



Transmedia Story Telling And Content Creation-An Empirical Study

Sujoy Goswami^{1*}

^{1*}Senior Technical Officer, Dept. of Journalism and Mass Communication, Swami Vivekananda University, Barrackpore.

Citation: Sujoy Goswami, (2023) Transmedia Story Telling And Content Creation-An Empirical Study, *Educational Administration: Theory And Practice*, 29(4), 2945 - 2950
Doi: 10.53555/kuey.v29i4.7618

ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

Foresight professionals and the futures field as a whole faces a series of challenges in communicating about the future. Simply presenting data and having a “rational” discussion is not enough to shape perceptions about the future and move people to action. 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. Transmedia storytelling is the use of multiple media – graphic novels, video clips on YouTube, blogs, Twitter, and enhanced e-books, for example – to tell one or more related stories set within a common story world. This article outlines some of the key principles of transmedia storytelling in order to provide a basic framework that foresight professionals can use when designing transmedia projects. Since the 2000s and up to the present day, transmedia awareness has been developing more and more, encompassing many areas of everyday life. Technological convergence and the subsequent evolution of media have led to the development of a new communication practice: transmedia storytelling. It has got important applications, from cinema to video games, as it is suitable for experimentation, especially in a transmedia environment. More than that, it is also used as a communication strategy, as it creates an exciting and engaging experience that introduces the audience to a new fictional universe, and also it manages to expand that world through various media to reach into reality. The opportunities offered by the practice of transmedia storytelling are so wide that it is also possible to develop promotional operations leading to the creation of transmedia marketing projects. Thus, starting with the two factors such as transmedia storytelling and audience engagement, it was possible to develop empirically based push models. The concept of Transmedia storytelling and content creation is the call of the hour.

Keywords: Scenario, visioning, foresight, futures studies, storytelling, transmedia, narrative, user interaction, audience engagement

Introduction

Shaping the future means shaping popular perceptions of the future. Unfortunately, foresight professionals wield less influence than science fiction writers when it comes to shaping those perceptions. The works of H.G. Wells, Isaac Asimov, Ray Bradbury, and other science fiction writers created not just their own visions of the future but inspired several generations of readers to create a world based at least in part on these visions. Science fiction books, graphic novels, films, and television continue to shape popular views of the future. The integral disproportionate influence of science fiction is a testament to the power of storytelling. While foresight professionals may have a more comprehensive and holistic understanding of how to vision, forecast, assess, and shape the future, it is the science fiction storytellers who have the most effective approach for communicating their visions of the future. The available foresight professionals has to be better storytellers if they want to help shape the crucial conversations about issues facing 21st century society. The emergence over the past decade of transmedia storytelling gives the futures field an opportunity to address some of the

communications challenges it faces. Today's complex media environment is changing audience expectations of how, when, and where information is consumed. Media convergence is driving the development of new forms of storytelling in which integrated narratives are presented across multiple media. Participatory engagement of audiences through games, remixing content, and original user-created content is increasingly common. In telling its stories the futures field faces challenges on two levels.

At the broader level is the field's relationship with popular culture, which is characterized by "a deep uneasiness", anxieties about the "legitimacy and utility of amateur, popular culture-steeped futures content", and the threat that the credibility and authority of futures professionals will be disrupted and usurped (Li, 2013). At the level of the individual foresight practitioner, a complex and turbulent world makes it challenging to help individuals and organizations comprehend the uncertainties they face, facilitate critical reflection, and support strategic decision-making. The development of useful scenarios, accurate forecasts, and compelling visions of the future is challenging in itself. Having them applied in a meaningful way can be even more difficult. It is not uncommon for excellent foresights and insights to be discounted or completely ignored while "business-as-usual" continues even in the face of threats that should be obvious. The challenge of filling the gap between foresight and action is a critical challenge for futures professionals. After working for more than three decades with scenarios in public administration, at the grassroots level and with students, there remains a pestering voice in my mind: what next? Most scenarios are buried in the archives of history and forgotten. They never incarnated in real world action. (Jarva, 2014)

