

Chapter 16

The Marketer as Storyteller: Transmedia Marketing in a Participatory Culture

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ABSTRACT

Marketers are trying to find new ways to communicate with their customers and adapt rapidly changing consumer behavior which requires implementing new communication techniques. One of these techniques, brand storytelling is evolving to transmedia storytelling or transmedia marketing in a participatory culture. Despite the continuous interest of researchers in transmedia storytelling, few researchers have studied the concept from a marketing point of view. Therefore, this chapter focuses on the concept in a market-oriented context and offers insights on how to use transmedia storytelling in marketing and suggest some marketing strategies to attract transmedia customers.

INTRODUCTION

Many scholars suggest that people categorize and restore information in the form of stories since they naturally think narratively rather than argumentatively or paradigmatically (Fryer, 2003; Hiltunen, 2002; Holt, 2003; Rutledge, 2011). The human brain processes all received information into stories. People use and seek out stories as they provide the context of time and place and an emotional framework that enables them to make sense out of the world and figure out their own place (Buckner & Rutledge, 2011). They naturally create their thoughts as stories and these stories always carry messages (Fleming, 2011). Moreover, people remember the messages in stories far longer and more precisely than any other form of communication (Buckner & Rutledge, 2011).

Development of information technologies created new and different communication methods, and storytelling is among the most fundamental elements of marketing communications today. Especially with the rapid spread of social media usage, storytelling is being used more intensely to motivate consumers. In addition, fast transfer of Web 2.0 to human nature caused a change in the format and content of storytelling. With the emergence of online media tools, storytelling has become a world which grows

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up fast with the contribution of the audience. Today, a story presented to consumers can spread very quickly on their Facebook and Twitter pages. Thus, in the era of Web 2.0 where the audience turned into an active user and a producer (prosumer), storytelling emerges as one of the most powerful weapons for media producers.

Today, the revival of storytelling is also seen in marketing practices. The narrative has a power in engaging and informing customers about a product or a brand (Fleming, 2011). Therefore, brand managers use narrative techniques in their branding campaigns by allowing consumers to participate. Transmedia storytelling is the new way of these techniques that can extend customer engagement by allowing them to live an experience in the narrative creation process. This technique offers the advantage of relating consumers to each other (Woodside, 2010) and creating a meaningful relationship with customers that transform them into brand advocates which is not possible to achieve with other communication methods (Buckner & Rutledge, 2011; Cronin, 2016).

Transmedia storytelling is a new communication technique that distributes entertainment value across multiple channels, in a world where we seamlessly move from mobile phone to computer, to television at the same time (Fogel, 2012). The term is defined by Jenkins (2011a) as “a process where integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience”. Transmedia storytelling is basically the process of telling a story across multiple media outlets. However, unlike multimedia communication or content marketing, it allows marketers to create mutually-reinforcing channels with consumers by using the distinct properties of different media channels to reach and engage different consumer segments through different ways (Buckner & Rutledge, 2011). According to Scolari (2009), transmedia storytelling is not just an adaptation from one media to another. He suggests that the story told in one media is not the same as that told in other; different media and languages contribute to the creation of transmedia narratives.

Some researchers also emphasize the participation of audiences in narrative's content. Transmedia storytelling spreads different parts of a story across multiple channels and allows audiences to become participants in integrating the pieces (Fogel, 2012). Yang and Zisiadis (2014) suggest that transmedia storytelling is an interactive narrative that exists on multiple platforms and allows the participation of the audience in the narrative creation process. Through transmedia storytelling, the organization's brand story is shared with consumers in a nonlinear way that consumers participate actively in the storytelling process by clicking on links, adding comments, sharing the story with their friends and in other ways (Cronin, 2016).

In addition, the emergence of collective intelligence and participatory culture which makes the boundaries of online and offline worlds more blurred, and the difficulties of reaching today's customers who are considered as the natives of the digital world, makes transmedia storytelling a vital subject for marketers. The eagerness of consumers to be involved in the story world is also a reflection of the participatory culture. Now, people are not satisfied with the messages they received, and they want to explore the story world more deeply. In this respect, transmedia storytelling, which is basically a storytelling method, comes out as a new method in all marketing communication processes. Therefore, the present chapter expands the literature on transmedia by examining the concept in a market-oriented context. The chapter also offers practitioners some strategies to implement for transmedia customers. Exploring implications for practitioners, the chapter can be regarded as an important contribution to a fairly new and unexplored area.

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