

Building Brands A While Back...!

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In the era of sophisticated technological innovations, where Internet has changed the pattern of communication between Organizations and public, building brands that engage consumers for a long time remains to be a business challenge. The Marketers are moving away from Traditional Marketing Communication programmes such as Advertising, Public Relations, Sales Promotion and Personal selling to sizeable Social Marketing activities. This shift is apparent in the United States, where brands have been experimenting with new participative communication models. European markets are also witnessing the growing presence and substantial usage of Interactive and social media.

In the mean time, a new narrative form is developing from mass media such as television and print. Web is considered for active use of content to weave a story or a narrative. In this novel participatory communication channel, consumers are invited to play an important role in shaping and spreading the narrative, unlike classical advertising. An ever increasing number of companies have adopted this new form of communication, investing money and creativity in the development of innovative interactive concepts.

At this point in time, Marketers need to focus on innovative engagement strategies. The goals of which must be to increase the range of possible and permissible meanings associated with brands, unlock valid channels of communication with all stakeholders. If old branding models were based on tight control over the circulation and messaging, such controls are no longer practical or desirable in a world where if it does not spread, it is dead. This ideology gave way to Transmedia Branding or Transmedia Storytelling (TS). Transmedia or transmedia storytelling is a way to tell a story using different media platforms (Jenkins 2006).¹

Former Massachusetts Institute of Technology professor and current USC Annenberg Professor Henry Jenkins developed the concept of transmedia, which he evolved into transmedia storytelling. He defines transmedia storytelling as “a process in which integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience ideally, each medium makes its own unique contribution to the unfolding of the story” (Jenkins, Transmedia 202). The present paper aims at discussing the basic framework of Transmedia Branding, by highlighting theoretical evidence and an iconic case study of Transmedia Branding. The paper ends with proposing future research areas in Indian context of Branding practices as well to academia.

Introduction

No aspect of the world remained untouched with the emerging trends in technology. Some of the new media technologies and media production platforms Interactive web pages, Mobile Computing, podcasts, etc are the outcomes of technological innovations. As a result of these technological changes many new ways of producing and distributing culture have been emerging. As a result of this, more and more amateurs are able to produce culture (Jenkins 2006). Therefore, there have been discussions on how the roles of producers and consumers are changing (Jenkins 2006, Storey 2006). All of these changes can be found in one of the new ways of producing culture – called transmedia. The concept of Transmedia was introduced by Henry Jenkins (2003).

¹ Jenkins, Henry (2006). *Convergence culture: where old and new media collide*. New York: New York University Press

The term Transmedia storytelling was introduced in the year 1999, through the film, *The Blair Witch Project*, although it can be argued that the concept itself is a lot older than that (Jenkins 2004, 40). Some claim that transmedia is not new at all and that for example *Star Wars* used transmedia several decades ago, although the term had not been invented (Jenkins 2006). The evidence to the presence of Transmedia was the merchandise of *Star Wars* movies as an extension of the story, which was taken ahead by kids to play with action figures. To understand the difference it is substantiated by finding the play today on the Internet and on a virtual platform.

Definition

Henry Jenkins², a leading scholar within the field, defines transmedia by aligning the term with the facade of storytelling: "[...] a transmedia story unfolds across multiple media platforms, with each new text making a distinctive and valuable contribution to the whole" (Jenkins, 2006, pp. 97- 98). According to Jenkins, "each medium does what it does best". Unique aspect of Transmedia story telling is that the audience is actively engaged with the content that is created. He or she perceives the story from different angles and in few cases the users or the audience actively become a part of the process of creating content.

Analyzing Jenkins' definition, transmedia branding can be understood as a communication process in which information about a brand is packaged into an integrated narrative, which is scattered across multiple media channels for the purpose of creating an interactive and engaging brand experience. The increasing usage of Transmedia story telling can be attributed to its special feature which provides a unique experience framework for the audience, compared to single-medium storytelling. It creates multiple entry points to a story associated with a brand, etc., through which unique portions of the whole story can be explored and added to by the audience.

