

Becoming Trivial: The Book Trailer

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Abstract

Despite the introduction of audiobooks and e-books, printed stories still are in high demand. However, in a globalized world which is more and more ruled by mass media and technology, it is increasingly difficult for writers and publishers to promote their books. The solution is almost ironic: popular media, which is assumed to decrease readership, is turned into a tool to increase the number of readers. In 2002 the book trailer emerged as a new web-based marketing strategy for the launch of new books. Since then the appearance of the book trailer has changed considerably. The article examines specific examples and highlights methods that establish the relationship between the content of the book and its representation in the book trailer. Although guidelines apply for the production of book trailers, such as constraints relating to time and content, there are no limitations for the imagination of the producers. A book trailer may be simple, supported only by music and pictures, but they may also be as complex as short films. Additionally, book trailers are not limited to the promotion of one specific genre or age group. Depending on the viral potential of social networks such as YouTube, Facebook, and Tumblr book trailers reach a global audience and, therefore, open up new markets. It can be argued, while book trailers have not yet reached the realm of the everyday, they will gradually come to the attention of academics and this article wants to present a starting point for this development.

Keywords: Book trailer, marketing, social media, film studies, adaptation studies.

The days of judging a book by its cover are drawing to a close. Publishers have finally tapped into the MTV generation, and now it is possible to make your literary choices in advance online by watching a sequence of rapid-fire images accompanied by a thumping score, big flashing words and, if you're lucky, a deep-voiced American talking about 'one man' and 'his quest to find meaning in a world gone mad'. Yes: there are now trailers for books and soon, according to Steve Osgoode, director of online marketing at HarperCollins Canada, they will be everywhere

(Fox 2006)

Introduction

As early as 2008, Jesse Baker stated in an online article that 'book trailers are now standard operating procedure in the world of publishing' (Baker 2008). Although Baker illustrates that publishing houses as well as independent authors increasingly employ book trailers to promote their books, this comparatively new type of advertising has still not been approached from an academic point of view. Whereas trailers for movies are frequently investigated,¹ book trailers have attracted very little academic attention even though they provide material for a multitude of research areas. Reasons for that are manifold, although it can be argued that three points are especially relevant. First, the genre still lacks a consistent definition or clear-cut categorizations. Second, it has not yet been proven to be an efficient marketing tool. Third, it can be viewed as an emerging art form independent from its original source text. In addition, a complete analyses of book trailers faces the same difficulties and challenges that Vinzenz Hediger encountered while studying the American movie trailer: there is only little literature available, the object of study is difficult to narrow down, and there is a huge quantity of material. Hediger proposes some questions for the investigation which could also be applied to book trailers: should the advertising material itself be investigated, the budget or the marketing itself, is a case study needed and if so how to choose in order to be representative. These considerations also apply to the book trailer, but with one difference: Hediger uses the movie trailer as the basis for the history of cinema advertising and shows which stylistic changes may be observed in the course of history from 1912 to 1998 (Hediger 2001: 16). Such an approach would surely be interesting for book trailers, however, Hediger investigates eighty-six years whereas the book trailer only emerged about ten years ago and has not yet reached wide recognition. Therefore, this article attempts to lay a foundation for an academic discourse about the book trailer. It will define and categorize the genre, discuss its relevance as a marketing strategy and illustrate key artistic qualities. It is the hope of the author that this rather horizontal approach in contrast to a vertical approach will trigger other scholars to engage with book trailers in their various fields of expertise.

Origins

According to the United States Patent and Trademark Office, the term ‘book trailer’ was first filed as a service mark on 28 October 2002 by Sheila Clover English and amended on 22 December 2003 (United States Patent and Trademark Office 2002). It denotes the ‘promotion of the goods of others by preparing and creating advertisements for books in the form of videos’ and was first used on 27 August 2002 before it was applied within a commercial context on 27 October 2002 (United States Patent and Trademark Office 2002). The idea for the production of a book trailer was formed when Clover English herself wanted to publish a book and sought a way ‘to do something special to make [her] book stand out’ (Clover English 2008: 11). Realizing that movie trailers encouraged people to go to the cinema and watch the promoted film, she invented the book trailer ‘to inspire someone to want a book’ (Underwood 2010). As a consequence, Clover English founded Circle of Seven Productions and created the first book trailer in 2002, thus becoming a pioneer in new forms of marketing for books (Circle of Seven Productions 2002-2011). At the time, many marketing experts believed ‘video promos to become mandatory launch elements’ (Sweeney 2011). However, it took six years for a book trailer to have a significant influence on book sales with the video for Kelly Corrigan’s *Middle Place* (2008) being acknowledged as ‘the first book to gain real traction through its trailer’ (Paul 2010). In the same year, Circle of Seven Productions produced a total of 140 video projects, which proves a significant increase when compared to the only twelve productions in 2006. Both, the increase in *Middle Place*’s sales numbers and Circle of Seven Production’s enhanced video production, do not only indicate the ‘advent of YouTube and MySpace’, but also the growing interest of mainstream publishers in new forms of marketing (Sullivan 2009). It had taken four years since the invention of the book trailer until big publishing houses joined the enterprise themselves, when in 2006, HarperCollins commissioned their first book trailer for Gregoire Bouillier’s *The Mystery Guest* (Jaszi 2009). At that time, book trailers were still a rarity among publishers; by now, however, Harper Collins orders trailers for 25 to 50 percent of their titles (Jaszi 2009).

