Chapter 7
Tell Me a Story, but It Should Be Real!
Design Practice in Transmedia Journalism

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ABSTRACT

Multi-channel structures within the convergence era, both as crossmedia and transmedia phenomena, have become increasingly important, and have completely changed the role of the audience, undermining the notions of authority and authorship, shaping society, and influencing media habits. This has created a mediascape in which readers can vicariously enter fictional and non-fictional spaces that can be explored through multiple media windows. Starting from the assumption that transmedia design can address not only the entertainment market but also the non-fictional field, this chapter aims at exploring journalism through the design lens. The first part of the work is devoted to a description of the contemporary communication scenario, and the second part aims to suggest guidelines for the application of a transmedia approach within the Italian news business, in the form of a conceptual and operational tool.

INTRODUCTION

Along with the development of social interconnections through digital technologies, nowadays multi-channel structures, both as crossmedia and transmedia systems, have become increasingly important, undermining the notion of authority and authorship. While "crossmedia" are concerned with the process of adaptation (Long, 2007), "transmedia" are concerned with the building of a story world (Wolf, 2012) through different channels to enhance the role of the audience (Jenkins, 2006; Pratten, 2015). Therefore, *transmedia practice* (Dena, 2009) is a phenomenon that allows audiences to participate in the meaning-making process and change the relationship between the mainstream media and the participatory culture (Jenkins, Ford, & Green, 2013). This chapter starts from the assumption that, as a result of story-building

processes capable of fostering audience engagement, *transmedia design* can address not only the entertainment field, but also the issue of contemporary complexity, through a phenomenological approach to the coeval reality (Ciancia, 2016).

This chapter focuses on the non-fiction field of journalism, a domain in which transmedia storytelling can be "a method for journalists to target their work to an increasingly dispersed public across an unlimited array of both digital and analog media" (Moloney, 2012, p. 2). The work proposes an exploration of journalism through a transmedia approach, considering the following core points: How multichannel strategies are changing journalism practice; how aesthetic, technological and economic issues work together in the "news business;" and what are possible transmedia forms in the journalism field? Is *transmedia design* an approach able to support networks and broadcast opportunities?

The first part of this chapter (*Authors, Audiences and Media Texts: A Continuous Balance of Power*) is devoted to the description of the contemporary *mediascape* (Appadurai, 1990). Subsequently, the section focuses on the journalism field, presenting national and international case studies to illustrate some reflections on the ethical aspects of reporting versus telling a story within news media production. This section aims to also tackle issues related to the role of the audience within processes such as open publishing, in which the process of news creation is open to readers, and thus to a certain extent can impact on editorial decisions, and citizen journalism, described as "a citizen, or group of citizens, playing an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analyzing and disseminating news and information" (Bowman & Willis, 2003, p. 9), bottom-up phenomena of the 21st century fostered by the spreading of social media and the consequent creation of social networks.

The second part of the work suggests a transmedia approach in the specific context of the Italian news business. The first part of this section gives a definition of the term "transmedia," and identifies three key features: 1) building of story worlds; 2) the distribution of these story worlds across multiple media channels; and 3) audience engagement. It also describes how, and to what extent, transmedia practice can be considered a design practice. Finally, a *design model* is proposed to explore 1) what are the possible transmedia forms of a news story; 2) what is the role of the designer in an Italian newsroom; 3) what are the distribution models of transmedia news; and 4) what all of this means in terms of audience engagement.

AUTHORS, AUDIENCES AND MEDIA TEXTS: A CONTINUOUS BALANCE OF POWER

The contemporary widespread use of digital videos, pictures, audio, and text and their distribution across social media has led to the rise of new consumption behaviors and the spread of new narrative forms that rely not only on technological developments, but also on the spontaneous practices of audience engagement (such as user-generated content). Moreover, people are surrounded by many forms of media, in which they can vicariously enter fictional and non-fictional spaces that can be explored through multiple media windows according to the multi-channel paradigm.

Today's societal context is one in which changes in the business and social environments have created a complex landscape where the relationship between the mainstream media (*top-down*) and participatory culture (*bottom-up*) have completely changed, undermining the notions of authority and authorship. As a result, now more than ever, fictional and non-fictional narratives are experienced on the small screens of our portable devices, such as laptops, tablets, and mobile phones, and the viewer/user/player (Dine-

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