

CMGT 570 Research Paper

The Future of Motion Picture Marketing? A Critical Assessment of the
Economic Implications of Transmedia Storytelling

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Introduction

Throughout its history, the motion picture industry has been facing growing levels of competition not only within its industry but also from other media channels. As a result, radio, a variety of sound recording technologies, television in its multiple forms, visual recording technologies, and new interactive media such as the internet and smart phones are vying for an ultimately limited amount of audience attention and spending nowadays, and have to constantly consider new ways in which they can set their products and content apart from others'. In the film industry, one of these product differentiation strategies is the emergence of 'transmedia storytelling', where a film's narrative is expanded across multiple media platforms. Merely a marketing device at first, transmedia storytelling is quickly manifesting itself as a business strategy for motion picture production and distribution, and industry experts seem extremely positive that it will be crucial in the future development of Hollywood (AnimationXpress, 2010).

In light of these predictions and using Disney's upcoming release *TRON: Legacy* (December 17th 2010) as an example, this paper is going to critically assess the economic implications of this trend towards transmedia storytelling in order to make tentative projections regarding its true viability in the future. Consequently, the first part of the paper will provide some necessary theoretical foundations and background for the evolution of transmedia storytelling, which will then be followed by an analysis of transmedia storytelling as a business practice, and the three different forms it can take as such. Lastly, I am going to put the outcomes of my analysis to use in making tentative predictions of transmedia storytelling's development in the future.

I. Transmedia Storytelling: Industrial Context and Historic Background

When examining the implications of transmedia storytelling, one must take into account the circumstances under which it has come into being, as well as current trends in the film industry regarding audience numbers and competition. An easy way to start off is to consider the immense effects that the process of digitization has had on the media in general. Not only has it made the production of media content a lot easier and cheaper, but it has also fuelled the development and growth of new media technologies such as the Internet, smart phones, and portable PCs. As a result, the distribution of media content has become a lot easier, too, and media producers are now able to reach vast audiences through a small amount of new media, and so the content choice audiences are presented with is increasing exponentially (Keen, 2007, pp. 2-3).

However, this choice of media content is no longer just a product of media professionals and trained experts. As the cost of media production itself decreased, amateurs' access to media production increased rapidly, resulting in surging levels of 'participatory culture', i.e. a "[c]ulture in which fans and other consumers are invited to actively participate in the creation and circulation of new content" (Jenkins, 2008, p. 331). Particularly due to the internet, the exhibition of such User-Generated-Content (UGC) i.e. media content produced by amateurs/non-professionals is no longer limited to the amateur's immediate surrounding; platforms like YouTube and MySpace allow amateurs to reach (in theory) the same audience as traditional mass media such as television, cinema, and radio (Keen, 2007, pp. 2-3). However, the most important result from the rapid spread of participatory culture is its effects on media audiences themselves. Rather than just seeing themselves as consumers, they are confronted with and eagerly embrace the opportunity to become media

producers, too, and to determine what type of media content is being produced (Benkler, 2009, pp. 327-329; Jenkins, 2008, pp. 110-113). As I will demonstrate later, this change in audiences' perception of the media production process is very important when it comes to the different forms transmedia storytelling can take.

Another development that has also impacted on audiences' media consumption in a profound manner is the evolution of what Henry Jenkins has called 'Convergence Culture' (Jenkins, 2008, p. 322). In his words, Convergence Culture can be described as

“... technological, industrial, cultural, and social changes in the ways media circulates within our culture. Some common ideas referenced by the term include the *flow of content* across multiple media platforms, the *cooperation* between multiple media industries, the *search for new structures* of media financing that fall at the interstices between old and new media, and the *migratory behaviour of media audiences* who would go almost anywhere in search of the kind of entertainment experiences they want.” (Jenkins, 2008, p. 322; italics added)

Thus, in the Convergence Age, media content is no longer restricted to only one medium but can be accessed and consumed across a variety of platforms. In the case of the motion picture industry, for example, this means that movies can still be consumed in theatres, but also on TV at home, on laptops/PCs, on mobile phones, and on portable MP3-players. As a result, there is a great rift between the way in which media used to be consumed by audiences of traditional mass media – in a linear, one-way fashion – and how it is being consumed today and in the future – in

a very interactive manner where media content is in constant flux and where audiences purposely go out and look for the media content they desire.