In recent years storytelling has become an increasingly important tool in facilitating changes in people and organizational cultures (Maas, 2012; Anonymous, 2012; Kaye, 1995). The role of media in shaping public opinion and societal values has been widely studied (McCombs, 2002; Semetko, 2004). Transmedia storytelling can be an effective approach for sense-making within the futures field. Transmedia storytelling has also been identified as a potential vehicle with which the futures field can engage with popular culture (Li, 2013). A vital, perhaps existential question has been raised about the future of futures thinking. ...how can we support and sustain a resurgence of futures thinking in mainstream conversation but also how can this be most effectively done in the same complex, turbulent media environment that transmedia storytellers face. (Li, 2013, pp. 137-138) A "rational" discussion focused on data is not enough. The complexity of today's societal issues makes it imperative that holistic solutions are developed. How do we do this? One essential way is through story: The only way to truly comprehend the human costs of policy and cultural constructs is to listen to and exchange stories. The humanitarian and emotional perspectives are often more persuasive than only the rational ones when we are creating livable societies. To build a culture of possibility, we have to build both a movement and an ethical framework grounded in multiple narrative from multiple voices, and fostered by co-creation networks that act for the good of the collective and the protection of the individual. (Srivastava, 2012) The rapid evolution of digital media technology makes transmedia storytelling a viable option in foresight projects. Professional and prosumer hardware and software provides sophisticated, low-cost tools for the production of transmedia stories. Consumer level cameras can shoot high definition video and still images. Software like Adobe's Creative Suite provides a series of applications for creating illustrations, editing photographs, recording and editing audio and video, developing websites, and creating e-books for a monthly subscription of around \$50.

Storytelling and Strategic Foresight

Storytelling as a guide to the future can be traced back to the very beginnings of civilization (Molitor, 2009). Storytelling has been used to foster the development of new values by linking the present and future (Nováky, 2001). The ability of stories to trigger or block change has focused attention on their use in change management efforts (Brown, Gabriel, & Gherardi, 2009). Some elements of storytelling have been a small part of the foresight professional's repertoire for the past few decades. In the early 1990s while in the graduate program in futures studies at the University of Houston-Clear Lake, one of us (von Stackelberg) used storytelling techniques along with role-playing during workshops in which participants took on the personas of citizens of 2030. Another technique used at the time was the creation of mockups of newspapers or magazines to highlight key issues through stories set at a particular time in the future. At about the same time, the futures consulting firm GBN used live stage performances to act out scenarios developed during multi-day scenario workshops. More recently, narrative and storytelling have become a common topic of discussion among futures practitioners (Schultz, Crews, & Lum, 2012). The terms "storytelling" and "narrative" have been used to describe elements in a crowdsourced scenario and foresight system (Raford, 2012). Stories have been proposed as a way to move away from the "flatland" scenarios developed using the "axes of uncertainty" approach and create a richer, deeper perspective of the future (Schultz, Crews, & Lum, 2012).

Transmedia storytelling techniques have been used in a number of projects designed to change perceptions on key issues or encourage social activism. *Collapsus: The Energy Risk Conspiracy* (www.collapsus.com), a transmedia project released in 2011, integrates fictional newscasts, interactive maps, video blogging, and other forms of media to draw participants into a world in which they need to access and analyze information about the future of global energy. The narrative provides a human touch by showing the audience individual

