

A STUDY OF SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE  
AND INTERACTIONS

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by  
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## APPROVAL

The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the thesis entitled

PROMOTING FILM THROUGH SOCIAL INTERACTIONS ONLINE

presented by Ashlan Fiester, a candidate for the degree of master of journalism,

and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

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# PROMOTING FILM THROUGH SOCIAL INTERACTIONS ONLINE

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## ABSTRACT

In-depth interviews were conducted where 30 participants provided information about their social media usage and interactions with films online. Participants answered questions dealing with their average social media usage, their favorite social media sites, their history with film interaction online, their knowledge of the film *Suicide Squad*, their current interactions with the film online, and how they viewed *Suicide Squad*'s social media campaigns and how they believed they could be improved. Individuals with high usage of Facebook and Instagram showed high levels of interactions with the film's accounts. Participants who used Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram daily were aware of the social media accounts for the film and believed the Facebook and Instagram accounts were the strongest of the three. Whiting and Williams theory of uses and gratifications for social media (2013) was used as a basis to discover why participants use social media to better explain why they specifically use social media for film interaction. This theory showed five major categories participants belonged to for why they interact with films online.

*Keywords:* uses and gratifications theory, film interaction online, social media usage, interactive advertising

## Chapter 1: Introduction

The production of a film can cost millions of dollars. In order to protect that investment, advertisers will spend half as much, if not more, on promoting the film in order to make a profit in the first two weeks of the film's release (Anders, 2011).

Advertisers need to understand their audience and know how to reach them in order to prevent wasting money on unsuccessful campaigns. Companies such as Lionsgate have discovered that interactive campaigns online and on social media are a successful way to reach and engage Millennials (Anders, 2011). For this study, social media promotions will be defined as any use of social media or online platforms that allow audiences to engage with films, whether that is through following a movie Facebook page, tweeting with their favorite films, or exploring an interactive movie site.

Today, it is hard to reach Millennials due to the heavy usage of streaming sites and social media. For the purpose of this study, we will define Millennials as being between the ages of 18-29, defined by the Pew Research Center (Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, & Zickuhr, 2010). To reach Millennials, it is not enough to play trailers during commercials and do traditional advertising. They want to be able to interact with upcoming movies and become a part of the film. Watching the movie when it is released is not enough anymore to satisfy the audience (Simpson, 2012). Interactive campaigns like the one done for the release of the *Hunger Games* films are a new way to reach Millennials and get them excited for the releases of upcoming films. Little research has been done on this particular topic to help advertisers understand why audiences interact with online promotions. Films that are not well known are suffering from their failure to

reach audiences through the clutter and making them aware that the film is being released (Simpson, 2012). Advertisers need to understand why audiences are paying attention to certain promotions on social media sites and how their interaction contributes to the success of the film. The proposed study examines the strategies and approaches film promoters utilize in order to reach younger audiences and encourage movie attendance.

Studies have shown that Millennials want a “two-way discussion” with movie advertisements (Wilcox, 2012). This means they want to be able to interact and engage with their favorite films to learn more and become more involved. Between the entertainment competition, increase in tickets prices, 3D versions of popular films, and the increased use of social media and streaming sites, advertisers have found it more challenging to get less known films in the spotlight and to produce high attendance in theaters (Berglund, 2012; Dergarabedian, 2011; Wilcox, 2012). Understanding the uses and gratifications Millennials get from social media from studies such as Whiting and Williams, provide insights as to why social media are being used. Research can further be done to study how advertisements can be successful on social media. Films such as *The Hunger Games* have used digital marketing and social media promotions in order to get their fans to interact with the film before it was released. Social media were used to release clips, interact with fans, and boost film knowledge. The Facebook account featured games and quizzes to find out what district you belonged in while their twitter account engaged followers and encouraged them to tweet about the film in order to have a pre-screening of the film unlocked at a theater near them. Lionsgate’s success with this campaign suggests that online and social media promotions can be a great way to engage with Millennials (Simpson, 2012).

