

New Tools for the Immersive Narrative Experience

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Abstract—As a result of Snapchat, Instagram, Twitter and Facebook, the way the audience experiences the written word has completely changed. New generations of readers are facing multimedia interaction as a part of the long format narrative. These technologies represent burgeoning strategies to spark and capture readers' interests. Partnerships between tech companies and traditional publishers are yielding breakthroughs in trans-media storytelling, and, as a consequence, offering new avenues for filmmakers. For example, romance novels read on smart phones now include videos and photos of the hunky love interest, voice messages amongst characters, and even short films accompanying the reading experience. As publishers and authors forge these new avenues for long form storytelling, do these multimedia elements dumb down fiction for readers with already shrinking attention spans? Will saving books undermine reading in general? Or, are the bonds readers feel with fictional characters so strong, that they will thrive in the digital realm. The future of the immersive narrative might not be just the massive spectacle of IMAX, but, more likely, an intimate experience in the palm of your hand.

Keywords—Transmedia, immersive narrative, multimedia, fiction

1 Introduction

This article addresses the forthcoming challenges and opportunities presented by the filmic developments in trans-media storytelling, with a specific emphasis on recent romance novels published on mobile devices. In arguing for the particular potential for transmedia to romance fiction, and genre fiction in general, I will:

- a) Define the role of long form narrative in transmedia storytelling.
- b) Note the distinctive position of genre fiction in contrast to literary fiction in trans-media storytelling.
- c) Present the case in point of romance novels and my experience as a filmmaker hired to develop a transmedia romance novel mobile platform.
- d) Describe the limits and promises of transmedia storytelling.

2 Long Form Storytelling and Transmedia

Transmedia storytelling is narrative that employs more than one storytelling platform. Transmedia does not just mean multimedia. It is multimodal *and* multimedia. It creates a complex story world. These narratives may combine a published book, or an animated film with games, toys, products and comics, and they may have exhibition on big screens, small screens, mobile devices, and other digital platforms. Writing in the *MIT Technology Review*, Henry Jenkins author of the seminal book *Convergence Culture*, described the ideal form of transmedia storytelling where “each medium does what it does best—so that a story might be introduced in a film, expanded through television, novels, and comics, and its world might be explored and experienced through game play.” It is important to emphasize that transmedia storytelling does not just mean multimedia. It is multimodal and multimedia. It creates a complex and complimentary story world, where the audience can engage with the narrative on a variety of levels.

Great stories have long used multiple platforms, while transmedia may at first seem like a burgeoning form of storytelling, even before contemporary digital technologies. Folklore, mythology and religious texts were never confined to the written word, but broadcast through visual art and music. From murals and vases to frescos and songs, human beings have surrounded themselves with the tangible manifestations of the stories that defined their self and culture. With the advent of mobile digital technologies, narratives simply have more avenues to reach those audiences. However, it is important to note that the media industry is changing so rapidly, that even as new technologies appear; they can just as quickly become extinct. Therefore, as Elizabeth Evans writes in her 2011 text *Transmedia Television: Audiences, New Media and Daily Life*, “it is crucial to map the emergence of these technologies, and the values attitudes and opinions of those who initially engage with them” (Evans: 2011).

Before we can explore creative and professional benefits of migrating narrative to mobile and multimedia platforms, it’s important to emphasize the value of long form narrative. Even though mobile devices are dominating our attention with quick bursts of images and text, we still love a good story, and these stories are good for us. According to psychologist James W. Pennebaker (2000:3), “The act of constructing stories appeared to be a natural human process that helped individuals understand their experiences and themselves.” In other words, human beings use storytelling to better understand the world around them and to exercise their empathic skills.

