CREATIVITY AND TECHNOLOGY: UNLIMITED NARRATIVE STRUCTURES IN TRANSMEDIA WORLD-BUILDING

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ABSTRACT

At the convergence of technology and narrative, transmedia worlds represent boundless universes, offering audiences rich, multidimensional narrative experiences that transcend traditional platforms. This study offers an updated view of these worlds, examining their complexity and methods of construction and providing a synthesis of digital narrative theories and practices. Furthermore, the study examines the potential of transmedia universes and their adaptation and evolution in the context of technological and cultural change. It demonstrates the synergy between creativity and technology that enables creators and audiences to co-create expansive narrative universes.

1. Introduction

In the convergence of technology and narrative, transmedia worlds emerge as limitless spaces of narrative and creativity that, unbound by the traditional constraints of media, offer richer and more multidimensional experiences. In 1991, Kinder introduced the concept of transmedia intertextuality, which he defined as a narrative practice that allowed young viewers to weave and navigate across different genres and media (films, television, comics, advertisements, video games and toys). She argued that this encouraged the audience's deeper identification and engagement with the characters and the narrative, indicating that a creative use of transmedia intertextuality could serve as a "powerful strategy for survival and to forestall obsolescence and death" (p. 50,83). Years later, Jenkins (2003) established the concept of transmedia storytelling, marking the beginning of a historical evolution of transmedia narrative and sparking a debate that continues to drive academic research and creative innovation in this field.

This evolution of transmedia storytelling has become a response to a fundamental human need, as, according to the renowned screenwriter McKee (2003), stories 'satisfy a deep human need to capture the patterns of life, not simply as an intellectual exercise, but framed within a very personal and emotional experience' (p. 69). Transmedia storytelling therefore resonates with the fundamental human quest for meaning and emotional connection with the surrounding world.

It is not simply a matter of technology or storytelling itself but rather of how the interaction between the two can amplify and enrich the human experience of telling and living stories through Jenkins' fictional worlds, in which the author, although he highlights the importance of the concept of 'world' in narratives by stating that transmedia storytelling 'is the art of world making' (Jenkins, 2006, p. 21), does not delve into how this concept fits into the transmedia phenomenon, leaving ample room for other scholars to propose different conceptualizations to define and describe the nature and dynamics of transmedia worlds (Rosendo Sánchez, 2016).

Jenkins is a key figure in the ongoing debate surrounding media convergence and transmedia narrative, highlighting the shift in media consumption patterns and the need for cooperation across various platforms. He emphasizes how the dominance of conglomerates has affected the production and consumption of media content, and how, in this era of technological convergence and shifts in ownership, the interaction between producers and consumers is being reconfigured.

Over the past two decades, the media ecology has undergone a profound transformation, characterised by an increased number of media and platforms as well as a proliferation of narratives and interactions. In the contemporary media landscape, social media and fan communities are more global and fragmented, making transmedia storytelling not only more visible but also one of the most interesting phenomena for media researchers and professionals (Scolari, 2014). This rise of transmedia narrative has also triggered an intense multidisciplinary debate which has extended to other academic fields such as semiotics, education, and politics, among others. The study of transmedia therefore entails exploring how storytelling can foster active participation and meaningful co-creation, providing a framework for how people find meaning from their interaction with media.

In this context of convergence and narrative evolution, this article aims to deepen the understanding of transmedia worlds by deciphering how the interaction between technology and storytelling can generate narrative experiences that are inherently participatory and multidimensional, demonstrating the significance of collaboration between creativity and technology. Ultimately, we aim to provide new perspectives that will foster a productive dialogue on the future of transmedia storytelling and its role in reshaping our media and cultural landscape in the 21st century.

2. Methodology

The methodology employed in this article has focused on an exhaustive exploration of the confluence between technology and storytelling in the field of transmedia narratives. To this end, an in-depth bibliographical analysis has been conducted, covering everything from the theoretical foundations of transmedia storytelling, as initially introduced by forerunners such as Kinder and Jenkins, as well as more recent research by Scolari, Freire and other scholars who examine the construction and structure of transmedia worlds, as well as their evolution and specific dynamics. This theoretical journey has included the revision of key concepts such as fictional worlds, active audience participation and co-creation in the expansion of narratives across multiple media platforms.