Lastly, there are also some industrial factors and conditions that should be considered when analysing the economic implications of transmedia storytelling on the motion picture industry. Ever since the advent of television in the 1950s (or rather, when it reached a growing number of households after its launch in the 1940s), cinema audiences have been in steady decline (Campbell, Martin, & Fabos, 2011, pp. 235-237; Motion Picture Association of America, 2010, p. 10). While this prove financially disastrous at first, the syndication of Hollywood movies to television stations soon offered movie studios another revenue source, and when home video systems such as VHS and DVDs were introduced, VHS/DVD movie sales quickly turned into a crucial source of revenue within the motion picture industry, often reaping larger profits than a film's original box office exhibition (Campbell, Martin, & Fabos, 2011, pp. 237-239). As the internet and digitization have given rise to movie piracy and the possibility of free streaming online, however, revenue from DVD sales has dropped significantly in the last years, which has become a major concern for movie studios in their predictions of future industrial developments (De Vany & Walls, 2007, p. 391).

In addition, ever since the 1970s, a large proportion of movie studios' revenues were based around income from blockbusters (Campbell, Martin, & Fabos, 2011, pp. 237-238). Blockbusters are big budget productions that are supposed to provide great spectacle for audiences, and that can in the best case be turned into franchises with multiple sequels and a variety of merchandise tie-ins, including action-figures, novels of the film, theme park rides, or promotion deals with fast-food chains (Campbell,

Martin, & Fabos, 2011, p. 238). As such, blockbusters can almost be considered a pre-stage to the dimensions and importance of transmedia storytelling, as I will explain in greater detail later.

Finally, there has been a strong trend amongst movie studios to provide their audiences with 'immersive' experiences, both in and outside theatres (Amobi, 2010, pp. 5-6; AnimationXpress, 2010). In order to provide consumers with a product and an experience they cannot get anywhere else, studio bosses have turned to 3D- and IMAX-technology that can provide extra spectacle on top of the theatre visit and the film's story itself (Amobi, 2010, p. 6). So far, this strategy has proven very successful; in 2009 alone, 3D-films generated more than \$1 billion in box-office revenues, while until late-November 2010, three out of the six top-grossing films were shot in 3D and already generated that same amount solely amongst themselves (MPAA, 2010, p. 5; Box Office Mojo, 2010). In addition, many studios, such as Disney and Warner Bros., have signed contracts with the IMAX Corporation in April 2010 and will distribute a certain amount of the future movies through IMAX theatres, too, so as to intensify the cinema-experience for viewers even more (Amobi, 2010, p. 6; AnimationXpress, 2010).

Outside theatres, the shift towards audience immersion can also be observed in movie marketing. When the motion picture industry first began to feel the pressures of growing media content choice and its resulting competition for viewers, they chose to employ traditional marketing tools (such as trailers, posters, merchandise, etc.) in a very aggressive manner, i.e. in high frequencies with a very direct audience address, in hopes that this very disruptive form of advertising would draw audiences' attention to their products (Kirsner, 2007, p. 13). More recently, however, this

aggressive style has lessened, and has been replaced by 'immersive' marketing (AnimationXpress, 2010; Sella, 2010). Rather than constantly confronting audiences with a movie directly and noisily, immersive marketing aims to 'creep up' on audiences, convincing through high visibility and high frequency also, but on a lot more subtle level (AnimationXpress, 2010; Sella, 2010; Friedman, 2010). This can include a strong presence in social media to create a favourable word-of-mouth, for example, or through guerrilla-marketing strategies that leave the audience confused and set on finding out more (Sella, 2010; Friedman, 2010). The immersive marketing message is thus no longer an outright demand along the lines of 'LOOK. AT. THIS.', but more of a continued, suggestive string of recommendations. For example, if one follows *TRON: Legacy* (Kosinski, 2010) on Facebook, very rarely does one encounter a "Watch it now!" message; instead, *TRON: Legacy's* page is full of announcements regarding "long-anticipated" released stills, trailers, video extras, the soundtrack, or interviews (TRON, 2010). Thus, rather than loudly pronouncing *TRON: Legacy* to be a film that audiences should go see, it establishes it subtly as an important product that many others care about, suggesting one oneself should care, too. Immersive marketing no longer asks consumers to make a piece of media content part of their world; it acts as if the content were already a fixed part of it.