In the journal *Literature and Medicine*, Pennebaker (2000:11) writes: “Within the psychological literature, there is a broadly accepted belief that humans—and perhaps most organisms with at least a moderately complex nervous system—seek to understand the worlds around them. If we feel pain or hear a strange noise, we try to learn the cause of it. Once we understand how and why an event has occurred, we are more prepared to deal with it should it happen again. By definition, then, we will, that is, be far more motivated to learn about events that have powerful consequences—either positive or negative—than about common or predictable events that don’t affect us. Similarly, events with large and significant personal consequences will be examined to a greater degree than relatively superficial events.” In fiction storytelling protagonists are faced with big decisions and the often-high stakes in a novel grab the reader’s attention,

just as they would have in real life. The empathic link they have with the characters in the story allows them not just to read along, but also to feel along. Additionally, readers then have the opportunity to spend time reflecting on these momentous, frequently life and death, events. This presence with the story is part of what gives long form narrative its tremendous impact, an empathic impact absent with the fast-paced, bursts of interaction we encounter on social media feeds which do not promote deeper empathic connections.

Although the individual and societal benefits of reading long form fiction have been well documented, this has not been reflected in the current publishing industry, which has been stagnant in recent years. While the industry has put significant effort into marketing E-books and audiobooks, these devices have not helped to cultivate a new generation of readers. “Several years of Pew Research Center survey data indicate there has been little change in the share of adults consuming e-books or audio books” (Lee and Perrin, 2015). As things stand, the majority of Americans still prefer print books (Pew Research Center, September 2016, “Book Reading 2016”).

On the other hand, the fact that there has not been a decrease of readers speaks to the value and ongoing interest in long form storytelling. This bodes well for the permanence of printed books, while demonstrating the need for innovations if the publishing industry is to grow. Consumption patterns are changing. The publishing industry has to adapt to these changes if it is to thrive and cultivate new readers. Today, human beings are bonded to their mobile devices. According to a recent study in Saudi Arabia, “academic staff are more negatively affected by feelings of incompleteness without smartphones” (Alfawareh 2017). With audiences hooked into mobile devices, one obvious opportunity is to disseminate books through the technology already in their hands, attracting new viewers to their content by adding multimedia elements that only electronics can offer.

According to the Pew Research Center, “nearly two-thirds of Americans own a smartphone, and 19% of Americans rely to some degree on a smartphone for accessing online services and information and for staying connected to the world around them” (Smith, 2015). Powered by growth and utility of digital devices, people have developed markedly different needs and expectations from their content: Shorter attention spans play a key role in consuming and sharing this content. In the marketing publication, *Consumer Insights* (2015), Microsoft Canada reported that “tech adoption, social media usage, and multi- screening behaviours mean consumers are getting worse at paying attention for extended periods of time.” The media and publishing industry are slow in responding to this massive shift in audiences. With shorter attention spans, how can storytellers and content creators adapt their long form fiction to the needs and habits of contemporary readers? To begin with, we need to take a closer look at the type of stories we are expanding through transmedia.

3 Genre Fiction

Transmedia enterprises are particularly effective in romance novels in contrast to literary works of fiction. Genre fiction (to draw a rough, commonplace but nonetheless

substantive distinction) is primarily plot drive; literary fiction is primarily character driven. The readers interest in genre fiction—horror, thrillers, mysteries, romance-- are directed to what happens, to the unfolding scenario, and the particulars of the characters are in service to the story-line; readers of literary fiction, on the other hand, are primarily directed to the character to whom things transpire. Moreover, of course superior literary fiction is also propelled by its use of language, which is less easily translated, into pictorial representations. (Indeed, when a genre fictional world is praised as reaching the level of genuine “literature,” as, say, the books of John le Carré, have been judged, this is because both the robust depiction of the protagonist and the richness of the language.) But explicating why genre fiction such as romance is especially amenable to transmedial applications traces, in fact, to crucial features of their fictional standing.

