Transmedia Storytelling: A Study of the Necessity, Features and Advantages

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***Abstract*—According to the Marxist view that economy is the base. The existence of storytelling as a source of entertainment for children is being influenced by a wide range of entertainments provided by digital media, and cyber space as a result of new economic and marketing systems. However the new technologies as the outcomes of new socioeconomic methods have been used to revive the storytelling tradition by the application of transmedia strategy which presents the opportunity to create deeper, stronger, and more varied connections between story universes and audiences, or in other words the virtual costumers. Transmedia strategy as a narrative storytelling uses different media and cyber space as platforms to advance the story and to create ever-larger fictional worlds of events and characters who become role models. As a result to facilitate the trend of promoting transmedia storytelling, this essay would introduce its concept as well as discussing its necessity and its socio-economical, educational and psychological advantages and causes to name a few.**

***Index Terms*—Transmedia, narrative storytelling, Web 2.0 connections, education and Blockbusters.**

I. Introduction

Transmedia storytelling which is also called transmedia narrative [1]) is the method of telling a story or story experience through different formats using the state-of-the art digital technologies. According to Henry Jenkins, "transmedia" per se means "across media", [2]. A transmedia production will develop stories across different forms of media. Moreover, these pieces of content are not only linked together, but are in narrative synchronization with each other.

Transmedia initiated in 1970's and 1980's when telematics artists started experimenting the use of new technologies in storytelling. Later in 1990's the internet made it possible for different people to try new ways to tell stories and entertain audiences using new platforms.

Today, transmedia is an approach of both educational and creative importance as it presents children with different methods of learning. In fact it is the result of economic growth which has brought about the new method as a result of which children can start learning via any available media, but when these media are interconnected, children will be motivated to explore even more; moreover it enables educators to use individual media for the functions for which they are best suited.

As Rutherford (2009) states: "Commentators have suggested that social media networks lend themselves to more diverse and eclectic tastes" [1], organized around generational or local populations and shaped by norms of sociability. Such a premise, followed to its logical conclusion, suggests that Web 2.0 connections, mediating the distinctive tastes of users, should facilitate peer sharing of favorite texts. Challenging the primacy of genre fandoms as a mode by which users learn about new entertainment texts, social benchmarking might thus eclipse genre–based subcultures in emergent online spaces" [3]

Transmedia enables the audience to be participants rather than mere viewers. As McChesney mentions, it is about "connection and collaboration" [3]. It gives the chance to create a stronger and more efficient bond between the story and audiences. This has all happened as the Internet has facilitated the coming together of separated youth taste cultures. Thus the paper examines the role of the publishing industry in marketing popular teen literary fiction through online channels in ways that often disguise promotional intent as well as the ways such technologies facilitate education.

II. Discussion

As discussed by Rutledge (2007) transmedia storytelling uses multiple media platforms tell a narrative across time. Each media piece—whether it's a comic, novels, video games, mobile apps, or a film—functions as a standalone story experience—complete and satisfying. Like a giant puzzle, each piece also contributes to a larger narrative. The process is cumulative and each piece adds richness and detail to the story world, such as character backstories and secondary plotlines [4].

Transmedia storytelling is completely based on the audience and their participation. The audience becomes actively involved in the social and creative processes. The audience becomes part of the process of artistic creation and the story telling, composition, designing as well as the process of adding content to the available stories.

The online marketing strategies have recognized the young adult population as the major aim to be reached by different social media. Industry discourse surrounding the young adult audience is different from that constructed in schools, books and film councils. Thus it is important to notice the ways the web applications, together with the social media, have been used by trade publicists within the publishing industry.

The influence of book concept marketing consider the teenagers and youth as trend conscious consumers. As Wyatt (1994) states, their aims are to "mobilize cross platform uptake of entertainment fiction artifacts. These young readers are understood as unlikely to be heavy readers with specific

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genre preferences. Their co–option is predicated on the viral communication of peer trends facilitated by social media"[5],

In addition to the traditional view of social media according to Rutherford (2009) "another popular strand of theory has envisioned new media audiences as romantic individualists. It foreshadows the end to mass culture in the fragmenting of traditional media audiences into ever smaller niche sectors" [1]. The economic idea behind this was further discussed in Anderson's book [6] which explains that information and communication technologies, with applications facilitating easy searching, empower users to locate and procure cultural products which are carefully designed to meet individual desires.