Having looked at these current and historic trends within the motion picture industry, it is now possible to situate transmedia storytelling within these by laying out its theoretical foundations before analysing its economic implications.

II. Transmedia Storytelling: Theoretical Foundations

According to Henry Jenkins, transmedia storytelling can be defined as

“[s]tories that unfold across multiple media platforms, with each medium making *distinctive contributions* to our understanding of the world, a more integrated approach to franchise development than models based on urtexts and ancillary products” (Jenkins, 2008, p. 334; italics added).

Thus, it is important to note that transmedia storytelling does not just displace a narrative from one medium to the other, e.g. a novel of a film, but that it adds new pieces of information to the story, thereby expanding it across multiple platforms. In the Age of Convergence, transmedia storytelling has been facilitated significantly by the technological possibilities to access a multitude of media formats through only one device; for example the possibility of watching television shows and movies on mobile phones, which are also able to play music, access the internet, and of course, to make calls. In addition, media consolidation has led to a situation where a few national and international corporations such as the News Corporation, Viacom, or Time Warner control a multitude of media outlets; as a result, it has become a lot easier to tell a story in a transmedia manner, and to have a variety of media channels cooperate for this purpose as their efforts can be directed centrally.

Moreover, as mentioned in the discussion of Convergence Culture earlier, audiences have changed, too, and now “would go almost anywhere in search of the kind of entertainment experiences they want” (Jenkins, 2008, p. 322). Thus, there is at least a basic willingness amongst audiences to actively reach out for a story or media experience via any channel that they can access it through. So far, transmedia storytelling has only been used for marketing purposes, but within the motion picture industry, there is a strong belief that this will change in the future, and that movies

will become the centre (or at least part) of large transmedia 'content worlds'/ narrative universes (Caranicas, 2009).

One such attempt can already be seen in the case of Disney's *TRON: Legacy* (*T:L*) (Kosinski, 2010; movie budget: \$17 million) (Barnes, 2010). Overtly planned as a franchise, the film will be the sequel to Disney's 1982 release of *TRON* (Lisberger, 1982) and thus continue the storyline established in the first film. It is scheduled to be released on December 17th 2010 and will be available in 2D-, 3D-, and IMAX-formats (Disney, 2010a). So far, *T:L* has been marketed both by traditional means, i.e. trailers, billboards, previews, sneak peeks, TV specials, and by the use of transmedia storytelling. For example, online and offline *T:L*'s narrative is expanded from the movie screen to a variety of media: The alternative reality game (ARG) *Flynn Lives* (Flynn Lives Organization, 2010); an online game on the *T:L* website in which a user can create his/her own *TRON* avatar and explore the *TRON* universe (Disney, 2010a); two video game console games, *TRON: Evolution* and *TRON: Evolution – Battle Grids* (Disney, 2010b); a TV show entitled *TRON: Uprising*, to be released in 2010 (Disney, 2010b); a six-piece comic book series called *TRON: The Ghost in the Machine* (1982-2003) (Disney, 2010b); and lastly, the entire *TRON* website, which includes amongst the online game an entire *TRON* encyclopaedia (Disney, 2010a). And all of this does not even include the video games and arcade games released along with the original *TRON* (Lisberger, 2010) movie.

Looking at this variety of media platforms across which the story of *TRON* has been told so far it becomes clear that the boundaries between what constitutes marketing and what constitutes the *TRON* universe get blurred easily. In the next section I will attempt to break transmedia storytelling down into three forms which from my

personal observations seem to occur most frequently at this point in time, and I am going to highlight the economic implications stemming from each of those forms. As a great contemporary example of the developments in the transmedia field, *T:L* (Kosinski, 2010) will inform my analysis throughout, and will serve as an illustration for the different forms.

III. Three main forms of Transmedia Storytelling

a) Transmedia Storytelling as a Mere Marketing Tool

The simplest form of transmedia storytelling is its use as a marketing tool. In these cases, the story of a movie (and its sequels) may be picked up by other media channels, but solely for advertising purposes. This includes, for example, official websites for movies or films (which contain movie trailers, cast lists and biographies, minor interactive games, and behind-the-scenes material), novels to a film, and also merchandise (e.g. figurines and toys, branded clothing, cups, and bed linen, amongst other things) (Campbell, Martin, & Fabos, 2011, p. 238).

