Transmedia Storytelling in the Indian Context: Select Structural Challenges and Significant Possibilities

*1M.N.V.V.K, Chaitanya, 2Mallam, Sasi Kiran Reddy

*1 *Associate Professor, Annapurna International School of Film and Media (AISFM), Hyderabad, India*
2 *Research Scholar, Department of Communication, University of Hyderabad, India*

ABSTRACT

While Transmedia Storytelling is more than a decade old concept in the west, it is yet to catch up in the Indian Media space. The recent phenomenal success of films like Baahubali led to a section of the media industry and audience noticing the franchise's transmedia efforts. Hollywood is one of the spaces which took the idea of transmedia forward, which initially took the shape of marketing and later became a more nuanced effort to add to the story worlds of franchises. It led to the formation of agencies specializing in transmedia storytelling like Starlight Runner and what's more, the Producers Guild of America incorporating the credit of 'Transmedia Producer'. One could argue that over the last two decades transmedia storytelling in the USA has moved from experimentation to institutionalization.

Although Hollywood and the various regional film industries that exists in India (Bollywood, Kollywood, Tollywood, Sandalwood, Gollywood, Deccanwood, Bhollywood, Coastalwood etc.) are radically and structurally different in every possible way, a comparative approach would lead to an identification of lacunae and might give us a few pointers to start with. The article will engage with the structural challenges and inherent possibilities of Trans-media Storytelling in a diverse media landscape that India is home to. Select possible business challenges and allied creative constraints that the article will explore are the reception of transmedia campaign of the film Baahubali, lack of specialized agencies in the transmedia space, audience awareness and specifically, fandom which is the most important factor in the success of any transmedia effort. The article while pointing out the problems would also come up with possible solutions.

Keywords

Transmedia, Storytelling, Movie Franchises, Entertainment, Indian Film Industry, Fandom, Tollywood, Telugu Film Industry.

1. Introduction

"*Transmedia will shape the future of Hollywood and Fortune 500 Firms*" screams a Forbes article headline (Escobedo, 2017). The author describes the vision of Jeff Gomez the CEO of Starlight Runner, a transmedia agency which does exclusive transmedia work for both brands and media products. Though the title of the article is definitely hyperbolic, it nevertheless describes the media buzz surrounding it aptly. While there has been a buzz surrounding transmedia in several geographies from time to time and in India, it only started getting some serious press around the pre-release, release and post-release of Baahubali. Prior to the film, there were a few sporadic attempts in that direction in terms of building franchises, but they were limited to film franchises and not a full-scale entertainment franchise spanning across multiple media.

The word transmedia was first used by Marsha Kinder to refer to multiplatform and multi-modal expansion of media content (as cited in Freeman and Gambarato (2019))

Jenkins (2006) observes that the new media landscape and the economic logic that governs it ensures that a narrative form like transmedia works. He elaborates on this concept using the case study of the Matrix Franchise which was one of the first well planned and executed Transmedia projects. He defines transmedia as

"*Transmedia storytelling represents a **process** where 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, Transmedis Storytelling 101, 2007)

Transmedia has also been understood as transmedia exploitation by Kearney (2004). Kearney classifies Transmedia exploitation into two different types, the first one refers to the adaptation of an established entertainment text into different media forms and the second one deals with the promotion of a text's reputation as a successful entertainment property while marketing later versions produced in other formats. She also observes that it is to do with more of a capitalist objective than to increase audience engagement.

Negri (2019) notes that the three characteristics of a transmedia narrative or trans fiction as opposed to a transmedia franchise, are retro-active (designed as a transmedia narrative since the beginning and not as an afterthought), centripetal (made up of multiple

textualities, not necessarily expansions of a driving platform like film or TV), transcendent (whole is larger than the sum of parts). To come up with this typology she quotes the works of Davidson, Mittell and Jenkins as cited in (Negri, 2019).