characters as they are caught up in the turbulent events portrayed in the story. Digital storytelling has been identified as a way for young people to construct their identities and re-imagine their futures (Murakami, 2008). *Future States* (www.futurestates.tv) is a series of short films set in the future that deal with immigration, human relationships, economic segregation, and other complex social issues. Transmedia narrative techniques are also used in *Animism: The Gods' Lake* (www.animism.com). The project, developed by Canada's Aboriginal Peoples Television Network, looks at environmentalism, capitalism, and spirituality through the eyes of characters drawn from Canada's aboriginal peoples. The project uses animation, a fictional blog and companion websites. *Conspiracy for Good* (www.conspiracyforgood.com) integrated a philanthropic mission into the narrative itself by using an interactive story that empowered its audience to take real-life action and create positive change in the world. It was accessible through online, mobile phone and flyers on sidewalks, live theater and a new level of audience participation. *The Harry Potter Alliance* (www.thehpalliance.org), built on the story world created in J.K. Rowling's bestselling Harry Potter novels, used live streaming to play a new genre of music called "Wizard Rock", posted action alerts on My Space, and developed fan sites and other media to create and move a community to action. Through partnership with non-governmental organizations, the Alliance prompts social action on issues like global climate change, poverty, genocide, and human rights.

Defining Transmedia Storytelling

The definition of transmedia storytelling has been the subject of considerable debate over the past several years. The term "transmedia" was first used by cultural theorist Marsha Kinder in 1991 to describe works where characters appeared across multiple media (Phillips, 2012). In 2006, media theorist Henry Jenkins' book *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* reframed the term to describe tightly integrated narratives like *The Matrix*, in which films, graphic novels, video games, and other forms of media were used in a way that allowed the story to flow seamlessly from one medium to another (Jenkins, 2006). The Producers Guild of America defines a transmedia narrative project as consisting of three or more narrative storylines existing within the same fictional universe and presented using film, television, short film, broadband, book or magazine publishing, comics, animation, mobile applications, special venues, DVD/Blu-ray/CD-ROM, narrative commercials and marketing rollouts, and other technologies that may or may not currently exist. These narrative extensions are NOT the same as repurposing material from one platform to be cut or repurposed to different platforms. (Kinke, 2011) This article uses a broad definition in which transmedia storytelling includes any works with one or more stories set in a single "storyworld" and told using at least two different forms of media, with the story elements in each form of media making their own distinctive contributions to the audience's understanding of the story world (von Stackelberg, 2011). In less than a decade transmedia storytelling has moved from the fringes of the entertainment, publishing, and advertising industries to become one of the hottest new ways of reaching audiences. It is a new form of storytelling that spreads the elements of a story across multiple media. Early examples of transmedia projects, for example, would present a character's story as a series of tweets, a number of still images posted to Flickr, written "diary" entries on a blog, video clips posted to YouTube, and texts sent via mobile phone. This approach, however, is already becoming dated and new combinations of media are emerging. Through rich, detailed, and multifaceted media, transmedia storytelling can simulate a real-life experience that rises above the "digital noise" of everyday life and strengthen the connection between creator and audience (Miller, 2008). The result is the communication of an experience, not just a message. The power of transmedia storytelling comes from its use of the storyteller's traditional tools – emotion, user engagement, universal themes, and relevance (Rutledge, 2011) – and the addition of new capabilities like personal connection and user-generated content. Transmedia storytelling creates experiences that are more than entertainment; it is now possible that personal education and societal transformation can be as entertaining as commercial entertainment properties. Because the story is at the heart of effective transmedia narratives, understanding how and why stories transmit meaning and foster understanding can provide foresight professionals with a framework for effectively integrating narratives into many different types of projects.

Intellect, Emotion, and Decision-making

Understanding the role of intellect and emotion in decision-making processes is important when determining how to present information in a scenario, forecasting, or other futures-oriented projects. These types of projects by their very nature are intended to challenge existing perceptions, mental models, and organizational structures. As a result they often provoke a range of emotional responses – uncertainty, confusion, insecurity, fear, and others – that lead to resistance to change. One of the most significant applications of storytelling from the perspective of foresight professionals is their use helping manage these emotions. Affective (emotional) and cognitive (intellectual) processes are crucial to survival. Emotional responses provide important information about what is beneficial and what is harmful (Fenske & Raymond, 2006). Processes involving emotion and selective attention work together to prioritize thoughts and actions (Fenske & Raymond, 2006). Highly emotional stimuli, provided they are relevant to the viewer, are processed faster and hold attention longer than less emotional stimuli (Eastwood, Smilek, & Merikle, 2001). Keeping stimuli simple and focused is important. Affective responses are lower and reaction times longer when distractions are present (Fenske & Raymond, 2006; Dickert & Slovic, 2009). If the objective of the stimuli is to provoke an empathic response

towards others, the focus should be on an individual rather than a group of people, as presenting a group in need of help reduces the level of sympathy and willingness to help (Dickert & Slovic, 2009). Cognitive and affective systems influence four other systems in humans (Potter, 2012):