Formats

Despite the great numeric increase of book trailers, Kathleen Sweeney still observes that ‘multimedia roll-outs remain ad hoc and inconsistent’ (Sweeney 2011) and Robin Sloan feels that people ‘are still pointing you to [book trailers] as oddities – “Hey, look at this weird thing”’ (Metz 2012). This sense of confusion about the existence and form of this new way of advertising books indicates that the book trailer has not yet achieved broad public awareness. When people are asked about book trailers, many are surprised about their existence or mystified as to

their form and function. The very few who do have a concept in mind think of what Sweeney describes as ‘the current mixed bag of clips swing[ing] from big budget pseudo movie trailers, to mundane talking head author interviews, to clever indie animations and experimental visuals’ (Sweeney 2011). To make it even more confusing, Circle of Seven Productions themselves distinguish on their official webpage between seven different types of book videos, ranging from various ‘teasers’ to ‘publisher advantage’, from ‘author interviews’ to the actual ‘book trailer’ (Circle of Seven Productions 2002-2011). For an outsider, boundaries between these individual types of video production are rather blurry and the descriptions are at first sight not very informative. Therefore, it can only be speculated that those categorizations are mainly done for the calculation of production costs.

The shortest explanation for the *book trailer*, as of yet, may have been provided by Matt Goodlett: ‘Consider it a marriage between the book jacket blurb and video’ (Goodlett 2009). In general, however, the question of definition is not as easy as it appears at first sight. The official definition of a book trailer, as provided by Sheila Clover English, states the following:

Technically, a book trailer® is an acted-out dramatization of a book synopsis. [...] Book trailers® use scenes from the book with live actors. These are primarily professionally made, and involve full production crews. (Clover English 2008: 15)

In addition, a good book trailer ‘is a visual synopsis that leaves people wanting more’ (Underwood 2010), as the following examples will show. The book trailer for Quirk Classics’ *Sense and Sensibility and Sea Monsters* was written and directed by Ransom Riggs in 2009 (Irreference 2009). This production received recognition by the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal* and the *Onion AV Club* and was named ‘book trailer of the year 2009’ by Amazon and the *Huffington Post* (Riggs n.y.). It opens with Marianne Dashwood and Mr. Willoughby approaching a lake where Willoughby is about to declare his love to Marianne. However, this seemingly perfect adaptation of Jane Austen’s *Sense and Sensibility* in the style of British heritage cinema ends as a B-movie horror scenario with Willoughby being taken into the lake by a huge sea monster. This twist of the story, in addition to the satirized Regency dialogue, reveals the comical mood of the book. Seth Grahame-Smith’s *Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter* presents another highly praised book trailer (HachetteBookGroup 2010). Similar to the style of *Sense and Sensibility and Sea Monsters*, this video opens with a feeling of historical authenticity, with the stereotypically austere looking Abraham Lincoln as he writes his memoirs at his desk and culminates with him killing a vampire. The trailer suggests that this is what he has apparently done all his life. A third example is provided by the rather unknown trailer for *The Turncoat* by Donna Thorland. At first sight, the video appears to be the trailer for an upcoming heritage movie, albeit with a limited budget, with real actors, on original locations and elaborate costumes until it is revealed at the very last second that it is indeed a book and not a film that is promoted here (Penguin NAL). All three examples

adequately illustrate that professionally produced book trailers ‘complete with actors, arty cinematography and a nourish voice-over, [are] the closest the book industry has come to a movie-style preview for a new title’ (Berton 2006).

