

Chapter 4

A Matter of Time: Transmedia Journalism Challenges

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ABSTRACT

*Among all factors that compose the journalistic routine, time plays an important role. It delimitates the period to produce content. Transmedia projects often need a faster pace than usual articles, mostly because the reporters need to plan before they leave newsrooms to capture content and, depending on the media used, work on different platforms to deliver the whole content. This chapter discusses the process behind three transmedia journalistic cases: *Black Hawk Down* (published by *Philadelphia Enquirer*, in 1997), *Inside Disaster* (released by PTV, in 2010), and *Harvest of Change* (published by *Des Moines Register*, in 2014). Using the case study method, they will be discussed, analyzing the process behind their publication. This reflection highlights how the adoption of tools and usage of paths to connect or publicize content on different media increased the relevance not only of time to create but the effort dedicated to plan the transmedia strategy.*

INTRODUCTION

Breaking the narrative arc into various and interconnected stories is a strategy often used in the realm of entertainment, but transmedia narratives are used for journalistic purposes as well. Different from professionals from cinema or video games, journalists rarely have an extended time to think about the strategies and craft products before deadlines, mostly because stories are produced and published in minutes—except long pieces. As pointed by Jenkins (2011), to better understand these processes “we need to come back to the relations between media and not simply count the number of the media platforms.”

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Thinking about news, the “time to produce” factor shall be analyzed, observing how some products use the proper technical language and devices for transmedia content. It seems that these stories demand a new comprehension of time and technology, going from choosing texts and videos to connect paper and the Internet to immersive experiences in virtual reality that place the reader inside a scene.

Transmedia journalism is not just a collection of stories transposed from newspaper into one online homepage with a video published along the complete text transcribed. These are two examples of common routines for daily news with automatic actions defined by content-management systems (CMS). Frequently, these publications are not pieces that together form a bigger narrative that uses the best of its technology to communicate. To create a unified and cohesive narrative spread across multiple media platforms requires time to produce, even if they were not going to be “transmediated,” therefore, this procedure is commonly applied just for special content. Special stories not only give time to craft content but to test and drive audiences to new grounds. Within the journalistic routines, this configures a movement of change, when creators change their mindset of producing one piece to craft a series distributed across different platforms. To better understand transmedia journalism, this chapter will study three transmedia stories from three different periods. This selection also helps to understand how transmedia journalism evolved along the past two decades.

The first case is *Black Hawk Down* (Bowden, 1997), a production published by *Philadelphia Enquirer* in 1997, that used the Internet as a living repository for a printed series about the “Battle of Mogadishu,” with videos, audios, and sessions of “question and answers” with the lead reporter. It is relevant to map a transmedia initiative short after the term spread but before its massive adoption. The second one is *Inside Disaster* (PTV Productions, 2010a), a documentary by PTV Productions with extras and a game published online. Using short videos connected by a narrative tree, the viewer can experience through three different perspectives the aftermath of the huge earthquake that hit Haiti in 2010. The case is relevant to understand how content created for television can be edited again to produce a different experience in different platforms. Contemporary, the third case will be *Harvest of Change* (Des Moines Register, 2014). Published in 2014 by Gannett Media as a special section inside two newspapers, it was one of the first usages of virtual reality (using Oculus Rift) for daily news. The five-part series provided an in-depth view on how farming industries changed in the American state of Iowa, along with an online virtual experience. It immerses the audience in a farm, recreating an exploration of a three-dimensional rural environment.

To understand how time is a challenge to producers, this chapter uses the case study methodology (Yin, 2001) to observe how the content was produced and how professionals dealt with time, and discussing how the technologies used influenced the narrative.

The case study is preferred in examining contemporary events, but when the relevant behaviors cannot be manipulated. The case study relies on many of the same techniques as a history, but it adds two sources of evidence not usually included in the historian’s repertoire: direct observation of the events being studied and interviews of the persons involved in the events. Again, although case studies and histories can overlap, the case study’s unique strength is its ability to deal with a full variety of evidence—documents, artifacts, interviews, and observations—beyond what might be available in a conventional historical study. (Yin, 2009, p. 128)

This is helpful to understand each of the three projects and later discuss them, pointing at the time and technologies used. The main goal is to reconstruct their processes, using interviews about the projects,

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