As noted, genre fiction is more easily adaptable to other media than in literary fiction., but at the same time, genre fiction is also more apposite to transmedial applications than is non-fiction. This is so, because unlike the transition from nonfictional words to nonfictional filmic depictions, for example, genre fiction preserves the ontological status of the hybrid fictional world. When, I write a description of Khrushchev banging on the table at the UN, even if my words do an admirable job of tracking the man’s actual feature and the occurrence, they still call for an imaginative construction reader’s part. A documentary clip showing that event, presents Khrushchev and his behavior as it actually transpired: the imaginative exercise is no longer necessary or operative. In contrast, the transmedial fluidity of genre fiction—and romance novels are exemplars of such—is marked by the continuation of the fictional universe in which one is an active participant. To see how this fictionality is maintained helps explain why transmedial narrative works well with genre fiction.

You are reading a romance novel and introduced to heartthrob Chris. He’s described as tall dark and handsome of course, and, as expected, an exotic foreigner with an intriguing secret. You picture the character—the nuances and details of Chris looks are within your imaginative prerogative. But now you hit the button on the page and transported to a video where you see Chris portrayed by an actor. Tall and dark and handsome and accented, but specifically so – textual Chris now has the particular features of real-life actor Chris. Nevertheless, you have not departed from the imaginative world to a real world, but remain, rather, within this circumscribed fictional world.¹ You, the reader/watcher continue to play this game of make-believe, much like children use props – a dollhouse, a toy cup they fill with imaginary water.

¹ This ontological distinction between fictional worlds and actual worlds raises intriguing challenges for transmedial depictions of violence and sex in genres devoted to this topic. Note that the violence we see in film is fictional else it would be rendered a snuff movie. Thus, our reactions as consumers of these films is contoured not merely by the action before us but our prior assumptions of its ontological status. The distinction between erotic art and pornography is more complicated. For one thing, erotic art is not transparent as in pornographic scenes. The aesthetic features stop us and demands attention, while with pornography the viewer is directed immediately to the bodies in action. The implications of this for transmedial development with regard to violence and pornography poses challenging issues that we need not address here.

The actor is a kind of prop here as well in our continuing game of pretend.² Because genre readers know that they have entered a fictional world, there is no real world that corresponds with their imagined characters; therefore, they will not be distracted from the narrative by these transmedia elements.

4 Case Study: Reimagining Romance Storytelling

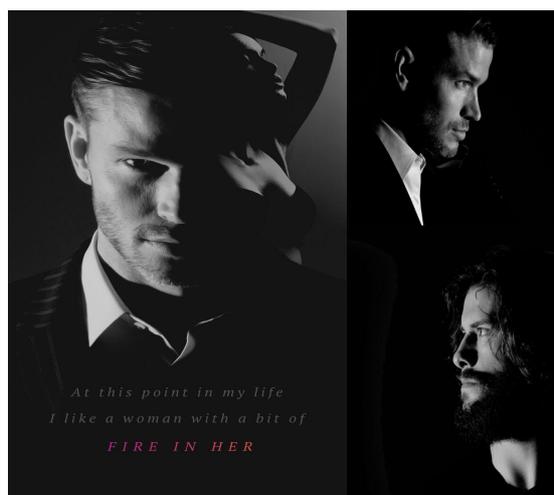


Fig. 1. Crave Romance.

In late 2015, the tech start-up Paragraph launched a trans-media app aimed at cultivating new readers for the romance publishing industry. Whereas traditional storytelling focuses on cultivating empathy in the audience, the experience of immersive storytelling promises a degree of *agency*. Using transmedia storytelling techniques, storytellers can provide readers with a more fulfilling immersive narrative experience, especially in genre fiction. I was brought in as a film director to help with the multimedia elements that would be included with the novels premiering on mobile devices. The first step in developing this software was to familiarize myself with the Romance genre and Romance readers.

Romance novels are characterized as having a central love story and a positive, emotionally satisfying conclusion. “The romance industry is big — it’s the second largest category of fiction, outselling science fiction, fantasy and the classics” (Rodale, 2017). It is the largest category in consumer publishing, generating over \$1.08 billion in total sales in 2013 (BookStats), with 34%-unit share of the adult fiction market (Romance Writers of America).