Clover English indicates that the term ‘book trailer’ is often wrongly used for other forms of video promotion for books and that the term, as with many other product names, ‘has been so widely used by the public that its original definition is sometimes lost’ (Clover English 2008: 15). In her view, book trailers are often confused with *book videos* which is ‘the most generic term for a book shown in a visual manner, whether it is digital or film’ (ibid.). Accordingly, the term ‘book video’ should be used as an umbrella term for any kind of videos intended for the promotion of books. Besides book trailers, Clover English mentions the *author interview* as the easiest and most direct way for authors to connect with their readers and tell them behind-the-scenes stories of their book. The author interview may be executed in different ways; either by having the author simply talk about the book or featuring an actual interview (Clover English 2008: 16). An example for this type of video marketing is the author interview for Rick Riordan’s *The Last Olympian* (2009), the fifth instalment in the series *Percy Jackson & the Olympian*. Riordan talks about the origin of the series and a brief synopsis of the featured book (DisneyLiving 2009). His explanations are at times accentuated by drawings of characters, displays of the covers of previous books in the series and real life footage from the promotion of the fourth book. Brian Selznick, the Caldecott winning author of *The Invention of Hugo Cabret*, also introduces his new book *Wonderstruck* (2011) through the means of an author interview. Similar to Riordan, Selznick talks about his latest novel while the visual impressions alternate between Selznick himself and drawings that are related to the content of the book (Selznick 2011). In contrast, Stephen King takes the spotlight in the video for his most recent publication *11/22/63* (2011). Only sporadically punctuated with authentic footage of the assassination of John F. Kennedy, the book video focuses on King himself without any additional visual effects (SimonSchusterVideos 2011).

In her typology of book videos, Clover English further lists book commercials or ads and viral videos and lays out a number of production features for those forms. However, she fails to explain how to stylistically distinguish them from the book trailer or the author interview (Clover English 2008: 15-16). For future discussions of the book video in general, further distinctions have to be made and new terms have to be coined. Owing to the lack of applicable terminology so far, the following two additions are suggested to engage with the medium in an academic context: ‘book teaser’ and ‘book animation’.

Terms ‘trailer’ and ‘teaser’ are often used synonymously. Therefore, this article understands the *book teaser* as a simpler and more rudimentary type of the book video. The book teaser uses images, music and some form of spoken narration, although the latter is not a necessary given. While sometimes also displaying

video footage of persons or locations, the book teaser lacks a story line and most commonly uses voice-overs that describe the story rather than having the actors talk themselves. In short, book teasers cannot be mistaken for movie trailers. The book teaser for John Green's *The Fault in Our Stars* (2012) uses split screen video sequences, textual graphics with phrases presumably taken from the book and blends the visuals with indie-folk music to raise the target audience's attention (PenguinYoungReaders 2012). The book teaser for Andrew Pyper's *The Demonologist* (2013) employs title cards similar to those found in silent films to create suspense and anticipation (SimonSchusterVideos 2013). Similar to the examples for the various forms for author interviews, the teaser for Charles Brodaw's *The Lucifer Code* (2010) is again entirely different (COS Productions 2010). This video provides a voice-over summary of the book and is accompanied by pictures and film sequences that underpin the narration. Like the book trailer, the book teaser creates an audio-visual atmosphere which presents the viewer with the general mood of the book and raises expectations for the story development.

In contrast to the teaser, *book animations* are as elaborated as book trailers because they employ pictures, graphics and other art forms in combination with a voice-over summary of the book. Audrey Harris, senior publicist of HarperCollins, calls these animated trailers 'the newest wrinkle' (Jaszi 2009). John Lanchester's latest novel *Capital* (2012), for example, is entirely free from any form of narration, be it a voice-over or textual graphics, (faberandfaber) and employs spin-offs from Tom Berry's cover illustrations from this book. The combination of paper cut-outs, shadows and music create a unique experience for the viewer and

suggest both the parallel social universes inhabited by Lanchester's characters on a single London street just ahead of the 2008 crash, and the way in which, as the author puts it, properties had become 'like people, and rich people at that, imperious, with needs that they were not shy about having serviced' (Irvine 2012)

In another example for the book animation, Neil Gaiman narrates a brief summary of *The Graveyard Book* (2008) while Dave McKean's paper cut-outs from the adult edition of the novel are artfully woven together for audio-visual support (HarperKids 2008). The same strategy applies to Scott Westerfeld's *Leviathan* (2009) in which the story is told using the book's illustrations by Keith Thompson (SimonSchusterVideos 2009). However, in this instance, the illustrations are animated and visual effects are used in order to create movement and depth in an otherwise two dimensional setting. In a way, the animation for Jacqueline West's *The Shadows* (2010) combines both techniques (PenguinYoungReaders 2010). This video uses illustrations from the book in a straightforward way in the fashion of *The Graveyard Book*. However, it adds new levels to the drawings by including movements and additional material in the style of *Leviathan* to make the animation appear three-dimensional. A much simpler, yet artistic and effective book animation is offered in Stefan Merrill Block's *The Story of Forgetting* (2009). The

video shows only seemingly disconnected pencil drawings and accompanies them with a voiceover to reflect the narrator's childhood (RandomHouseInc 2009).

