

RPTSS 2017
**International Conference on Research Paradigms Transformation
in Social Sciences**

**TRANSMEDIA STORYTELLING AS NEW FORMAT IN MODERN
MEDIA LANDSCAPE**

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Abstract

In the age of information society, new communication technologies bring great and rapid changes in the modern media landscape and development of mass communication. Under the conditions of media convergence and the processes of digitalization, the new kinds of media formats are emerging. One of them is transmedia storytelling. The paper focuses on the etymology of the term 'transmedia storytelling', the issues of difficulty of giving definitions to such concepts as 'convergence', 'transmedia storytelling', 'digitalization', and pays attention to the searches of transmedia projects research methods in the framework of journalism. The matter is that modern media text is a combination of semiotic resources and is presented at different levels: verbal language, image, sound and picture (video). In transmedia storytelling, journalists use a new set of innovative tools: parallax scrolling, a computer graphic effect, creating an immersive experience, maps and graphics; rollover effects; a slideshow of pictures, and others. This multimedia approach creates a so-called immersive effect, a feeling of taking part in the events.

As a new format of digital journalism, combining traditions and new trends, transmedia storytelling can be actively used at different media platforms for coverage of current events that take place in modern communication environment.

In order to create transmedia storytelling project, journalists need to master new competences and techniques.

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Keywords: Transmedia storytelling; journalism; digitalization; media convergence; multimedia; universal journalist.



1. Introduction

In his classical work ‘Mass Communication Theory’, Dennis McQuail wrote ‘The media are now probably the key institution of the public sphere, and its ‘quality’ will depend on the quality of the media’ (McQuail, 2010, p. 569).

It is impossible to imagine contemporary media without innovations. The words and phrases ‘convergence’, ‘digitalization’, ‘transmedia storytelling’, ‘innovations’ became the buzzwords in journalism of the 21st century. All they emerged due to using ICT in mass communication.

According to the authors of the book ‘The World News Prism: Digital, Social and Interactive’, new communication technologies ‘provide a nervous system of our world today’ (Hachten, Scotton, 2015, p. 9). They are new communication technologies that made modern journalism change rapidly. Nowadays the traditional kinds of mass media are transforming in a convergent one, ‘traditional journalism of print on paper is rapidly giving way to journalism by digital technology (Hachten, Scotton, 2015, p.2), ‘the Internet environment merges modes and media in a single platform’ (Kalogeras, 2014, p. 80).

2. Problem Statement

This paper deals with the issue of emergence of new media formats in modern communication space and the concept of transmedia storytelling from the perspective of journalism.

3. Research Questions

How can transmedia storytelling be defined? How can transmedia storytelling be applied in journalism? What are the methods of transmedia storytelling research?

4. Purpose of the Study

The aim of the study is to describe and analyse the concept of transmedia storytelling as a new format of digital journalism.

5. Research Methods

The main research methods used were general scientific methods, such as analysis, synthesis, generalization. Besides, a method of the comparative analysis, a system method, a method of a categorization were applied.

The descriptive method and methods of categorization and classification were used for presenting and describing definitions concerning the main theoretical terms and concepts in the framework of the topic of transmedia storytelling.

The paper is based on the cross-disciplinary approach synthesizing knowledge of journalism, theory of communications, psychology, social philosophy, which allowed achieving the set goal.

6. Findings

The primary outcome of the survey is a description of the state of investigation of the term ‘transmedia storytelling’ in modern scientific literature. The findings revealed that there are different definitions of this term and there is no consensus among scholars what it means. Transmedia storytelling is becoming one of the new and the most popular kinds of media formats.

6.1. Media convergence

For the last decade media convergence became the main topic in practice of modern journalism and its researches.

Under the conditions of media convergence and development of Internet mass media, the new kinds of media genres or formats are emerging. One of them is transmedia storytelling.

By convergence, Henry Jenkins means ‘the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behavior of media audiences who would go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they wanted. Convergence is a word that manages to describe technological, industrial, cultural, and social changes, depending on who’s speaking and what they think they are talking about’ (Jenkins, 2006, p. 2-3).

Media convergence is more than simply a technological shift. Convergence alters the relationship between existing technologies, industries, markets, genres, and audiences (Jenkins, 2006, p. 15).