Disney is one studio that has always made very heavy use of this type of transmedia marketing, and has become known for its variegated merchandise tie-ins and transmedia branding strategies (Campbell, Martin, & Fabos, 2011, p. 238). *TRON: Legacy* is no different in this respect. Although its overall transmedia storytelling has a greater depth than simple transmedia marketing, it too offers the typical Disney merchandise tie-ins: *T:L* branded t-shirts, mugs, action figures, PC accessories, and game controllers, to name a few (Disney, 2010b). In addition, audiences can also purchase various books accompanying the release of *T:L* and its story (Disney,

2010b), and access additional information on the 'TRONiverse' via the games' website, as mentioned earlier (Disney, 2010a).

The difference between transmedia storytelling as a marketing tool and its other, deeper forms is that in the case of transmedia as pure marketing, the original story is not built upon or expanded through its various tie-ins; instead, it is only reiterated or recalled. As a result, it does manage to engage audiences with the storyline, but does not require much intellectual effort or time as no new information is added to the overall narrative. At the same, transmedia marketing can be extremely profitable. Most branded products it distributes amongst audiences will be paid for by those, and even if websites and their gimmicks are usually free of charge, the cost of establishing and maintaining these can easily be recovered from consumer spending on the branded merchandise and the film itself (Campbell, Martin, & Fabos, 2011, pp. 237-239).

Moreover, most merchandise products are not actually produced by the movie studio itself; instead, it gives out licenses for the use of a film's name and imagery to other companies in return for a share of the merchandise's sales returns (Campbell, Martin, & Fabos, 2011, pp. 237-239). Thus, if a movie does not create enough excitement amongst audiences for them to buy related merchandise, movie studios do not actually suffer great losses from these non-sellers as the initial investment and financial risk lies with the license-takers (Campbell, Martin, & Fabos, 2011, pp. 237-239). In this respect, transmedia marketing can look like a certain win-win situation for movie studios; if these branded transmedia tie-ins sell, the movie studios as license-suppliers receive a share of the profits, and if the tie-ins stay shelved, they are not incurring any losses.

In order to be in the position to offer licenses to others in the first place, however, studios are incurring a very great financial risk: that of producing a blockbuster. As mentioned earlier, blockbusters are meant to be spectacle-providers; their storylines, effects, and cast must excite audiences and draw them into theatres *en masse* (Campbell, Martin, & Fabos, 2011, pp. 238). This alone requires very high production values and budgets, meaning that the initial investment and thus the financial risk of blockbusters are extremely high (Campbell, Martin, & Fabos, 2011, pp. 238). Despite decades of market research, movie producers have been unable to identify a formula guaranteeing the success of a movie; although casts, storylines, and effects can be contributors, there is no rule that can ensure a film will be a success (Campbell, Martin, & Fabos, 2011, p. 218). As a result, a blockbuster is very carefully planned, executed, and budgeted, but nevertheless, studios are facing a great economic risk in its production (Campbell, Martin, & Fabos, 2011, pp. 238). In fact, the risk can be so great that a failure can drive a studio out of business, as it happened in the case of *Heaven's Gate* (1980), which turned out to be United Artist's financial ruin when its gross revenue of \$ 3 million did not even come close to its production budget of \$44 million (CNBC, 2010).

Thus, transmedia marketing is a great tool if a film/blockbuster is successful. Not only does it raise awareness for the film and enhances its branding and visibility, but it also creates additional revenue without additional investments from studios. At the same time however, transmedia storytelling as a marketing tool also means that the initial investment in form of a blockbuster-budget and the profound financial risks stemming from it lie solely with the producing film studio, a situation that can be highly critical in the case of a box office failure.

b) Transmedia Storytelling as a Tool to Create a Controlled Content World

A form of transmedia storytelling that goes beyond mere marketing is its employment to create a controlled content world. In this case, a narrative is purposely told through different media channels, each of which serves as entry points into a collective 'story universe' (Jenkins, 2008, p. 253). Moreover, other than in the case of transmedia storytelling as a marketing tool, each of these media channels also builds on to the overarching narrative, offering distinct story content that the other channels do not (Jenkins, 2008, p. 322). Unlike 'Participatory' Content Worlds described in the next section, 'Controlled' Content Worlds are defined by their strict adherence to a centrally dictated narrative, usually from a media conglomerate. In addition, depending on the nature of the content world, the individual media products offered by each media channel may or may not be conclusive in themselves, i.e. understandable to a consumer who is unfamiliar with the over-arching narrative and/or story content from one of the other media channels (Jenkins, 2008, p. 322).

