

ANALYZING AND UNDERSTANDING THE CHANGES IN MEDIA PRODUCTION AND CONSUMPTION CARRIED BY IT

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INTRODUCTION

Changes that occurred at the beginning of the 21st century heavily influenced physical and cultural productions within media organizations. ICTs provided alterations in the production and consumption processes of media narratives.

Media production processes were especially influenced by the changes undergone by digital technologies. Who would have told us 10 years ago that US news weekly Newsweek would declare its print edition obsolete and replace it for a version that is exclusive available for tablet computers and other online gadgets, would be considered losing his or her mind. Newsweek took this decision because they expect that on the long run the audience for an online only magazine would be bigger and not less important more profitable. UK daily newspaper The Guardian is seriously considering making the same switch in the coming years.

From Hollywood movies to TV shows, from hard news to people magazines, the content production process is exposed to drastic transformations. For Caldwell (2008) and Alvares & all. (2013), such transformations occurs much more in meaning production process. At the end, since communication boundaries loses their clarity, roles of the producers and media users also change. Communication tools turns more and more effective, less expensive, and easier to use than in the past; access and collaboration are increasing, and we are evolving from being mostly media consumers to include many media producers – or ‘producers’, as the current jargon calls it.

In short, the borders between media turn more and more fuzzy and the role of producers and audience are shifting. In order to deconstruct the dichotomy between production and reception, this paper consider the narrative as a whole in transmedia storytelling. But what is transmedia storytelling exactly and how does it change the way we produce and consume media?

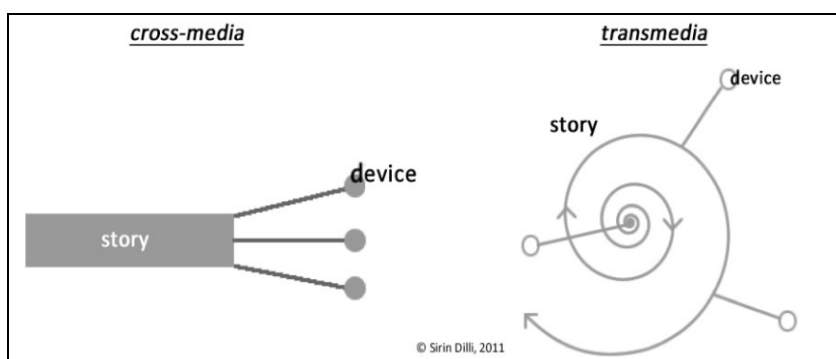
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TRANSMEDIA STORYTELLING vs. CROSS-MEDIA

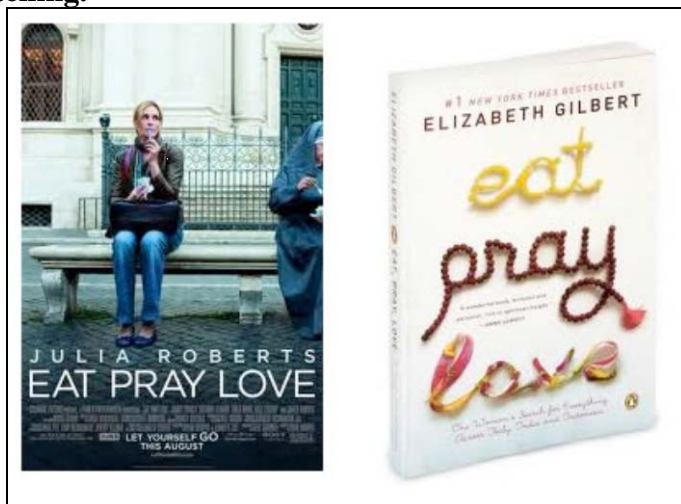
In order to pinpoint more precisely what the definition of transmedia storytelling is, it is useful to clarify the difference between "transmedia storytelling" and another similar concept: "cross-media".