² The notion of make-belief as a central feature of how we enter fictional worlds is developed in original detail by Walton, Kendall L. "Mimesis as Make-Believe: On the Foundations of the Representational Arts". Harvard University Press, 1990.

According to a survey conducted by the Romance Writers of America romance fans read their books as follows:

- E-books: 39%
- Mass-market paperback: 32%
- Trade paperback: 18%
- Hardcover: 9%
- Audio: 1%
- Other: 1%
- (Nielsen, 2015)

With 39% of romance readers already adapted to the e-book format, the highest eBook penetration rate of any genre, they are an ideal group to make the shift from conventional storytelling to trans-media storytelling.

While literary critics might be tempted to dismiss this genre because of its often cliché characters and predictable storylines, romance readers don't seem to be missing anything from their reading experiences. Romance fans embody Matt Hill's theory to *hyperdiegesis*, "the creation of a vast and detailed narrative space, only a fraction of which is ever directly seen or encountered within the text, but which nonetheless appears to operate according to principles of internal logic and extension" (2002: 137). They form a special relationship with the hero of these books, as if he was a character in their own lives. They show up at romance conferences with nametags stating who their "book boyfriend" is. They join online forums for fans of specific characters and authors. They fantasize about what their "book boyfriend" would look like. They spend weeks debating which model or actor should portray the lead character. This intense emotional connection and fantastic escape, enriches the lives of these readers. "Just as in real life, the worlds of literary fiction are replete with complicated individuals whose inner lives are rarely easily discerned but warrant exploration. The worlds of fiction, though, pose fewer risks than the real world, and they present opportunities to consider the experiences of others without facing the potentially threatening consequences of that engagement. More critically, whereas many of our mundane social experiences may be scripted by convention and informed by stereotypes, those presented in literary fiction often disrupt our expectations. Readers of literary fiction must draw on more flexible interpretive resources to infer the feelings and thoughts of characters" (Kidd and Castano, 2013). While Kidd and Castano were writing about literary fiction, I believe their observations can inform our understanding of romance as well. "The romance-reading process gives the reader a strategy for making her present situation more comfortable without substantive reordering of its structure rather than a comprehensive program for reordering her life in such a way that all needs might be met" (Radway: 1984).

Not satisfied with simply consuming books, but also desiring a closer relationship with their "book boyfriend," the deep and valuable connection Romance readers feel with their favorite characters are what drives this massive section of the publishing industry. And this is exactly why the Romance genre is ripe for transmedia exploration. Describing audience engagement in transmedia fiction, Sarah Atkinson in the *International Journal of Communication* 8 (2014) writes, "audience members take on

performative and narrative roles and the community is sustained through the social activity and contributions from an active contribution and collaboration between all of the performative functions.” Crave Romance is an app that seeks to profit from what readers and fans have already begun to do by offering an immersive reading experience, blending text, audio, video, and dozens of other storytelling elements into small, or even daily, installments on mobile devices and social media platforms. The app transforms long form storytelling into an experience that can be consumed on-the-go, like the social media “readers” are all accustomed to consuming in brief intervals. These bite-sized digital chapters feature instant notifications, videos and photos from the lead character, coupled with messages from the author.

Community is part of the content. Because readers have higher audio/visual thresholds, they welcome the multimedia experience of a brief video interview with the author at the end of a chapter. The video loads as readers scroll through the book on their mobile device; it feels familiar and appropriate to encounter a short audiovisual bite, similar to the types of clips encountered on social media feeds. This direct connection to the writer also increases the overall value of the narrative, as they offer insights into the story and the characters that are not found in the published manuscript.

As part of the creative team, I would read the novel and identify pages where there were obvious opportunities to illustrate a visual moment. Any passage that was particularly descriptive of a location or action was easily converted into motion pictures. The creative team also took the opportunity to create original content not found in the book. In order to be sure that our adaptations into visual storytelling were in keeping with the original texts, the author always approved these short scenes or plot lines before production.