Concept of Transmedia

At the most basic level, transmedia stories "are stories told across multiple media. At the present time, the most significant stories tend to flow across multiple media platforms" (Jenkins, Purushotma, Clinton, Weigel & Robison, 2006, p. 46). In the ideal form of Transmedia Storytelling, each medium does what it does best — so that a story might be introduced in a film, expanded through television, novels, and comics, and its world might be explored and experienced through game play. Each franchise entry needs to be self-contained enough to enable autonomous consumption. That is, you don't need to have seen the film to enjoy the game and vice-versa. (Jenkins, 2003)

Transmedia narratives are emerging as the most important new form of communication. Transmedia narratives are also called transmedia storytelling. They present multiple components of a story across several different media in a closely integrated manner. (Miller, 2008) The term transmedia describes the way communication technologies are used to extend storytelling onto multiple media and shift audiences across distinct but interconnected media platforms (Evans, 2008).

Typically, any story about a brand is communicated through a single medium, such as storytelling either in a book, audio or video channel, etc. But with transmedia storytelling, different parts of the same story are scattered onto different media platforms. For instance, a website might reveal the backstory and mythology, while the accompanying videogame focuses on the characters, who would present the story. At the same time, the two channels together would allow the audience to have a self-assigned role as an interpreter who would align the clues received from different media platforms together and find out the hidden mysteries to familiarize with and immerse into the gamut of story world.

² Henry Jenkins III (born June 4, 1958) is an American media scholar and currently a Provost Professor of Communication, Journalism, and Cinematic Arts, a joint professorship at the USC Annenberg School for Communication and the USC School of Cinematic Arts

For example, Pokemon exists in several hundred different forms. Each with plentiful evolutionary varieties, and an intricate set of rivalries and attachments. There is no single text available which provides information on these various species. Rather, the child assembles information from various media, with the result that each child knows something his or her friends do not. As a result, the child can share his or her expertise with others. (Jenkins et al., 2006, pp. 46-47)

An effectual transmedia narrative is more than a compilation of story rudiments or stories spread across a number of different media. There have not yet been any creators of transmedia works that have been able to successfully construct a *unified* project that harnesses the power of each medium (whether through the producer's skills or collaboration with other creative people) to its largest potential (Leavitt, 2010). It is obvious that the personality of transmedia narratives include a multitude of information design challenges. Every individual element of a transmedia narrative, such as text, images, audio, video, and other forms of media encompass their individual opportunities and challenges.

Each medium has its own affordances, its own systems of representation, its own strategies for producing and organizing knowledge. Participants in the new media landscape learn to navigate these different and sometimes conflicting modes of representation and to make meaningful choices about the best ways to express their ideas in each context. (Jenkins, Purushotma, Weigel, Clintion, & Robison, 2009, pp. 87-88)

The story can origin from one medium which the audience may be familiar with and then allow them to become involved as an active part of the narrative as he or she can share his or her own point of view of the story through the creation of a fan fiction³ or a participating in real-world events. The ideology of transmedia branding framework relies on shared cleverness, participatory audience techniques and reachable content. The narratives that are a part of storytelling would be spread across apps, games, homepages, etc., that enables the content to be accessed by the audience anytime and anywhere in different forms.

For instance, a transmedia story may be created while using a character's story as a series of tweets using Twitter.com, a number of silent pictures posted to Flickr, written narrative posted to a blog, video clips posted to YouTube, and texts sent to mobile phones. Transmedia storytelling uses the tools of the storyteller, emotion, engagement, universal themes, personal connection, and relevance, to create a communication experience instead of a message. (Rutledge, 2011)

The transmedia model of storytelling has been successfully used for many purposes, from development of Hollywood entertainment franchises, to independent and public media productions, and most recently, new approaches to public relations and advertising. The transmedia approach is such a powerful storytelling technique because it enables the user to become involved in the material in an extremely deep way and sometimes in a manner that eerily simulates a real-life experience...By spanning a number of media; a project can become far richer, more detailed, and multifaceted. (Miller, 2008, p. 152)

Richer, deeper experiences that rise above the digital noise are helping drive the adoption of transmedia storytelling as the "new standard for 21st century communication" (Rutledge, 2011). The scope of using transmedia narrative approaches is believed to be a influential form of storytelling which enables the audience to engage deeply and get connected to the world of the story. Ed Sanchez, a member of the Blair Witch production team, said:

³ Fan fiction, often also referred to as fic, fan fic or simply ff are stories that involve popular fictional characters that are written by fans. They are often posted on the internet (Merriam-Webster).