In 2010, the Producer's Guild of America added 'Transmedia Producer' to its code of credits with the following guidelines, which is a very comprehensive definition of a Transmedia Project.

"*A Transmedia Narrative project or franchise must consist of three (or more) narrative storylines existing within the same fictional universe on any of the following platforms: Film, Television, Short Film, Broadband, Publishing, Comics, Animation, Mobile, Special Venues, DVD/Blu-ray/CD-ROM, Narrative Commercial and Marketing rollouts, and other technologies that may or may not currently exist. These narrative extensions are NOT the same as repurposing material from one platform to be cut or repurposed to different platforms*" (Producer's Guild of America, 2019)

2. Methodology

The article attempts to build a short case study of the transmedia efforts of the Baahubali franchise through secondary research using owned media, paid media and earned media of the franchise. The case study is followed up with an identification of challenges using the theoretical framework of Henry Jenkins 'Transmedia Principles' (2009). It engages with the transmedia principles laid down by Jenkins and applies them to the Indian context. The article uses a comparative approach at several places to identify select challenges and eventual avenues of introducing Transmedia as a viable storytelling platform in an Indian context. The article also dwells on earlier instances where creators have used the idea of Transmedia using select and specific examples.

2.1 Reception of the Transmedia properties of Baahubali

The makers of the franchise – 'Arka Media Works' call it India's first tent pole franchise (Arka Media Works, 2019). They are clearly using Hollywood terminology to drive home the stupendous success of the franchise and they have ventured into all territories that a typical Hollywood tent pole franchise does.

Baahubali is a fantasy drama film franchise that released in two parts and became wildly successful and gained fans as far as Mexico, Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Venezuela, South Korea, Taiwan, China and Japan (Bhushan, 2015). Baahubali in its transmedia efforts published a book – The rise of Sivagami, launched a series in OTT platform Amazon Prime, a graphic novel – 'Baahubali - Battle of the Bold' along with a game, Virtual Reality Project. Indian media was at the forefront highlighting the franchise and exaggerating it even certain times. Economic times ran an article discussing how Hans Solo and Darth Vader will find themselves alongside Baahubali and Bhallaladeva and mentioned that the franchise will break the Indian film industry's merchandising jinx (Laghate, 2017). The licensing and merchandising agency Black White Orange Brands was hired by the Baahubali producers to put together an elaborate licensing and merchandising plan. (Bapna, 2016). The producer was quoted saying that it is India's first truly transmedia brand (Laghate, 2017). The same article discusses the challenges of the longevity of the brand to drive sales.

The first print run of 'The rise of Sivagami' sold 10000 copies and the publishes were upbeat about its eventual success. The author Anand Neelakantan in an interview noted that they released the prequel before the release of the second film, so that the audience can know more about the characters and their psychology before they watch the film and so that they can enjoy the film more. (Rawat, 2017) This is similar to the transmedia release strategy adopted by the Wachowskis for the Matrix, where they released most of the Transmedia properties after the release of the first film, thus sustaining interest and speculation till the second and third films released (Jenkins, 2006).

After the film's success, Netflix signed a deal with the makers roping in two telugu film directors for two seasons mostly based on Anand Neelakantan's book 'The rise of Sivagami'. Netflix's website describes the series as Baahubali: Before the beginning, this prequel series to India's epic fantasy franchise traces the dramatic rise of Queen Sivagami and her empire. The VP of Netflix originals, Erik Barmack had this to say about the franchise – "Baahubali is a world-class franchise that epitomizes the power of compelling stories that resonate globally. We are excited to work with some of the world's most talented writers and producers on one of India's most beloved stories. The series is a tremendous opportunity for us to give audiences more of the universe that they have come to love, and welcome millions more into the global Baahubali fandom." (Netflix, 2018) It is very interesting and encouraging that the core lingo of Transmedia is being used to describe the series by the corporate – Universe, Fandom etc.