Claire Fallon, writing for The Huffington Post described Crave Romance: “While the book itself is written by a bestselling romance author, there’s a humming hive of production surrounding the queen bee. One actor is cast to play the romantic hero, and sometimes other characters are cast as well. A film crew is on set to shoot the performances. The lines each actor speaks are almost all written by a separate writing team—they’re not drawn from the original text or written by the book’s author. It’s like watching little snippets of officially sanctioned fan fiction caught on tape” (Fallon, 2016). Fan artwork is a huge part of the extended romance readership community, so building that into the reading event taps into an intimate experience fans are already trying to create by themselves.

Below is an excerpt from Crave Romance’s manuscript and media script for “He Will Be My Ruin,” (Tucker, 2016). The book is described in Publisher’s Weekly as “a nail-biting thriller. clever twists and turns will keep readers in suspense, and just when they think they have figured out what happened to Celine, the story veers in another direction.” Since this is a plot driven narrative, the scripted scene directly relates to the original manuscript, it is an audio/visual representation of the protagonist’s thoughts at that moment in the story.

“... I watched Zac go through every high-end hotel reservation from July through November. There were no more rooms booked by a James Grady beyond that one.

“No reservations means either he didn’t see Celine again, or they weren’t meeting at hotels anymore.” Doug leans forward to study the fire escape in the alleyway.

“Ruby may not have heard any man coming to Celine’s door, but that doesn’t mean none came to her apartment.”

My stomach tightens, the same way it did the first time Doug suggested that Grady and Celine had used the fire escape to maintain discretion and minimize cost, especially if he became a “regular” that Celine knew and trusted.

He used the fire escape when he came to me, claiming he didn’t want to disturb Ruby. He had even called it “more romantic” than using the door.

Insert Scene 22.4 fire escape video (151)

INT. BEDROOM AND FIRE ESCAPE-NIGHT

Noir styling. From the bed, we see Grady, 20’s, handsome, bearded, pulling on a shirt over his muscular torso. He opens the window and begins to step onto the fire escape.

GRADY

Use the door? But this is so much more romantic, don’t you think?

He winks, and then he’s gone out the window and up the fire escape.

For fans deeply invested in these fictional characters, the brief snippet of audio/visual exposition heightens the narrative experience. “The easy alternate reality of romance and “book boyfriends” is that the role of the reader doesn’t need to be all that clear. Romance readers aren’t delusional; on a factual level, it’s obvious that they are reading a story about two made-up people. But the imaginative space created and left open by a good book allows for a gratifying slippage between the real and unreal, the self and the other... Readers are watching but we’re also identifying, sometimes very strongly, with the characters. It’s not so easy to separate a romance heroine from the desires we invest in her” (Fallon, 2016).

One concern Crave’s Founder and CEO, Ziv Novath, encountered at the start was the psychology of the reader identifying with the main character. Unlike movies and TV shows where the protagonist is pictured and heard, in a book, the story takes place in our minds; a reader imagines the characters and can imbue them with unique traits that enrich the story. Maybe, as we read, Peter Pan starts to resemble a first crush, or maybe all those sisters in *Little Women*, look like our own relations. Even more importantly, when a story is told in the first person, a reader’s connection to the reflections and thoughts of the hero allow them to put aside the physical differences that would otherwise prevent the formation of such intense empathic bonds. Novath worried that “if you showed the protagonist, how she looked could have interfered with your ability to relate to her.” With that in mind, Novath elected to use a POV approach in the media created for the app.

Crave readers never see the female protagonists; instead, they experience the media from her (yes, in Romance, it’s usually a her), point of view. Hoping to avoid the pitfalls of alienating a reader who doesn’t look like the hero of the story, and therefore might not relate to a bombshell or pinup protagonist, the emphasis is on creating media featuring the objects of desire. This includes screenshots of the character’s social media feeds, **Figure 2.**, photos and gifs of hunky men, for example, **Figure 3.**, and the voice messages they might leave their lover, as well as video one-liner’s where a shirtless

boyfriend leans into the camera and whispers, “come here” with what is meant to be, spine tingling authority.