Henry Jenkins also explains the term in correlation to transmedia storytelling, where he states that fan fiction can be seen as an "unauthorized expansion of [...] media franchises into new directions which reflect the reader's desire to "fill in the gaps" they have discovered in the commercially produced material" (Jenkins, 2007).

What we learned is that if you give people enough stuff to explore, they will explore. Not everyone will but some will. The people who do explore and take advantage of the whole world will forever by your fans, will give you an energy you can't buy through advertising...It's this web of information that is laid out in a way that keeps people interested and keeps people working for it. If people have to work for something they devote more time to it. And they give it more emotional value. (Jenkins, 2006, p. 103)

One indication of the growing importance of transmedia narrative is the recognition of the title Transmedia Producer by the Producers Guild of America (PGA). The emergence of transmedia narratives is likely to significantly disrupt the entertainment and communications industries (Kohn, 2011). Each increase in the complexity of our communications vehicles – the moves from pictographic languages to abstract alphabets or from cave painting to digital image manipulation has been motivated by the desire to improve the range and richer of meaning we can share. (Macy, Anderson, & Krygier, 2000)

Building Blocks of Transmedia Branding

Transmedia branding campaigns share a common set of design elements that of any other successful campaigns used in various media platforms, such as narratives, participation and brands (Burghardt Tenderich, 2013 & USC Annenberg Innovation Lab⁴).

The figure given below depicts the elements of Transmedia Branding

Transmedia Branding Design Elements		
Narratives	Participation	Brands
Memes Media	Culture Communities	Markets

Narratives

In Narrative structure, events are placed in time and space from the point of view of the narrator in a book and/or camera in a film in such a way that a style is created that illustrates the theme. Transmedia story telling shows storylines that travel across different media channels, in different content forms, such as articles, videos, cartoons, etc. The significant feature of TS is that, parts of the content that collectively result in a narrative are dispersed in unique bits. The content bits cease to spread when storylines become redundant. In the movement across channels, the story bits may be altered.

For example, special element in 'The man your man could smell like' was a random tweet by a man asking the Old Spice Guy to propose to the man's girlfriend on his behalf. Old Spice Guy responded with a bathtub video doing as requested, which led to the man tweeting "she said yes." The tweet and a corresponding photo were taken by Mashable.com, spreading the story over into editorial media.

According to Richard Dawkins a meme "conveys the idea of a unit of cultural transmission, or a unit of imitation"⁵ which, he introduced in The Selfish Gene. "Leaping from brain to brain via a process which, in the broad sense, can be called imitation. Memes are "condensed images that stimulate visual, verbal, musical, or behavioral associations that people can easily imitate and transmit to others." Memes are "condensed images that stimulate visual, verbal,

⁴ The Annenberg Innovation Lab at the University of Southern California has established a research group tasked with exploring how transmedia branding continues to evolve

⁵ Richard Dawkins, The Selfish Gene, Oxford, 1989, p 192

musical, or behavioral associations that people can easily imitate and transmit to others.”⁶ Examples include tunes, ideas, catch-phrase, clothes, fashions, etc.

Medium is essential for a narrative to exist. Or else, a narrative would not be heard, seen, read or experienced outside a medium. Hence, narratives and medium are interdependent. Media encompasses a broad variety of communication channels, ranging from interpersonal interactions to pictures, music, art, letters, books, billboards, objects, traditional mass media as well as social media. However, it is worth remembering that Internet is not a precondition for transmedia branding.

Participation

Participation includes a wide gamut of activities, arraying from sharing conversations to leaving comments on blogs or articles to generating new content, satires and additional storylines. In addition to creating, changing and spreading content, effective participation relies on additional notions namely, culture, community and policy.

Brands

According to American Marketing Association⁷, a brand is a “Name, term, design, symbol, or any other feature that identifies one seller's good or service as distinct from those of other sellers.”