The construction and structure of transmedia worlds is also addressed, emphasising how the theory has evolved to include concepts such as negative capability and migratory cues, which encourage active consumer participation in the expansion of these narratives across multiple platforms. This analysis is further enhanced by the discussion of the importance of paratexts and intertextual consistency for the depth and expansion of narrative universes.

3. Development

3.1. Theoretical Foundations of Transmedia Narrative

The concepts of storyworld and storybuilding (world creation) are built upon the theoretical principles of transmedia storytelling, which is why we consider it essential to provide a brief review of these before delving into a more detailed analysis of the specific dynamics of these narrative frameworks within the scope of this study.

To contextualise the theoretical foundations of transmedia storytelling, it is essential to refer to the term transmedia intertextuality, coined by Kinder (1991). This concept was further developed through the work of Jenkins (2003) and Scolari (2009), as they explored how transmedia narratives articulate a hierarchy of values across different media. This world-building through transmediality not only promotes an additive comprehension (Jenkins, 2006) but also encourages critical reflection on the extent of the term transmedia storytelling, as discussed by Long (2007), who urges a distinction between contributions that directly extend the narrative and those that do not.

The convergence between narrative and technology in the transmedia domain is reshaping the dynamics of media interaction. In this arena, the theoretical foundations proposed by Jenkins and Scolari lay the groundwork for an expansive and enriching narrative engagement. Jenkins, with his seminal concept of transmedia storytelling, explains how "each medium does what it does best" (2003) enabling a story to unfold and diverge across different media, where each one leverages its unique strengths to convey an aspect of the overall narrative.

The structure of transmedia storytelling, sustained by the interaction of various media, is not only shaped by the creativity of content creators but also by the active and innovative participation of consumers, or "prosumers". This creative dynamic, in which the audience becomes a crucial part of narrative development, is particularly significant in the digital age (Scolari, 2008). In this creative fusion, fandom emerges as a key element, exemplified by characters like Conan, whose identity is significantly shaped by their followers, showcasing the synergy between audience creativity and the narrative itself (Bertetti, 2014).

In terms of availability and expansion, Gosciola & Tagé Verissimo Ribeiro (2018) highlight the importance of content accessibility, suggesting that stories must reach the audience in all possible forms. This availability is also what fosters collaborative environments, empowering ordinary citizens and transforming the interaction between political brands and the public in the digital age (Moya, 2020). Scolari (2014) expands on this view with a semiotic-narrative approach, arguing that what is most significant in transmedia storytelling is not the origin of the stories but how the different parts interrelate and work together. This perspective is shared by Halwani (2022), who sees in the interconnection of smaller parts of a story the potential to create a richer and more engaging narratives.

At its core, transmedia storytelling weaves a complex tapestry of multidimensional stories, acknowledging and valuing the active participation of users, while promoting collaboration in the expansion of detailed narrative universes. This approach transcends the conventional boundaries between the audience and the creator, opening up a universe of limitless creative possibilities.

3.2. Theoretical Foundations and Development of Transmedia Worlds

In the field of transmedia studies, Jenkins (2003) introduced the concept of fictional world, emphasising the importance of a consistent narrative world beyond the plot and characters. However, he did not delve into the elements that shape these fictional worlds in transmedia storytelling, exploring less of the internal structure and specific components that form these worlds, and instead focusing more on the theoretical and critical aspects of the expansion of the narrative across multiple platforms and media. (Rosendo Sánchez, 2016).

The understanding of the concept of the transmedia world has evolved over time thanks to the contributions of various scholars who have sought to refine its definition. Scolari (2014) focuses on how the transmedia world is mentally constructed, considering that

> A transmedia world is more than a specific narrative; its properties are usually communicated through storytelling. Transmedia storytelling can be seen as a social narrative practice, while transmedia worlds are a social text-based interpretative construction situated at a cognitive level. (p. 2384)

suggesting that transmedia worlds go beyond telling a specific story; they are complex narrative experiences that require deep interpretation by the consumer and are rooted in social cognition. Atarama-Rojas (2019) includes within the transmedia world all the stories told within it, emphasising user-generated content, which Scolari (2009) identifies as essential for the expansion of strategies within the fictional world.

