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TRANSMEDIA MARKETING AND RE-INVENTION OF PUBLIC RELATIONS

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*When a digital story is finished it should be remembered for its soul,
not the bells and whistles of the technology tools.*

Bernajean Porter, 2004



Summary

Many concepts have been developed to describe the convergence of media, public relations and storytelling formats in contemporary media systems. This article presents a theoretical reflection on "transmedia storytelling" from a perspective of integration narrative in the context of the re-invention of public relations. The rapid evolution of digital media technology and the emergence of transmedia storytelling present foresight professionals with a powerful new approach for communicating about the future. A transmedia story unfolds across multiple media platforms with each new text making a distinctive and valuable contribution to the whole. Between other, this article also outlines some of the key principles and elements of transmedia storytelling in combination with modern public relations, in order to provide a basic framework that public relations practitioner can use when designing transmedia projects.

Keywords: transmedia storytelling, media, public relations, transmedia marketing

Transmedia has many different definitions: some primarily based on legacy, some which we consider today as new one or some included in non-storytelling media such as marketing or advertising, as an example. In many well known definitions, transmedia is conceptually interchangeable with terms like "cross-media" storytelling or interactive marketing. Since transmedia has narrative as its basic value, all these variations and alternative definitions of the transmedia concept are somewhat confusing and can lead to the wrong conclusions.

To be more precise, transmedia basically used fragments of different platforms in order to reveal a previously unknown, undiscovered or hidden story. In this sense we can say that the concept of transmedia marketing exists through marketing storytelling or even better, in order accurately to describe this term, we would say, through transmedia storytelling. In both cases, it is best to stay — transmedia.

Therefore, transmedia (storytelling) is the ultimate mash-up of ancient traditions and new communications models. Media technologies have come a long way since cave painting and have so many new capabilities. The immersive, interactive reading and learning environments enabled by media technologies have recently tipped the clash between words and images. Transmedia storytelling engages, informs and inspires participants — who are more than mere "readers" or consumers of organized concepts — to become immersed in participatory experiences by connecting with and collaborating over content meaning-making.

Henry Jenkins gave a definition of transmedia storytelling in his book *Convergence Culture* (2006):

"A transmedia story unfolds across multiple media platforms with each new text making a distinctive and valuable contribution to the whole."

Also, it should be noted that a transmedia is not tied exclusively to transmit stories on different platforms, but we should, rather, perceive it as the expressions of its smaller parts that then become an interactive part of one large story. This indicates that the primary goal is to create multiple expressions of a story across various platforms in order to create

a richer, deeper and more immersive experience for the interested audience.

Transmedia is most conducive to those stories where there is a complex universe and rich backstory or mythology that can extend into an exploration of that universe via multiple (potentially interrelated) characters, each with their own stories that expand and deepen our understanding of the world.

Transmedia makers care about all the details very carefully, and because of it practically speaking they are building blocks. And for the construction, the most important are the following components: story, plot, settings, characters, and to that, it can be added the style or tone of the story. The larger impact will be created if the story is reliant on an existing one with which the public is emotionally connected.

We can forget the days when consumers were getting most of their content from television, newspaper and time-to-time from computers. With modern technologies such as smartphones and tablets, consumers are now discovering content from numerous different devices, often simultaneously. Although storytelling in marketing has been around for a very long time, now due to all the different devices, marketers are required to provide one story consistently over all of these media and that is the pure essence of transmedia storytelling.

A consistent experience through all media does not mean having the same advertisement on every device; the key to transmedia storytelling is to have differentiated consistency. This means each medium has its own segment of the story that can stand on its own, while still giving depth to the story as a whole. Because each device brings its own unique strengths, it is important to incorporate these into each experience to give a different perspective on the story.

In the terms of markets, today's most desirable target markets, Millennial young adults and Generation Z 'tweens and teens, have come of age in a time of pervasive communications. As a result they are far more media savvy, interpersonally connected, and able to express themselves than any previous generation.

Elements of Transmedia storytelling that represents goals for creating persistent, immersive worlds that blend reality and fiction:

1. **Pervasive:** the story is available on multiple devices, anytime and anywhere. Reality and fiction are blurred.
2. **Persistent:** the story evolves even if the author isn't engaged with it. Audience activity and real world factors shape the story development.
3. **Participation:** the audience is able to interact with story characters, locations and each other.
4. **Personalised:** the audience can personalise their experience with the characters and environment.
5. **Connected:** a seamless, integrated experience is available to the audience.
6. **Inclusive:** the experience is available across a range of devices and engagement styles so that it is not just confined to expensive smartphones or tablets.
7. **Cloud-based:** the experience is managed from the cloud to permit the other six stands to function in real time.

What makes transmedia exciting, interesting and challenging is that it is a way to combine the story with experience, or how such a bond can be connected to a variety of platforms in a multitude of ways.

To achieve great success in transmedia marketing we need to "connect" all elements of transmedia storytelling, but at the same time we have to be very careful how that integration functions as transmedia storytelling per se is not necessarily interactive.

A new toolset and new techniques are necessary to reach and engage mass audiences. The consumer or audience member is now a user and a participant. The narrative needs to be accessible through an array of media platforms, and the story must be designed to play to the strengths of the platform at hand. Instead of the classical way there is a pressing necessity for dialogue.