- Physiology – the automatic bodily responses to stimuli
- Belief – faith in the truth or reality of something the individual has not directly

Experienced

- Attitude – an individual's judgment about a person, place, thing, event, or issue
- Behavior – overt action taken by an individual
- Cognitive, affective, belief, attitudinal, and behavioral structures also typically exist at the institutional and societal levels (Potter, 2012).

All media, including transmedia stories, can exert an influence on these systems in one of four ways (Potter, 2012):

- Acquiring: influences a person to obtain something that is not present prior to exposure to the message
- Triggering: influences a person by activating something that already exist within that individual
- Altering: influences a person to change something that already exists with them
- Reinforcing: influences a person to make it more difficult to change something that already exists within them.

These four media influences are applicable to the cognitive, affective, physiological, belief, attitudinal, and behavioral systems. For example, information in a forecast might be presented so readers are given new knowledge (acquiring), to prompt their memory of previous actions (triggering), have them change their opinion about the organization's strategy (altering), or confirm that the current strategy is working (reinforcing). These influences are similar at the personal, institutional and societal level.

Why Stories?

Stories appear to be an innate part of human beings. Provided they are engaging and follow a simple dramatic arc, even the simplest narratives can produce the release of neurochemicals like cortisol, which focuses attention, and oxytocin, which affects empathy (Popova, 2012). Humans respond to narratives from very early in life (Nelson, 1989). Narratives are a form of "mental imprint" that can mold perceptions and touch the unconscious mind (Simmons, 2006, p. 29); create patterns and structures of life events, provide insights into life and human nature, and reflect the unconscious needs of human beings (McClean, 2007, pp. 18-21); and are central to the way humans perceive everything in our world (Szulborski, 2005, p. 42). Stories bridge the gap between the intellect and the emotions, providing a much quicker transfer of meaning than the intellect alone. In life idea and emotion come separately. Mind and passions resolve in different spheres of humanity, rarely coordinated, usually at odds...But whereas life separates meaning from emotion, art unites them. Story is an instrument by which you create such epiphanies at will...In life, experiences become meaningful with reflection in time. In art, they are meaningful now, at the instant they happen. (McKee, 1997, pp. 110-111) Narratives can bring order to the chaotic flow of events in the world around us, enabling us to comprehend what is happening.

Personal Narratives

As we integrate data and information with context and experience the knowledge and wisdom that we develop becomes more internalized and integrated into us as a "personal narrative". Narratives can prompt changes in the brain's synaptic connections (Lakoff, 2009), essentially creating who we are (Gazzaniga, 1987). We comprehend life as an ongoing series of internal narratives (Fisher, 1985), which are our primary way of modeling our perspectives of ourselves and the world around us – our "worldview" (Schlitz, Vieten, & Miller, 2010). Our personal narrative is partially constructed by an "unreliable narrator" (ourselves) to add meaning to the facts presented to us (Shelley, 2012). Narratives are stories that weave together a series of facts (or assertions) so they make sense. Narratives create what is true for the believer, which is more germane to the believer's life than facts. Facts are like dots on a graph. The narrative is the curve that connects them, that gives isolated data points meaning, and gives meaning shape. (Shelley, 2012) There is an interplay between popular culture's narratives and the personal narratives of the individual. The movie *The Day After*, broadcast in 1983, is an example of how storytelling played a role in reshaping a global issue by impacting a personal narrative – in this case that of Ronald Reagan, the president of the United States. In his diary, Reagan noted: Monday, October 10, (1983) Columbus Day. In the morning at Camp D. I ran the tape of the movie ABC is running on the air Nov. 20. It's called "The Day After." It has Lawrence, Kansas wiped out in a nuclear war with Russia. It is powerfully done—all \$7mil.worth. It's very effective & left me greatly depressed. So far they haven't sold any of the 25 spot ads scheduled & I can see why. Whether it will be of help to the "anti nukes" or not, I can't say. My own reaction was one of our having to do all we can to have a deterrent & to see there is never a nuclear war. Back to W.H. (Reagan, 2007, p. 43) Reagan's position gave him a level of power most individuals do not have.

