

REVIEW ARTICLE

TRANSMEDIA STORYTELLING AND TRANSMEDIA ADVERTISING AS TOOLS OF COMMUNICATION AND PROMOTION

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Abstract : Since the 2000s and up to the present day, transmedia awareness has been developing more and more, encompassing many areas of everyday life. Technological convergence and the subsequent evolution of media have led to the development of a new communication practice: transmedia storytelling. It can have many applications, from cinema to video games, as it is suitable for experimentation, especially in a transmedia environment. More than that, it is also used as a communication strategy, as it creates an exciting and engaging experience that introduces the audience to a new fictional universe, and also it manages to expand that world through various media to reach into reality. The opportunities offered by the practice of transmedia storytelling are so wide that it is also possible to develop promotional operations leading to the creation of transmedia marketing projects. Thus, starting with the two factors such as transmedia storytelling and audience engagement, it was possible to develop empirically based push models.

Keywords: *Transmedia advertising, Transmedia storytelling, Alternate reality games, ARGs, guerrilla marketing, Non-traditional marketing.*

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Where Convergence Brought Us

"The proliferation of digital technologies and the consumption of new forms of seriality and narration today forces organisational communication, marketing and advertising to evolve in favour of an increasingly savvy and demanding audience for narratives and forms of promotion spread through multiple media in an interactive and useful manner" [1].

Modern communication dynamics are a response to the new forms of interaction and storytelling that Web 2.0 offers, i.e. content that is always available anytime, anywhere. All areas of culture and technology had to be reinvented and adapted in order to be able to exploit the advantages that the media brought. Therefore, there has also been an evolution in marketing: from emotional marketing, which was mainly used in the 1990s, to experiential marketing. It is a response to the changing needs of the user, who is no longer content to buy or use a simple product or service, but needs an

engaging experience that makes him/her feel like a protagonist.

Hence, creating advertising means creating personalised advertising and, above all, understanding the most opportune moment to communicate with the customer. The customer is at the heart of the marketing strategy, he/she is the protagonist, and it is he/she who chooses whether and when to interact with the brand. Henry Jenkins in his book 'Convergence Culture' describes the modern world as a result of the collision and contamination of old and new media (H. Jenkins, 2007).

This phenomenon, called 'convergence', is the starting point for the biggest changes. First and foremost, this is clearly a technological evolution that began with the advent of the Internet and continues to this day. Another profound change resulting from the evolution of the media is the cultural development that favours the inclusion and constant change in people's use of digital devices.

Indeed, the Internet has given us the opportunity to adapt the use of technology to ourselves, providing unlimited personalisation and experimentation. "Welcome to convergence culture, where old and new media collide, where grassroots and corporate media intersect, where the power of the producer and the power of the consumer interact in unpredictable ways" [2].

In his book, Jenkins managed to describe the phenomenon of convergence, characterized by the flow of content across multiple media platforms, greater public participation and different market sectors such as technology, economy and culture finding common ground.

In the same year, to further emphasise this change, the cover of TIME magazine featured a turned-on computer with the words 'You' on its desktop, which was a response to the title 'Person of the Year'. This cover was meant to symbolise the centrality of the user and, above all, his/her desire to always be the protagonist. Again Jenkins, in his blog article 'Confessions of an ACA-Fan' [3] lists eight characteristics that define today's media world:

- Innovative
- Convergent
- Daily
- Interactive
- Participative
- Global
- Generational
- Unequal

The door to a media ecosystem opens, where different media no longer have clear boundaries, but are all interconnected and integrated. This is where transmediality comes into play in digital communication, i.e., the development of complex systems that can be adapted to different media in order to achieve cooperation with the audience.

The user in this converging landscape lives within the 'transmedia generation', i.e., he/she has specific behaviours, such as the desire to participate, which must be explored and taken into account when developing or promoting content, products or services addressed to him/her. For this reason, communication is aimed directly at people, trying to communicate through stories the

values that a brand, company, etc. might have in order to raise awareness. Therefore, new media should take into account two important aspects:

- **Interactivity:** the user is not passive, as in the past, but becomes an active digital consumer who creates and consumes content, developing interaction between the parties.
- **Personalisation:** creating personalised content for each customer is possible, thus moving from a 'one-to-many' model to a 'one-to-one' model.