‘The first of many convergent ideas in journalism is the idea of reporting one story to be produced in a redundant form across many platforms’ (Moloney, 2011, p. 7).

Rich Gordon identified five kinds of convergence:

- 1) Ownership convergence,
- 2) Tactical convergence,
- 3) Structural convergence,
- 4) Information-gathering convergence,
- 5) Storytelling or presentation convergence (Gordon, 2003, pp. 65 – 70).

6.2. Digital journalism

According to the editor of the book ‘Digital journalism: Emerging Media and the Changing Horizons of Journalism’ Kevin Kawamoto, ‘digital journalism’ is a difficult concept to define precisely because it can mean different things to different people (Kawamoto, 2003, p.3). The book proposes one definition of digital journalism: ‘the use of digital technologies to research, produce and deliver (or make accessible) news and information to an increasingly computer-literate audience’ (Kawamoto, 2003, p. 4).

‘Digital Journalism was not born out of nowhere. It grew from technical possibilities, and within a short time span, it has decidedly altered the face of journalism, notably in North America, Europe and Australia (Witschge, 2016, p.9).

With development of new technologies, new digital presentation platforms emerged. The new forms of storytelling appeared. One of them is transmedia storytelling. Nowadays there are a lot of

textbooks and special literature on applying TS (Pratten, 2015; Phillips, 2012; Denning, 2011; Bernardo, 2011, 2014; Tom et al., 2013; Miller, 2014 and others).

Today's Internet technology allows combining semiotic resources (language, image, word, and sound) to produce textual meanings. 'A mode is perceived by one of the three human perception channels: *visual*, *additive*, and *touch*. When more than two modalities are involved, the term *multimodality* is used to convey communication content. Therefore, meaning can be derived from the different modes and media combined' (Kalogeras, 2014, p.77).

6.3. What is transmedia storytelling?

'Transmedia storytelling' is an umbrella term. Speaking about TS, scholars include many other concepts: 'cross media', 'multimodality', 'multiplatform', 'media convergence', 'digital media', 'interactive story'.

Paying attention to 'semantic chaos' surrounding the concept 'transmedia storytelling, C. Scolari argues that it is 'a very complex and polysemic term that should be well defined if it is employed in theoretical discourses (Scolari, 2009, p. 600).

'A traditional definition of transmedia storytelling would be: telling a story across multiple platforms, (Pratten, 2015, p. 2). But there is no consensus in contemporary scientific literature what TS is. Even in one culture under TS projects, different things are understood. According to A. Phillips, 'There is a divide between what some wags call West Coast versus East Coast transmedia. West-coast style transmedia, more commonly called Hollywood or franchise transmedia, consist of multiple big pieces of media: feature films, videogames, that kind of thing, e.g., *Star wars*, *Avatar*, *Tron* and *Transformers*. East Coast transmedia tend to be more interactive and much more web-centric (Phillips, 2012, p 15).

The term *transmedia* was first used by cultural theorist and University of South Carolina professor Dr. Marsha Kinder in 1991 as 'transmedia intertextuality' describing works where characters appeared across multiple media...' (Phillips, 2012, p. 14).

The term '*transmedia storytelling*' was first introduced in 2003 by Henry Jenkins in his article published by *Technology Review* (Jenkins, 2003). Then, three years later he defined this concept in his book 'Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide (2006). 'A transmedia story unfolds across multiple media platforms, with each new text making a distinctive and valuable contribution to the whole (Jenkins, 2006, p. 95). The scholar considers transmedia storytelling as 'a new aesthetic that has emerged in response to media convergence', 'the art of world making' (Jenkins, 2006, pp. 20-21).

Carlos Scolari defines TS as 'a particular narrative structure that expands through both different languages (verbal, iconic, etc.) and media (cinema, comics, television, video games, etc.) (Scolari, (2009), p. 587). Robert Pratten calls transmedia storytelling 'a design philosophy' (Pratten, 2015, p. 2). Daniel Lynch looks at the transmedia storytelling through a philosophical lens (Lynch, 2016, p. 161).

Summing up different definitions of TS, one can conclude that a transmedia story is a multiplatform story, which is told to consumers in multiple media forms across different media channels.

Kevin Moloney puts the question how transmedia storytelling methods and techniques can be used in journalism context (Moloney, 2011).