As is the case with any other categorization, it goes without saying that the boundaries between the different forms of book video which are offered in this article are very often blurred and it is often rather difficult to place a book video into one or the other category. The video for Ransom Riggs's *Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children* (2011), for example, uses actors and a storyline to frame the core narrative and additionally employs pictures from the book and a voice-over (Irreferance & Riggs 2011). Thus, it is a blend between book trailer and book teaser and, depending on the focus of the academic, can be categorized as either one. Interestingly, Riggs produced an additional 'directors cut' for his own book which is about a minute longer than the book video used for the official marketing campaign (Irreferance & Riggs 2011). This already suggests that book videos are not only marketing elements but that they are in fact an emerging new art form very similar to movies or adaptations. Another book video that does not fit neatly into any category is Lane Smith's *It's a Book* (2010) (MacmillanChildrens 2010). At first glance it clearly belongs to book animation because the images for this clip are directly taken from the picture book. However, two problems arise with this particular book animation. First, although it is animated, the video resembles very much a book trailer. It has characters similar to actors, it follows a story line and it can be watched as a self-contained movie. This already leads to the second problematic point: it is a short film. Therefore, it is not inconclusive whether this video is meant to promote the book or whether it already constitutes a film adaptation because it contains almost the entire text of the printed book. Still other versions of promotional videos for a book that defy classification according to any of the above mentioned categories are John Wray's *Lowboy* (2009) (MacmillanUSA 2009) and Suzanne Guillette's *Much to Your Chagrin: A Memoir of Embarrassment* (2009) (Peyrano 2009). Both cases of video depend on and play with the public's reaction to the actual printed book. The setting for Wray's book video mirrors the book itself as well as the author's writing progress. The clip for *Lowboy* takes place on the subway and, according to Sabrina Jaszi, large portions of this book were written in transit (Jaszi 2009). The book video relies on the participation of commuters on a Brooklyn L train as they read out excerpts of *Lowboy* (MacmillanUSA 2009). Thus, the video contains something of the quality of a documentary film or a making-off feature. *Much to Your Chagrin*, on the other hand, is based on the public's answer to the question 'Have you been embarrassed or do you have an embarrassing story to tell?' Consequently, the clip does not use the label 'book video' or 'book trailer' but rather calls itself 'a short film inspired by a book' (Peyrano 2009).

Problems of categorization might be approached by film studies. Introducing a broader definition of book videos as 'a short video that promotes a book', various sub-genres rather than different definitions could be established. As a result, ex-

amples of book videos could be analysed and categorized, depending on the purpose of the subsequent study, in regard to their stylistic devices, common tropes or their content.

Characteristics

Ideally, book videos should be as short as possible in order to keep the viewer's interest for the duration of the whole clip. Most book videos have a length between one and three minutes (Booth 2006) which keeps them from being either too long or too short, as Rye Barcott explains (Barcott 2011). David Teague, a filmmaker from Brooklyn, says that it is a challenge to condense books into short clips, but that it is a necessity because 'people would want to e-mail their friends' about their interesting finds on the web (Berton 2006). He goes on to explain that 'just as thick books can intimidate customers in a bookstore, a video clip that runs more than three minutes can go overlooked on the increasingly crammed Internet', especially since the online medium depends on brevity (Berton 2006). However, the average length for book videos is certainly not only dependent on the viewer's alleged preference of brevity, but is also constrained by the file size as well as the production costs. In addition to its length, the presentation style of the content itself is essential in order to 'catch [the viewer's] eye in the hope that [they]'ll remember the author's name – or at least the title of the book (Baker 2008). In general, two stylistic choices have to be made. Firstly, depending on the kind of video created for the book, 'they can be anything from the author reading a passage from the book, to an elaborate mini-movie' (Booth 2006), as already discussed above. Nevertheless, even after categorizing the book video, major differences between individual productions cannot be ruled out since the categories themselves are not uniform. After extensive comparisons between a number of online book trailers, Barcott concludes: 'Some looked like Hollywood productions (*Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter*). A few were beautifully simple (Kelly Corrigan's *The Middle Place*)' (Barcott 2011). Secondly, since the function and form of book trailers are very similar to those of movie trailers, the same characteristics apply for their production. Depending on the genre, the mood and the narrative structure of the book, music, atmosphere and cuts are chosen in accordance with raising the expectations of viewers in the hope that they will eventually become readers. *Sense and Sensibility and Sea Monsters*, for example, clearly employs common tropes of the heritage film. According to Belen Vidal, the heritage film