Cross-media is the exact same story told via different channels (only altered to fit the rules of the medium), while in "transmedia", every channel tells its own unique part of the story. The following schemas help to better understand the difference between the two concepts:

Cross-media vs. Transmedia



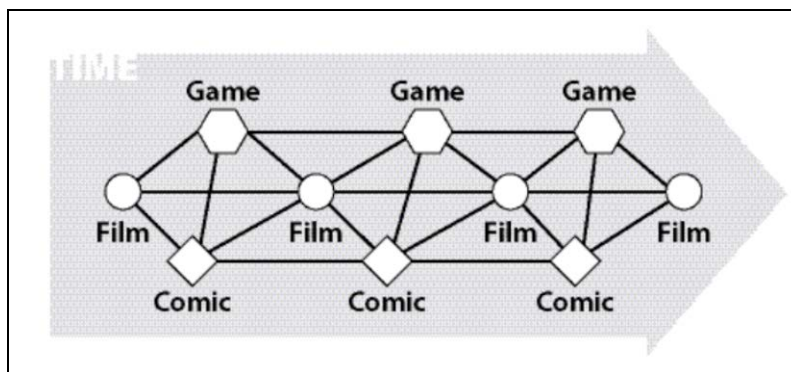
The movie *Eat, Pray, Love*, with Julia Roberts is a good example of cross-media storytelling.



Source: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0879870/> (for the movie);
<http://successfulhealthcoach.com/wpcontent/uploads/2010/12/eat-pray-love-3d.jpg> (for the book)

The movie is basically a screen adaptation from Elizabeth Gilbert's novel. It is the same story in a different form. No additional narratives are added.

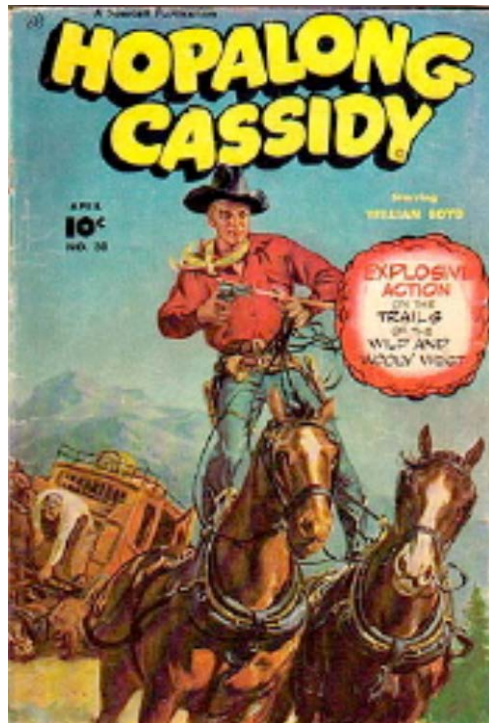
In 2003, Henry Jenkins introduced the term "transmedia" to better analyse and understand the changes in media production and consumption carried by IT. He described "transmedia storytelling" as "a story unfolding across multiple media platforms with each new text making a distinctive and valuable contribution to the whole" (2006). Contrary to cross-media, according to Carlos Alberto Scolari (2009), transmedia storytelling is a narrative structure that expands through both language (verbal, iconic, etc) and media (cinema, comics, television, video games, etc.). Geoffrey A. Long graphs Jenkins's transmedia narrative as follow:



© Geoffrey A. Long, 2007

As you can see in the above graph, transmedia narrative interactions enhance people reading experience (across multiple media) and encyclopedic expanse of information (a Henry Jenkins criterium of this new mode of sotrytelling) alter traditional rep-rensentation of the fiction as a whole. Although each component can be experienced individually, they all clearly exist in relation to each other in the larger transmedial story. Therefore, if an audience member can consume individually the games, the films or the comics... the connections between other media forms improve the transmedial experience as a whole (Long, 2007, pp.15-16).

The B-Western TV series Hopalong Cassidy is a good example of a transmedia narrative. In 1948, when the B-Western started to go out of fashion after World War II, William Boyd (the actor who played Hopalong Cassidy in the TV series) bought the rights to the dying TV series and everything related to it for \$400,000. He took the TV serial and expanded the story via every possible media platform he could find. He wrote new Cassidy stories and told those stories via television, radio, newspapers, comics, records and books.



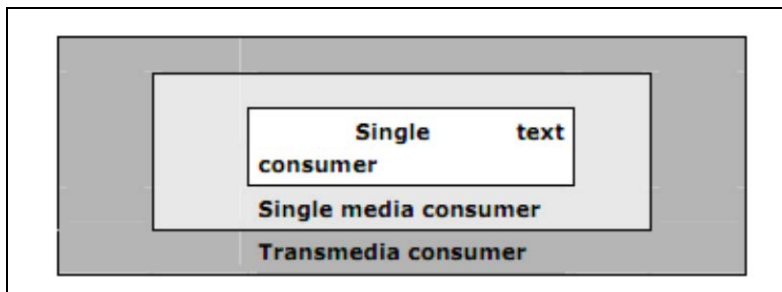
For every medium, William Boyd made new and exclusive nar-ratives (Westenberger, 2010). He turned the over 60-year-old Hopa-long Cassidy into an international media phenomenon thanks to transmedia storytelling techniques. This example is an important one since it provides one of the first example of a certain narrative strategy used in television series: seriality and intertextuality. This strategy is not about just one story, for just one media. It is about constructing worlds that can support the augmenting and stretching of multiple characters and multiple stories across multiple media.

