

## Pre-Roll Video Ads

For a while, I was taught that “genre” referred only to what kind of book I was reading at the moment: science fiction, fantasy, nonfiction, and so on. It was not until recently that I learned there are thousands of genres outside of books, from academic journal articles (one of which I will be analyzing in this paper), to wedding toasts. From my understanding, genres come into existence when the same type of writing is produced over and over and there starts to become a kind of “standard” for that type of writing. It is not a template or a blueprint for how it has to be written, nor should every piece of writing in one genre be exactly the same, but when writing in a new genre, it is helpful to look at other works of that genre in order to get an idea of how it is done. There is a reason that emails to professors are not composed the same way as a text to your best friend. The academic journal article I have chosen to analyze is called “Understanding Why Consumers Don’t Skip Pre-Roll Video Ads.” It was published in the *Journal of Advertising* earlier this year by Colin Campbell, Frauke Mattison Thompson, Pamela E. Grimm, and Karen Robson. I will be looking at its introduction and use of personal pronouns to analyze the rhetorical choices the authors made in this particular genre.

Pre-roll ads are the short online commercials that play before a video, specifically on YouTube. Often, viewers are given the opportunity to skip to the content they want to watch after the ad has been playing for five seconds. In a few cases, viewers are forced to watch a whole fifteen or even thirty second ad before being able to watch the video they originally clicked on. This article is a presentation of the findings of the authors’ research on why people would choose not to skip an ad after the first five seconds and continue watching it through to the end.

In examining the article's rhetorical situation, this would be the exigence. The authors address it by making four hypotheses, quoted below:

1. Basic affective ad characteristics will result in increased pre-roll ad skipping. (413)
2. Complex affective ad characteristics will result in decreased pre-roll ad skipping. (415)
3. Attention-getting tactics will result in increased pre-roll ad skipping. (415)
4. Longer pre-roll ads will result in increased skipping. (415)

Essentially, they are making the claim that the sooner viewers become aware that they are watching an ad, the sooner they will become annoyed and skip it. If it taps into emotions that are “complex,” like humor and nostalgia, and make the viewers think a little bit, they will be more engaged with the ad and less likely to skip it. The authors then present their research and accept all of the hypotheses except Hypothesis 2. Since this article was published in the *Journal of Advertising*, the audience is most likely supposed to be people who work in advertising or are studying advertising. According to their website, “*The Journal of Advertising* is the premier journal devoted to the development of advertising theory and its relationship to practice. All research related to all types of advertising will be considered for publication” (Taylor & Francis Group). Based on the nature of the journal, reading this article could give someone who wants to create a pre-roll ad ideas for how to make it interesting, engaging, and overall less “skippable.” It could also indicate to advertisers whether or not a pre-roll ad is a good format for their product or service to be advertised in. In addition, it is clear that the authors are writing to people who are part of this discourse community (advertising) because they occasionally use a specific lexis, such as when they talk about the “distractor devaluation hypothesis” (412). I assume people in this field would already be familiar with this term, and that is why the explanation of it in this

article is rather short. They also mention “ad blockers” (412) and do not include an explanation of what they are. Again, this is most likely because people in the advertising field already know what they are.

The first rhetorical feature I noticed when reading this article was the use of personal pronouns. Although it is controversial, the authors of “Understanding Why Consumers Don’t Skip Pre-Roll Ads” clearly saw the benefits of using personal pronouns because I found them to be very common throughout the article. An online word frequency counter came across the word “we” 56 times, “our” 35 times, and “us” twice, to offer a quick overview. My sixth-grade self would have been appalled, but phrases like “our explanations,” “our study,” “we suggest,” and “we reject” allow the authors’ voices to play a role in the article. By using “our,” they are taking responsibility for the study that they conducted and letting readers know that their conclusions are solely theirs. In other words, they acknowledge prior research that has been done by other people, but make it known that the findings in this article are their own, original ideas. The word “we” shows that all four authors have participated in this study and agree on the results/have come to the same conclusion. They are not saying that Campbell and Thompson accept a hypothesis, but Grimm and Robson reject it. Rather, they are all in agreement and have evidence to back up their opinions.