One of the most comprehensive recent works has been produced by Freire-Sánchez et al. (2023), where they assert that not all transmedia storytelling qualifies as a transmedia narrative universe, and that

> es posible afirmar que los universos narrativos transmedia son un ente mayor a un mundo transmedia o transmediático, que pasa por la construcción literaria de un código y un gran relato que enriquece a un conjunto de mundos, cada uno de ellos con su propia historia independiente (storyworld). Sin embargo, un universo narrativo no es lo mismo que un multiverso, el cual contempla diferentes líneas de tiempo o dimensiones temporales, por lo que presentará a unos personajes en diferentes épocas o dimensiones, viviendo diferentes vidas e independientes de sus otros yo. (p. 19)

3.3. Construction and Structure of Transmedia Worlds

Jenkins' theory has developed over time to address the construction and structure of transmedia worlds. Over the years, this theory has been enriched by contributions from scholars such as Long (2007) who argued that transmedia storytelling must drive the growth of the narrative universe to qualify as an integral part of a transmedia narrative. Long also established a distinction between hard and soft transmedia, proposing classifications based on the nature and timing of such transmediation.

Driven by the need to theorise concepts about the complexity of narrative world-building, Ruppel (2005) and Long (2007) introduced theories such as negative capability and migratory cues which foster active audience participation in the expansion of narratives across multiple media platforms. This notion of interaction is complemented by the work of Herrmann & Herbig (2018), who explore how narratives are enriched through the dialogue between the audience and the intertextual references across various narrative universes. On the other hand, Brummitt (2018) challenges Genette's earlier perspective on paratexts as subsidiary materials, arguing that these elements not only add dimensions to a story but are instrumental in shaping our understanding of the narrative world and in forging connections between fiction and reality.

The importance of the connection between different narratives and platforms culminates in cohesive transmedia structures such as the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU), where Menard (2015) highlights the interconnectedness of each stand-alone instalment, offering audiences a more enriched experience while Ciammella et al. (2019) point out that the effective interrelation of different media and narrative forms is essential for the successful expansion of a transmedia story.

As previously mentioned, the construction of transmedia worlds, known as world-building, is crucial in storytelling to create detailed and consistent universes. Bertetti (2014) illustrates that this technique, present since the pulp stories of Conan, has evolved over time, with authors like Tolkien and Lovecraft being recognised for their deep commitment to world-building, or subcreation in Tolkien's words. Brummitt (2018) examines how the wizarding world has expanded beyond its original texts and films through a variety of texts and timelines. This process is similar to the techniques applied in the expansion of the Star Wars universe, whose narrative development and world creation were influenced by West End Games' Star Wars: The Roleplaying Game, as described by Bestor (2021).

Paratexts such as Pottermore and the theme parks, identified by Brummitt (2018) in Harry Potter, are not mere additions but rather enhance the main narrative, offering a richer and more interconnected experience. This approach to transmedia world-building not only seeks consistency and detail in the creation of narrative environments but also aims to generate an immersive and complete experience for the audience—a process that has been refined and expanded in modern storytelling through the collaboration of various media and the active participation of audiences.

Consistency and continuity are fundamental in transmedia world-building because they ensure that, despite expanding across various media and episodes, the core narrative remains intact. Menard (2015) emphasises the importance of continuity in the Marvel Cinematic Universe, where it goes beyond simple cross-media connections and is embedded within the structure provided by fictional organisations in the stories, contributing to both narrative structure and coherence. However, the application of similar rules in the classic Conan sagas reflects that the principle of maintaining narrative consistency across different formats and media is not unique to contemporary productions; although each medium—books and comics—followed its own internal logic, the approach reflected a conscious effort towards media continuity, while still allowing the flexibility needed to adapt to each specific format (Bertetti, 2014).

