make about the kinds of experiences and narratives audiences want to watch unfolding, eventually leading to sensations (Kernan, 2004). At the same time, viewers might already be familiar with the narrative, in the case of an adaptation or biographical film, thus drawing on familiarity.

Both movie trailers and posters promote a film's narrative world especially when it is based on "presold" material, by highlighting the entity's narrative world and they build on

already successful factors such as best-selling novel or famous play (Kerrigan, 2017). For original films, trailers tend to concentrate on the story's suspense elements through teasing hints that form the film's core enigma (Kernan, 2004). The suspense factor aims to generate a desire among audiences to resolve the enigma which will be achieved by watching the film, during which they will experience both the emotional excitement and resolution that the movie has promised. Such enigmas are based on the assumptions about the type of suspenseful experiences, shocks and mysteries that studios believe viewers find thrilling (Kernan, 2004). Therefore, trailers play an important role in revealing the nature of the story or parts of it to create curiosity among audiences.

Although, posters are not that strong in disclosing a film's story due to their static nature they can still offer more complex meanings, such as the poster for the film *Jaws* (1975), that instead of just revealing the fact that it's a horror film it taps into the emotion of the audience by hinting that this is the kind of feeling they will experience (Gray, 2010). Moreover, taglines often found in posters might hint at aspects of the story. They are fundamental paratextual elements, similar to peritexts, which consist of one or two sentences that summarize the basic idea of the movie. Taglines are important marketing tools, very much like advertising slogans, that intend to catch the interest of audiences while highlighting a particular aspect of the film and set expectations about the story (Mahlknecht, 2015).

### *Stars*

Finally, movie stars work as paratexts through their own communal signifiers and intertext. Particularly, the presence of stars is directly related to their appearance in previous films, the type of characters they have embodied but also their extratextual publicity that has been attached to them which results in creating particular expectations and interpretive strategies (Kernan, 2004). This is also in line with the concept of sensations and familiarity where being familiar with the work of an actor or actress leads to certain expected roles, performances and sensations in future movie material.

Movie trailers highly promote star quality by emphasizing on visual, aural or narrative pleasures that are connected to the star as a spectacle and their familiar qualities. As Kernan (2004) highlights star quality is significant to trailers whose film deals with stardom as an element of the story. At the same time, star pairings are intensively promoted in both trailers and posters, implying that the increased number of stars signifies increased cinematic pleasure. Specifically, it connotes that since stars are already successful the film will be successful as well, even more so that a number of them participate in it (Kernan, 2004). In a similar way

with trailers, within posters stars are often posited at the center so that audiences will instantly recognize them or their names might be present to indicate star power.

All three paratextual appeals play a significant role in persuading audiences that a film is worth it by creating such high expectations that are needed to be met by going to watch the movie. Each of the appeals might be present individually or all assembled together. Nevertheless, their presence within a promotional medium does not always guarantee persuasion. As Hennig-Thurau and Houston (2019) argue, too much information about a product is likely to hurt it as it reduces the consumers' uncertainty and consequently anticipation of things-to-come. By disclosing too much information during speculative consumption, consumers' curiosity and interest is likely to decrease, reaching a satiation serving as a substitute for the actual product. Thus, a balance is essential when revealing the genre, story and stardom in paratextual promotional mediums as an attempt to convince audiences to watch a movie.

## **2.5. Previous studies and gap in literature**

From the examined theoretical frameworks above, some sub questions emerge in relation to the research question "*How do films create expectations through promotional material? And are those expectations met?*". Primarily, since film marketing campaigns are rather spread across multiple platforms, how and where audiences come across promotional material and which medium they consider more effective in terms of motivating them to go and watch the film? What kind of appeals do each promotional text focus on and what kind of expectations are generated? What is the relationship between different promotional advertising film media texts and what kind of similarities or differences can be traced between them? For example, one would expect that if a film's key selling point is its director, then that element would be central both in the poster and movie trailer. Finally, what kind of appeals do audiences recognize, how are their expectations shaped by them and did the film achieve to meet the expectations?

Previous studies that have investigated film promotional materials have examined them independently. For example, Finsterwalder et al. (2012) examined the ways in which film trailers in New Zealand influenced consumer expectations about particular movies. They found that factors influencing expectations regarding film content were the film genre and while the people involved in it such as the actors and directors influenced the expectations formulated regarding the quality of the film. (Finsterwalder, et al, 2012). Similarly, Stokmans (2009)

investigated the effectiveness of film posters in impacting the attitudes towards a particular movie, finding that their appeal highly depends on the motivation and expectation from it.

Movie trailers and posters have also been examined in relation to the film's revenue. For instance, Karray & Debernitz (2015) examined the creative characteristics of movie trailers and their effects on abnormal returns, where they found that the plot reveal, number of cut scenes and incorporation of humorous, violent or sexual scenes impacted a film's abnormal returns. Rao et al., (2017) in their research on movie posters content such as number of reviewers, stars and directors and movie revenues found that and particularly external validation reviews particularly from "top" magazines such as New York Times or Time magazine were associated with high box office. Such studies highlight the significant role of marketing materials on the final choice of going to watch a movie.

The main gap in the existing literature is the fact the prior research has not investigated the relationship and synergy between film promotional material as well as the expectations they create both separately and jointly. By examining film posters and trailers together, this thesis will provide valuable knowledge into how film marketing materials operate together and by studying audience reception it will reveal what their relationship to the main film is as well as if it successful or unsuccessful representation of that. Therefore, the aim of the study is to reveal if the anticipation and hype generated by the promotional marketing material is indeed fulfilled when viewers watch a movie or if they hyperselling the movie since their main purpose is to convince audiences to attend the cinema.

### **3. Methodology**

The most suitable approach to carry out the specific research is through qualitative methodologies. Particularly in this case, qualitative is better suited than quantitative since the research is concerned with studying phenomena as well as the meanings that people bring to them and qualitative analysis allows for the segmentation, categorization and reassembling of data in order to achieve a theoretical understanding of the social phenomenon examined (Boeije, 2010). The methodologies through which this research will be operated are semiotic analysis and interviews. Since the research question that is examined in this thesis is related to how movie expectations are formed and if these are fulfilled, semiotic analysis was chosen to answer the first part and interviews the second part. The benefit of combining the two methods is that it allows to get valuable insight both in the persuading methods employed and

expectations generated and how audiences perceive promotion as well as if their expectations were indeed met and were in line with what was analyzed.

Semiotics are defined as the science centered around texts and signs, where a sign is the smallest unit of a meaning while a text is a collection of signs (Berger, 2010). The particular method investigates how language facilitates understanding and focuses on the sign which is made up from a signified and the signifier. The signifier is the main form of sign which might be a written or spoken word or even a photograph, and the signified is the mental concept that it invokes. The ways in which signs are placed together, and relate to each other, generate various sets of meanings which audiences recognize. The relationship between the signifier and the signified is socially situated and the consequence of social conventions specific to each society (Hall, 1997). Therefore, the meanings that are generated are not universal but rather particular to history and culture.

A significant feature of signs is that they carry denotative and connotative meanings (Chandler, 2021). Denotation refers to the obvious, literal meaning of a sign both in textual and visual elements while connotation are the socio-cultural or personal associations of the sign. Therefore, when applying semiotics, it is highly important to look for the in-depth, implied meaning behind the initial impression both in movie posters and trailers.

Moreover, semiotics can be divided into three main types of signs, the icon, the index and the symbol. Particularly, an icon is a pattern that it closely resembles what it stands for. For instance, a picture of a cigarette with a diagonal line signifying non-smoking (Port, 2000). Similarly, an index is a sign that suggests a casual relation between point A and B. For example, dark clouds signify impending rain. Finally, a symbol is a sign that is associated with a specific notion such as a bald eagle signifies USA (Port, 2000). It is important to note that although these signs are different they might overlap and their syntax and co-presence matters, since their composition creates certain meanings. The arrangement of different visual elements, such as use of colors, background, product as well as sound and movement within the film posters and trailers bring forward certain meanings and ideas that include both connotations and denotations.

In the particular research, semiotics was used to bring forward the underlying meanings of each paratext, notably the poster and trailer and examine the differences and the similarities between them. Semiotics revealed how creators of trailers and posters guided and framed the reception process of audiences as well as the expectations generated through them. At the same time, semiotics was highly valuable in detecting promotional persuasive appeals such as genre, story and stardom as well as their underlying relationship to the concepts of sensations and

familiarity. Therefore, the particular method was useful in the operationalization of the key promotional and persuasive concepts that are examined in the literature review. Moreover, interviews are an appropriate method since they allow interviewers to get an in-depth understanding into the perceptions and commonsense assumptions of the informants as well as grasp multiple views and perspectives (Johnson, 2011). Hence, the specific method was effective in capturing the different point of views on film posters and trailers, and at the same time reveal the relationship between the set expectations and actual film.

### **3.1. Sampling Method**

This thesis's data collection concerned obtaining promotional material of movie trailers and posters. The thesis focused on the Greek audience and collected data regarding movies watched in that country. Greece was chosen due to Covid19-restrictions and since I, the researcher, is placed here, it increased the possibilities for face-to-face interviews. In order to examine how promotional material created expectations and if they are met, the study employed purposive sampling and analyzed 5 of the highest-grossing and most-watched films in Greece during the year of 2020. The year 2020 was chosen up to when the COVID-19 pandemic began but also summer releases when open-air cinemas were available, which increases the chances that audiences have seen the movies in the cinemas and have been exposed to film posters and trailers in there.

Purposive sampling for promotional materials was preferred for this thesis since the final sample represented a variety of movie genres and as such different promotional approaches and communication strategies. The genres of the chosen movies included action, thriller, romance, drama and crime. Moreover, choosing popular films increased the chances that interviewees will have watched the movies and could participate in the research. The information regarding data about films in Greece were retrieved from a variety of sources that included both Greek websites and international ones in order to increase credibility. Particularly, the information about the most-watched films with the highest ticket sales were gathered from Box Office Mojo which is powered by IMDB and other Greek credible online sites such as LIFO, which provide information on the most watched films through highest ticket sales made from each film. The movies that were chosen to be examined are the following: *1917* (Mendes, 2020), *Tenet* (Nolan, 2020), *Little Women* (Gerwig, 2020), *The Gentlemen* (Richie, 2020), *The Invisible Man* (Whannell, 2020). Films that belonged to the highest grossed list but targeted younger targeted audiences were excluded from the analysis since the interviews were addressed for ages 18+. The specific age was chosen due to the fact that adults

are more likely to attend the movies for recreational purposes rather than young adults who will most likely need the permission of their parents to go and at the same time they might have some restrictions in particular films. Sequels were also excluded since audiences are already familiar with key factors examined such as the story or the genre, while original movies highly depend on the marketing tools.

Moreover, the film posters and trailers that were chosen for each film were gathered from the website of a Greek cinema chain, particularly VILLAGE Cinemas, as the posters and trailers they provided were with Greek information and subtitles. Consequently, the particular marketing materials promoted by VILLAGE were possibly the ones that Greek audiences were exposed to and created their expectations based on them. Selecting posters and trailers that were adapted in Greece, was important since both mediums might differ from country to country and culture. After data regarding popular films were collected, semiotic analysis was applied to reveal the expectations they create. Particularly, examination started with analyzing the movie posters and then trailers since they are significant for additional information and in-depth portrayal of the main film. Hence, each medium was initially examined individually in order to see the kind of expectations it generates and secondly the synergy in order to determine their cohesiveness and transmediality.