According to Marketing Science Institute⁸, branding issues dominate the list of research priorities with particular attention to managerially directed topics including brand equity measurement, brand accountability, brand leverage and architecture, and internal branding. The scope of application of branding insights has expanded owing to the strategic value of branding. Branding has extended beyond consumer goods and services to include business-to-business domains (Webster Jr. & Keller, 2004), countries (van Ham, 2001), and people (Schroeder, 2005a).

Over a period of time, patterns of brand communication and especially in television advertising have taken a new stride with the increasing awareness of storytelling. Especially, between the 1980's and 1990's the impact is apparent. Ever since, brands are building fictional universes and stories as the pivotal point of their external communication. Especially in the context of identity brands, companies are increasingly disregarding traditional focus on product and prize and are instead focusing their efforts on the story and trying to engage and involve consumers emotionally (Ibid). The brand creates a contract between the companies and the consumers by expressing the value it carries despite the consumers' acceptance. Brands appear as narrative or possible worlds since they constitute complex discourse universes with a strong narrative imprint (Codeluppi, 2000, 2001; Ferraro, 1999, 2000; Semprini, 1990, 1996; Semprini & Musso, 2000). Semioticians⁹ consider brands as narrative worlds that can be analyzed by applying the theoretical tools developed for fictional texts¹⁰.

A brand is placed in various ways inside a fictional narrative. The first is, obviously, the traditional TV spot using a commercial micronarrative structure in which a product or service is usually presented as the consumer's “helper” (Propp, 1968). In these narrative worlds, women can drive faster, men can cook better, and children can be smarter if they use a certain “magical” product. Another way is to position a product inside a non-commercial fiction. For instance, a T.V. commercial may show a fictional character that consumes a certain beverage or drive a car. This is the so-called product placement or embedded marketing technique (Galician, 2004; Segrave, 2004; Lehu, 2007) where

6 Center for Communication and Civic Engagement. <http://ccce.com.washington.edu/projects/cultureJamming.html>

7 The American Marketing Association (AMA) is a leading organization for marketers; is the trusted go-to resource for marketers and academics.

8 the Marketing Science Institute is a nonprofit, membership-based organization dedicated to bridging the gap between marketing science theory and business practice

9 From a semiotic perspective, the brand is a device that can produce a discourse, give it meaning, and communicate this to audiences.

10 Codeluppi has questioned the “possible world” concept applied to brands, which would be limited when representing the richness and communication potential of current brands. This researcher proposes the concept of “imaginary world” to replace it (Codeluppi, 2000).

the product becomes integral to the plot. Transmedia storytelling further introduces an alteration to this scenario in which the brand is no longer inside the fiction, but rather the fiction *is* the brand.

Oldspice – the most successful Case of Transmedia Branding

Procter & Gamble’s transmedia branding of Old Spice with an advertisement (ad) campaign ‘The man your man could smell like’ in 2010, is an iconic transmedia campaign till date. It was created by Wieden + Kennedy¹¹.

The advertisement campaign was initially aired as a humorous commercial for Old Spice Red Zone body wash featuring former NFL player Isaiah Mustafa¹² (Fig. 1). The (ad) campaign shows Mustafa standing in a bathroom with a towel wrapped around him, accentuating the goodness of Old Spice’s new body wash. Within no time, he is then moved to a sailboat to ride a horse on the beach, without taking a pause, and with a constant eye contact.

As Wikipedia notes: “The punchline of the commercial is Mustafa’s non sequitur final statement: ‘I’m on a horse’, delivered as the camera zooms out to reveal to the viewer that Mustafa is now sitting atop a horse” (Wikipedia). The ad that was initially released on YouTube a week prior to Superbowl 2010 has sent a message that it is a ‘must-see ad’, which enabled Old Spice saving multi-million dollars on ad purchase time during the game. The commercial garnered 20 million views on YouTube in just three days which was considered to be the most-viewed ad on Social media, and was promoted by celebrities via Twitter.

The ad campaign was continued by a sequence of 186 short videos, in which Mustafa stands in a bathtub wrapped in towel (Fig. 2). He responds to tweets by celebrities, members of the general public, and specific online communities aimed at the Old Spice Guy. These videos received positive response from people as they were included in the advertising campaign to their surprise. In addition, several people shot caricatures and posted them on YouTube. Sesame Street¹³ created the ‘Smell like a Monster’ impression (Fig. 3). Traditional media re-aired the original advertisement, and Mustafa appeared in numerous talk shows discussing the commercial. At the same time, the ad was seen in YouTube videos numerous times, and the YouTube respond ads developed their own storylines as subsets of the overall brand story.