Bestor (2021) also points out the importance of careful narrative oversight with a strategic selection of content and close monitoring of the story. This approach ensures that every element added or removed from the narrative, significantly contributes to the overall goal of the story and maintains its consistency

Overall, these studies suggest a transmedia landscape in which audience participation and intertextual consistency are essential for the depth and expansion of narrative universes.

3.4. Creativity and Technology in Transmedia World-Building

The convergence of creativity and technology in the conception of transmedia worlds, marked by McLuhan's iconic statement "the medium is the message" (McLuhan, 1994, p. 7), has evolved into a critical field in contemporary storytelling. Today, the multiplicity of platforms redefines interaction, expanding McLuhan's vision of how media affects perception and interaction with reality.

In line with this evolution, Ciammella et al. (2019) argue that the technological, cultural, productive, and distribution characteristics of media shape transmedia projects and affect user perception to the extent that they "ci restituiscano uno schema della dimensione dell'ambiente formato dai Transmedia Screen" (p. 105), influencing how users experience and make sense of the narrative within that media environment.

This paradigmatic shift is even more evident when considering the influence of the resource of allotopia and the philosophical foundations in the creation of narrative worlds. Maj (2019) observes "the tendency to create the storyworld prior to the storyline – as a 'matrix for possible narratives'" (p. 151), suggesting that plot development now takes place in a broader context where, utilising new technological possibilities, the story can unfold in multiple directions. This same technology enables online communities to alter and develop possible worlds through global conversations, challenging traditional semiotic theories and indicating that meaning no longer arises solely from individual interpretations but rather from collective ones (Scolari, 2013).

Scholz (2020) calls for a critical reflection on the narrative within these meticulously constructed worlds, pointing out that that world-building theory has focused on the invention of elements and their relationship to the real world, while neglecting to explore how these worlds are presented within the narrative. Focusing on the dynamic aspects of these worlds, according to the author, offers new perspectives for analysing how stories convey their universes, which is key to understanding how audiences assign meaning to these fictional worlds.

This analysis leads to a deeper understanding of the impact of technology on transmedia storytelling, revealing that it has not only expanded the variety of tools available for storytelling but also transformed the way audiences interact with and contribute to these narratives. This dynamic has led to the development of a rich and complex form of storytelling, nourished both by the innovation of creators and the active engagement of global communities, resulting in a significant transformation of storytelling in the digital age.

3.5. Characters in Transmedia Worlds

The mythology of Superman has evolved over time, incorporating the unique elements of the new media in which he has appeared in order to maintain his relevance and dynamism in popular culture, a process that Jenkins et al. (2013) describe as vital for keeping the character alive in the audience's imagination -although this constant reformation is not exclusive to transmedia storytelling, as Bertetti (2014) points out. This evolution may also involve learning more details about them, including those who are not the main subject of the story (Howard, 2013) and it must have an organic connection to the expansion of worlds to ensure the consistency of the narratives, so that as the universe expands, the characters grow in an integrated manner (Kim & Kim, 2022).

Vidal-Mestre et al. (2023) expand on these observations from the perspective of character uniqueness, arguing that "los personajes deben estar construidos con base en un arco de evolución y deben poseer un punto diferencial del que surja su relato personal" (p. 18). Piñeiro-Otero (2020) supports this claim by noting that in the Flash Gordon franchise it is the distinctive characters that serve as the foundation for the development of various stories.

3.6. Media Diversity and Transmedia Expansion

Transmedia storytelling finds a powerful ally in superheroes, who, as demonstrated earlier, possess the ability to continuously evolve their characters, allowing franchises to expand across various media platforms and transcend their original form, creating a robust and multidimensional narrative system (Jenkins et al., 2013). This process is reinforced by the diversification of platforms, illustrated by the transmedia development of franchises such as Harry Potter, which, according to Brummitt (2018) has moved from relying on paratexts to fostering an active transmedia universe. Even League of Legends, originally a MOBA without a strong narrative focus, has succeeded in building a successful transmedia narrative thanks to its distinctive art and distribution strategies, illustrating that a consistent story can thrive across a wide range of platforms and content types by adapting to the specificities of each medium and context (Kim & Kim, 2022). Furthermore, this expansion not only extends the stories and characters but also the core concepts, creating a broader dialogue with the audience and allowing for a diversity of representation and depth that was previously unattainable (Javanshir, 2021).