### **3.2. Procedure and Participants**

After analyzing promotional materials using semiotic analysis, this study proceeded by conducting interviews to look at the relationship between viewers and film marketing material, how audiences perceive film promotional material if their expectations regarding the film are met and which type of promotion is considered more effective. In particular, media texts like movie trailers and posters, carry meanings that are multilayered and open to audience's interpretations (Livingstone, 2007). Through interviews, this study aimed to examine the effect of the persuasive appeals on viewers, what expectations have audiences built through the meanings created by promotional material, and if such expectations were met in relation to the film. Audience reception studies are important within the field of media as they are concerned with the interpretive relation between audiences and the medium (Livingstone, 2007). Both posters and trailers are sources of significant information that audiences engage with and can trigger individual pleasures, such as familiarity and sensations (Johnston et al., 2016). Thus, the relationship between promotional material and viewers is not linear and mono-directional, but rather audiences are active recipients who decode the texts that they are being advertised.

Specifically, in the second part of the study, 10 semi-structured interviews took place using snowball sampling. Snowball sampling was appropriate since interviewees that belong to one age group can nominate other potential participants (Naderifar, et al., 2017). The interviewees were all Greek, aged 18+ with the older participant being 57 years old.

Particularly, five of the interviewees were between 18-30 of age and five within the age range of 30-50 while 6 participants were females while 4 were males. The interviews were conducted mainly in English but participants were encouraged to speak Greek if they had any trouble communicating their thoughts, which was later translated into English. The different age groups were selected for this thesis to compare and contrast their views and choices of promotional material as well as expectations. For instance, today's younger generation might be more familiar with film trailers and trust them more rather than older generations who might still be basing their opinion on watching a film on the information provided posters. The sampling criterion for interviewees was that they had to have watched at least 2 films from the ones that were chosen for semiotic analysis. In this way, the interviewees views on the film's expectations could be examined in relation to persuasive appeals and expectations traced in the analysis. During the interview, the participants were shown both the poster and the trailer of the film they had previously declared they had watched. The duration of the trailer approximately took 2-3 minutes thus 4 to 6 minutes of the total interview. The interviewing process lasted two weeks and all of the interviews took place online via zoom meetings that approximately lasted from 45 to 60 minutes. During the interviews, a topic-list was followed which was divided into two parts. The first set of questions regarded the participants' movie habits and opinions on posters and trailers while in the second part they were presented with the poster and the trailer of the film they had watched and asked about the persuasive appeals, expectations as well as synergy between the two mediums.

The interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using thematic analysis in order to track key patterns among the interviewees. Thematic analysis was suitable for the interpretation of interviews since research data can be converted into key patterns or "themes". A theme captures important information regarding the data in relation to the research question analyzed, and it reveals a patterned response of meaning within the data set (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This particular method allowed for common descriptions of views on promotional material and expectations for each film to rise and be patterned together in order to answer the research question. The thematic analysis was employed using the steps described by Braun and Clarke (2006). First the interview data were closely read and initial ideas were written down. Second, initial codes were assigned to data which was followed by merging common

codes together and placing them into larger categories. In the final stage, the codes were refined, improved and four main themes emerged. No qualitative analysis program such as ATLAS.ti was used to assist in the groupings of categories. The formulation of themes was also helped by the Topic List that was developed based on academic literature prior to conducting the interviews, since it allowed for answers to the same questions to be grouped together. As a result, the thematic analysis occurred in a more deductive manner than inductive. Moreover, within the emergent themes common patterns as well as differences were traced between the two interviewee groups in gaining more in-depth analysis on promotional materials and explanatory power of marketing mediums.

The combination of semiotic analysis and interviewees aims to triangulate data by capturing different dimensions of the same phenomenon: persuasive communication on promotional materials and generation of expectations. Therefore, data collection regarding the expectations that films create through promotional materials and the relationship between them will be carried out through semiotic analysis while examining if expectations are achieved and how audiences perceive them through interviews.

Ethical concerns regarding this thesis was taken under serious consideration. Prior to the interviews, participants were informed about the nature of the study and what was investigated. After that, interviewees were asked to give their verbal consent since all of the interviews took place online. Additionally, the interview process was voluntary, and interviewees were free to withdraw at any point during the process. Finally, all participants stayed anonymous.

## **4. Semiotic Analysis of Film Posters and Their Trailers**

### **4.1. 1917**

Released in Greece in January 2020, 1917 follows the story of two British soldiers, Blake and Schofield, during World War I who are up against a dangerous mission by crossing over enemy territory in order to deliver a message that might save fellow comrades including Blake's brother (Village, 2020).



**Figure 1:**Poster of *1917* (Mendes, 2020)

The title of the film, 1917 a central element in the movie's poster, signifies that this is the year that the film takes place which is during World War I. Thus, immediately the title draws on the familiarity of the audiences with important historical events and it also indicates the genre of the film which can be characterized as a War film. Moreover, the orange and purple colors that are present are an index of an environment that has suffered from fires, probably due to the grenades that appear to be exploding in the background. The prominent grey, blue and black colors in combination with the soldiers who are in motion denote action. Thus, the poster reveals two genres, typical for movie trailers as Kernan (2004) has emphasized but also appearing to be applied in posters as well. This contributes to the creation of expectations among audiences as they are likely to anticipate a war film with action elements.

In the middle of the poster, there is a man standing while everyone else around him appear to be on the ground or falling, placing the focus on him and giving him salience in relation to the other soldiers which suggests that he is the central character of the film but also the hero. In terms of the stardom, the actor portrayed, George MacKay, is of British descent and although he might have some recognition locally he is not internationally famous. Therefore, stardom in terms of actors is not a key attraction and persuasive tool in the particular poster. In contrast, the director of the film is prominent through the capital letters "From the director of Skyfall". Instead of directly having the name of the director, Sam Mendes, the particular tagline can be characterized as a denotation towards the expected directional style this film will have which will be similar to that of Skyfall, a James Bond film full of action and adrenaline. As a result, this sentence functions as a promotional tool that draws both on

sensations and familiarity. It hints to audiences that the previous sensations that they might have felt with action movies will be present in 1917 and at the same time aims at their familiarity with the director and his style.

Key part of the poster is the tagline at the bottom of the posters which translates into “Time is the enemy”, also the official slogan of the movie. Through this sentence viewers are revealed a part of the movie’s story which is often the case as proposed by Mahlkecht (2015). Without having any other information regarding the movie’s plot other than when it takes place and the protagonist, the tagline plays an important role in highlighting the main challenge that the protagonist will be facing, which is time.

In the particular movie poster all three appeals appear to be present. Genre is evident through visual cues as well as the title of the film, stardom through the director and story through the tagline. Subsequently one would expect a war-action film about WWI where George MacKay is the protagonist and main hero who has limited time to achieve something very important.

### *Trailer*

From the beginning the trailer introduces two main characters sitting under a tree. The one actor is the same depicted on the film’s poster, while the other does not appear anywhere. This is a key difference between the poster and trailer which introduces one main character while the trailer two. The setting of the film is also introduced at the beginning of the trailer, a battlefield, in much more detail in contrast to the poster. Examining the synergy between the two mediums, an important distinction between them for this film is the display of the production studio.



**Figure 2:** Screenshot from 1917 trailer (Mendes, 2020)

DreamWorks is one of the biggest entertainment conglomerates as Hennig-Thurau and Houston (2019) note, with many previous successful productions. Its appearance on the trailer signifies the high quality of production while the familiarity of the audiences with movies produced by DreamWorks is likely to give them an affirmation about the cinematic experience. Although the production might not be such an influential factor in contrast to genre, story and stardom it is important to acknowledge it.

Moreover, in the trailer further stars are introduced such as Benedict Cumberbatch and Colin Firth, which play an important role in persuading audiences and enhancing the appeal of the film. These actors have an established successful career worldwide in contrast to the protagonist of the film and thus their presence increases the film's quality making it more attractive for viewers who are familiar with them. However, their faces or names do not appear in the poster which might be due to the fact that they have a more secondary role. It is possible that if their names did appear on the poster audiences would expect them to have a prominent presence within the film.



**Figure 3:** Screenshot from 1917 trailer (Mendes, 2020)



**Figure 4:** Screenshot from 1917 trailer (Mendes, 2020)

An important distinction between the poster and the trailer is that audiences get important insight about the story and plot of the film that shapes and influences the expectations they create. From the beginning of the trailer viewers are introduced with the mission that the soldiers have to follow which entails crossing through enemy territory and save soldiers in the second battalion, from getting into a trap. This story element creates suspense and curiosity among viewers who will want to see if the two soldiers will eventually make it. This anticipation that trailers generate as Kernan (2004) emphasizes, will only be resolved by watching the film. Moreover, the hype created by the story is in line with the poster's tagline "Time is the enemy" since the soldiers are fighting against time in order to achieve the orders that they were given.

One of the trailer's distinct characteristics is that audiences get a sneak peak of the action and start getting to know the main characters. For instance, Blake's brother is in the

second battalion therefore it is crucial to save him. From the small dialogue in which the two soldiers engage in it appears that one character, Schofield, is more strategic while Blake is more impulsive. This is signified from when Schofield urges Blake to “talk about this” but Blake says “Why?”, indicating that he cares more about saving his brother than planning a way to do it.

Additionally, an important similarity between the two mediums is the emphasis on the director. The trailer stops approximately in the middle of the clip to inform viewers that the film is from the director of *Skyfall*.



**Figure 5:** Screenshot from 1917 trailer (Mendes, 2020)

Thus, it is evident that within the marketing strategy of the particular film it was highly important to use the stardom of the director as a promotional appeal and persuasive strategy.

After the shot of the director, the trailer starts building the suspense of the audiences. In line with Fintesterwalder’s et al. (2012) trailer structure, the final section of the clip escalates while hinting at a possible outcome. In the final shots, the genre becomes even more evident through the use of multiple shots of war scenes and intensifying music.

The use of the dramatic song in combination with the bombarding and gun sounds, indicates the action that takes place but also the horror and difficulty of the war. Music plays an important role in the final section of the trailer since it hints at another genre which is not evident through the poster, drama. This second genre in combination with the war-action elements might be a key appeal to audiences who are familiar with the hardships of WWI through the history of previous films, and want to watch them come to life.

The trailer further escalates the tension at the end since it informs audiences that if the mission fails they will lose 16000 men, which is a key insight into the story that builds anxiety if they will eventually make it. However, viewers are also hinted at a resolution when Benedict Cumberbatch says that “There is only one way that this ends, Last man standing”. This signifies that in the end only one person will survive the mission and in combination with the last shot

of the trailer where Schofield runs through the battlefield we are connoted that it is likely to be him. From this trailer one can expect a film that successfully depicts the hazards and difficulties of the war, with George MacKay as a protagonist and a dramatic yet full of action storyline.

Looking at both paratextual mediums, it is clear that the trailer offers more information that will potentially urge audiences to watch the film, as expected. Interpreting the two promotional materials they create similar expectations yet with some important distinctions.

Key differences between the two are the presence of the production company, additional stardom, the appearance of two main characters instead of one as well as the addition of the drama genre. Synergistic peritextual elements include the war genre, the emphasis on the director and the main storyline which is explored in depth through the trailer. In terms of transmedia storytelling it can be argued that the posters offer an initial framework through which audiences interpret the film while the trailer continues the story by providing detailed information on the genre, storyline and protagonists.

## 4.2.Tenet

Released in Greece in August 2020, Tenet is about a secret agent who learns to manipulate time in order to prevent an attack from the future that might cause World War III and destroy the present (Village, 2020).