There was no prior academic research focusing on movie promotions through social media and how audiences interact with movie promotions on social media. Research done by Copeland (1992) and Bennett (1990) is outdated and only shows how audiences respond to other forms of entertainment, not specifically film (Bennett, 1990; Copeland, 1992). However, there are non-scholarly sources that have analyzed the importance of movie promotions and the use of social media. Daly shows the importance of movie promotions in Cinema 3.0 and how those promotions affect the outcomes of films. There has also been very little qualitative research focusing on the audience to better understand how to engage them. The studies cited throughout have provided a background of knowledge to help see where research on this particular topic lacks and where more research can be done.

### **Rationale**

Billions of dollars are spent each year on producing major pictures. In order to protect their investment, marketers will spend half to three times the amount of the production budget on advertising alone. In 2012, Hollywood spent \$4 billion on print and television advertising for upcoming films (Westland, 2012). While this is a large amount of money being spent, studies have shown that no other market has earned more revenue from advertisements like film has (Mahlknecht, 2012). This shows how important advertising is for films and how successful it has been for films in the past. The investments in these advertisements are proving to pay off when a film hits theaters. Thus films need to be promoted through advertisements in order to get people to see the film and be profitable. Audiences needs and wants are constantly changing and marketers



need to know how to stay up to speed with these changes and how to successfully follow these marketing trends in the future (Mahlknecht, 2012).

This study seeks to understand how and why audiences interact with different film promotions by discovering the uses and gratifications they receive from different types of promotions.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this study is to explore how Millennials perceive interactive movie promotions on social media and online. I will study the uses and gratifications audiences receive from interactive promotions on different social media sites in order to discover Millennials' perceptions of what interactive advertisements are successful and why.

My research will provide qualitative research that helps us understand how audiences use social media. Marketers need to understand which specific promotions are working and why and what platforms are reaching their audiences in order to continue to meet the consumers' needs. We live in a fast-paced world today where social media are being used to quickly get an update on what is going on in the world and consumers are getting bored quicker than they used to so it is important to gain and keep their attention (Daly, 2010). This study will not only provide insight for film marketers, but will also provide insight for other advertisers on how film audiences perceive the utility of social media in their decision-making on which films to attend. The study will also provide academic research for the future of film promotion on the social media sites Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Advertisers will be able to see how social media can be used to interact and connect with a large amount of people while creating a "buzz" to become a trending topic on these social media sites.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

Audiences today are looking for ways to interact and engage with upcoming films such as being able to tweet their favorite characters and follow the Facebook pages of their favorite films (Daly, 2010). Researchers have found that the future of cinema involves using more than just the eyes and watching a two-hour film in the theater. They claim the brain needs to be active and engaged in order to gain and keep audiences' interests when promoting a film in order to get them to see the film (Shaw & Weibel, 2003). Audiences want a full experience that they can engage with outside of the theater that allows them to engage online with their favorite films (Mahlknecht, 2012). To sum it up, audiences want to be able to interact with films before they are released in order to make the decision on whether they want to see a film in theaters or wait until it is released on DVD. To adapt to this idea, marketers have begun using interactive promotional techniques that provide audiences with an experience or benefit for participating. Whether that experience is learning about behind the scenes details about the film or promoting a specific event for the release of the film, audiences need to be engaged with through promotions leading up to the film in order to get them excited for the release of the film (Mahlknecht, 2012).

### **Understanding The Audience**

Marketing's job is to understand and successfully reach a target audience. An interactive promotion through social media needs to be well thought out and planned. The marketer needs to understand audiences' thoughts and reactions to different advertisements in order to know which ones work and why. With film promotions,

marketers can spend more on advertising a film than what was spent on producing the film (Westland, 2012). This is in part because if a film can fill theater seats during opening weekend and make a profit in doing so, then it does not matter the reviews the film receives after that weekend because they already made their profit. A film can receive poor reviews but have successful promotions that filled the theaters during opening weekend to make a profit (Westland, 2012).