Fig. 2. The protagonist’s social media feed.
Crave Romance.



Fig. 3. The handsome heartthrob.
Crave Romance.

Turning the fantasized book boyfriend into an audio/visual reality was an obvious approach, but filling the book with the platonic relationships is a bit riskier. Do readers really want to exit the reading experience to watch a scene between friends or supporting characters? Without sexual appeal is can multimedia elements keep their interest? “The texts aren’t romantic, directed at the reader as if she were the girl in the story, perhaps because directing them to a third, platonic party creates a space for new storytelling revelations. But by sending platonic ones, the app puts the reader firmly in her place — not the love object, but the voyeur” (Fallon, 2016). This goes against the intention of transmedia storytelling, pulling readers out of the experience, rather than bringing them deeper into the narrative. Another obstacle to the development of transmedia storytelling is that these industries are still optimized to deliver products. Until recently, the delivery of content to consumer followed this linear direction: a storyteller, or content producer, would make a film, or TV series, or book, and with the help of a distributor, their long form story would reach the consumer via a retailer such as a bookstore, movie theater or cable network. However, consumers are devoting more and more time to their mobile devices where the immediacy of information and interaction make the traditional value chain seem outdated. Audiences spend hours scrolling through social media feeds that go directly from the content creator to the receiver. Celebrities and politicians are already maximizing this new value chain for their

personal success and profit. They don't need to rely on distributors and retailers as heavily as they once did. Consider President Trump who skirts conventional media channels by reaching citizens via Twitter. While his number of actual followers is up for significant debate, somewhere between 3 and 20 million (Salkowitz, 2017). Trump's tweets are shared amongst individuals and quoted in the news media on a regular basis. A Washington Times article published on July 28, 2016, while Trump was still campaigning for president, wrote: "Even if you don't follow Donald Trump you only need one person in your network re-tweeting what he's posting in order for you to be exposed to his messages" (Barbera, cited in McLaughlin 2016). Without a dependency on news networks, magazines or papers, there's no denying that Trump's direct communication via Twitter has stirred up conventional methods of reporting as well. In his own tweets Trump (2015) writes: "It's like owning The New York Times without the losses — it's tremendous. It gives you a lot of power." If Facebook, Snapchat and Instagram are how readers consume content today, how do long-form stories need to be reimaged to stay relevant? Fiction narrative hasn't successfully made the leap onto these platforms, in part, because a rich, meaningful story with intriguing characters demands time, both to develop and consume. However, this isn't the case for genre fiction, with plot driven narratives. Additionally, literary fiction may be at a disadvantage because recent evidence suggests that reading on digital devices may hinder a reader's ability to process longer form content. In a research review published in the July 2017 Review of Educational Research, professor Patricia A. Alexander and her graduate student, Lauren M. Singer, surveyed 25 years of research into digital reading. The results were inconclusive, revealing how little we know about the effects of reading on screens. However, "there's evidence that people have more difficulty understanding texts that require them to scroll extensively on a screen." (Sawchuk, 2017). If this is the case, since it is very unlikely that we will return to an all-print readership, transmedia storytelling of specifically genre fiction may step in to address this deficit within digital reading.

Ironically, authors, filmmakers and storytellers are the last ones to recognize the power of their own medium while advertisers are the pioneers in bringing in-depth narrative to the mobile audience (Chahal, 2017). "Long-form storytelling is having a moment right now. Brands and media alike are using narrative arcs to capture and engage audiences for extended amounts of time. Long-form content (1,200+ words) becomes a story when it follows a narrative arc – meaning it has a premise and a plot (a beginning, middle and end). This type of content has been the gold standard of journalism for ages, but with the prominent rise of content marketing, an increasing number of brands are telling their own stories. Storytelling is a powerful tool that brands can use to establish themselves as thought leaders" (Kearney, 2016). Even as the power of story is confirmed, cultivating the next generation of long form narrative fans will require a new way to experience stories that fit people's consumption habits. Will the main characters from novels have their own fictional social media accounts, written and by the authors themselves? Will filmmakers produce media content solely for mobile devices, alongside the feature length films they project in movie theaters?