The first and most famous transmedia storytelling in journalism is ‘Snow Fall’, the 6-part multimedia series about a deadly avalanche that took place in the mountains. The creators of the multimedia piece used text, images, graphics, a combination of a high-quality video, photography, and sound that were presented in a web page. The new set of innovative tools included a video; parallax scrolling, a computer graphic effect, creating an immersive experience; maps and graphics; rollover effects; a slideshow of pictures; and others. This multimedia approach created a so called immersive effect, a feeling of having been at the place of the event.

In Russia, journalists working in large information agencies and media holdings - ‘RIA Novosti’, ‘Kommersant’, ‘Arguments and facts’, ‘Komsomolskaya Pravda’ - began to create special analytical projects and documentary movies (web documentary) in the format of transmedia storytelling. Their works were devoted to current political, social and cultural events of great importance.

‘The new multimedia formats of journalistic media texts in fact are the texts of news, information and analytical, and literary, or narrative genres that are created with the use of information and communication technologies’ (Kolosova, 2016, p.40).

Thus, development of such media format as transmedia storytelling demands from the modern journalist not only to master the word, but also to master new digital technologies, allowing one to create texts at different levels - verbal, visual, and aural, introducing thereby a new aesthetics in the construction of media realities.

The most important components of TS are interactivity, digitality, hypertextuality, non-linearity, multimedia, convergence (Kawamoto, 2003, p. 4).

6.4. Transmedia research and analysis

Transmedia projects are the new formats of media texts for research and analysis of approaches of different disciplines that can be used and are usually used: linguistics, semiotics, sociology, cultural studies, ethnography, marketing, and others.

C. Scolari proposed to apply a semiotic approach to research TS, considering multimodality of TS as combinations of writing, speaking, visualization, sounds, music, etc. (Scolari, 2009, p. 587).

On the basis of ‘Seven Principles of Transmedia Storytelling’ by H. Jenkins (Jenkins, 2009) Kevin T. Moloney provides the framework for discussing transmedia storytelling as a journalism tool (Moloney, 2011).

The analytical model of TS analysis was proposed by R. Gambarato in 2013 and then developed in 2016 (Gambarato, 2016, pp. 1450-1452). The model includes the following dimensions: premise and purpose; narrative; world building; characters; extensions; media platforms and genres; audience and market; engagement; structure; and aesthetics.

6.5. Universal or backpack journalist

In order to create TS in the field of mass communication and mass media, a journalist needs to master new competences and techniques. ‘Technological convergence continues to move forward. ...For information gathering and storytelling convergence to become commonplace, many new kinds of jobs must be created, and many existing jobs will require new skills (Gordon, 2003, pp.71-72).

‘Universal or backpack journalist’ is a new term which emerged at the beginning of the 21st century for describing a new kind of journalism. As R. Gordon argues, a backpack journalist ‘can do everything necessary to create an interactive multimedia news story’ (Gordon, 2003, p. 71).

7. Conclusion

The digitalization process in media marked the beginning of a new era of mass media development. The new communication and information technologies bring new possibilities for developing digital genres of media in different countries. The emergence of new media genres and formats is determined by development of digital technologies.

There is not yet consensus on what exactly transmedia storytelling means. The term ‘transmedia storytelling’ has many definitions, ranging from telling a story across multiple platforms, taking the audience on an emotional journey, as far as to a design philosophy and a way of creative thinking.

Summing up different definitions of transmedia storytelling, the authors tried to identify this term as follows: a transmedia story is a multiplatform story, which is told to consumers in multiple media forms across different media channels.

On the one hand, transmedia storytelling is a long-term project to describe and investigate important social, political, cultural events in the life of modern society. On the other hand, transmedia storytelling can be applied in the coverage of current events in news genres of journalism.

In the field of journalism transmedia storytelling, unfolding across multiple media platforms and presenting media text at different levels, can be used in different genres: a documentary film, a long-term investigative project, coverage of current news.

The most important components of transmedia storytelling are interactivity, digitally, hypertextuality, non-linearity, multimedia, convergence.

To analyze transmedia storytelling projects in journalism, it is possible to use linguistic, semiotic, sociological, psychological and other approaches.

The creation of transmedia storytelling projects in media landscape demands new skills and competences. A journalist who masters all necessary techniques to create a transmedia story can be called a universal or backpack journalist.

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