While it may have taken months or even years to produce a major picture, the time that really matters is the first weekend a film is released (Irwin, 2004). Opening weekend is the first indicator of the success of a movie. If a movie sells out in theaters and can produce a profit, then it is considered successful in gaining audience members' attentions leading up to the release. Even if a film gets poor reviews and its attendance rate drops after opening weekend, the sales from the first weekend can be enough for a film to make a profit. This is why promotions are important for that first weekend. A movie's life span can be short if it doesn't do well the first few weeks (Irwin, 2004). If marketers fail to do their job and do not make audiences aware and interested in seeing an upcoming movie, then the movie can flop in the first weekend. While there are other reasons for a film flopping in the first weekend, social media is a great resource to use to see what people are saying, if anything at all, leading up to the film's release and after the film's release. Social media allows marketers and researchers to see how much engagement there are among their pages by using social analytic tools such as Facebook and Twitter analytics. This allows marketers to see if the audience is interacting with their pages and if they are reaching consumers. This can help marketers understand the reasons behind the flop because they are able to interact with their audience and see what

they are saying, whether it is positive or negative. It needs to be stated that if a film is bad, the promotion of the film will not keep it from flopping. If there is low attendance for a film while it is in theaters, critics can become audiences' main source for hearing reviews on the particular movie and can further persuade them to never see the movie if they are their only source. It is crucial that this doesn't happen. After the first weekend in theaters, the chances of a movie returning a profit or producing a sequel become smaller (Irwin, 2004). New movies are being released every weekend and more popular movies can take over the spotlight. This is why it is necessary for marketers to understand their target and to successfully reach audiences by getting them involved with movie promotions.

### **Audience Interaction**

There are few previous academic studies that focus on how and why audiences use social media to interact with movie promotions. Previous academic studies, such as Wang, Tcherney, & Solloway's study on the uses and gratifications for social media usage, took a quantitative approach and used surveys to understand social media usage in general. Research done on social media usage can benefit the present study by providing a basis of what social media sites consumers are on and why. This can help marketers to understand if different kinds of promotions work better on different platforms. Social media are crucial for advertisers to understand and use because studies have found that social networking interaction with movies have increased film revenue by 64% while increasing the search rate by 48% (Westland, 2012). Today consumers are on multiple social media platforms and have a different use for using each platform (Shade, 2015).

Meaning, there are different uses and gratification audiences receive from using Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.

Other research in this area studied the transition from traditional media advertising to social media advertising. According to one study, brands don't stay in a consumer's mind unless they are engaging, whether that is chatting on Twitter or being able to follow on Facebook. "Likes" matter and consumers want to be able to follow and interact with their favorite brands (Armellini & Villanueva, 2011). WOM, or word of mouth, is also very important among consumers. On social media, consumers can interact with their brands and share that interaction with their friends and family. Consumers also use social media to share their opinions. When it comes to movies, consumers listen to what others have to say about a particular film. Armellini and Vilanueva's study also showed that WOM has a positive effect on the box office and is a great form of publicity for films (Armellini & Villanueva, 2011)

Social media promotions and interactions with audiences can and have provided positive results for a movie's awareness. Understanding why users like these promotions and interactions from different films and what social media platforms they like to engage on is the next step in finding why these promotions work and how to continue to make them work.

### **Uses and Gratifications Theory**

Uses and gratifications theory is a lens through which we can view how and why audiences are engaging with movies. Uses and gratifications theory works to understand what consumers get from using different products. Previous studies that have relevance to this study have shown why audiences use certain social media sites. The main four

reasons found for social media use are for emotional, cognitive, habitual, and social needs (Wang, Tchernev, & Solloway, 2012). Another study found more specific common themes among participants as to why they use social media. These themes included social interaction, information seeking, pass time, entertainment, relaxation, communicatory utility, and convenience utility. Communicatory utility was used for those who used social media as a way to provide information to others, whether it was personal information or public information (Whiting & Williams, 2013). The other themes are clearly explained in their title. By grouping the uses and gratifications users receive into themes and categories, it provides areas a marketer can focus on in order to reach their audiences.

As stated throughout this paper, there has been little research done on the specific focus of this study. The research done on uses and gratifications of social media usage will benefit this study in providing a basis as to what sites are used more than others and why. This will help narrow the study to focus on only the main social media sites that are being used and will also help to understand why some promotions do better on different social media platforms.