So clearly the Baahubali franchise was received very well by the industry. It will be a matter of time before we gauge the success of the franchise from the perspective of the audience. For instance, though Netflix announced only two seasons initially, the makers are confident about a third season. That would be a mark of success of the franchise, if Netflix orders a third season as well.

3. Select Structural Challenges

The following paragraphs analyze the structural challenges that a narrative form like Transmedia can encounter in an Indian media setting.

3.1 Cross Media Ownership

Historically, the film industry in India has largely been disorganized, unorganized and highly fragmented, with thousands of producers making films across the country. Though the output was high, there was no major studio system in place. Even Hollywood's media moguls transitioned into being huge media conglomerates owning multiple media outlets over a period of several decades. India's film industry is gradually getting to a studio system only in the recent years and even they are limiting themselves largely to one or two mediums. For instance, Dharma Productions only recently launched their new media wing 'Dharmatic' (Jha, 2018). So, there are practically no 'economies of scope' in truest sense and associated synergies to be explored in the organic sense of the term. For instance, even Baahubali has partnered with several third-party service providers for its publishing, animation, graphic novel extensions. For instance, hypothetically if the film was produced by a media conglomerate like Disney, there would be a huge opportunity in terms of exploitation of synergies to the maximum as Disney has its own merchandising, theme park, interactive wings. That is one major structural challenge that over shadows every other challenge. Transmedia can work from bottom up only if the top down is setting up these opportunities for fans to participate. Without a major monetary incentive, corporations would never venture into a novel concept like Transmedia.

3.2 Transmedia Literacy

Jenkins (2006) differentiates between corporate and grassroots convergence, while the former is top down coming from the producers of the media product, the latter is grassroots convergence is more a bottom up approach where consumers are collaborating pooling in their intelligence using internet technologies, Jenkins terms this as collective intelligence in a participatory culture. The gap between media producers and consumers is blurring and this is happening even in the Indian context. Zeiser (2015) talks about a tectonic shift, a bottom up revolution and creation of legions of empowered contributors from the audience – media consumers, media critics are two of those sets of audience. While circumstances in the media landscape in India are getting there, the same words cannot be used to describe the situation here. But there is a definite new category of audience created that has taken media into their own hands and has been disruptive to a certain extent. For instance, film reviews by professionals from the press have been around since many decades, but there is a new set of amateur film critics hosting their own YouTube channels (Cinemapicha, n.d), the brutal 'Blue Sattai' (Thirumurthy, 2019) and creating content based on these media products and some of them have been successful too

Transmedia Literacies (Gordon & Lim, 2016) refer to the ontological frames, skill sets used or required of the audiences to participate actively in the franchise and the ways in which audience negotiate the Transmedia landscape. The creators also in some cases need to equip audience with the necessary know how or ensure they are using technology that is simple for most of the audience to use.

Audiences, especially digital natives are extremely tech savvy. They familiarize themselves with the latest in technology like a fish takes to water. They learn these digital skills naturally and this is a huge opportunity for Transmedia. Despite this digital familiarity, a moderately complex idea like Transmedia is yet to reach the digital natives of India in a big way. It is surprising since most of these audiences consume Hollywood Franchises and are fans of Marvel and DC Comics.

The word Transmedia puzzles people outside the Media education space, as it is not yet gone mainstream. Media conglomerates and brands in India are yet to get themselves acquainted with the idea. It is used as a synonym of multi-media, convergence and there is no clear space demarcated for itself. There are very few academic institutions in the country which offer it as a course. For instance, in the west, there are communities dedicated to Transmedia which conduct events, conferences and ensure that the word crosses over from academia to the industry. There is a need to popularize the concept itself so that it reaches the mainstream and especially it reaches audiences and future fans who will participate in Transmedia play set up the franchises.