**Figure 6:** *Poster of Tenet (Nolan, 2020)*

This highly anticipated film had created a huge hype among audiences prior to its release due to its director and cast which are both highly important stardom appeals. Christopher Nolan is a successful Hollywood director who has earned multiple awards and is famous for his directorial style from films like *Interstellar* (Nolan, 2014). His name and reputation is a very big appeal and promotional attraction among audiences who are both familiar with his work but also with the sensations they have gotten from his movies. Therefore, stardom in terms of director is very important for this film which is also exemplified by the poster that depicts his name in bold white letters “A film by Christopher Nolan”. Stardom in relation to casting is also very strong. John David Washington, the man who the poster focuses on signifying his protagonist role, is a well-known Hollywood actor. Thus, it is likely audiences who are familiar with the actor are drawn to the film.

The action genre of the film is evident through the visual signs. First, the protagonist holding a gun into his hands, looking straight at the camera and walking towards us. As Aley and Hahn (2020) noted, posters for action films often give emphasis on the male hero, carrying weapons with prominent blue, gray and black colors. Furthermore, in the particular poster ashes appear to be scattered around, a typical symbol of explosion, further highlighting the genre of action. Therefore, the composition of the poster’s setting signifies action that possibly takes place in a city due to the buildings that appear behind the protagonist. Simultaneously, paying attention to the image of Washington we see that there are two of them as if he is reversed. On the reversed side he also holds a gun but he wears an oxygen mask. This difference connotes that there are two different sides of the same world since he wears the same attire and holds the same gun in both the reversed and not reversed side. The particular detail also signifies another genre found within the poster that of science fiction. Nolan is famous for working with sci-fi films thus the genre will be appealing both for those who are familiar with and have enjoyed the sensations gained but even more so since it is directed by Nolan.

Finally, a prominent feature within the poster is the title. Although the particular poster does not have a tagline the title of the film is emphasized due to its size and its unusual location since it is not at the top or bottom like other films but at the center and diagonally reaching from one end of the poster to the other. The size of the title signifies that the word Tenet will play an important role during the film.

As a result, the notable appeals in this poster are stardom and genre but the story is intriguing as well due the title. Considering the expectations that this poster creates, one would

anticipate an action-sci fi film related to the theme of inversion with John David Washington as a protagonist, characterized by the directorial style of Nolan.

### *Trailer*

The beginning of the trailer for *Tenet* begins with an indirect appeal, that of studios that produced the film.



**Figure 7:** Screenshot from *Tenet* Trailer (Nolan, 2020)



**Figure 8:** Screenshot from *Tenet* trailer (Nolan, 2020)

Warner is another leading entertainment conglomerate with many successful action films while Syncopy is a production company founded by Christopher Nolan. Both productions connote to audiences who are familiar with them that *Tenet* will be a high-quality movie. Moreover, the dark colors that dominate, grey and black, along with introductory music, set an eerie sensation that signifies to viewers that something big is going to happen.

The trailer begins by setting the genre of the film and introducing the characters. First, two men, one being John David Washington also seen in the poster, are climbing a building establishing the genre of action. The attire that both men are wearing appears to be an expert gear and in relation to the gun that Washington holds it connotes that they might be professional spies or secret agents. After that the trailer provides insight into the character of Washington as viewers learn that he has passed a test that not everybody does and he is being welcomed to the afterlife.

Moreover, during this time audiences see a change in the scenery from the city landscape in the beginning, to a train station and a sea setting with boats and windmills, signifying that it is a visually appealing, expensive production and the movie will take place in a variety of settings. Moving on, the trailer dedicates a shot to inform audiences that this film is from Christopher Nolan, highlighting his stardom appeal.



**Figure 9:** Screenshot from *Tenet* Trailer (Nolan, 2020)

From that, the trailer reveals a significant part of the story which is the threat that Washington is up against. This is in line with the theory of trailer sections by Finsterwalder et al. (2012), where a tension or obstacle is provided. In the case of *Tenet* they are trying to prevent World War III signifying the gravity and dangerousness of the threat. Moreover, as Washington says that he needs to understand the threat that they are facing, his protagonist and heroic role is emphasized. As the trailer progresses more stars appear, such as Robert Pattinson, Elizabeth Debicki and Michael Caine increasing the film's appeal to viewers who are familiar with the actors' previous cinematic work. Nevertheless, the names of the particular actors are not depicted anywhere on the poster which is a key difference between the two mediums.

After the threat is being introduced, the trailer provides further insight into the story. Viewers are signified that the word *Tenet* plays an important role into the development of the film's plot as they are being revealed that it opens both right and wrong doors. The same emphasis is placed on the poster of the film, connoting that *Tenet* represents more than the title of the movie but a key plot line within it. In addition after the "wrong doors" the clip starts escalating and building suspense by showing audiences action scenes. This signifies that the wrong doors that will open will also initiate the action. A distinct similarity between the poster and trailer is the prominence given on the protagonist.



**Figure 10:** Screenshot from *Tenet* Trailer (Nolan, 2020)

Both mediums place their focus on the protagonist of the film, appealing to the audiences' familiarity with the actor. In the final part of the trailer the tension intensifies and

suspense as well as curiosity are built as the music intensifies. The next shot is Washington wearing an oxygen mask, the one also depicted on the poster, and the action scene with the car tumbling and being crashed but being immediately reversed. These two scenes signify the sci-fi genre but also that the element of reversion will play a key role. This is heightened as the music reaches its peak and the title of the film is being shown.



**Figure 11:** Screenshot from *Tenet* Trailer (Nolan, 2020)

Looking at the particular shot it is evident that the two last letters are upside down and that the word *tenet* is written the same when it is reversed, further signifying that it will be prominent throughout the film. Finally, the trailer offers the tagline “Time Runs Out” in contrast to the poster that does not include a tagline. The tagline signifies that the mission will have to be accomplished in a limited time. From this trailer one would expect a film starring Danzel Washington that is full of action, with a complicated storyline that has sci-fi elements and impressive landscapes.

Both paratexts offer significant information regarding the film’s genre, story and stardom. Particularly, both promotional mediums successfully encapsulate that the film has two genres, that of action and science-fiction indicating their synergy. At the same time, they both place their focus on the same stardom as a persuasive approach that of the director and the protagonist. However, key differences are the additional stars that appear in the trailer which add to the film’s appeal. In addition, both paratexts emphasize on the word *Tenet* a key plot line in the movie's story and introduce reversion as a significant element. Nevertheless, the trailer adds on another important story aspect through the tagline which is time, a significant element missing from the poster. It can be argued that although both mediums employ the same persuasive appeals, the missing tagline in the poster which offers valuable insight into the story might influence how expectations are generated through the specific medium. Thus there is a gap in the cohesiveness and transmedia storytelling between the two promotional tools.

### 4.3 Little Women

Little Women, released in Greece in February 2020, is an adaptation of the 1868 famous novel by Louisa May Alcott that follows the story of four sisters, Jo, Meg, Amy and Beth in 19th century Concord Massachusetts (Village, 2020).



Figure 12: Poster of Little Women (Gerwig, 2020)

It is apparent that the specific poster places its focus on the protagonists of the film. At the top of the poster the names of the casting are evident while all the surnames are in bold letters. Despite the names of the four protagonist sisters who we also see in the images below, some really big Hollywood names are also present such as Meryl Streep and Laura Dern. As Kernan (2004) highlighted, an ensemble of actors signifies a “guaranteed” cinematic pleasure due to the previous success of the stars. Both the younger and older generation of actresses that appear in the poster have established Hollywood success which is a key attraction to viewers who are already familiar with their work from previous movies and at the same attracts a wide audience. The combination of actors from different generations, aims to attract both young audiences who are not familiar with the story, by placing famous, young and relevant actors, and older audiences who will return to the cinema in order to see their favorite book come to life. Thus, stardom in terms of actors is highly emphasized in this poster and it is used as a very strong promotional tool.

At the same time, the director of the film, Greta Gerwig, is also a persuasive appeal towards audiences, since she is famous from both her acting career and as a director. By

emphasizing with red letters both the name of the director and where she is known from the poster draws on the familiarity of the viewers with her previous work, employing her as a means for promoting the film.

The background is limited in this poster and each picture of the actors appears as if it is a shot from the film very much like a trailer. Although, the presence of the male actor, Timothee Chalamet, is not in line with the title of the film, including him the poster signifies that he will have an important role during the film. Moreover, the only actress dominating the poster is Saoirse Ronan of whom the image is bigger in size which signifies that her part might be bigger in relation to the others.

The particular poster does not offer a lot of signs that signify the genre or story of the film mainly due to the fact that it is an adaptation of a famous novel and it bases its' appeal on both the familiarity and sensations that audiences have from reading the book or perhaps from previous cinematic adaptations that they have seen. Through the prevailing pale colors such as yellow, and violet in combination with the facial expression of the actresses and the presence of the male actor, it is connoted that the genre of the film is romance. Additionally, the tagline which translates into "Own your Story" signifies part of the movie's story by suggesting that although the sisters have different dreams from each other they own them and are in control of them. However, this can only be interpreted in such a way if one is familiar with the story and the plot of the novel in contrast to someone who is not and might find the tagline rather vague.

The expectations that this poster generates are highly rooted in the familiarity and sensations of the novel, thus the genre as well as story appeals are present through those concepts. At the same time stardom is heightened through actors and the director. Thus, one would anticipate that this film will cause the same sensations as the book while following the same storyline with actors successfully portraying the familiar favorite characters.

### *Trailer*

The trailer of the film begins by providing insight into the story of the film as viewers learn that Jo is writing a novel, connoting that the story is being told from her point of view. Moreover, from the beginning the trailer introduces the four sisters using stardom as a persuasive appeal as they appear in an ensemble. The trailer also sets the setting and time where the film takes place through the scene where Jo pitches her idea and the man says that the girl has to be married at the end which signifies the dominant ideas back then.



**Figure 13:** Screenshot from *Little Women* trailer (Gerwig, 2020)

After that the trailer, similarly to previous trailers, shows the production companies of the film that play a role in establishing the film's quality. Both Columbia and Regency are entertainment conglomerates, signifying that the movie is of high-quality production.



**Figure 14:** Screenshot from *Little Women* trailer (Gerwig, 2020)



**Figure 15:** Screenshot from *Little Women* trailer (Gerwig, 2020)

The trailer continues by introducing the characters of the film and showing scenes that reveal the relationships between the four sisters. For instance, audiences learn that Jo wants to be a famous writer while Amy a painter. Additionally, Jo mentions that she wants to make her own way in the world, signifying she does not want to conform with the rules of her time and go against societal pressures. Moreover, the trailer introduces the two characters whose names only appear on the poster, Laura Dern as the mother of the girls and Meryl Streep as aunt March. Their presence plays a significant role in the stardom persuasive appeal of the film as well as valuable insight into the story. Furthermore, similarly to the poster, the trailer highlights the stardom of the director Greta Gerwig and her previous work, tapping into the familiarity of

the viewers by reminding of what they might have seen from her and even the sensations that they might get from the film.



**Figure 16:** Screenshot from *Little Women* trailer (Gerwig, 2020)



**Figure 17:** Screenshot from *Little Women* trailer (Gerwig, 2020)

After the stardom appeal, the trailer reveals one of genres also identified in the poster, that of romance. Particularly, viewers see a love story flourishing between Jo and Timothee Chalamet who portrays Laurie. Moreover, the trailer draws on the familiarity of the viewers since it employs a shot to remind them that the film originates from the famous novel. Thus, the appeal here is the familiarity of the viewers with the beloved book.