has become associated with a powerful undercurrent of nostalgia for the past conveyed by historical dramas, romantic costume films and literary adaptations. These films often flaunt their connections with classical works of the literary canon, lavish production values and star performances. (Vidal 2012: 1)

All this is certainly true for the beginning of *Sense and Sensibility and Sea Monsters* until the hero hears a noise nearby. At this point of the book trailer, it be-

comes rather obvious that it is not the usual heritage film which is promoted, but a horror B-movie with a strong comic undercurrent. The dialogue and acting is over-exaggerated and the scene culminates with the short appearance of a sea monster which pulls the male protagonist – rather than the female protagonist – into the lake. Using a typical device for horror movies, most of what happens is left to the viewer's imagination as only Willoughby's arm is left floating in the water at the end. Hence, the book trailer for *Sense and Sensibility and Sea Monsters* uses features of heritage film, comedy and horror movies which mirrors the style and content of the promoted book itself – a Jane Austen novel paired with the horrors of sea monsters, and written in a comical way.

Challenges

Although book videos have the potential to catch the future readers' eyes and intrigue them enough to buy the book eventually, not all book videos are a success and most are viewed with suspicion. Christopher Shea remarks on a supposed absurdity of the genre and asks whether there is 'anything that more pungently demonstrates the desperation and confusion within the publishing industry than book trailers' (Shea 2011). In his opinion, book videos will not last for long after the 'publishing revolution' has ended and will be seen as 'a relic of our nervous transitional era' (Shea 2011). While Rye Barcott reveals that 'most of the authors [he] know[s] detest the very idea of them' (Barcott 2011), Pamela Paul sarcastically remarks that with the invention of book videos 'those who once worried about no one reading their books can worry about no one watching their trailers' (Paul 2010), and Tim Kreider comically describes the relation between publisher, author and book video as it happened to himself:

The sudden, insane hula hoop-like popularity of social media and mass dinosaurian die-off of print has publishers panicked and willing to try anything, and so writers, typically reclusive types who are used to being able to do their jobs without putting on pants, now find themselves shoved on camera and hawking their books like mattresses on Presidents' Day. (Kreider 2012)

These doubts are probably supported by the huge number of low quality videos, as Nina Metz observes (Metz 2012), and the unease of publishers as 'few want to be caught trying too hard' (Shea 2011). It could be argued that as long as a book video is well made it will be remembered and shared, and it will inspire viewers to look out for the book. Some book videos may even trigger the search for more videos. Unfortunately, professionalism does not necessarily equate to quality and Lindesay Irvine rightfully criticizes that 'most of the time they are a little on the perfunctory side: Camcorder pointed at author, author fielding questions or (oh, the visual riches) looking down and reading from the book they're promoting' (Irvine 2012). As a consequence, badly executed examples discourage authors to

use book videos for their marketing campaigns, repel viewers from actually buying the book and ridicule the whole industry of book video producers.

Nonetheless, even book videos of high quality are faced with many challenges. First of all, they are ‘hidden away in random nooks and corners on the Web’ (Metz 2012) and, unlike film trailers, ‘have no natural home besides YouTube’ (Walker 2012). Nina Metz lists three more possible sources for the problems that book trailers have to face:

Amazon would be a logical place to start, but the retailer pushes book trailers so far down on the page (on tiny media players) that they are easy to miss. Unless you’re searching a specific author or book title, Google isn’t much help, either. The handful of book trailer sites that do exist are clunky and half-hearted, with a limited (frequently obscure) selection.² (Metz 2012)