While individual storytellers are late to the game, partnerships between tech companies and traditional publishers are yielding breakthroughs in transmedia storytelling, such as Crave Romance. These partnerships offer new avenues for the filmmaker as

well. For example, books read on smart phones can feature instant notification videos and photos from the lead character, voice messages between characters, and even short scripted films coupled with the reading experience. In these situations, the “narrative world becomes so large that it is necessary to make use of additional platforms” (Evans: 2011). The future of the immersive narrative might not be just the massive spectacle of IMAX, but more likely, it will be in the palm of a “reader’s” hand on a phone.

5 Limits and Promises of Transmedia Storytelling

“To read fiction means to play a game by which we give sense to the immensity of things that happened, are happening, or will happen in the actual world. By reading narrative, we escape the anxiety that attacks us when we try to say something true about the world. This is the consoling function of narrative — the reason people tell stories, and have told stories from the beginning of time.” — Umberto Eco.

Would great literature make the leap to transmedia storytelling, or is this just for low-brow books? It’s easy to see why a romance reader might enjoy the visuals of a finely chiseled man punctuating the reading experience, but do we want to see a Dickens or Dostoyevsky character? If one of the benefits of long form fiction is the empathic link created between the otherwise unlike reader and the fictional characters that come alive in our minds, would seeing them pictured create a roadblock for that intimate connection?

At this point, it’s still hard to say. While fans leave positive comments on the Crave app, the experience hasn’t hit the note intended by Crave’s Founder Ziv Novath. It hasn’t been the runaway success he imagined. Although you can still download the six books on Crave, since its release in January 2016, the app has ceased producing new content. Most complaints about the Crave Romance app have to do with the subscription model. In the iTunes app store, reviewer Thejjsrthebest comments: “-5 stars!! Should have said "In-apps purchase" DECEIVING!!I wouldn't have even rated this app the 1 star, but you're required to give at least 1. I wish I could give it negative 5 stars. After you read a half and start getting interested in a story, it stops and invites you to subscribe so you can read the rest of the story.”

A commercial or bill in the middle of a reading experience will be far more distracting than the question of whether or not a reader can bond with a fictional character once they are pictured on screen. Crave has successfully expanded the possibilities of transmedia storytelling, but their subscription business model rubs readers the wrong way.

However, there’s an obvious and immediate application for platforms like Crave. “The higher education landscape is particularly suitable for the integration of student centered mobile educational applications to be adopted because mobile devices have become ubiquitous on university campuses” (Chuchu & Nodoro, 2019). History texts and educational publications would benefit from these tools. Images and video have such a profound impact on our understanding of history. In *Perspectives on History*, a publication of the American Historical Association, Professor Anna Pegler-Gordon (2017) writes: “using images to teach history and discussing this process with other teachers, I’ve noticed that visual media often seem more accessible to our students than

the written record. Students themselves mention that images make the past seem more accessible, giving concrete shape to a world that sometimes seems intangible.” By embedding images, news footage, hyperlinks and polls, directly into the mobile versions of these texts, today’s media savvy, short attention span students, would have a far more direct relationship with the content.

“Some educators have already begun to try this out. In their 2012 paper presented at MindTrek, Professors Paul Teske and Theresa Horstman, spoke about their recent research on the implementation of a transmedia story in the study of several works by Edgar Allen Poe in a 9th and 10th grade language arts class. Combining an artificial social media platform, where the students interacted and collaborated with each other in the network, with the in-class teacher instruction, their curriculum "allows students to dive as deeply into a topic as they wish, while providing them with a way to access difficult texts and concepts.” However, teachers encountered pedagogical obstacles due to the ethereal nature of the transmedia story, and the multimedia model sometimes confused students, it therefore may prove easier to determine the educational benefits of transmedia through non-fiction texts.