However, that doesn't mean the average person is powerless. While today's public narratives can shape the personal narrative, digital media tools and networks make it easier for individuals to interact with each other to create new collective narratives that contain the building blocks of new futures, informed but not constrained by the past.

Designing Transmedia Narratives

Designing effective transmedia stories is a complex task that goes well beyond simply mastering the mechanics of producing content in several different media. Creating transmedia stories involves three distinct but interrelated sets of design tasks (von Stackelberg, 2011):

- Narrative design, which focuses on the design of the story elements of the transmedia narrative.
- Engagement design, which focuses on designing aspects of the transmedia narrative that primarily involve the audience's mental and emotional engagement with and participation in the narrative.
- Interaction design, which focuses on how users physically interact with the interface and navigate through the transmedia narrative's content.

In this article we will address only the narrative design aspects of transmedia storytelling and its application in foresight projects.

Stories Within a Story world

Multiple stories can emerge from the interaction of characters, objects, settings, and events in a rich storyworld. This provides the opportunity to use a variety of approaches in communicating about key issues. For example, different characters can be used to show a range of perspectives of a single issue; different characters can be used to show the same perspective to different demographics and psychographics within the target audience; or different media can be used for stories targeting different groups within a diverse audience. This ability to create different stories with different characters across different media platforms makes a unified message essential. Confusing, contradictory, and disconnected messages can make the overall narrative ineffective or counterproductive. Foresight practitioners who plan to use transmedia storytelling in a project must explicitly identify the message that they are want to present to the audience. Professional storytellers – screen writers, novelists, non-fiction feature writers, and others – work to find the *theme* or *controlling idea* that expresses the meaning of the story they want to tell. The theme/controlling idea identifies how and why something changes from the beginning of the story to the end (McKee, 1997). The development of a *designing principle*, the idea around which the story is synthesized, provides its internal logic and the overall strategy for how the story will be told (Truby, 2011). The third element in planning the story is the *central conflict*, which focuses on the question of “Who fights whom over what?” (Truby, 2011, p. 28). The theme/controlling idea, designing principle, and central conflict should all be written as single sentences, forcing the storyteller to focus in on what is at the core of the story's meaning. For example, assume a company has become involved in a foresight project designed to develop new strategies in the face of rapid technological changes that affect its core products. These three elements might look like this for a story used in that project:

- Theme/Controlling Idea: “The organization triumphed because it was more agile than its competitors.”
- Designing Principle: “Force the organization to make a difficult transition from its current position as a market leader.”
- Central Conflict: “The organization is in a fierce competitive struggle with a nimble new competitor that has just entered the industry.”

These three elements are not separate pieces, but rather slightly different perspectives on what should be a consistent and unified framework that forms a *storyworld arc* that moves us from the beginning to the end of the “grand story” of this world. The foundational storyworld arc is the source from which all of the emergent stories in this storyworld arise.