She continues to lament that there is no ‘centralized clearinghouse for these videos – the kind of savvily designed website that could transform the tedious act of sifting through content into an experience of discovery’ (Metz 2012). As a consequence, publishers and authors have difficulties to place their book videos on the internet for many to see because, although they can use a multitude of websites, it is not always the case that viewers actually access the clip. In addition, the production of book videos itself is often difficult and challenging. First, brief content summaries have to catch the reader’s attention without spoiling the whole story and, second, provide certain catch phrases in order to make the reader buy the book. As mentioned above, book videos either use voice-overs similar to the function of the blurb on the book jacket to provide auditory input or they feature passages from the book in the form of textual graphics in the video. In order for viewers to read these texts, they have to be relatively short and clear and they should not disappear too quickly. Adding to these technicalities, images, sound and timing have to be taken into consideration. Barcott sums it up rather adequately: ‘Capturing a 120,000-word book in a hundred words is hard enough without thinking through images, sound, and timing. I didn’t know where to start’ (Barcott 2011). Moreover, one reason why (movie) trailer making is ‘a little explore[d] art form’, is given by Finola Kerrigan: ‘It is this tension between giving the consumer enough information to persuade them to choose a film, while avoiding the repeated accusation that film trailers give away all the funny bits or give away the story’ (Kerrigan 2009: 141). Book trailers are even more affected by this because, even though they are similar to movie trailers, they lack the visual images with which movie trailers work (Booth 2006). The book video completely depends on the director and/or producer in regards to the visuals:

The trick is to convey a sense of what the book is about without giving anything away – and without really clearly defining what the characters look like, as most readers prefer to visualize what they are reading about as they imagine it themselves (Booth 2006).

This is especially true for book trailers since they feature actors performing as the characters who, understandably, have a huge visual impact on the viewer.

Marketing

Although book videos as supplements to print campaigns are not yet well known, movie trailers are part of everyday life. Their purpose is to ‘provide the potential consumer with a taste of the film’ and to ‘persuade the consumer to watch a particular film in the not too distant future’ (Kerrigan 2009: 140, 142). In a similar way, a book video is ‘designed to build interest in an upcoming or current novel and to encourage people to buy the book that they are based on’ (Booth 2006). Especially in a time where book publishers are confronted with the challenge of ‘how to compete for attention in an ever-growing entertainment market that includes TV, cable, online social networks, downloadable music and video, podcasts and video games’ (Chmielewski 2006) and where people are ‘developing the practice of consuming short media clips on a range of media devices’ (Kerrigan 2009: 142), the book industry has to adapt to and look out for new promotional tools. In order to stand out, publishers are desperately looking for new forms of advertising. Emily Romero, vice president of marketing for Penguin Young Readers Group, states:

We wanted to create something that was more meaningful for our audience. Sure, a print ad, a banner ad campaign, a TV spot, those are pretty traditional ways to market a book, but we just wanted to try something completely different. We wanted something that spanned multiple platforms since that is how this target audience consumes their media. (Donnelly 2010)

That book videos should not and cannot be the only way of promoting a book is a simple matter of fact. Carolyn K. Reidy, president and CEO of Simon & Schuster, herself admits that ‘in some cases, we don’t even expect it to increase sales at all [...] It’s almost a gift to the audience, and hopefully it makes them buy the next book’ (Mechling 2008). The publishers hope for their videos to ‘become viral and generate buzz about books’ (Baker) and there are, according to Reidy, ‘a few cases where the gamble has paid off’ (Mechling 2008). However, whether book videos or, in fact, any kind of marketing are successful or whether they are not, is often difficult to estimate (Beckwith 2011) and since the internet is flooded with short videos of every kind, it will be difficult to analyse book videos in respect of viewer-response. Whereas, according to Hediger, movie trailers only need about one to 4.5 percent of the advertising budget in order to be accountable for about a quarter to one third of the movie audience (Hediger 2001: 13), there are currently no numbers available to support any statement about the success of book videos. In some cases, a book video was watched by thousands of viewers on YouTube, but it still did not increase sales numbers for the advertised product (Mechling). Nick Davis points out that Mary Roach’s nonfiction work *Packing for Mars: The*

Curious Science of Life in the Void (2010) does not animate readers to buy the book although it has ‘a dandy tongue-in-cheek NASA-themed video that spoofs industrial films of old (with a tally of 32,500 views on YouTube)’ (Metz 2012). On the other hand, social media are ‘a great equalizer: big brands can be outsmarted without making huge investments, and small brands can make big names for themselves’ (Zarella 2009: 7) and sometimes provide the only way to promote books by unknown or independent authors ‘still looking for a following’ (Baker 2008). Especially for those who cannot afford a very expensive campaign, a book video is an innovative form to promote a book as can be seen in the case of the book teaser produced by the independent author Annelie Wendeberg for her second novel *The Fall* (2013) (Wendeberg 2013). In addition, it reaches out to the ‘Internet-savvy reading audience, who might skip the traditional newspaper book review section’ (Berton 2006) and may ‘draw more people to the beauty, substance, and transformative power of books’ (Barcott 2011). After all, it is no coincidence that the book trailers are rapidly increasing in their numbers since the start of YouTube in 2005 because social media now play a huge role in everyday life. Therefore, it would be interesting to conduct a study about the increase and reach of book videos, for example since the launch of YouTube, and to assemble statistics which prove more clearly whether or not book trailers have a significant impact on the numbers of book sales.