In the context of video games, as evidenced by Bestor (2021) in the case of the Star Wars universe, the integration of past narratives adds depth and consistency, allowing all narrative extensions to enhance each other. At the same time, this approach, enriched by the fan base feedback, demonstrates how transmedia narratives can adapt and remain relevant over time.

3.7. Aesthetics and Narrative Consistency

Consistency and careful planning are essential in the development of transmedia narratives. Long (2007) emphasizes the importance of meticulous structuring to ensure that each narrative extension aligns with the overall narrative arc, while Veugen (2016) highlights how collaboration across platforms ensures that the stories maintain internal cohesion and provide an immersive experience for the audience. Together, these approaches allow all narrative contributions to enhance the development of the universe, providing a richer and more coherent experience.

The concept of the macro story enriches transmedia storytelling, which, according to Howard (2013), provides a comprehensive view of the fictional universe, motivating the audience to intertwine different stories and discover their deeper connections. This intertwining of narratives is deepened by the development of the setting, as detailed by the same author, where the introduction of new spaces within the narrative world expands and enriches the viewer's experience. Additionally, Howard highlights the importance of micro stories, which add an extra layer of detail and depth, inviting followers to immerse themselves in the subtleties of the plot and connect more deeply with the story, enhancing immersion and emotional engagement with the narrative. Ciammella et al. (2019) refer to these macro stories as delineating extensive arcs that nurture and bring coherence to the transmedia world, providing a framework for the interstitial stories that elaborate on the details between the main events, further expanding the exploration of the universe.

Menard (2015) stresses the significance of connections between instalments that serve as bridges between events, enhancing audience understanding by enabling them to anticipate future narrative

developments. This concept is expanded upon by Herrmann & Herbig (2018), who suggest that these connections can also arise from external narratives to their immediate universe. These cross-references acknowledge that narratives are not isolated entities, but exist in constant dialogue with other stories, characters, and universes, mutually enriching the overall narrative experience.

In conclusion, in the development of transmedia narratives, coherence across platforms and careful planning are essential to maintain the aesthetic and narrative integrity of the universe. By ensuring that each extension aligns with the overall arc, a cohesive and rich experience is created, allowing audiences to connect more deeply with the story and its characters

3.8. Participation and Transmedia Synergy

As previously mentioned, Jenkins (2006) argues in his work Convergence Culture that transmedia storytelling transforms consumers into active co-creators, prompting them to take on the roles of hunters and gatherers in a collaborative process that both expands and enriches existing narratives. Jenkins identifies this synergy as a form of collective intelligence, emphasising the importance of cooperation and shared effort as key pillars of emerging knowledge communities.

User participation and user generated content (UGC) are also essential elements in the construction and expansion of narrative universes, which serve to enrich transmedia storytelling. According to Herrmann & Herbig (2018), this interaction not only promotes greater engagement from media consumers but also gives rise to emergent and feral narratives, as described by Moloney (2020). Walden (2019) highlights the importance of additional contributions, whether from users or other media, in creating a secondary world experience that is perceived as complete and cohesive.

Since the publication of Jenkins' Convergence Culture in 2006, the consumer's role in content creation has been extensively studied. Norrington (2010) acknowledges the evolution of the viewer into a more interactive and creative role, attributing to them the ability to influence and modify the narrative, thereby evidencing a blurring of the boundaries between fiction and reality and transcending the traditional fourth wall. In turn, Quintas-Froufe & González-Neira (2014) introduce the term social audience as a result of the combination of social media, second screens, and television, which has led to a new relationship between viewers and their televisions, permanently altering the traditional roles within the communication paradigm.