### **Research Questions**

Previous research has helped narrow the focus of this study and has shown what questions still need to be asked. This study seeks to understand how and why audiences use Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram to interact with different types of movie promotions. In order to find the answer, the study needs to start with a main focus on why audiences interact with different types of movie promotions. Once this is answered, more

detailed questions will be asked to find out why platforms are being used and who are using these different platforms. This study will focus on these three research questions:

RQ1: How do audiences interact with movie promotions?

RQ2: What are the uses and gratifications audiences receive from different forms of social media promotion on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram?

RQ3: Who is participating in these interactive promotional campaigns and why?

These research questions provide insights into the motives, uses, and gratifications people express regarding social media and film.

## Chapter 3: Methods

For this study I chose a film that came out at the end of the summer and had promotions on social media and online leading up to its release. The film that is being used for this study is *Suicide Squad*. I chose this film because it came out in theaters on August 5, 2016 and released information about the film 6 months in advance. The film had a Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram page, as well as a main website. I chose this film over other films released during the same time because it was the only film that had high engagement with audiences 4 months before its' release date and was well known. This enabled me to have access to a larger sample. The focus on a single film was important for the research I conducted with in-depth interviews because I needed to find a sample that knew about the film and have the time to interview my sample. If I were to have focused on more than one film, it would have been more difficult to find a sample that knew of all the films in the amount of time I had to find and conduct these interviews.

For this study, in-depth interviews were conducted. The sample consisted of Millennials, ranging in age from 18-29. Millennials have been defined differently depending on the researcher's choice of age. For this particular study, the Pew Research Center definition will be used (Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, & Zickuhr, 2010).

Whiting and Williams' study used in-depth interviews to discover the uses and gratifications participants received from social media (Whiting & Williams, 2013). For this study, the same method was used to collect homogenous samples of 30 student interviews by posting on Mizzou Facebook groups and pages. The posts asked participants who were in the Columbia area to participate in a 30-minute interview.



Participants were encouraged to participate in the interviews with the opportunity to win one of 3 gift cards to Chipotle or Starbucks. In order to participate, participants had to meet certain criteria. They had to have an interest in movies, specifically *Suicide Squad*, own or have access to a laptop, have social media accounts for Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, and did not have a problem with being recorded during the interview.

### **Procedure**

The sample size for the in-depth interviews was 30 participants with the youngest being 21 and the oldest participant being 26. Fifteen females and 15 males were interviewed. The study defined saturation as when at least five uses and gratifications categories for the use of Twitter, Facebook and Instagram to engage with the *Suicide Squad* promotions could be concluded from the combined interviews. The participants were collected by using snowball sampling, meaning each participant was asked if he or she could recommend another participant for the research to gain more interviews. Once the interviews were confirmed, times were set up to do the interviews. Depending on the location of each interviewee at the time, the interviews took place in person, by phone, or by Skype. The interviews lasted no longer than 30 minutes and participants had the opportunity to be put in a drawing for one of three \$15 gift cards to Chipotle or Starbucks. The interviewees were asked about their experience with movie promotions, their favorite promotions and why, and their knowledge of the film *Suicide Squad*. They were asked if these promotions affected their choice to attend a movie in theaters or not and why. They were then asked to interact with *Suicide Squad*'s Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram accounts and answer questions about their interactions with each platform. Once the interviews were over, participants were asked if it was permissible to contact

them closer to the time of the film to see if they did see *Suicide Squad* in theaters during the first two weeks of its release and why. This provided a follow up opportunity to see what affect the interviews and promotion exposure had on the individuals.

Once all the interviews were conducted, the audio recordings from the interviews were transcribed. To find the uses and gratifications, the model and method of frequency analysis used in Quan-Haase and Young's study was used. In their study, they used a model to find repeating and overlapping statements participants made about Facebook and IM. Once they found these common statements, they created six main categories for the gratifications users received from using Facebook. They then coded the interviews using a grounded theory approach by using inductive and deductive components to see if the interviews fit into one of the six categories they created or if a new category needed to be created (Quan-Haase & Young, 2010). This study followed this example by looking for common gratifications the participants received from the different interactive promotional sites for the film. Once the audio from the interviews was reviewed, the constant comparative method and frequency methods were used to help find common responses in the dialogue in order to create major categories. The frequency analysis was used for each interview. Once all the interviews were completed, the constant comparative method helped show what similarities were among all the interviews.