Advantages

Especially those book trailers that are very similar to little movies have the most potential to be shared among the internet community. In a globalised world, short clips on the internet can be shared among thousands within only a short time and especially social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, or tumblr provide ideal networks to promote books with the help of videos. Book videos that contain elements which are provoking, funny or, according to filmmaker Nick Davis, provoke remarks like ‘Wow, I’ve never seen that before’ (Metz 2012) are most likely to encourage viewers to share them with friends. Not only does the habit of sharing content between friends provide an instant promoting effect for established authors and publishing houses, but the same may also be achieved for unknown and independent authors. Since book videos do not necessarily depend on a huge budget, but can be easily made with limited costs, they can be produced and used by basically everybody whose computer runs simple video editing programmes. And the internet itself provides several websites on how to make a book video. In addition, the advantage of book trailers lies in their wide and lasting reach of global audiences. Whereas traditional promotion strategies such as print campaigns only last for a limited time and may even be completely overlooked by the target audience, book videos are being circulated among internet users at various times and across all sorts of platforms. This allows the commissioner of a book

video to re-launch it whenever needed. As a result, previously unsuccessful campaigns to sell the book may suddenly develop into an internet phenomenon which then promotes the book anew without adding much further cost. These almost automatic promotion waves are then most likely to result in the purchase of the marketed book.

Although Steve Osgoode, who started HarperCollins's book trailer programme at the beginning of 2006, states that some titles are better suited for book videos than others (Fox), there seems to be no thematic limit to book videos. Not only fictional works are now being promoted in this way, but also non-fictional works are given their own short clips. Three examples for the non-fiction section of the book market for which book trailers have been produced are *The Social Media Marketing Book* (2009) by Dan Zarrella, as the name already implies, a book about marketing campaigns with the help of social media (Zarrella), *Evolution Impossible* (2012) by Dr. John Ashton who questions the theory of evolution (nlpgvideo) and *Tower of Babel: Cultural History of Our Ancestors* (2013) by Bodie Hodge, a book that 'trace[s] your roots back to the Bible' (nlpgvideo 2013). Despite their varied content, all three, however, employ the same stylistic devices. They show short phrases that blend in and fade out, fly across the screen and morph into other words. These textual graphics reflect key statements about the content of the book and, therefore, raise the interest of the viewers and animate the reader to buy the book. The visual input is then supported by music that always catches the mood of the book. *The Social Media Marketing Book* uses a rhythmic, simple and jaunty tune that is easily recognizable, *Evolution Impossible* is characterized by drums and dynamic accents reflecting the Big Bang, and *Tower of Babel* sounds mysterious, ancient and oriental.

Furthermore, book trailers have the great potential to adapt to new technology at regular intervals. Book videos may find their way into cinemas or TV programmes as an integral part of commercials. Whereas filmmakers Scott Thrift and Ari Kuschner humbly suggest to integrate book videos into Amazon's e-reader 'to help convince online window shoppers to make a purchase' (Jaszi 2009), Nick Davis and Peter Mendelsund boldly propose book videos to become the 'visual face of the book' that 'lives online and is also the cover when you download it on your Kindle' (Metz 2012). Lindsay Irvine goes even a step further and wonders why there are no 'novels that work video into the body of the text' (Irvine 2012). As a result, book videos might become an essential component of online marketing in a 'streaming video era, with the publishing industry under relentless threat' (Paul 2010), reach a global audience depending on the viral potential of social networks, and open up new markets.