Walt Disney Studios was one of the first to understand this phenomenon: children who love the characters from their cartoons and animated movies would ask their parents to buy toys, books and other merchandise that portrayed their favorite characters. A documentary broadcasted on the French channel France 5 on October 10, 2011 depicts this well:



Source: <http://documentaires.france5.fr/documentaires/histoires-de-jouets>

The documentary *Histoire de jouets* (Toys' story) illustrates Carlos Alberto Scolari's multiple implicit (trans) media consumers.



© Carlos Alberto Scolari, 2009

Carlos Alberto Scolari differentiates three kinds of multiple implicit (trans)media consumers which can be classified according to their relationship with the media:

1. "Single text consumers": people who only play a game or read a novel and do not take into account the total geography of the fictional world.

2. "Single media consumers": consumers who experience the world by watching the narrative world on TV each week or by watching DVDs.

3. "Transmedia consumers": consumers who participate in the narrative world in different media and language. (2009)"

But a fixed formula that defines the relationship between consumers and the stories they consume via media is hard to make. Hedonistic dimensions play an important role in the way people consume and participate in transmedia storytelling. Morris B. Hol-

brook & Elizabeth C. Hirschmann (1982), two specialists on behavioral studies, have already argued while analyzing consumption how it is important to take into consideration feelings, fantasies and fun. This also explains why a standard formula that defines the relationship between an animated game avatar, a living actor and a verbal characterization does not exist. Neither does a simple intertextual reference between them.

Today, stories can start their lives in many forms. It can begin as a book (Rowlings' Harry Potter), film (Star Wars), television series (StarTrek), cartoons (The Simpsons), graphic novels (Spiderman), or video games (Angry Birds) and spread to other media and genres, together with all kinds of merchandise.

WHEN DIFFERENT NARRATIVES MEET

If we explore the game universe as a collaboratively created, socially networked intertextual digital hyper-object, we can usefully focus on the game Angry Birds. Briefly, in this game, the birds need to destroy the pigs and their fortresses, since they have stolen their eggs. But while talking about this game, it is important to focus on the elaboration of strategies of transmedia diffusion in order to reach audiences. We have to explore Angry Birds' game universe as a collaboratively created, socially networked intertextual digital hyper-object since the game has been downloaded more than 500 million times since its first release in 2009 ¹. Therefore, Rovio (the Finnish company behind the game), announced first to have plans to make an Angry Birds movie. However, on (social) media news website Mashable, Rovio later announced to write a new story line since nobody would watch a movie in which one could see for more than an hour birds destroying pigs. At the end, in 2011, Angry Birds and the animated 3D-movie Rio joined forces ².

¹ For more details: <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/11/02/us-rovio-idUSTRE7A137Q20111102>

² In the movie, a blue Parrot of a species about to be extinct, has to travel to Rio de Janeiro in order to be able to mate with another blue parrot and save its own species. The city parrot never learned to fly and that brings him (and the other parrot) in all kinds of trouble. Close to the end of the movie they end up being caught by a bird trader. As today it is the case with every 3D-animated movie, Rio was accompanied by a set of computer games for pc, xbox and playstation. In these games people could play all kinds of Mario Party-like games with and against their favorite characters from the movie. The interesting thing about Rio was, that prior to the release of the movie, an interesting mobile phone application was released: Angry Birds Rio: the storyline of Rio mixed with the gameplay and storyline of Angry Birds. In the game, the Angry Birds don't try to destroy the green pigs as they usually did. The birds are in the storage barn of the bird trader from Rio, trying to liberate the captured birds (with the liberation of the two main characters of the movie as ultimate goal), by destroying their cages.

Genre-hybridisation and transmedia narratives:
The case of Angry Birds in Rio



The two transmedial stories meet and mingled. It was clever deal between two transmedial story producers to use the strenght of each others storylines to promote two products: the movie Rio in the first place, and Angry Birds in its slipstream. By passing over closed and static boundaries of a single media, Angry Birds in Rio draw the audience into potentially infinite ongoing narratives riddled with intertextual references and allusions creating layers of meaning.

