

Chapter 9

Transmedia Journalism and the City: Participation, Information, and Storytelling Within the Urban Fabric

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ABSTRACT

This chapter discusses the participatory flair of transmedia journalism within the concreteness of urban spaces by examining The Great British Property Scandal (TGBPS), a transmedia experience designed to inform and engage the public and offer alternative solutions to the long-standing housing crisis in the United Kingdom. The theoretical framework is centered on transmedia storytelling applied to journalism in the scope of urban spaces and participatory culture. The methodological approach of the case study is based on Gambarato's (2013) transmedia analytical model and applied to TGBPS to depict how transmedia strategies within urban spaces collaborated to influence social change. TGBPS is a pertinent example of transmedia journalism within the liquid society, integrating mobile technologies into daily processes with the potential for enhanced localness, customization, and mobility within the urban fabric.

INTRODUCTION

The ever-changing waters in Heraclitus' river appropriately illustrate the fluidity issues well considered by Bauman (2000) in his liquid society. A liquid society in which changeability, flow, uncertainty, and conflict are constant. Deuze (2008) relates journalism to Bauman's liquidity, reflecting upon the fact that "Media as social institutions do not escape the sense of accelerated, unsettling change permeating liquid modern life, and it is exactly this notion of volatile, uncertain (global and local) flux that professional journalism fails to come to terms with" (p. 856). Furthermore, Deuze advocates that the involvement of audiences in rich forms of transmedia storytelling paves the way for the so-called "liquid journalism" (ibid., p. 859), in which news industry tries to integrate "disruptive technologies" (ibid., p. 856), such as the Internet. Transmedia journalism absorbs Bauman's fluidity combined with Deuze's conception of

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liquid journalism, encompassing multiple media outlets and narrative expansion with integrated actions between journalists and citizens. Transmedia journalism ought to be participatory, broadly exchangeable, and essentially expandable (Alzamora & Tárca, 2012).

In this scenario, the aim of the chapter is to discuss the participatory flair of transmedia journalism within the concreteness of urban spaces by examining The Great British Property Scandal (TGBPS), a transmedia experience designed to inform and engage the public and offer alternative solutions to the long-standing housing-crisis in the United Kingdom (UK). The journalistic project was created by Channel 4, one of the largest British television broadcasters. Architect George Clarke, the project's host, started a personal crusade against the British housing problem after discovering how many livable homes were empty or being demolished, while a significant number of families needed a home. The project appeals to audiences' civic and social sense for not wasting empty properties as a result of the difficulties faced by private owners to bring them back into use. Therefore, the core goal of TGBPS was to report the issue and force it on the government agenda, seeking for actual policy amendment and, consequently, social change within the urban fabric. The main proposition of TGBPS was the creation of a low-cost loan fund established to support empty property owners, who would like to refurbish their properties and put them back into the market.

TGBPS, a transmedia experience that weaves people, participation, information, and storytelling in the city space, collaborates to a new perception of the context, in which cities achieve an enhanced hybrid function. Moreover, "It is likely that urban media content will gradually develop into content that can provide storytelling, not just information, to receivers" (Kim & Hong, 2013, p. 9). Thus, this chapter focuses on the analysis of the transmedia strategies of TGBPS to demonstrate how this production contributed (1) to make the public aware of the senseless waste of a million empty homes in the UK (Syndicut, n.d.); and (2) to offer opportunities for the audience to take action and change government policies in order to promote the revitalization of abandoned properties in the cityscape. "Inspiration to action" (pursue intervention by the public in real actions seeking solutions to problems) is one of the core features of transmedia journalism proposed by Moloney (2011) and the highlight of TGBPS.

The theoretical framework of this chapter is centered on transmedia storytelling applied to journalism (Alzamora & Tárca, 2012; Gambarato & Tárca, 2017; Moloney, 2011) in the scope of urban spaces (Bachelard, 1997; Calvino, 1974; De Certeau, 1984) and participatory culture (Carpentier & Dahlgren, 2014; Jenkins et al., 2013). The methodological approach of the case study is based on Gambarato's (2013) transmedia analytical model and applied to TGBPS to depict how transmedia strategies within urban spaces collaborated to report an issue and influence social change. The research findings point to the transformative potential of TGBPS, which is increased by the participatory nature of the project. Concrete tools for taking action and fostering social change are offered to the audience. TGBPS is a pertinent example of transmedia journalism within the liquid society (Bauman, 2000), integrating mobile technologies into daily processes with the potential for enhanced localness, customization, and mobility within the urban fabric.

TRANSMEDIA PRODUCTIONS AND URBAN SPACES

Transmedia storytelling involves the unfolding of a storyworld (Jenkins, 2006) in which installments of the narrative are distributed across multiple media platforms to engage the audience and offer a more meaningful experience. Transmedia storytelling "is clearly premised on a macro-story that weaves it-

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