Art Form

Although the academic world has, until now, almost completely ignored book videos, the internet community has already acknowledged this new approach to book advertisement. Owing to its high quality, the video for *Vampire Hunters* has given a boost to the recognition of the genre of the book trailer more than any of its predecessors. This particular video is frequently shared and discussed on the internet and has logged over two million hits on YouTube. The aforementioned ‘book trailer of the year 2009’, *Sense and Sensibility and Sea Monsters*, provides another example for a high quality book trailer. Both trailers exist in their own right and ‘begin to look like artworks in themselves’ (Irvine 2012). Publishers seem to agree with this sentiment since several awards are now being bestowed to book videos. Random House, for example, held a competition in 2008 that ‘encouraged students at the National Film and Television School to submit trailers for three of its books’ (Baker 2008). Since then, the formerly one-off campaign has developed into an annual book trailer competition (Walker 2012). Since 2010, Melville House Publishing also joined the game and hands out the Moby Award to the best and the worst book trailer each year (Walker 2012). Although being compared to the Oscars by some (Paul 2010), Christopher Shea sees them as having a rather satirical thrust (Shea 2011). In addition, the sole fact that well-known actors and directors participate in the production of book videos shows that the genre is becoming more than a simple marketing strategy. For example, James Franco, among others, guest starred in a trailer for Gary Shteyngart’s new novel, *Super Sad True Love Story* (2010) (rhpubgroup 2010), not only showing that ‘meta spirit was alive’ (Shea 2011) but also helping to ‘goose the number of views for Shteyngart’s sketch comedy video poking fun at the literary world’ (Metz 2012). With almost five minutes in length, this book video is unusually long and pretends to be a documentary about Shteyngart and his book. It received much media attention owing to the performance of the famous actor³. Alfonso Cuarón’s attempt at a book video for Naomi Klein’s book *The Shock Doctrine* (2008) is even longer (Cuarón & Klein 2008). The director of *Children of Men* produced a seven-minute film which was not only shown at the Toronto International Film Festival (Sullivan 2009), but also at the Venice Film Festival in 2007, one of the most important international film festivals (Walker 2012). Although this short film is frequently mentioned as a high quality book video in newspapers articles,⁴ the question in those cases remains whether or not these are still book videos or already short films. Just like Naomi Klein said herself: ‘the film was a thing unto itself; it didn’t feel like an advertisement’ (Sullivan 2009).

Outlook

In 2011, almost ten years after the first book trailer had been produced, Rye Barcott recognizes book trailers as ‘relatively recent additions to the literary world’ (Barcott 2011). Statements such as this clearly show the prevailing lack of information about book trailers which only supports the claim that it is about time the academic world stopped ignoring the existence of book videos and instead started investigating this new genre. Perhaps Nick Davis is right that

[o]ne of the huge reasons [book videos are] so bad is because they’re called book trailers [...] No one has said, ‘Wait a minute, this is its own thing.’ How can we take advantage of what it can offer that a movie trailer can’t? How can we get inside the reading experience in a visual way? In order to do that, there needs to be a new word. [...] Maybe bideo? (Metz 2012)

It is questionable whether coining a new term will help the book video to become more accepted among scholars or if it may even be counter-productive since an excess of newly coined terms might lead to even more confusion. However, to see the book video as ‘its own thing’ is definitely the right direction, and maybe even the only one. They should be considered an art form rather than (only) a marketing tool because until it is proven that any form of book video does indeed enhance book sales, they will probably be ignored by marketing experts. As an art form, however, the book video can provide various points of discussion. Costas Constandinides nicely sums up Cartmell and Whelehan’s *Adaptations: From Text to Screen, Screen to Text*, which is ‘one of the most significant works in adaptation studies’ (Constandinides 2010: 10), saying that film is as complex as literary fiction and a serious art form despite its restriction by the consumer culture (Constandinides 2010: 11). The same holds for book trailers with only one difference: their length. The book video may also be seen as completely detached from its original textual source and should be analysed in an aesthetic way with regards to choice of colours, camera angles, construction of dialogues, common tropes, etc. As a result, the engagement with book videos will contribute to the study of social media and reveal attributes of ‘contemporary’ society just like film theory ‘can illuminate cinema’s role within history and culture’ and ‘lay bare cinema’s significance for our own cultural lives, as well as for other cultures and historical epochs’ (Rushton 2010: 2). Therefore, as soon as consistent definition or categorization are established, this new genre might not only become a ‘standard operating procedure in the world of publishing’ (Baker 2008) but also, and more importantly, an art form in its own rights which would eventually introduce book videos as an academic discourse into already existing fields of study and might even open up a new area of research.

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Notes

- ¹ See, for example, Hediger (2001); Kernan (2004); Marich (2005); Böringer (2005); Johnston (2008) and Kerrigan (2009).
- ² See, for example, Book & Trailer Showcase, Book Trailers for All, Book Trailers, BookCaster.com and Harderode.
- ³ See, for example, Fischer (2010); Ferguson (2010) and Vu (2010).
- ⁴ See also Baker (2008), Shea (2011) and Metz (2012).

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