

Chapter 11

Transmedia Storytelling Edutainment and the Contemporary Textbook in Higher E-Education

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ABSTRACT

In the era of media convergence, transmedia (cross-media/cross-platform/multi-platform) narratives are catering to users who are willing to immerse themselves in their favorite entertainment content. The inherent interactivity of the Internet and the emotional engagement of story can lead to innovative pedagogies in media rich environments. In the digital age, the textbook is being replaced by new forms of learning technologies such as a story-based screentext. This paper focuses on web-based Transmedia Storytelling Edutainment as a pedagogical practice in higher education.

INTRODUCTION

The importance of narratives in education is evident by the new media rich environments that are supported by technology, the online global educational models, which embrace worldwide presence, and the storytelling production process that has been democratized. Jenkins theory of convergence culture (2006) provides a window to examine how transmedia storytelling can emerge within education as a product and as a practice in technology-supported environments. Jenkins (2006) described convergences in his book *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, ‘by convergence, I mean the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behavior of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want’ (p. 2). Using Jenkins’ theory of convergence culture as a toolkit, this paper examines how entertainment can emerge within education and how it can facilitate student-centered, technology-supported approaches to learning in the age of media convergence.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-1709-2.ch011

Media-Education Convergence and Transmedia Storytelling

The literature on globalization and convergence has several threads. According to Jenkins (2001), media convergence can be categorized as follows: Technological convergence -- the digitization of all media content which allows them to flow across platforms; Economic convergence -- the horizontal integration of the entertainment industry; Social convergence -- consumers are multitasking and navigating through the new media rich environments; Cultural convergence -- the rise of a new participatory culture by giving the average person the tools needed to recreate and recirculate content; Global convergence -- the crossbreed of culture that results from a plethora of media content; and finally, my emphasis, Educational and Informational convergence -- the distance learning paradigm, which is influencing and changing the traditional methods of teaching and learning.

As a result of media convergence, new pedagogies and theories of education have arisen. Open, distance and blended learning are on the rise, which are supported by media tools, media rich environments and technology. Moreover, complimentary to the change is the practice of transmedia storytelling which can be considered a student-centered pedagogical approach to education. Today, a film moves across media and it can have different parts such as a book, game and mobile component. This creative practice, where a story is at the center of media, is known as transmedia storytelling. The practice of transmedia storytelling is further examined here for its employment in education. The concept of Transmedia Storytelling Edutainment with the acronym TmSE is proposed and defined as using stories from popular entertainment to create educational components around a discipline. I argue that these self contained parts can be utilized as teaching aids, in conjunction with traditional learning tools, when the context of the material is complementary to the subject matter. The stories may be transmedia franchises, however, they are not limited to this classification although the more popular stories that are distributed on multimedia platforms may have a better hook to capture learners' attention. In educational terms, the 'hook' can be demonstrated in Gagnè's Nine Events of Instruction (1985) which lists 'gain attention' as the first event (Clark, 30 June 2010).

TmSE is contextualized as the producers of commercial product such as films and the student-produced narratives in the form of web-based stories, also referred to as digital stories and mashups. Mashup videos are web-based stories that use pre-existing sources to create new content by recombining and modify existing digital works, which are extremely prominent on the Internet today. Therefore, TmSE encompasses both media tools and narrative in online education, but it is not limited to online, and may consist of ancillary derivatives that do not include moving image, such as scenario based activities.

It is also important to highlight the dominance of the screen in e-education. Kress pointed out the changes in the contemporary communicational landscape:

It is no longer possible to think about literacy in isolation from the vast array of social, technological and economic factors. Two distinct yet related factors deserve to be particularly highlighted. These are, on one hand, the broad move from the now centuries-long dominance of writing to the dominance of the image and, on the other hand, the move from the dominance of the medium of the book to the dominance of the medium of the screen. (Kress, 2003, p. 1)

Along those lines, the dominance of the screen was considered when developing the contemporary e-textbook. A screenplay, termed a screentext for e-learning purposes, was examined and the findings reported. A screentext incorporate less text, making screen reading easier, and stories have image making

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