**Figure 18:** Screenshot from *Little Women* trailer (Gerwig, 2020)

In addition, a key part of the story that the trailer also discloses is the emphasis that the movie places on women's empowerment through the character of Jo. From the start of the trailer Jo appears to be the independent one, making her way through the world. She refuses to marry Laurie, produces her own show and encourages her sisters to follow their dreams. Moreover, she mentions that women have ambitions and talents and love is not all a woman is fit for. Such issues continue to be highly relevant today, and through the character of Jo the movie signifies that it will still be relatable to this day. This aspect of women empowerment that the trailer exposes is significant in the decision-making process and expectation creation of the viewers, which is in line with the poster's tagline "Own your story". Finally, the trailer places its focus on the stars of the film by showing shots of their names and then their characters

from scenes within the film. The same focus is also placed in the poster whose names and figures are depicted.

Looking at the trailer, one can expect an adaptation of the classic novel with stars embodying the famous characters, a touching story and a romantic genre. The synergy between the two paratexts is consistent. First, both the poster and the trailer highlight the presence of stardom through the cast as well as the director Greta Gerwig. Second, both mediums portray the genre of romance but surprisingly only this one. Audiences who have read the story are familiar with the story's dramatic elements, such as the death of one of the sisters. However, the genre of drama does not appear in either the poster or the trailer. This might be due to the fact that as persuading advertising tools they want to target audiences who are not familiar with the story, thus they are communicating the pleasant sides of the story. Additionally, both mediums imply the theme of women empowerment and independence. It can be suggested that in terms of transmedia storytelling, the poster offers an introduction into the film's story through the tagline and the trailer reveals more details mainly through the character of Jo. Therefore, the trailer provides a richer insight by unfolding the story but they both contribute in revealing the film's story world.

#### 4.4 The Gentlemen

Released in Greece in January 2020, *The Gentlemen* follows the story of an American drug dealer, portrayed by Mathew McConaughey, that has built his empire in London but now wants to go back to his country and needs a successor. This decision leads to a series of events and conspiracies from those who are plotting to take his position and thus his estate (Village, 2020).



Figure 19: Poster of *The Gentlemen* (Richie, 2020)

The film highly depends on stardom as a promotional tool, since an ensemble of famous actors is the central element. Audiences are likely to be familiar with the work of the depicted celebrities, such as Mathew McConaughey and Hugh Grant, since the majority of them have big careers both in the UK and US. Moreover, like in *Little Women* (Gerwig, 2020), the combination of multiple stars together is an important persuasive method signifying that the success of the actors will be brought into the film and therefore the quality of the movie is high. Additionally, this film is directed by Guy Ritchie, as it appears on the top of the poster, thus another significant stardom appeal. Ritchie is a famous British filmmaker known for his gangster movies and an influential marketing tool since audiences are possibly familiar with him and the genre he stands for, therefore previous sensations that they might have experienced. Thus, stardom here in terms of actors and director signifies both the quality of the film but it also functions as a hint for its genre knowing the previous work of the filmmaker.

The genre also becomes apparent through the visual elements of the poster, mainly through the positioning of the characters since a background is absent. The way that they are positioned as well as their facial expressions can be characterized as an icon of a gang group who are ready to fight with some being more important than others. For instance, the foregrounding of Mathew McConaughey and Hugh Grant signifies that they will play a more important role in contrast to Henry Golding and Jeremy Strong who are placed at the back of the image. Moreover, the difference in attire signifies that this will not only be a gang film but it will likely include battles between them and thus an action element.

The poster's tagline which translated into "Criminal. Class" signify part of the film's story. Particularly, since the identified genre is crime the tagline suggests that the plot will revolve around criminals, but not ordinary ones, rather gangsters who have a status. The word class and in relation to the title of the film connote that these are not typical criminals and any illegal activity is going to be with elegance and discretion which is also an irony considering gangsters are not usually gentlemen.

Seeing this poster, one would expect a gangster, crime film with protagonists, the actors portrayed, and elements of action while having elite and upper-class features. Furthermore, the poster incorporates all three appeals with stardom being the more prominent one.

### *Trailer*

The particular trailer, similarly to the previous ones, begins by showcasing the production studios, which do not appear anywhere within the poster and by introducing two of

the characters that are depicted in the poster, Hugh Grant and Charlie Hunnam whose name within the film is Ray but the nature of their relationship is unclear.

The trailer, like the poster, places its focus on the director as a persuasive tool since early on it dedicates a shot from the clip to inform viewers that the film is from Guy Ritchie. The music that accompanies that shot, is an intense classical sound that caughts the interest of the audience. This signifies that the trailer uses the specific sound purposely in order to make viewers notice the name of the director.



**Figure 20:** Screenshot from *The Gentlemen* trailer (Richie, 2020)

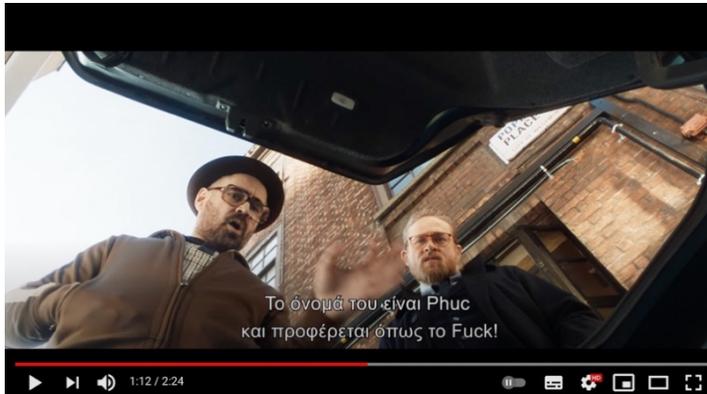
Continuing, viewers are informed about the plot of the film as they find out that Mathew McConaughey is the boss of Raya and Fletcher (Hugh Grant) blackmails them connoting that he is the villain of the movie. After that, the trailer uses an intense musical sound similar to the one before that follows the shot that informs viewers about the previous work of Guy Richie.



**Figure 21:** Screenshot from *The Gentlemen* trailer (Richie,2020)

The specific shot is similar to the one that is incorporated in the *Little Women* (Gerwig, 2020) trailer and it aims to draw on the familiarity of the audiences with the director as well as a reminder of previous sensations that viewers have experienced from these films.

After that, audiences get further insight into the story of the film through the depicted greenhouse that has marijuana plants, signifying that the plot will revolve around drugs. In contrast to the trailer, via the poster viewers are not hinted from any sign that drugs are involved which is a key detail that influences the generated expectations.



**Figure 22:** Screenshot from *The Gentlemen* trailer (Richie, 2020)

During the trailer audiences are connoted another genre that of comedy, through the pun that Colin Pharell uses to characterize the man who got into the “farms” of Mike Pearson. Humor is also evident in the last scene of the trailer where a man is being killed by falling from a building, but Ray argues that “gravity killed him”. The genre of comedy that is signified in the trailer throughout these scenes, is in line with the theory proposed by Kernan (2004) and Gray (2010) who argued that trailers often present multiple genres for a holistic representation. Nevertheless, there are no signs for the genre of comedy within the poster, which appears to have a more serious tone.

Following the comedic scene with the trunk, the trailer focuses on the action and crime elements. The music becomes more playful and intense, accompanying shots of guns, car chases, and shootings which are all symbols of a crime and action genre.

The last part of the trailer focuses on stardom by showing shots of the cast’s names along with a shot of their face during the film. This signifies the importance that the trailer places on the actors and particularly on the ensemble of multiple stars together establishing the movie’s quality. The emphasis on the stars is the same as the one placed on the poster. It is important to note that the particular trailer does not have a clear structure as the one proposed by Finsterwalder et al. (2012). The tension of the plot is not clearly formulated and a potential resolution is not hinted at the end. Instead audiences are offered multiple scenes from the film which appear to be stitched all together.

From the trailer, one can expect that this film will be full of action and crime, revolving around drugs with Mathew McConaughey having a protagonist role and Charlie Hunnam the antagonist. The synergy between the two films is consistent but with some key differences. First, the crime genre of the film is hinted at through the familiarity with the previous work of the director within the poster while it becomes evident in the trailer through the action scenes and use of guns. However, the additional genre which is added within the trailer, that of comedy, is left out of the poster, indicating a distinction in the synergy of the two mediums which is likely to influence the formulation of the audiences' expectations and their decision-making process. Moreover, other than the tagline which is rather vague the poster does not offer any insight on the film's plot, in contrast to the trailer which reveals that the story is related to drugs. This is an important difference between the two mediums since the plot is key in shaping expectations. Finally, both mediums place equal focus on stardom of cast and director with the addition of the trailer mentioning the previous work of Guy Richie. In terms of transmedia storytelling it can be argued that the trailer does not appear to be a continuation of the poster since significant elements of the trailer are omitted from the poster. As a result, the trailer as a paratext offers more insight in the particular film in contrast to the paratextual poster that does not fully capture all of the movie's aspects.

#### **4.5 The Invisible Man**

Released in Greece in March 2020, *The Invisible Man* (Whannell, 2020) follows the story of Cecilia, portrayed by Elizabeth Moss, who is trapped in an abusive relationship that tries to escape it. But when her boyfriend takes his own life and leaves her his fortune a series of weird almost lethal coincidences take place, and she tries to prove that she is being hunted by an invisible presence (Village, 2020).

*Poster*



**Figure 23:** Screenshot of the *Invisible Man* trailer (Whannel, 2020)

The specific poster incorporates all three appeals. First, stardom is evident from Elizabeth Moss whom we see both her name and half of her face suggesting that she is the heroine of the film. Moss is a famous Hollywood actress that has received numerous awards and her success as an actress as well as ability to embody a variety of roles is a big promotional advantage. Therefore, audiences are likely to be drawn due to their familiarity with her previous work. At the same we do not see any other names of the cast being depicted, emphasizing her stardom.

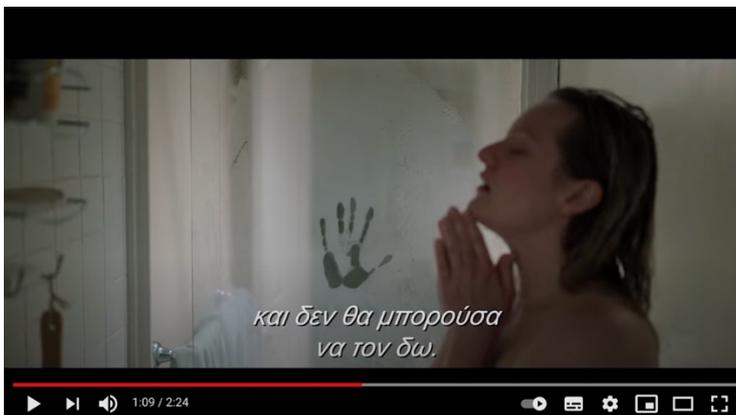
Second, the genre of the film becomes apparent through various visual signs. The facial expression of the actress signifies fear while she appears to be in a shower which connotes a confined space that the actress is trapped in and needs to escape. Moreover, the prominent colors of grey and black signify darkness and mystery epitomizing the thriller genre of the film. The hand behind her is an icon that she is being followed or harassed by possibly her murderer but she is unaware by that. This is in line with the tagline of the poster that offers insight into the story, translating into “What you can’t see can hurt you”. This signifies that although she cannot see whose hand it is it can hurt her. This catchy story element in combination with viewers’ familiarity with the genre of thriller and previous sensations they might have previously experienced are key in attracting audiences.

Looking at the poster one can expect a thriller film in which Elizabeth Moss is the protagonist where an invisible man is trying to hurt her. However, solely from the poster it is not clear if the invisible man is actually a person who is invisible leaning into the science fiction genre or a construct of the protagonist’s imagination leaning into psychological drama.