Angry Birds Rio is not the only encounter of different transmedia storylines. For instance, in the South Park episodes “Cartoon Wars I & II”, three transmedia storylines meet: South Park, Family Guy and The Simpsons. In these South Park episodes, Family Guy is planning to broadcast an episode in which the prophet Mohamed appears. In this South Park episode Eric Cartman tries to get a fictional episode of another animated tv-series Family Guy in which the propher Mohamed appears pulled of the air. In this attempt he gets help from Bart Simpson (one of the main characters from The Simpsons).

The episode is a direct reaction on the case of the Danish cartoonist Kurt Westergaard. The television network broadcasting hesitates to air the show. Eric Cartman, one of the main characters of South Park, hopes that they will cancel the episode since he hates Family Guy. His theory is that, as soon as one episode is cancelled, the whole show will soon be cancelled. His friend Kyle wants to do everything in his power to keep the show on tv. Kyle decides to go to the television network to convince them to air the show. Cartman acts like he supports him, and joins him on his trip. During the trip Cartmans real intentions become clear, and the trip

turns into a race who reaches the network directors first. In his race and fight against Kyle and the tv-network, Cartman gets help from Bart Simpson, one of the main character from The Simpsons.

Bart Simpson (hating Family Guy) appearing in South Park episode “Cartoon Wars”



Source: <http://i32.servimg.com/u/f32/15/02/21/76/bart10.gif>

In an age of technological, economic, and cultural convergence, the ever-growing kinds of media we have at our disposal makes it easier for media producers (no matter if they are professionals or amateurs) to produce transmedia stories. However, for creating a transmedia narrative, one needs to go a step further than thinking in terms of different platforms and their borders.

THINKING BEYOND PLATFORM BORDERS

In a transmedia narrative, the platform is of secondary importance. The often strict borders we created between media channels need to be crossed (and in some cases even broken down) in order to create a true transmedial narrative.

For instance, cooking or sports events are more than a television format: they are a kind of social ritual. If reality shows are not seen to be as intellectually challenging as a documentary or a political discussion program could be; however, they give interesting insights into how television formats can work beyond genre and platform borders: People become involved in the show, they tweet about it, visit the official website but also several parallel “fan” website for exclusive content not yet shown on television. Just like people follow their favorite sports club, they follow and discuss it using every possible channel available to them. They participate in the mediated world in different media and languages. But the question of how a ‘traditional media’ such as television draws in its viewers still remains.

In fact, Umberto Eco tried to answer this question in 1983. In his article «TV : la transparence perdue », he made an opposition between what he calls paleo-television

and neo-television. For him, during the paleo-television era, which started in 1955 and lasted until 1980, public television (France Television, BBC, ZDF, TRT, etc.) had mostly a pedagogical discourse and broadcasted a mixture of fiction and information.

The neo-television era started in the 80's with the emergence of private channels (for example RTL or Canal+ and made television more fragmented (as with the broadcast of videoclips on MTV): people started to "zap", while at the same time, television cultivated a closer relationship with its audience and broadcast a mixture of fiction and information. However, nowadays, the opposition between paleo and neo-television is almost obsolete. Television involves a multiplication of narrative programs, screen fragmentation, and an acceleration of narrative speed.

Chef Gordon Ramsey's reality show Hell's Kitchen is a good example of this. Unlike classical cooking programs, it is not about food or hidden advertisements for consumer goods. The core ingredient of the show is the competition between the professional and amateur cooks trying to be the best and win the show. Just like in a sports match, the viewer gets involved, picks his or her favorite character, and agrees or disagrees with the jury. This competition entices viewers to watch the show every week, just as they would follow their favorite football club. Even a website is dedicated to Hell's kitchen fans:

Screenshot of Hell's kitchen community website



Source: <http://hellskitchen.community.fox.com/>

At any moment of the day fans have the possibility to connect to their program. While the history of fandom is long and storied, never before have fans (of television, cinema, games, sport or celebrities) operated in such a hypermediated environment as exists in the contemporary world. Just as cultural texts use multiple medial platforms, so too do their fans have access to and utilise this multi-plicity of platforms to reify and display their commitment to the objects of their fandoms. While in the past, the audience was merely seen as a passive receptor, today (s)he is more and more seen as a story co-creator. Producers have the possibility to connect to an 'expert' global niche audience with more immediacy through the internet, engaging virtual communities, crowd funding and fan building initiatives in a variety of social media landscapes.

Transmedia narratives aim to create a user community and to be consumed (and created) in multiple ways. As a result of the new transmedia narratives, the closed and static boundaries of television (but not limited to television) turn more and more unstable and fuzzy.