The design elements of transmedia storytelling are: *brand, narratives, media and participation.*

Brand

The most basic component of transmedia is the brand — an abstract idea used to differentiate products, whether that product takes the form of a consumer good, personality, company or idea. It is the collection of perceptions held by all those that are aware of the product and the meaning derived from those perspectives.

Transmedia allows brands a larger canvas in which to tell their story by leveraging the best features in each platform to enhance every piece of the experience; giving diversity and richness to the content and characters and helping users get the most out of a great story.

A brand most commonly refers to a consumer product or service. Other types of brands are products and services targeting other businesses (B2B), as well as individuals, causes and ideas. Most transmedia stories are built around a brand community that rallies fans around the brand and product story, activating the audience and creating deeper engagement through participation and co-creation.

Narratives

At its core, people are interested in stories that may be true or fictional, serious or funny, aspirational or provocative, entertaining or thought provoking — as long as they are engaging. Most importantly, such stories are passed along when people find these narratives meaningful and emotionally engaging. Spreadability is a key enabler of transmedia branding.

Transmedia narratives have been categorized as two fundamental types: intra-compositional, which are works that use multiple media to create a single story, and inter-compositional, which are works that create interrelationships between multiple narratives across multiple media.

Transmedia narrative can be defined relatively broadly as any intra-compositional or inter-compositional works that have one or more stories

set in a single "storyworld" and told via at least two different media. In other words, when we talk about transmedia narratives, it consists of three key factors that we need to follow; one or more stories, one storyworld and two or more different media.

Media

The media landscape today is a complicated network of connected platforms that content is released on to. When we talk about platforms we mean categories or types of media content that can be consumed by audiences. Example of these platforms may be: films, episodic shows (TV, web series), games, literature (comic, graphic novels, books), or even social media (Facebook, Twitter). Each platform has its own affordance and limitations that all media practitioners need to take into consideration when creating content and stories to be released with each platform.

When we have a transmedia story, we have the story being unfolded, being developed and growing across different media platforms. We do not have the repetition of the same content.

We tell and consume stories across, and using, different platforms because we're curious little creatures. We wonder: how might that story look from a different perspective? From a different character's standpoint? How else might the story be told? Technology affords us so many new options for extending a storyline, for customizing plot and character, for altering or presenting another visual look and feel that for many it can feel, well, disappointing to settle on a single unchanging narrative.

The number of stories has been used as the basis for some definitions of what constitutes a transmedia narrative. For example, the terms "multimedia", "crossmedia", and "transmedia" have been defined as (Holme, 2011):

Multimedia — a single story is told using different media, with the core narrative being supported by story elements spread across several types of media.

Crossmedia — a single story interpreted independently in different media.

Transmedia — multiple stories set in a single universe (or story world), with different stories being told via different media.

These three terms can be divided on how they use media form and media channel. Media form is a language a story uses, and it can include text, photographs, illustrations, motion pictures, audio, graphic nonfiction, interactive forms and many others. These forms are then reproduced someplace and that place is a media channel.

Probably the main difference between the transmedia storytelling and crossmedia for an example is that transmedia involves the prefix "trans" which means transcendence, which is related to the idea of going beyond.

Participation

Participation should be the heart of transmedia storytelling. Transmedia stories use the qualities of spreadability and drillability to engage their audiences. Spreadability uses "a mix of top-down and bottom-up forces" to share material and involve audiences in media participation. In this mode the audience is involved in not only sharing, but also framing the media content.

Drillability is a complimentary property that encourages long-term engagement by immersing the audience in the world of the story. It is the depth to which an audience can become engaged with the story beyond their initial contact.

As much as possible, we need to offer opportunities for the audience to go beyond what we've created, to enable them to participate by interacting with our content or to create their own. While it's unrealistic to expect a majority, or perhaps even ten percent, of a general audience to devote time to writing something or creating a video, storytellers have to offer ways to participate for those who are most enthusiastic about the story. This is why the move from linear delivery needs be less of a framework and more based on transmedia storytelling. The stories depend on the imagination of the users and the outcomes have a need for shareability, so that anyone can come and play. Choice was always key but now it is about being able to choose the choices that can be made. This leads us onto arguably the most important point; we need to be able to measure that emotional engagement

and feed it back into the ongoing design process in order to create more effective story experiences in future.

Ultimately, our goal is to create an experience that leads to the general audience taking some sort of action as a result of being engaged and motivated with the transmedia story.

Re-Invention of Public Relations in terms of transmedia storytelling

Now, with the erosion of mainstream media and the surge of social media, even PR experts aren't entirely sure what their profession is or should be. This "shaking" element outcome as an opportunity to shun the PR label and replace it with integrated marketing or integrated communication. The strength of the public relations practice has always been the ability to engage audiences and create strong relationships, mostly via media relations. These two skills, arguably, have never been more important than now, in a media environment where all participants are communicators themselves and selectively choose information they care about and engage with.

Transmedia branding is primarily focused on the important idea that consumers and businesses engage with content that is important to them or crucial. Transmedia branding is one of potentially many alternative ways to understand and to manage public relations, which are still more than ever unreasonably directivity primarily on media relations. As the media environment is constantly changing and continues to develop, PR practitioners need to accept and expand the nature of their profession through the PESO model, where media relations, targeted advertising, multi-media content production and social media campaign execution work seamlessly hand in hand, but also take transmedia storytelling as the current tool to create messages that can be linked to the target audience.

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