*Trailer*

The trailer begins by introducing audiences to the main characters, which is the typical structure for movie clips as Finsterwalder et al (2012) have noted. Viewers see Cecilia who escapes from a house taking a knife with her, signifying she is in danger and wants to protect herself. She appears to be leaving Adrian whose relationship is being revealed through the trust that is being read.

Moreover, Adrian appears to be violent towards Cecilia as he breaks her window while screaming to open the door. This violent gesture connotes that he is an aggressive person that perhaps has harmed Cecilia in the past and that is why she is running away. After viewers learn that Adrian committed suicide, the trailer starts building suspense as the audience are introduced to the invisible man through a shot of someone breathing next to Cecilia, but whom she cannot see. This is followed by a series of facts regarding Adrian such as the fact that he is a “sociopath” which signifies that he is the antagonist of the film and the one who hunts her.



**Figure 24:** Poster of the *Invisible Man* (Whannel, 2020)

Moreover, the above shot where Cecilia is in the shower and there is a hand print, is the same as the shot of the poster. Thus, the trailer can be argued to be continuation of the poster, adding more to the story, a typical feature of transmediality. In addition, viewers are hinted that Adrian has achieved becoming invisible through a machine. The particular element of the story is unclear within the poster but it is revealed in the trailer. Another common element between the two mediums other than the shower scene, is the tagline which also appears in the trailer.



**Figure 25:** Screenshot the *Invisible Man* trailer (Whannel, 2020)



**Figure 26:** Screenshot the *Invisible Man* trailer (Whannel, 2020)

Towards the end, the trailer introduces action through guns, car crashes and people running as Cecilia appears to be trying to defend herself from the invisible man. The specific genre is not signified within the poster but intensifies at the end to build the anticipation and grab the attention of the viewers. Finally, the trailer employs its strongest promotional appeal, the protagonist, by showcasing a shot of her name.



**Figure 27:** Screenshot the *Invisible Man* trailer (Whannel, 2020)

The trailer ends with even more action as Cecilia attacks the invisible man. The two mediums appear to be quite similar. Particularly, they both focus on the protagonist as well as the intriguing storyline regarding what can't be seen can hurt you signifying the thriller genre. Moreover, they have a cohesiveness between them suggesting transmediality both through the shower scene as well as the hints about why the man is invisible. The only incoherence between the two is the fact that the poster does not suggest any action which might influence the viewers expectations and decision making.

To sum up, the concepts of familiarity and sensations were incorporated within the promotional material and communicated through the persuasive appeals of the films, which plays a role in their effectiveness as well as formulation of expectations. From the analysis of the chosen films, it is evident that the two mediums have a consistency between their selling points, however they are not totally cohesive. This is due to the fact that the two mediums do not hold the same persuasive power. As it was suggested in the literature review posters are only based on visual cues while trailers employ visuals, music and movement, thus audiences have a better grasp of the main film. This might make posters less persuasive tools and weaker in creating expectations in relation to trailers. It is noteworthy to mention that none of the analyzed material used any epitextual appeals such as critic's reviews or awards regarding the movie or the stardom involved in it, which might have an impact on persuading viewers. The absence might be incidental since these are the posters and trailers that were specifically

targeted in Greece. As Fleishman (2016) marketing material film marketing material are likely to differ from culture to culture, especially when it comes to distributing American films to other regions. He notes that getting a thorough understanding of the aesthetics and cultural preferences is crucial for a film's success and maintaining Hollywood's competitive edge (Fleishman, 2016). As a result, the promotional material for the particular films might be different in other countries and might even include epitextual appeals.

Additionally, it is important to note that the identified appeals and their relation to sensations and familiarity are subject to each interpreter's background, which means that the appeals and thus expectations might had been interpreted in a different way if the interpreter was from another European country or the US for instance. The next section analyzes the results from the interviews, how the two mediums are perceived by audiences as well as what their perception of influence and appeal of the analyzed films.

## **5. Interview Results**

To begin with, one of the initial findings was the fact that American and British movies dominated the top box office in Greece. This is a paradigm of the globalizing entertainment phenomenon, where Hollywood and other powerful transnational media corporations export films and TV shows across borders (Mirrles, 2013). Such movies are often manufactured to have a global appeal by appealing to mass audiences both in the US and in multiple other countries, in order to achieve a maximum profit. They accomplish that by employing recognizable genres through codes and conventions, linear narrative structures and globally recognizable movie stars to achieve popularity (Mirrles, 2013). The five chosen films fall under the globalized entertainment category as they all have commercial characteristics that increase their mass appeal and their promotional material highlight those attractions such as the genre, directors or casting.

From the interviewees, *1917* was watched by 6 people, *Little Women* by 4, *The Gentlemen* by 4, *The Invisible Man* by 4 and *Tenet* by 2. The interviews began with some general questions about the movie habits of the interviewees, such as the frequency that they watch films and their favorite kind, in order to establish rapport with them and transition them into the topic of promotional marketing tools. Then the conversations were stirred towards film marketing material, what participants found most persuading and what they expected from the demonstrated mediums. As a result, some of the key themes that emerged were Promotional Information, Effectiveness, The role of the Posters, The role of the Trailers, Synergy and

Incoherence. These were later narrowed down into: 1) Promotional Material and Persuading Effectiveness, 2) Expectations through Paratextual Mediums, 3) Cohesive Expectations and 4) Opposing Expectations.

### **5.1. Promotional Material and Persuading Effectiveness**

The particular theme derived from the common patterns that were traced among the responses of the interviewees regarding where they come across promotional mediums and their capability in influencing cinema-going. The majority of the interviewees mentioned social media, but a distinction was detected between the two age groups. In particular, the younger age group, 18-30 all referred to social media as a source where they come across promotional material. As one interviewee mentioned “ I will see something on social media about a new movie and then I would go to the... to the YouTube channel and just search the movie and see the trailer” (Interviewee 3, 14 May 2020). Similarly, another one mentioned Instagram and TikTok as platforms that she comes across movie promotion. This does not only highlight the digitization of movie marketing campaigns, but it is in line with Zeiser (2015) who argued that studios employ social media as cost-effective distribution systems where promotional material can be dispersed across a variety of platforms. Moreover, it emphasizes the prominence of social media within a film’s marketing campaign and the fact that they play a vital role in notifying and informing viewers with the latest promotional material, as also suggested by Kafoury (2013).

The phenomenon of transmedia marketing also implicitly came up by one interviewee who referred to engaging promotion. In particular, she mentioned that the most efficient promotion for her is an “interactive commercial in the social media” and “..like engaging with the audience. Because sometimes trailers can be boring if you don't want to...you are not caught by it immediately” (Interviewee 1, 13 May 2020). This indicates that when audiences come across marketing material on social media, they need to feel engaged by them while capturing the interest of the viewers and potentially motivate them to explore the movie further.

In contrast to the younger group, the older group rarely mentioned social media, but rather newspapers and online sites, as one participant said “ in the newspaper or in the internet, when I'm watching what's next thing in this week” (Interviewee 6, 16 May 2020). An older participant even commented that he does not have any social media so he comes across print ads and reads the creative section newspapers. This was an interesting difference between the two groups, suggesting that older generations are still used to informing themselves through

more traditional outlets such as papers and sites that have a standardized publication of the upcoming movies. At the same time, it indicates that although film marketing has migrated in the online sphere, film producers and studios still employ conventional media channels in order to reach wider audiences. As a result, utilizing different media channels within a campaign it increases the chances for viewers to learn about a new film regardless of their age.

Despite the specific difference among the two groups, almost all of the interviewees found the trailer the most effective medium in persuading them to watch a film and influencing their decision. Hype, buzz and word of mouth usually through a recommendation of a friend were also significant factors that recurrently appeared to be motivating participants to watch a movie, however the trailer even in relation to the poster, was considered more powerful since it provides a sample of the movie. One interviewee mentioned that it “gives you an idea what you're going to see you understand the, the atmosphere” (Interviewee 6, 16 May 2020), while another highlighted that “the trailer is the real work.. to pick up on the story because I don't think you can get the full story from a poster” (Interviewee 8, 21 May 2020). The efficiency of the trailer is in line with the importance that is given to trailers by the industry as forms of advertising that combine narrative pleasure with promotional communication. As the quotes encapsulate the trailer informs you about the content of the film in a narrative style and gives viewers a complete idea of the film's content. Moreover, some participants noted that the trailer is highly likely to influence their decision in eventually going to watch the film. As exemplified by one interviewee “it can influence my decision to actually watch the movie” (Interviewee 1, 13 May 2020). Nevertheless, the power of the trailers to affect potential moviegoers is not always positive and might even avert audiences from seeing the movie, if they consider the trailer does not convince them and they consider it “bad”. One participant mentioned that “If the trailer is good I will go and watch the movie if the trailer is not good, I will probably not watch the movie” (Interviewee 9, 25 May 2020). This not only highlights the power of the trailer as the ultimate decision maker but it reveals that when trailers do not construct an initially appealing paratextual framework, it will avert audiences from watching the main film, indicating that their persuasive ability can take both a positive and negative direction.

Among the participants, there were also two interviewees who did not find the trailer the most persuading medium but rather had doubts about it. For example, interviewees expressed their dissatisfaction since “the trailer for me is something that we construct to attract the viewers” (Interviewee 8, 21 May 2020), “ they're done more commercially than the actual movie, so they might give you the wrong message or the wrong expectations” (Interviewee 10, 26 May 2020) and “I saw the trailer and it was all the movie the trailer. So, there's no reason

to watch the movie” (Interviewee 7, 20 May 2020). On the one hand, the first two quotes indicate that the interviewees recognize the fact that trailers are a form of advertising for films where they might be hyper-selling the film in order to entice audiences which might even lead to generating wrong expectations just to sell the main film. For both of them the most persuasive promotional medium were a film’s critic reviews and directors. Moreover, a common characteristic that these two participants shared was the fact that they had personal experiences from the film world either due through work or previous studies. Thus, they base their movie decisions on their previous knowledge rather than trusting a marketing medium, like trailers, whose only purpose is to sell.

On the other hand, the second quote pinpoints to the concept of reduced curiosity towards a product due to the disclosure of too much information as suggested by Hennig-Thurau and Houston (2019). If a trailer contains all the signs that one needs to decode for the main film, the interest and anticipation is highly reduced, resulting in no need of experiencing the product which is the exact opposite purpose of the trailer. For this interviewee the most persuasive advertising are snapshots from the movie that often appear on social media.

The effectiveness of the promotional tools is related to personal choices and previous experiences of the viewers. Although the movie trailer is the most prominent and persuasive in motivating audiences to go and watch the film, this is not always the case as exemplified above. Other mediums such as film reviews and awards which are epitextual information might be more influential if one does not believe in the trailer. However, both peritextual and epitextual information about the film influence the decision making-process of audiences in ultimately watching the film.

## **5.2. Expectations Through Paratextual Mediums**

The specific theme emerged from the shared views that were observed regarding what type of information participants decode from each examined medium and the expectations derived through them. It became clear that the poster as an attention-grabbing medium had very low persuading influence and thus created little to no expectations regarding the main film. Particularly, the recurring responses regarding the type of information they decode on posters were the type of film, title, actors, director and an overall sensation. This indicates, that posters as paratextual devices do not carry important thresholds of interpretations in regards to the main film, but they do carry peritextual information which is what potential consumers like the interviewees, notice. Despite their static nature, posters still play an important role in making a good first impression among viewers by employing promotional appeals, thus providing

some insight into the film. From the interviews it was evident that the participants considered the poster as a visually appealing summary of the movie since “posters offer a more aesthetic representation of the movie” (Interviewee 1, 13 May 2020). and “the posters can describe the general feeling of the movie”( Interviewee 7, 20 May 2020). This is in line with Chen and Gao (2014) who propose that posters must convey all the information through text and image and captivate audiences in a very short amount of time. In particular, the information that interviewees get from the posters’ visual cues are the genre of the movie and the actors. The story of the main film was not an element that interviewees looked for and there were few that paid attention to the tagline. As one participant said “ I’m more attracted from the graphic design of the poster so I’m not trying to..to understand what it’s about in the movie” (Interviewee 6, 16 May 2020). This was a highly interesting insight that emphasizes the fact that posters must make a great first impression since audiences pay little to no attention to them and they need to be attracted by what they see in just a glimpse.