## Chapter 4: Analysis/Results

After coding the results of all 30 interviews, the data revealed that social media was not considered to be a way for participants to pass time or relax when they shared what they liked to do in their free time. A majority of participants do not consider social media an activity, but instead social media has become a part of their daily life. When asked what they like to do in their free time, 68 percent of the participants chose a type of indoor activity with watching television and movies rating the highest of those indoor activities at 72 percent. P1, male, 22, stated, “Watching movies on Netflix and Hulu are my favorite way to spend my free time when I am not in class or at work. It is nice to wind down from a busy day that way.” The remaining 32 percent of participants chose outdoor activities as being their favorite way to use their free time, with exercising and hanging with friends rating the highest. P3, female, 22, stated, “I am a big outdoors person and hate to be cooped up inside. When the weather is nice, you will find me outside.”

Participants were then asked to share their history and current use of social media to see if their analyzed responses would fit into one of Whiting and Williams’s seven categories of uses and gratifications for social media usage. These categories include social interaction, information seeking, pass time, entertainment, relaxation, communicatory utility, and convenience utility. Communicatory utility was used for those who used social media as a way to provide information to others, whether it was personal information or public information (Whiting & Williams, 2013). A majority of the participants’ uses for social media were for social purposes or work. Thirty-six

percent of participants use social media for social purposes, whether they are communicating with friends or family, keeping in touch, or sharing personal information. P22, female, 22, stated, “Social media is a great way for me to stay in touch with my family and friends that live in different states. Once you move away to college, every gets spread out and Facebook provides a great way for me to share what I am up to.” Twenty-four percent of participants said they use social media for networking, work, and career purposes. P13, female, 25, stated, “Social media sites such as LinkedIn are a great way for me to network and find jobs that are available in the field I am interested in.” To break it down even further, participants were asked to focus on three main social media applications, Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, and for what they use each platform. For Facebook, 35 percent use the platform for news and information and 35 percent responded that they use the platform for social purposes such as staying in touch with friends and family. P18, female, 22, stated, “Facebook is a quick and easy way for me to see what my friends are up to and stay up to date.” For Instagram, a majority of participants use the platform for mainly social purposes such as sharing pictures and videos. P17, female, 22, stated, “I love using Instagram. I can scroll through throughout the day to see what everyone is up to. I love using the filters on my photos too.” A majority of participants only use Twitter for news and information. From this data, only five of the seven categories are used, with the passing time and relaxing categories being the two that are not used. This agrees with the earlier statement that participants do not consider social media use as an activity or a way to pass time.

Respondents were then asked the frequency of their social media usage with each of the three platforms. A majority of participants answered they use each platform

multiple times a day every day. Facebook was rated being used the most frequently of the three while Twitter was rated as being used the least of the three. P14, male, 25, stated “I am constantly on Facebook throughout the day. It’s the easiest and quickest way for me to stay up to date on local news and social news.” Of the social media platforms not mentioned above, a majority of respondents replied that they use Snapchat as frequently as they use Facebook. P15, female, 23, stated, “I really don’t use twitter very much. I love using Instagram and Facebook for both social and news purposes every day. Other than that, I use Snapchat almost every day. It’s a great way to interact with friends.”

After a basis for their social media usage and the uses and gratifications they received from each platform was established, participants were then asked about their experiences with films. Participants were asked how often they go see a film in theaters and what was their favorite way to view a film. Fifty-six percent of participants see two or more movies a month and 26 percent see at least one film a month. P23, female, 25, stated, “Depending on what it being released in the theaters that month, I usually see a movie or two each month, especially during the cold months. A lot of good films come out during the holidays and it’s a great way to stay warm.” Forty-four percent of participants prefer to see films at the theater while 38 percent prefer to stream movies through sites such as Netflix. P7, male, 24, stated, “If it is a film I am really excited for, I will definitely see it in theaters and prefer to see it that way. The experience of Imax and surround sound makes it awesome, however, if it is a film I am not sure about I will wait until it is available to rent to save money.” Participants were then asked to identify how they find out about upcoming films and if there were any specific platforms they preferred to use. Thirty-two percent of respondents said they like to use an application or