Creative Culture Consortium (C3), anchored by Prof Henry Jenkins of MIT, is an academia-industry collaborative network. They organized conferences known as the Futures of Entertainment (FoE) conferences (Kompare, 2009) to discuss and debate collaborations. This sort of a dialogue between academia and industry will be symbiotic and help both the parties involved in learning and unlearning media practices

3.3 Collaborative Authorship

The Wachowskis, creators of the Matrix Franchise travelled to Japan and collaborated with Japanese animators, the likes of Shinichiro Watanabe, Koji Morimoto for the Animatrix which released as a DVD after the release of the first film. They collaborated with authors like Neil Geiman for their Matrix comics collection all of which were set in the world of the Matrix. All these artists were given a brief where they simply had to stick to the story world but can come up with their own storylines inside it, in their own authentic styles. That is the only way in which they can avoid the redundancy which eventually puts off fan interest. That requires a certain sense of letting go from the end of the creators and a strong confidence in the world they have created. One look at the comics and animatrix vindicates any doubts that the Wachowskis might have had. The sheer value they add in terms of depth and variety is astonishing. Back home, Rajamouli also expresses his serendipity at what Anand Neelakantan has done with the prequel with the limited brief he was given. (Krishnaswamy, 2017)

Even Bollywood has been breaking barriers and collaborating with outsiders. For instance, for the film Gullyboy, Javed Akhtar collaborated with Divine to write a song which starts as a poem from Javed Akhtar and ends up as a rap song by Divine, the entire album of Gully boy is a huge stride for Bollywood in terms of Collaborative Authorship. (Team FC, 2019)

3.4 Planning and Execution

"A Transmedia Producer credit is given to the person(s) responsible for a significant portion of a project's long-term planning, development, production, and/or maintenance of narrative continuity across multiple platforms, and creation of original storylines for new platforms. Transmedia producers also create and implement interactive endeavors to unite the audience of the property with the canonical narrative and this element should be considered as valid qualification for credit as long as they are related directly to the narrative presentation of a project." (Producer's Guild of America, 2019)

These guidelines indicate with significant clarity all that must go into transmedia project. The line which indicates that the producer's responsibilities include creation of original storylines for new platforms and more importantly unite the audience of the property with the canonical narrative. The responsibility of the producer also involves long-term planning.

Philips (2012) observes that Transmedia Projects require a high degree of collaboration and planning, in some instances, across geographies. The launch of different narratives in various media must be done in a coordinated manner. Given the highly disorganized nature of our industry, which is still coming to grips with corporatization, the planning and coordinating part of Transmedia poses a huge challenge. For instance, one needs to coordinate with the Graphic Novel artist, the Book author, the Animation company and ensure all of them follow a single brief even for a minor transmedia project. When the stakes are high like in the case of a mainstream film, that requires altogether a different skill set and a host of unlearning to be done on the part of Indian film makers.

3.5 The trap of technological determinism

Since there is so much innovation in technology both production and distribution wise, there is a danger than one gets too embroiled in the technology while forgetting about the narrative. The technology needs the narrative to stay relevant and not the other way around; narratives have been there since time immemorial and all this while they have been co-opting technologies in their effort to reach audiences.

In a narrative form like transmedia which could possibly involve many different platforms involving both hardware and software, there is the trap of focusing on the technological gimmicks and forgetting about the quality of content. Stories and content have always been the Achilles heel of the Indian media industry, especially the Telugu film industry which has really struggled to come up with award winning content in any platform.

3.6 Intellectual Property rights

There is a huge legal challenge to Transmedia in the form of IPR. In the west, because most of the transmedia planning and execution happens within the conglomerate and they own all the media assets there is less of a confusion, but in the Indian context where there will be multiple industries involved, Transmedia properties will hit a roadblock without proper IPR resolutions in place. As discussed earlier, collaborative authorship is the key to an authentic Transmedia Franchise which means giving credit where its due.