In the case of *TRON: Legacy*, for example, those familiar with the world of *TRON* will be offered new content building on the story of *TRON* narrated in the first film, video games, and comic so far (Disney, 2010a). At the same time, however, the movie will still be conclusive in itself, so as to be understandable and appealing to the largest audience possible, and not just to fans of *TRON* (Disney, 2010a). Hence, when it comes to transmedia storytelling for the creation of a content world, this conclusiveness can be a tight-rope walk; in general, familiarizing oneself with a certain story universe takes time and intellectual investment, something that not all audience members are willing to provide (Jenkins, 2008, p. 323). In order to reap

maximum profits from any single media product within a content world, however, it must be accessible for the largest audience possible and thus has to be understandable even for those unfamiliar with the rest of a certain story world (Jenkins, 2008, p. 323; Anderson, 2009). Therefore, although a transmedia content world is ultimately the product of a collaborative effort between different media platforms, each medium itself must ensure that its content contribution remains conclusive in itself and to some extent independent from the overarching narrative in other media in order to appeal to the largest audience possible and to generate the largest possible revenue for itself.

Similarly, the question of independence versus inter-dependence also arises when it comes to the financial risk of a transmedia content world. Whereas the use of transmedia storytelling as a marketing tool leaves the initial investment into the storyline solely with the movie studio, the collaborative effort involved in the creation of a transmedia content world means that both the initial investment and the financial risk stemming from it are shared by the individual media channels involved (Barnes, 2010). As a result, a movie studio may lose some of its independence in determining the creative content of the transmedia story, but they are gaining greater financial security instead (Barnes, 2010). In addition, distributing the same content world through a variety of media channels also facilitates and reduces the cost of marketing, as each media outlet essentially markets the others (Barnes, 2010).

Another important factor in transmedia storytelling for the purpose of creating a content world are media conglomerates. As mentioned earlier, these corporations have facilitated the process of transmedia storytelling significantly due to the fact that they own a variety of media outlets, which they can coordinate for the sake of

expanding a narrative across multiple media platforms. As a result, conglomerates now face the possibility to create one centralized, over-arching narrative that is being distributed through the different media channels they own, whilst separately charging access to the story at each of these media channel–entry points. In short, as media conglomerates create a transmedia content world, they can garner maximum levels of revenue from a comparatively low initial investment.

At the same time, however, just like in the case of blockbusters, the success of a transmedia narrative is extremely hard to predict (Campbell, Martin, & Fabos, 2011, p. 218). Although the initial investment into a content world may be *comparatively* low due to the fact that conglomerates can pool resources a lot more easily than individual media channels, setting up and maintaining a transmedia universe is still a costly enterprise. In order to entice audiences to invest into a transmedia content world both financially and intellectually, they must be presented with a noteworthy narrative in the first place (Jenkins, 2008, p. 322). For this purpose, creativity and originality are key; however, these two are also one of the scarcest resources within the media industry (Jenkins, 2008, p. 322). If a transmedia universe fails to perform and appeal to audiences, losses can still be significant for media conglomerates, even if they will be distributed across a variety of their subsidiaries (Barnes, 2010).

In addition, many transmedia universes require a long set-up time; in the case of *TRON*, for example, the development and implementation of its various games, the movie, books, and the website took more than five years of planning (and resources), so if such a long-planned content world fails to appeal to audiences, its transmedia set up can backfire severely and cause a conglomerate to lose money

on many different media outlets at once, a fact that its consolidation is actually supposed to prevent.

Consequently, there are manifold economic implications of the use of transmedia storytelling in the creation of controlled content worlds. While this form of transmedia storytelling does reduce the financial risk of creating a blockbuster-like storyline and allows individual media outlets to market each other, it can also reduce each media channel's independence in determining the content of its media products related to a certain content world, and make an individual product such as a movie less appealing to audiences if it is inconclusive, i.e. impossible to understand for viewers unfamiliar with the wider transmedia narrative.