Transmedia Advertising

In today's convergent, changeable and dynamic world, various habits and behaviours, referred to as media behaviours, have developed, both within content production companies and among the public.

The consumption of products has always been driven by the media environment, especially what it offers producers and consumers, and the communication methods used by companies.

Both of these factors have been altered by technological evolution.

Before these major changes, advertising was driven by two forces: push and pull. Push corresponds to the continuous delivery of the advertising message to the consumer; Pull corresponds to the user's ability to choose which content to access. Both of these forces are characterised by the desire to stimulate and, above all, to persuade the consumer to approach a product or content.

Based on these goals, advertising was developed with the idea that it should be memorable.

However, digital technology has led to increased distraction, i.e., users are much more likely to be distracted when receiving information as they regularly use various devices and are exposed to massive amounts of content through their use. This forces them to divide their attention and spend it only on certain moments, contexts and media. Therefore, communicating directly with the consumer has become a challenge.

This is why communication used in digital marketing uses engagement: a communication strategy that should be

evaluated on its ability to engage target consumers and motivate them to interact with the content created.

Engagement is a consumer-driven activity, Linda D. Hollebeek defines it as a level of a customer's cognitive, emotional and behavioral investment in specific brand interactions [4].

Engagement is able to influence fundamental components of marketing such as word-of-mouth, which is triggered through virality, and customer loyalty, which starts with engagement. Therefore, marketing communications has introduced the concept of storytelling to achieve engagement. Thanks to it and subsequent storytelling, communication has undergone a major change, and we have moved from a unidirectional model to a bidirectional one, where the consumer can be emotionally and symbolically engaged.

In fact, through storytelling, the consumer is confronted with a narrative that manages to captivate him/her, creating a profound relationship. The term is often described as the 'art of storytelling' and has become a communication tool because it creates attention and interest in the message, managing to actively engage the consumer.

Digital communication is characterised by transmediality, which is represented by the continuous shifting and use of different types of media, each distinguished by a heightened user experience characterised by increased information. Transmediality and storytelling are naturally linked.

Transmedia storytelling emerges from the connected and integrative use of multiple media and forms the basis for a narrative or communicative project. The result of this connection is a story told using different media and communication platforms in which the consumer plays an active role.

Advertising is combined with storytelling, which is no longer seen as advertising, but as one of the possible pathways within the transmedia project. For example, the combination of cinema and advertising generates advertainment, a promotion based on play, active participation and collaboration.

Transmedia Storytelling in Marketing

Since its inception, transmedia storytelling has shown a close connection to marketing. There are different types of transmediality, namely, according to Andrea Phillips (2012), West Coast transmediality and East Coast transmediality. West Coast transmediality emerges from the merging of large media segments such as video games, blogs, and feature films.

Each can be seen as an autonomous and complete story, not necessarily connected to the others. One of the characteristics of this transmedia is that it has persisted over the years. The use of transmedia on the West Coast has enabled the development of transmedia franchises in the entertainment industry and beyond, an example of which is the Marvel universe, which includes films, TV series, video games, etc.

Whereas, East Coast transmediality has developed more online using mainly social media. In this type of transmedia, the story is divided into fragmented and interconnected pieces on different platforms. Each of these fragments tells only part of the story, and in order to get the full narrative, each segment needs to be found and then connected.

This transmediality usually has a short duration and is characteristic of Alternate Reality Games. The development of the second type of transmediality has led to the full recognition of transmedia storytelling as a marketing communication strategy. Transmedia storytelling has a strong commercial and promotional component that makes it suitable for inclusion in marketing techniques.

Bill Carmody in his article 'Transmedia Marketing is the Future of Brand Storytelling' [5] defines storytelling as the future of digital marketing communication, highlighting the relationship with transmedia.

Chester Elijah Branch points out why it will be the future: "Content marketing has occupied marketers for the last few years and is now heading towards the light. The Internet will expand 500% over the next few

years so all of this so-called 'content' has already become nothing more than 'white noise.'