3.7 Multiscreen Behavior

Evans (2011) in her work on Transmedia Distribution and Engagement in the context of the UK Television industry explores how new media has expanded the spaces in which Television content is accessed by audience and notes that the reception practices are changing as a result. This is a huge challenge as audience are more likely to switch to another screen if they are bored with the content they are consuming. This also provides a huge opportunity especially for Transmedia practitioners, as more and more audience shift towards smart TVs the lines between internet and TV distribution are getting blurred. Also, the reception behavior has drastically changed as audiences use more than one screen at a time. This can be utilized by Transmedia practitioners to make content more interesting by making them glued to the content being provided, irrespective of the screen they inhabit. For instance, in the commercial break of a TV episode, audience can be invited to view a back story on one of the characters, whose release is exactly timed in between the breaks and provides a crucial plot point that makes the TV episode more meaningful. Adapting technology to the Transmedia narrative to make it more interesting for the audience to consume the franchise is a prerequisite to explore the synergies to the fullest.

Deeper insights into the Transmedia puzzle can be gained by applying henry Jenkins principles of Transmedia (Jenkins, 2009) and critically analyzing the core challenges that an idea like Transmedia could probably face in an Indian setting. Some of these principles are already familiar to the Indian media producers/creators/audience and some of them are yet to be fully and elaborately explored.

4. Insights from Transmedia Principles

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4.1 Spreadability Vs Drillability

Spreadability is the capacity of the audience to engage with the franchise, whereas drillability refers to the opportunities the franchise provides the audience to drill deeper into the narrative and ensuring that the experience they get when they start finding more and more openings into the story world is satisfying. In India, given the decent proliferation of internet and mobile technology, Spreadability shouldn't be a problem. But the idea of drillability where the franchise creators are making the franchise more and more complex, multi-layered and interesting, at the same time certainly is new in the Indian landscape.

A film franchise like Baahubali doesn't leave anything to the imagination of the audience. The other big issue is of longevity. All the extremely successful Hollywood franchises like Star Wars have been around since a few decades and have built their core fanbase over the years and that makes those franchises money spinners even today. Some franchises like the Marvel Cinematic universe have a longer history across different media, so much so that in a recent film outing, while watching Spider man into the spider verse, the entire audience erupted into cheers and hoots when Stan Lee, the creator of Marvel comics came on screen. Such is the fandom, and according to reports (Farooqui, 2018), Hollywood does make a lot of money even in India based on its franchises.

Most of the mainstream media products like commercial films, TV soap operas use an exhaustive amount of exposition always under the impression that the audience is not as intelligent as the makers. In a transmedia this frame is turned on its head where the creators go with the assumption that the audience is almost as intelligent as the makers and have the same cognitive capacities as them which will enable them to construct highly complex sequence of clues, rabbit holes, which will lead them to satisfying and profound insights about the franchise.

4.2 World Building

The idea of world building is not new to the Indian audience, since they have encountered the complex mythological worlds of Mahabharata, the Dashavatharas and several other puranas and several films were made on them. There are familiar with the idea of inter-textualities between worlds as well. Even in the Telugu Film world, there was a certain inter-textuality at play very early on, for instance in mythological films like Krishnanjaneya Yudhamu. (Rao, 1972). Rajamouli was also very conscious of the idea of world building while conceptualizing Baahubali. For instance, one of the first promos for the film involved a teaser with the designs/sketches of the world of Baahubali and the second set of teasers involved introducing individual characters. He was also conscious of creating new languages that would make the film more encyclopedic and adds depth to the narrative. As the world of Baahubali expands further one can notice deeper aspects of the world. This is one area which is dependent on the creators and not so much the audience.