Transmedia storytelling with the aim of creating controlled content world also has implications for media conglomerates. On the one hand, it allows them to reap maximum revenues from a centralized investment into a transmedia narrative; on the other hand, however, transmedia content worlds can be a great financial risk if they fail to attract audiences, particularly given the fact that transmedia content worlds take a lot of time and resources to create.

c) Participatory Transmedia Storytelling

A third form of transmedia storytelling is its employment in the creation of 'participatory' content worlds. As mentioned earlier, digitization and the rise of convergence culture have resulted in a rapid growth of participatory culture where "fans and other consumers are invited to actively participate in the creation and circulation of new content" (Jenkins, 2008, p. 331). According to Henry Jenkins, media fans have always appropriated existing forms of media content and expanded

its narrative through their own fan fiction, fan videos, or fan art (Jenkins, 2008, p. 331). Famous examples of this are the *Star Trek* and *Star Wars* narratives, or, more recently, the one of *Harry Potter* (Jenkins, 2008, pp. 135, 196). In this sense then, fans have been practicing transmedia storytelling a lot longer than all other media outlets, and Jenkins himself hopes that the developments of the Convergence Age will allow fans and consumers to play a more active role in the creation and continuation of media content, particularly in the case of transmedia narratives (Jenkins, 2008, pp. 18-19).

From an industrial point of view, this might not be such a bad idea. Having consumers re-use and expand existing transmedia narratives through their own User-Generated-Content (UGC) on platforms such as YouTube, MySpace, Facebook, or FanFiction.net could ultimately provide a professionally created transmedia content world with free publicity and marketing, and could indicate to producers and script-writers of potential sequels what it is that audiences would like to see. In the case of *TRON: Legacy*, producers actually made use of this method by showing a short piece of a potential *TRON* sequel storyline at the Comic Convention in San Diego in 2008, and afterwards encouraged the Convention's visitors to contribute their own ideas for a storyline (Topel, 2010). Whether this strategy will be successful remains to be seen once the film opens in mid-December.

At the same time, however, inviting audience participation in the continuation of a transmedia story can also backfire easily. For one, many studios, such as Disney, have carefully and over a long-term established a very valuable brand reputation. Although an intangible asset, this brand reputation can be crucial, as it directs audience expectations and can act as a certificate of quality in a market of

experience-goods where audiences have to pay before they consume, not-knowing whether the product they receive will be worth its price (Nelson, 1970, pp. 311-312). Having a brand reputation defined by certain values and quality standards can thus act as an important enticement/advertisement for audiences and increase their willingness to pay for an experience good before consuming it.

Moreover, many times before, again in the cases of *Star Trek* and *Star Wars* for example, fans have appropriated narratives by giving them queer or subversive readings, often through the creation of fan content focusing on values and events that did not occur in the original narrative at all, such as (homo-)sexual encounters (Jenkins, 1992). So far, *TRON* has not inspired such fan participation, but it is possible that this is going to change significantly once the upcoming movie and its transmedia complements have been released. Should Disney continue to invite fan participation and the expansion of the *TRON* narrative with the help of fans without controlling the direction this fan participation is taking, it is possible that fans might appropriate the content of *TRON* in a way that may be very contradictory to Disney's family-friendly, clean-cut brand image; for example, fans could focus on the antagonists and turn them into protagonists (whilst keeping their 'evil' intentions), they could give *TRON* queer or otherwise subversive readings (e.g. a 'dark ages' mentality), or they could give the narrative an extremely violent twist, all of which would probably alienate a large proportion of the mainstream audience who will have certain expectations about content offered by Disney.

It must also be noted that fan participation cannot be controlled or directed. While it is possible to encourage fans to take a certain direction in their appropriation through competitions and challenges, they will ultimately appropriate content exactly as they

see fit (Jenkins, 1992). In most cases, fans will also become very possessive of a narrative, which often results in the creation of distinctive 'canon' and 'fanon'; 'canon' being the original source text – the narrative's ideologies, characters, and history – while 'fanon' is comprised of the source text also, but in addition features certain events or characters that do not occur within the original narrative but have been widely accepted as an addition to the canon by fans (Pugh, 2005). Thus, if the fans are unhappy with a direction that they are being pushed towards, they will simply create a fanon incorporating their ideas, regardless of what the original content producers might have intended.

Moreover, very often one will find rivaling fan communities with different visions of the direction a certain narrative should take; in this case, there might even be multiple fanons (Pugh, 2005). In such a case, appropriating one fanon over the other might actually have disastrous consequences, as it could profoundly alienate those fans whose ideas were not catered for.