Moreover, none of the participants mentioned that what they saw in the poster was expected to be seen in the film as suggested by Aley & Hahn (2020), underlying that its’ effectiveness on potential viewers is very limited. As one interviewee mentioned it is only effective if “I see a poster, and ...and I pay attention to it, I will then Google the movie and see the trailer” (Interviewee 3, 14 May 2020), highlighting the significant role of the poster as a first impression tool since it might lead to the trailer of the actual film. As a result, film posters must be visually clear, approachable and aesthetically pleasing towards audiences by efficiently communicating the genre, the actors and perhaps the story although this was not an important element that interviewees looked for.

As it was indicated above, trailers are highly persuasive tools unlike posters. They convey the type of movie through a combination of elements such as music, montage and lighting, which help potential viewers create a thorough impression regarding the film and decide if it is worth spending their leisure time. Notably, one interviewee commented “it gives you more information, when you have more information you’re more convinced to watch it” (Interviewee 9, May 25 2020). The merger of small snippets from the main movie is what gives audiences a sense of what they are going to see but it has to be enough to create some anticipation. As one participant noted, the trailer gives “some moments of the movie, mostly the most important of them, but without revealing what is going to happen in the end” (Interviewee 4, May 14 2020). This quote is in accordance with Zeiser’s (2015) description of the movie trailer and it encapsulates the marketing effect that it creates as it lures viewers by giving them some scenes from the film but to the extent to create some kind of expectations

and eagerness, without exposing everything. In other words, a successful trailer must be exciting, without any spoilers and creating the need to watch the film.

Though the trailer's purpose is to generate anticipatory feelings, it is up to the main movie to fulfill that desire by offering what the trailer promised and even more. Throughout the interviews, some of the participants pointed out that trailers can be deceiving because they portray the most interesting parts but the main film does not deliver what was expected. Consequently, this leads viewers to feel "betrayed" (Interviewee 6, May 16 2020) and "bummed out" (Interviewee 9, May 25 2020). Furthermore, they can be misleading in the overall feeling that they convey since they might hide important information. One interviewer commented that "a lot of trailers have comedic stuff in them. You know, the..the comedy scenes just to attract people. So yes..But the movie is not comedic"(Interviewee 7, May 20 2020). This is also indicated by Kernan (2004) and Gray (2010), who stated that more often than not trailers incorporate more than one genre, but as it appears, this might not be reflected in the movie and thus it is not a good representation of the film. Consequently, the majority of the interviewees stated that trailers should create accurate expectations. From an audience reception perspective, they should be realistic and precise without creating bigger expectations than they should while at the same time generating some anticipation and not revealing everything, leading to a spoiler. As expressed by one interviewee "don't create too much hype without the movie actually being no good or like creating super high expectations and then going and watch the film and is something different." (Interviewee 9, 25 May 2020).

Therefore, as devices that set primary paratextual frameworks they should accurately reflect the movie in order to establish correct expectations and avoid the disappointment of the viewers. Nevertheless, some participants also referred to the "business" perspective of the trailers by acknowledging that it is a marketing tool and its mission is to sell, therefore being misleading is justified. As one participant commented, it is okay that trailers glamourize the main film "Because it's a marketing tool. To get people to see the movie and make money." (Interviewee 3, 14 May 2020).

### **5.3. Cohesive Expectations**

Since it is the main film's task to fulfill the expectations, the participants were asked if the marketing material that they were shown were in line with what they saw. Although one would expect that both posters and trailers accurately reflected the promoted film and had a cohesion between them, this was not only the case. As a result, the specific theme emerged

from the marketing material that participants considered to adequately reflect the main movie and there was a synergy between the two mediums.

The first film was *Little Women* (Gerwig, 2020). To begin with, two of the interviewees had a personal connection with the novel as the one had read it herself and the other one had personal memories of her mother reading it, while the other two were familiar with the story. This is in line with the familiarity and sensations concepts that were observed as potential appeals within the promotional mediums, tapping into emotional past experiences of potential consumers. Overall, the poster for the film was found to be a “very accurate representation” (Interviewee 1, 13 May 2020) and the trailer a “good representation” (Interviewee 3, 14 May 2020) of the main film as two the participants characterized. What was found to be persuasive were the appealing young actors and the pleasant and happy feeling that both mediums generated through the colors and beautiful costumes. At the same time, they created similar expectations regarding the genre, which they anticipated to be romance revolving around a love story due to the presence of Timothee Chalamet, and a happy film regarding four sisters with Saoirse Ronan having a prominent role. Additionally, the theme of women empowerment was identified by two interviewees through the tagline and trailer, while the choice of young actors was an appeal which is in line with the semiotic analysis highlighting that both mediums place their focus on stardom. However, none of the participants found the director Greta Gerwig as a persuasive appeal. Notably, almost all of the participants commented on the fact that neither the poster nor the trailer carry any visual cues to signify drama as one of them said, “it's going to be a happy movie. Although the story's not so happy at all.” (Interviewee 3, 14 May 2020). This was found to be relatively misleading especially if one is not familiar with the story and was also detected in the semiotic analysis as an important element missing from the poster and the trailer. The hidden genre was found frustrating by two participants since the actual film was not a happy story but much sadder than expected. Nonetheless, the two other interviewees found the film to be fulfilling their expectations with one commenting she was satisfied “because I saw a movie with a very interesting character who was Joe.” (Interviewee 9, 25 May 2020).

Similarly, *The Invisible Man* (Whannell, 2020) generated similar expectations among the two mediums. Participants found appealing main actress as well as the intriguing story hinted through the tagline and showcased within the trailer. Moreover, since the identified genre was thriller interviewees referred to the expected sensations they would get. As one participant commented she expects “to spend two hours of my life being afraid” (Interviewee 6, May 16 2020) while another “you get all the anxiety in an image.” (Interviewee 8, 21 May

2020). The specific appeals were also distinguished within the semiotic analysis where it was identified that viewers are likely to be drawn by their familiarity with the actress and the sensations that the film will trigger based on previous experiences with thriller. Another similarity between the analysis and the participants' observations was the ambiguity regarding the invisible man as interviewees commented that they expected the invisibility to be related with “metaphysics” (Interviewee 2, 13 May 2020) and not to technology which signifies a sci-fi genre, something that was not evident neither in the poster nor the trailer. Nevertheless, all of the interviewees found that there was a cohesion and synergy between the two materials and therefore found that they generate the same expectations. From the four participants, three found that the trailer was more than enough to get a grasp of the film, without the main movie contributing more, as encapsulated by one interviewee “it would be for me just fine to see the trailer” (Interviewee 6, 16 May 2020). In this particular case, even though the expectations were cohesive, the movie did not live up to that resulting in disappointment.

The third and last film that participants found generated similar expectations was *Tenet* (Nolan, 2020). The two interviewees found the genre and the director as the main persuasive appeals, which were also identified in the semiotic analysis. However, none of them considered stardom in terms of actors as an influential element. Moreover, the poster was found to be very similar to the main movie while for the trailer one participant commented “I was I was expecting to see exactly what I saw at the end” (Interviewee 10, 26 May 2020). Although the two mediums were quite synergistic, the participants were not satisfied with the film. One of them said “Emm not very much. Actually, there was also a lot of bad criticism about the movie before I even saw and I had heard of it. So I was influenced by that.” (Interviewee 1, May 13 2020) while the other found it too commercial. This indicates that even though *Tenet* (Nolan, 2020) created high expectations and hype among the moviegoers it did not fulfill what it promised. Furthermore, the above quote reveals that epitextual information can have a negative impact on viewers.

#### **5.4. Opposing Expectations**

In contrast to the previous theme, the specific one emerged from the promotional mediums which participants did not consider to have a cohesiveness between them and thus did not generate the same expectations.

Particularly, although the marketing material for *The Gentlemen* (Richie, 2020) employed the same persuasive appeals, participants found them to be incohesive. Interviewees mentioned that what attracted them towards the film in both the poster and the trailer were the casting and the director. As one participant commented “it was the casting actually. Because

it's, you know, it's very intriguing to see whats all these are doing together” (Interviewee 2, May 13 2020). This is in line with Kernan (2004) who highlighted that star pairings are highly promoted to indicate cinematic success as well as quality, also detected in the analysis. However the poster of the film in relation to the trailer was not found to be a good representation of the movie by any of the participants, “ I don't think that this poster, like says anything about the movie” (Interviewee 4, 14 May 2020). Rather the poster was considered to be blank, abstract and not providing the story’s relation to drugs. The expectations obtained solely relied on the fact that it is a Guy Richie film. Specifically, the one participant was a huge fan of the director and familiar with all of his previous works did not found that the poster was missing important information but rather “Guy Richie says it all..it can help you..you know, fill in the blanks” and “has a specific style in specific movies. I'm waiting to.. to watch these kind of stuff.” (Interviewee 7, 20 May 2020). This does not only emphasize how familiarity and sensations are incorporated within persuasive appeals where the name of a star, in this case director, can generate expectations solely based on that but also suggest that when the film has a distinct directorial style the visual cues of the poster do not need to accurately represent the main film since viewers are already prepared for what they are going to watch.

Moreover, none of the interviewees referred to the tagline of the poster. This might be due to the fact that viewers are not interested in understanding what the film is about through the particular medium as previously observed. In contrast to the poster, the trailer was found to be a good representation of the film that successfully created anticipation. From the participants, two of them were satisfied by the movie and watched what they expected while the other two were not. Those who did not like the film commented on the fact that they found the storyline confusing and hard to keep up with. However, the Guy Richie fan commented that “It was exactly what I was expecting to see” (Interviewee 7, 20 May 2020), which suggests that at the end of the day audiences pay attention to different aspects of the film based on their personal tastes, preferences and film experiences.

Another film where expectations were not cohesive was *1917*(Mendes, 2020). Specifically, what interviewees found appealing was the director and the fact that the whole movie was famously one-shot. The participants found that the poster of the film did not reflect the main movie nor was it visually eye-catching. One interviewee commented “totally uninteresting for me to be honest” (Interviewee 6, 16 May 2020) while another “it doesn't do justice to the film” (Interviewee 10, 16 May 2020). The flaws in the poster emerged from the fact that it did not capture the extent of the movie as it only showcases action. The only expectations derived were from it were the director and the genre which is a war and action

film. The particular appeals were also detected in the semiotic analysis, emphasizing that the persuasion for this film depends on the familiarity with the director and his previous work. Stardom was not considered a persuasive appeal, as analyzed casting is not a strong promotional element in *1917* (Mendes, 2020), and this was mirrored in the interviews since none of them referred to that. Moreover, none of the participants referred to the tagline, indicating the power of the aesthetics and visuals that posters possess and the fact audiences rely on them. The trailer on the other hand, was found to be a successful promotional medium as it generated anxiety that was fulfilled when the film was watched. One participant said that “ I think it says the right amount of stuff that you need to know before watching the movie” (Interviewee 7, 20 May 2020) while another mentioned “I feel very much that you get the full essence of the film” (Interviewee 8, 21 May 2020). As a result, all of the participants who watched the film were highly content with what they saw.