To emphasize the true nature of Oldspice’s transmedia branding, it is important to mention that a man using his Twitter lever @JS Beals, asked the Old Spice guy to ask his girlfriend to marry @JS Beals in real life. Mustafa did the same on one of his YouTube responses. In less than few hours of the video being posted, @JS Beals tweeted: “She said yes,” and posted a picture of his fiancé wearing a ring. The picture was taken by Mashable¹⁴, and then by traditional media.

Oldspice’s ad campaign ‘*The man your man could smell like*’, has been widely acclaimed for its creativity and reach. The campaign was iconic which was proved through the return-on-investment numbers as shown by Event Reports¹⁵:

- In the first six months after the launch of the campaign, Old Spice sales increased 27% year-to-year. By the sixth month of the effort, month-to-month sales had increased 107%.
- 2 billion-plus total campaign impressions since February 2010.
- 40 million total video views in the campaign’s first week.

¹¹ Wieden+Kennedy (W+K; pronounced WHY-den and KEN-eddy is an independently owned American advertising agency best known for its work for Nike.

¹² Isaiah Mustafa is an American actor and former NFL practice squad wide receiver. Mustafa is widely known as the main character for a series of Old Spice TV commercials, The Man Your Man Could Smell Like. (Wikipedia)

¹³ Sesame Street is a long-running American children’s television series created by Joan Ganz Cooney and Lloyd Morrisett. (Wikipedia)

¹⁴ Mashable is a British-American news website, technology and social media blog founded by Pete Cashmore in 2005

¹⁵ Warc combines current new thinking and trends with best practice to make the most informed decisions about a marketing strategy. It gives access to over 6,000 award-winning case studies, in-depth trend analysis, and research reports in one place. www.warc.com

- A 75% share of all brand conversations in the first three months of 2010 (with women having half the conversations).
- The all-time most-viewed YouTube brand channel (and, with 170,000 subscribers, YouTube's top subscription channel).
- 3,000% increase in Twitter followers.
- 2,000% increase in Google searches.
- 800% increase in Facebook interactions.
- 300% increase in traffic at oldspice.com.

Insights to Indian media and researchers

Contemporary trend that is connecting consumers and the brands is the transformation of content as transmedia. Stories of brands are spread across borders through various innovative platforms, enabling consumers with multiple entry points. The aim of these efforts is to engage deeply with customers, through their active participation. In today's inter-connected world, Transmedia would emerge to be a norm for many marketers as it involves narrative threads tailored for different channels such as mobile phones to big screens, from social to traditional media to connect audiences like gamers, readers, Tweepers, etc.

Transmedia branding practices are emerging in marketing, in the film industry, television industry, new media arts, gaming, literature, education and beyond.

Indian marketers are not strangers to storytelling, whether it may take the form of Panchatantra, Birbal stories, Amarchitra Katha, or epics such as Mahabharata, Ramayana, etc. The surge to integrate narratives or stories in promoting a brand's benefits still seems to be uncommon in Indian branding practices. Narratives fit the pieces of people's lives together with causal links: Stories elucidate goals, evaluate actions to achieve goals, and interpret outcomes (Pennington & Hastie, 1986). Thus, to build better brands, engage consumers and enhance their experience, Indian marketers may attempt to converge the content by combining the incompatible media, i.e., digital and non-digital.

The popularity of the practice and scope of transmedia has resulted in transmedia being for many the first to investigate the relationship between a narrative and distinct media; design and development of a narrative, the interconnections between elements of the narrative, and the interfaces that facilitate users to navigate through the transmedia narrative. The researchers may also probe into intrinsic properties of a particular medium that would influence the structure of a narrative and its affect on transmedia narrative experience. At the same time, the marketers must appreciate that transmedia has to be more than an entry-point in building brands. And the researchers may need to clearly distinguish it from other traditional media platforms if it is to carve its own research area.

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