site to find out about upcoming films while 29 percent prefer to use social media sites such as Facebook. P10, female, 21, stated, “I usually see trailers or my friends sharing things about a movie on Facebook. It’s hard to not find out about upcoming films with social media sites such as Facebook.” Fifteen percent of participants rely on word of mouth to find out about upcoming films. YouTube and Facebook are the top two places participants find out about upcoming releases. When asked how participants interact with films online, 37 percent replied that they do not interact with films online, 27 percent share posts such as teasers and trailers, and 27 percent subscribe and follow the film’s account. P12, female, 25, stated, “I am a huge movie buff, so I am constantly subscribing to my favorite film’s social media accounts and sharing posts to get my friends interested in seeing the film.” P20, male, 20, stated, “I don’t really interact with films online. On occasion I will like or follow a page on Facebook if the film looks really good.”

Participants were then asked if interactivity matters to them when it comes to films using social media. To be clearer, they were asked if they look for their favorite films to respond to their comments or retweet their tweets about the film in order to add a more personal touch to their campaigns. Fifty-seven percent replied that interactivity does matter to them, while 43 percent replied that it doesn’t matter. P30, female, 21, stated “It’s a really great experience when your favorite actor or character in a film retweets something I posted about the film. Out of all the people posting about the film, it is crazy to be one of a few people who were noticed. Makes you feel like a celeb in some way.”

A basis to each participants’ social media usage, film experience, and preferences was established before asking more specific questions about *Suicide Squad*’s specific social media accounts and campaigns in order to have a better understanding of all the

results. Participants were then asked about the film and what they knew about the film prior to this interview. Forty-six percent of respondents talked about the specific actors that were appearing in the film and the roles of the characters in the film. This shows that the participants either have an interest in these characters or the accounts of the film have put an emphasis on them in their posting. P25, male, 22, stated, “The actors in this film are awesome. They couldn’t have picked a better cast for this film.” Thirty-two percent of respondents new about the film because they are a fan of the DC Comics. P26, male, 24, stated, “I am a huge fan of DC Comics so I already know the story line. I just hope they represent the comics well.” This shows that these specific participants don’t require as much advertising of the film because they know they storyline from past experience with the comics.

Going into deeper detail, participants were asked to view *Suicide Squad’s* Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and website. After spending time looking over each platform, they were asked to give feedback on what they liked and didn’t like. A majority of participants liked the interactivity and themes of each platform. They spoke specifically about the artwork, videos, photos, and color schemes. P18, female, 22, stated, “Every time I scroll through my pictures on Instagram, I immediately stop on *Suicide Squad’s* photos because the colors are so vibrant and catch your attention. I love seeing the posters for each character.” Twitter was viewed as the weakest platform by participants because of the poor quality of links and the inconvenience of using the platform to find out more about the film. Facebook was rated as the best platform because of the artwork and videos that were shared about each specific character in the film. P21, male, 19, stated, “Their Facebook page is the easiest one to interact with. I like viewing

the videos and artwork. Twitter on the other hand was not enjoyable to interact with. Some of the links didn't work and it was more effort than I wanted to put in to learn about the film." When asked what would improve or encourage participants interaction with each platform, a majority wanted to see more on other characters other than Harley Quinn and the Joker, more interactions with the cast, contest and freebies that encouraged participants to attend the movie on opening night, and more teasers and trailers leading up to the film. P19, male, 21, stated, "I feel like the main focus is on the Joker and Harley Quinn. While their characters are awesome, I would like to learn more about the other characters. It would be cool to have each character take over the social media accounts for a day." Overall, 91 percent of participants saw the film in the first week it was in theaters. P16, male, 25, stated, "Of course I saw the film opening weekend. I heard some mixed reviews from critics but thought the film was awesome after viewing it myself. I even went back the next weekend with some friends." P11, female, 24, stated, "I waited to see the film on the Monday morning after opening weekend so it would be less crowded and it was worth the wait. The film was great and I was glad to discover that the trailers and clips released before the film didn't give away the whole plot."



## Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusions

### Findings

Audiences interact with movie promotions by following their favorite films, using applications, sharing content, participating in contests, using their talents and creating fan artwork, and using WOM.

The uses and gratifications audiences receive from different forms of interactive advertising on social media depend on the social media. For this study, I focused on three main social media sites: Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. A majority of participants said they used Facebook for sharing, following, staying connected and informed and staying up to date with the news. When it comes to entertainment such as films, participants like to use Facebook to follow and/or subscribe to a film's page, share trailers for movies they are looking forward to, use their talents to create fan art or participate in contests.

Facebook is convenient to use and easy to navigate on the go. Pictures and videos can be viewed without even clicking on a link. Viewers can scroll through at a glance to see what they are interested in. P19, male, 21, stated, "Whenever I am walking to class or have a quick minute to look at my phone I always go to Facebook. With the images and easy viewing on my phone, I am able to quickly scroll through and get an update on anything that I want." With Twitter, viewers liked to use the service mainly for news.

They do not like to learn about upcoming films with this platform because it is not easy to view. Twitter is great for quick clips of news and events. P8, male, 24, stated, "When Twitter first came out, I was all about it and used it to update my current status. But now I rarely use it unless I want a quick update on news. It's not convenient for much else."

Instagram is a great place to view the photos and videos *Suicide Squad* has to offer. The colors and themes really popped and grabbed participants' attentions. P2, female, 23, stated, "It was easy to scroll through my feeds and be able to quickly pick out which posts were from the film because of the bright colors. I really liked how the images represented each character's differences."

Overall, participants had different uses and gratifications for why they used the applications or social media sites of their choice to know about upcoming films. These uses and gratifications are what keep them following and learning about the different films being advertised.

After reviewing all the data and seeing what social media uses and gratifications themes from Whiting and Williams research are accurate for this study, new themes were created to show the uses and gratifications participants receive from film interaction and participation on social media. These five themes are fandom experience, benefits and promotions, information seeking, early access, and entertainment. The data from these participants show that these are the five main categories of why there are interactions with films on social media. The fandom experience includes those who are loyal fans to a film and want to get the full experience of following a film on social media up until its release date. P6, male, 25, stated, "I loved the comics and I know I am going to love the films. I follow all of the film's social media accounts so I can stay up to date with anything new or interesting about the film." The benefits and promotions category include those who are interested in a film but need the extra encouragement of a benefit or promotion to influence them to spend the time and money to see a film in theaters, so they interact with films to get those benefits. P4, female, 24, stated, "I think it would be a

great idea if there were some sort of incentive to see a film opening night, whether you could have the opportunity to be put into a drawing or can get a discount at the concessions for dressing up as your favorite character.” The information-seeking category includes those who like to get facts and updates on a film but don’t want a full interaction on a day-to-day basis. P5, male, 22, stated, “It’s cool to see behind the scenes information about a film or learn facts about an upcoming film, but I don’t rely on the information to see a film in theaters.” The early access category includes those who want to get previews or clips before the film comes out so they can decide if the film is worth it for them to see. They want extra viewing up front so they look to social media to provide those sneak previews. P24, female, 24, stated, “Seeing a film in theaters can get expensive so I like to be able to see as many previews and clips of the film that I can find before I make a decision if I want to spend the money or wait until it is released.” Finally, the entertainment category is used to represent anyone who likes to follow films and watch trailers for entertainment. P19, male, 21, stated, “Whenever I am bored or want something to do, I like to look up upcoming films and watch their trailers. This helps me to pass time and make a list of what upcoming films I want to see.”

When it came to gender, age, and how participants responded, those between the ages of 23 and 25 generally focused on work and staying connected with family when they spoke of how they used social media. The younger participants, between the ages of 19 and 22 focused more on social interactions and entertainment when they spoke about their social media usage. P9, male, 20, stated, “Social media is a great way for me to stay in touch with my friends and see what they are up to. It is also an easy way to pass time while I am waiting for class to start.” Gender did not play a significant role in the

frequency of social media usage and the reasoning for social media usage. When specifically focusing on using social media to find out about upcoming films, gender did not play a specific role, but a majority of the older range of participants fell in the categories of fandom experience, early access, and information seeking. P27, male, 24, stated, “I really get into the films that have a history to them, whether they are a remake of a classic or started out as a comic or book series. I get invested and want to learn as much as I can about them leading up to the release.” A majority of younger participants fell in the categories of benefits and promotions and entertainment. P28, female, 20, stated, “I wish there were more promotions that benefited us when it came to seeing films at our local theater. All the promotions are usually on a grander scale.”