## **6. Conclusion & Discussion**

All things considered the aim of this study was to examine what kind of expectations promotional material generate and if these are indeed met. Through the conducted research it is clear that posters but mostly trailers are vital and powerful paratextual tools that create anticipation and expectations among viewers and can influence their decision-making processes both positively and negatively. The examined concepts of sensations and familiarity were deeply rooted within the appeals of the promotional material examined. It was evident that both posters and trailers highlighted the most recognizable appeal that was likely to be identified by a mass audience, whether that was the director in the case of *The Gentlemen* (Richie, 2020) and the star actress in *The Invisible Man* (Whannell, 2020). Nevertheless, not every participant found the same aspect of the main movie appealing. For interviewees who gave importance in the quality of the film, they were more persuaded by the director or through critical reviews they had read, rather than the stardom. The particular participants were also the ones that had some experience within the field of film and therefore prior knowledge, leading to be more critical towards marketing material and appearing to not really being influenced by them since they were the ones to be opposing movie trailers. Other interviewees who were convinced by the presence of actors or a compelling story expected their anticipation to be realized by those factors rather than directorial elements or cinematography. It is in such a way it can be concluded that both the formulation of expectations and their fulfillment is highly depended on the personal sensations, familiarity and experiences that each individual has with previous movies but also with film as a subject in general. Moreover, is important to note that

the specific difference concerning what participants found appealing was not related to age. Rather the only result found to be strongly influenced by age was where interviewees came across film marketing material. As emphasized, social media were central in younger individuals' encounter with promotional movie feed, while websites and newspapers were key in finding out about new films for the older generation. This distinction can be justified with the technological savviness that young people have today in comparison to older ones who have gotten accustomed to traditional media channels and thus prefer them.

Despite the particular difference, it was repeatedly emerging within the interviews that trailers are the most effective medium for persuading and motivating audiences to go and watch a movie. It influences them in their decision-making process both positively and negatively and plays a crucial role in the formation of expectations and eagerness. The trailers of the films examined were not perceived neither as misleading nor deceiving but rather accurate representations of the main movie. In contrast to the trailers, posters were found to be a neutrally effective medium that holds little to no persuasive power. Due to the medium's stagnation, it is difficult for posters with so little information to capture the essence of a whole film and can be therefore characterized as a more misleading, always in relation to the trailers. The indifference of the participants towards posters also verifies the significance that studios and producers give to movie trailers as it the most persuasive medium for the majority of viewers. As exemplified by opposed interviewees, trailers are too commercial and might give too much of the plot, leaving no room for curiosity and anticipation to rise and are thus avoided.

The analyzed expectations were in line with what participants said they expected from them including the incohesive elements between the two mediums. Although the differences found between posters and trailers did not seem to matter for the interviewees they all found movie trailers to be better at representing the main movie. From the expectations that the interviewees generated by the promotional material of the analyzed movies, some were more successful in fulfilling them than others. Despite the differences between the poster and the trailer, *1917* (Mendes, 2020) was the only movie that created curiosity and anticipation among viewers and successfully satisfied everyone. Considering the uniqueness of the particular film both in terms of direction and story, it is unlikely that someone would be disappointed by it, although that still depends on everyone's taste. In contrast, *Little Women* (Gerwig, 2020), *The Gentlemen* (Richie, 2020), *The Invisible Man* (Whannell, 2020) and *Tenet* (Nolan, 2020) were dominated by contrasting views as some were satisfied by the movie while others were utterly disappointed. Whether a film was liked or disliked by the participants is highly depended on

the developed expectations, personal preferences but also other influential factors such as where the movie was watched and the dominating mood.

### **6.1. Theoretical/societal and international implications**

The particular research provides highly useful knowledge and insight into the communicative strategies and audience perception of film marketing material. First, the as proposed by Kernan (2004) the persuasive appeals that marketers employ were not only evident within the posters and trailers analyzed but they were what motivated viewers to watch the examined films. The findings are in line with the results by Finsterwalder et al. since genre and actors were key in formulating expectations and anticipation. Moreover, the key concepts of sensations and familiarity were indeed incorporated within promotional material with each of them highlighting the most prominent selling point whether director or cast assemble. However, since sensations and familiarity are highly personal and based on previous film experiences not everyone find the same appeals equally effective. This is also in line with Stokmans (2009) research verifying the fact that what viewers consider appealing is contingent on an individuals' motivations to watch particular movie. This study contributes towards the existing literature in three main ways. Primarily, posters hold very little persuasive power but are important for first-impression tools that might lead to further quest of the film. Second, there is not always a consistency between the two mediums regarding the information they provide resulting in inconstant expectations about the main film. Finally, since the main movie has to fill those expectations, when promotional mediums do not precisely reflect the film it will most likely result in disappointment especially for individuals that base their assumptions about the main film on them. Moreover, it can be argued that the findings of this study have some societal implications towards film marketers. Since movie posters provide significant first-impression paratextual frameworks, they need to be eye-catching, aesthetically pleasing and realistically reflect the main movie. Additionally, film trailers should prepare audiences for exactly what the main movie is about, by reflecting the pace, genre and stardom, in order to avoid the viewers' frustration after viewing the film. However, this must be done in such a way that it will not only show the best parts nor spoil the movie but create enough excitement and curiosity that will draw audiences in.

In regards to the international component of this research both the data and the participants are of international character. As suggested by (Hall, 1997) the meanings generated from texts are situated within history and culture. This indicates that the information-decoding that participants engaged in when they were shown the posters and the trailers are not universal but rather built-in the Greek culture as well as each individual's history and experience. As a

result, this study could be adapted to other countries and cultures, whether European, American or Asian, in order to see what kind of appeals and expectations they derive from the particular films. Moreover, the chosen promotional material were the ones that were most likely promoted in Greece, but they might be differ depending the country they are targeting. Thus, the specific movie trailers and posters for the chosen films are likely to vary from location to location.

## **6.2. Limitations and Future Research**

This study is not without its limitations. First, regarding the sampling process, although purposive sampling for the selection of the marketing material was time-efficient the sample was rather small, only 5 movies, which is limiting in generalizing the results of the findings. Moreover, the reliability of the study is reduced with the particular type of sampling while levels of bias increase (Dudovskiy, 2018). In addition, the fact that only American, and one British, movies dominated the top box office resulted in a minimum variability in terms of movie origin which makes the results of this study limited to a specific type of cinema, that of Hollywood. Additionally, saturation was not achieved during the interviewing process since only 10 interviews were conducted which is small number and again limiting in generalizing the outcome. Furthermore, snowball sampling was useful in contacting the interviewees but it resulted in a sample where the representativeness in both age and gender was small. This might be due to the fact that the initial subjects that were nominated were familiar (Exporable, 2009). Moreover, the material chosen to examine expectation formation were narrowed down to posters and trailers which is limiting considering the size of film's marketing campaign. It can also be argued that due to the nature of the two material, one being a photo and the other being a video, is somewhat restrictive comparing them in relation to the generation of expectations.

In regards to the methodology used to analyze the promotional material, semiotics heavily depends on and are influenced by individual readings (Chandler, 2021). Although the analysis was done in an objective manner as possible the observations regarding the familiarity and sensations might have been influenced from personal bias. In a similar manner, all of the interviewees had already watched the film they were shown and as a result it was harder for them to be totally objective regarding why they are persuaded and what they expect since they had already been exposed to the film itself. This might have influenced their responses regarding the expectations they derive from the movies. Moreover, some time had passed since some of the participants had watched the film examined and therefore it was harder for them

to remember what the film was about and whether they were satisfied by it. Another important limitation within the interview process was the fact they were conducted via Zoom. Although participants were recommended to have a stable connection and a quiet place, some technical issues, either with the internet or outside distractions, emerged during some interviews which had impact on the flow of the conversation.

In order to get more insight and further insight regarding the formulation of persuasive effectiveness and expectation formation of film marketing material, future research I could address the same issue but conduct the interviews at two separate parts. In the first part, participants can be exposed to promotional material for upcoming films and be asked what are their expectations without having watched the movie. In the second part, participants will have watched the movie, this for example could happen within the context of a cinema, and then be interviewed about how they feel after they have seen it and whether what they saw was in line with what they said they expected. Another direction in which this study can take is by cross-checking if the expectation formation is the same among cultures. As it was previously emphasized film marketing material might change from country to country and from culture to culture. Therefore, what might be considered appealing in Greece, such as an actor, might not be considered appealing in other parts of Europe such as France or Turkey or even in other parts of the world. Moreover, if one wants to place their focus on the communication strategies that marketing material employ future research can examine how the persuasive language used on the texts differs from cinema to cinema. For instance, Hollywood and Korean cinema are most likely not using the same persuasive appeals since they have different targeting audiences. Finally, future research can also examine other parts of a movie's marketing campaign, such as social media, in persuading viewers as well as expectation formation.

All in all, the influence of film marketing material on viewers is very high and it can affect viewers to a great extent in generating expectations and convincing to attend the movies. Considering the amount of revenue that films, especially Hollywood ones, make out of viewership it is thought-provoking the kind of strategies they employ to persuade us and not only through posters and trailers but through an entire marketing campaign.

## References

- Alexander, I. (2011, 26 June). *Why movie poster art is so important*. Film Industry Network.  
<https://filmindustry.network/why-movie-poster-art-is-so-important/11530>
- Aley, M., Hahn, L. (2020). The Powerful Male Hero: A Content Analysis of Gender Representation in Posters for Children's Animated Movies. *Sex Roles*, 83, 499–509  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-020-01127-z>
- Berger, A. A. (2010). *The Objects of Affection. Semiotics and Consumer Culture*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Bohnenkamp Björn, Knapp, A.-kristin, Hennig-thurau, T., & Schauerte, R. (2015). When does it make sense to do it again? an empirical investigation of contingency factors of movie remakes. *Journal of Cultural Economics*, 39(1), 15–41.  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10824-014-9221-6>
- Boieje, H (2010). *Analysis in qualitative research*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Buckerman, O. (2005, April 1st). To cut a long story short. *The Guardian*.  
<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2005/apr/01/2>
- Chandler, D. (2021). *Semiotics for Beginners*.  
<http://visual-memory.co.uk/daniel/Documents/S4B/>
- Chen, Y., & Gao, X. (2014). Interpretation of the Representational Meaning of Movie Posters from the Perspective of Multimodal Discourse Analysis. *Proceedings of the International Conference on Education, Language, Art and Intercultural Communication*, 346-350.  
<https://doi.org/10.2991/icelaic-14.2014.87>
- Davis, C., Michelle, C., Hardy, A., & Hight, C. (2014). Framing audience prefigurations of The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey The roles of fandom, politics and idealised intertexts. *Journal of Audience & Reception Studies*, 11(1), 50-87.  
<https://www.participations.org/Volume%2011/Issue%201/4.pdf>
- Drake, P. (2008). Distribution and Marketing in Contemporary Hollywood. In P. McDonald, & J.Wasko (Eds.), *The Contemporary Hollywood Film Industry* (pp. 6382). Wiley.  
<http://eu.wiley.com/WileyCDA/WileyTitle/productCd-1405133872.html>