How do marketers break through the clutter? What should we call this new marketing? I believe that Transmedia is the answer. Transmedia marries your brand with your consumers through collaboration and story. Many media strategists propose that transmedia marketing is the future of all digital media marketing. Transmedia basically means to transport a story-world or message into a customer's everyday life through the use of multiple media platforms." Branch himself wondered what constituted successful transmedia marketing.

To illustrate and explain it, he used social currency.

Erich Joachimsthaler, CEO of consulting agency Vivaldi, who coined the term in 2009, defined it as "the extent to which people share brands or brand information as part of their daily social life. I am convinced that consumers' willingness to share has great brand-building potential" [6]. In other words, we can define it as the set of opportunities, real or potential, triggered by social networks and communities.

Indeed, Branch noted that brands are no longer seen as heroes who save the customer. Since the advent of social media, this view has been reversed, with the customer itself becoming the hero, creating his/her own customer journey. In fact, brands are seen as guides to help the customer on their journey. The brand doesn't create the story, it helps the customer to create it themselves.

In order to engage positively with these stories, brands need to spread social currency to their customers (J. Sachs, 2012). This is the right approach to create effective transmedia marketing.

Another element of great importance is prosumerism. This word comes from prosumer, that is someone who is both a producer and a consumer of a product. The term was coined by Alvin Toffler, who included it in his book 'The Third Wave' [7].

Thus, Prosumerism is the belief that consumers are moving from simply

consuming a product to being able to make more and more decisions about that product with the ability to redesign or change it. Given this, Branch argues, "This new reality where consumers produce as well as consume content is also the reason many digital media marketing strategists have said brand storytelling is dead and we are witnessing the rise of brand story making" (2016). So, what is the difference between storytelling and storymaking?

David Berkowitz, in his presentation 'Revenge of the Story Makers', given at Inbound15, stated that storytelling should no longer be passive for the audience. The goal of transmedia marketing is to be able to capture the stories that consumers are already experiencing and sharing and create new narratives based on them. This leads to the co-creation of a story and, above all, to high consumer engagement.

Table1: Storytelling vs Storymaking

Storytelling	Storymaking	Action
Proprietary	Participatory	Invite
Idea-Ispired	Fan-Ispired	Lsten
Centralized	Decentralized	Organize
Predetermined	Unpredictable	Plan
Unilateral	Reciprocal	Incentivize
Approved	Authentic	Accept

Source:
<https://image.slidesharecdn.com/inbound2015storymakers-dberkowitz-slideshare-150910133415-lva1-app6891/85/revenge-of-the-storymakers-how-brands-are-battling-storytelling-44-320.jpg?cb=1664967822>

The interesting part of this table is that Berkowitz proposes actions for brands to follow in order to succeed in storymaking with their customers. This storymaking structure allows for a transmedia-social process that brings storytelling into the everyday life of the consumer. From this perspective, we can easily understand the immense power of Alternate Reality Games. In fact, they are a true promotional game using treasure hunt mechanics.

They invite people to solve a mystery by searching for scattered clues, and they have to use their critical thinking skills and abilities to do so. If you manage to create great engagement with an alternate reality game, you can gain such a loyal fan base that they will participate in any offering. This game can either be sponsored by a brand who

will use it as an advertising campaign for a product launch, or by a communications agency or film studios who will always use it for promotional activities that can take place both before and after the product launch.

There may be multiple sponsors, e.g., ARG may be implemented by a major brand, which will be the creator and designer of the game, and other organisations that may be involved in developing the platforms that will serve as the basis for the game. The protagonists through whom the alternate reality game experience comes to life are the same players who will make up the market segment the product or message is aimed at.