For example, consider a history or political science textbook with a chapter on the 1964 Presidential election. An iconic and controversial television ad at the time, featured a little girl plucking petals off a daisy as she counts down, her countdown transitions into a nuclear launch and her image is replaced by a mushroom cloud. The voice-over begins: "These are the stakes. To make a world in which all of God's children can live, or to go into the dark. We must either love each other, or we must die." The explosion footage is replaced by white letters on a black screen, with another voiceover reading the words on the screen, "Vote for President Johnson on November 3rd", then adding, "The stakes are too high for you to stay home." Lyndon B. Johnson's message to voters about Barry Goldwater was clear, a vote for Goldwater meant the death of innocent American children. With so much of recent history intertwined with our understanding of media, students cannot study areas such a politics, sociology, communications or history without concurrently researching the media of the time. A text that lacks these transmedia elements requires students to oscillate between web searches and textbooks needlessly. The same could be said about science texts where videos can immediately illustrate the principles described in the textbooks.

6 Conclusion

Already, start-ups and advertisers like Crave are forging ahead in the interest of profiting from the captive audiences who actively scroll and click on their smart phones for hours each day. These companies and entrepreneurs have come to understand that long form genre narratives have the power to reach through the haze of conventional marketing. Since the brain processes images approximately 60 times faster than words, “One undeniably compelling characteristic of effective storytelling is that it allows our brains to “cut through the noise,” which as “more brands make the move towards content marketing,” is becoming increasingly significant” (Kerr, 2016). They see the profound potential of reaching readers through the emotional connections established by

their bonds to the protagonist in a long form story. But if transmedia storytelling is going to serve a purpose beyond advertising creative individuals need to be at the forefront of the new medium.

Who better to invent new storytelling tools than the storytellers themselves? Filmmakers are ideally poised to maximize the new transmedia tools, as well as inventing new ones which center around increasing the impact of the narrative. Already accustomed to balancing the imperatives of the narrative arc and the experience of visual communication, they intrinsically understand the adage, "show, don't tell." Filmmakers are always asking themselves how they can translate a character's interior life into images and sounds. What does sadness look like? What does doubt look like? How do we show how a character feel? Transmedia storytelling can weave in and out of descriptive prose and pictured settings or characters, but it can also allow for much more creative approaches with impressionistic illustrations of a character's interior monologue or a montage of imagery that triggers memories from earlier moments in the story.

The power of the moving image resonates for great storytellers, and transmedia storytelling will only flourish when authors begin to write for the format. Many popular writers are already accustomed to applying cinematic techniques to their novels. Writer Don DeLillo says: "When I get together with writers I know, we don't talk about books, we talk about movies. This is not because we see the mechanism of the novel operating in certain films, work ranging from Kieslowski to Malick. It's because film is our second self, a major narrative force in the culture, an aspect of consciousness connected at some level to sleep and dreams, as the novel is the long hard slog of waking life. When reality elevates itself to spectacular levels, people tend to say, "It was like a movie"" (DeLillo, 2005). Apps like Crave allow writers to go further into the cinematic realm. The format allows them to embed multimedia elements directly into the linear reading experience, not just as an afterthought once the book is complete, but earlier in the creative process as the story is born from their minds. Whether they partner with filmmakers or write content independently, authors should spearhead transmedia storytelling efforts in the service of *their* stories.

We are in the midst of a shift from intent-driven story formats, such as books, movies and magazines, to minimal, modular, immersive experiences consumed on mobile devices. At the moment, marketing companies are pioneering in the realm of transmedia storytelling, monetizing what creative storytellers have always known, that story is a crucial way to reach audiences. Transmedia is an inevitable development for contemporary readers, and will no doubt be a rich medium for storytellers, but it is more likely to reach early success in the service of plot driven genre fiction, rather than literary fiction. What we can say with assurance is that the experience of reading will change in the process, even as the stories and the emotional stimulation they provide remains intact, indeed, even benefitting from the combined impact of text and multimedia.

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