- Dudovskiy, J. (2018). Purposive Sampling. *Business Research Methodology*.  
<https://research-methodology.net/sampling-in-primary-data-collection/purposive-sampling/>
- Explorable. (April 24, 2009). Snowball Sampling. *Explorable*.  
<https://explorable.com/snowball-sampling>
- Finsterwalder, J., Kuppelwieser, V. G., & de Villiers, M. (2012). The effects of film trailers on shaping consumer expectations in the entertainment industry-a qualitative analysis. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 19(6), 589– 595.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2012.07.004>
- Fleishman, J. (2016). Not all American films travel easily. It takes expertise to connect them with foreign audiences. *Los Angeles Time*. <https://www.latimes.com/entertainment/movies/la-ca-mn-selling-films-abroad-20160417-story.html>
- Gerwing, G. (Director). (2020). *Little Women* [Film]. Columbia Pictures; New Regency Productions; Pascal Pictures; Sony Pictures Entertainment
- Grainge, P., & Johnson, C. (2015). *Promotional Screen Industries*. New York, NY: Routledge
- Gray, J. (2008). Television pre-views and the meaning of hype. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 11(1), 33–49. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1367877907086391>
- Gray, J. (2010). *Show Sold Separately: Promos, Spoilers, and Other Media Paratexts*. New York; London: NYU Press. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt155jkjw>
- Green, M. C., Brock, T. C., & Kaufman, G. F. (2004). Understanding media enjoyment: the role of transportation into narrative worlds. *Communication Theory*, 14(4), 311–327.  
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2885.2004.tb00317.x>
- Guy, R. (Director). (2020). *The Gentlemen* [Film]. STX Films; Miramax; Toff Guy Films; CAA Media Finance; Coach Films
- Hackley, C., & Hackley, A. R. (2019). Advertising at the threshold: Paratextual promotion in the era of media convergence. *Marketing Theory*, 19(2), 195–215.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1470593118787581>
- Hall, S. (1997). The Work of Representation. In Stuart Hall (Ed.) *Representation. Cultural representation and signifying practices* (pp. 13 - 71). London: The Open University.
- Hennig-Thurau, T., & Houston, M. B. (2019). Entertainment science. *Data Analytics and Practical Theory for Movies, Games, Books, and Music* Cham: Springer
- Jerrick, D. (2013). The effectiveness of film trailers: evidence from the college student market. *Uw la crosse - Journal of Undergraduate Research*, 16, 1–12.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/13527266.2010.538071>

- Johnson, J. M. (2011). In-depth interviewing. In Jaber F. Gubrium & James A. Holstein (Eds.). *Handbook of Interview Research*(pp. 103-119). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc. doi: <https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781412973588>
- Johnston, K. M. (2008). “The Coolest Way to Watch Movie Trailers in the World”: Trailers in the Digital Age. *Convergence*, 14(2), 145–160.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1354856507087946>
- Johnston, K. M., Vollans, E., & Greene, F. L. (2016). Watching the trailer: Researching the film trailer audience. *Participations*, 13(2), 56-85. <http://www.participations.org/Volume%2013/Issue%202/5.pdf>
- Kafoury, M. F. (2013) *Transmedia Cohesion in Motion Picture Advertising*. [Communication Honors Theses, Trinity University]. Thesis Open Access  
[http://digitalcommons.trinity.edu/comm\\_honors/9](http://digitalcommons.trinity.edu/comm_honors/9)
- Karray, S., & Debernitz, L. (2017). The effectiveness of movie trailer advertising, *International Journal of Advertising*, 36(2), 368-392, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2015.1090521>
- Kehe, J. (2013, June 10). What's the Best Trailer Ever? Film Maestros Weigh In, and You Can Too. *WIRED*.<https://www.wired.com/2013/06/best-trailer-of-all-time/>
- Kernan, L. (2004). *Coming Attractions*. University of Texas Press. Retrieved January 11, 2021, from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7560/706002>
- Kerrigan, F. (2017). *Film Marketing* (2nd ed.). Routledge.  
<https://doi-org.eur.idm.oclc.org/10.4324/9781315795287>
- Livingstone, S, (2007). Audiences and Interpretations, *E-Compos*, 10, 1-22  
[http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/5645/2/Audiences\\_and\\_interpretations\\_\(LSERO\).pdf](http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/5645/2/Audiences_and_interpretations_(LSERO).pdf)
- Long, P., & Wall, T. (2012). *Media Studies Texts, Production, Context* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed). London, UK: Taylor & Francis
- Mahlknecht, J. (2015). Three words to tell a story: the movie poster tagline. *Word & Image*, 31(4), 414-424, DOI: [10.1080/02666286.2015.1053036](https://doi.org/10.1080/02666286.2015.1053036)
- McDonald, P. (2013) *Hollywood Stardom*. Wiley: Malden, MA.
- Mendes, S. (Director). (2020). *1917* [Film]. Dreamworks Pictures;Reliance Entertainment;New Republic Pictures; Neal Street Productions; Mogambo (produced in association with; Amblin Partners

- Mirrles, T. (2013). *Global Entertainment Media: Between Cultural Imperialism and Cultural Globalization*. Routledge
- Naderifar, M., Goli, H., & Ghaljaie, F. (2017). Snowball Sampling: A Purposeful Method of Sampling in Qualitative Research. *Strides in Development of Medical Education In Press*  
DOI: [10.5812/sdme.67670](https://doi.org/10.5812/sdme.67670)
- Nolan, C. (Director). (2020). *Tenet* [Film]. Warner Bros.; Syncopy
- O'Reilly, D., & Kerrigan, F. (2013). A view to a brand: introducing the film brandscape. *European Journal of Marketing*, 47, 769-789.  
<https://doi.org/10.1108/03090561311306868>
- Oja, M. (2019). On the concept of the deceptive trailer: Trailer as paratext and multimodal model of film. *Sign Systems Studies*, 47 (1-2), 177-204.  
<https://doi.org/10.12697/SSS.2019.47.1-2.07>
- Ortiz, J. (2011, October 12). *Woman Sues 'Drive' Distributors Because The Movie Wasn't Enough Like 'Fast And Furious*. BusinessInsider.  
<https://www.businessinsider.com/ryan-gosling-drive-lawsuit-2011-10>
- Port, E. (2000, September 4). *ICON, INDEX and SYMBOL*. Indiana University.  
<https://legacy.cs.indiana.edu/~port/teach/103/sign.symbol.html>
- Rao, V. R., Ravid, A. S., Gretz, R.T., Chen, J., & Basuroy, S. (2017). The impact of advertising content on movie revenues. *Marketing Letters : A Journal of Research in Marketing*, 28(3), 341–355. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11002-017-9418-5>
- Stokmans, M. J. W. (2009). Effectiveness of promotional film posters. In Z. Voss, & R. Steinhart (Eds.), *10th International Conference on Arts and Cultural Management SMU*.
- Strobin, A.A., Hunt, J.B., Spencer, F.J & Hunt, T.G. (2015). The role of music in motion picture advertising and theatrical trailers: Altering music to modify emotional response and genre expectations. *International Academy of Marketing Studies Journal*, 19 (3), 244-260. <https://www-proquest-com.eur.idm.oclc.org/scholarly-journals/role-music-motion-picture-advertising-theatrical/docview/1768357533/se-2?accountid=13598>
- Village Cinemas (2020). *1917*. <https://www.villagecinemas.gr/el/tainies/movie/?c=105176>
- Village Cinemas (2020). *Tenet*. <https://www.villagecinemas.gr/el/tainies/movie/?c=105266>
- Village Cinemas (2020). *Little Women*.  
<https://www.villagecinemas.gr/el/tainies/movie/?c=105188>
- Village Cinemas (2020). *The Invisible Man*.  
<https://www.villagecinemas.gr/el/tainies/movie/?c=105209>

Village Cinemas (2020). *The Gentlemen*.

<https://www.villagecinemas.gr/el/tainies/movie/?c=105217>

Whannell, L. (Director). (2020). *The Invisible Man* [Film]. Universal Pictures; Blumhouse Productions; Goalpost Pictures; Nervous Tick Productions; Screen Australia; Government of Australia; The New South Wales Government

Zeiser, A. (2015). *Transmedia Marketing: From Film and TV to Games and Digital Media*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315880112>

Zeithaml, V. A., Berry, L. L., & Parasuraman, A. (1993). The Nature and Determinants of Customer Expectations of Service. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 21(1), 1– 12. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0092070393211001>

## **Appendix A.**

### **Interview Topic List**

#### **Opening**

Thank you so much for taking the time to do this interview with me. This will really help my master research. Before we begin, would you like to share some information about yourself.

- Name, age, nationality, location?
- Hobbies, education, work?

#### **Research Objective**

To tell you a bit about what I am investigating, I am looking at how promotional marketing tools for movies are creating expectations among viewers and I am conducting interviews to see if these expectations are met. Do you have any questions?

#### **Movie Habits**

Now, I would like to ask you some questions about your movie habits such as movie frequency and types of movies.

-So, to begin with how often do you watch movies?

-Where and how do you prefer watching them (home, cinema, with friends, alone)

-What is your favorite type of movie (action, thriller) and why?

-Before you watch a movie, what kind of information do you want to know about it?

-For example who is in it, or how many stars it has?

-When a movie is promoted, where do you usually come across such promotion?  
For instance, the movies, on social media?

-In terms of types of promotion, for example, social media campaigns, trailers, posters, etc.? Which one do you prefer and why?

-Which one is more effective for you?

-How important is it for you to know what you are going to watch?

#### **Promotional material**

Two of the most significant promotional tools for movies are posters and trailers and according to theory, they provide audiences with important information about the film viewers are going to consume by shaping our interpretations. So, if its okay with you, I am going to ask you some questions about them before diving into the films that you have watched.

-Where do you usually come across posters and trailers?

-How often would say that is?

-What kind of information do posters offer and what kind of information do trailers offer?

-Which medium do you believe is more effective in persuading audiences to go and watch a film?

-To what extent does promotional material influence your decision-making process in ultimately deciding to watch the film?

### **Movies the interviewee has watched**

1917, Tenet, Little Women, The Invisible Man, The Gentlemen,

Let's first talk about the first film that you have watched:

-How long ago did you watch the film and where did you watch it?

-How did you learn about it?

-What motivated you to watch it? (genre, story, actors)

-What did you like and disliked about the film you watched and why?

### **Posters and expectations**

-Going back to the promotional material that we were discussing before I want to show you the poster of this film.

-Seeing the poster and reminiscing about the movie, how similar or dissimilar are they? Which elements are present in both the poster and the movie you watched and which are not?

-What kind of information found on the poster do you find most useful and persuading in motivating you to go and watch a film?

-What kind of expectations does this poster generate and how were those formulated?

-Which part of the poster was most influential?

## **Trailers and expectations**

Now I am going to show the trailer of the same film.

-Looking at the trailer and remembering the film, how similar or dissimilar are they?

-How does it differ from the poster?

-What did you like about the particular trailer and which elements did you find appealing?

-What type of information provided by the trailer do you find most persuading? For example, this might be who has directed it or critical reviews.

-What kind of expectations did the trailer generate and how were those formulated?

-Which part of the trailer was most influential?

## **Expectations and Synergy**

-Looking at both mediums together, do you believe there is synergy between them? Or is one more misleading than the other?

-if yes, which one and why?

-Do both mediums create the same expectations for you? What kind of pleasures can be derived from the poster and what from the film?

- Do you believe that what was promoted was accurate? And were those expectations met when you were watching the film?

-From the anticipation created from the promotion, was it fulfilled when you watched the film?

-If yes which elements were present both in the film and in the promotional material and which were absent?

-How misleading or accurate would you characterize the particular poster and trailer and why?

-If it's misleading, why do you believe that is?

*Same round of questions for the second movie*

## **Conclusion**

- Do you believe to what extent do you believe the poster and trailer guided your expectation of the main movie? And on what level did they influence you?

-Do you believe that posters and trailers are enough to shape your expectations regarding a film? Or do you need more information?

-Do you believe that promotional material should be realistic or it okay to show the best parts?

-Finally, is there anything else you would like to add.