TV program creators no longer write one story for television only. They write narratives which are from the beginning are meant to be transmedial. Screen writers are constructing a multi-medial world (involving both new digital media and old media) that provides space to follow, augment and develop multiple characters: worlds that they can explore, spread and drill. They are making narratives that replicate via different media channels and enables spectators to follow and influence them. This development shows that television is undergoing a change from spectatorial culture to participatory culture.

In order to understand modern media culture and the new media sphere it brings, academics need to have deeper insight in how fans actively participate in media productions and the way they form communities. It is important to realise that fandom goes deeper than just adoration. Fans do not only take part in debates about the object of their adoration. They extrapolate existing storylines or even create their own new ones. This is what David Marshall calls “massaging [a] text in to something larger” (2002, p.69). In this new method of creation, production, distribution and financing, digital technology process allow the intensification and elaboration of the intertextual matrix. In his book *The New Intertextual Commodity* (2002), Marshall argues that media productions (e.g. television programmes, books, computer games) are cross-referenced in refined way through-out the whole entertainment industry (e.g. magazines, tv program-mes, newspapers, websites). The audience learns about a narrative not only by following the main storyline itself, but more and more via its associations in other cultural forms (new products, from remix to media content share).

Studying narrative worlds is often done with the preassumption that the researcher has a complete overview of this world. Studies of cultural productions which use ICT to diffuse their narrative often focus on the commercial aspect of the outlet. They often have a predefined world in mind in which products are being sold. A good example of this is the Matrix case of Jenkins. In his example, information about the narrative (and associated products) are spread via different narratives via different channels. But transmedia narratives and convergence are not just a technique aiming to sell products. Convergence can also be found in other fields than the media industry.

Since consumers of a certain narrative take part in the same trans-medial world, convergence also happens between users. Storylines intertwine. When studying transmedia narratives it is important to keep the level of user participation into consideration. Not every user is involved in the same level. The way they interpretate the narrative on a certain media channel influences the way they look at the narrative in another channel. In this sense, there is no such thing as one transmedial narrative. Every user creates his own transmedial world and it is impossible to have overview of the 'complete' narrative (Jenkins, 2004).

TRANSMEDIA, MORE THAN A TECHNOLOGICAL END-POINT

Creators do not longer just write just one story, just for one media. Now, they are constructing worlds that can support the augmentating and stretching of multiple characters and multiple stories across multiple media.

As scholars, it is crucial to analyze the various processes in modern culture and the new media sphere, by virtue of fans' active attitude to mass media, their practice of community formation and their engage-ment in the media industry. It is a truism, but it pays to reiterate that in this age of digital fandoms, the distinction between producers and consumers is no longer sacrosanct. Fans not only participate in debates about the media text(s) that are the objects of their fandom, but they also create cultural texts of their own—particularly, videos, fiction, games—that further the original text either by corresponding to it or deviating from it in imaginative ways.

The study of the construction of the audiences must take into account the degree of involvement of individuals, the participatory part in the construction of the apparatus themselves. Interpretative models that the users carry from one media to another and which help them to give sense to their practices must also be considered here. That is why we can say that “the transmedial narrative is a virtual possibility that only exists within the peculiar, personal and always incomplete actualization by the users (because it is impossible to see everything“. This is the case of the Matrix universe, an example used by Henry Jenkins, from which information concerning the fictive universe is spread through various works on various media. But transmedia links and convergence can also be observed in numerous other fields.

Scriven and Roberts (2003) focus especially on the rise in usage of digital technology and how it have changed the face of the audiovisual landscape, stating the way to consume popular television. Thanks to cable, sattelite and digital technology, TV broadcasting can reach an international audience. Yet this is not the end point. We are still in the middle of a transition process. Television enters the digital era, the era of the franchise formats. There an ongoing shift from linear to non-linear television (e.g. DVR (Digital Video Recorder) and VOD (Video on Demand).

Non-linear television dismantles the concept prime time and seems to make power of the mass market decrease. DVR and VOD offer more screens and more temptations to view a program. When you look at the top 10 most viewed programs on DVR: it is a combination of serials and reality shows like Survivor and Hell's Kitchen. In general, the development of digital media presents a unique opportunity to reconsider the meaning of transmedia, and what individuals, groups, and societies might hope to accomplish through new(er) as well as old media. As explained by Klaus Bruhn Jensen (2009), at a time when digital media still provokes both utopian and dystopian views of their likely consequences, it is important to place these “new(er)” media in a comparative perspective together with “traditional” mass media, restating the two classic questions of media studies: what do media do to people, and what do people do with media?

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