For Zaluczkowska & Robinson (2013) media convergence is a way to unify the entire media landscape in one place, providing the audience with every opportunity to become part of the story, which, according to Moya (2020) turns them into emotional investors and enables fans to move beyond mere entertainment towards political engagement and effective social activism. Atarama-Rojas (2019) and de la Torre-Espinosa (2019) similarly agree that transmedia storytelling goes beyond simply telling stories, as it influences reality by activating the audience. In this sense. Atarama-Rojas also adds another perspective to the theory, noting that transmedia documentaries are key tools that foster user interactivity and meaningful participation, not only complementing the narrative but also linking it to real-world actions. Moya (2020) and Ciammella (2022) observe how empathy transforms into activism, emphasising the crucial role of fandom in enabling users to make meaningful contributions to the broader and more emotionally resonant narrative arc. However, audience co-creation also demands a carefully planned strategy, as suggested by Fast & Örnebring (2017).

The key issue regarding audience and co-creation in transmedia storytelling is rised by Kustritz (2022), who notes that while transmedia storytelling offers viewers a more detailed and extensive exploration of their fictional worlds, this approach can sometimes create barriers that fragment rather than unite audiences by separating and isolating viewers into demographically determined alternate realities.

4. Conclusions

Transmedia storytelling has evolved in response to a fundamental human need to understand life patterns through rich and emotional stories. Transmedia narrative is not merely an exercise in technology or narrative but a means of enriching the human experience through the construction of fictional worlds. This work offers a critical reflection on the evolution, participation and impact of transmedia storytelling in world-building, proposing that beyond being a collection of scattered stories, it represents a cultural phenomenon that reshapes the narrative experience and the relationship between creators and audience.

User participation and content creation have emerged as key components of transmedia storytelling, serving as catalysts for the evolution of stories and offering audiences not only the role of spectator but also that of co-creator. The transition of fandom from passive viewers to creative partners has become an essential element in the expansion and enrichment of narrative universes. This reinforces the importance of strategies that allow for greater inclusion and diversification of participation while also opening an innovative path towards a transmedia narrative that promotes greater activism, both political and social, broadening the spectrum of influence of these communities in the public sphere. This new dynamic reconfigures the narrative landscape and challenges the traditional boundaries of authorship and intellectual property, establishing an ongoing dialogue between creators and audiences that continually strengthens and revitalises narrative universes.

Technology has reshaped storytelling tools, expanding the possibilities for creativity and audience participation, making the experience more immersive and engaging. These dynamic highlights the double-edged nature of audience participation, which on one hand enriches the narrative through interactivity but on the other hand presents challenges related to narrative consistency. This creative freedom must operate within a structured framework, aligning with an established canon and strategic planning to ensure that each new addition integrates seamlessly into the narrative and connects to the existing universe. The aim is to preserve the narrative world's congruence and ensure that transmedia expansion does not compromise its integrity. Maintaining this discipline protects the integrity of the narrative world and ensures that transmedia expansion enhances the story without compromising its harmony or audience loyalty. Within this equilibrium between creativity and tradition lies the key to the future of transmedia storytelling, guaranteeing that its extensions serve the larger purpose of the story and contribute meaningfully to the weave of the shared narrative universe.

Despite the promise of transmedia narrative to create wider and richer worlds for a more inclusive and deeper experience, it often runs the risk of fragmenting and isolating audiences (Kustritz, 2022). The author addresses the critique of how transmedia networks can end up creating demographically bounded alternate realities, allowing both mass media and niche transmedia extension audiences to live in completely different narrative worlds, arguing that instead of unifying viewers within a shared universe, there can be a segmentation or even a kind of segregation based on specific interests, which contradicts the inclusive and democratic promise of transmedia narrative.

Although research on transmedia storytelling has focused on the relationship between fiction and the real world and on the fan interaction with these elements, it has largely neglected the analysis of how these worlds are presented and how the narrative is perceived. A more in-depth study is required on how stories are conveyed, the narrative elements and techniques that are applied and the impact they have on audience immersion and response. This analysis should encompass narrative design, information architecture and the usability of storytelling platforms, as well as the subjective experience of users when interacting with different transmedia elements.

There is an emphasis on technology and operational mechanics whereas successful world-building models are often overlooked. In the psychological field, understanding which fictional worlds attract fandom is also critical; this knowledge could reveal how to design transmedia experiences that encourage deeper and more sustained engagement from fan communities as well as uncovering how these preferences impact the continuity and development of transmedia storytelling.

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