In his article about identity in academic writing, Ken Hyland names four rhetorical functions of personal pronouns. I believe that this article utilizes all of them. The first is when the author explains what they did in the study (355). The authors of the article I chose used this rhetorical function in the section of the article titled “Study.” The first sentence of that section is, “We obtained access to a data set of 690 pre-roll advertisements from Unruly, one of the largest programmatic online video ad distributors in the world” (415-16). They are letting readers know

what they did to gather information to either accept or reject their hypotheses. They then go on to say, “For each of the 690 pre-roll ads in our data set we calculated a skip rate by dividing the total number of skips by the total number of views (415). In my opinion, this part of the article started to sound a bit scientific, but the use of personal pronouns still made sense and the authors were still objective because they used the pronouns to describe exactly what they did. Hyland’s second rhetorical function is “structuring the discourse” (355). The pre-roll research article outlines what the paper will discuss and in what order at the very beginning to give readers an idea of what to expect. “First, we qualify pre-roll ad skipping as a unique context in which ad avoidance occurs. Second, by coding and testing 19 ad characteristics, we significantly expand on the number and nature of ad characteristics studied in the ad avoidance literature” (412). They go on to list a third and fourth item on their agenda for this article. Just from reading this one paragraph that is full of the word “we,” readers understand what the paper will accomplish and what they are going to be reading about in the following pages. Readers also learn that the work is collective and that all four authors were involved. The third rhetorical function, according to Hyland, is “showing a result” (355). This article has a whole section called “Results” and includes sentences like, “We reject this hypothesis because only seven of the 21 beta coefficients are significant and negative” (419). Again, the authors are taking responsibility for their research and letting readers know that they came to their own conclusions via this research. The final rhetorical feature has to do with making a claim (355). The claims about pre-roll ads are very clear in this article and they all use personal pronouns. Directly before each hypothesis, the authors explain what led them to make each one. For example, “For these reasons, we expect attention-getting tactics (branding, celebrity presence, colorfulness, initial loudness, motion, and uniqueness) to increase ad recognition, leading to avoidance through skipping” (415). They are

taking information and interpreting it to come up with a claim. I believe that personal pronouns almost have to be used in this case, because if the author does not stand behind their claim and “claim it” as their own, it loses its credibility with readers. If the author is not confident enough in an idea to take ownership of it, the reader cannot be expected to believe it.

I believe the writer’s role in the case of this article is fairly important because the personal pronouns do not simply guide the reader from point to point. Instead, the authors play an active role in the article as they make claims, present their evidence, and discuss the results. It is important that they are included in the writing because the information is objective for the most part, but they are the ones who conducted the research to accept or reject their claims, and that makes a difference in the article overall. They did not come to their conclusions after reading someone else’s research or by some other method – they did it themselves and only they can best describe the process.

The second rhetorical feature I think this article makes good use of is the introduction. It follows Swales’ CARS model for research almost exactly, which is interesting because I doubt the authors consulted his article when writing theirs. They first establish a territory by talking about the current state of online advertising:

The active obstruction and forced delay caused by pre-roll ads is likely to generate an even greater sense of intrusiveness and associated annoyance compared to other online ad forms. (411)

The authors set the groundwork for the topic of the article by discussing things that are commonly known among advertisers. This way, they are all on the same page and understand how this particular research article fits within the field of advertising. The authors also refer to prior research that has been done on the subject:

In their work on ad avoidance, Goodrich, Schiller, and Galletta (2015) explore factors that cause online video ads to be seen as intrusive and how such perceptions affect ad abandonment, attitudes, and purchase intentions. (412-13)

Citing other researchers' work like this situates their article in the context of other findings on the same subject. The authors then use Swales' second move, establishing a niche, by indicating that further research needs to be conducted on the subject of pre-roll ads. They mention some of the constraints on previous studies, such as how consumer responses could be different in a different setting and that ad skipping is not the same as ad abandonment (413). By pointing out these gaps in information, the authors show why their research is necessary. Work has been done in those other areas, but this article explores the parts that were missing by focusing only on ad skipping and not ad abandonment and conducting research in a more natural setting, as opposed to an experimental one. Finally, they use Swales' third move and occupy their niche by announcing what they will discuss throughout the paper. They do this in the same paragraph I talked about earlier in which they structure the discourse:

First, we qualify... Second... Third, we demonstrate... Fourth, we find that... (412)

Laying out the organization of the article in the first couple paragraphs like this allows the reader to get an idea of what they are about to encounter and also makes the authors' arguments clearer. It gives them a sort of guide to follow as they read and keep track of what points are being made and why they matter.

My analysis of the CARS model and personal pronouns in this article has both challenged and reinforced what I have learned in school about writing in academic genres. From the time I wrote my first "research paper" in sixth grade, I had always been told to avoid personal pronouns at all costs. Research papers are supposed to present information objectively – your findings are

more important than what you think about them, or so I was told. What I now realize is that, in some cases, using personal pronouns can help an article rather than hurt it. Inserting the authors' voices into the article helps them establish their authority on the subject and make their claims more credible by showing commitment to and taking responsibility for what they are arguing. The introduction of this article and how it follows the CARS model, on the other hand, is similar to what I have been taught in school about beginning a research paper. It sets the stage for the rest of the paper and allows the authors to clearly lay out their arguments and the format of the article, which makes it all the more convincing for readers. Both personal pronouns and this form of introduction are typical rhetorical features found in academic journal articles like "Understanding Why Consumers Don't Skip Pre-Roll Ads."

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