Basing the evolution of a transmedia content world on the input from participatory audiences could also deter possible investors. Usually, financiers expect a long-term business plan of the enterprise they are investing in, and in the case of the film industry where there is no guarantee for success, they need to know at least which genre, cast, and script a film and its sequels will have so as to roughly gauge a film's potential for success. Starting off without a direction because one bases the development of a transmedia content world on the ideas of a participatory audience can thus be very risky, particularly if one takes into consideration the uncontrollable direction fan participation can take.

Lastly, it must be questioned whether inviting fan participation to build on an existing content world and to cater to their wishes might be economically viable in the long-run. As mentioned above, fan participation can be very specific in its readings of source texts, and might not be compatible with the interests of a mainstream audience (Pugh, 2005). Although fan audiences are usually a lot more willing to invest time, money, and effort into a transmedia universe, it is still mainstream media who offer the greatest possibilities for revenue. Whilst one could of course argue with Chris Anderson (2009) that in the Ages of Digitization and Convergence niche audiences such as fan communities can be served a lot more easily and more direct, it is unlikely that this is applicable in the case of the motion picture industry where film theatres have to be filled to remain profitable. Although new media technologies do allow films to be distributed directly to interested audiences in their homes, pure fan audiences are likely to be unable to make up for the high levels of investment and resources required to establish and maintain a transmedia content world in the first place (Barnes, 2010). Mainstream audiences, on the other hand, do possess this buying power, and so catering to them is likely to be a lot more profitable than serving only fan audiences (Anderson, 2009; Barnes, 2010).

IV. Evaluation and Future Projections

Looking at these different forms of transmedia storytelling, it becomes obvious that there are a variety of economic implications, some advantageous, some risky. If put to use the right way, however, it is very likely that transmedia storytelling's benefits will outweigh its dangers, which leads me to predict that transmedia storytelling is here to stay. The possibility of expanding a narrative across multiple platforms fits contemporary demands perfectly, and it is very likely that transmedia storytelling will be able to carry on some of trends Hollywood has already started until now. This

includes, for example, the search for immersive media experiences, the evolution of a proactive audience willing to follow and explore a narrative through different media channels, and the ever-present search for the potential to generate large revenues within the film industry. As such, transmedia content worlds have a great probability of replacing blockbusters as industrial tent-poles; however, just like blockbusters, transmedia universes will have to be planned and executed extremely carefully due to the high investments involved, and will thus be relatively few in number.

Nevertheless, transmedia stories also have the ability to make the best use of contemporary media conglomerates, which in turn will be able to facilitate the creation of transmedia universes greatly.

Consequently, in terms of the motion picture industry, the assessment of transmedia stories' economic implications leads me to project a trend towards controlled transmedia content worlds. Rather than remaining but one marketing *tool*, controlled transmedia storytelling will allow different media channels to market each other whilst keeping the financial risk of creating and maintaining a transmedia universe as low as possible for the individual media platforms involved. Moreover, given the format and length of motion pictures, it is very likely that they will be able to still provide conclusive products in the future; i.e. films that are both part of a transmedia franchise but also understandable to those audience members that are unfamiliar with the wider context of a narrative. In addition, due to the high costs of launching and maintaining a comprehensive and sustainable transmedia content world, it will be necessary to appeal to the largest audience possible rather than to niche consumers; thus, fan participation in the sense of predicting the future course of a transmedia narrative should not be encouraged. However, it may be useful to keep

track of the inevitable fan appropriation of any transmedia narrative for general market research.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have critically assessed the economic implications of transmedia storytelling with the aim of determining whether transmedia narratives will indeed be the future of marketing, as they have been hailed by some. After a consideration of current industrial and cultural trends, I have identified three distinct forms transmedia storytelling can take – as a marketing tool, a means of creating controlled content worlds, and as a way to encourage audience participation in the expansion of content worlds. The careful evaluation of these forms and their individual economic implications has led me to project that rather than remaining a marketing tool, transmedia storytelling will dominate in the form of controlled content worlds, where marketing is but one aspect of transmedia narratives. Particularly within in the film industry there is a lot more potential behind transmedia storytelling than mere marketing; this includes, for example, catering towards contemporary and possible future trends of audience immersion and interactivity, as well as lower financial risks for all media agencies involved in the creation and sustenance of transmedia content worlds. Although it is impossible to truly foretell which direction transmedia storytelling will ultimately take, its many benefits (if used carefully) strongly suggest that transmedia storytelling is here to stay.

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