

Chapter 14

The Transmedia Script for Nonfictional Narratives

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ABSTRACT

This chapter proposes a journey through an experience of transmedia journalism developed by the multimedia communication team at the National University of Rosario, Argentina, focusing on the transformation of the current media ecosystem, the characteristics assumed by transmedia storytelling in a nonfictional field, and the development of the transmedia script for the project Women for Sale, a transmedia documentary that addresses the trafficking of people for the purposes of sexual exploitation. The creation of a complex narrative universe and the definitions of stories, platforms, user experiences, and the execution of a transmedia project are analyzed in light of what has been learned in this experience of journalistic production.

INTRODUCTION

In the last few decades, multiple processes of convergence have enabled the emergence of a technocommunicational scenario where digital narratives began a process of transmediation. Digital technologies and telecommunications accelerated media ecosystem mutations. In particular, the development and popularization of communication technologies, better connectivity conditions and data transfer speed have transformed the methods of media production, distribution and consumption. In the first decade of the 21st century, companies and media producers were surprised in the transition paradigm (Igarza, 2010) trying to move in a scenario marked by the absence of certainty, far from the shelter of stable models of the broadcast and monomediatic paradigm, seeking to create digital media and business models capable of adapting to mobile, hyperconnected and multiplatform audiences (Lovato, 2016).

Citizens inhabit a world where media and formats are reconfigured daily. This complex multi-platform ecosystem has become propitious for transmedia forms of storytelling, which have appeared in fictional and nonfictional projects, reaching even documentary and journalistic discourses. Talking about transmedia storytelling today involves referring to stories developed through multiple media platforms. In

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these stories, each new element in the narrative structure makes a specific and valuable contribution to the whole. Transmedia narratives do not adapt or repeat content: They create complex and consistent universes whose referrals can be freely traveled by users, integrating digital media and traditional media, on- and off-line. Users also take an active role in the expansion of the plot, acting as disseminators but, moreover, participating and generating content for the story.

The project analyzed in this chapter falls within the field of transmedia nonfiction. The field of nonfiction includes a set of stories that seek to represent and interpret reality. Nonfiction discourses establish a pact of veridiction with their audience (Chillón, 1999): Their stories are truthful, verifiable and therefore credible. In particular, this chapter refers to the design and production of the transmedia documentary *Women for Sale: Human Trafficking for Sexual Exploitation in Argentina*, developed between 2015 and 2017 by the Department of Multimedia Communication team (#DCMteam) at the National University of Rosario, Argentina. The author of this chapter participated in the development of the project as the transmedia scriptwriter. Therefore, much of the text constitutes a review of this experience of production in the field of transmedia journalism in Argentina.

TRANSMEDIA STORYTELLING: A BRIEF GENEALOGY

Although a very popular term in contemporary communication studies, the term transmedia was not born in this century, and did not even come from the field of communication. In fact, the term transmedia can be traced back to the 1970s, when journalist Bernard Levin (1970) used it to title one of the chapters of his book *The Pendulum Years: Britain and the Sixties*. However, Matthew Freeman has identified narrative strategies developed even earlier, in the early 20th century, that today could be considered as belonging to the field of transmedia storytelling. Freeman took Frank Baum's *Land of Oz* storyworld and its multiple texts and promotional tie-ins as a case study. This storyworld developed between 1900 and 1907 included the publication of a series of novels, plays, comics and mock newspapers (Freeman, 2014). In 1975, Stuart Saunders Smith, an American composer and instrumentalist, used the term transmedia to refer to a consensus-building methodology (Humphries, 1991). The transmedia works of Saunders Smith functioned as a set of notations arranged for the artists to become co-composers of the work. The open and collaborative spirit of transmedia was present in its original genetics (Lovato, 2016). In 1991, transmedia was applied to the study of social communication by Marsha Kinder (1991) to explain complex intertextuality phenomena in the media industry of children's entertainment (Gosciola, 2012). These early conceptualizations paved the way for the development of transmedia storytelling, an area afterward profited by producers and experts, such as Brenda Laurel (2000), Henry Jenkins (2003), Jack Boumans (2004), Jeff Gomez (2012) and Carlos Scolari (2013), among others.

From academic studies of communication, Jenkins (2009) proposed a series of basic principles that describe the forms of production, circulation and consumption of transmedia stories. These principles include the expansion/depth pair (in reference to the public's ability to actively engage in circulating media content, expanding the commercial and cultural value of the proposals, but encouraging the investment of time and energy in exploring them beyond the surface, with a forensic spirit), the continuity/multiplicity pair (transmedia stories build a strong sense of coherence between pieces while encouraging audiences to dig between multiple frame connections and narrative subplots) and the immersion/extraction pair (the ability to create transmedia environments that are exploitable but are populated with transportable contents: A set of pieces and data that users can carry). Among the principles proposed by Jenkins, the

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