Chapter 22
Immersive Journalism Design Within a Transmedia Space

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this chapter is to contribute to the theoretical frame of transmedia journalism by proposing a question-based model that focuses on transmedia design when an immersive journalism piece is integrated into a transmedia space. Immersive journalism is a new medium that could be effectively used to foster social empathy by means of virtual reality stories in journalism. The chapter is guided by the following ideas: (1) narrative strategies that may be useful in the design of immersive journalism experiences; (2) aesthetic principles of immersive experiences; and (3) inclusion of an immersive experience in a transmedia space. Thus, this chapter reviews the narrative techniques and aesthetics of immersive experiences that might contribute to the design of both the immersive piece and the transmedia space.

INTRODUCTION

Virtual Reality (VR) headsets such as Oculus Rift, Samsung Gear, HTC Vive, Google Daydream, Google Cardboard, and PlayStation VR are now cheaper and more portable than previous interfaces for experiencing virtual reality. Their presence makes the production and the consumption of immersive experiences for different purposes, including journalism, simultaneously easier and more widespread. VR has been used to produce immersive journalism: "the production of news in a form in which people can gain first-person experiences of the events or situations described in news stories" (De la Peña, Weil, Llobera, Giannopoulos, Pomés, Spanlang, & Slater, 2010, p. 291). In addition to these three-dimensional (3D) modeled environments, 360-degree video has been used to report in the field and to produce what could be called live action immersive chronicles and documentaries.

Immersive journalism has become a new asset of the transmedia journalism space. Transmedia space, according to Saldre and Torop (2012) "appears as a notion that integrates meta- and inter-communicative levels, presuming the interpretation of the same message as the sequence of proto- and meta-texts described in different discourses and fixed in different sign systems and media" (p. 41). An immersive

experience may function both as a *mothership*, that is, the main work from which other products derive (Jenkins, 2009), or it may function as an *extension*: Media products that have a complete meaning on their own but serve to enrich the main story (Scolari, 2013; Gambarato, 2013). When combining VR with other media in order to create a transmedia space, VR should have a clear, non-superfluous role in the whole user experience.

Since immersive journalism is a recent trend, it is necessary to develop a theoretical frame that assists in both the design and analysis of immersive journalism within a transmedia space. This chapter contributes as a theoretical-practical tool for journalists, researchers, and students of communication and journalism. Thus, this work includes a literature review from the fields of journalism, digital media aesthetics, virtual reality and transmedia storytelling. In order to write this chapter, the author explored different interfaces such as Oculus Rift, HTC VIVE, and Samsung Gear; downloaded different VR applications for general purposes; used different headsets such as Google Cardboard, Viewmaster, and VMAX; and downloaded different immersive journalism experiences on Android and IOS phones. The chapter is guided by the following ideas: (a) narrative strategies that may be useful in the design of immersive journalism experiences; (b) aesthetic principles of immersive experiences; and (c) inclusion of an immersive experience in a transmedia space.

JOURNALISM AND VIRTUAL REALITY

Journalism in this century has broadened its meaning. Van der Haak, Parks, and Castells (2012) argue that journalism is about telling meaningful stories on what is new or what is happening in the world, understanding it in context, explaining it to others, and making it available to the public so they can use it for their own needs. This demonstrates how journalism in this century is more contextual than it was in the past. Fink and Schudson (2014) explain how the rise and predominance of contextual journalism started in the 1960's. Furthermore, they clarify the difference between conventional stories and contextual stories: Conventional stories answer the "who-what-when-where" questions, usually ignoring or only implicitly addressing "why"; they describe activities that have occurred or will occur within 24 hours; and they focus on one-time activities or actions. In contrast, contextual stories vary formally, have a wider focus, and describe more complex issues.

According to Menke, Kinnebrock, Kretzschmar, Aichberger, Broersma, Hummel, and Salaverría (2016), contemporary journalism, has been influenced by convergence culture and has been evolving over the last two decades. Van der Haak et al. (2012) insist that "good" journalists in the 21st century tell fact-based stories about the real world through text, audio, and visual media which people can relate to, share, and appropriate. Through the transmedia nature of journalism, a journalist should consider how every medium is used for doing what it does best (Jenkins, 2006) and ideally, as with any social or cultural transmedia project, active user participation should be included in the design (Lugo, 2016).

What virtual reality does best as a medium is to offer users the opportunity to "see for yourself" and "be there." For Ryan (2015), virtual reality is the latest technology that attempts to erase the interface in favor of creating a believable experience. Wilson and Zoranzo (2015) declare that one of the main advantages of virtual reality is stereoscopic depth, which creates the illusion that the viewer is seeing objects in a virtual space. The advantage of VR is the ability to present stimuli in three dimensions. The power of virtual reality simulations is evident in fields as psychology and neuroscience studies because of the key feature of this medium that makes the user a participant: *Presence*. North and North (2016)

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