4.3 Subjectivity

Subjectivity is one of the core principles that dictates Transmedia Strategy, it deals with ways in which franchises can focus on unexplored dimensions of the fictional world in different delivery platforms. For instance, Rise of Sivagami also explores the youth of Kattappa, whose past is not explored in the films. If properly executed, exploring subjectivities can be a profitable way to expand the franchise and explore the synergies resulting from it. The concept of a spin-off is similar to this, where a back story, secondary character, etc. are explored in full detail in another medium. Successful examples include the TV series Bates Motel, which explores the relationship between the son and mother, the owners of the motel in Hitchcock's 'Psycho'.
Telugu filmmakers especially from the era of mythological films explored the idea of subjectivity, for instance, the hugely popular Film, written, directed and performed by the South Indian Veteran Star 'NTR' – Dana Veera Sura Karna (Nandamuri, 1977) is a case in point. The film explores the character of Karna and makes it the film's focus, who remains a very interesting, albeit unexplored secondary character in the epic Mahabharata.

4.4 Multiplicity

Mani Ratnam, the South Indian film maker has explored the idea of multiplicity where one story is taken and moved into a different setting. He made two films, one based on the Ramayana and the other on Mahabharata, where the characters and the story line are similar, but he is exploring secondary characters. In Villain (Mani Ratnam, Villian, 2010), the setting of the film is changed to a forest with a bandit playing the role of Raavan and a police officer playing the role of Rama. Similarly, in the film Dalapathi (Mani Ratnam, Dalapathi, 1991), he narrates the story of Karna and his friendship with Duryodhana, the story of Kunthi in a modern setting. For multiplicity to work in a transmedia setting, we need at least one popular story world that shifts its base into another setting. This is also an area that film makers have explored in the Indian film industry.

4.5 Immersion

"I want audience to enter the world of Baahubali" noted Rajamouli in an interview (Shashidhar, 2016), sure he is peaking the lingo of Transmedia. Entering the world and immersing oneself into the fictional world of a franchise is known as Immersion in transmedia parlance. This implies commercial opportunities in terms of Theme Parks and related instruments. The sets of Baahubali have been retained by the Ramoji Film city for tourism purposes and this is a form of immersion (NDTV, 2017). The next logical step as per the Hollywood sequence of things, would be a Baahubali Theme Park, which would be a true immersion situation.

4.6 Performance

Fan performance is also a well-established concept, especially in the Southern part of the country. This takes several extreme forms as well. But the difference is how far can the franchise gets the audience involved in the world so that they start engaging with the media as well. Though the notion of fan fiction is still very rare in the Indian context, fans have definitely found ways to perform through online channels like YouTube, where they create fan art, fan made trailers and engage in squabbles with fans of other stars. But this fandom has entirely based on stars and not on franchises. We wouldn't really find the equivalent of a DC fan disappointed at the way superman was portrayed in the film. The spaces that fandom inhabits in India are quite different from that of the west and that makes a world of difference for the Transmedia franchise. Also, there is a need to develop deeper narratives and worlds with an encyclopedic impulse for the fans to perform in the franchise.

Transmedia Franchises typically have two sets of audiences – peripheral and core. The core audience is committed to the franchise and religiously consumes all media from the franchise and generate conversations and buzz around the franchise which later feeds into the peripheral audience who might be interested in some parts of the franchise. It is the core audience that decide the fate of the latest installment of the franchise and the biggest scrutiny is from them followed by the general audience. Case in point is the disapproval of a lot of fans when it was revealed that Ben Affleck would play the lead in Batman.

The Indian YouTube space with its current set of eclectic content providers is well equipped to deal with transmedia than the mainstream film industries. For instance, a spoof of Star trek, Starboyz (Datta, 2016) set in a spaceship with characters speaking English with a tinge of with a dash of south Indian accents thrown in, is an effort in the fan performance direction. Also, a tribute to Seinfeld performed by two comedians Navin Richard and Rohan Desai in the form of a skit is also a case in point. (FP Staff, 2015)

4.6.1 Notions of Fandom

Nowhere in the world, is fandom more expressive than in Japan, the Japanese express it through cosplay, fan art, manga and by showing up in costume to the screenings. Baahubali has seen an altogether different level of fandom, where everything from Manga, fanart, cosplay was in full display (Ghosh, 2018). The film was very successful there and that is the kind of fandom that a transmedia franchise aspires for. The notions of fandom in India are slightly different from what a transmedia franchise requires to survive. India fandom is a performance by the fan that happens mostly off the screen and does not involve creating art. There is some change recently where people are coming up with fan art in the form of trailers and paintings, but that is yet to take a serious form.

