The Innerworkings of Digital Storytelling

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ABSTRACT

Traditionally, storytelling was used for entertainment and the transfer of know-how. The advent of digital media gave rise to new possibilities for telling stories. When the context is, for example, to relay information about how to protect a person from COVID-19, it is referred to as serious storytelling. The main objective of this research was to establish what skills and attributes would be required for someone to autonomously "tell" a serious digital story in a resource constrained environment. A systematic literature review of peer reviewed articles resulted in a knowledge bank of articles. Atlas Ti was used to qualitatively analyse these articles. Even though a resource constrained environment may be a limiting factor for telling a digital story, this research has found that emotional support, digital inclusion, as well as assisting individuals with their devices, can pave the way to autonomous digital storytelling.

KEYWORDS

affordances, competences, digital affinity, digital inclusion, digital landscape, digital storytelling, ethics

1. INTRODUCTION

Storytelling was used through all ages to share traditional knowledge and practice as well as cultural information. As Yilmaz & Ciğerci explained: "*Telling stories is one of the basic qualities of human understanding*" (Yilmaz & Ciğerci, 2019, p. 1). Initially stories were retold orally, but later—when other media became available—it was conveyed as a narrative using text and sometimes visual media such as drawings or photos. The main difference between digital storytelling and paper-based storytelling is that the latter is physical and static whereas digital storytelling is virtual and thus transient. Even though digital videos were used prior to 1993, it was mostly used by digital artists and within the domain of filmmaking, using expensive equipment. The term "*Digital storytelling*" was used to explain to people how to—without computer or filmmaking knowledge—create and digitally record their own short story. With the advances made in technology—and improved access

to smart mobile devices—storytelling has become more accessible to people from all walks of life. Especially those with the know-how and resources to tell these stories.

Currently storytelling is used for entertainment, advertising, as well as in therapy and other serious matters. According to Lambert "*We look forward to a time when cognitive scientists and therapeutic researchers look more closely at the tools of multimedia as an extension of our understanding of art and narrative therapies*" (Lambert, 2013, p. 106).

COVID-19 catapulted the global population into digital mode–and serious digital storytelling— and thus the digital divide and associated disparity of those people without access, resources or the know-how to use technologies, have become more pronounced. The pandemic has expedited the concept of the "*fourth industrial revolution*" which demands skills, access and resources. These will increasingly become a requirement rather than a luxury (Schwab, 2017).

1.1 Background and context

The requirements to tell a digital story means that the following needs to be considered: motivation, ability as well as resources. To put it in a nutshell: to be able to tell a digital story ethically and autonomously, the storyteller needs certain digital skills (competences), general skills (such as literacy), digital resources as well as the motivation (digital affinity) to tell the story.

It might be asked what digital skills would be required to tell a digital story? It is the ability to use visual content—such as images and video—and audio content—such as making a recording or using existing audio clips—and the ability to assemble and edit these to create a story. However, what is also required are resources such as a mobile phone, a computer and access to editing, as well as visual and audio software. And obviously the motivation to create such a story either for social media, advertising or for serious matters.

Mobile technology is being used ubiquitously by all and a digital identity and digital memory on social platforms, is often an important component of an individual's life "*The affordances shared by texting, social media and the interactive storytelling medium have become infrastructural to identity in many youth cultures*" (Proctor & Blikstein, 2019, p. 298).

1.2 Terms and concepts explained

To inform the discussion, definitions of all the key terms used in this paper will be provided in this section with reference to the literature. The relationship of these terms are depicted in Figure 1.

1.2.1 Digital affinity

It can be considered a person's interest and motivation to use digital resources. High digital literacy levels do not infer an awareness and interest in digital device utilization (Park, Kim, & Park, 2021).

1.2.2 Digital storytelling

The "*story circle*" was coined by Lambert (2013) and entails telling a fragment of a personal experience that will become the foundation of a digital story. The facilitator creates an inclusive environment, to allow all to share their stories and ideas. This enabling environment will allow the creation of a story and the "*story circle*" ends with the viewing and discussion of the story.

Available resources will inform what methodology should be employed to tell a story. Digital curatorship is identifying and selecting digital artefacts to complement the story.

How does serious digital storytelling differ from digital storytelling? According to Artur Lugmayr *et al.* serious storytelling is defined as "*storytelling with a purpose beyond entertainment*" (Lugmayr, Sutenin, Suhonen, Sedano, Hlavacs, & Montero, 2017).

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