Conclusion

Using state-of-the-art tools for communicating about the future is essential if foresight practitioners and the futures field as a whole are to stay relevant in the crucial conversations around 21st century social, technological, economic, environmental, and political issues. Transmedia storytelling experiences using audience engagement, interactivity,] collaboration and user generated content give users more than just an entertainment experience. When we enter a fictional world, we do not merely “suspend” a critical faculty; we also exercise a creative faculty. We do not suspend disbelief so much as we actively create belief. Because of our desire to experience immersion, we focus our attention on the enveloping world and we use our intelligence to reinforce rather than question the reality of the experience. (Murray, 1997, p. 110) While Murray refers to fictional story worlds, entering compelling non-fiction or hybrid fiction/non-fiction story worlds can have the same effect. Engaging with storyworld characters and learning the same lessons they are learning through the story can be used to share visions of the future and help change personal and collective narratives to shape the future. The role of the creative media industry is considered crucial for social change because storytelling puts

a human face on the societal issues we are trying to solve (Srivastava, 2012). Creative media and storytelling highlight local voice and local solutions the best, more so than reports, more so than charts that don't have narrative. Technology is not the driver; it is the enhancer; the driver is the social change goal and then the narrative. What we need are architects that have a bird's eye view and can combine story, social transformation and technology. As stated earlier, digital storytelling has been identified as a way for people to construct their identities and re-imagine their futures. With the rapid evolution of digital media technology opening opportunities for foresight practitioners to communicate in new ways, the potential for change is accelerated. The cost and capabilities of today's digital media hardware and software makes it possible to create sophisticated, high-quality video, audio, e-book, web, and other content on the average desktop or laptop computer.

References

1. Anonymous. (2012). Changing Minds Through Storytelling. Retrieved on February 15, 2013, from http://2012books.lardbucket.org/books/leading-with-culturalintelligence/section_01.html
2. Bode, C. (2013). Narrating Futures. Retrieved on September 9, 2013, from <http://www.anglistik.uni-muenchen.de/forschung/nafu.html>
3. Brown, Andrew D., Gabriel, Y., & Gherardi, S. (2009). Storytelling and Change: An Unfolding Story. *Organization*, 16(3), 323-333.
4. Chiaet, J. (2013). Novel Finding: Reading Literary Fiction Improves Empathy. Retrieved September 9, 2013 from <http://www.scientificamerican.com/article.cfm?id=novel-finding-reading-literary-fiction-improves-empathy>
5. Deragon, J. (2012). The Business Implications of Tribal Aggregation. Retrieved January 12, 2013, from <http://www.relationship-economy.com/2012/09/thebusiness-implications-of-tribal-aggregation/>
6. Diaskeaus. (2006). Character Archetypes. Retrieved October 30, 2011, from <http://www.listology.com/list/character-archetypes>
7. Dickert, S., & Slovic, P. (2009). Attentional Mechanisms in the Generation of Sympathy. *Judgment and Decision Making*, 4(4), 297-306.
8. Eastwood, John D., Smilek, D., & Merikle, P. (2001). Differential Attentional Guidance by Unattended Faces Expressing Positive and Negative Emotion. *Perception, & Psychophysics*, 63(6), 1004-1013.
9. Eira Jones, Ruth. (2013). *Change the Story...Change the World: Transmedia Storytelling, for Transformation*. London: London South Bank University.
10. Fenske, Mark J., & Raymond, Jane E. (2006). Affective Influences of Selective Attention. *Current Directions In Psychological Science*, 15(6), 312-316.
11. Fisher, Walter R. (1985). The Narrative Paradigm: In the Beginning. *Journal of Communication*, 35(4), 74-89.
12. Gazzaniga, Michael S. (1987). *The Social Brain: Discovering the Networks of the Mind*. New York, NY: Basic Books
13. Jarva, Vuokko. (2014). Introduction to Narrative for Futures Studies. *Journal of Futures Studies*, 18(3), 5-26.
14. Jenkins, Henry. (2006). *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York, NY: New York University Press.
15. Kaye, Michael. (1995). Organizational Myths and Storytelling as Communication Management. *Journal of Management & Organization*, 1(2), 1-13. Retrieved
16. January 4, 2013, from <http://trove.nla.gov.au/version/166915535> Kinke, Nikki. (2011). Producers Guild Of America Agrees On New Credit: "Transmedia Producer". Retrieved on June 18, 2011, from <http://www.deadline.com/2010/04/producers-guild-of-america-vote-on-creation-of-new-credittransmedia-producer/>