5. Other Transmedia Avenues

Transmedia being a narrative form has been applied to several different areas. Transmedia activism, Transmedia Marketing, Transmedia Education, Transmedia Journalism are just a few avenues where the concept has been applied with varying degrees of success.

5.1 Transmedia Journalism

News corporations like Guardian and New York Times have been at the forefront of transmedia journalism. For instance, The Guardian has used Transmedia to publish very complex new stories like the American NSA- Edward Snowden episode and the Arab Spring using multiple media like audio, video, visualizations all in one single interactive page. (The Guardian, 2013)

5.2 Transmedia Marketing

"Transmedia Marketing is the holistic discipline of making media and marketing media across multiple platforms-on air, online, and on the go-through engaging storytelling, rich story worlds, and interactive audience experiences." – (Zeiser, 2015, p. 14)

There is a scope for brands to venture into transmedia storytelling as it has been tried and tested by several brands like Coca cola, Intel, Toshiba, BMW in the west. Coca Cola in fact was the pioneer in transmedia through their campaign the happiness factory created in collaboration with Starlight Runner. Transmedia narratives are also dependent on strong and memorable characters, there have been enduring characters in Indian advertising for example Ramesh and Suresh duo from the 5 Star campaigns and the Flipkart commercials portraying children as adults.

5.3 Independent Transmedia Projects

There have been a few independent transmedia projects based on Indian stories, though some of these projects were funded by foreign funding agencies

5.3.1 Priya's Shakti (Priyas Shakti, 2019)

A transmedia activism project that was created by Ram Devineni, which was conceptualized after the brutal gang rape in Delhi that shook the nation and led to nation-wide protests against Gender based violence. The project's narrative has two central characters – Goddess Parvati and Priya, a rape-survivor. The platforms used for the project are an Augmented Reality comic book and exhibition. Funders for the project included Ford Foundation, New York State Council on the arts amongst others.

5.3.2 Antariksha Sanchar

Redbull music collaborated with the Avinash Kumar and came up with India's first ever immersive cultural transmedia live performance. This project fuses traditional art forms like dance with modern story telling techniques. The plot happens in early twentieth century Madurai and involves the famous mathematician planning to go to space, taking help from an ancient text. It premiered in Mumbai and Delhi last year in the form of a dance opera. (Sequeria, 2018)

6. Conclusion

Aping the West in terms of story-worlds will only be a temporary solution to making transmedia a bankable option in India. Each culture/Sub-culture in India is home to several rich narratives both religious and secular. The success of Transmedia narratives depends heavily on audience connecting them and making them their own, that is the only way they will spend time, money and energy on the franchise. Baahubali's success is also partly because it uses a lot of familiar tropes and Hindu symbology that helps even a modern audience connect with its epic medieval/pre-modern setting.

The answer to the content conundrum may lie in going local and not global, looking inward and not outside for inspiration. The other leap of faith that creators need to take is believing that the Indian audience is truly capable of taking the narrative into their hands and give them the respect they deserve. For, Fan Labor as a concept is thriving and rampant in all states of Southern India and it is only a matter of time that with eventual legal industry maturity (IP protection) and myriad monetization avenues, the business and commercial possibilities are many and endless in each one.

Overcoming structural challenges and establishing a transmedia franchise is a treacherous journey, one that has already been initiated by the likes of Baahubali, which will encourage other players to try this unexplored fan generating and sustaining concept. Reinforcing viewer commitments is a huge challenge for a franchise and transmedia is one way to ensure that happens. Mega Franchises like Star Wars are still relevant even today only because they have been able to create and sustain a loyal fan base that possess an almost encyclopedic knowledge of the franchise and take pride in it.

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