Guerrilla Marketing

Undoubtedly, ARGs are part of marketing called 'Guerrilla Marketing', i.e., non-traditional marketing that uses new ways and approaches to advertising. Guerrilla marketing is based on creativity, which is applied by trying to find a different way of seeing the world. Such concepts as surprise and spreading are added to creativity. Surprise refers to the ability to create unexpected events on the part of the audience and thus generate emotional connections. Spreading refers to the ability to encourage word-of-mouth transmission and sharing of a message. There are many different applications of Guerrilla Marketing whose motivation lies in its creative basis, which has prompted experimentation and hence the creation of different types, such as:

- **Ambient marketing:** uses elements of the physical environment to create attractive advertising campaigns. The consumer is an active part of these installations. It is an evolution of out-of-home advertising campaigns, i.e., traditional billboards.
- **Sensation marketing:** uses real performances by actors hired for the advertising campaign instead of objects.
- **Viral marketing:** a tool that takes advantage of spreadability, never underestimating the audience.
- **Buzz marketing:** this is a highly planned practice for word-of-mouth development, obviously of a positive nature. It often uses leaders who have an extensive reference network to develop a conversation with the audience.

ARGs make wider use of ambient marketing. It uses the logic of OOH, an acronym that stands for 'Out-Of-Home', which is all those forms of communication that can be found in the outdoors, and involves engaging the public, starting with surprise. This marketing method forces elements typical of the narrative universe to be present in the physical world, creating an extension of the environment.

It uses 3 different actions:

- **Two-dimensional extension:** narrative graphics are used together with urban elements (billboards, murals, installations, etc.);
- **Three-dimensional extension:** characters or narrative objects are placed in an urban environment;
- **Four-dimensional extension:** events are created with themes and narrative elements in which the audience actively participates.

Generally, this type of advertising is used in Alternate Reality Games as a narrative starting point and can often lead to online sharing and messaging in a way that creates typical Viral Marketing [8-23].

CONCLUSION

The marketing strategy of Alternate Reality Games can have different goals or objectives and, accordingly, use different ways of developing advertising campaigns and marketing communication. All goals are related to the process of translation, which is chosen and carried out when we move from the story we want to tell to the advertising text. Translation means transferring the meaning of a certain thing from one place to another. When we are in the linguistic realm, translation takes the form of linguistic translation. In the field of communication, it is a much broader concept, as different types of language can be used, for example: the transfer of brand values into a product or service, or this transfer can lead to an experience that can be lived by the audience.

This process of translation, when used in transmedia narratives, engages all possible languages: auditory, visual, audiovisual, experiential, etc., as well as different channels to divide the narrative. When translating in transmedia narratives, it is important to maintain the coherence of the narrative, as this raises awareness and

facilitates the communication of the message we want to promote.

By means of vertical analysis and horizontal development of distinctive themes of a story, active audience participation is stimulated, and through diegetic extension developed through media, objects or environment, an immersive experience is created that transports the audience into the world of storytelling, activating grassroots practices that manage to develop a promotion defined from below, which can make the user feel like a protagonist.

Most promotions through ARGs follow tactics defined as game-oriented, that is, they are based on advertising solutions that manage to be engaging, that follow and respond positively to the behaviour and desires for sharing and participation that are needed and demanded in today's era of convergence culture. By hybridising traditional advertising using print advertising media and advertising 2.0 with all media platforms, Alternate Reality Games allows the creation of effective promotion because they combine many traditional marketing strategies and many non-traditional marketing strategies.

The most notable aspect of this promotion strategy is that it is created ad hoc for each campaign and that it is possible to use different marketing techniques in each campaign. As a result of hybridising or sharing them, new and revolutionary developments can be discovered. However, it has important limitations, the first of which is economic, as the experience requires a lot of content, which must be well organised in a network of channels. Thus, ARGs require artefacts, purpose-built digital platforms and always innovative content to make the experience as complex as possible, and this is very expensive.

Another limitation is the applicability of this strategy because the fictional world is explored vertically, which may generate a certain niche engagement or attract users who are already fans of the promoted object.

This leads to the promotional strategy through ARGs being used mainly for film productions such as large narrative universes containing sagas, prequels, sequels or spin-offs, or for video games to allow

players to learn and begin to experience the narrative world before the video game is released. In conclusion, Alternate Reality Games have great communicative and promotional advantages, but their implementation is limited in terms of economics and target audience. Hybridising ARGs with other promotional strategies creates a project capable of bringing together different forms of Guerrilla Marketing.

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