Moreover, Elberse (2008) has discussed that in addition to the online compartmentalization of audiences eliminating mass consumer behavior in the circulation of cultural texts, the "importance of individual bestsellers is not diminishing over time" [7]. Moreover as Théberge points out "the rise of fan culture is intimately bound up with the creation of the star system in popular culture" [8]

Moreover, Busse and Hellekson [9] trace the changes in fan cultures subsequent to the rise of social media applications, particularly the influence of friendship on the online publication of cultural productions. In spite of the fact that there are significant emotional aspects which must be considered in the content circulated, the important visibility of some titles remains predictable on the basis of traditional marketing campaigns for publishers main titles.

The technological developments have led to the popularity of social media platforms and apps which have in turn facilitated the storytelling process and opened the door for storytellers to deliver their content in inventively and engage with the audience. Transmedia storytelling is becoming a way of life for many who create content, but the definition of the phrase isn't always clear. Basically, it's taking a single story and breaking it down into pieces that are delivered through multiple media platforms.

After the successful marketing of the Twilight series, as "a Phoenix housewife" [10], Grossman (2008) describes the story of the dream source of Twilight as: "a young woman was talking to a beautiful, sparkling man is a sunlit meadow. The man was a vampire. They were in love and he was telling her how hard it was to keep from killing her" [10]. This is consistent with the thinking of contemporary advertisers.

Moreover, attention must be paid to the fact that, as Rutherfort has also pointed out, online advertising will only represent a part of the promotional aspect of a lead title, there has been an increasing trend to strategies targeting the online young adult and teen market through Internet channels. Marketers may design a site; send books to bloggers or produce podcasts and so on. Video interviews are frequently linked to the book's page on Amazon and other online sellers. As an example one can refer to Meyer's first novel which became popular among teenagers, soon after she started to promote it in her own blog.

Transmedia storytelling is completely participatory. The audience becomes actively involved in social and creative collaborators. They become part of the experience. The storytelling project generates the motivation to engage with other participants, and contribute to the plot by adding content. Transmedia stories can be simple, across a few media platforms or reduce the distance between the story and reality by bringing the narrative out into the real world, in the form of complex and exciting alternative reality games, where participants involve with plots and characters using real world locations as part of the story.

As earlier pointed out, transmedia storytelling employs different media platforms and tell a narrative across time. Each media piece, regardless of its genre, functions as a separate story experience—complete and satisfying. The process is collective and each event adds richness and detail to the story world, such as character backstories and secondary plotlines.

Considering the rapid developments in online communications, one must point to the fact that printed fiction seem to be in decline. As Flesch states, the market has traditionally been characterized by a strong lines of communication between publishers, authors and readers. [11]

The digital revolution has led to a new interactive art form which aim as motivating the children to read more and interact with the story, regardless of the form (printed/electronic). As Springen states: " indeed, a child today may read a print book at home—and an app version of the same title on his mother's iPhone in the grocery store. To tap into the new reality, publishers are taking some risks." [12] Since the publishing industry have traditionally been less involved in promoting teenagers and children books, the writers of children literature seem to have used different personal methods to communicate with their readers.

The recent developments in technology have motivated the audience to what Theberge(2005) calls "commodity focus to the artist–fan relationship through personal investments in a set of fetishized objects" [8].

Definitely the publisher and author sites as well as the personal pages and online groups give feedback to the industry on the popularity of the series as well as the marketability. In addition to the previously mentioned electronic media a search on online books and literature provides a number of groups for example, Because of Edward Cullen, Human Boys have lost their Charm with, over 45,000 members; compare this with the less than 2,000 members for Facebook groups devoted to what the industry describes as "literary fiction" [8]. An analysis of sites shows that about whether the movie option for Twilight would ever be taken up. As the sales of the later books escalated along with the celebrity–oriented Internet fandom, these modest projects gave way to the financing of a blockbuster teen movie, which took over the prime theatre release date previously slotted for the sixth Harry Potter adaptation.