### **Significance**

From this study we can see that social media is an effective tool for advertisers, but there is a right way on how to use social media to interact with followers. *Suicide Squad*'s artwork and color scheme was perfect for advertising on Instagram. Participants would stop scrolling on their feed when the pop of colors would appear because it would catch their eye. Twitter was a weakness perceived by participants for the film because it was not easy to access and interact. A suggestion made by participants is to have characters of the film take over the Twitter account leading up to the release similar to what Ryan Reynolds did for his film, *Deadpool*. P29, male, 22, stated, “I loved how Ryan Reynolds took over Twitter for a day and interacted with his fans as his character Deadpool. It was awesome to see the interaction and feel like you were really communicating with Deadpool.” Fans really enjoyed this interaction because they got to experience his character in a real life setting. It was entertaining for people to follow and

encouraged them to tweet about the film. With *Suicide Squad*'s abundance of characters and big name actors, this would have been a successful way for them to have used Twitter and boost their interaction on Twitter.

### **Future Research**

*Suicide Squad* was a well-known film being released at a time where there was not a lot of competition. While a majority of participants knew about the film, it was hard to pinpoint exactly where they first discovered the film. Several participants knew about DC Comics and the theme of the film before the idea for a movie was released. For those who did not know a lot about the comics, they relied on word of mouth, social media, and sites. All of the participants knew enough about the film that they wanted to see it when the film was released. Because of the popularity of this film, this research was unable to discover how a social media interaction could impact a film that is not as well known or from source material that is not as popular. Social media interactions and advertising can benefit a film to some degree, but if the film is not viewed as being a good film by viewers, then social media cannot make up for the lack of viewers. It ultimately relies on the quality of a film and then social media creates awareness and a buzz to get the most amounts of attendees at the theaters in the first two weeks of the release to make the profit they want to see.

For future research, larger samples should be used and more than one film over a span of a year should be studied. This would allow us to see how popularity, genre, and time of a film's release affect the social media interactions. Data can be compared and contrasted to see which films create more of a buzz on social media and during which time of the year.

## **Application of Findings**

In order to successfully use social media to promote films, studios need to first take a look at the film they want to promote. A film's genre and style can determine the best way to advertise a film and the type of interaction fans want. For films that belong to the fantasy or superhero world, fans like to interact with these films online and emerge themselves. For films that are based on true events or have a more serious and realistic storyline, audiences do not need that sort of interaction. For the future of the DC Comic films, advertisers should look to social media sites that are frequently used, such as Snapchat, and continue to allow audiences to feel like they can become a part of a different world. Technology and social media are constantly changing. In order to be successful with reaching audiences, marketers need to stay up to date on current trends and future trends .

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## Appendix

### Interview Questions

1. What do you like to do in your free time?
2. Do you enjoy using social media?
3. What are your favorite social media platforms and why?
4. How often do you use Facebook in a week? Twitter? Instagram?
5. What do you use Facebook for? Twitter? Instagram?
6. Are there any other social media platforms you use? If so, what do you like about them and what do you use them for?
7. How often do you go to the movie theater to see a film? Why?
8. What is your favorite way to see a film? (In theaters, Netflix, redbox, etc.) Why?
9. How do you hear about upcoming films?
10. Are there any specific platforms you use to find out about new films?
11. How do you interact with films online?
12. What have you heard about the film *Suicide Squad*?
13. What do you like or dislike about their Facebook page? Twitter page? Instagram page? Website?
14. Is there anything you think film advertisers could do better to engage audiences?
15. Will you see *Suicide Squad* when it comes out in theaters? Why or why not?
16. Is there anything else you would like to share that may help this research?
17. What gender do you identify with?
18. How old are you?