As Theberge (2005) explains, "One of the major promotional events scheduled for the release of Breaking Dawn was a midnight book launch concert in New York, which featured some of Meyer's favorite musicians. This event was a hybrid of the musical concert tour, and the convention of film premiere. However, the author was clearly still the primary star of this event. Like the earlier fan site, and the buzz merchandizing of Team Edward or Team Jacob [8].

A practical example of how transmedia storytelling is summarized by Donna Hancok (2011) as follows: [13]

Lowlifes consciously blurs the line between fiction and non-fiction in an experiment by producer Rob Pratten. This project tells the story of drug addicted San Francisco cop Larry Hayes and his fight to save his career, his life and his family. The other two characters in Lowlifes are Haye's ex-wife Jennifer and the private detective she has hired Lauren Ortega. The story is set in and around the Tenderloin in San Francisco (which is almost a character in itself in the story) and uses three distinct storytelling styles for each of the characters. Larry's story is told through a novella in the tradition of the hard-boiled detective novels from the early twentieth century by writers such as Dashiell Hammett (who lived and wrote in the Tenderloin), Jennifer's story is told through a series of blog posts, her Facebook page and her Twitter account and Lauren's story is a series of webisodes shot on the streets of San Francisco while looking for evidence on Larry. Pratten uses each of these to their fullest potential and they are perfectly suited to the character. Lowlifes is also interesting in its approach to social activism. Traffic from the Lowlifes site is directed onto the Coalition for the Homeless San Francisco website where the audience can explore ways to become involved with the not for profit organisation. Also the business model for Lowlifes means that all the content is available as paid and free media, and is licensed under a Creative Commons agreement meaning readers can add their own content.

III. Conclusion

The culture industries have invested in online strategies which create an ongoing relationship between writers, readers, distributors and publishers. While niche communities exist, with strong preferences for individual genres such as paranormal romance and fantasy, a profile of such readers as romantic individualists pursuing esoteric tastes cannot be supported by my research to date.

The Internet has, to a large degree, facilitated the coming–together of separate youth taste cultures, such that literary, screen and graphic fandoms now more readily overlap. In looking at what might previously have been thought of as the light reader of entertainment fiction, it seems fair to conclude that many of these consumers may now be recruited to reading by means of an initial engagement with celebrity culture. An initial investment in the image of a celebrity performer may serve to recruit readers to a fictional series.

Finally, the role of the publishing industry in marketing popular teen fiction can be shown to use the Internet and social media in ways that deliberately disguise a promotional intent, mimicking the ostensibly non–commercial discourse of youth sociability in online channels.

Ruthledge(2007) considers transmedia storytelling useful on the following grounds:[4]

1) Persuasion: Transmedia stories are the most fundamental and immersive form of communication, engaging our brains at the intuitive, sensory and executive levels
2) Audience Connection: Transmedia strategies create many points of entry that reach and link multiple demographics and target different user needs to effectively expand the customer base

Transmedia in many ways is the future of education and communication. Transmedia as multiplatform media facilitates human interaction and helps students experience a new style in education. In this context teachers engage their students via media. To engage and learn, students must create stories of their own. Thus, transmedia storytelling offers digital stories for students to engage in, participate and create their own learning process in creative by creating stories, games, and relevant activities, Moreover, according to Jenkins [2] "The best transmedia storytelling serves four key functions. It extends the timeline, maps the world, explores secondary characters, and engages the audience"

Because transmedia storytelling needs coordination across the different media sectors, the collaboration would definitely be impossible without imagination and creativity, thus transmedia storytelling is not just storytelling, but as readers response criticism says, it is much of give-and-take relationship which needs creativity, ability to communicate efficiently and judge the final product.

Transmedia storytelling can be used to educate children and teenagers. It can be used not only for entertainment or increasing the engagement of the audience; but also as a very useful way to engage students in education as students get personal experience and need to use their imagination, their ability to coordinate and communicate will improve as well. Developing a narrative over multiple platforms while interweaving learning outcomes creates transformational learning experiences. Through the application of transmedia storytelling in education, students shape their ideas into well-structured narratives and complex storyworlds. Moreover, as earlier discussed, transmedia provides the platform for the students to learn how to identify, understand, and engage different audiences in their stories as well as how to create and link a story across different platforms

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